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Chapter XXIII

Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings

Donald Guthrie

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The large amount of pseudepigraphical literature which circulated during the early period of the history of the church serves one useful function. It provides a most effective contrast with the canonical New Testament books, which cannot fail to stamp the latter as productions of a different kind. It has always been recognized that imitation is a form of flattery which often leads to a greater appreciation of the real thing. It is with this end in view that the present study will look at some of the apocryphal Acts and Epistles. A study of the structure and methods of compilation of apocryphal books will throw light on certain problems which arise out of the canonical models.

I

There were several apocryphal Acts but only the four earliest will be examined. These are the Acts of John, of Paul, of Peter and of Andrew.¹ The most significant will be the Acts of Paul, because it alone of these books was highly regarded in some quarters within the orthodox church, as for instance at Alexandria. Moreover, of the production of this book some details are known because Tertullian referred to the matter and to the attitude of the Asiatic church towards it.

(a) *The Acts of John*

This was considered by M. R. James² to be the earliest of the apocryphal Acts, and was dated mid-second century. According to Photius (A.D. 890) this Acts, together with the other major pseudo-Acts (Paul, Peter, Andrew and Thomas), was the work of Leucius Charinus, who was supposed to have been a disciple of John,³ but M. R. James restricts this author's activity to the Acts of John alone.⁴

¹ Cf. Lipsius-Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* II (1898), for the texts. C. Schmidt published some important works on the apocryphal acts, of which the most notable for our purpose are *Die alten Petrusakten*, TU n.f. ix I (1905) and two on *Acta Pauli*, one on the Heidelberg coptic text in 1904 and the other on the Hamburg text in 1936.

² *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), p. 228.

³ According to Epiphanius; cf. P. Carrington, *The Early Christian Church* II (Cambridge, 1957), p. 354.

⁴ In his *Apocrypha Anecdota* II (Cambridge, 1897), M. R. James pointed out the appropriateness of the choice of the name Leucius by a writer of a book of Acts, because of its resemblance to Luke (pp. xi-xii). On the connexion of the Acts of John with those of Paul and Peter, cf. M. Blumenthal, *Formen and Motive in den apokryphen Apostelgeschichten*, TU XLVIII (Leipzig, 1933), pp. 161-6. By form-critical methods he concluded that these were not directly dependent upon each other; Thomas was derived from Paul and John, and Andrew was indebted to all the others. But some recent writers would dispute this view of Andrew (see note I, p. 336).

Donald Guthrie, "Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings," W.Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.328-345.

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In the strictest sense the Acts of John is not pseudepigraphical, for the story is told generally in the third person except where speeches are attributed to John and to other speakers. It is therefore rather a religious romance published under an apostolic name. But two tendencies which it displays are significant for our purpose since they furnish useful background material. (i) There is a very definite desire to enhance the honour of the apostle by the description of numerous miracles, especially the raising of the dead. And (ii) there is a decidedly dogmatic motive in propagating what appear to be Valentinian ideas.⁵

The details of John mentioned in this book are based on traditional material. The scenes are set in Ephesus and mention is made of the adjoining cities of Miletus and Smyrna.⁶ Numerous people are named in the book, but only three of the names bear any resemblance to names found in the canonical writings, Andronicus (31, cf. Rom. 16:7), Tertullus (59, Acts 24:1, 2) and the latter's wife called Aristobula, which might be an echo of Aristobulus (Rom.16:10). But the other fifteen names are quite unknown in canonical traditions.⁷ In this respect the Acts of John differs from the Acts of Paul, where more of the names are culled from such a source.

The exceptions to the third person style are curious. In 60 a "we-section" abruptly appears, while in the next section the first person singular is used ("But when the day was now dawning I arose first"); but the "I" is sharply distinguished from John, who is then said to be still asleep (61). The plural "we" is continued to the end of section 62, not to be resumed again until sections 72 and 73. It occurs again only in the Latin account of John's death (or assumption). This supplies an interesting parallel with the canonical Acts, where "we-sections" again appear and disappear. In the Acts of John, it may well be a direct imitation of Luke's style which would show an early awareness of this characteristic. Clearly the author of this book does not intend to use John as a pseudonym, but is making himself out to be an associate of the apostle.

In a speech attributed to John there are clear marks of identification to show which John is intended. "For when he had chosen Peter and Andrew which were brethren he comes to me and James my brother" (88). John

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connects himself with James and Peter on the mount of transfiguration (90), and in the same incident he claims special privilege "because he (i.e. the Lord) loved me". Since the only mention of John in the canonical Acts is in company with Peter, the imitative process is again apparent.

⁵ Carrington *op. cit.*, p. 355. illustrates from the background of the Gnostic threefold division of mankind. J. Quasten, *Patrology* (Utrecht-Antwerp, 1950), p. 136, considers that the speeches of this book "evinced unmistakably Docetic tendencies".

⁶ Cf. *Acts of John* 18, 35, 55.

⁷ The following are mentioned: Damonius, Aristodemus, Cleobius Marcellus (18), Lycomedes, Cleopatra, Callippus (19), Verus (30), Drusiana, Aristippus, Xenophon (59). Craton (xiv), Stacteus (xvii), Atticus and Eugenius (xviii). [References follow James, *op. cit.*]

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Again he says "all we his disciples were at Gennesaret" (92), and in the next section "sometimes when I would lay hold on him". The conscious attempt to achieve verisimilitude is here unmistakable. Moreover, the author's high estimate of John is clear from the descriptions he uses, e.g. "apostle of Christ" (26, 55), "servant of God" (19, 74), "holy apostle" (62, XVIII). But all these terms are found within the canonical books, and would be quite natural in describing one of the apostolic circle. A similar high estimate of John is found in one passage (92), where it is said that all the other disciples slept, but John watched, an obvious mark of his superiority. This tendency to exalt one apostle beyond the others was a feature of Gnostic writers.

