

RECENT LITERATURE ON THE PETRINE EPISTLES

by Donald Guthrie

From time to time we hope to publish bibliographical articles. These will sometimes draw attention to important contributions to recent study which are sometimes overlooked. Dr. Guthrie, Lecturer in New Testament at London Bible College, is well-known for his work on the Pastoral Epistles. He is also producing a substantial *Introduction to the New Testament*, the first volume of which, published last year, has been widely welcomed. The second volume is due very shortly.

The word 'recent' in the title of this article clearly needs definition. It must be wide enough to provide for an adequate study of current trends, but it must be sufficiently narrow to encompass in a brief study. The year 1946 has been chosen as the starting point since this was the year prior to the appearance of Dean Selwyn's great commentary on the first epistle. In one sense he began an epoch in Petrine studies, for many further studies have appeared since that time which have been prompted by his writings.

Some explanation is also necessary of the method to be followed in this survey. In dealing with a mass of material attention to detail is obviously impossible. But to be valuable a survey must contain enough detail to indicate the variety of tendencies in the recent approaches to these epistles. To do this adequately these trends must not be entirely divorced from the background of earlier interests, and some references will need to be made to these earlier studies.

In the first half of this century the main British contributions came from Bigg (1901), Blenkin (1914), Masterman (1912), Moffatt (1928), Wand (1934) in their respective commentaries and Chase in articles in *Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible* (1900). In addition to these, three works may be mentioned on the second epistle – Mayor (1907), Strachan (1910) and James (1912).

Continental contributions were both more numerous and (often) more critical. Perdelwitz (1911) raised the question of the relationship of I Peter to oriental cults and dated the epistle as a second century production

as well as treating it as a baptismal liturgy (a theory which Streeter developed in 1929). Contrary to this Hellenistic emphasis was Völter's view (1906) that I Peter was a Jewish Christian letter. Of the two, Perdelwitz has undoubtedly had the greater influence. The main commentators during this period have been Knopf (1912), Wohlenberg (1915), Spörri (1925), Windisch (1930) Meinertz⁴ (1932), Chaine² (1939) and Schlatter (1937). Most of these apart from Knopf and Windisch were conservative in tendency. In addition to these commentaries important articles appeared by Bornemann (1919-1920) on I Peter as a baptismal address of Silvanus, and Radermacher (1926) also on the part played by Silvanus in the production of I Peter.

Then came Selwyn's commentary (1947), and since his time and the simultaneous publication of Beare's commentary interest in I Peter has been considerable, but the same cannot be said of 2 Peter. The recent literature will be surveyed under the various problems which have been raised in connection with I Peter, 2 Peter will be dealt with separately under a concluding section.

The Authorship

Two opposite tendencies have been apparent in recent studies on the problem of authorship. (i) An increasing number have been inclining towards Petrine authorship, although usually linked with an amanuensis hypothesis, and (ii) an increasing confidence has been shown by those who dispute. For instance, Cranfield^{17, 18} considers that the balance of

probability is with the traditional ascription to Peter, provided the Silvanus theory is allowed. Hunter²⁵ takes the same view, following the strong lead which Selwyn⁵⁰ had given. So also Leconte³², who nevertheless does not consider the Greek style presents so great a difficulty as many scholars have done, for he regards the secretary as a man of the people. The Silvanus hypothesis is strongly maintained by Walls in his introduction to Stibbs' commentary⁵³. Moule, in his discussion of the chronology of the epistle⁴⁰, thinks the way is open as far as chronology is concerned for Petrine authorship. Yet Beare², in his first edition (1947), maintained that the case against attributing this letter to Peter is "overwhelming". In the appendix of his second edition (1958), Beare strongly criticizes Selwyn's secretary hypothesis, mainly because he is unconvinced by the comparisons with the Thessalonian epistles, in which Silvanus is cited in the salutation, and because of our lack of knowledge of Silvanus' prowess at Greek, since he was a Jerusalem Christian. Beare's criticisms have been well counter-criticized by Walls⁵³. Wand⁵⁸, although regarding Beare's statement of the case as exaggerated, nevertheless admits that Beare (and Cross²⁰) have made him less certain of Petrine authorship. Two scholars who have been critical of the position taken up by Beare and have maintained the Silvanus hypothesis are Carrington¹³ and Schelkle⁴⁶, the former of whom cites parallels from Marcianus and Clement to support the contention that I Peter 5. 12 refers to Silvanus as the producer of the epistle.

