

that will facilitate harmony in the Christian community. Such an early imposition of community standards should be remembered when a question arises today about the right of the church to set societal standards for its clergy. For instance, I have heard the right of the church to demand a college-educated clergy challenged on the grounds that Jesus did not demand education for membership in the Twelve. The logic of that type of observation should be rejected because of the dissimilarity of situation. As I indicated above, the Twelve were not residential clergy; and Jesus never lived in a structured church. Similarly to be queried is the idea that the requirements imposed by the Pastorals are eternally valid. Rather, since sometimes the requirements have to do with public respectability, they can and should change in the course of time. The primitive church was prejudiced against the remarriage of widowers (1 Tim 5:9,11; 1 Cor 7:8), allowing it only reluctantly for ordinary people. Consequently, the Pastorals would not tolerate remarried presbyters/bishops (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6); they should meet the ideal. Today few Protestant churches would refuse ordination to remarried widowers. On the other hand, an echo of being "the husband of only one wife" is found in many Protestant churches that impose on their clergy the requirement of not being remarried after divorce (even though they allow such remarriage for laity). Roman Catholicism has imposed Paul's personal standard ("It is well for them to remain single as I do": 1 Cor 7:8) on all its presbyters. One can always query the wisdom of individual requirements that different churches have made for their presbyterate, but the right to make such requirements seems to have been supposed from the beginning.

Institutionalization of the Christian movement was an aspect of what scholars call "early Catholicizing." (Early Catholicism is often a pejorative designation to cover the emergence of ecclesiastical features found later in Roman Catholicism and deemed objectionable by the Reformers and their spiritual descendants among contemporary biblical scholars.<sup>51</sup>) While judgment on that term and topic re-

51. See my brief discussion in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, art. 67, #94-97; and the excellent article by D. Harrington, "The 'Early Catholic' Writings of the New Testament: The Church Adjusting to World History," in *The Word in the World*, ed. R. J. Clifford and G. W. MacRae (F. L. Moriarty Festschrift; Cambridge, Mass.: Weston, 1973) 97-113; reprinted in Harrington, *Light* 61-78.

quire nuance, Gager is certainly correct in pointing out that "a good deal of nonsense has been written about the decline of primitive Christianity into 'early Catholicism.'" <sup>52</sup> Rudolf Bultmann would agree with Sohm that "legal regulation [when seen as constitutive] contradicts the Church's nature."<sup>53</sup> Rather, if the church is a society, regulations, constitutive or otherwise, are an inevitable sociological development that is of the nature of the church.

#### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Having described briefly a principal motif in the Pastoral Epistles, namely the stress on church structure, let me now point out both the strengths and weaknesses of such an emphasis as an answer to church continuance after the death of the apostles (or more precisely, after the death of *the* apostle, Paul). I forewarn readers that a section on strengths and weaknesses will also be part of subsequent chapters dealing with other answers. All answers to a theological problem, of necessity being partial and time-conditioned, involve paying a price. One emphasis, no matter how necessary at a particular time, will inevitably lead to a neglect of truth found in another answer or emphasis. I plan to center on three points in my discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the Pastorals' structural answer: (1) The idea of preserving an apostolic heritage against radical ideas and teachers; (2) The safe institutional virtues required of pastors; (3) The sharp distinction between those who teach and those who are taught.

First, impressive stability and solid continuity are marks of an institutional structure (presbyter-bishops and deacons) designed to preserve the apostolic heritage. The Pastorals have found a way to highlight the uniqueness of the apostle and at the same time to extend his influence beyond his lifetime. Apostolicity is personified in

52. J. W. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974) 67.

53. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; New York: Scribners, 1951, 1955) 2.97-98.

Paul—no other apostle is mentioned and no other is needed<sup>54</sup>—and this apostle provides for the aftermath of his departure by passing on his heritage to the presbyter-bishops under the supervision of Timothy and Titus. Emphatically Paul is a teacher, “a teacher of the nations” (I Tim 2:7; see also II Tim 1:11); and the chief function of his heirs is to teach “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1), carrying on the guidance given to his converts by the apostle. The bishop must “hold firmly to the sure word as it was taught” (Titus 1:9). Timothy, who had been an observer of how Paul taught (II Tim 3:10), is admonished, “Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (3:14).

