The authenticity of the epistles of Paul was accepted as fact throughout most of church history. In the early 19th century, however, German scholars surfaced questions about the authorship of three letters, known as the Pastoral Epistles, namely 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. By the early 20th century, scholars applied a more statistical, scientific method to the problematic that had been raised. Subsequent research conducted in the last century led about 80 to 90 per cent of New Testament scholars to conclude that these three letters were pseudepigraphic and written after Paul’s lifetime—some 80 to 100 years after his death.¹ In other words, these texts were written not by Paul but by another writer claiming to be Paul. However, near consensus or majority vote does not prove truth.

Research to support the pseudonymity thesis for the Pastorals is vast, to be sure. However, further scholarly research—though clearly in the minority—conducted in the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century offers strong evidence that the Pastorals, and 2 Timothy in particular (which is the focus of this paper), is authentically Pauline. This paper, if not fully convincing for the reader, will surely cast a shadow of doubt on the assumption of pseudonymity in mainstream theology as regards 2 Timothy.

Among the most convincing scholars conducting new research and offering arguments in recent times in favor of Pauline authenticity are Michael Prior,² Myriam Klinker-De Klerk³ and Donald Guthrie.⁴ In order to appreciate their clear and succinct arguments, it is first necessary to review the most significant points in favor of pseudonymity and the context in which this research is conducted.

The Pastorals as a Unit
One of the major problems in scholarly research on the authenticity of the Pastorals is the tendency of most scholars to lump the three together and to treat them as one whole unit. Arguments in favor of pseudonymity, perhaps found justifiably in one epistle, are then applied indiscriminately to all three. However, the problem of authorship for 2 Timothy is interesting because it is the only epistle among the three, which some scholars on both sides of the argument have singled out as having distinct characteristics and being “a case apart in the discussion about the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles”.⁵

It is no surprise then that 2 Timothy would garner the most variations in theory, with some scholars considering it to be pseudepigraphic, others considering it to be authentic and yet others doubting authorship but entertaining the possibility that it was compiled by an anonymous writer working from authentic fragments of Paul’s writings.\(^6\)

While all three letters give their readers instructions on how to live as Christians and how to be leaders of a Christian community, Prior describes this centuries-old grouping of the Pastorals as an impediment to objective research in the area of pseudonymity. He argues that 2 Timothy is different from the other Pastorals in tone and subject matter, and this distinctiveness is lost in this “lumping together”. In other words, 2 Timothy merits to be considered apart from the other Pastorals. Furthermore, there is a lack of historical evidence to indicate the Pastorals were written in close succession and should be read as a unit.\(^7\)

Employing statistical methods, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor further underlines the distinctiveness of 2 Timothy in relation to the other Pastorals in his 1991 study, which “draws attention to more than 30 elements in which something in 2 Timothy is missing in both 1 Timothy and Titus, or where something shared by them is absent from 2 Timothy”.\(^8\) Murphy-O’Connor concludes that the cumulative effect of his arguments “is disastrous for the hypothesis of the unity of the Pastorals”.\(^9\)

### Arguments for Pseudonymity

That said, most scholars who support pseudonymity still tend to treat the Pastorals as a group and to compare them with other epistles, whose authorship is not disputed. They argue from the basis of five major points: writing style, theology, ecclesial structure, reference to false teaching and historical inconsistencies. First, they note that the Pastorals use different vocabulary, grammar, style and subject matter from the other epistles attributed to Paul, namely Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon.\(^10\) The Pastorals express both a different theology and a different church structure, which seems closer to second-century Christianity than to the early Jesus Movement. Fourth, the Pastorals challenge Gnostic or false teachings, which are not addressed in early Pauline letters and which some scholars claim emerged as an issue only after Paul’s lifetime. Finally, scholars have noted that the historical facts about Paul’s life in the Pastorals do not coincide entirely with those presented in Acts.\(^11\) Many contemporary pro-pseudonymity scholars base their arguments on P. N. Harrison’s statistical analysis of the vocabulary in the Pastorals, published in 1921, and on others that followed in his stead.

Harrison demonstrated that the Pastorals have a vocabulary of 902 words, of which 52 are proper names. Of the 848 ordinary words, 306 are not found in any

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\(^6\) Collins, 4. 
\(^7\) Prior, 16. 
\(^8\) Ibid, 18. 
\(^9\) Ibid. 
of the undisputed Pauline letters (Harrison considers there are 10 undisputed letters). Conversely, there are 1,635 ordinary words in the undisputed letters that do not occur in the Pastorals. As well, some words common to both the Pastorals and the undisputed Pauline letters are not used with the same meaning.

