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It is a sure sign that a new approach has passed from the realm of fad to that of indispensable addition to the exegetical toolkit when studies appear that convincingly show that this approach can yield significant gains in helping untangle interpretive knots. The publication of Annette Merz’s Heidelberg dissertation from 2001 demonstrates this for intertextuality. The author is already known to English-speaking readers through her co-authorship with Gerd Theissen, her doctoral advisor, of *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), John Bowden’s translation of a textbook that originally appeared in German in 1996. With this new publication, she further enhances her reputation as an up-and-coming New Testament scholar.

The book is divided into four sections, unequal in length. In the first, introductory section, the author begins with a brief, programmatic statement of the approach and goals of her investigation, followed by a well-informed, balanced discussion of intertextuality in current literary discourse, in the course of which she stakes out her own position. She holds to the integrity of the text against thoroughgoing deconstructionist models, yet sees value in an intertextual program that is more than investigating sources and influences. The author then devotes herself to the task of developing a range of analytical
instruments appropriate for the description of the various forms and functions of the intertextuality of ancient Jewish-Christian texts; these include referentiality, communicability, self-reflexivity, structure, selectivity, and dialogicity. She rounds off this section by illustrating the relevance of the methodology she introduces for biblical interpretation with examples drawn from the Pastorals (1 Tim 2:15; 4:3–5; 2 Tim 2:19; 4:17). Particularly the last of these is a successful demonstration of the potential fruitfulness of intertextual analysis in that the author shows how a brief phrase, in this case, the reference to deliverance out of the mouth of the lion, can be saturated with meanings from other texts and that these can be related to one another in a way that results in an enrichment of the phrase beyond what has previously been noted in commentaries.

In the second section Merz asks whether intertextual tools can help decide the question of whether Ignatius and Polycarp used the Pastorals. After a survey of the discussion on dating the Pastorals, which has led to no consensus, and methodical considerations, she turns first to Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians. The letter is obviously intertextual to a high degree, virtually an early Christian cento, with a proximity to the Pastorals that has been long recognized and much discussed. The task Merz sets for herself is to show that Polycarp was not here employing anonymous tradition but consciously appropriating Paul. Evidence for this is found in the use Polycarp makes of statements similar to those in the Pastorals: they are steps in argument, placed on the same level as quotations from the authentic letters of Paul. There are also cases of the formation of statements out of elements of Pastoral phrases together with “other” Pauline texts. The implication is clear for Merz: the Pastorals belonged for Polycarp to the writings of Paul. He knows them well, and they largely govern his overall reception of Paul.

In the case of Ignatius, the demonstration of intertextual use of the Pastorals occurs in the overall context of his literary strategy of using Pauline reference texts in his self-stylization as a successor of Paul, both in his professions of humility and in his claims of quasi-apostolic teaching authority, yet to be sealed, at the time of writing, by the martyrdom he yearns for. This self-stylization is achieved in part through use of Pauline phrases or forms of argument that are only implicitly marked, if at all, and thus could only be recognized by readers on the basis of their own acquaintance with the letters of Paul. Set against this backdrop, it becomes evident that references to the Pastorals participate in this strategy of showing Ignatius in imitation of Paul, both in his opposition to heresy and in his approaching martyrdom. Merz points out that the pastoral letter to Polycarp is superfluous in light of the letter to the congregation in Smyrna. In addition, it employs a form of mediated paraenesis that is typical of 1 Timothy/Titus but does not correspond to the actual communicative relationship of Ignatius to Polycarp. From this it follows that the Pastorals have served not only in content but also in form as a model.
Just as the Pauline corpus consists of letters both to congregations and to individual leaders, so must that of Ignatius. Merz terms this a conscious system reference and concludes that Ignatius oriented himself unmistakably on a Pauline letter collection that already included the Pastorals.

The finding that the Pastorals belonged to the Pauline letters on which Ignatius and Polycarp consciously drew and the knowledge of which they presumed on the part of their readers has consequences for their dating. References to them in the years 110–120/135 C.E. from Syrian Antioch via Asia Minor and Macedonia to Rome, understood as references to Paul, mean that they were presumably written before the turn of the century, or at the latest shortly after.

Having dealt with the earliest use of the Pastorals as pretext, the author turns, in the third section, to the pretext used by the Pastorals. Once again she begins with a survey of the history of research, then turns to questions of method. In this case, Merz works out the intertextual structure of the genre of pseudonymous Pauline letters. As presumed letters of a known author, each statement in them points to the corpus of orthonymous Pauline letters as well as to other Pauline tradition known to the recipients. The Pastorals, conceived as a group of three, presume not only individual letters of Paul but a collection of Pauline letters, and they aim to serve as their ultimate interpretation. Decisive throughout is the assumption that the pretext references are deliberate; the author knows that he is claiming to be Paul, but is not really. At the same time, it is important that the readers do not know that these are references to the texts of another. It is especially in this “fictional self-reference” that the possibilities of intertextual reference for the text that is being referred to come into play. Fictional self-reference makes it possible to place in perspective, modify, or correct earlier statements by (purportedly) the same author. While this could simply be due to a changed historical situation, Merz considers the possibility that it arose out of a conflict of interpretations among followers of Paul, a suspicion that will harden through the exegetical studies that follow.

