CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE ON
THE TESTIMONIA HYPOTHESIS

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter I will review and evaluate the modern scholarly literature on the testimonia hypothesis. Rather than presenting each scholar's work discretely, I will attempt to trace the larger contexts and movements within which scholars developed their proposals. This review has two major goals: to clarify terminology and to evaluate the method by which scholars reached their conclusions.

As a step to the first goal, I wish to present each scholar's understanding of the term testimonia. While Harris used the term to refer to actual or hypothetical written collections of OT proof-texts, Dodd and Lindars used the same word to refer to common uses of scripture rooted in oral traditions. Again, while most scholars properly associate the term testimonia with the forensic function of proving theological assertions, a significant number of others have applied the term more broadly to collections of scriptural passages which serve other functions. To keep this latter distinction clear, I will use the short-hand terms EC (extract collection) for general scriptural collections, and TC (testimonia collections) for those collections that function as proofs. In my review of the literature, I will summarize and comment on each author's understanding of the form, genre, life-setting, and function of testimonia as far as judgments can be made from his or her statements.¹

¹ This study is first and foremost a literary study of the testimonia genre and its forms in early Christianity. Although I do address to some extent the social setting in which this literature was produced, space precludes a thorough analysis of this important aspect.

The distinction between "form" and "genre" is often not clear in scholarly use. I use the term "form" for shorter, less complex structures (e.g., a list) which are capable of independent transmission, and "genre" for longer, more complex literary forms (e.g., a gospel). For similar distinctions, see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 13–14. I thus understand testimonia as a genre which may take a variety of forms.
My second goal is to discuss the method employed by scholars in reaching their conclusions regarding testimonia. Since much of the testimonia debate has centered on developing sound criteria to establish the use of written TCs in a given document, I will pay special attention to each scholar’s treatment of this question. At the same time, I will also consider the steps that scholars have taken to reach conclusions regarding wider issues of the form, function, life-setting, and theological influence of actual and hypothetical ECs and TCs. At the end of this chapter, I will offer a summary in which I list and evaluate what I judge to be the central issues that have been raised in the scholarly discussion.

1.2 Modern Scholarly Investigations of Scriptural Quotations in the New Testament

Quotations of the Old Testament in the New have long occasioned scholarly interest. Early studies presented the OT quotations as messianic prophecies, fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus, which functioned as proofs for the truth of Christianity. A representative statement of this position is found in a 1731 study of the NT quotations by Hermann Samuel Reimarus, who maintained that the truth of Christianity is most strongly supported by the OT prophecies and the miracles of Jesus and the apostles. Already seven years earlier, however, the English Deist Anthony Collins had challenged this posi-

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