Harrison then argued that the vocabulary was closer to that of second-century writers than to Paul. Of the 175 *hapax legomena* (words not found elsewhere in the New Testament) in the Pastorals, more than half—93—are found in late first-century and early second-century Hellenistic and Christian literature, namely the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists. Specifically, 2 Timothy has 60 of the 175 *hapax legomena*, and of the 413 words used in 2 Timothy, 114 do not appear in any of the undisputed epistles.

Third, he observed that more than half of the particles, prepositions and connective words used in the undisputed letters do not occur in the Pastorals. As well, some of Paul’s theological vocabulary—such as the words “Lord” and “body”—is absent from the Pastorals, which are described as “stiff”, “ponderous”, and “complex” texts compared with the “free-flowing” undisputed letters.

Scholars who hold Harrison’s view have offered a number of theories to explain authorship. Some attribute the letters to a follower of Paul—a Paulinist—who wrote in a Pauline style to respond to the problems facing Christian communities at the time. They claim that a disciple of Paul practiced pseudonymity because he wanted a particular teaching or counsel “to be received authoritatively as what Paul would say to the situation addressed.” As well, the presence of words used in Acts has led some scholars to claim that the Pastorals were written by the author of Acts, who is Luke.

Harrison posited the fragment hypothesis, claiming that 2 Timothy was compiled with the fragments of four letters that had been written by Paul: one written from Macedonia (2 Tim 4:13-15), a second from Caesarea (2 Tim 4:16-18a), a third after Paul had been recalled to Rome (2 Tim 4:9-12, 22b) and a fourth series of fragments written in Rome prior to his death. This last observation further reinforces the statement above regarding the distinctiveness of 2 Timothy compared with the other Pastorals. In making this observation, Harrison well admits that it is closest to Paul’s hand than to any of the other Pastorals.

Interestingly, Raymond Collins uses 2 Timothy’s distinctiveness to argue for pseudonymity:

As far as the body of each of the Pastoral Letters is concerned, the material in 1 Timothy and Titus is similar to later documents on Church order, especially the early second-century Didache… The ma-

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12 Marshall, 60.
14 Collins, 3.
16 Brown, 586.
18 Collins, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, 5.
material contained in the body of 2 Timothy is of a different sort. With its many ‘reminiscences’ of the life of Paul, its rereading of older traditions and its concern for Timothy’s ministry, the body of this epistle is reminiscent of Jewish and Early Christian testamentary literature.\textsuperscript{19}

Collins proceeds to argue that Jewish and Christian testamentary literature is evidence of non-Pauline authorship because it was “not composed by those to whom they are attributed” and proves that “Jews and early Christians were not averse to accepting pseudepigraphic material”.\textsuperscript{20} This claim will be debunked later in the paper.

Pro-pseudonymity scholars point out that the Pastorals move beyond Paul’s Spirit-centered message and into the organization of ecclesial communities, the delegitimizing of false teachers, apostolic tradition and acceptable behaviors in a Hellenistic society. In other words, they are addressed to a more developed Christian community rather than to the enthusiastic participants of the early Jesus Movement. While this is true of the Pastorals as a whole unit, these themes are far more present in 1 Timothy and Titus than in 2 Timothy, where they are but mentioned either in brief or in passing.

In 2 Timothy, Paul is more concerned about his mission and Timothy’s involvement in it than anything else. According to Prior, who argues for Pauline authorship, Paul wrote 2 Timothy with the confidence that he would be released from prison and able to prepare for the next stage of his missionary activity. With this purpose in view, he asked to see his disciple urgently. He wanted to incorporate Timothy into this new mission, hence expressing more concern about Timothy and his spiritual well-being in this letter than in the other Pastorals, where he addressed “doctrinal and ethical deviations” more at length.\textsuperscript{21} These important facts, which mark the distinctiveness of 2 Timothy among the Pastorals, arguably serve as evidence of Pauline authenticity.

### Evidence of a Pauline Text

Among the more convincing arguments in favor of Pauline authorship are Michael Prior and Myriam Klinker-De Klerck. Both lament the lack of critical analysis among scholars regarding pro-pseudonymity arguments, which they say are based on assumptions rather than on historical evidence.

Historical evidence indicates that the practice of composing pseudepigraphic letters was “rare”. According to Prior, pseudonymity was not morally acceptable in the Early Church and in post-apostolic times. If it was, asks John McRay tongue-in-cheek though altogether appropriately, then why did none of the Synoptics avail themselves of the added prestige that would have come with the use of Peter and Paul for their writings?\textsuperscript{22} On the contrary, Prior states, there is “abundant evidence to show that no writing known as pseudegraphical was ever accepted as authoritative in the early church”.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 7. \\
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 7-8. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Prior, 19. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Prior, 12.
\end{flushright}
Addressing Harrison’s critique of style and language presented above, Prior argues that the fact of co-authorship in the Pauline letters would “alone dilute the prevailing certainties concerning the style and language of Paul as an epistolographer”. The ancient practice of mentioning more than one person in the introduction of a text indicated co-authorship, of which there is a remarkable prominence in the Pauline corpus. Prior also laments that this important fact remains largely ignored in scholarship.

