

Testing Pauline Pseudonymity: 3 Corinthians and the Pastoral Epistles Compared¹

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3 Corinthians as an Experimental Control

In this paper, I would like to test the hypothesis that the Pastoral Epistles (PE) are pseudonymous by using the *Apocryphal Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians* (a.k.a. *3 Cor*) as an experimental control. In the scientific method, controls are used to determine the validity of an experiment. To test a new medication, for example, a scientist uses two groups, one which takes the medication, and another, called the “control,” which takes a placebo. The researcher can then test the real effects of the medication when both groups are subject to the same external factors, such as environmental conditions, diet, sex, race and age. In literary and historical studies, researchers use fewer experimental controls than do those in the hard sciences, because it is impossible to repeat historical events or the production of ancient literature. Nevertheless, controls are useful when they can be found,² and there are good reasons to think that *3 Cor* could be such a find for Pauline studies.

In the Heidelberg Coptic papyrus (cop¹) published by Carl Schmidt in 1904,³ *3 Cor* is a part of the ancient *Acts of Paul (API)*,⁴ but there is significant evidence to suggest that the author of the *API* may have used a pre-existing *3 Cor*. In the *API*, *3 Cor* consists of four parts: (1) a preamble recounting Paul's imprisonment in Philippi and the unsettling of the Christians in Corinth by the false teachers Simon and Cleobius; (2) the letter of the Corinthians to Paul asking him to come to them or at least address in writing the false teaching of Simon and Cleobius; (3) an intermediate narrative of Paul's reception of the letter while in prison; (4) the letter of Paul to the Corinthians containing a detailed rebuttal of the teaching of Simon and Cleobius. The preamble is extant only in cop¹; part two and four are extant in Greek, Latin, Armenian and cop¹; the intermediate narrative is extant in cop¹, Latin and Armenian but is missing from certain Latin MSS and notably from the only Greek MS, Bodmer Papyrus X (P⁷).⁵ Since there are also internal signs, which we cannot get into here, that *3 Cor* was originally independent of the *API*, Willy Rordorf⁶ and others have supposed that P⁷ represents a recension of *3 Cor* which was always independent of the *API*. In all likelihood, the original *API* included *3 Cor*.⁷ This means that *3 Cor* existed before the rest of the *API*, which itself probably dates from the mid-second century.⁸ May I suggest a tentative date *3 Cor* of 100-145?

This early date for *3 Cor* is one of several factors which makes it a good experimental control. It is also extant in Greek, it is orthodox in its theological stance, it claims to be written by Paul, and it displays advanced exegetical techniques and theological reflexion. In this light, the *Ep. Lao.*, one of the only other non-canonical Pauline epistles, is inferior: of uncertain date and extant only in Latin, it

is a mere pastiche of texts cut and pasted from the Pauline letters of the NT. *3 Cor* is also a good control because it is not canonical⁹: thus, scholars who judge its authenticity should be less influenced by a desire either to protect or to undermine the authority of the NT Canon. We may thus unemotionally test *3 Cor* against the various criteria for authenticity.

A quick comparison with the PE on the point of external evidence shows that *3 Cor* has only a weak claim. While no one claims *3 Cor* is by Paul before Ephrem in the fourth century, the PE are explicitly considered to be by Paul no later than ca. 180, in Rome (Muratori Canon) and in Asia and Lyons (Irenaeus, *passim*); and Theophilus of Antioch (*Autol.* 3.14) cites 1 Tim 2.1-2 as the divine word.¹⁰ This comparison shows that the external evidence for the PE is both early and widespread, despite the view of their modern detractors that they are weakly attested. Thus, the external evidence bestows upon the PE a claim to authenticity many times greater than that of the second-century *3 Cor*. Why is this? *3 Cor* is in fact very useful in the fight against heresies in the second century, and yet unlike the PE, it is never cited by fighters of heresy in the second and third centuries.