According to A. F. Findlay⁸ this author was a man of great literary gifts and deep religious feeling. Yet although the book may shine among its pseudepigraphical fellows, it is considerably inferior to the canonical Acts, both in literary form and spiritual purpose.

(b) *The Acts of Paul*

This book is more important for our study because it appears to be an orthodox work and because we happen to possess a comment upon the author's production by Tertullian, who records the strong disapproval of the church against it. The book is sometimes dated ca.A.D. 160, although recent studies have tended towards a date nearer A.D. 200.⁹ It is an important witness to the approach to pseudepigraphy at a time when the New Testament canon was gaining increasing fixation.

The first important consideration is the relationship of this book to the canonical Acts. There is no doubt about the author's close acquaintance with the latter book, but there are differences in his treatment of the historical facts. The main framework seems to be Paul's first missionary journey,¹⁰ as is evident from the mention of Antioch, Iconium and Myra, particularly in connection with the martyrdom of Thecla. Yet whereas in the canonical account Barnabas was with him, in this account he is alone. Moreover, there is no mention of the sea voyage. On the other hand, there are further journeys mentioned which differ from the canonical account;

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for from Myra Paul goes to Sidon, Tyre and probably Jerusalem in the reverse order from his final journey to Rome (Acts 21:3, 5), although the author may have had the details of Acts 21: 3, 5 here in mind. At least, some confusion seems to have occurred in Acts of Paul 4, where, after describing the departure of Paul from Myra, the narrative mentions him in company with two Christian couples, eating bread under a tree, which is not easy to reconcile with the sea journey

⁸ *Byways in Early Christian Literature* (Edinburgh, 1923), p. 210. Findlay was of the opinion that the "we-sections" in this book were suggested by the "we-sections" in Acts, and if this is true it shows the strong imitative impulse. Cf. also G. Schimmelpfang, "Johannesakten", in Hennecke's *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* (Tübingen, 1904), p. 431, on his literary characteristics.

⁹ So C. Schmidt, *op. cit.*, on the strength of the Hamburg text and G. Quispel VC 10 (1956), p. 147, on the basis of its use of the Acts of Andrew.

¹⁰ But cf. M. R. James' suggestion that the *Acta Pauli* may have been intended as a continuation of the canonical Acts, *JTS* 6 (1905), pp. 244-6.

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which the narrative requires. The author appears to be little concerned about the way his narrative fits into the Acts story, provided some impression of a connection is created by the use of parallel names.¹¹ Leon Vouaux considered the choice of names to be quite arbitrary.¹²

These observations are sufficient to establish the nature of this book as a pious romance; because it also displays certain tendencies which appear to be germane to the question of pseudepigraphy in general, it is worthwhile to make further comment on it. 3 *Corinthians* (This is an apocryphal epistle 1 & 2 Cor. are canonical = in N.T.) *Corinthians* will be considered separately when apocryphal epistles are examined.

Of the fifty-six names of persons mentioned, few are taken from the New Testament and even those that are appear in a different role. Titus appears as Paul's precursor at Iconium and Rome,¹³ which is not out of keeping with canonical references to him as Paul's special representative (cf. 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13 ff.; 8:7). Onesiphorus (cf. 2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19) has his residence at Iconium instead of Ephesus, although it is not impossible that this man originated in Iconium and that a correct tradition is here preserved.¹⁴ Demas (cf. 2 Tim. 4:10) and Hermogenes (cf. 2 Tim. 1:15) become leading heretics,¹⁵ while in the Corinthian correspondence names are mentioned of which one only appears in the canonical Corinthian epistles, i.e. Stephanus (1 Cor. 16:17), although Eubulus is mentioned in 2 Tim. 4:21 in a different context, and Theophilus in the preface to the canonical Acts (Acts 1:1). Eutychus (Acts 20:9), a young man of Troas, becomes a deacon at Corinth (spelt Eutyches). Luke is said to have come to Rome from Galatia and Titus from Dalmatia,¹⁶ and here there seems to be a reminiscence of 2 Timothy 4:10 with Luke substituted for Crescens. Another curious transposition is the appearance of Barsabas Justus, the losing candidate for apostolic office in Acts 1:23, as one of Caesar's chief men.¹⁷ But the great

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majority of names bear no resemblance at all to canonical personalia. Moreover, there are some mistakes of an historical kind, as for instance in the reference to the Roman Governor at Iconium.¹⁸ In face of these facts some reserve must be exercised before assuming that the Acts of Paul is a typical example of the use of personalia in pseudepigrapha to add verisimilitude. If that was the author's purpose he badly bungled the attempt, and the work would have possessed an

¹¹ Cf. J. Gwynn, article on "Thecla", in *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, edited Smith and Wace (London, 1887), IV.

¹² *Les Acts de Paul et ses lettres apocryphes* (Paris, 1913), p. 115, "On saisit facilement le procédé; l'auteur n'emprunte en Somme à la source authentique que des noms de villes, unis par un lien plus ou moins lâche, on même complètement séparés, et il fait de ces noms l'usage arbitraire qui lui convient".

¹³ *Acts of Paul* in James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 272, 29.

¹⁴ Cf. E. B. Redlich, *St. Paul and his Companions* (London, 1913), pp. 258 f.

¹⁵ James, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹⁶ Cf. James, *op. cit.*, p. 293. Cf. also M. Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe*³ (Tübingen, 1955) p. 97.

¹⁷ Cf. James, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

¹⁸ Cf. C. H. Turner, *Studies in Early Church History* (Oxford, 1912), p. 181, who also drew attention to the confusion over the two Antiochs.

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appearance of greater veracity had the personalia been omitted.¹⁹ Strangely enough there are no personalia in the incorporated 3 Corinthians, which achieved some success in separate circulation in spite of, or perhaps even because of this. The fact that among the canonical names used one only, Stephanus, does not occur in the canonical Acts or 2 Timothy, suggests that these two books were the author's chief sources, and may further indicate that this book is intended as a continuation of the canonical Acts.