Before leaving the problem of authorship, it would be appropriate here to mention two special studies on Peter the man, which form a useful introduction to the study of the epistles under his name. Cullmann's¹⁶ study of Peter, the apostle and martyr, is a detailed examination of all the early evidence, caonical and otherwise, which throws any light upon the part which Peter played in early Christian history. This book is written especially against the background of Roman Catholic claims for the primacy of Peter at Rome. A much slighter book on the apostle is that of Lowe³⁴, who gives a useful survey of the evidence in more concise form.

The Destination

This has not been a great theme for discussion. Beare² (pp. 19-24) fixes on Pontus and Bithynia as the main persecution trouble spots (i.e. the first and last mentioned in I Peter w.f.). But Walls⁵³ favours Hort's view that the order of mention indicates the intended journey of the messenger. There has been some discussion of the nature of the communities addressed; Selwyn⁵⁰ regarded them as mixed Jewish-Gentile, but more recently Leconte³² favours a Jewish Christian destination, interpreting the generally held Gentile references in a Jewish manner. But most hold to a Gentile destination.

The Place of Writing

Generally "Babylon" (I Peter 5. 13) is interpreted as Rome, but there have been one or two exceptions. In his first edition Beare² considered

that the author was writing from the same area as that to which the epistle was addressed, but he later abandoned this on the strength of Cross²⁰ connection of I Peter with the Old Roman liturgy (for which Hippolytus is claimed to be a witness), although he notes that the *Apostolic Tradition* may point to a Syrian background. Boismard⁷ maintains Antioch as the place of writing on the grounds of doctrine (because the Descent into Hell doctrine, according to him, arose in that district) and history (because the name 'Christian' was first used there). But Lohse³³ argues strongly for Rome, especially because of the affinities of language with I Clement. Cullmann¹⁶ is opposed to any other interpretation of "Babylon" than Rome.

The Historical Background

There has been much earlier discussion on the persecution situation and it is interesting to note the prevailing position taken up by recent authors. Among authors in English it is mainly Beare versus the rest, for he maintains that the persecutions reflected in I Peter are those which occurred under Trajan, and in this opinion he is supported by Knox³¹, who supposes that I Peter was written to urge Christians not to allow themselves to be condemned on any grounds other than profession of Christianity.

Among many scholars there is the assumption that I Pet. 4. 12 marks a change of approach towards persecution. In this they are influenced by Perdelwitz's observations. The main contenders for this position may be cited as Preisker⁴³, Cross²⁰ and

Boismard^{6, 7, 8}. But this break-theory has not gone unchallenged. It is strongly criticized by Nauck⁴², who maintains that both hypothetical and actual persecution are necessary for a complete picture of the background. More will be said about this when the unity of the epistle is discussed. Hunter²⁵ regards the Trajanic dating as "very rash", while Selwyn^{47, 51} maintained that the persecutions were private, not official, and could therefore date from almost any time in the primitive Christian period. Similarly Moule⁴⁰ cites many other New Testament passages in which persecutions were generally the harrying of opponents. Walls⁵³, who gives the question a full discussion, comes to a similar conclusion. Suspicions would naturally arise against Christian groups and the references in the epistle are best understood against such a background. It is clear that historical grounds are completely inconclusive in deciding the authenticity question. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the allusions in I Peter would ever have been regarded as official persecutions had not the authenticity been first disputed on other grounds. Once posited, critical suppositions die hard.

The Unity of the Epistle

Composite theories have always appealed to certain types of critical minds and the most glaring of recent examples in the criticism of I Peter is Bultmann's¹⁰ treatment of certain passages, particularly I Pet. 3. 18-22, where he cuts out verses 19-21 as an interpolation. His method is a relic of an earlier radical type of criticism, which postulates theories

and then emends the Biblical text to support the theory. This kind of criticism is fortunately now largely discounted. Jeremias²⁸ dismisses Bultmann's suggestion with little serious discussion.

The more current question of interest is the break at 4. 12, already mentioned above. Many scholars attach sufficient importance to this phenomenon to feel bound to supply an explanation, and a variety of suggestions have been made. Cranfield¹⁷ considers that 1. 3 - 4. 11 was originally a sermon which was adapted and expanded by the author for a particular reader circle. He does not regard this part as having been "just mechanically copied out", but rather worked over. In this way he aims to preserve the unity of the epistle. Nauck⁴², on the other hand, treats the epistle as a whole when discussing the theme of Joy in Suffering and sees no reason to maintain a change of viewpoint in the two parts.