Besides the external criteria, there are the historical criteria (Paul's biography, church development, heresy and orthodoxy) and the internal criteria (style, dissimilarity from or imitation of the Pauline epistles). As for Paul's biography, neither *3 Cor* nor the PE may be fitted into Paul's journeys in the Book of Acts. But many scholars who question the PE also question the historicity of Acts, leading to an impasse. As for church development, scholars claim that the PE manifest the threefold church leadership prevalent in the second century, but the evidence is far from clear—the term “presbyter” appears to be interchangeable with “bishop” in the PE (see esp. Tit 1). As for style, the interpretations of the evidence are subjective, since what is imitation to some scholars is the sign of the genuine Paul to others; what is decisively dissimilar from Paul's style or vocabulary for some does not deviate inconceivably from him for others. I will address all of these criteria in greater depth in a later article. But here I would like to focus upon the historical criterion of heresy and orthodoxy, which will yield some of the most tangible results of a comparison of *3 Cor* and the PE.

Heresy and Orthodoxy in *3 Cor*

3 Cor is a polemic against a well-defined gnostic theology. While there are differences of opinion concerning the identity of the heresy in view,¹¹ two scholars, Willy Rordorf and Thomas W. Mackay¹² have independently identified the heresy which agrees in the main points with the Simon and Cleobius, Saturninism. I reproduce here the heresy of Simon and Cleobius in *3 Cor* and that of Saturninus, as found in Irenaeus¹³:

Simon and Cleobius (3 Cor 2.9-15)	Saturninus (excerpted from Irenaeus, <i>Haer.</i> 1.24.1-2; ANF 1.348-49).
10 one must not appeal to the prophets;	They hold, moreover, that some of the prophecies were uttered by those angels who made the world, and some by Satan, ...
11 God is not the Almighty ¹⁴ ;	... he maintained that the God of the Jews was one of the angels;
12 there is no resurrection of the flesh;	He declares, therefore, that this spark of life, after the death of a man, returns to those things which are of the same nature with itself, and the rest of the body is decomposed into its original elements.
13 the formation of the human race is not the work of God;	Man, too, was the workmanship of angels, a shining image bursting forth below from the presence of the supreme power; and when they could not, he says, keep hold of this, because it immediately darted upwards again, they exhorted each other, saying, "Let us make man after our image and likeness." He was accordingly formed, yet was unable to stand erect, through the inability of the angels to convey to him that power, but wriggled [on the ground] like a worm. Then the power above taking pity upon him, since he was made after his likeness, sent forth a spark of life, which gave man an erect posture, compacted his joints, and made him live.
14 and one must not believe that the Lord has come in the flesh, nor that he was born of Mary;	He has also laid it down as a truth, that the Savior was without birth, without body, and without figure, but was, by supposition, a visible man;
15 the world is not the work of God, but of angels.	The world, again, and all things therein, were made by a certain company of seven angels.

The heresy in *3 Cor* agrees with Saturninism on six major points; this gives us confidence to suggest that either *3 Cor* is fighting against it directly or against something very akin to it. In the second century, Simon Magus is considered the father of Gnosticism and a predecessor of Saturninus. It makes sense, therefore, that the author of *3 Cor* would try to denounce a contemporary heretic by having his teaching proceed from the mouth of Simon and then condemned by Simon's contemporary, Paul. The pseudepigraphical guise lends authority to the rebuttal. Saturninus was active in the beginning of the second century. His teaching was also relatively unsophisticated compared to later forms of Gnosticism (e.g., that of Basilides or Valentinus).

Unsurprisingly, the orthodoxy of *3 Cor* is formulated in direct opposition to the heresy of Simon and Cleobius, and it resembles in this respect the second-century rule of faith—indeed in 6.36, Paul urges his readers to remain attached “to this rule.” The doctrine in *3 Cor* is thus conceived as a summary of essential Christian teaching. A comparison of *3 Cor* with the rule of faith in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1, shows important commonalities: (1) God, the *Pantocrator*, is the maker of heaven and earth; (2) salvation through incarnation of Jesus born of Mary (*3 Cor*) or of the virgin (Irenaeus); (3) the apostasy of the prince, who thinks he is God (*3 Cor*), or of the fallen angels (Irenaeus); (4) eternal

judgment of the wicked in fire; (5) the resurrection of the flesh, for which Jesus is the model¹⁵; (6) the inspiration of the prophets of Israel by the Holy Spirit.