Another aspect which deserves mention is the use of traditional and other material unconnected with canonical sources. Apart from Nero only one personage known in secular history is introduced and that is Queen Tryphaena, a great niece of the Emperor Claudius.²⁰ This fact, together with the royal route chosen from Antioch to Iconium which was not usual in the second century, suggested to Sir William Ramsay²¹ that the author used an earlier traditional source; but his views on this are not widely accepted. Various opinions are held regarding the Thecla story,²² making it difficult to reach any conclusion over the extent of the author's inventiveness. But that a major portion of his romance is his own fiction pure and simple can hardly be challenged. His portrait of Paul is an interesting study²³ for it is not exactly flattering, although it is clear that the author held the apostle in high esteem. Some think that this latter fact makes it improbable that he invented the portrait, but perhaps it is no more than a portrait of a representative Jew. There is certainly a touch of realism about it which speaks much for the artistic imagination of the author if it is his own invention.

When the purpose of this fiction is considered, tradition helpfully supplies one answer; Tertullian²⁴ reports that the author, a presbyter of Asia,

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did it for love of Paul (*amore Pauli*). But this statement does not tell us what he hoped to achieve by this means, unless it was to enhance the reputation of Paul.²⁵ But if so it was not a success

¹⁹ It is on this score that A. F. Findlay rejected Schmidt's opinion that the author was a deliberate forger, who, he argued, could not have shown less skill, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

²⁰ Cf. James, *op. cit.*, pp. 272, 278.

²¹ *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*⁴ (Edinburgh, 1905), pp. 375-428.

²² M. Goguel, *Introduction an Nouveau Testament*, Tome IV, Les Epîtres pauliniennes (Paris, 1925), p. 77, admits the possibility of the existence of such a person as Thecla but denies the possibility of reconstructing her history. He mentions Harnack, Rolffs, Clemen and Vouaux as holding a similar opinion. Ramsay and Zahn were more certain of her real existence, while Rey, Schmidt and Kruger regarded her as an invention. J. Gwynn, *op. cit.*, gives a full discussion of the historicity of Thecla. On the romance-motive behind the story, cf. Blumenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

²³ Cf. James, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

²⁴ *De Baptismo*, xvii.

²⁵ In discussing the author's purpose, A. F. Findlay, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-70, suggests that he "was an enthusiastic hero-worshipper, and he wrote a tale to glorify his hero of the kind that he knew would be eagerly read. In doing so, he made him the mouthpiece of his own thoughts and convictions, believing that he was doing the apostle honour; and his purpose was served when these were lodged in men's minds with the vividness of appeal which a fascinating story can commend." Findlay excuses the author on the grounds that he possessed a different "conscience for historical veracity from our own" (*op. cit.*, p. 271).

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among many of his own contemporaries, for his fiction was apparently soon discovered and unhesitatingly condemned. One further comment may be made on Tertullian's statement.²⁶ He was evidently aware that some people were using this book to support the right of women to teach; and if the author intended to support such a cause, his purpose would be definitely dogmatic. But although his approach to women teachers in the church was novel, his doctrine appears to have been orthodox.

The place of this book in the early church is of great importance because it throws considerable light on the orthodox attitude towards such fictions. That the second century church took a strong line is evident from the fact that the presbyter-author was unfrocked (*loco decessisse*). But there has been some dispute over the precise reason for such action. Did the church deprive the presbyter of his office on account of his fiction, or on account of his teaching?²⁷

Tertullian himself condemns no particular doctrine in the book, and we have no reason to suppose that the Asiatic church did either. At least, had Tertullian been aware of any error advanced in the book it is hard to believe that he would have restrained himself from attacking it, in view of his attacks on so many heretical notions. It seems reasonably conclusive that the presbyter was not condemned on account of unorthodox views, but on account of his fiction. Indeed, Tertullian reports that the condemnation followed the author's own confession of being author of the book.²⁸ There is no room here for the theory that the church in Asia might regard the work as a legitimate convention, and certainly Tertullian lends no support to this view. To him the work falsely (*perperam*) bears Paul's name and was fabricated as if by Paul's authority (*construxit quasi titulo Pauli*). The fact that the author claims to have done it *amore Pauli*

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apparently made no difference.²⁹ Neither the church in Asia nor the African Tertullian seems to have been moved by such methods of hero-worship. It should, moreover, be noted that the people whom Tertullian is informing were evidently appealing to the Acts of Paul as if it set forth the genuine Pauline approach to the position of women. They were apparently unaware that the work was unauthentic and Tertullian sees no necessity to do more than draw their attention to the fact.

²⁶ Tertullian, *op. cit.*, "Quod si qui Paulo perperam inscripta legunt exemplum Theclae ad licentiam mulierum docendi tingendique defendunt, scint in Asia prebyterum, qui cam scripturam construxit, quasi titulo Pauli de suo cumulans, convictum atque confessum id se amore Pauli fecisse, loco decessisse." A. Souter, "The Acta Pauli" etc., in Tertullian, *JTS* 25 (1924), p. 292, mentioned a different text which reads "quodsi que *acta pauli* que perperam scripta sunt...."

²⁷ R. A. Lipsius, *Die apokryphen Apostelgeschichten* (1887) II, pt. 1, pp. 448 ff., maintained that our present work is a catholic recension of a Gnostic original.

²⁸ J. Gwynn, *art. cit.*, p. 869, strongly maintained that the presbyter was punished for fraud.

²⁹ A strange feature of this claim to have written *amore Pauli* is the lack of understanding of Paul shown in the book. As Gwynn remarked, "with a large and verbally exact knowledge (characteristic of one who had a "love of Paul") of the parts of the New Testament whence a knowledge of Paul's life and teaching is to be gathered—his Epistles and the Acts—the author combines an utter want of faculty to appreciate or reproduce their spirit", *ibid.*, p. 890. The author shows some attempted ingenuity by including here and there a Pauline phrase as, for instance, in the beatitudes in Paul's speech in Onesiphorus' house.