The enemy against whom this advice is directed are teachers who are introducing new ideas, a group described as insubordinate men, empty talkers, and deceivers.<sup>55</sup> Such people love discussion and controversies (I Tim 6:4–5; Titus 3:9); and they win an admiring following among hearers with “itching ears” (II Tim 4:3), a group that might be described less pejoratively as having enquiring minds. The apostle of the Pastorals would have such purveyors of new and different ideas stopped from teaching (I Tim 1:3): “They must be silenced, for they are upsetting whole households by teaching for dishonest profit what they have no right to teach” (Titus 1:11). The faithful are reminded to be submissive to rulers and authorities, both secular and religious (Titus 3:1). In the Pastorals, then, we have the ancestor of the theology of a deposit of doctrine, and such ecclesiastical developments as the approval of professors, *imprimaturs*, an index of forbidden books, and supervised church presses—features not unique to Roman Catholicism by any means, even if the same names are not used in other churches and the control is not as obvious.

The historical circumstances in which the Pastoral Epistles were written involved great danger for the form of Christianity that would ultimately be designated “orthodoxy” (pp. 17–18 above). A follow-

54. R. F. Collins, “The Image of Paul in the Pastorals,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 31 (1975) 147–73. In Kertelge, *Paulus* 70–121, 122–45, there are nuanced articles on the Pauline heritage in the Pastorals by G. Lohfink and P. Trummer. The latter (143) points to the importance of the Pastorals in saving the Pauline corpus canonically for the church and argues (144) that one should not set up the Pastorals and the undisputed letters as contradictory.

55. See the various descriptions in I Tim 1:3ff; 4:1ff; 6:20–21; II Tim 2:16–18; 3:1–9; 4:3–4; Titus 1:10–16; 3:9.

ing among Christians was already being won by the propagandists of gnosticism (I Tim 6:20: what is falsely called knowledge [*gnōsis*]).<sup>56</sup> The struggle-to-the-death that would culminate ca. 180 in the *Adversus haereses* of Irenaeus had now begun. Already the “Paul” of the Pastorals had divined that the best response to a plethora of views claiming to be revealed and even traditional was a pedigreed tradition, involving a link between the apostolic era and approved church officials. Irenaeus would only be refining the argument when he appealed to a chain of bishops of the great Christian centers in his refutation of gnostic doctrines.<sup>57</sup> I would contend that the underlying maxim, “Hold firmly to the sure word as it was taught” (Titus 1:9), remains an essential weapon in times of major doctrinal crisis. It enabled the Roman Catholic Church to survive the tumultuous days of the Reformation; it enabled Luther’s movement to survive an anarchical Protestant left-wing (*Schwärmerei*) spawned by his own protest against Rome; today it should enable the mainline churches to survive biblicist sectarians.<sup>58</sup> True, a stringent control over teaching (and writing) exercised by church authorities runs against a democratic sense of freedom of thought and expression; but in the rare moments when theological freedom threatens to become anarchy, “the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (I Tim 3:15) has the right not to let itself be destroyed from within.

The great danger with an *exclusive stress* on officially controlled teaching, however, is that, having been introduced at moments of crisis, it becomes a consistent way of life. The Pastoral Epistles, shaped by doctrinal crisis, are often read without context as offering a universal and unconditioned policy. Truly pastoral policy, rather, requires a *relaxation* of such stringent controls when the crisis has

56. Actually it is not clear that only one form of heretical thought was the target, since I Tim 1:7 and Titus 1:10 envision Jewish or Jewish-Christian opponents who may not be the same as the gnostics.

57. *Adv. haer.* 3.3.3 begins with the succession of bishops at Rome (which the author of II Tim 4:7 may well envision as the place where Paul would “end the race”).

58. To speak of biblicist sectarians in the same sentence as radical movements may seem strange, since often they are looked on as ultraconservative in their bible reading. In my judgment biblical fundamentalism as we know it in the English-speaking world is a recent innovation quite foreign to the great exegetical tradition of the church, which has always allowed (but with different nuances) a non-literal element in the Scriptures. Many sectarians retroject nineteenth-century American individualistic pietism into the biblical period.

passed. For instance, having survived both the Reformation and the Enlightenment through controlled teaching, the Roman Catholic Church showed great wisdom in abolishing some of its negative doctrinal controls as an aftermath of Vatican II.<sup>59</sup>

What type of exaggeration may flow from the failure to see that an *exclusive stress* on appointed teachers is a policy conditioned by dangerous times? The fear of new ideas evident in the *Pastorals* may become endemic in the structured church. There are times when having "itching ears" in the sense of an inquisitive mind is necessary in order to keep the spirit of Jesus from being suppressed. After all, the Jesus who challenged the religious authorities of his time with the dictum, "Let that person hear who has ears to hear" (Matt 11:15; cf. Mark 8:18), could well be accused of having admired itching ears. At certain times the greatest peril facing a well-ordered institutional church is not the peril of new ideas but the peril of no ideas. The community described in the *Pastorals* would be perfectly safe if no one thought any other ideas than those handed down. Then, however, it might fall under the condemnation of the gospel parable against the servant who was perfectly happy to hand over what he had received, but was considered by Jesus as wicked and slothful because he had added nothing new to it (Matt 25:24-30).