Beare², following Streeter, maintains a combination of homily and letter, probably by the same writer. There is therefore unity of authorship though not of construction. Preisker⁴³ gets over the difficulty by an elaborate reconstruction of a baptismal service in which each part plays an essentially different rôle. Another explanation is proposed by Moule⁴⁰, who regards the two parts as portions of two epistles (1. 1 - 4. 11 and 5. 12-14 is one and 1. 1 - 2. 10, 4. 12 - 5. 14 is the other). In this way he maintains common authorship of both parts but posits two distinct purposes. Bieder³, on the other hand, maintains two writings (1. 3 - 4. 11 and 4. 12 - 5. 11), but regards them as both

post-apostolic. This view of Bieder's is well criticized by Michaelis³⁶. More recently Thornton⁵⁴ has explained the difference between the two parts by suggesting that after 4. 12 the author gives a brief practical summary of points already mentioned theoretically. On the whole these attempts to dissect the epistle are unsatisfactory. As Floyd Filson²² has pointed out, since the letter has come to us as a unity we should if possible explain it as the work of one writer.

Baptismal Liturgy Theories

These theories follow closely upon the problem raised in the last section and it remains only to comment upon some of the different approaches to the baptismal motif. The main advocates for this are Preisker, Cross and Boismard, all of whom emphasize baptism as the main centre of the epistle. The supposed break between 1. 21 and 1. 22 is thought by Preisker⁴³ to make way for the baptismal act and this idea is followed by both Cross²⁰ and Boismard⁷. But Moule⁴⁰ while admitting a baptismal background, considers that this need not mean that the baptism is actually in progress. He dismisses the arguments based on *nun* and *arti* and rejects the interpretation of *logos* in 1. 23 as referring to the baptismal formula. Beare², who accepts the baptismal discourse theory, nevertheless considers that *logos* in the latter reference means the Gospel. He is critical of an overemphasis on 1. 22. Another who has criticized the baptismal act between 1. 21 and 1. 22 is Hauck²⁴, who interprets the perfect tense of the verb *hegnikotes* in 1. 22 of "tested

sanctification in Christian living". Of Preisker's arguments he says that their artificiality detracts from their power to convince.

Cross' ²⁰ theory goes the furthest in connecting I Peter with the Paschal Vigil, but the theory is based on questionable comparisons (e.g. Cross suggests a connection between pascho and Pascha). Van Unnik ⁵⁷ disputes any word play here and is critical of Cross' whole theory. One of the major objections is that it provides no satisfactory explanation of the latter part of the epistle from 4. 12f. If the original was a Paschal liturgy why was it ever published in letter form? Cross provides no answer. Moreover, Thornton ⁵⁴ particularly complains of the vague way in which Cross uses the word "liturgy" Wand ⁵⁸ is less searching in his criticisms, but he does admit that Cross' evidence is somewhat forced. The two Roman Catholic writers, Leconte ³² and Cantinat ¹² retain an open mind about these theories. Yet however intriguing they may be they seem to be constructed on the flimsiest evidence and no-one can be blamed for preferring the traditional assumption that the thoughts of the epistle are the natural product of the author's mind without the mediating help of liturgies.

Sources

It was one of Selwyn's ⁵⁰ great contributions to the study of this epistle to point out the traces of traditional material to be found in this epistle. He suggested three main sources, a liturgical source, a persecution fragment and catechetical material. But his theory was subjected

to criticism by Beare, although the latter's criticisms are weakened by the interplay of his own presuppositions. For instance, because he considers I Peter reflects Ephesians, which he dates late, he must of necessity date I Peter late, which means he is predisposed to dispute evidences of primitive material such as Selwyn suggests. Bultmann ¹⁰ finds three hymn fragments in the letter (3. 18, 20, 1. 20, 2. 21-24), though each is mixed up with credal forms which have to be disentangled. It is difficult to see what confidence can be placed in such form criticism in which the text is not treated intact. Boismard ⁸ finds four hymns, I Peter 1. 3-5, 3. 18-22, 2. 22-25 and 5. 5-9.

Other scholars, like Lohse ³³, have found common paranetic material behind parts of I Peter, particularly 1. 3 - 4. 15. The merging of doctrine and moral exhortation is seen most clearly in 2. 21-25, where Christ's atoning work becomes an example in an exhortation to slaves.

Literary Influences

The Old Testament background has always been acknowledged, but a new turn has been given to it by the baptismal theories, especially in respect of the Exodus typology and the use of Ps. 34. Both Boismard ⁶ and Danielou ²¹ make much of the exodus typology in support of the baptismal homily hypothesis. Moule ⁴⁰ however is critical because of the substitution of the Flood allusion for a Wilderness allusion, which would equally well have illustrated baptism. Most would agree that the Exodus allusions are not surprising if the Church is being

regarded as the new Israel. Boismard ⁷ maintains that Ps. 34 formed part of the liturgical ceremony, but it is surely better to regard the use of the Psalm as due to the author's Old Testament background, as Moule in fact does. Jeremias ²⁸ thought that another Psalm (16. 8-11) had influenced the author in his Descensus doctrine.

