POLYCARP OF SMYRNA'S VIEW
OF THE AUTHORSHIP OF 1 AND 2 TIMOTHY

BY

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The authorship and dating of the so-called Pastoral Epistles is perennially discussed in NT studies. In this paper I will not try to resolve this discussion. I hope, however, to contribute to the scholarly discussion of Polycarp and the Pastoral Epistles in two ways.

1. The first contribution will be to our understanding of Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians in its own right. This paper will document an unmistakable tendency in the letter of Polycarp to cluster Pauline citations and allusions after each of the three instances that Polycarp mentions the name of the apostle Paul. As far as I know, this observation has never been made before; but it is certainly a needed addition to the literature about Polycarp.

2. The second contribution flows from the first. Within the first two of these three clusters are citations almost certainly dependent upon 1 or 2 Timothy. If, as will be demonstrated in this paper, Polycarp tends to group references from the Pauline Epistles around explicit namings of Paul, and if there is a quotation from 1 or 2 Timothy in two of these clusters, it can be plausibly argued that Polycarp (rightly or wrongly) understood Paul to be the author of these two epistles. The relevance of this observation is plain. Even if the late dating of the main body of Polycarp’s letter, chapters

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1 I've referred to “citations” and “allusions” throughout this paper. The goal is to include any phrase which has a high likelihood of being dependent upon a previously written text (whether biblical or extra-biblical, as in 1 Clement). There is no attempt to make nuanced distinctions between such categories as citations, loose citations, or allusions (reminiscences do not play a role in this paper). The issue being studied is the likelihood of dependence upon an earlier literary source. For the purposes of this paper (which seeks to demonstrate a general pattern) finer distinctions are not necessary. It will be demonstrated that Pauline clusters occur whether stringent or more flexible criteria are employed. I will sometimes use the word “reference” as a general term pointing to literary dependence upon an earlier source.
1-12 (P.N. Harrison's "crisis letter") is accepted at 135 C.E. (I prefer 120 C.E.), Polycarp becomes the earliest witness to the Pauline authorship of two of the three "Pastoral Epistles" by about 50 years.²

Thus, this paper does not try to settle the question of Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, but does argue that Polycarp of Smyrna in the early parts of the second century considered at least 1 and 2 Timothy to have been written by Paul.

References to the Pastoral Epistles in the early church and their connections to Paul³

Two questions will be briefly revisited here to set the study in its proper context. First, how early do we see traces of the Pastoral Epistles in the literature of the developing church? Second, how early are we able to make a clear connection between the Pastoral and the church's understanding that they were written by Paul?⁴

The answer to the first question is somewhat disputed. There are some verbal similarities between the Pastoral Epistles and the so-called letter of Clement of Rome (ca. 96 C.E.). Streeter reverses the dependence, however, and claims that the Pastoral quoted Clement.⁵ The letters of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110-117) may also show some dependence on the Pastoral, but it is not at all certain.⁶ Polycarp is the first writer who almost certainly quoted from 1 and 2 Timothy (though not necessarily Titus). Curiously, von Campenhausen considered Polycarp himself (or a representative of

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² I view positively P.N. Harrison's suggestion that Polycarp's letter is actually two letters. See P.N. Harrison, Polycarp's Two Epistles to the Philippians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936). I think, however, he has dated chs 1-12 too late. I prefer the suggestion of L.W. Barnard of a date no later than 120 C.E. for Polycarp's second letter. Refer to L.W. Barnard, Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Backgrounds (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), ch. 4 for arguments.


⁴ We are not interested here primarily in the question of canonicity but in early church attestation of these letters and the degree to which they were considered Pauline.
