

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN VIEW OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHIC WRITINGS

Thomas D. Lea*

Modern NT scholars quite commonly ascribe the authorship of many NT writings to pseudonymous writers who used a famous name in order to accomplish purposes that the writer deemed important. Among books frequently treated in this manner are Ephesians, the pastoral epistles, James, and 1 and 2 Peter. An example of this approach is seen in F. W. Beare's very helpful commentary on 1 Peter when he says, "There can be no possible doubt that 'Peter' is a pseudonym."¹ Beare adds that the readers of 1 Peter "would recognize the pseudonym for what it was—an accepted and harmless literary device, employed by a teacher who is more concerned for the Christian content of his message than for the assertion of his own claims to authority."² Beare does not feel that the pseudonymous writer of 1 Peter was seeking to gain an artificial prestige for his work, but he "seeks to re-create the personality of the one whose name he has chosen, and to make him speak in his own personality and accents."³

Of the NT books mentioned above, no book is more commonly described as a pseudonymous writing than 2 Peter. In order to gain a perspective of the reasons behind the ascription of the term "pseudonymous" to certain NT writings, it will be helpful to examine the reasons why many feel that 2 Peter falls into this category.

W. G. Kümmel lists several factors contributing to his designation of 2 Peter as pseudonymous.⁴ First, he sees that Peter demonstrates literacy dependence on Jude. Since Jude is assigned to the post-apostolic age, Peter could not have written 2 Peter. Second, he finds that the language and concepts of 2 Peter are so strongly influenced by Hellenism that they could not have been written by Peter or even by one of his pupils. He sees Hellenism as a stream of learning into which the apostle Peter could not have been immersed. Third, he finds that the interest in opposing those who deny the parousia is more easily fitted into second-century gnosticism than into a first-century Christianity. The movement denounced in 2 Peter is seen by Kümmel to bear the traits of a second-century

*Thomas Lea is associate professor of New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

¹F. W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947) 25.

²Ibid., p. 29.

³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 430-434.

gnosis. Fourth, the appeal to the writings of Paul is taken to refer to a time when the Pauline letters had been collected. This demands a date in the second century. Finally, Kümmel notes that the absence of the mention of 2 Peter among the apologists of the second century and from the Muratorian Canon militates against first-century authorship. He feels that there is simply inadequate external attestation for the apostolic authorship of the writing. No effort will be made to elaborate upon or to discuss these objections, for such discussion is not within the scope of this paper. His views merely provide a sample of the kind of evidence used in calling for acceptance of pseudonymous authorship. It should be noted that the first four items suggested by Kümmel concern internal evidence while the fifth concerns external evidence.

Questions concerning the apostolic authorship of 2 Peter are apparent even within a more conservative realm of NT scholarship. Ralph P. Martin examines the question of authorship of 2 Peter and states:

The conclusion is that in 2 Peter we are faced with a later expression of the apostolic gospel, extended and modified to counter the problems raised by the inroad of a gnosticizing antinomianism. The writer builds his case on the deposit of apostolic teaching he has inherited and applies it to his own day. Yet it is apostolic truth and, to that extent, Peter's name and aegis can be claimed for it.⁵

It appears to this writer that the internal evidence cannot be conclusively evaluated as either for or against apostolic authorship. Another question should also be raised concerning the authorship of 2 Peter: Is there external evidence for pseudepigraphy? Would the early Church have admitted a known pseudonymous writing into the NT canon? If the Church tended toward the acceptance of pseudonymous writings in the NT canon, then the evaluation of evidence against apostolic authorship becomes more plausible. If on the other hand the Church tended to reject pseudonymous writings from the NT canon, then the evaluation of evidence for apostolic authorship becomes more plausible.

It is indeed possible that the Church would have rejected a known pseudonymous writing but could have made a wrong decision about the authorship of a writing. They could have admitted it into the NT canon under a presumed author who was not the actual author. If this did occur, it would raise serious ethical considerations concerning the integrity of a writer who would use a pseudonym when he knew that such a practice would be morally reprehensible to the Church.

The question raised concerns pseudonymous authorship and not merely anonymous authorship. This writer would view such NT writings as Matthew, Mark and Hebrews as anonymous in authorship in that no claim of authorship appears. The question of ethics concerns only the willful use of a pseudonym in place of the name of the genuine author. The remainder of this paper will investigate the question of the early Church's view of the practice of pseudepigraphy and sources for this view. The investigation will be limited to the period before Nicea.

