Nina E. Livesey, *The Letters of Paul in the Roman Literary Context: Reassessing Apostolic Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024) pp. xix + 324, ISBN 978-1009487054. £85.00

This provocative book calls for a complete re-evaluation of Pauline authorship, arguing that none of the letters purporting to be by the apostle Paul, both canonical and extracanonical, originate from him. In fact, Livesey argues that the historical person of Paul did not exist. Rather, the canonical letters are mid-second century compositions from Marcion's school in Rome who fabricated the character of Paul in the composition of Acts. Livesey claims that the dates held to by traditional scholarship are lacking in methodological rigour and that a proper evaluation of the data will lead to different results.

Livesey begins by placing herself within the history of those who challenge Pauline authorship. Especially important is the Dutch Radical School, which was founded in the nineteenth century and whose tradents argued that the Pauline corpus is completely pseudonymous and that Marcion's *Apostolikon*, the earliest witness to Paul's letters, is essential for understanding how this corpus came into being. Livesey presents her work as 'Dutch Radical Thought 3.0' (p. 25) and as a logical extension to the theories of the Radical School.

Chapter two offers a detailed argument for a second-century date for the Pauline letter corpus. Essential for Livesey is the difference between the Paul depicted in the Acts of the Apostles and the Paul found in the letters. This variance, Livesey argues, is found in comparable corpora in antiquity in which the life of a famous individual is subsequently augmented by a pseudonymous letter collection (e.g., Apollonius of Tyana, Socrates in Plato's letters, and Seneca). The crux of Livesey's argument is that variation between biography and letter collection is indicative of pseudonymity. She also argues for an inverse in the traditional relationship between Acts and the Pauline corpus, claiming that Acts was written first and that the Pauline letters were composed in response to it. This is a minority position that fits with her constructed timeline, but would not be held by most Acts scholars, both traditional and progressive.

The second half of the chapter evaluates standard arguments for the establishment of a Pauline letter collection in the late-first/early-second century. After challenging the idea that Pauline communities existed as typically discussed by scholars (i.e., home churches, for which there is

little archaeological evidence), Livesey proceeds to evaluate evidence of Pauline letters in surviving texts, specifically 1 Clement, the Letters of Ignatius, the Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians, and 2 Peter. Livesey rightly notes that firm evidence of these works only arises in the mid-to-late second century and she argues (following others, esp. Knox)[1] that these works are best understood to have been written (pseudonymously) after Marcion's construction of the *Apostolikon* in 144 CE.

Chapter three offers an evaluation of the Pauline letters and the nature of epistolography in antiquity. By parallelling Paul and Seneca, Livesey shows that the letter form, with its relational foundation, verisimilitude, and flexible genre, provides an ideal work to advance one's teaching agenda. Of specific focus are the addressee, the addressor, and 'occasional' discourse (i.e., things that have happened to spur the writing of the letter), and Livesey makes a strong case for seeing parallels between Seneca and Paul. The fabrication of an ideal recipient in Lucilius and in Pauline communities, the use of constructed occasions for writing, and the production of a rhetorical self all align with features of the letter genre and show that the authors were schooled in how to exploit literary expectations in pursuit of their argument.

The final chapter argues that the Pauline letters are products of a second-century school located in Rome, sometime after the Bar Kokhba revolt. Livesey, expanding and amending the work of van Manen, highlights the non-Law-centric nature of Paul's letters and the negative assessment of circumcision as evidence for placing the Pauline compositions in the mid-second century. Having established that Rome was a centre for 'Christian' teaching and schools, Livesey argues that the Pauline letters are best understood as being composed in Marcion's school. Mirroring Markus Vincent's argument – that Marcion (or his school) wrote the first-known gospel text, which inspired subsequent compositions – Livesey posits that Marcion was the originator of the Pauline letters corpus (or at least ten of them) in his *Apostolikon*.

Following a short epilogue, in which Livesey offers a précis of her work's contribution, there is a sizeable abstract that outlines Greek educational practices. Here Livesey traces how a person would acquire literacy in antiquity, beginning with elementary exercises and continuing to higher-

[1] John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament: An Essay in the Early History of the Canon* (The University of Chicago Press, 1942).

level assignments that focus on composition. This chapter does not offer a new study, but its contents underpin many discussions in the work, especially the *progymnasmata* (rudimentary exercises) and Quintilian's prescriptions for forming the ideal orator.

Livesey draws heavily on Rosenmeyer's theory of 'the anxiety of fiction',[2] in which pseudonymous epistolographers, seeking to ensure verisimilitude, go beyond reasonable concern to state that this work is real (e.g., mention other letters, meetings, plans, etc.). One of the tensions is that such features are naturally occurring in ancient letters and so their presence is not a guaranteed sign of fabrication. The Pauline corpus has many instances of so-called anxious signs, which in Livesey's theory indicates that they are pseudonymous. However, each individual letter has some, but not an abundance, of such evidence; it is primarily in the collective that they trigger concern. If they are pseudonymous, were they written as a collective? If so, why did the author not make them more cohesive? If not, how can we tell what features count as evidence? It would be helpful if there were more data regarding the frequency of such features, what range of practices there might be, and what situational influences might impact their presence.