The idea of entrusted truth (II Tim 1:14), translated into a "deposit of faith," is very useful as a corrective against liberal romantics who think that Christian theology can be *created* anew in each generation. It has severe limitations if it projects the image of a safe deposit box sterilely protecting what was put into it in the first century. Every generation must add to the deposit through its unique experience of Christ in its time. The presbyter-bishops of the church must "hold firmly to the sure word as it was taught" to them (Titus 1:9), and woe to them if part of the deposit of faith is lost in their administration. But also woe to them if they do not encourage constructive

59. Since pastoral practice responds to existing situations, the stress on official teaching may change frequently in intensity. In the Roman Catholic Church, less than a decade after Pope Pius X's severe stress on controlled teaching in reaction to the Modernist crisis, Pope Benedict XV rejected overly zealous heresy-hunting, espionage, and denunciation. Two decades after the relaxation associated with Vatican II, Pope John Paul II seems to feel a need for tightening some controls again, especially in practical matters of lifestyle.

insights that augment and nuance the sound doctrine they are obliged to teach. A weakness of the *Pastorals* is that the latter duty is never mentioned.

Second, a related strength and weakness in the *Pastorals* is a total orientation toward pastoral qualities in the officials of the structure that is to be erected. Through the safe, institutional virtues demanded of the presbyter-bishops (tantamount to prudence, sobriety, and balance), these writings are meant to insure a benevolent, holy, and efficient administration. The "clergy" appointed by Timothy and Titus should have been good, sound people, easy to get along with as resident pastors; but their job profile is not likely to have brought to leadership dynamic "movers" who would change the world. As I point out above (p. 35), the historical Paul could not easily have met the requirements for the local presbyter-bishop. But then the historical Paul was a missionary and never a lifetime resident in a settled community. He had risky new ideas about Christ as the end of the Law and an untamable restlessness that made him highly successful in opening new frontiers for Christ. Traversing those frontiers, whether geographic or intellectual, required an unconventionality frowned on by the *Pastorals*. Paradoxically, the leaders of the Jerusalem circumcision party opposed to Paul (whom he undiplomatically called "false brethren" in Gal 2:4) may have exemplified well some of the condemnatory attitudes encouraged by the *Pastorals*, for undoubtedly they regarded Paul as a dangerous teacher of novelties who should be silenced. After all, in their estimation he did not hold on to the sound doctrine taught by Jesus (in the tradition of Matt 5:18), namely that not the smallest letter, not even the smallest part of a letter, of the Law would pass away.<sup>60</sup>

In other words the pastor and the missionary are different roles that characteristically require different strengths. One may justly object that making new converts was not the problem faced by the "Paul" of the *Pastorals*. The fact, however, that the *Pastorals* were

60. The Jerusalem meeting on whether the Gentiles had to be circumcised (i.e., become Jews) in order to become Christians is described in different forms in Acts 15 and Gal 2, but in neither account do those who say circumcision is unnecessary quote the Jesus of the ministry as supporting their position. One may well suspect that the advocates of circumcision were the ones citing the historical Jesus, insisting that he never dispensed with the practice.

at a knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup>As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these oppose the truth—these people of depraved mind and counterfeit faith. <sup>9</sup>But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

The vituperation is made up of customary, expected charges. The gnostic teachers under attack may well have deserved some of the descriptive adjectives; but not infrequently where only approved teachers flourish, those who ask probing questions about the standard doctrine will be presented as the opponents of God's truth. In other words, prompted by struggle, the Pastorals present a dualistic view of the true and the counterfeit, but ordinary church life is scarcely dualistic. Differing from standard teaching may indeed be a mark of false teachers who need to be opposed; it may also be a mark of constructive thinkers whose ideas, startling at first, may lead the appointed teachers to perceive more clearly what really has been entrusted to be guarded with the help of the Holy Spirit (II Tim 1:14). In the Roman Catholic Church the Galileo case is a notorious example of where the official teachers confused a new teaching with false teaching because involved was a different view, challenging what had always been taught from the Scriptures about the relation between the sun and the earth. One could find thousands of less famous examples, many of them in Protestantism; and they warn us that a condemnatory dualistic approach may be an example of weakness rather than of strength.