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Yet this book achieved some popularity among orthodox Christians. Origen cited it and regarded it as optional whether his readers chose to receive it.³⁰ But it is not mentioned again until the fourth century. The Claromontanus list contains it but distinguishes it from canonical books, as does Eusebius,³¹ although he does not place it among the heretical books (*notha*) but among the disputed books. Methodius referred to Thecla, while Ephraem³² actually wrote a commentary on 3 Corinthians. To Aphraates this spurious epistle appears to have been on a par with the canonical books. In the West both Jerome and Augustine rejected it. The history of the book, while it shows some popularity in some quarters, makes clear that this book was never considered as apostolic with any serious claim to canonicity.³³ This happened only to 3 Corinthians in Eastern regions.

(c) *The Acts of Peter*

According to M. R. James³⁴ this book was probably written by an author from Asia Minor not later than A.D. 200. He has drawn much from the Acts of John, but his theological approach is less unorthodox. The book is an instructive example of the propagation of a literary device through imitation, and is a pointer to the way in which such devices might have become conventional. This is further supported by the fact that the author was apparently also well acquainted with the

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Acts of Paul. Indeed the first three chapters of the Vercelli Acts of Peter relate to Paul and not to Peter, leading some scholars to attach them to the Acts of Paul, but M. R. James³⁵ was not inclined to favour this. In any case the Acts of Paul, unlike this book, is not heretical.

While the major part of this work is a fictitious invention, there are a few points where it touches historical tradition. Paul's visit to Spain is mentioned (IV), and Peter's contest with Simon in Judea is recalled (V, XVII, XVIII), but a new feature is Peter's second clash with Simon in Rome and the latter's manner of death (XXIII ff.). There may be some earlier tradition behind this, but

³⁰ In *De principiis* I. 2. 3. In his commentary on Jn. 20:12, Origen says, "If it pleases anyone to receive what is written in the Acts of Paul..."

³¹ *Ecclesiastical History* III. iii. 5.

³² Ephraem did not suspect the unauthenticity of this work for, as Vouaux (*op. cit.*, p. 34) has pointed out, he condemned the practice of the Bardesanites for having written some Acts of the Apostles under the forged names of apostles.

³³ J. Gwynn, *art. cit.*, p. 894, comments on this book as follows, "Thus the contents of these Acts of Paul and Thecla serve indirectly to confirm the authenticity of the canonical Acts by showing how difficult, it may safely be said how impossible it would be for a *falsarius*, even if writing at no great distance in place or time from the scene and date of his fictitious narrative, to avoid betraying himself by mistakes such as the author of our Acts has fallen into. And the history of the reception of his work proves further that such attempt to palm off pseudo-apostolic documents for genuine was not difficult of exposure, nor passed over as a light offence."

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 300.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

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it is difficult to be certain.³⁶ The account of Peter's martyrdom, in which Peter himself is made to request to be crucified upside down, is probably based on the allusion in John 21:18; but the whole account is tinged with Gnosticizing tendencies, resembling in this the *Acts of John*. This Petrine romance steers clear of the framework of Acts, and is clearly intended to be supplementary to the canonical account to satisfy curiosity regarding the later history of Peter.

As a literary production this book does not shine, nor does its doctrine inspire. There are ascetic characteristics, as for instance in the stress on the continence of women (cf. Acts of Paul). There is also a marked love of the extraordinary. Some are raised from the dead (cf. XXV ff, where three youths are raised in succession), a dog speaks with a man's voice (IX) as does an infant (XV), while on two occasions Simon the sorcerer is said to fly (IV, XXXII); but the most unusual act of Peter the wonder-worker is the resurrection of the dead herring (XIII), which as Carrington³⁷ suggests may have been poking fun at the type of miracle attributed to Simon. Another instance of the heightening of the miraculous is the restoration of a statue smashed to pieces (XI). The writer is not lacking in imagination, but his production is poor in quality when compared with the canonical Acts. It is no wonder that in spite of its circulation in many quarters it never even approached being considered as canonical. Its unauthentic character must have been too obvious to the more discerning minds of the church, while its late appearance would naturally create almost insuperable suspicions.

While not strictly pseudepigraphic in form, it nevertheless contains many samples of Petrine speeches in the first person; and the author's method in these speeches is worth noting. Peter is made to refer to his denial, although the allusion is quite vague (VII): he is reminded of his faithlessness when doubting in the waters (X); he speaks of being "with the sons of Zebedee" at the Transfiguration (XX), but the account of this bears only the faintest resemblance to the canonical accounts. He also

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recalls Simon's homage to him (and to Paul!) in Judea (XXIII). These details may rightly be regarded as personalia introduced to add an appearance of verisimilitude to the narrative. Many names are included which are unknown from biblical sources (such as Theon, Eubula [also in the Acts of Paul], Italicus, Autulus, Agrippinus, Nicostratus, Chryse and many others).

The mentality of the author towards his literary device must be assessed against the fact that he represents deceit as a device of the devil, exemplified in his representative Simon (cf. XVII). "God who is full of all truth" is the God he worships, while he makes Peter confess from the cross that truth and falsehood issue from his tongue (XXXIX). It is difficult to believe that a man

³⁶ P. Carrington, *The Early Christian Church* (Cambridge, 1959), II, p. 358, thinks that "the readers of the tale would look for the points which were familiar to them, and the writer would use these points to provide a semblance of historical outline for his inventions."

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

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so conscious of the nature of deceit would have considered that his own work fell under this category.

