

The Apostles and the Apostolic Church

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Abstract: How should a contemporary reader understand the complexities of the early church? Many scholars utilize a religious studies perspective to understand the early church concluding that the church grew as a direct result (synthesis) of group conflicts (in particular, the Pauline and Petrine communities). This essay approaches the early church from a different paradigm. Using theological analysis, the author concludes that although the early church contained elements of diversity, she exhibits significant unity. The Catholic Epistles (the letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude) are independent letters that are interconnected by the Jerusalem tradition, and the theologies of these letters reflect the unique character of the early church. Therefore, it is important that NT scholars should give more attention to the Catholic Epistles so that the early church can be understood from a more constructive perspective.

Keywords: Religious Studies, Theological Analysis, Catholic Epistles, Jerusalem Tradition

Abstrak: *Bagaimanakah pembaca masa kini memahami kompleksitas gereja mula-mula? Banyak ahli percaya bahwa gereja mula-mula, seperti pada umumnya perkembangan sebuah agama, bertumbuh melalui proses sintesis dari pertentangan antarkelompok dalamnya, yakni kelompok orang Kristen bukan Yahudi (yang diwakili oleh Paulus) dan kelompok orang Kristen, Yahudi (yang diwakili oleh Petrus dan Yakobus). Dalam artikel ini, penulis berupaya menunjukkan bahwa dalam kompleksitasnya, gereja mula-mula tetap harmonis. Di sisi yang lain, artikel ini berusaha memperlihatkan pentingnya surat-surat umum dalam memahami gereja mula-mula. Surat-surat dari Yakobus, Petrus, Yohanes, dan Yudas memuat warisan ajaran dari para rasul, yakni para pemimpin gereja Yerusalem, yang menjadi pusat dari pergerakan gereja mula-mula. Pembaca modern perlu menggali surat-surat umum lebih lanjut untuk dapat lebih memahami ajaran dan pemikiran gereja mula-mula.*

Kata-kata kunci: Studi Agama, Analisis Teologis, Surat-surat Umum, Tradisi Yerusalem

Introduction

Every religion grows from a small movement. Christianity as shown in Luke-Acts has its origin in a small movement and subsequently grows under the leadership of Jesus' disciples (see, e.g., Acts 1:13-14, 2:42).¹ The important role of the disciples is related not only to disseminating the gospel but also in forming the early Christian teachings (cf. 1 Cor 15:3). While spreading the gospel to the gentiles had an impact in transforming the face of Christianity from its Jewish character to become more accommodating to the gentiles, according to some scholars, the apostles, including Paul, are responsible for creating a new teaching that Jesus never taught.² For instance, Reimarus believes Jesus' followers are responsible for changing the story about Jesus; Jesus never considered himself to be the Son of God, it was the apostles who taught that Jesus's death is for all humankind.³ Many scholars believe that there is a gap between the teaching of Jesus and the apostles; according to James D. G. Dunn, when we try to put Jesus within his Jewish historical context, then it seems the gap between Jesus' message and the apostles/disciples becomes larger; moreover, if the continuity between Jesus and his apostles is pushed too hard, we could put ourselves at risk of "hearing only an elaborated form of the tradition and not the originating voice of Jesus himself."⁴

¹There is an indication that it was not until the first century that Christianity was deemed as an important movement in the eyes of members of the Gentile society in which the Christians lived (see James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 53-54; Paul W. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 14-15).

²Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 17-18; Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 2-8.

³Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*.18-23.

⁴*Ibid.*, 20, 25. It is important to highlight that the gap which Dunn is speaking about is a tricky, problematic, and difficult one to observe. We assume that there must have been some differences between Jesus' teaching and that of his disciples, we do not have any single written source that was written directly by Jesus himself, consequently, we are unable to compare the teaching of Jesus and the disciples to thereby determine if the disciples really have changed the story and theology.

There are some monographs written to support the relationship between the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and the apostles. For instance, David Wenham, who analyses the relationship between Paul and Jesus concludes that (1) "there is massive overlap between the teaching of the two men;" (2) the difference between them is related to the terminology used and its focus, yet there is no "fundamental divergence of outlook The divergences that are there reflect in all, or almost all, cases the differences between Jesus' situation and Paul's;" (3) there is strong indication that the teaching of Jesus influences Paul.⁵ Further, Paul W. Barnett who observes Christology in the early Christianity, concludes that Peter's early christological message about Jesus' resurrection and his "messiahship" becomes the early apostolic teaching that influences early Christianity including Paul.⁶

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to state that Paul is not the founder of early Christianity. Paul's teaching is basically anchored within the apostolic teaching, that is, the Jerusalem tradition (cf. 1 Cor 15:3; Acts 2:29-36). The Jerusalem church, which was a locus of apostolic teaching, became the root of the teaching of the early churches and the source of the burgeoning Christian movement.⁷

This essay will discuss the relationship between the early church and the apostles' tradition, in particular, the teachings which were preserved within the writings of the Catholic Epistles. The following questions will loom as prominent within this essay: how should the relationship between the early church and the apostolic tradition be understood? Further, how does the early church view Paul the apostle?

⁵David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 373-392.

⁶Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 180-186.

⁷Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1995), 415-480.

To understand the development and characters of this early church, we could track it based upon two bodies of writings; the historical-chronological data that is found in Acts and the letters of Paul, and that which is based on the teaching of the Catholic Epistles that represents the Jerusalem tradition. Due to the fact that there are also other records besides that of Acts and the letters of Paul that are used by some scholars to build upon in understanding the history of the early Church that are different from Luke and Paul's perspective, it is important that a discussion is unfolded related to the sources that are used in the reconstruction of early church development. The second topic that will be discussed relates to the beginning of, and the growth of, the early church and the apostolic teaching and tradition. This discussion is also important because it will show the continuity in the theology and ministry of first, Jesus, then the Jerusalem leaders (Peter, John, James, and Jude), and finally, that of Paul. Lastly, this essay will facilitate a brief exposition on 2 Peter 3:15-18, which will contribute to an understanding of the relational issue between Peter, who represents the early church, and Paul.

Sources

In any ancient historical investigation, it is important that an approach to the historical records is conducted through the lens of an ancient historian and his/her use of qualified and trusted sources. Any conclusions achieved could be very different because sources are used selectively. There are two kinds of sources that are important to preview, i.e., (i) internal sources and, (ii) external sources. In the context of early Christianity internal sources are related to the documents written by any follower of Jesus. External sources are related to the historical writings which related to the early church, but were written by others.

The best internal sources for the apostolic church are Paul's letters because they are the oldest sources that we have in hand. The

problem with this is that Paul's letters do not follow an historical narrative and are sometimes polemical.⁸ The other important internal source is Acts which witnesses directly to the apostolic church from the beginning to ca. 60. In fact, regarding the beginning of the apostolic church, the book of Acts is the only witness we have in hand. While there is not much question about Paul's historical reliability, there are some potential serious questions related to the reliability of Luke's record.⁹ It is alleged that there are (i) some inaccurate citations related to the historical record as it pertains to Roman history, (ii) some discrepancies between Luke's report and Paul's, and (iii) a theological agenda evidenced in Luke that makes him selective in his material and, further, he has a particular purpose in mind.¹⁰

In response to this objection outlined above, the fact that there is a different picture or report that is held between a testimony of Paul and Luke does not necessarily indicate that there is a contradiction. The differences between both reports shows that Paul and Luke are independent in their reports.¹¹ In addition, it is anachronistic to judge the ancient historical records by contemporary assessment, as Dunn has shown; within that historical era, all historians wrote based upon their own interests.¹² Therefore, it is wrong to state that the fact that an author unfolds a theological emphasis necessarily makes his/her historical writing untrustworthy. Further, the alleged inaccuracies made by Luke in his writing on Acts does not mean that he cannot be trusted. It is normal for even modern historians to make some mistakes in their historical reports. In addition, Luke's main interest is not to write Greco-Roman history but a

⁸Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 2, 8, 15.

⁹For an excellent discussion of the book of Acts in its historical setting, see Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids; Carlisle: Eerdmans ; Paternoster, 1995); Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 300.

¹⁰Cf. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 12-16.

¹¹Ibid., 17-18.

¹²Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 68-73.

history of the early church.¹³ Therefore, Acts can still be considered to be a trusted internal source witnessing to the beginning of, and growth of, the early church.