In regard to the II Tim 3 passage, however, I am more interested in the attitude of this passage towards those who are taught, for the author ungracefully refers to "weak women" as an example of the ignorant and impulsive who are easily misled. One may argue that he is not speaking about all women<sup>61</sup> and that in his time women were seldom given the opportunity of education. Meeks, *First Urban* 23-24, points out that conservative Greco-Roman historians and sat-

<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere in the Pastorals "real widows" are honored (I Tim 5:3), and women deacons are envisioned (3:11). Elder women are to teach what is good (Titus 2:3) and to be treated with respect (I Tim 5:2—for the debatable suggestion that the latter are women presbyters, see the discussion in Brown, *Critical Meaning* 141). But the author permits no woman to teach or have authority over men (I Tim 2:12).

shaped by the problem then at hand often has not been recognized, and they have been thought to describe an ideal church order adequate for all times. In fact they make no structural provision for ongoing mission activity, and the thrust toward such highly prudential leaders, holding on to the past, creates an orientation that is not going to favor the innovations necessary for a dynamic mission. That recognition becomes all the more important if the pastoral care even of those who are already Christian requires a missionary innovativeness, as it often does in times of change. Alas, the judgment of both higher church authorities and of the laity on pastors has too often been exclusively along the lines promoted by the Pastorals. The pastors who disturb because they see that new things have to be done, and those who are impatient over the inertia they encounter have frequently been rejected. So often churches work on what I call "the Caiaphas principle" when they encounter a brilliantly disturbing leader: It is better that one man be eliminated than that the whole institution perish (John 11:50). There may be a certain societal inevitability to that principle, but the source of it should at least make the designation "weakness" none too strong for a tendency (which is incipient in the Pastorals) to favor blandness.

Third, there are strengths and weaknesses in the church's having carefully selected presbyter-bishops who alone can hand on the doctrine safely, with the result that other teachers arouse suspicion. The plus and minus values are patent in II Tim 3:1-9, a passage that vituperates other teachers who oppose the authority of the presbyters and mislead people:

<sup>1</sup>But understand this: in the last days there will come times of stress. <sup>2</sup>For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, unforgiving, slanderers, profligate, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>3</sup>holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Have nothing to do with such people. <sup>4</sup>For among them are those who make their way into households and gain control over weak women burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, <sup>5</sup>who will listen to anybody and never arrive

times such a picture has been equated with the classical theological distinction between the *ecclesia docens* (teaching church) and the *ecclesia discens* (learning church). This is a valid distinction as long as one recognizes that membership in the two groups is mobile—at one time or other every Christian is or should be part of the teaching church and everyone should be part of the learning church.<sup>64</sup> However, from the Pastorals one might judge that, apart from the presbyters, everyone else is in a fixed class of the taught who, if not instructed by the official teachers, will be deceived by false teachers.<sup>65</sup>

Only the foolish would deny the danger that uneducated members of a Christian community will be deceived by false teachers. For instance, today there are many Roman Catholics (and increasingly many Protestants from the mainline churches) who have little acquaintance with the Bible from youth and whose first real familiarity with it comes through hearing fundamentalist media-preachers. How quickly they can be convinced by simplistic interpretations! But granted this, very often a greater peril faces the community where the dividing line between official teachers and the taught is very sharp, namely, the peril that little by way of creative ideas or intellectual contributions is expected from the taught who constitute the majority of the community. Certainly II Tim 3:6-7 shows no expectation that sometimes women might on their own detect a falsehood peddled to them or might even have something to teach the presbyters. The failure of the author to make allowance for ideas "from the bottom up," as if all perspicacity comes from the top down in the structure, does not prepare the ordinary readers of the Pastorals to play a contributive role in teaching. Such a one-sided situation will become ever more disastrous in any area of the world where the laity are highly educated and quite capable of making a significant contribution toward the overall religious growth of the community. Of course, even educated laity need to be taught the great Christian tradition, and that is a signal task of the official teachers of the church who have been (or should have been) trained in that tradition. But once having been instructed, some lay people are quite capable of be-