(d) *The Acts of Andrew*

Until recently it had been maintained that this book was a third century product; but with the discovery of a Coptic fragment of the book it is now suggested that it was produced during the last quarter of the second century.³⁸ It probably influenced the production of later Acts associated with Andrew's name, although little direct relationship can be established. The book is a defence of Gnostic theology and therefore had a distinctly dogmatic purpose. It is significant because the whole narrative centres upon the importance of Andrew, about whom so little is recorded in the canonical Gospels. It is practically certain that no historical importance can be attached to the legends included in this book. Andrew appears to have been chosen as a symbol for propaganda purposes. Since no hint is given in the canonical Acts about Andrew's missionary activities, it was an easy matter to resort to imagination to fill in the lacunae. The Gnostic Acts of Andrew set those activities in Asia Minor and Greece, while the later Acts of Andrew and Matthias placed them in Scythia. The location is not a matter of great importance, but the arbitrary character of the selection throws some light on the mental processes by which this series of apocryphal books were produced. In the same vein is the creation of a number of speeches in which Andrew verbosely addresses various people and even things (as for instance his cross). Historical probability was not a high priority for this author.

The book is of interest because of its connection with the other early apocryphal Acts. Indeed, G. Quispel³⁹ has dated this book before the Acts of Paul, in certain scenes of which he thinks an imitation of the Acts of Andrew can be found. In this case an orthodox apocryphal Acts is seen to have imitated a Gnosticizing one.

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General Considerations on these Acts

These samples of apocryphal Acts were the prelude of a mass of literary productions of a similar kind. With the Acts of Thomas they were formed into a corpus by the Manichaeans and substituted for the canonical Acts.⁴⁰ In addition to these, the numerous minor Acts, produced during the later period, are testimony to the fertile although often dull imagination of Christian romancers. They show the ease with which the mental atmosphere, which was peculiarly adapted to foster the spread of fictitious stories about the apostles and the use of pseudepigraphy, could and did develop. The main features of the earlier works may be summarized as follows:

³⁸ Cf. P. M. Peterson's study, *Andrew, Brother of Simon Peter* (1963). Cf. also G. Quispel, *VC* 10 (1956), pp. 129-48; and J. Barns, *JTS* ns 11 (1960), pp. 63-70.

³⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ M. R. James, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

Donald Guthrie, "Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings," W.Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.328-345.

(i) They are mainly associated with the major apostles, although there was a strong tendency at a later period to develop narratives to satisfy the curiosity of Christians regarding the subsequent history of other apostles and even of their disciples.⁴¹

(ii) They were undoubtedly modelled on the canonical Acts as far as their narrative form, but the parallels are often very loose. In narratives about the apostles other than Peter or Paul, the pseudepigraphic authors had no canonical precedent and could therefore give free play to their imagination.

(iii) As in the case of the apocryphal gospels there is a heightening of the miraculous and a glossing over of the human weakness of the apostolic wonder-workers.⁴²

(iv) In some of these Acts no dogmatic purpose is clear, but in the majority it is dominant. Even where no heretical tendencies can be traced, as in the Acts of Paul, certain practices of an unorthodox kind may be discerned (e.g. baptism by women).

(v) The pseudonymous device is confined mostly to speeches attributed in the first person to the apostolic hero. But this has been accounted for by the conventions of ancient historiography.

(vi) Some of the extra-canonical material may reflect genuine tradition, although it is seldom possible to indicate its extent. The portrait of Paul in the Acts of Paul furnishes an example of this.

(vii) Fictitious names are freely introduced, but they are mostly unconnected with the canonical personalia. Where persons known from

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canonical sources are mentioned, there are often differences which suggest that the authors did not place much store by "personalia" to achieve acceptance for their works.

⁴¹ A. F. Findlay, *op. cit.*, p. 186, well expressed this point, "The writers of the apostolic romances had little conscience for the facts of history—history, indeed, was not their concern—and their audience, whose appetite was whetted for any tales bearing on the heroic age of the faith, was not disposed to be critical". L. Duchesne, *The Early History of the Church*, I (London, 1909), p. 370, commented, "The curiosity of the little world of Christians led them to give too ready a welcome to Gospels which were not officially recognized and especially to the pious romances about the apostles which claimed to be genuine."

⁴² J. Geffcken, *Christliche Apokryphen* (Tübingen, 1908), pp. 25, 26. On the other hand, A. Walker, *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Revelations* (Edinburgh, 1870), p. xiii, maintained a distinction on this score, with the Acts containing less of miracle. He explained the difference on the grounds that the Gospels were suited to the *vilis plebecula* and the Acts to the *Academia*. For the "Wundermotive" in the Apocryphal Acts, cf. Blumenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 144 ff.

II

Pseudepigraphic Epistles. The study of extra-canonical examples of apocryphal epistles has greater importance than that of any other apocryphal Christian writings because of the number of canonical epistles and the number of hypotheses which involve the assumption that pseudepigraphy was a commonly accepted device. And yet, paradoxically, pseudepigraphic letters are fewer in number than the other types, a factor which immediately demands explanation. M. R. James comments, "This form did not find much favour with the makers of apocrypha.... It does appear that the epistle was on the whole too serious an effort for the forger, more liable to detection, perhaps, as a fraud, and not so likely to gain the desired popularity as a narrative or an Apocalypse. Certain it is that our apocryphal epistles are few and not impressive".⁴³ Those which James includes number six: the Letters of Christ and Abgarus, the Letter of Lentulus, the Epistle to the Laodiceans, the Correspondence between Paul and Seneca, the Epistle of the Apostles and 3 Corinthians (included in the Acts of Paul). Of these only the two Pauline letters and the Epistle of the Apostles merit consideration for our purpose, for these alone with any probability are sufficiently early to warrant examination. Besides being later, the others make little attempt to conform to the accepted epistolary form, which may suggest that later pseudepigraphists were more interested in the pseudonymous ascription than the literary form. The correspondence between Paul and Seneca is notable in this respect, for the letters are not shaped according to the pattern we should expect, and there is not the remotest similarity between the literary style of either men and these poorly produced counterfeits. Their later popularity is but the measure of popular credulity, although it should not be forgotten that even Jerome included Seneca in his catalogue of Christian authors, presumably on the strength of this correspondence.