The theological emphasis evident in Acts is far from an obstacle in understanding the historical early church; actually it provides a lens that needs to be used in order to understand Luke's reporting. Theologically, Luke leads the reader to understand that the geographical movement from Jerusalem to Rome is a fulfillment of Jesus' missionary command. Interestingly, Luke also directs the reader to focus upon the movement between Jerusalem and Antioch. Additionally, the synagogue where the diasporic Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, proselytes and gentile participants gathered becomes a starting point for early missionary activity (see, e.g., Acts 13:5). Furthermore, based upon its composition, Luke focuses the attention of the reader upon the continuity between Peter and Paul.¹⁴

A somewhat different assessment arises from Ferdinand C. Baur, one of the most influential German scholars, and his followers. They interpret Acts as a synthesis between the Petrine community which represents Jewish Christians, and the Pauline community which represents gentile Christians.¹⁵ Numerous scholars have shown that this theory is an exaggerated one due to an absence of evidence that the difference between both is so clear-cut and that the two communities are theologically opposed to one another. Actually, Acts highlights the continuity that exists between the two communities. Further, the fact that Acts is essentially an undivided work from the gospel of Luke signals that there is no contradiction/opposition between Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Acts 15 is a good example to show that James, Peter, and Paul are in harmony. To state it differently, the book(s) of Luke (Gospel and Acts) is arranged to basi-

cally show the progressive and continual story of the Kingdom of God unfolded in Jesus, Peter, and Paul.

Thus, Acts makes a significant contribution in formulating a response to the accusation that the apostles are responsible for changing an understanding of the teachings of Jesus. Based upon Paul's earliest letter, the letter to the Galatians (ca. 49),¹⁶ Jesus' followers held a belief that Jesus is the son of God and the messiah; according to scholars who believe that Jesus had a different teaching from the apostles. It would mean that the theological and Christological change occurred in the narrow period of time between Jesus' resurrection and before Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. The problem is it is almost impossible to change a story like that in a time period of less than 20 years without any records standing against the untrue story.¹⁷ On the contrary, Acts reports a different story; it bears witness that there is continuity between Jesus, Peter and Paul. In conclusion it can be stated that the message about Christ as Lord existed within the Church since the very beginnings of early Christianity.

Besides the sources listed above, the Gospel of Mark and the Q Source also merit attention. Mark and Q are believed to be the sources used by both Matthew and Luke. While Mark was written about ca. 50, Q is believed to represent the oldest tradition in the early church.¹⁸ Some believe that Q is a tradition that showed interest in the ethical teaching of Jesus, but was not interested in Jesus' messianic message and his redemptive work. This view is challenged by Barnett who shows convincingly that even if Q does exist, it represents a similar Christological view point to that of the other Christian traditions.¹⁹ The second problem pertaining to Q is related to

¹³See Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 27-41.

¹⁴Andrew C. Clark, "The Role of Apostle," in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 185-186.

¹⁵Cf. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 31-36.

¹⁶There are different views about the date of the letter to Galatians; although most scholars believe that the letter was written around 55 AD, it is still possible to date the letter earlier (see Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 206-210).

¹⁷See *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸Cf. *ibid.*, 128-149.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 138-139, 148-149.

the quality of the various hypotheses that are, in essence, speculative; many other theories could be posited that could also explain the relations between the synoptic gospels. For instance, P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, who argues for the “tradition hypothesis,” believes that the source of the four gospels is to be found in the early apostolic teaching/tradition. This teaching/tradition is rooted in the meetings/gatherings of the apostles in which they shared their own memories of Jesus and his teaching. Based upon these meetings and this tradition, the four evangelists independently wrote their gospels.²⁰

Besides the internal sources there also exists, though somewhat limited, information about the apostolic church that is recorded by non-Christian writers. There are six records that mention the apostolic church directly or indirectly; namely Josephus (ca. 37-100), who records James’ death in 62;²¹ Epictetus (ca. 55-135) who mentions the Galileans, which is probably a reference to Christians; Tacitus (ca. 56-120) who highlights Christians’ suffering during the time of Nero; Suetonius (ca. 70-140) who records the expulsion of the Jews from Rome because of a disturbance related to one who is called *Chrestus* and who also writes briefly about the suffering of Christians in the time of Nero; Pliny (ca. 61-113) who writes about Christians including their spread, characters, and suffering in the reign of Trajan; and finally, Cassius Dio (ca. 160-230) who describes how Domitian executed the family of his own cousin because they were probably Christians.²² Besides these external sources mentioned above, Eusebius’ notes should be

accepted as a secondary source; although his writing has some errors, it contains many historical records about early Christianity that need to be considered.²³

In summary form, the canonical writings, especially the book of Acts and the letters of Paul, are still the best sources that can be employed in seeking an understanding of the early church. The different emphases and diverse theological views outlined in these reports do not necessarily mean that they are totally inaccurate and untrustworthy. On the contrary, by comparing their diverse perspectives, interpreters can arrive at a more comprehensive picture of the early church.

The Apostolic Church

There are numerous perspectives held in the pursuit of an understanding regarding early church history and its theology. Barnett uses Acts and the letters of Paul as “windows” in order to gain a perspective of the early church.²⁴ It is also possible to use the Jewish witness as another “window” to understand the early church since the early church is not separated from its historical context and is part of society. Therefore, the church shared in the same struggles as other Jewish movements and sects. The Jewish community was always impacted by political change unfolding in Rome. For instance, when Caligula became emperor he demanded people worship him. This included the Jewish people in Jerusalem who had to face this “religious turbulence,”²⁵ and along with the Jewish people the early Church also faced this same struggle. While this article will combine the information from these various sources, the canonical writings will attract the most attention.

²⁰P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, “Why Are There Four Gospels,” *LuxMundi* (December 2013): 106–107. Further discussion regarding source theory in the synoptic gospels from an evangelical perspective can be found in David A. Black and David R. Beck, *Rethinking the Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

²¹Josephus also mentions information about Jesus in Ant. 18.3.3 (see Wm. Whiston, trans., *The Complete Works of Josephus* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991], 379). However, there exists disagreement among scholars concerning this citation (see “Josephus and Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Question,” accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/testimonium.html>).

²²Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 53-64.

²³G. F. Chesnut, “Eusebius of Caesarea,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 675-676.

²⁴Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 55-85.

²⁵It is possible that “the man of lawlessness” mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 probably refers to Caligula; further discussion on this issue can be found in Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 278-284.

The Birth and Growth of the Early Church

When was the church born? According to Luke, it was born in Jerusalem after Christ's ascension. Theologically, Luke traced a line both backwards and forward: between Jesus' movement (the gospel of Luke), Jesus' Commands (Acts 1:8), and its fulfillment (the Acts). Following Luke's report, historically the birth of the church happened during the time when Tiberius was emperor (ca. 33-37). This period gave rise to various political decisions that affected the Jewish community such as (i) the recall of Pilate, the dismissal of Herod Antipas, and the replacement of Caiaphas.²⁶ Chronologically, Luke put the birth of the early church between Christ's ascension and the feast of Pentecost. Dunn proposes that there are nine theological purposes related to the story of the beginning of the early church and among them are two key purposes; the centrality of Jerusalem and constitutive authority of the apostles.²⁷

Dunn questions whether Jesus' disciples existed only in Jerusalem, or whether there were also possibly other disciples who existed apart from the circle of disciples in Jerusalem. Using a history of religions approach, Dunn proposes a critical question related to the complexities of a new movement that becomes separated from its locus. However, in the case of Acts, the author is silent about it. Furthermore, there is an indication, according to Dunn, that there are other movements/traditions that can be posited.²⁸ For instance, Galilean disciples that emerged within early Christianity outside of the Jerusalem tradition which had become the mother of the church or mainstream movement.

While Dunn's analysis is reasonable in that it posits that the early church may have been more complex than which is evidenced in the book of Acts, there is not much evidence that could be used to make an adequate reconstruction. Therefore, some proposals which make

use of hypothetical sources (for example, the Q source), and then address an alternative historical description about the early church, basically build their arguments from silence.²⁹ Many reasons could be given that explain why Luke does not mention other churches outside of Jerusalem, such as the church in Galilee. It is possible that the church in Galilee (if it is true that there existed such a church in that city) was considered to be a part of the Jerusalem church. Moreover, the fact that Luke repeatedly mentions the Galilean ministry and shows in his Gospel that this place functioned as a kind of "base camp" for Jesus' ministry, indicates that the author of these writings (the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts) did not overlook the believers in that city.