The Pauline influence on the writer has long been felt and has recently lessened very little. Selwyn's ⁵⁰ great essay on this subject traces most of the similarities to common material (pp. 363-466), and if he is correct this would considerably lessen the claims to literary dependence. He thought that common tradition accounted for all the affinities between this epistle and Romans, Ephesians and Titus, but claimed close similarities between I Peter and the Thessalonian Epistles. This latter position was challenged by Rigaux, *Les Épitres aux Thessaloniens* (1956) pp. 105-111, and by Beare ². In an article subsequent to his commentary Selwyn ⁵¹ strongly challenged the theory of Pauline domination of the writer of I Peter. On somewhat similar grounds Lohse ³³ rejects the dependence of I Peter upon the Pauline Epistles, for he maintains that common paranetic material accounts for the similarities, although he admits the author's proximity to Pauline theology. Carrington ¹³ also disputes dependence, on liturgical and catechetical grounds. On the other hand, many writers still maintain the dependence of I Peter on Ephesians. Mitton ^{37, 38}, for instance, denies that Selwyn's codes-theory dispenses with literary dependence, and concludes for I Peter's dependence on

Ephesians on the basis of a comparison of passages paralleled in both Ephesians and Colossians. Coutts ¹⁵ has a similar interest in compassing I. Peter with Ephesians and on the grounds of their similarity suggests a baptismal purpose for Ephesians. Beare goes as far as to maintain dependence on most if not all of the Pauline Epistles, in this following Goodspeed. But few would make such a claim as confidently as these two scholars.

Some studies have concentrated on affinities with other New Testament books, among which is Selwyn's comparison with Hebrews, as a result of which he suggested that the author of that epistle had either read I Peter or had been in touch with someone who knew its author. He also examined affinities with James and thought that, if dependence existed, I Peter was more likely to be original. Boismard ⁷ also notes similarities between these two epistles and claims that the parallels supported his liturgical theory. For the same purpose he ⁶ examines affinities with I John and thinks that both authors were inspired by the same liturgy.

Doctrinal Studies

It would be a mistake to suppose that all interest has been centred on literary and historical questions. Selwyn ⁵⁰ has a full discussion of the theology of the epistle, drawing especial attention to its great themes. Stibbs ⁵³ does the same thing, although more concisely, in an appendix in his commentary. Nauck's ⁴² article on Joy through Suffering has already been mentioned, but his attempt to find common patterns

behind this epistle is sometimes rather forced. The teaching of this epistle on the theme of Christian Salvation has always attracted attention. Miller's³⁷ article on this theme focuses upon the divine initiative the human response. In an article since his commentary Selwyn⁴⁹ has provided a stimulating examination of the eschatology of the epistle. He finds its background to be essentially Jewish, but nevertheless stripped of its Jewish limitations. The whole emphasis is on the blessedness of the life to come. The practical teaching of the epistle has engaged the attention of Brandt¹¹, who gives particular consideration to the theme of Christian behaviour and its relation to the preaching of the word as a means of winning non-Christians. He concludes from a study of I Peter 2. 11, 12, that Christian behaviour may continue the challenge of the Word where this has been rejected. The theme of good works is also discussed by Van Unnik⁵⁵ who decides that the background of the notion in this letter is more Greek than Jewish. His idea is that because outsiders are to recognize Christian good works, these must be regarded in terms truly human and not of special Christian ethics. In a note on *agathopoiia* Van Unnik⁵⁵ finds further evidence for the Greek sphere of the author of I Peter.

Exegetical Studies

The many separate studies which have appeared relating to this epistle are a witness to the lively interest it has recently provoked. Blinzler's⁵ article on the word *hierateuma* in I

Pet. 2. 5, 9 is of interest as illustrating a Roman Catholic attempt to get round the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He admits this is the teaching of I Peter, but appeals to tradition for the development into a special priesthood.