(a) *Third Corinthians*. This spurious epistle is being examined apart from its original context in the Acts of Paul because of its later separate circulation in the Syriac-speaking church, where it even appears to have achieved some sort of canonicity for a time. It has recently been suggested by M. Testuz,⁴⁴ who has published the Bodmer Greek text of the Corinthian correspondence that 3 Corinthians had an independent history and was later incorporated into the Acts of Paul. If this theory were correct, it would provide an example of an orthodox anti-heretical pseudepigraphical

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epistle. But it is more probable that the author of the Acts of Paul was himself the creator of this correspondence. Ephraem commented on it and placed it on a level with the other Pauline epistles. It is therefore an example of a definite pseudepigraphon which not only possessed a popular appeal, but also received the favour of a notable Eastern Father. Yet the fact that it was placed among the Pauline Epistles suggests that its pseudepigraphical character was not suspected and its Pauline claims treated as genuine.

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, p. 476.

⁴⁴ M. Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer X* (1959).

In this epistle the author's motive for producing it is transparent. It is placed in an historical setting in the Acts of Paul, which sufficiently accounts for its appearance. Paul is represented as at Philippi when he received a letter from the Corinthian church, which is troubled about two false teachers, one of whom is significantly named Simon (no doubt an allusion to Simon Magus, reputed father of all Christian heresies). This introductory letter lists six erroneous doctrines being propagated. (i) The prophets must not be used, (ii) God is not Almighty, (iii) There shall be no resurrection of the flesh, (iv) Man is not made by God, (v) Christ is not come in the flesh, nor was born of Mary, and (vi) The world is not born of God but of the angels.⁴⁵ It is not difficult to recognize in this description the tenets of certain Gnostic sects, and the spurious Pauline epistle is clearly designed to answer these false assertions. It looks as if the author is transferring to the Corinthians the problems of his own age and is purporting to give the answer that he imagines Paul would have given. If this is a true account of the author's purpose, it would supply a valuable support for the theory that certain New Testament epistles were produced with a similar aim (e.g. the Pastorals). But the author's methods as well as his motives must be taken into account.

The most important consideration is to discover the extent to which the author attempts to approximate to Pauline literary style and teaching. He begins well; the opening phrase ("Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ") is identical with Philemon I (cf. also Eph. 3:1), while the addressees are described in words parallel to Colossians I:2 ("the brethren in Corinth"). But the use of Χαίρειν⁴⁶ in the opening salutation shows that the author's imitative purpose is not strong, for this does not occur in Paul's epistles at all. After this the epistle shows little direct contact with Paul's epistles until towards the end, although there are many phrases which may be mental echoes of the author's acquaintance with these epistles. For instance, "in the midst of many tribulations" might echo 2 Corinthians 1:4 (ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν) or 6:4 (ἐν θλίψεσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν στενοχωρίαις) or perhaps an even closer parallel in 2 Corinthians 2:4, where Paul says that he wrote to the Corinthians ἐκ πολλῆς θλίψεως. If 2

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Corinthians 2:4 was in the author's mind, he may be providing a lost epistle; but this must remain conjectural, since we do not know his interpretation of this verse. It is unlikely that he had unravelled the complicated Corinthian problem or was even aware of its existence. He may well have thought it proper to make some allusion to θλίψις in a Pauline letter. Other echoes from Paul's epistles are:- "The teachings of the evil one" (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1): "them that falsify his words" (3) (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1-7, 4:2) "for I delivered to you in the beginning the things which I received (4) (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 3, almost verbatim) ; "of the seed of David according to the flesh" (5) (cf. Rom. 1: 3) ; "that he might come down into this world and redeem all flesh by his flesh" (6) (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15, Tit. 2:14, Gal. 1:4) ; "quickened by adoption" (8) (cf. Rom. 8:11, 15, 23, Gal. 4:4, 5); "the temple of righteousness in his body" (17) (cf. 1 Cor 3:17, Eph. 2:21); "children of wrath" (19)

⁴⁵ Cf. M. R. James, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁴⁶ Cited from Harnack's reconstructed Greek text in *Kleine Texte, Apokrypha IV, Die apokryphen Briefe des Paulus an die Laodicener and Korinther* (Bonn, 1905), p. 13.

(cf. Eph. 2:3); "flee from their doctrine" (21) (cf. Eph. 2:5, 6; Col 3:6); these are all phrases which may well have formed part of the author's stock phraseology, culled subconsciously from Paul's epistles but revealing no sustained effort at verbal or stylistic imitation. It is rather different in the long passage from 24-33, where direct indebtedness to 1 Corinthians 15 seems unmistakable. In 24 the author speaks of those who say there is no resurrection of the flesh (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12); in 26 he uses the analogy of seeds (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35 ff), while in 33 the phrase occurs "at the sound of the trumpet, in the twinkling of an eye" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:52). In this passage Matthew's gospel is also echoed in the citing of the incident of Jonah (29, 30) (cf. Matt. 12:40) and in the expression, "How much more, O you of little faith" (31, 32) (cf. Matt. 6:30). In the concluding section, 34-40, a few echoes of Pauline phrases occur, the most notable being in 35, "for I bear these bonds that I may win Christ, and I therefore bear his marks in my body that I might attain to the resurrection of the dead", which is clearly a conflation of Philippians 3:8, 11 and Galatians 6:1-7. The same passage in Galatians may have provided the idea of "rule" in 36 (cf. Gal. 6: 16) and the expression "let no man trouble me" in 34 (cf. Gal. 6:17). The idea of God as witness in 34 may be compared with Romans 1:9, and 1 Thessalonians 2: 5.⁴⁷

This survey of Pauline parallels has brought to light some interesting data about this early pseudo-Paulinist's method of compilation. The influence of the genuine Corinthian epistles is, as we should expect, stronger than that of any other epistles. Whereas isolated echoes from several others are probable, the author does not show a deep acquaintance with them. Moreover, he does not model the form of his letter on any canonical example. It is surprising, for instance, that he does not approximate more closely to 1 and 2 Corinthians, although the differences between those two

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epistles would provide some safeguard against the detection of obvious deviations. Apart from the introductory statement about Paul being a prisoner and an allusion to his tribulations, there are no conscious attempts to maintain his identity. In this case, no doubt, the author would hardly have considered it necessary since the narrative in the Acts of Paul itself supplies the setting, unless the epistle was produced independent of and prior to the narrative.