The second aspect that Luke describes in his book is the growth of the Jerusalem church. Luke describes that the church grew by the power of the Holy Spirit even though there were existed some serious obstacles arising from both outside of (i.e., Acts 4) and within the Church (i.e., Acts 5). Through the Holy Spirit's leadership, the church was able to resolve them.³⁰ Dunn believes that Luke used these examples to show the unique characteristics of the early church which Dunn describes as follows, the church as a messianic body, enthusiastic and as a renewal party within Judaism.³¹

Outreach

Luke describes the early church movement as the fulfillment of Jesus' command. The disciples were compelled to witness of Christ not only in Jerusalem, but also in Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the world (Acts 1:8). In this theological context, Luke places the accounts about Stephen (Acts 6-7), Philip

²⁹John D. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998). For a critical response to Crossan's proposition, see Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 211-214.

³⁰I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 177.

³¹Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 172-240.

²⁶See Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 28-30.

²⁷Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 133-156.

²⁸Ibid., 133-134

(Acts 8), Peter (Acts 10-12), and Paul (Acts 13-28) to show that the church mission is being fulfilled. Stephen is the key figure that causes the early church to spread because of his preaching. Philip continues what Stephen has begun with evangelizing within Samaria. Peter is also described as beginning his works in the Gentile mission, and Paul continues the mission to the ends of the world (i.e. Rome).

Dunn believes that Luke deliberately leads the reader to see that the schism between the Hebrews and the Hellenists in Acts 6 has resulted in a movement from its beginnings in Jerusalem outward to Antioch. This movement is not only related to geographical advancements, but also related to a change in the nature of the church. The church became more Hellenistic, there was a change of the missionary center from Jerusalem to Antioch, and further, there unfolded a theological development.³² Although it may be true that the book of Acts indicates there was a leadership change (from the apostles to James) and an advancement in the missional movement (from Peter to Paul) within the early church, it is important to underline that the change and development that happened within the early church is described by Luke as a progression and not as a separation.

Peter's Mission and Theology

Peter was considered as an important apostle. Paul, Matthew, John, and Luke indicate and uphold the special position of Peter within the early Church (Gal 2:9; Matt 16:17-19; John 21:16; Acts 2).³³ Unfortunately, there are few sources evident within the NT writings that we hold that could be used to reconstruct Peter's theology and life. The sources regarding Peter depend upon indirect statements in Acts, Paul's letters, and the Gospel, and let-

ters of Peter (which are considered by many scholars as not original to Peter himself).

Based upon the report of Luke (Acts 15), and the indirect description of the Antioch incident (Gal 2:11-14), Dunn concludes that Peter is a kind of middle man who tries to mediate the conservative leaning James and the radical Paul.³⁴ In the book of Acts and Galatians, it is clear that there is a tension between a particular Jewish Christian party and Paul, yet there are indications that the schism is not with James' party. In Acts 15:5 Luke mentions that the requirement of circumcision comes from believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. However, in Galatians 2:12 there is an indication that the people who came to Antioch consisted of two parties; James' party and those of the circumcision group. Peter's reaction is not caused by James' party but by the other one.³⁵ In Acts 15 and Galatians 2:11-14 it is not clearly indicated that Peter tries to mediate between the circumcision party and Paul. In fact, based on Acts 15, Peter seems to stand within the same theological position as Paul.

Based upon indirect evidence found in Paul's letter, there is an indication that Peter was actively involved in missionary activities outside Jerusalem/Judea (1 Cor 9:5; 1 Pet 1:1). Dunn proposes that Peter may also have served at both Corinth and Rome.³⁶ In Corinth there was a party that related their identity to Peter. Further, Paul's advice in Romans 14:1-15:6 indicates that the continual guidance of Peter had been extended in Rome previous to Paul. Although it is clear in Galatians 2:7-8 that there was a distinct different mission in relation to Peter and Paul, it does not mean that there was a clear-cut division between them. In Acts 10 Peter is pictured as still involved in the Gentile missionary activity and Paul usually began his new ministry in a given place by visiting the local synagogue where the Jewish

³²Ibid., 241-321.

³³For excellent studies on Peter in NT writings and traditions, see Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory: The New Testament Apostle in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010); Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Remembered Peter: In Ancient Reception and Modern Debate*, WUNT 262 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

³⁴Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 1059-1061.

³⁵Cf. Mark D. Nanos, "The Inter- and Intra-Jewish Political Context of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," in *The Galatian Debate*, ed. Mark D. Nanos (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 396-407.

³⁶Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 1062-1065.

people gathered. Therefore, it is still possible that Peter worked together with Paul to maintain the church that was established in a given place founded by either Paul or Peter. If Dunn is correct that Paul continued his ministry after his imprisonment in Rome, and then Peter built upon Paul's ministry in Rome, it indicates that there likely was no clear-cut ministry lines upheld between them.

Catastrophe in Judea

The period of 60-70 was important as during these years some of the first Christians leaders died. James as the leader of the church at Jerusalem died in the year 62. A few years later Paul and Peter also died as martyrs.³⁷ The basic issue that needs to be considered during this phase is the question, what happened next with the Christians in Jerusalem between the times when their leaders died until Jerusalem's fall? Is it indeed true that the Jerusalem church was ended during this time period?

In response to this question, there are two alternative possibilities. First, according to the traditions written by both Eusebius and Epiphanius, the Jerusalem Church fled to Pella before the fall of Jerusalem and then returned afterwards. Secondly, it is believed that the Jerusalem church became extinct together with the early Jewish movement which revolted against the Romans. There are two basic arguments that are proposed to reject the witness of Eusebius and Epiphanius, (i) it is impossible that the Jewish Christian people could go out from Jerusalem and flee to Pella because the city was surrounded by Romans soldiers, and (ii) the credibility of Eusebius' witness, which is also believed to have been used by Epiphanius, is doubt-

ful.³⁸ In response to the first argument, van Houwelingen argues that there actually was still a way that could be used by the Jewish people to flee from Jerusalem.³⁹ He refers to the evidence from the report of Josephus that mentions Jewish people who succeeded in fleeing from Jerusalem by using bribery. Related to the second objection, van Houwelingen argues that there is no strong evidence showing that Eusebius' report on the flight of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem is based on a legend. The witness of Eusebius and Epiphanius shows that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem could escape from the catastrophic event of the fall of Jerusalem and then return to the city afterwards. The Jerusalem church could continue their ministry and existence under the leadership of Jesus' brothers. These facts imply that the apostolic church did not come to an end in the year 70, and there is no evidence that shows that the Jerusalem church lost their Jewish identity or influence after 70.⁴⁰

Van Houwelingen believes that the letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage Jewish Christian who had fled from Jerusalem before the catastrophic event in AD 70.⁴¹ Although there is clear evidence indicating that the letter was written to Jewish Christians, the Greek language used indicates that the letter was written for the Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. In accord with this point, van Houwelingen argues that the author used that particular language because the letter was not directed to Jewish Christians from Jerusalem alone, but was also to be read by other Jewish Christians resident within the diaspora. Further, many references in the letter would be easier to understand if the reader is a Jewish Christian from Jerusalem (e.g.,

³⁷According to Dunn, the year 70 is the end of the first Christian generation (ibid., 3). If what Dunn means with "the first Christian generation" is the apostolic period/church, then his statement is confusing for the evidence indicates that the apostolic church, which included the Jerusalem church, survived this catastrophic moment. In addition, the apostle John and Jude the brother of Jesus who are the first generation Christian continue to exist.

³⁸Cf. P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "Fleeing Forward: The Departure of Christians from Jerusalem to Pella," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 182-189.

³⁹Ibid., 189.

⁴⁰Cf. ibid., 197-198.

⁴¹P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "Riddles around the Letter to the Hebrews," *Fides Reformata* 16, no. 2 (2011): 154-156.

Heb 6:4-6).⁴² Furthermore, van Houwelingen argues, from the content of the letter, that the author mainly exposes the cultic life of Jewish people as a preparation to face the destruction of Jerusalem that will soon take place.⁴³ Moreover, van Houwelingen, based upon the content and composition of the book, argued that the author admonishes the readers about the supreme character of Jesus.⁴⁴ This implies a demand to exhibit faithfulness in teaching, faith and ethical life.

Van Houwelingen's argument is based primarily upon the point that the description of cultic Jewish life, as seen in the letter of Hebrews, is a strong indication that the temple had not yet been destroyed.⁴⁵ However, there is still a question that needs to be addressed that is related to Josephus' writing which describes the cultic life after the fall in a lively way (*J.W.* 5.184-247).⁴⁶ This suggests that Jewish cultic life still operated even after the fall of Jerusalem. The lively description of cultic life by the author of Hebrews does not necessitate a view that posits that it must have been written before the fall. However, if the book was indeed written after the fall, it means that the book was written primarily to help them to interpret the new cultic life system in the light of Christ and not to prepare the Jewish Christians to face the immanent destruction.