This comparison demonstrates that the theology of *3 Cor* belongs squarely in the second century. Above all, both Irenaeus and *3 Cor* emphasize the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the flesh in opposition to the docetism of the gnostics.¹⁶

Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Pastoral Epistles

Scholars cannot agree as to the heresy envisioned in the PE. Indeed, what can be gleaned about false teachers in the PE suggests that there may be more than one tendency going on at the same time. First, there is the gnostic tendency, of those who claim falsely called knowledge (1 Tim 6.20), of those who require sexual and dietary asceticism (1 Tim 4.1-4), and of Hymenaeus and Philetus who say the resurrection has already taken place (2 Tim 2.17-18). Yet the PE attack no coherent gnostic doctrine, nor is there any sign of anti-docetism in the PE; even the line, ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, is no more a polemic against docetism than the incarnation passages in the unquestioned Pauline letters (cf. Rom 1.3; Gal 4.4; Phil 2.6).

A second tendency is found in those emphasizing Jewish myths and the commands of men (Tit 1.14; cf. 1 Tim 1.4), who want to be teachers of the law (1 Tim 1.7). Some belong to the circumcision party, οἱ ἐκ τῆς περιτομῆς (Tit 1.10), which probably refers not to Jews generally, but to those Jews and proselytes who would insist on circumcision as a Christian initiation rite (cf. Acts 11.2; Gal 2.12; Phil 3.2-3). Hence, Titus 1.14-15 refers to the commands of men and to purity laws, which the circumcision party would impose. Furthermore, the affirmation, οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς, also belongs to the polemic against such Judaizers, and is reminiscent of Romans and Galatians. The power of such Judaizers waned in the second century.¹⁷ Thus, it is surprising to find Titus 1.10 saying that there are many deceivers, μάλιστα οἱ ἐκ τῆς περιτομῆς, when it is the threat of gnostics, not Judaizers, that looms over the whole second century. Perhaps the author has put in some Pauline accents only to authenticate his forgery.¹⁸ However, my experimental control, *3 Cor*, does not add punches against the heretics of Paul's day; Simon is the exception but he promotes a second-century heresy! Likewise, in the extant *API*, Demas and Hermogenes become proto-typical gnostics—in both these traditions, the concerns of the second century consistently supplant the troubles Paul faced in the first century.

Often commentators see a combination of the judaizing and the gnostic tendencies in a single group, a syncretistic Jewish Gnosticism. The trouble with seeing such a group behind the PE is twofold: First, no name is given to the group by the commentators, so that if such a group existed, it would not seem to have been very influential, especially when compared to Marcion and the gnostics.

Second, both the gnostic and judaizing tendencies appear as early as in 1 Cor and Col, as Gordon D. Fee states:

In Corinth the people in the “know” (“gnostics”), who also considered themselves to be the “spiritual” ones, had so imbibed Hellenistic dualism, along with an over-realized eschatology, that they were denying sexual relations within marriage (7.1-7; cf. 1 Tim. 4:3) and a future bodily resurrection (15:12; cf. 2 Tim 2:18). And in Colossae a form of Hellenistic Judaism had recently begun to syncretize the Christian faith with Jewish and Hellenistic elements with wisdom/knowledge (2:3-8) and OT ritual (2:16, 21).¹⁹

Furthermore, Fee’s understanding that certain elders in Ephesus were coming under the sway of wayward doctrines seems perfectly consistent with the eclectic and unsystematic nature of the heresy in 1-2 Tim.

The orthodoxy of the PE, while wholly compatible with the second century, does not belong peculiarly to it. God is the maker of a good creation for our enjoyment (1 Tim 4.4) against too strict an asceticism regarding marriage and food, tendencies appearing already in 1 Cor 7 and 9-11. But there is no hint that the false teachers believed that the demiurge of the OT was not the Father; thus, the polemic of the PE is not aimed at Gnosticism or Marcionism. Indeed, the unqualified acceptance of all foods taken with thanksgiving would be surprising in the second century, when the normal response was to warn against idol meat.²⁰ 1 Tim 4.4 is too much like Paul (esp. 1 Cor 10.23-33), whom the second-century writers largely ignored or misunderstood in this regard.²¹

The Scriptures are affirmed, but against those who would be teachers of the law, not those who reject them (1 Tim 1.7f; cf. 2 Tim 3.16).²² Jesus does appear in the flesh (1 Tim 3.14), but there is no emphasis on the incarnation of Christ born of Mary as a polemic against docetism. The fire of judgement, the apostasy of the archon (or the wicked angels), and the resurrection of the flesh are not mentioned. The PE lack both the emphasis and the formula of second-century orthodoxy as it crystallized in the fight against heresy.