If the expected Pauline phraseology is largely lacking, the same is true of the characteristic Pauline teaching. It is not merely a lack of some of the great Pauline concepts, which need not be imported into every letter that Paul wrote, but the poverty of the ideas which are attributed to him. Although the Corinthians' own letter raises issues of fundamental importance, there is only the most meagre attempt at a doctrinal answer. Indeed, there is no real conception of how Paul would have tackled the problem. Each point raised by the Corinthians is touched upon but there is no grappling with essential issues as we should expect from Paul. The whole attempt reveals the author's pathetic lack of spiritual stature. Even in that part which shows closest acquaintance

⁴⁷ It is significant that the author does not make Paul speak in the first person except in phrases which seem to be directly echoed from his epistles. The only possible exception is that in which he makes Paul say, "I marvel not if the teachings of the evil one run abroad apace" (2).

Donald Guthrie, "Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.328-345.

with Paul, i.e. the part dealing with the resurrection, the author has weakened the apostle's incomparable argument with an allusion to Jonah. It is not without justification that P. Wendland⁴⁸ called this epistle, together with that to the Laodiceans, "paltry and clumsy"; and there are few who would dispute this opinion. The majority of early Christians were not deceived by its pseudo-apostolicity, and even its Syrian "canonicity" was certainly short-lived since soon after the time of Ephraem the Syrian church rejected it.⁴⁹

(b) *The Epistle to the Laodiceans.* In the Muratorian Fragment a statement occurs regarding two works spuriously attributed to Paul, which is full of significance for our present purpose. "Fertur etiam ad Laudicenses, alia ad Alexandrinos Pauli nomine finctae ad heresem Marcionis et alia plura quae in catholica ecclesia recipi non potest".⁵⁰ ("For there is also one to the Laodiceans, another to the Alexandrians, forged in the name of Paul for Marcion's heresy and several others which cannot be received in the Catholic church"). It is therefore certain that pseudepigraphic Pauline epistles were circulating during the second century A.D., although none of these have been preserved. Nothing is known of the letter to the Alexandrians, but differences of opinion exist regarding that to the Laodiceans. It can hardly be the epistle still extant under that name, for that epistle was not forged in the interests of Marcionism. It contains nothing which would have advanced Marcion's cause; and had the anonymous author of the fragment

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been acquainted with this colourless Pauline pseudepigraphon he could not have added, "fel enim cum melle misceri non congruit" (for gall ought not to be mixed with honey). There seems to be a distinct cleavage between the Marcionite and Catholic approaches to the pseudonymous device. "Pauli nomine finctae" makes it clear that the church which the Fragment represents (no doubt Rome) could never accept forgeries and was far from regarding the practice of pseudepigraphy as a literary convention. The incongruity of gall and honey no doubt reflects the orthodox attitude towards Marcion's heresy, but the fact remains that literary methods were being used which could never command the respect of the Roman church. An important factor in the present case is the full recognition of the spurious character of the epistles under review. The Fragment tells us nothing about any epistles unwittingly regarded as genuine although really pseudepigraphic, but it clearly suggests that the church was acutely sensitive to forgery (*finctae*).

Some comments are necessary on the extant epistle to the Laodiceans, as it is occasionally appealed to as a parallel to suggested canonical pseudepigrapha.⁵¹ Harnack⁵² dated it most probably before the middle of the third century. M. R. James⁵³ suggested that the word "finctae"

⁴⁸ *Die urchristlichen Literaturformen* (Tübingen, 1912), p. 301, "dürftig and ungeschickt".

⁴⁹ It found no place in the Peshitta.

⁵⁰ Cited from Souter's text, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (2nd edit., C. S. C. Williams, 1954), p. 192. For the Latin text and English translation conveniently set side by side, cf. D. Theron's *Evidence of Tradition* (London, 1957), pp. 107 ff.

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. C. L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford, 1951), p. 116.

⁵² *Der Laodicenerbrief in Kleine Texte*, pp. 2, 3.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 478.

Donald Guthrie, "Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.328-345.

might have been singular in the original text and would then apply only to the Epistle to the Alexandrians, in which case it would be possible to link the other reference with our extant epistle to the Laodiceans and date it during the second century. Harnack's⁵⁴ opinion of it as the most worthless document which has come to us from the ancient church will be shared by most, although it is mystifying why it commanded such respect in the western church (particularly in England) for a period of more than a thousand years. It is more important as a testimony to the gullibility of the medieval church than for its own sake.

Although its earliest attestation is from the pseudo-Augustinian *Speculum*, there is evidence that in the time of Jerome, "certain persons read also an Epistle to the Laodiceans but it is rejected by all".⁵⁵ In spite of this emphatic rejection, interest in the epistle did not die; and a great variety of Latin MSS representing all the great nations of the West—Italy, Spain, France, Ireland, England, Germany and Switzerland—placed this epistle among the canonical books. With the Renaissance its spuriousness was again fully recognized. The main interest for our present purpose is whether the epistle throws any light on the ingredients of a successful pseudepigraphon.