⁵R. P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2. 388.

I. JEWISH EXAMPLES OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHY

The practice of Judaism in regard to pseudepigraphy provides abundant illustrations of such writings. Such an apocalyptic production as 1 Enoch is pseudonymous. Jewish pseudepigraphic writings also include two examples using the epistolary form (the Epistle of Jeremiah and the Epistle of Aristeas). Guthrie notes that the Epistle of Jeremiah "purports to be another letter from the same prophet supplementary to the canonical book and containing a biting indictment of idolatry. It was issued under Jeremiah's name because it was intended to supply a supposed deficiency in the canonical treatment of Babylonian idolatry."⁶ Guthrie feels that the recipients took the letter to be a long-lost letter of the real Jeremiah.

Guthrie also mentions that the Epistle of Aristeas claims to be written by a Gentile although it aims at glorifying Jewish culture, religion and literature. The epistolary form was used in order to place the production in an historic setting much earlier than the author's lifetime. He feels that the readers of the letter would have felt that the writer was linked with the production of the LXX in the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285-245 B.C.).⁷

It should not be immediately deduced that a Christian writer would be prone to adopt pseudepigraphy merely because of the numerous examples of Jewish usage. The high place given to integrity and honesty in Christian writings makes it appear unlikely that a practice of questionable integrity would be adopted merely because there was an example of it. Also it must again be asked if the Church would permit and accept the practice. This question and its answer seem more basic than a stress on the availability of examples of pseudepigraphy from Judaism. The student of pseudepigraphy should recognize the presence of the practice in Judaism but should not conclude that the Christian writer would adopt it easily.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHY

It should be admitted that there is little NT evidence concerning the views of early Christians on the subject of pseudepigraphy. However, what evidence there is seems to be negative concerning the practice.

In 2 Thess 2:2 Paul warns his readers against being troubled and upset by a writing professing to come from him. In 3:17 he states that the greeting in his own handwriting was a sign of the genuineness of that writing. It seems unlikely that Paul would have been content to accept a pseudonymous writing when he was specifically proscribing it in these passages.

Further, some of the NT writings for which pseudonymity is claimed by contemporary students have a "nobility of thought"⁸ that would not seem to fit the mental approach of a deliberate imitator. In Eph 4:15, 25 there is a firm directive to the readers to speak the truth and later an appeal to be clothed with truth

⁶D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (2d ed.; London: Tyndale, 1963-65), 2. 284.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 292.

(Eph 6:14). In Col 3:9 there is a strong appeal to the readers not to lie to one another. In the pastorals there are frequent references to "the truth" in 1 Tim 2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim 2:15; 2:25; 4:4; Titus 1:1; 1:14. Guthrie has well warned that "pseudepigraphic hypotheses must assume that the author's notion of the truth contained nothing inconsistent with a literary method which he must have known would deceive many if not all his readers."⁹

III. THE ANTE-NICENE WRITINGS AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHY

In this section an effort will be made to determine the criteria by which leaders after the NT era distinguished between those writings that were genuine and those that were spurious. By "genuine" it is meant that the writing was seen as penned by an apostle or an associate of an apostle. By "spurious" it is meant that the writing was seen as coming from other than an apostle or his associate. Some noncanonical books from this period were believed, at least by some, to be genuine and therefore deserving of a place in the canon. Among such books were the subapostolic writings including 1 Clement, the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas.

It must be admitted at the outset that there is not a great amount of evidence by which to determine the criteria used by the fathers. Nevertheless certain statements and opinions held by the fathers will be examined for their relevance to this question. It should be realized that the question concerning the apostolic authorship of any Christian writing would normally be disputed only for those writings produced in the period before Nicea. After this period the time distance from the apostolic period would be so great that an audience could normally recognize that any document claiming apostolic authorship was spurious.

Eusebius questioned the inclusion of the Shepherd of Hermas among canonical literature due to the possibility of mistaken claims for authorship. He states that the failure to include this book among those confessed or acknowledged as genuine was due to an uncertainty of whether the Hermas who wrote the book was the same as Hermes mentioned in Rom 16:14.¹⁰ It is a legitimate assumption from his statement that known pseudonymous authorship of this book would have caused it to be rejected from the list of those that were received or approved.