This discussion leads to a reconsideration of the second main issue proposed by Dunn in his study of the apostolic period, namely how early Christianity which was primarily Jewish in its character which, over time (post AD 70), then became Gentile in character. The traditions mentioned by Eusebius show that there was still a Jewish Christian community resident in the city of Jerusalem. In fact, the Jew-

ish Christian community found there was the same as the Jerusalem church which existed in the city before the catastrophe of AD 70. The book of Hebrews, it could be argued, indicates that the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem still survived alongside the remaining Jewish population. Jewish Christians within Jerusalem remained post AD 70, yet they began to understand their Jewish heritage in a different way from their Jewish peers. Over time, this led to their separation from the Jewish mainstream religion after the fall which was instigated by rabbinic Judaism.

After AD 70

The Apostolic church did not come to an end in AD 70. Although James, Peter, and Paul had already passed away, John, the last surviving apostle, lived and ministered until the end of the first century. Besides the Pella tradition, the book of Revelation (and also the Gospel of John) which was authored by John the apostle, functions as a window from which to view the early church in the post AD 70 era.⁴⁷ There are some descriptions found both within the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 and within the rest of the Revelation that give indication regarding the true condition of the early church in Asia Minor in ca. 90.

Van Houwelingen believes that there exist paradise motifs in the book of Revelation.⁴⁸ John does indeed use images found from within the book of Genesis in his work. These include such concepts as imagery about the tree of life, a new earth, living water, etc. However, it is also correct that a canonical approach to the book of Revelation highlights

⁴²Cf. *ibid.*, 156-158.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 158-161.

⁴⁴P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "Mission and Ethics in the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Insiders versus Outsiders: Exploring the Dynamic Relation between Mission and Ethos in the New Testament*, ed. Jacobus (Kobus) Kok and J. A. Dunne, PPRT 14 (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2014), 245-256.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 241.

⁴⁶See Whiston, *The Complete Works of Josephus*, 554-556.

⁴⁷There are few objections proposed to object the authorship of John. The main objection is related to the Greek style used in Revelation that is so different than the gospel. However, it is still possible that John, who wrote Revelation, could have experienced a progression in his ability to write Greek beyond that found in the Gospel of John. For a discussion of the relation between the Gospel, Letters, and Revelation of John see Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 567-578; also Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 700-707.

⁴⁸P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "Paradise Motifs in the Book of Revelation," *Sarospataki Füzetek* 4 (2011): 11-25.

the final stages of God's redemptive works.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the book of Revelation was also written to address the struggle faced by the churches at that time. The author uses the message of Daniel which highlights the immediate coming of God's kingdom as the answer to a period of intense evil faced by the Church (cf. Rev 1:1; Dan 2:28-29, 44-45).⁵⁰ God remains in control of everything. Deception and disaster become the punishment that is faced by those who are doing evil and are persecuting God's people (e.g., Rev 6:1-17).

The seven churches find themselves in different situations, yet there are still indications about the general condition faced by each of the churches i.e., the danger of deception pertaining to both teaching and morality (Rev 2:2-3, 9, 14-15, 20, 3:4, 8, 16-17). Beyond just encouraging the church with a message of hope and a warning about God's righteous judgment, John asks the readers to keep to sound teaching and a godly life. Similar dimensions (ethical-theological teaching and God's judgment) are also prominent in the Catholic Epistles that were written two decades earlier. This fact could indicate that the problem of deception and immorality still existed well into the end of the first century, or, this theological emphasis could possibly highlight an indication of John's theological heritage.

The Apostolic Teaching and Tradition

Van Houwelingen believes that the Catholic Epistles have a close relationship with the Jerusalem tradition.⁵¹ His assessment is only correct if the epistles were truly written by James (the brother of Jesus), Peter, John, and finally, Jude who was the last leader in the first

⁴⁹Van Houwelingen applies a combination method between the preterist and the historicist approaches (ibid., 11-19). This approach could help to understand biblically the book of Revelation in light of the history of redemption.

⁵⁰Cf. Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids; Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1999), 182-183.

⁵¹P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, "Jerusalem, the Mother Church," *Sarospataki Füzetek* 3-4 (2012): 11-32.

generation of the apostolic church in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider the authorship of each letter individually, and then an attempt will be made to find a theological connection between each of them.

Authorship of Catholic Epistles

James

The letter of James was written to members of the Jerusalem church that were scattered throughout many areas (cf. Jas 1:1; Acts 8:1; 11:19-20). Although James wrote his letter for a few scattered Jewish communities, its contents indicate that he was trying to answer some particular issue inherent within the larger church community (see, e.g., Jas 4:1-3).⁵² The structure of the letter is complex and highlights many themes, for example, "wisdom" as an overlapping concept (e.g., 1:5; 3:13; 5:14-15).⁵³ Although some scholars have concluded that the letter is similar to a kind of moral discourse, it is basically a pastoral letter.

Based on both internal and external evidences, there is good reason to believe that the letter of James was written by James the brother of Jesus.⁵⁴ However, some modern interpreters take a different view⁵⁵ arguing that the book is pseudonymous because, (i) James does not mention any thing about his relationship with

⁵²Although some scholars believe that issues in the letter of James are hypothetical, the issues could reflect a real situation of believers scattered throughout the diaspora (e.g. Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* [London: Routledge, 1999]).

⁵³For a discussion on the structure of the letter of James, see ibid., 61-73 and Peter H. Davids, *Commentary on James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 22-29.

⁵⁴For a detailed discussion about the authorship of the letter of James, see Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2013), 3-28.

⁵⁵Many scholars who use the diachronic approach (historical reception of the letter in the Christian canon) to read the letter date the letter as the second century writing; however, there is no strong evidence to support this proposal. For further discussion on this issue, see Luke T. Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 45-83.

his brother Jesus, (ii) James, the brother of Jesus, would not have had the ability to write the book of James, (iii) the theological perspectives found in the book, particularly regarding the law, are different to the portrayal that we have about James who was both conservative and zealous for the law, and finally, (iv) James' perspective on faith and deeds indicates that he fails to understand Paul's teaching on justification correctly.⁵⁶

The first three objections mentioned are not supported by any solid evidence. In the first objection, it can be countered that focusing upon the familial relationship to Jesus was clearly not something held in high esteem within the early church and the audience of the letter acknowledged James's authority.⁵⁷ In the second, it is an exaggeration to classify the book of James as a kind of classical Greek writing and further, the influence of the Hebraic wisdom tradition in the letter is strong. Additionally, it is also possible that people from Galilee could write competent Greek. To address the third objection to James' authorship, the portrayal of James within the book of Acts and also the witness from Paul shows that James was not as strict as previously assumed (Acts 15:13-21; Gal 2:1-10).

In relationship to the fourth issue, further evaluation to this objection is necessary. There are two possible scenarios that might have occurred; James failed to understand Paul's teaching on justification correctly because the letter was not written by James who would have understood Paul's theology correctly, or, James failed to understand Paul because the book of James was written before his meeting with Paul. In the latter scenario, he either misunderstood Paul or he is responding to a kind of teaching of Paul's that was misinterpreted by others. It is the opinion of this article, that there is also another possibility that could be envisioned. James may not even be referring

⁵⁶Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 623-625.

⁵⁷The fact that the author of James could send the letter to Jewish believers around the diaspora (Jas. 1:1) shows that the early church recognized and accepted his authority.

to Paul's teaching. Even though they may both utilize similar words, it does not necessarily mean that they are addressing the same topic and/or issues.⁵⁸ It is clear that James uses language from the wisdom literature such as that found within common proverbs/the Book of Proverbs. One of the most important themes in the wisdom literature is the integration between "saying" (confessing) and "deed" (e.g., Prov 12:14; 16:23).⁵⁹ Therefore, it is also possible to understand James' teaching found in chapter 2 as wisdom teaching for an integrated life and not as a counter attack to Paul's teaching.

1 and 2 Peter

There are two letters found in the NT written under the name of Peter. While 2 Peter is written to encourage the believers to pursue Christian maturity, 1 Peter's purpose is that of comforting and exhorting Christians who are experiencing suffering.⁶⁰ There is an indication in 1 Peter 4:13 that the suffering faced by the church in Asia Minor was related to their identity as Christians. The suffering described in 1 Peter seems to refer, not to global persecution or state persecution, but rather to general hostility directed at them from the Roman people.⁶¹ Some scholars propose that there are separate traditions underlying 1 Peter, such as the tradition of *the baptismal sermon*. However, there is no external evidence supporting that theory and there are no acceptable reasons related to the usage of such a tradition (*Roman baptismal sermon*) found within the context of the churches of Asian Minor.⁶² The provenance of 1 Peter and

⁵⁸For a fine discussion of this issue, see Bauckham, *James*, 120-140 and see also Douglas J. Moo, "James, Theology of," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 387.