The motive for the writing is clear enough. The tantalizing reference to

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such an epistle in Colossians 4:16 offered a tempting invitation to would be pseudonymous authors, and it is easy to see that this extant epistle would supply the missing writing.⁵⁶ To some minds a lost epistle by an inspired author is unthinkable, and to supply the lack would be regarded as a real service. Unlike most pseudepigrapha there is no dogmatic motive and the author appears to have been quite artless. M. R. James⁵⁷ justly commented that "it is not easy to imagine a more feebly constructed cento of Pauline phrases". This feebleness in the production shows the character of the imitator.⁵⁸

Similarly the author's method of working is clear. He used the genuine Philippian letter as a framework for his own composition, reproducing phrases from it in practically the same order as in the original. These extracts are made from all four chapters of Philipians, interspersed with occasional phrases from other epistles (Galatians, Colossians, the Pastoral epistles).⁵⁹ The conclusion is inescapable that the author wrote with a copy of Philipians before him, and that the echoes of other epistles are from memory and arise from a feeble attempt to introduce some variation from his model. This epistle is not strictly an imitation of Paul; it is sheer plagiarism.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Cited by J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London, 1900), p. 291, from *Vir.* III. 5, "Legunt quidam et ad Laodicenses, sed ab omnibus exploditur."

⁵⁶ Cf. M. Goguel, *Introduction au Nouveau Testament IV* (Paris, 1925), ii, p. 50 n.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 479.

⁵⁸ Cf. Goguel, *op. cit.*, p. 438. He calls it "un pur exercice de rhétorique".

⁵⁹ For these parallels see Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, pp. 291, 292, and Harnack, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that, as in the case of 3 Corinthians, the only use of the first person occurs in direct echoes of Pauline phrases.

Donald Guthrie, "Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings," W.Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.328-345.

But the fact that it constitutes so close a reproduction of Pauline phrases was no doubt responsible for its long period of assumed canonicity. It suggests that the closer a pseudepigraphon is to the style and language of its putative author the more successful it is likely to be. This pseudonymous author, dull and uninspired as he was, possessed enough psychological insight to recognize this. But his insight does not appear to have been shared by the general run of pseudepigraphists.

(c) *The Epistle of the Apostles*. In spite of the title of this book it is not strictly epistolary. Quasten⁶¹ calls it an apocalypse. It purports to be a revelation granted by Christ to his disciples; and, except for a brief opening statement (in the Ethiopic text) in the third person, the first plural is used throughout. The authors are named in section two where eleven apostolic names are cited. A peculiarity is the inclusion of both Peter and Cephas (which appear to be used of the same person in canonical sources) and Nathaniel (who is not included in any canonical lists). Moreover, John, not Peter, heads the list.

The author is not well-informed historically, for he couples Archelaus with Pilate as being responsible for the crucifixion. This Archelaus may not be the one mentioned in Matthew 2:22, but the son-in-law of Agrippa 1.⁶² Even so the chronology is at variance with the Gospel records. The

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author certainly makes use of the four gospels, especially John. He also appears to have used some non-canonical books, notably the Apocalypse of Peter. It is perhaps noteworthy in this connection that he couples both Peter and Andrew with Thomas as the doubters after the resurrection (section two). Could it be that he was no lover of Peter? It may be that the epistle is an eastern protest against Roman ecclesiastical domination, as de Zwaan⁶³ maintained.

Paul is brought into the picture with commendation: the Lord is made to foretell not only his future influence, but also his heavenly revelation, (a fact which throws doubt on M. Rist's⁶⁴ contention that this passage was designed to refute Marcion's view that Paul's revelation was superior to others). Indeed, Rist maintained that the whole book was intended to combat Marcionism, but Goodspeed⁶⁵ regarded it as a kind of apostolic summary for the whole world. For our present study the main importance of the book is that it provides an orthodox example of a group pseudonym which was imitated later by Gnostics.⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Patrology*, p. 151.

⁶² Cf. J. de Zwaan's article in *Armicitae Corolla* (edited H. G. Wood, 1933), p. 349.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁶⁴ *Journal of Religion* 22 (1942), p. 45. It should be noted that Simon and Cerinthus are twice mentioned (sections 1, 7): were these symbolic of Marcion and his followers? It is not self-evident.

⁶⁵ *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1942), p. 35.

⁶⁶ Hennecke-Wilson mention several Gospels attributed to the Twelve, all of which were of Gnostic origin, *New Testament Apocrypha* I (1963), pp. 263 ff.

Donald Guthrie, "Acts and Epistles in Apocryphal Writings," W.Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.328-345.

III

General considerations on pseudepigraphic epistles

It is an important question why the epistolary form was so little favoured in apocryphal works. M. R. James' opinion has already been cited and his threefold suggestion that the epistles were (a) too serious, (b) too easily detected, and (c) less popular than narrative or apocalypses is worthy of further comment.

The first point is probable enough. Epistles give less rein to the author's imagination and restrict him to a too rigid situation. The modern novelist does not often choose the epistolary form, although this has at times been used quite effectively.⁶⁷ A continuous narrative of a fictitious kind makes far less demands than an exacting letter, which must bear some similarity to what the putative author might be expected to write. The greater ease of detection may also be readily admitted, for generally speaking there are genuine models with which to compare and where this is true the pseudepigraphist would need to proceed with more ingenuity than most possessed. From the readers' point of view, more scope would be offered for narratives and kindred literature; and the absence of epistolary forms serves to remind us of the type of reading public for whom the pseudepi-

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grapha were mainly designed, i.e. the less serious and therefore more easily gullible type. Although some other forms of pseudepigrapha may have become literary conventions among Jews and Christians, there is a striking lack of evidence for such a convention in the use of epistles. Against the background of the wide popularity of this form in the Graeco-Roman secular world, its almost complete absence from Jewish and Christian literature is remarkable, and cannot fail to be highly significant in the examination of pseudepigraphic epistolary hypotheses in New Testament criticism.

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⁶⁷ An example of its use for didactic religious purposes may be seen in C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*.