"GOD OUR SAVIOR":
THE FUNDAMENTAL OPERATIONAL
THEOLOGICAL ASSERTION OF 1 TIMOTHY

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For 200 years, all of the history of modern biblical scholarship, the Pastoral Epistles have been read as a corpus in which any possible distinctive features of the individual writings have been subsumed. This has been due, in part, to the critical judgment that they are pseudonymous. But this corpus reading has also characterized those who assert the Pastorals' authenticity. However, recently Luke Johnson and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor have challenged the idea that all three epistles address the same situation. Their observations render the tradition of corpus reading the Pastoral Epistles questionable, at best.

The practice of reading the Pastorals as a corpus has led some interpreters to question whether these three documents belong within the genre of letter. For example, when Oberlinner refers to these writings as letters (Briefe) he often puts that word in quotation marks. But the prima facie evidence indicates that these writings are letters. Not only does the

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1 I thank Victor Furnish for reading an earlier draft of this essay and offering valuable suggestions about its content. Two-thirds of this essay had been previously published (with slight differences) in Lexington Theological Quarterly 33 (1998) 151-61; reprinted here with permission.

2 See Lorenz Oberlinner, Die Pastoralbriefe (HTKNT 11/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1988) 1.xxv-xxvi. Similarly, Jürgen Roloff (Der erste Briefe an Timotheus [EKKNT 15; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1988] 48) speaks of the letter form as a larger frame into which smaller Gattungen are fitted.
opening and closing epistolary frame indicate this, but so do the various personal notices, even if they are only literary conventions in a pseudonymous writing. If it is correct that they are letters, then they must initially be read as separate occasional documents. This means that even if they are pseudonymous and written as a corpus, they must be read individually to see what exigence each addresses and how each addresses that situation. When writing letters, an author may approach one problem/situation very differently than s/he does when facing another problem, and so use different types of arguments and starting points. (Paul is a perfect example.) Thus reading these documents as letters opens us up to the possibility of a richness and diversity which is otherwise lost.

I. Prolegomena

The reading of the theology of 1 Timothy offered here denies itself the presupposition of either authenticity or pseudonymity. This stance has some practical advantages. First, it need not constantly compare itself with ideas and emphases assumed to be present in the undisputed Paulines, whether to show similarity or difference. Often studies of the theology of 1 Timothy do not get beyond this apologetic purpose. Perhaps more importantly, this "agnostic" stance on authorship allows the letter to speak for itself because it does not presuppose a provenance in a narrow period of early church history which is assumed to be concerned with some issues and no longer, or not yet, concerned about others. Given the starting point of this essay, the first order of business is to establish the primary exigence of the letter. After this is done, we will turn to the theological reasoning of 1 Timothy.

The primary purpose of 1 Timothy has most often been seen as the defeat of Gnostics or proto-Gnostics. This identification of the opponents of this letter (as one among the Pastorals) has usually been based on the

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3 E.g. George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles; A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). The only treatment the theology of the Pastorals receives in the introduction of his commentary is in a section on the question of authorship.