Also coming from Eusebius is the story of Serapion and the Gospel of Peter. In the late second century Serapion, bishop of Antioch, learned of the partiality of a town in his diocese for the Gospel of Peter. He allowed it to be read at first, but after investigating the matter he forbade its usage. Initially Serapion may not have been well informed about the book and may have wished to avoid undue interference in the reading customs of the Church. When he had informed himself he said, "We, brethren, receive Peter and the other apostles as Christ himself. But those writings which falsely go under their name, as we are well acquainted with them, we reject, and know also, that we have not received such

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.3.

handed down to us."¹¹ It is true that the doctrinal deviations of the book were factors in his rejection of it, but of paramount importance here is the fact that its pseudepigraphic origins rendered it unacceptable.

Tertullian makes several statements that indicate that he grounded his teaching in that which was apostolic. He says, "All doctrine must be prejudged as false which savours of contrariety to the truth of the churches and apostles of Christ and God."¹² Again he declaims against Marcion and suggests that a true edition of the gospel is not that of Marcion but that which is the work of apostles.¹³

Tertullian also refers to the frequently mentioned incident of the composition of the apocryphal Acts of Paul by an elder of Asia. He notes that the elder composed the writing to increase Paul's fame, and he confessed to have done it from love for Paul. Nevertheless Tertullian notes that he "was removed from his office."¹⁴ The practice of pseudonymity, even for the commendable end of honoring Paul, was greeted by the Church with the removal of the author from his office. It should be noted that Tertullian further rejected the teaching of the Acts of Paul concerning the role of women in the Church, but it appears that his quotation substantiates the fact that the Church rejected the writing due to the false claims of authorship made by the elder.

Origen discusses the question of the corporeality of God by reference to a treatise entitled the Doctrine of Peter. He rejects the use of that writing in discussing the subject because he indicates that the book "was not composed either by Peter or by any other person inspired by the Spirit of God."¹⁵ It should be admitted that Origen and other Fathers do refer to some OT apocrypha and pseudepigrapha in their writings, but it is not evident that they refer to them with the full authority of canonical Scripture. Sometimes they are used for the purpose of illustration or to express teaching in agreement with Scripture itself.¹⁶

The opinion of Dionysius on the authorship of Revelation provides a different insight into the investigations of early Christian writers. Dionysius admits that the author was John and that he was a holy and inspired man. He questions apostolic authorship with these words:

But I could not so easily admit that this was the apostle, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, and the same person with him who wrote the Gospel which bears the title *according to John*, and the catholic epistle. But from the character of both, and the forms of expression, and the whole disposition and execution of the book, I draw the conclusion that the authorship is not his.¹⁷

¹¹Ibid., 6.12.

¹²Tertullian *On Prescription Against Heretics* 21.

¹³Tertullian *Against Marcion* 4.3.

¹⁴Tertullian *On Baptism* 17.

¹⁵Origen *De Principiis* Preface 8.

¹⁶Ibid., 3.2.1.

¹⁷Dionysius *Extant Fragments* 1.4.

The words of Dionysius will assist in refuting the idea that the early fathers were of necessity gullible in accepting claims for authorship. Dionysius examined the book with some methods resembling the techniques of modern criticism. He rejects the apostle John as an author, but it should also be noted that he rejects pseudonymous authorship as an accepted practice. He is not certain who the mentioned John might be, but he is certain that it is written by a John who was a follower of Jesus.

The anonymous writing known as *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* was sometimes attributed to Clement, bishop of Rome. Other writers found it to be basically a document of the second or third century, possibly containing additions that could be dated later.¹⁸ The writings consisted of laws or instructions on various aspects of morality, directives to bishops, presbyters and deacons, and encouragements to those who faced the possibility of martyrdom. The writing contains a section warning against pseudonymous literature that claims to be from the apostles but in reality stems from heretical sources. The author says:

For you are not to attend to the names of the apostles, but to the nature of the things, and their settled opinions. For we know that Simon and Cleobius, and their followers, have compiled poisonous books under the name of Christ and of His disciples, and do carry them about in order to deceive you who love Christ, and us His servants.¹⁹

These words provide some idea of the mindset of a representative of the ante-Nicene fathers on the practice of pseudonymity. It seems unlikely that this unknown writer would have accepted a writing as genuine if he had known that it came from a pseudonymous author. This evidence is all the more interesting in light of the fact that the author has himself been viewed as making a pseudonymous reference to the apostles and elders in order to gain acceptance for his writing.