⁵⁹Peter H. Davids, "James," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 344.

⁶⁰For a discussion of suffering in 1 Peter and the other NT writings, see Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistles of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 30-44.

⁶¹Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 642.

⁶²Davids, *The First Epistles of Peter*, 12-13.

its dating is a little tricky because the meaning of the term “Babylon” in 5.13 is not easily determined. Van Houwelingen believes that it refers to some concrete region/place that is found in Mesopotamia.⁶³ On the other hand, there also exists the possibility that the author used the word “Babylon” metaphorically just as the phrase “stranger in the world” in the opening section is used to indicate that the readers are like the OT people when they were in exile. Alternatively, the word “Babylon” could be used as a reference to Rome. Furthermore, the letter must have been written before Peter’s death, yet it is hard to determine the exact timing because the hostility that was faced by believers described in 1 Peter could refer to numerous periods during ca. 40-60.

The authorship of Peter in conjunction with 1 Peter has externally strong evidence. However, many modern scholars, continue to reject the external evidence and rely solely upon the internal evidences as highlighted above. The competent Greek language used by the author of 1 Peter can be easily explained. For example, van Houwelingen, who uses the learned experience of Josephus as a primary example, proposes that there exists the possibility that Peter studied Greek while engaged in ministry in Rome. During that time period Peter’s writing ability could have improved immensely.

Besides addressing the issue of the quality of the Greek language used by Peter, it is also important to discuss the theological relationship between 1 Peter and Paul. A few modern scholars believe that there exists a theological gap between them and this suggests that the author of the letter was not Peter. However, Barnett has shown that Paul, in his letters, actually used Peter’s teaching on Christ and, therefore, the existing theological gap concluded by modern scholars regarding Peter and Paul is too exaggerated.⁶⁴

⁶³P. H. R. Van Houwelingen, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *EJT* 19, no. 2 (2010): 124.

⁶⁴Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity*, 185-186; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 642-644.

The authorship of 2 Peter is also under dispute. Although external evidences strongly support Peter’s authorship there are still objections to his authorship that are proposed by modern scholars.⁶⁵ However, there exist seven evidences that would confirm Peter’s authorship. First, the author’s relationship with the readers (2 Pet 1:16-18) highlights that the letter was written to answer a particular problem within a particular Christian community. The author uses the form of a letter to show that the author wants to interact in a personal manner. This shows that the internal dynamics of the letter were real and not fictional.⁶⁶ Secondly, the genre of 2 Peter, though similar to a form described as *literature of testament*, does not necessarily mean that it is indeed a form of that genre of literature. 2 Peter is actually a letter. It would be rare that literature with the genre of “letter” would have been pseudonymous. Conversely, it is rare that a “fictitious testament” would take the form of a letter. Even if 2 Peter is a *literature of testament* it is misleading to generalize and conclude that all *testament literature* is necessarily fictional.⁶⁷ Thirdly, the slow process of the acceptance of 2 Peter within in the canon indicates that the letter had already passed the authorship test because there are strong evidences that the early church would not have allowed any forged authors to be included within the canonical selection process.⁶⁸ Fourth, Peter’s citation of Paul’s letters should not be understood that he was talking about the full collection of Paul’s letters that were believed to have taken its final

⁶⁵Van Houwelingen, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” 120.

⁶⁶Cf. *ibid.* The fact that the author does not mention any personal greeting to the reader does not mean that the letter is fictional because letters in the NT period were diverse, including a letter that has a short personal greeting such as 2 Peter. For an excellent discussion of ancient letters, see Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).

⁶⁷Van Houwelingen, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” 121.

⁶⁸Cf. *ibid.*, 121-122; for an excellent response from an evangelical perspective regarding the issue of pseudepigraphy in NT writings see Armin D. Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum: mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung* (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2001).

form in the late first century. The phrase used could refer to any letter written by Paul. However, on the other hand, a kind of collection of Paul's letters could have been preserved within the earliest church community. Therefore, even if 2 Peter refers to a kind of collection of Paul's letters, it does not mean that 2 Peter was written later.⁶⁹ Fifth, the similarity between 2 Peter and Jude does not mean that Peter could not be the writer of the letter. This similarity could be understood in many ways. There exists the possibility that Peter and Jude used the same primary source. Also, the criteria that the shortest version must be the earliest is not always true, therefore, there is equally possible that the book of Jude is a summary of 2 Peter or it possible to see both as inter-dependent writings. Sixth, the different style between that of 2 Peter and 1 Peter does not prove that 2 Peter was not written by the apostle Peter. The differences could be explained by the fact that Peter used an "amanuensis" who would write according to his own style.⁷⁰ Unless it can be posited that the author of 1 and 2 Peter had an essentially different theological view, differences in writing style cannot be considered strong enough evidence to conclude there were separate authors. Further, van Houwelingen offers another viewpoint when he argues that the different writing style in 2 Peter was a direct result of the progress of Peter's writing ability after his time in Rome.⁷¹ Once again, as highlighted earlier, Peter could have had the same developmental experience as Josephus. And lastly, the false teaching mentioned in 2 Peter, that is believed to be a clear indication that 2 Peter was written later, is not primarily related to the second coming of Christ, but to the rejection of a judgment day. This explains the reason that the false teachers led such an ungodly life.⁷²

⁶⁹Van Houwelingen, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," 122-123; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 336.

⁷⁰Davids, *The First Epistles of Peter*, 6-7.

⁷¹Van Houwelingen, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," 124-125.

⁷²Ibid., 125.

1, 2 and 3 John

There are five writings in the NT canon that are believed to be written by, or to have a relationship to, John; the gospel of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. Due to the fact that the focus is primarily upon the Catholic Epistles that represent the Jerusalem perspective, only the Johannine letters will be addressed below.

The letters of John, which were preserved in Ephesus, basically exhibited the characteristics of a letter. Although 1 John does not include an opening section, the content of the letter indicates that it is not a theological tractate, but a letter. John attempted to answer a problem that existed in the Christian communities who would read his letter (e.g., 1 John 2.26).⁷³ While 1 John and 2 John were probably written to a few congregations, 3 John was sent to Gaius. While the structure of 2 John and 3 John is clear, the structure of 1 John is somewhat confusing. For example, there are a few themes (like the theme of love) that overlap throughout a few chapters.⁷⁴ The goal of the letter of 1 John was to warn his readers about false teachers and to teach about a life contrasted between that of the true believer and that of the false teacher. The identity of the false teaching mentioned in the epistle is hard to conclude, yet there exists the probability that the heresy had a close relationship with the views of proto-gnostic, embryonic Docetism and Cerinthianism.⁷⁵

Based on the external evidence, John the disciple of Jesus was the author of the Johannine letters. The vocabulary, syntax, and themes unfolded in the gospel of John and 1 John

⁷³Cf. Judith Lieu, *I, II, III John: A Commentary*, NTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2008), 4-5; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 669-670, 675-676.

⁷⁴S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, rev. ed., WBC 51 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xxx-xxxi.