On the much discussed passage, I Pet. 3. 18-20, several studies have recently appeared, the most exhaustive being that of Bo Reicke⁴⁴. Others who have made contributions are Bultmann¹⁰, Jeremias²⁸ and Bieder⁴. Bultmann's mutilation of the text has already been mentioned and this treatment can hardly be called exegesis. Jeremias is more constructive and discovers a double tradition in the church regarding the interval between Good Friday and Easter, of which I Peter presents the Descensus doctrine and Hebrews the Ascensus. But he thinks that both point to the same thing – the objectivity of the work of salvation. Sherman Johnson²⁹ maintains a close connection between 3. 18 and 4. 6 and suggests that the passage in between is in the form of a chiasmus.

Nauck's⁴¹ article on I Peter 3. 2, 3 should be noted, although his attempts to explain the background from analogies in the Damascus sect is of questionable importance. The article, nevertheless, contains some useful lexical studies on *topos*, *tagma* and *bathmos*. His conclusion is that there is no evidence of an early distinction between Laity and Clergy. Another useful study is Bo Reicke's⁴⁴ article on Gnosis in I Peter 3. 7, in which he considers that this passage shows a contrast with the Gnostic degradation of women.

This rapid survey has disclosed a wide variety of topics which I Peter

has recently called forth and is a reminder of the abiding interest and value of this brief letter.

The Second Epistle

Astonishingly little has appeared on this epistle. It seems almost to have been written off. Its authenticity is generally rejected and its value accordingly decreased. In his commentary Cranfield¹⁸ disposes of the whole epistle in a few pages and gives no discussion or even serious indication of its problems. The same goes for both Barnett¹ and Homrighausen²⁶. The former is quite emphatic that Petrine authorship must be eliminated on four grounds; the use of Jude, the reference to the fathers in 3. 3, 4, the esteem for Paul's letters and the reference to the heretical misuse of Paul. He dates the letter mid second century and considers it to be a plea for loyalty to the tenets of primitive Christianity. Homrighausen, although accepting pseudonymous authorship, yet recognizes that the epistle is Petrine in character and spirit. In the commentary on this Epistle in Herder's series Schelkle⁴⁶ regards the author as a Jewish Christian who came from a Hellenistic background. The author kept close to Peter's teaching and therefore used his name. Schlatter⁴⁷ was content to regard the choice of Peter's name as due to his position as chief apostle. On the other hand, Green⁵⁹ in his careful reconsideration of the authenticity problem definitely supports Petrine authorship. He has shown that non-authenticity cannot be regarded as a foregone conclusion.

Many earlier writers suggested partition theories for 2 Peter; this process is not yet dead as is seen in McNamara's³⁵ proposition that our present letter probably consists of three partial letters. But this kind of theory is not likely to command much support.

Boobyer⁹ has attempted to show how the author of 2 Peter has used 1 Peter. He supposes that 2 Pet. 3. 1 was written with I Pet. 1. 10-12 in mind, 2 Pet. 1. 1-11 with I Pet. 1. 1-9, 2 Pet. 1. 12-21 and I Pet. 1. 10-12, while the Transfiguration account was suggested by 1 Pet. 5. 1. Were it not that Boobyer assumes dissimilar authorship, his evidence at least in part might be held to suggest that one mind lies behind both epistles. Käsemann's³⁰ article, based on a study of Eschatology, regards II Peter as a 'Petrustestament'. Käsemann considered that the author thinks of himself as an executor of a testament, which necessitated the use of a pseudonym. Certain passages in his view presuppose a post-apostolic situation and therefore an apostolic mask must be worn. Michaelis³⁶ does not go all the way with Käsemann, but he is impressed by the argument that the eschatology is far removed from apostolic times. Green⁵⁹ has criticized Käsemann's arguments on this count, however, and maintains that the *parousia* hope is primitive.

According to Carrington¹³, 2 Peter is an imaginative recreation to produce the illusion of authenticity, and this is probably a representative view of the current approach to question of authorship. Few scholars, however, give any attention to the problems which such a pseudonym-

ous theory creates in relation to this epistle. The only writer, in fact, who has done so is Green, who concludes for authenticity against pseudonymity. Preisker³⁷ does not consider it worthwhile to make any adjustment to Windisch's views on 2Peter, an evidence that the epistle did not much engage his interest. Of the Roman Catholic contributions to the study of this epistle, Leconte³² and Cantinat¹² both consider the author as a disciple of the apostle, the former taking good care to point out that

the Council of Trent declared the epistle to be canonical without raising the issue of authenticity. Another Roman Catholic writer, Skehan⁵² has published a brief lexical note on 2 Pet. 2. 13 which is worth noting. It will be seen from the above considerations that 2 Peter has not commanded much recent attention. Is this has been altogether outshone by the increasing interest in the First Epistle. It is to be hoped that the next fifteen years will see more worthy study devoted to it.

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