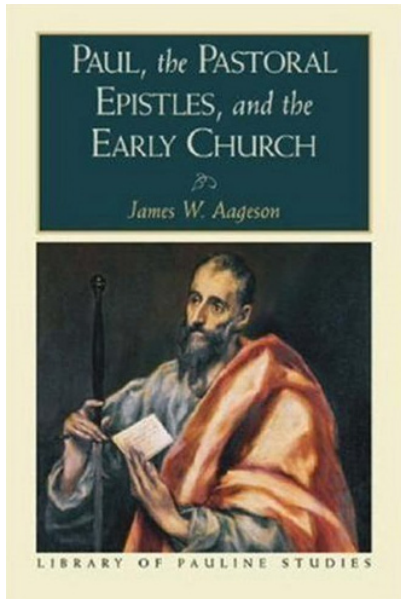


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Aageson, James W.

Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Early Church

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Recent years have seen an increase in the number of commentaries (e.g., Marshall, Mounce, Johnson, Collins, Towner) and monographs (Young, Lau, Miller, Van Neste, Wieland) devoted to the theology, literary structure, and social context of the Pastoral Epistles. James W. Aageson's monograph *Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Early Church* is a welcome addition to the study of the Pastoral letters. Yet while this book sheds interesting light on 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, Aageson's scope is actually far broader. Aageson, Professor of Biblical Studies at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, aims to locate the Pastorals in the developing stream of the Pauline legacy.

After Aageson sets the stage in the opening chapter ("Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Pauline Legacy"), chapter 2 ("The Pastoral Epistles and Their Theological Patterns") offers a detailed description of the literary and theological patterns of each of the Pastorals. Following a recent trend in the study of the Pastoral Epistles, Aageson treats each document individually. Instead of looking for a theological center of each letter, Aageson employs the metaphor of an orchestrated collage, which highlights "the pattern of convictions and behaviors related to God and to the activity of God represented in these texts" (11). Aageson is far less concerned with the (reconstructed) historical context

behind these texts for determining the theological witness of the Pastorals than he is with the theological world represented *in* the texts themselves.

Chapter 3 (“The Pastoral Epistles and Paul: A Comparison of Patterns”) brings the theological patterns of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus into comparison, first with one another and then with selected letters from the authentic Pauline corpus. With respect to the comparison among the Pastoral Epistles, Aageson notes both similarity and difference on issues such as the images of God and Christ; the motif of godliness in the household of God (prominent in 1 Timothy and less important in 2 Timothy); the themes of truth, knowledge, and faith; the nature of the opponents and their teaching; and qualifications for leadership. Importantly, Aageson concludes:

On one level, the reality of doctrinal correctness is assumed in all three Pastorals, and those who deviate from it are thought to jeopardize the faith. In this regard, the three epistles clearly represent the same theological world of thought and the differences between them are negligible. On the level of their orientations to the larger world and their perception of the divine order, 1 Timothy and Titus most assuredly come from the same frame of reference. But 2 Timothy is another matter. Either 2 Timothy was written by a different author or the circumstances in Ephesus in the author’s own life had changed quite dramatically. Neither of these can be ruled out. At this point in the discussion, we can only say that there is a distinct possibility that a different author wrote 2 Timothy, an author whose experience of the larger social world was different from that of the author of 1 Timothy and Titus. (71)

The second half of the chapter is then devoted to a comparison of the three Pastoral Epistles (now treated together) to three authentic letters of Paul: Philippians, Galatians, and 1 Corinthians. Again, Aageson’s focus is on “the larger structural picture of the respective patterns and the concepts and images that represent them” (71). Drawing especially on the work of the Society of Biblical Literature Group in the 1980s and 1990s to frame his discussion of the theology of the authentic Pauline letters, Aageson emphasizes the structural relationships between Philippians and 2 Timothy. Although authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is not his primary concern, Aageson’s method does lead him to posit a tentative theory of authorship: “Hence, we might conclude that there is a relatively low probability that Paul wrote all three of the Pastorals, a somewhat higher probability that Paul wrote 2 Timothy but not 1 Timothy and Titus, and a slightly higher probability still that Paul did not write any of the Pastorals; rather 2 Timothy was written by one author, and 1 Timothy and Titus were written by yet another” (87, emphasis original).