With Judaizers still posing a prominent threat, with docetism not yet showing its ugly face, with the tendencies of the false teaching in the PE fitting in the first century, it is difficult to locate these epistles in the second century. Especially problematic is the failure of the PE to address the docetism which was promoted by all of the most influential heretics of the late first and early second century, Cerinthus, Saturninus, Basilides, Marcion, and Valentinus. Anti-heretical Christian writings originating from the same region of the Mediterranean (Asia Minor-Syrian-Antioch) as the PE, contain explicit polemic against docetism (1-2 John, Ignatius, Polycarp).

Conclusion

What are we to conclude from this exercise of using *3 Cor* as an experimental control? *3 Cor* belongs squarely in the second century: the historical evidence from heresy and orthodoxy especially

leads to this conclusion. On the other hand, when seen in the light of *3 Cor*, the PE stand much closer to the Apostle Paul than to the second century.

Notes

¹ I use my own translations of the *3 Cor*, the numeration of which follows W. Rordorf, P. Cherix and R. Kasser, "Actes de Paul," in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, (ed. F. Bovon and P. Geoltrain; Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 1.1126-77. The designations for MSS (P¹, P⁷, cop¹) of the *Acts of Paul* and *3 Cor* are from Rordorf, *Acta Pauli*, forthcoming text and introduction in the Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum.

² E.g., see the benefits of finding an experimental control for testing the methods used in the commentary on Acts 27 by H. Conzelmann (*Die Apostelgeschichte*, 1963, 141-147) in R. P. C. Hanson, "The Journey of Paul and the Journey of Nikias: An Experiment in Comparative Historiography," *SE 4, TU 102* (Berlin, 1968) 315-18.

³ *Acta Pauli aus der Heidelberger koptischen Papyrushandschrift* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1904).

⁴ Cop¹ is the only extant MS which conserves the entire *API*, albeit in very fragmentary form.

⁵ M. Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer X-XI. X: Correspondance apocryphe des Corinthiens et de l'apôtre Paul. XI: Onzième Odes Salomon. XII: Fragment d'un Hymne liturgique* (Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1959).

⁶ "Hérésie et orthodoxie selon la correspondance apocryphe entre les Corinthiens et l'apôtre Paul," in H.-D. Altendorf et al., *Orthodoxie et hérésie dans l'Eglise ancienne*, Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie 17 (1993) 24-35.

⁷ The Hamburg Papyrus (P¹) does not contain *3 Cor* where expected, an omission which is not significant, since the MS explicitly skips the Philippian episode. But the close literary relationship between *3 Cor* 4.9-13 and *API* XI, 6-7 (P¹ 8.16-21, 25-29), probably indicates the dependence of the author of the original *API* upon *3 Cor*. See A. F. J. Klijn, "The Apocryphal Correspondence Between Paul and the Corinthians," *VC 17* (1963) 14-16; but see the reservations of Rordorf, "Hérésie et orthodoxie," 32.

⁸ On the date of the *API*, see Rordorf, "Actes de Paul," 1122.

⁹ It is, however, not self-evident that *3 Cor* is a forgery. The canonical Corinthian letters do refer to letters of Paul to the Corinthians which are not extant. Thus, it is theoretically possible for an authentic, extra-canonical letter of Paul to be discovered. Two of the earliest interpreters of *3 Cor* in modern times, William Whiston (the translator of Josephus) and Wilhelm Fr. Rinck, bubbled with the excitement that a genuine epistle of Paul had been recovered, if only in the Armenian language. Others, Bishop Ussher, Stephan le Moine, Cotelerius, La Croze, Joh. Lor. Mosheim, Joh. Ben. Carpzou pronounced *3 Cor* inauthentic. For this early history of interpretation, see W. F. Rinck, *Das Sendschreiben der Korinther an den Apostel Paulus und das dritte Sendschreiben Pauli an die Korinther, in armenischer Übersetzung erhalten, nun verdeutscht und mit einer Einleitung über die Ächtheit begleitet* (Heidelberg, 1823) 1-12. Furthermore, a few witnesses from antiquity considered Paul its author: in the Syrian and Armenian churches, *3 Cor* was at times considered canonical. Ephrem the Syrian (fourth century), e.g., expounds *3 Cor* directly after his commentary on 1-2 Corinthians. We must therefore apply the canons of criticism to *3 Cor* so as to test its claim to be by Paul.