⁷⁵P. J. Lalleman argues that the heresy combated in the 1 and 2 Epistles of John has a close relationship to a kind of belief that is existed in the Act of John (P. J. Lalleman, "Adversaries Envisaged in the Johannine Epistles," *Netherlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 53 [1999]: 17-24). He discovered a kind of docetism that denied the human nature of Christ that stands behind the theological problem in the letters of John.

indicate that they both share the same tradition that unfolded from John the Apostle. Similarly, 2 John and 3 John both use similar vocabulary to that of 1 John.⁷⁶ Modern scholars, who challenge the traditional view, base their arguments on the following points; the different doctrine and wording used in 1 John and the gospel of John, the use of the pronoun “we” in 1 John indicates that the author is part of a kind of school of John, and thirdly, the author of 2 John and 3 John identifies himself as “the elder.” In response to the first objection, although there is a different usage of some words in 1 John and the gospel of John, such as the word “logos,” there is no theological contradiction between them. The word “we” as used by John does not refer to a kind of school surrounding John, rather it refers to John and other people who along with him were eyewitnesses (e.g., 1 John 1:1; cf. 1 John 1:3). This is, in part, based upon the usage of the pronoun “you” that is used to represent the reader (e.g., 1 John 1:3), and the word “they” that is used to refer to the “sinful world” (e.g., 1 John 2:3). Lastly, the self-identification of John as the elder does not indicate that he denies his apostleship, in addition, the article “*ho*” used indicates that the author is not just recognized as an ordinary elder (2 John 1:1).⁷⁷

Jude

Jude is clearly a letter; the opening, the body and the closing of the writing shows that the genre is that of the letter.⁷⁸ The reader is addressed as a theological identity, the content of the letter indicates that there is a specific problem faced by the Christian community to which the letter was addressed (Jude 3) and, the letter, just as was seen in 2 Peter, was indeed written to a particular communi-

ty.⁷⁹ The problem faced by the community is related to the false teachers that are described in almost the same manner in 2 Peter.⁸⁰ The difference, however, is that Jude does not indicate that the false teachers held a kind of eschatological skepticism. The false teachers in 2 Peter and Jude are related, but they are not identical. This leads to the conclusion that the letter was probably written at a time not too far distant from 2 Peter, namely approximately ca. 60.⁸¹

The book generally is believed to have been written by Jude the brother of James and Jesus.⁸² Some rather weak objections related to authorship of the book are proposed by some modern scholars. These are related to the Greek used, an indication to an apostolic reference, and the failure to mention Jude’s family relationship with Jesus. The first objection is speculative because there is no evidence that someone from Galilee could not write in a competent Greek style. The second is not supported by any firm evidence as the term “the faith” (v.17) does not refer to apostolic teaching, but to Jesus and the apostles’ prediction about false teachers (v.18). Finally, Jude prefers to refer to his relationship to Jesus as Jesus’ servant rather than as his brother. The familial relationship to Jesus is not needed because his readers have already known the author and have acknowledged his authority.

Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, John, and Jude

Studies within NT theology have not given much attention to the Catholic Epistles. This is likely the direct result due to the fact that NT scholarship has been carried out under the shadow of the “historical Jesus” and the

⁷⁹Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 512.

⁸⁰Bauckham, *Jude*, 11-13.

⁸¹For a discussion on the date of Jude see *ibid.*, 13-14 and Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 12-16.

⁸²Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (London: T & T Clark, 1990), 171-178.

⁷⁶Smalley, *I, 2, 3 John*, xx-xxi.

⁷⁷Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 672-675.

⁷⁸Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 3-4.

“New Perspective on Paul.” Additionally, the diverse theologies and contexts inherent within the body of letters make scholars reluctant to study the theology of the letters of the Catholic Epistles as a corpus.⁸³

In contrast, few scholars (for example, Thielman) have begun to recognize that there could be a kind of unity that could link the letters. In this section, an attempt will be made to discuss the theological characteristics of each of the letters.⁸⁴

James’ teaching is ethical, eschatological and God-oriented.⁸⁵ Davids recognizes three main theological topics in James; testing, speech and wealth. These ethical topics are related to God and should be understood in the light of God’s eschatological work. For instance, God’s people might experience suffering because of their commitment to living a godly life, yet they need to ask for God’s wisdom to understand that their suffering will lead them to eschatological joy.⁸⁶

The teaching of 1 Peter is also ethical, eschatological as well as God and Christ-oriented.⁸⁷ According to Gene L. Green, 1 Peter follows the line of the history of salvation. The suffering faced by God’s people should be understood as a part of God’s work throughout human history. The community is advised

⁸³R. Wall and David R. Nienhuis, who use the canonical approach to analyze the Catholic Epistles, believe that there is a unifying theology found within the corpus. Although their proposal is probably over exaggerated and untenable to other scholars, it is still possible to find a “linking theme” that connects the letters (R. Wall and David R. Nienhuis, *Reading the Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude as Scripture: The Shaping and Shape of a Canonical Collection* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013]).

⁸⁴Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 293-294.

⁸⁵There is a debate about the main theme and structure of the letter. It is possible that the concept of faith in this letter could be a linking theme that connects the structure of the text (see Dan McCartney, *James*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009]). Additionally, the letter of James is indebted to the OT traditions, in particular the wisdom tradition.

⁸⁶Davids, “James.”

⁸⁷The letters of Peter also make use of the OT materials (for example, the book of Isaiah in 1 Pet 3:21-26 and the story of Noah in 2 Pet 2:5). In fact, the first letter of Peter uses OT traditions more than other NT writings.

to bear their suffering patiently and wait for God’s coming that will lead to final victory.⁸⁸ A similar characteristic is also presented within the second letter of Peter. 2 Peter, like 1 Peter, is also ethical and eschatological as well as God and Christ-oriented. Davids concluded that the letter is a response to false teachers that exhibit an unethical life because they have rejected God-Christ’s coming and God’s judgment.⁸⁹ Davids seems to have ignored the question that Peter’s main teaching about the coming of God-Christ’s day is related to an unethical life. A focus upon Peter’s response will highlight that the main problem with the false teachers is related to their teaching, yet, as Davids admits, the main problem of the false teachers is related to their lack of an ethical lifestyle. A focus upon the unethical life of the false teachers, leads to the conclusion that the main problem is related to the rejection of judgment in God’s coming day.

1 and 2 John apparently share a similar theology in which there are three theological themes explored by John. These three are the truth about Christ, obedience to Christ’s commands, and love for each other.⁹⁰ The theology of 3 John is also related to ethical teaching within the context of leadership.⁹¹ The emphasis of the Johannine letters, that of ethical issues related to teaching and leadership, indicates that the letters have the same concerns as the other Catholic Epistles.

The content of Jude shows that he is concerned with two aspects, namely the false teacher problem particularly related to unethical life, and the exhortation related to the

⁸⁸Gene L. Green, “1 Peter,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 346–351.

⁸⁹Peter H. Davids, “2 Peter,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 350–351.

⁹⁰In the first letter of John OT, quotations are present probably only in a few texts (like 1 John 3.12), however, Lieu believes that the OT texts hold a significant place within the letter (Lieu, *I, II, III John*, 16-17).

⁹¹Donald A. Carson, “The Johannine Letters,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 351–354.

deception.⁹² This indication leads to the conclusion that Jude, as with James, Peter, and John, also speaks about an unethical life as the mark of deception or heresy that will lead these false teachers to God's eschatological judgment.⁹³

The brief observations mentioned above do not amount to a comprehensive theological analysis of the Catholic Epistles, yet through this analysis, it is evident that a key theological perspective existed and is shared throughout most of the epistles. There is evidence that the concern with ethics is of key theological interest in the epistles. This could be due to the sufferings of early Christians, but this could also be due to a kind of hallmark of the Jerusalem tradition. In comparing Acts 15 and Galatians 2:10, there is likewise a similar emphasis that ethical concerns, which are not

⁹²The Old Testament texts also play an important role in this letter, such as the story of Sodom-Gomorrah (Jude 7). Further discussion on this subject can be found in J. Daryl Charles, *Literary Strategy in the Epistle of Jude* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 91-127.

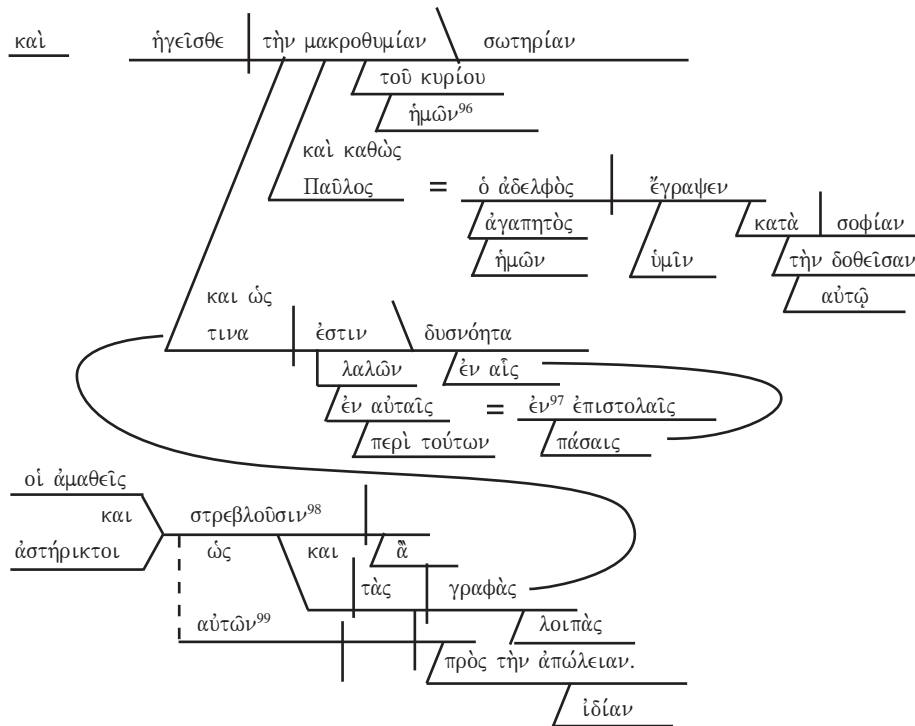
⁹³Cf. Peter H. Davids, "Jude," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 335.