This conclusion raises an interesting question for the book as a whole. Given the fact that Aageson's method of comparing discrete theological patterns largely brackets out questions of historical context and background, one wonders about the utility of this approach for addressing questions of authorship and, as a consequence, the location of the Pastorals in the development of the Pauline legacy. Aageson is, of course, well-aware of potential problems, and his approach helpfully prevents his study from becoming bogged down in the seemingly intractable debates about the authenticity of the Pastorals. But without seriously considering the contingent nature of each of the Pastoral letters, can one conclude, as Aageson does, that "based on our work with 1 Timothy, Titus, and the undisputed letters, the textual and theological evidence suggests that these two pastoral letters represent an even more conservative and conformist strand in the developing Pauline tradition than does 2 Timothy (with their concerns for church order, qualifications for leadership, conformity with the household of God, hierarchical notions of social structure, and their views of women's roles)" (88)? Without consideration of the diverse historical and rhetorical contexts that spurred Paul to write to, say, the churches of Thessalonica and Galatia, would a comparison of the differing literary and theological patterns in 1 Thessalonians and Galatians lead one to conclude that these epistles were written by different authors? Moreover, Aageson's attempt to frame his comparative approach with reference to Jonathan Z. Smith's *Drudgery Divine* (12) fails to account for the fact that an important element of Smith's work is a *critique* of genealogical comparisons—and questions of authorship and the development of the Pauline legacy are, if nothing else, genealogical.

Having raised the issue of authorship through a comparison of the Pastoral Epistles and three authentic Pauline letters, chapter 4 ("Apostolic Authority, Images of Paul, and the Development of the Pauline Scriptures") develops the argument that already in the Pastorals one can detect "a Pauline concept of Scripture, the precursor to a full-fledged Pauline canon" (91). This is seen particularly in the emphasis on tradition in the Pastorals and in extent to which Paul is portrayed as the representative of true doctrine and the source of the "good deposit" of sound teaching. The chapter then follows the same method as that found in earlier chapters by comparing the presentation of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles and in Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians. Aageson asserts that his operating assumption is that the so-called Deutero-Pauline letters "were written, in all likelihood, by someone other than Paul" (115). Yet if this assumption is true, it would appear that the presentation of Paul in the Deutero-Pauline letters, and the role that this depiction played in the developing Pauline legacy, might merit more concentrated attention than the eight pages it receives here.

Chapter 5 ("Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Postapostolic Church") carefully undertakes the difficult task of tracing the legacy of Paul in the apostolic fathers, focusing on Ignatius,

Polycarp, and 1 Clement. Aageson shows that, for these writers in the postapostolic age, the image of Paul is conformed to the contingent needs of each author: Paul as martyr (Ignatius), Paul as wise teacher (Polycarp), Paul as writer to the divisive Corinthians (1 Clement). The Pastoral Epistles, therefore, “stand closer, both theologically and historically, to the Paul of the undisputed Pauline epistles. But in terms of their concern for the good order and leadership of the household of God and for the church that suffers, they stand closer to the church of the Apostolic Fathers, especially the church of Ignatius and Polycarp” (154). An important point that Aageson makes in this section is also that Paul was a hero, not merely to Marcion and the gnostics, but also to representatives of so-called orthodox Christianity.

Chapters 6 (“Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Early Church: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, and Other Early Figures”) and 7 (“Paul, the Pastoral Epistles, and the *Acts of Paul [and Thecla]*”) continue this comparative task by considering how the patterns of thought seen in the Pastoral Epistles are reflected (or not reflected) in a number of ante-Nicene fathers and in the Acts of Paul. Again, the emphasis is on the place of the Pastoral Epistles in the developing legacy of Paul in the early church. Aageson consistently highlights the extent to which the diverse images of Paul are shaped by the geographical, ecclesiastical, and social locations of the authors who produced this literature.

Chapter 8 offers a “Summary and Conclusion.” The book also contains a short bibliography and helpful indices of modern authors, subjects, and ancient sources.

Aageson is to be applauded for writing a book that attempts to move beyond worn-out debates concerning the authorship of the Pastorals. His lucid study provides insightful readings of numerous sources, and his examination of the Pauline legacy in the first through the third centuries opens a fascinating window into the earliest interpretations of the Pauline writings. Yet there is a tension that runs throughout this volume. As the second half of the monograph clearly demonstrates, all theological articulation is historically contingent. The image of Paul found in the apostolic and ante-Nicene fathers, for example, “displays a regional stamp, as different traditions, issues, and movements developed in different parts of the church” (209). Aageson’s focus on the theological patterns in the Pastoral Epistles, however, tends to sidestep discussion of the particular, historical contexts, either in Paul’s lifetime or shortly thereafter, that would have given rise to the theological perspectives found in the Pastorals. The observation that Aageson’s method does not fully resolve this tension is not so much a critique of this stimulating book as it is an invitation to further study of these complex matters. Future researchers will have Aageson to thank for mapping out an approach to Paul’s influence on Christian praxis and theology that brings the apostle into conversation with his earliest interpreters.