Obviously the treatment of evidence from the ante-Nicene fathers is not exhaustive, but the evidence suggests that at least two factors were used by the early fathers in judging the acceptability of writings for the canon: orthodoxy and authorship. A book inculcating heresy would be rejected. At the same time a book known to have been written pseudonymously seems to have been rejected. It was generally demanded that a writing be apostolic or at least from the circle of the apostles. Under no conditions does it seem that the Church sanctioned the use by one man of the name of another in writing. Pseudonymous authorship seems not to have been an acceptable option for the early Church.

IV. PSEUDEPIGRAPHY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The NT apocrypha are defined as

writings which have not been received into the canon, but which by title and other statements lay claim to be in the same class with the writings of the canon, and

¹⁸ANF, 7. 387-390.

¹⁹*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 6.16.

which from the point of view of Form Criticism further develop and mould the kinds of style created and received in the NT, whilst foreign elements certainly intrude.²⁰

The definition given above would include in its content many writings whose professions to belong in the canon would immediately have been seen as false by alert Christian readers.

Some of this apocryphal literature originated in order to supplement and enlarge upon material in the canonical writings. This development is particularly true in the infancy gospels in which meager statements of the canonical writings are elaborated and expanded. In addition, some of this literature represented the variant teachings and traditions present in early Christianity. This feature is most readily apparent in the Gospel of Thomas, a writing acknowledged to be of gnostic origin. Other writings attempted to glorify the figures of the apostles for reasons that are not always fully apparent. Among these writings the Acts of Paul penned by the elder of Asia in honor of Paul should be included. Hennecke's two-volume work contains examples of over seventy-five apocryphal fragments and documents that touch in some way upon the history of the NT or its doctrine.

The Church used some discernment and discrimination in rejecting these writings as spurious and as not deserving of a place alongside the canonical writings. Although there is some uncertainty of the precise principles used by the Church, Hennecke feels able to say that "what was fundamental and apostolic was given precedence, but what was apostolic was determined by what was fundamental, i.e. by the confession and faith of the Church."²¹ The twin factors of doctrinal orthodoxy and apostolic authorship were used in testing these writings for genuineness. The Church did accept some writings from nonapostolic hands, but in the instance of Mark and Luke these men were seen as at least influenced by the apostles Peter and Paul respectively.

Evidence for the conclusion by Hennecke can be found in the Muratorian Canon, which essentially accepts only those books of known apostolic authorship. In listing the Revelation of Peter and the Shepherd of Hermas, the author of the Canon suggests that there is something defective about them and that they are not on a level with canonical literature. Also the compiler of the Canon specifically indicates an epistle written by Paul to the Alexandrians but rejects it because it was forged in Paul's name for the Marcionites.²² Thus the twin factors of apostolic authorship and doctrinal orthodoxy are used in order to ferret out the true writings from the spurious.

Eusebius contains a list of the canonical writings in his *Ecclesiastical History*. His list includes the four gospels, Acts, the epistles of Paul, 1 John and 1 Peter. He includes James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 John and 3 John as approved by many but still disputed. He mentions also that both Hebrews and Revelation were books subject to dispute, but he speaks favorably of both of them.²³ In the same section

²⁰E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 1. 27.

²¹Ibid., p. 36.

²²Ibid., pp. 42-46.

²³Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.25; 6.25.

he mentions the rejection of the Gospel of Peter and the Gospel of Thomas because "they are adduced by the heretics under the name of the apostles."²⁴

Eusebius' opinion may be understood to represent the techniques used by earlier Christian leaders to distinguish the true writings from the spurious. It is again noted that the twin themes of orthodoxy and apostolic authorship appear as the criteria by which canonical writings are separated from NT apocrypha.

V. OPINIONS CONCERNING THE PRACTICE OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Donald Guthrie is one of the few contemporary writers who have written significantly in the field of pseudepigraphy and the NT. Guthrie admits that there was a great quantity of pseudepigraphical literature in the Greco-Roman world.²⁵

He points out that Jews often resorted to the practice to secure a hearing for their words in an era when the cessation of prophetic utterances would prevent a new prophet from gaining a hearing. Guthrie particularly investigates the use of epistles in the practice of pseudepigraphy and finds only six examples of epistolary pseudepigraphy among the NT apocrypha. He does note other types of pseudepigraphic literature, such as the apocalypse and gospels. His study of evidence concerning the acceptance or rejection of these writings leads him to assert that "where the pseudonymous device was recognized it was not merely not tolerated but emphatically condemned."²⁶ He also indicates that if the pseudepigrapha were ever received into the NT canon, they must have entered without an awareness by the recipients of their true character. Such a conclusion would suggest that authoring a pseudepigraphic work involved deliberate deception by a writer, a quality difficult to reconcile with the high spiritual outlook of the NT.