64. See *Critical Meaning* 47-48.

65. Footnote 61 above indicates that the author's thought was more subtle and made an allowance for familial teaching.

irists frequently blamed the lush growth of esoteric cults and superstitions on irresponsible women who felt emancipated by them. Plutarch (*Moralia: Coniugalia praecepta* 145CE) observes that uneducated women tend to believe in superstitious stupidities, and unless they receive the seeds of good doctrine, they conceive monstrosities. Certainly some of the rules limiting women in the Pauline writings are designed to show that Christians are not rebels against the social expectations of the Hellenistic world, and are not a wild sect. Be that as it may, II Tim 3:6-7 can easily contribute to a generalization wherein women typify the taught section of the community who will always get things wrong unless they are instructed by the official teachers. Understandably, many modern readers or hearers will be offended by what will appear to them as sexist; and preachers, instead of decrying such a reaction as simplistic or anachronistic, should take the trouble to interpret the passage critically in both senses of that adverb. Elsewhere<sup>62</sup> I have stated my firm opinion that little is gained in public reading by omitting offensive Bible passages, for bowdlerized versions permit people too easily to say they "accept" the Bible. They never hear passages that should cause an intelligent audience to demur and to ask themselves constructive questions that will lead them to recognize the human conditioning in the biblical account. Hearing the difficult passages of the Bible and wrestling with them honestly (rather than explaining them away) will strengthen the realization that every word spoken about God on this earth, including the biblical word, which is uniquely "of God," is a partial and limited witness to the truth.<sup>63</sup> To accept the Bible in that sense leads to a faith that is not credulous.

As part of the "wrestling" with this passage in II Timothy, I would like to go beyond the unpleasant fact that women personify the dangerously weak and naive in order to concentrate on the problem of a class of those who are taught. (I shall return to the Pastorals' treatment of women in Chapter 7 below.) From the Pastorals one gets the impression that officially appointed teachers and false teachers are battling for the minds of those who are to be taught. Some-

62. R. E. Brown, "The Passion According to John," *Worship* 49 (#3, March 1975) 131.

63. *Critical Meaning* (1-22) argues this point in detail.

ing teachers themselves, not just transmitting what they received but making their own contribution. The Pastoral Epistles were written at a time when the author felt he had to tell Titus (3:1), "Remind the people to be submissive to rulers and authorities"; perhaps he expected the good sense that at another time it would be said, "Remind them to be constructive and contributive." But the fact is that such a follow-up directive never made it into the Scriptures that were to be so pastorally determinant. That is a weakness.

A need to insist that there are weaknesses in the Pastorals' proposal of firm administration by official teachers is a compliment to the enormous strength of that proposal, which has tended to dominate church history precisely because it worked so well. Communities that have reacted by ignoring it have often been short-lived. As we shall see in Chapter 7 below, the one NT community that specifically rejected the idea of official teachers lost many of its members, and the remnant ultimately had to accept a qualified form of pastoral authority.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Pauline Heritage in Colossians/Ephesians: The Church as Christ's Body to Be Loved

**C**OLOSSIANS/EPHESIANS constitutes another strain of the sub-apostolic heritage, even more directly connected to Paul than were the Pastoral Epistles. Colossians may have been composed within a decade of Paul's lifetime, closer to him in time than any of the other Deutero-Pauline letters.<sup>66</sup> It has so many features of genuine Pauline thought (but not of Pauline style) that even some critical scholars think that Paul composed it, at least through a secretary. (By way of very broad approximation, about 90% of critical scholarship judges that Paul did not write the Pastorals, 80% that he did not write Ephesians, and 60% that he did not write Colossians.) It is not clear to what extent the author of Colossians knew the earlier Pauline

66. Ephesians is difficult to date but the period A.D. 90-100 is plausible. The tendency to place the Pastorals in the second century is debatable; and I would disagree with H.F. von Campenhausen and H. Koester who tend toward the mid-second century and would place the Pastorals at the same distance from Paul as Polycarp stands. See G. Lohfink in Kertelge, *Paulus* 119. Nevertheless, some decades separate the Paul of the 60s from the writing of the Pastorals (a possible implication of II Tim 1:5, if Paul is imagined as a contemporary of Timothy's grandmother). P. Trummer, *Die Paulustradition der Pastoralbriefe* (Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie 8; Frankfurt: Lang, 1978) speaks of writing in the third generation after Paul. Marston's failure to acknowledge the Pastorals in his canon (if it represents ignorance of them rather than ignoring) and their absence from P<sup>4v</sup> may indicate that they were preserved differently from the rest of the Pauline collection.