The main argument of the work is that the Pauline letter collection was created by the Marcion school in Rome around 144 CE. Many readers would rightly wonder how Livesey handles the data from other texts/authors (e.g., 1 Clement, 2 Peter, Justin Martyr) that are traditionally dated prior to Marcion and who mention Paul's letters. For Livesey, the answer is to move the proposed date of composition to after Marcion. While technically possible, given that earliest external evidence for Clement's composition is later in the second century, I am not convinced that this is the most plausible solution. It is one thing to change the date of an author's corpus through an argument of pseudepigraphy, but it is less convincing if one must move the dating of five or six other texts/corpora. The change of dates also does not speak to the issue of their broad acceptance and the fact that Christians outwith Marcion's school do not question their authorship or see them as contemporary compositions. If Marcion's school had a 'nearly exclusive interest in the Apostle Paul' (p. 30) (who, as you saw

[2] Cf. Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. 204.

above, was apparently fabricated by the author of Acts), why would other Christians be interested in his supposed writings?

The heart of chapter 3 is Livesey's comparison of Paul and Seneca as creating relationships with the recipients through relational language and occasional frames. I agree with her identification of these features and her argument of how they forge a connection with the reader to facilitate their didactic purpose. However, in comparing Seneca and Paul, according to her position, Livesey contrasts a real (i.e., Seneca) and fabricated (i.e., Paul) author. This seems to me to create tension between the proposed data, as the authorship is not alike. If the author of the Pauline letters was Marcion (or someone else), then the Pauline letters are doubly fictitious and so would introduce additional variables to the comparison with Seneca.

One question that regularly arises in reading this work is how Livesey perceives the possible overlap of literary construction and historical event. Livesey highlights how something in the text of Acts or a Pauline letter employs a trope that has literary benefit, such as the name change of Saul to Paul (Acts 13, p. 89) or Paul being lowered in a basket to escape a city (Acts 18:12–17; 2 Cor 11:33, p. 94). The implication of her argument is that such tropes undermine the historicity of these events. While I am sympathetic to her position here, more discussion of possible historical overlap is needed. Literary tropes can arise from historical events, and it is possible that someone could escape a city via a basket or adopt a new name because of a major event. Livesey's lack of exploration of these possibilities stems from her view on the dating of Acts and the Pauline collection, but it would have been beneficial to have had some discussion.

Another question of historicity is how one handles a dearth of data. Livesey regularly (and rightly) draws attention to limitations of evidence and data (literary, documentary, archaeological) for people and institutions (e.g., early home churches, p. 103; Clement of Alexandria, p. 113). What Livesey rarely discusses is whether the amount of surviving evidence is 'normal' (statistically speaking), how much is to be expected, and how much is needed to counter her position. Livesey is correct that we lack strong archaeological evidence for early home churches. However, rural spaces are often not the focus of archaeological digs, which prioritise grand, civic spaces. Further, as homes are lived spaces, it is unlikely that material evidence would have been stable over time.

Overall, Livesey is to be congratulated for writing such a stimulating book. Her arguments challenge established scholarship and force a re-

evaluation of the evidence and honest reflection about the limitations of our data.

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https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v33i2.3274

Alistair J. Cuthbert, *Spiritual Warfare: A Charismatic Baptist Theology of Participating in Divine Conflict*, Foreword by Gregory A. Boyd (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications 2025), pp. xxviii + 213 pages, ISBN 979-8385230006. £24.99

Recalling the embarrassment that theological liberals felt in the 1960s, as traditionalists resolutely upheld the necessity of the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, as well as His virgin birth, Alistair Cuthbert's first monograph might cause the same kind of squeamishness. Not that this research on spiritual warfare is unjustifiable, but theological heavyweights such as Karl Barth and Walter Wink, coupled with biblical scholars such as N. T. Wright, following George Caird, have swayed discussion away from the ontology of evil as a credible field for many readers, so attempting to enter into such a theological enquiry is uncommon today. Cuthbert's contribution is therefore an important one, bravely bringing to the table a minority report, but a serious one which demands respect.

As this book correctly reminds us, the Christian Church today is most numerous, dynamic and buoyant in the Global South. It is in these Latin American, African and Asian countries where contemporary accounts of the Church bringing about deliverances, exorcisms, encounters with Satan and the demonic, continue to be described and accepted as real. To their advantage, Cuthbert is quick to note, these realities happen to be remarkably similar to the 'power encounters' we read of in the Gospels and Acts. Irrespective of the resistance to this in the hardwiring of post-Enlightenment rationalist thought in the West today, these reports demand a theology honest enough to come to terms with theological praxis in the world today. This is just such an account. The book's argument is divided into three parts: the first comprises two chapters on the theology of Paul S.