In a related article Guthrie discusses factors that led to the development of the idea of canonical pseudepigrapha.²⁷ He notes that the mental atmosphere of the rationalist period gave rise to theories of NT pseudepigrapha. Beginning with Schleiermacher and continuing through F. C. Baur and Jülicher, critics of apostolic authorship suggested that the pastorals and other NT writings were the work of some writer who had put himself in Paul's place. Jülicher, for example, urged that the word "forgery" be avoided. He appealed to the credulity of ecclesiastical circles and felt that first- and second-century Christians were indifferent to the form in which truth was expressed. In opposition to this, Guthrie notes that the practice of pseudepigraphy must be examined historically to determine whether there is evidence that the practice used in the ancient world would be accepted in the Church. Guthrie concludes: "There is no evidence in Christian

²⁴Ibid., 3.25.

²⁵Guthrie, *Introduction*, 2. 283.

²⁶Ibid., p. 290.

²⁷D. Guthrie, "The Development of the Idea of Canonical Pseudepigrapha in New Testament Criticism," in *The Authority and Integrity of the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965) 14-39.

literature for the idea of a conventional literary device, by which an author as a matter of literary custom and with the full approbation of his circle of readers publishes his own productions in another's name. There was always an ulterior motive."²⁸ This ulterior motive consisted of commending some extra-canonical doctrine or some unusual practice not otherwise acceptable in the Church.

Kurt Aland has offered a new approach to explain the alleged presence of pseudonymous writings in the NT.²⁹ Aland feels that all the gospels and many other NT books were published anonymously. He feels that the authors simply regarded themselves as the channels through which the information from the Holy Spirit could be given to readers. Beginning with the publication of the *Didache* there was a transition from the spoken to the written word. Such literature as the *Didache* is seen as pseudonymous, but it was written by an author who had the conviction that he too was a tool of the Holy Spirit. Since the real author of the writing was the Holy Spirit, it was viewed as irrelevant even to mention a human author. Whenever the pseudonymous writings claimed the authorship of prominent apostles, this was not seen as a deceitful trick but as the logical conclusion of the presupposition that the Holy Spirit was the author. Aland admits that the use of a prominent name would secure acceptance and a wide circulation for a work, but he sees no deceit in this practice. He would feel that such writings as the pastorals and 2 Peter fall into this category of pseudonymous NT writings. He notes that the end of the second century brought with it an abating of the spirit of revelation so that in later centuries the personality and identity of the individual writer came to the forefront. Aland feels that those writings published pseudonymously in this later period did use the name of a prominent figure in order to secure recognition and widespread acceptance. Because of the unusual conditions holding true during this period in the late first and second century, Aland feels that the Church canonized some pseudonymous writings by attributing them to the author mentioned. He sees this as harmless. Aland notes that if the Church suspected pseudonymity it excluded the writings from the canon.

In a briefer article J. C. Fenton argues that pseudonymity in the NT can be urged for twelve of the books of the canonical collection.³⁰ He feels that the practice arose when a student may have wanted to attribute his work to his teacher, when a writer may have wished to call the faithful away from heresy, and because the practice was so widespread in the ancient world. He adds that pseudonymous writers believed that they spoke for their principal and that the general acceptance of the literary form should prevent Christians today from viewing it with too much suspicion.

Arnold Meyer made a brief but comprehensive survey of pseudepigraphic literature and suggested that the ethical difficulty created by a writer's claiming that someone else was the author was not a convincing argument against pseude-

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁹K. Aland, "The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries," in *The Authority and Integrity of the New Testament* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965) 1-13.

³⁰J. C. Fenton, "Pseudonymity in the New Testament," *Theology* 58 (February 1955) 51-56.

pigraphy.³¹ Meyer did not feel that the question of literary genuineness was the issue upon which the Church viewed a writing as authentic. He opted instead for the Church's concern about the orthodox content of a writing. One can infer from Meyer's writing an apology for accepting pseudepigraphical literature, for he is effectively stating that the Church would show more concern for doctrine than for authorship.