necessarily an issue in the Acts 15 meeting, are added together with the decision on the issue of circumcision. Besides, almost all the epistles, except 2 and 3 John, are eschatological in nature. James, Peter, Jude, and 1 John speak about immorality as the mark of the false teachers or the insincere Christians and the eschatological coming of God's judgment. Both ethical and eschatological concerns evident in the epistles also existed in Paul. Paul's teaching on sin and judgment in Romans 2 is self-evident, in fact, the same message also existed in the teaching of both John the Baptist and Jesus (e.g., Luke 3. 7-18; Matt 7:15-23).⁹⁴ This observation could be evidence that the gap between Jesus and his disciples or between Paul and the other apostles is too exaggerated. Further, the ethical and eschatological view inherent in the Catholic Epistles and Paul indicate that there is still a theological connection between both the Jewish and Gentile churches.

⁹⁴Cf. Simon J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting?: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Peter and Paul in 2 Peter 3:15-18

Syntax Analysis⁹⁵



⁹⁵The diagram is arranged based on grammatical structural principle in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 69-96. The text is taken from NA-28. All variants proposed by NA-28 will not be discussed. Rather, only a few variants that are important will be discussed in the following footnote.

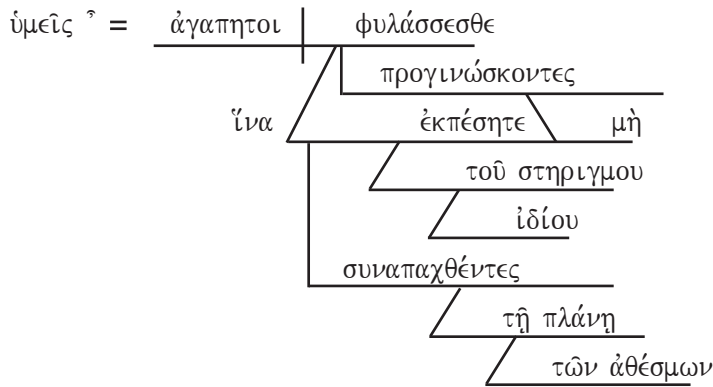
⁹⁶The word ἡμῶν is changed to be υμων in Ms. 5 and omitted in an important Alexandrian text (i.e., Codex Porphyrianus), Philoxenian Syriac version, and Bohairic Coptic versions. The external evaluation shows that the replacement is not supported by any old and variegated type of text; on the other hand, although the omission is supported by the important manuscripts and versions, but it is not supported by other types of evidences. On the contrary, based on internal evaluation, it is clear that the author usually uses the personal pronoun ἡμῶν together with the word κυρίου (2 Pet 1:2, 8, 11, 16; 2:20; 3:18). Based on this evaluation, therefore, the best reading is the word ἡμῶν

⁹⁷The word ταις is omitted in few old and important Alexandrian texts such as \mathfrak{P}^{72} , Codex Alexandrinus, and Ms. 33. Based on external evaluation, the suggestion is not supported by other different type of texts. Based on internal evaluation, it seems that the word ταις makes the sentence become more difficult to understand because contextually it is not clear which Paul's letter is referred; in other word, the omission leads to the better reading. Moreover, it is also possible that a later scribe thinks about 1 and 2 Thessalonians that also talks about misunderstanding on Jesus' second coming, and therefore they add the word ταις. In this case, the best reading is following the Alexandrian texts namely omitting the word ταις.

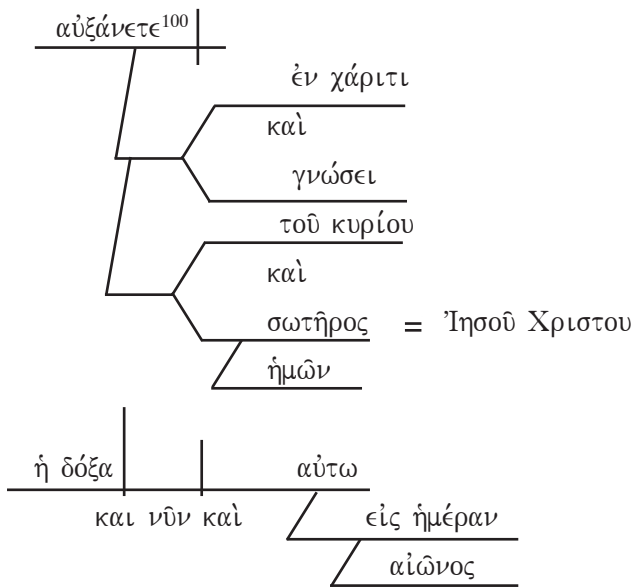
⁹⁸There are two different variant reading here i.e., στρεβλοῦσιν and στρεβλωσουσιν. Comparing to NA-27, it is clear that NA-28 has chosen the second reading that is basically supported by only one old qualified evidence (\mathfrak{P}^{72}). On the other hand, the first reading is supported by few Alexandrian old and qualified texts (such as Codex Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, Ms 33, 81), Byzantium text, and Coptic version. The internal evidence shows that στρεβλωσουσιν grammatically is incorrect; there is possibility that the original reading uses the incorrect word and therefore some scribes make a repair or the original reading contains the incorrect word that is recorded at \mathfrak{P}^{72} . Although both reading is possible, yet because the meaning of the word that is used by Peter is still clear even if Peter uses the incorrect word, in this case I will choose the word streblou/sin as the best reading because external evidence support more this reading.

⁹⁹The word αὐτῶν is replaced by the word εαὐτῶν in \mathfrak{P}^{72} . The suggestion is come from the old and qualified witness, yet it is not supported by other old and qualified witness; on the other hand, the word εαὐτῶν is more emphatic; it is possible that the scribe of \mathfrak{P}^{72} changes the word because of his own feeling on the similar issue faced in his time.