¹⁰ Kenneth Berding, “Polycarp of Smyrna’s View of the Authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy,” *VC* 53 (1999) 349-360, argues that Polycarp cites the first two PE in Pauline clusters, indicating a tacit acceptance of their authenticity. This would push back the date of the earliest witness to these letters by roughly 50 years.

¹¹ Scholars have proposed Marcion (M. Rist, “Pseudepigraphic Refutations of Marcionism,” *Journal of Religion* 22 [1942] 46-50; idem., “III Corinthians as a Pseudepigraphic Refutation of Marcionism,” *Illif Review* 26 (1969) 56-58; H. E. Lona, *Über die Auferstehung des Fleisches*, BSNW 66 [1993] 168). Berlin: De Gruyter), Simon Magus (A. F. J. Klijn, “The Apocryphal Correspondence,” 22) and the Orphites (Testuz, *Bodmer Papyrus X*, 30, n. 3). There are serious objections to each of these which Rordorf takes up (“Hérésie et orthodoxie,” 39-40) and which I also address in my PhD dissertation, “The *Acts of Paul* and the Pauline Legacy in the Second Century,” (University of Cambridge, 1996) 122-27.

¹² “Content and Style in Two Pseudo-Pauline epistles (3 Corinthians and the Epistle to the Laodiceans),” in *Apocryphal Writings and Latter-Day Saints* (Brigham Young University: Salt Lake City, 1986), 224.

¹³ This chart is inspired by Rordorf, “Hérésie et orthodoxie,” 41-42.

¹⁴ Παντοκράτωρ. Rordorf is certainly right in saying (“Hérésie et orthodoxie,” 37): “Dans la LXX, παντοκράτωρ est la traduction courante de *Sabaoth*, attribut, comme on sait, très fréquent du Dieu d’Israël. Si l’on dit que Dieu n’est pas παντοκράτωρ, qu’il n’est pas *Sabaoth*, on veut souligner que le Dieu supérieur n’est pas identique au Dieu inférieur tel qu’il nous est présenté dans l’A.T.” Thus, the God of Israel, the παντοκράτωρ, is not the Supreme God, and the saying is in keeping with Saturninus’ teaching that the God of Israel is one of the angels.

¹⁵ Here Irenaeus calls for a double resurrection of the whole human race—the blessed for reward, the wicked for judgment, whereas 3 *Cor* denies the resurrection to those who say there is none.

¹⁶ Regarding the definition of docetism, I refer the reader to D. D. Hannah, “The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christology,” *VC* 53 (1999) 166-70. He makes a correct distinction between properly docetic and separationist Christologies which I have not found necessary to make in this paper. See in this light, Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (trans. ed. R. McL. Wilson; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 157f.

¹⁷ Ignatius shows that the concern of Judaism has not disappeared altogether (*Phld.* 6.1; *Magn.* 8.1), but he is more concerned about docetists. *Barn.* and Justin, *Dial.*, are the exceptions that prove the rule: they are no longer concerned about the circumcision of gentile Christians but about proving that the Church supplants the Jews as the true people of God.

¹⁸ E.g., H. von Campenhausen writes (*Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* [trans. J. A. Baker; Stanford: University Press, 1969], 112): “Their author is concerned to ensure the appearance of authenticity against any doubts that may be raised; and he ingeniously corroborates this with numerous details quite peripheral to his real purpose.”

¹⁹ *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) 9.

²⁰ The stance of the second century regarding idol meat is more in line with Acts 15 and Rev 1-3 than with Paul’s subtle approach. Thus, Irenaeus cannot condemn the Encratites for not eating meat without immediately criticizing those who permit the consumption of idol meats (*Haer.* 1.28.1-2).

²¹ See John C. Brunt, "Rejected, Ignored, or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul's Approach to the Problem of Idol Food in Early Christianity," *NTS* (1985) 31:113-24.

²² Admittedly, all the gnostics misused Scriptures; but the reaction of the rule of faith, as we see in *3 Cor*, is against those who say that the OT is to be rejected.