F. Torm has penned a monograph in order to discuss the psychological problems underlying the notion of pseudepigraphy.³² Torm carefully studies the mentality and motivation of various authors and concludes that there are greater problems in regard to religious than to secular pseudonymity. For example, he studies the problem of the authorship of the pastorals and concludes that it is easier to accept Pauline authorship than to accept as a pseudonymous writer a man who becomes a shrewd, calculating master of deceit and at the same time is an earnest, deeply ethical Christian. He also suggests that it is better to allow the author claimed by a book to have the possibility for variation and nuances of expression than to create a pseudonymous personality who might more easily resemble a phantom than a living man.

J. S. Candlish conducts an extensive investigation of historical practices in early Christianity in order to determine the ethical viewpoint lying beneath pseudonymous writing.³³ He suggests that the inspiration of Scripture would be consistent with any form of literary composition that would be intelligible to the readers. He also feels that intentional falsehood or deceit must be seen as immoral, and he cannot feel that the Holy Spirit would ever sanction wilful deceit even for a good end. He concludes with the statement that "books in which a false authorship is claimed, merely in order to gain the more acceptance for their contents, cannot be divinely inspired, or any part of the canon of Scripture."³⁴ It should be carefully noted that Candlish did not come to this decision merely on the basis of dogmatic theology but arrived at it after a careful examination of the early Christian approach to pseudepigraphy.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In considering the possibility of pseudonymous writings in the NT the ethical question must loom large. How can the high commitment to truth of the NT writers be reconciled with adopting a literary form that is likely to be seen as involving deception? For example, 2 Peter contains passages in 1:1; 1:14; 1:16-18; 3:15 clearly implying that Peter is the author. It should be observed that those who face this ethical issue come away with varying opinions concerning its relevance. Kurt Aland says frankly, "Ethics is no proper category for our prob-

³¹A. Meyer, "Die Pseudepigraphie als ethisch-psychologisches Problem," ZNW 35 (1936) 262-279.

³²F. Torm, *Die Psychologie der Pseudonymität in Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: C. Vertelsmann, 1932).

³³J. S. Candlish, "On the Moral Character of Pseudonymous Books," *The Expositor* 4, series 4 (1891) 262-279.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 278.

lem."³⁵ Guthrie correctly notes that opinions on the relevance of the ethical question vary and are not conclusive.³⁶ J. S. Candlish states: "Intentional falsehood or deceit must certainly be held to be immoral; and the detection of these in any composition, designed to promote selfish or sectarian ends, is inconsistent with its being divinely inspired."³⁷ Those who dismiss the ethical question as irrelevant have not succeeded in explaining how a Church concerned with truth and urging Christ's followers to walk in the light could have condoned the deceit of pseudepigraphy. The failure to handle adequately this question leaves this writer skeptical of the pseudepigraphical solution.

In addition to the ethical question, there is also the historical issue earlier articulated. Would the Church sanction the use of pseudepigraphy? The evidence indicates that when the Church became aware of pseudepigraphy it rejected the writings as canonical candidates. This was true in the instance of the deposition of the writer of the Acts of Paul for attributing a writing to Paul. It was further true in the instance of Serapion's banning the use of the Gospel of Peter. Paul's denunciation in 2 Thess 2:2 of the practice of circulating a letter in his name provides further substantiation. It is true that the Church was concerned about heresy and rejected as spurious those writings teaching heresy. However, the concern was not merely for doctrine but also for apostolic authorship.

There is simply no evidence that the Church knowingly accepted a writing viewed as pseudonymous into its canon. This is the historical problem. If the Church had innocently accepted such a writing, this would raise the issue of the ethical problem. This brief study of the practices of the early Church in regard to pseudonymous literature suggests that the Church would have asserted an ethical insight and would have rejected pseudonymous writings as unworthy of inclusion in its canon. Modern advocates of pseudepigraphy in the NT must provide more complete answers to these issues if their claims for accepting the practice as normal are to be heard. The use of pseudonymous authorship as a device to explain differences in NT literature must not be used carelessly but with a full appreciation of the practice of the early Church in this regard.

³⁵Aland, "Problem" 2.

³⁶Guthrie, "Development" 35.

³⁷Candlish, "Moral Character" 276.