οὖν



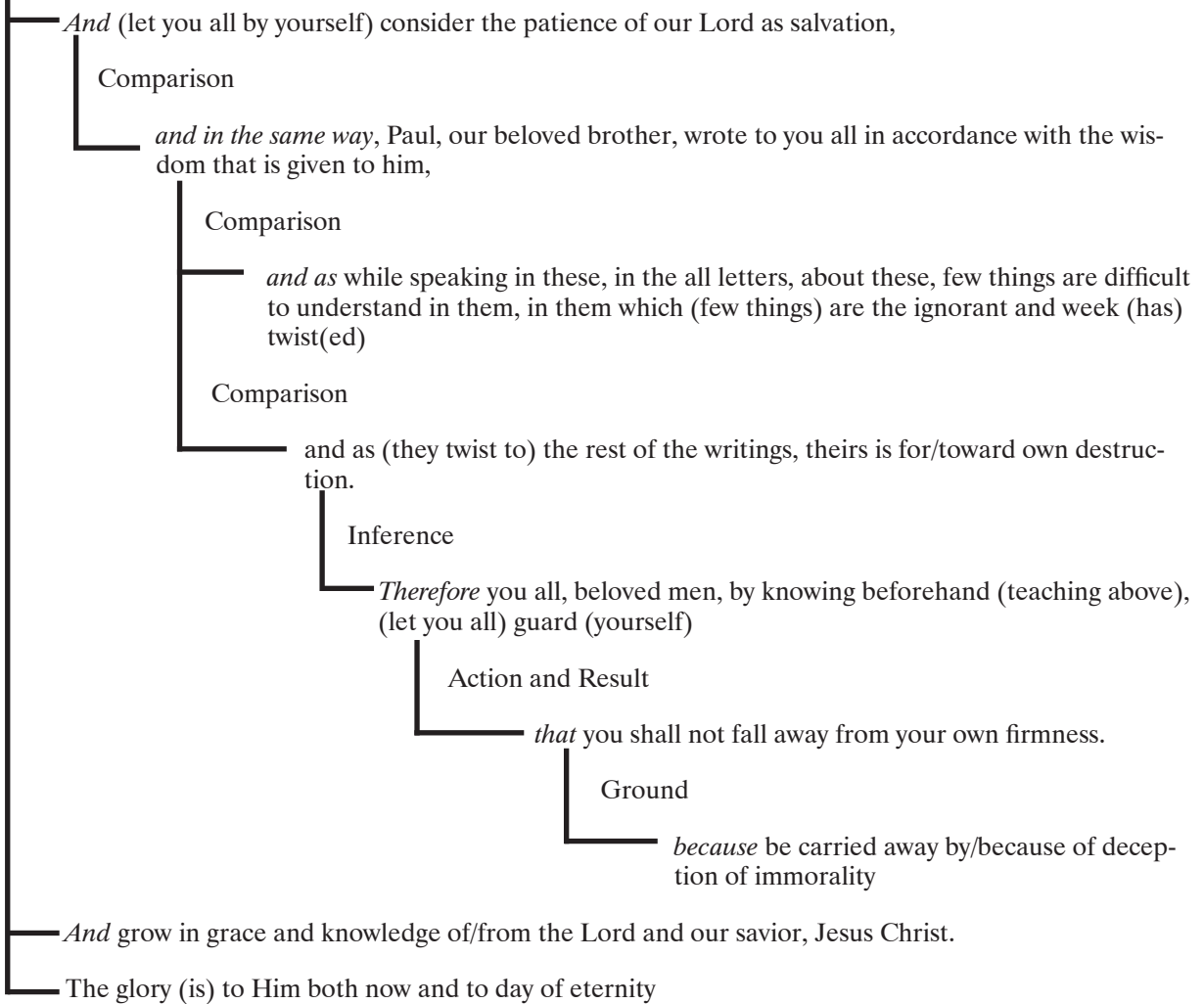
δε



¹⁰⁰The word αὐξάνετε is replaced by the word αὐξάνητε in MS. 5 and some majority texts; in a few important and qualified Alexandrian texts such as P⁷² and Ms. 81 is used the word αυξανεσθε. The word αὐξάνητε is grammatically incorrect; it seems that the mistake made by the scribe; the word αυξανεσθε seems a grammatical correction made by scribe. Because the both suggestion are lack of evidences, the best reading is αὐξάνετε.

Argument Analysis¹⁰¹

Verse 11



¹⁰¹The diagram is arranged based on a tracing of the principle in Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 97-124.

Interpretation

There are two questions that will be addressed. The first question is “what is the important concept that Paul is addressing in this passage.” Green believes that the answer to this question is that “the false teacher has distorted the message (Paul’s letters) and has used those epistles to support their heresy.”¹⁰² This interpretation lacks evidence. Based on the syntactical and argumentation highlighted in the structure above, it is clear that the citation about Paul is made in the context of encouragement to consider the Lord’s patience. Peter simply compares his teaching with that of Paul’s, who also teaches about the Lord’s patience, and contrasts this with some people (called “the ignorant and weak”) who have twisted his teaching about the Lord’s patience. The reference is not so definitive as to make it easy to connect the “scoffers” (2 Pet 3:3) to the “ignorant and weak.” Yet, it seems that both share the same characteristic, namely twisting the teaching of the Lord’s patience. Who are the “ignorant and weak?” Bauckham believes that both terms are used to refer to people who “are unwilling to learn, and unstable because they allow themselves to be misled.”¹⁰³ This is perhaps a correct rendering of the lexical meaning. However, based on the analysis above, Peter’s advice to the readers is that they need to guard themselves so that they will not be carried away by the deception of immorality is part of the previous sentence about “the ignorant and weak”. It is reasonable to relate the issue “the ignorant and weak” to a kind of immorality that could deceive the reader. Therefore, “the ignorant and weak” are people who ignore the warning about God’s judgment at Christ’s return and merely continue living an immoral life.

¹⁰²Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 338-339.

¹⁰³Bauckham, *Jude*, 331.

The second question is as follows, “what is Peter’s assessment of Paul in this passage?” Based on the above syntactical and argumentation analysis, there are two possible ideas about Peter’s view of Paul. First, Peter states that Paul wrote with the σοφία that was given to him. Many scholars believe that the word σοφία, that is used by Peter, indicates a confession that Paul’s writing is considered as authoritative as the OT. Louw and Nida who use the semantic domain approach put the word σοφία into two semantic fields; the semantic field “understand,” and the semantic field “know.” In the first semantic field, the word σοφία is used together with the other words used in relationship with the activity to know something. In conjunction with this semantic field, the word σοφία has the meaning of “knowledge which make possible skillful activity or performance-specialized knowledge, skill.” In the second semantic field, the word σοφία is used together with the accompanying words used in the context of capacity for understanding. Neither Louw nor Nida seems to place the word σοφία within the semantic field used to refer to “inspiration.”¹⁰⁴ Based upon this approach, it seems that Peter’s statement about Paul could refer to his special skill or ability that is not always to be equated with God’s supernatural work. However, if we understand the word σοφία in the broader context, particularly in its relationship to the word τὰς γραφὰς (“the writings”), it will lead to an understanding that Peter not only affirms Paul’s skill and ability but also affirms that Paul’s writing is authoritative.

Louw and Nida put the word γραφή within the semantic field of “communication” that functions within a broad range of contexts. Louw and Nida place the word into the sub-

¹⁰⁴See the further discussion in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1:225, 335, 385. Also see *ibid.*, 2:299.

domain field of “word, passage” and “written language.”¹⁰⁵ In the first subdomain field the word γραφή is used not only in the context of scripture, but it is also used together with other words that are generally used within the context of discourse. In the second subdomain the word γραφή. is used together with the word that is used within the context of scripture.¹⁰⁶ Based upon the context of 2 Peter 3.16 that highlights the reality about the ignorant and the weak who have twisted...τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς (the composition of the sentence implies that Paul’s letters are included) and which leads to destruction, there is an indication that Paul’s letters (as τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς) are not seen as just an ordinary discourse, but as authoritative writings like the OT.

The analysis above leads back to a sample issue in the letter of Peter that was addressed earlier. This matter, the ethical-theological issue and God’s judgment, is the theological perspective that is shared by the Catholic Epistles, Paul’s Letters, as well as found within Jesus’ teaching. This shows that there exists a continuing theological perspective shared between Jesus, the apostles, and Paul.

Conclusion

While the differences between Paul and the apostles (Peter, John, James, and Jude) are self-evident, there is still significant continuity between them. The continuity between Paul and the apostles should enable the reader to understand that the difference between Paul and the apostles does not entail a “gap.” The ethical-theological perspective and the theme of God’s judgment that was highlighted, and exists within the Catholic Epistles, is, as shown by Gathercole, too general in nature.¹⁰⁷ It is doubtful that this understanding even existed within early Jewish thought. Consequently, a theological perspective needs to be found that exclusively underlies the Catholic Epistles. This may be a difficult task to accomplish particularly because the letter of Jude

is so short, yet there must be something that could connect each letter together within the Catholic Epistles.

The Catholic Epistles and the book of Revelation indicate that a heretical movement existed in the early church and presented a serious issue. It is clear that the early church did not think that every movement that seemed different from the Jerusalem view was heresy. Paul’s approach and understanding was probably different from the Jerusalem approach, yet they could accept and support Paul’s mission and theology. However, some movements were clearly rejected. The question remains, what criteria was used within the early church to distinguish a movement which was considered heretical from one which was not.

Dunn’s fresh way of reading Acts is indeed interesting. The traditional way of reading Acts was too historical and seems to ignore its theological motif. Dunn, however, consistently reads Acts not only as an historical record, but also from a theological perspective. Unfortunately, this manner of reading seems to have caused Dunn to mistrust Luke’s historical record. He focuses upon always attempting to find the theological motif and understanding of each historical record made by Luke and, as a result, Luke’s historical reliability is treated as doubtful. Therefore, a fresh approach that can grasp both Luke’s historical and theological intention to read Acts would be the next topic under consideration.

Dunn’s proposal that there is a kind of transformation that takes place from the Jewish church to the Gentile church is not convincing. Both the Jewish churches and the gentile churches survived beyond AD. 70. There is a clear indication that a separation occurred between the Jewish and gentile communities (cf. Rev 2:9), but it was not between the Jewish church and the gentile (non-Jewish) church. Therefore, the unique mixture of the early church seems to be reflective of the dominant character of the early church from its beginning to end.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 1: 390, 395.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 2:318 and 1:395-396.

¹⁰⁷Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting?*

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