The first of these deals with the paraenesis for slaves (1 Tim 6:1–5) and the second with the prohibition of women teachers (2:8–3:1). In the first, she shows how 6:2 clarifies that the brotherly relationship between a Christian slave owner and a Christian slave admonished by Paul in Phlm 16 can lead to no expectations by the slave toward the owner that might have had consequences for the strictly hierarchical structure of the society. In the case of woman teachers, the form of Pauline soteriology based on the equality of all in Christ has been abandoned. In its place, a path to salvation is prescribed for women based on their second-class status in creation (1 Tim 2:13) and their priority in sin (2:14); she shall be saved in childbearing (2:15). Through intertextual coupling with 1 Cor 11:8–9; 14:34–35; and 2 Cor 11:3 it is assured that even statements in the genuine
Pauline letters would be read in the future in light of this statement. Fictional self-reference as a means of intertextual construction of meaning is thus shown to be a means to prevent competing followers of Paul from claiming the apostle’s legacy.

In the fourth section the author summarizes her results and turns to the question of the theologically appropriate use of Pauline pseudepigraphy as embodied by the Pastorals. Owing their existence and influence to an existing, authoritative set of texts, they employ various strategies to mislead readers so as to place themselves within that set and even claim, through the special form of their fiction (e.g., testamentary character, double pseudonymity) to be the final interpretation of the Pauline heritage. Merz concedes the sincerity of this claim; the author of the Pastorals was conscious of standing in an unbroken continuity of tradition to Paul, yet she views that claim, seen from today’s perspective, as fragile. In her estimation, the most problematic aspect of pseudepigraphy as a form of exegesis is when it uses the reference-text-oriented functions of intertextuality to modify statements of the orthonymous pretext corpus under the fiction of being their author. While not guilty of conscious falsification of Pauline statements, in Merz’s view, the author of the Pastorals is guilty of deceiving his readers and likely himself.

In the search for the appropriate theological use of the Pastorals, Merz considers and rejects what she terms a kind of postcritical naiveté that accepts the construct “the canonical Paul,” a position she attributes, for instance, to B. S. Childs. Such an approach demands, in her view, that we adopt the posture the author intended for readers of the Pastorals; this would mean accepting the claim the Pastorals make to be the ultimate word on Paul’s letters. We should be clear, she states, about what this and similar reading-strategies would mean if applied in interpretation: a return to the precritical reception of the pseudepigraphic writings as orthonymous. Merz argues instead for an acceptance of the Pastorals in their claim to be an interpretation of Paul, yet recognize the limits of this claim. As polemic statements of one wing of the Pauline school, they should be reintegrated in the intertextual dialogue on the correct interpretation of Paul. Here she sees herself in a tradition of interpretation that, in the wake of Walter Bauer, is associated with scholars such as J. M. Robinson, H. Conzelmann, K. Berger, D. R. MacDonald, and E. Schlarb, which she hopes to have enriched by introducing a new methodical instrument, with which the conflict of interpretation carried out under appeal to Pauline texts can be more precisely reconstructed. Merz believes that the perception of Paul’s theological individuality has for too long been hindered through a deuteropauline reception filter. She hopes that her investigation has made a contribution toward clarifying the question of how this filter was literarily established (through means such as cloaked onomastic references and fictional self-text-references).
This is a book that belongs in every serious collection of New Testament studies; it is primarily addressed to fellow scholars but can also be read with profit by advanced students. English-speaking readers may have difficulty, especially in the first section, where Merz uses terms such as “analysepraktische Operationalisierbarkeit” (9); prior familiarity with the discussion of intertextuality is helpful. More important, readers who have until now either accepted the Pastorals as a faithful extension of Paul’s theology, if not by Paul himself, or, conversely, have committed themselves to late dating, will find much food for thought as they reconsider their conclusions. Others who have been suspicious of intertextuality as simply a fashionable way of recycling tradition criticism are urged to take note of this convincing display of what biblical studies can gain by its use in concert with the more established tools of criticism.

This reader was particularly impressed by the way the author, in accordance with her agreement with the dictum that there is range of possible interpretations but that the range is not unlimited, describes her results and those of other scholars. Merz is cautious about claiming too much for her own conclusions, generous in her assessment of many other viewpoints, yet clear about those that, in her estimation, simply do not accord with the text under examination. There is little here that I missed, save that in her discussion, the author remains within modern literary critical discourse, and makes no attempt to relate the modern understanding of intertextuality to the ancient practice of midrash. Nor does she address, until the last four pages, the problem her findings raise for the canonical question: the canonization of the Pastorals was only possible because the fiction succeeded.

The author points out that the studies she presents on the slave paraenesis and the prohibition of teaching by women are meant but as examples. Out of the intention of the author of the Pastorals, demonstrated in these cases, to rule out certain interpretations that can be presumed on the part of other followers of Paul, there arises a general hermeneutical suspicion that, in other cases in which the Pastorals attach themselves to Paul, these too take a position in an interpretive debate. To place her results on firmer footing would require nothing less, she admits, than a commentary of a new type, one that is consistently intertextual in its interpretation of the Pastorals within the overall literary context of the Pauline corpus and contemporary traditions about Paul (383). Should Merz contemplate taking on this project herself, one can only wish her well and eagerly await the result.