The suppositions that he wrote his letters unaided, after the fashion of an isolated scholar writing entirely on his own, break down completely when the clear testimony of his practice is allowed to take its natural place within that of ancient epistolology.

Prior points out that Paul used secretaries for at least six of the 13 letters in the New Testament canon. It was very common for secretaries in antiquity to be given considerable freedom and to have an editorial role. Given this historical reality, the following questions arise: How did Paul operate with his secretaries? And how much of each letter did he write himself? Prior posits that the Pastorals, which are personal letters directed to individuals by name, were likely the only ones written by Paul’s own hand, without the aid of a secretary, thereby accounting for the variation in style and language. In other words, he concludes that Paul wrote the ecclesial letters to early Christian communities with others and the Pastorals alone. According to Prior, 2 Timothy “is free of the obstacles to Pauline authenticity which are detected in 1 Timothy and Titus”.

Donald Guthrie also makes a similar observation, stating that linguistic differences in the epistles may be due to greater freedom allowed to the amanuensis. As further regards vocabulary, style and grammar, Guthrie convincingly argues that these variations in the Pastorals cannot be held as conclusive evidence of non-Pauline authorship because they “would imply the impossibility of any change in an author’s style or language, and this position cannot be decided on numerical data without reference to psychological probability”.

Furthermore, Guthrie and other pro-authenticity scholars argue that Paul wrote 2 Timothy in prison in the final days before his death. Therefore, age, experience and circumstance could have accounted for a change in style.

If full allowance is made for dissimilarity of subject matter, variations due to advancing age, enlargement of vocabulary due to changing environment and the difference in the recipients as compared with the earlier letters, the linguistic peculiarities of the pastorals can in large measure be satisfactorily explained.

McRay makes a related observation, stating that the “quality of a work cannot

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24 Ibid, 14.
26 Ibid, 14.
27 Prior, 15.
28 Prior, 19.
29 Guthrie, 56.
30 Guthrie, 54.
31 Ibid.
of itself be a valid criterion of authorship.”

Guthrie also strikes down Harrison’s second-century vocabulary argument with his observation that there are greater similarities between the language of the Pastorals and the Septuagint than between the Pastorals and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Certainly, he argues, Paul was familiar with these Hebrew Scriptures and its vocabulary.

Guthrie also discounts Harrison’s fragment theory for 2 Timothy due to the uneven distribution of the fragments and their incorporation in “a particularly disintegrated manner”. A Paulinist, with the goal of pseudonymity in mind, he observes, would have put greater effort in elaborating on the fragments with a Pauline flavor and theology, but this is not the case in 2 Timothy. “It is difficult to believe that the Paulinist would write long sections without attempting... to give as much as an echo of Pauline phraseology.”

J.W. Roberts also attacks Harrison’s statistical analysis with his own study, in which he concludes that Harrison is “guilty of padding his evidence so that it will look more impressive” with regards to the use of particles, pronouns and prepositions. While Roberts’ analysis is quite detailed, it suffices to say for the purpose of this paper that Roberts proves that Paul did not really have habitual words as Harrison claimed. John J. O’Rourke, also employing statistical analysis, comes to a conclusion similar to Roberts. He states: “The Pastorals do not stand out from the rest of the Paulines by the reason of the peculiarity of their vocabulary.”

Klinker-De Klerk takes another swipe at Harrison’s statistical analysis, making reference to a 1986 study by A. Kenny, who argues that the only Pastoral deserving of suspicion is Titus. Kenny also underlines an oversight in Harrison’s work: statistics do not account for the phenomenon called “authorship”. Audience has a lot to do with an author’s choice of words and content. The absence of Pauline theology from the Pastorals should not seem odd since the recipients, being close collaborators of Paul, would have been very familiar with Pauline theology and would not have needed yet another reminder of its precepts. As well, it is neither odd that these letters would deal with matters more closely related to the mission, such as ecclesial matters, for much the same reason. Klinker-De Klerk addresses the inconsistencies of the Pastorals with Acts, explaining that pro-authenticity scholars place the origin of the three epistles during Paul’s third missionary journey and the Roman imprisonment as described in Acts.

Finally, two pro-pseudonymity scholars offer evidence in support of authenticity at the rudimentary level of historical fact. Historical evidence indicates that

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32 McRay, 5.
33 Guthrie, 54-55.
34 Ibid, 58.
35 Ibid, 59
37 Ibid, 135.
39 Klinker-De Klerk, 104.
40 Ibid, 105.
41 Ibid, 103.
the Pastorals were well known in the Early Church, thereby debunking the claim that they were written up to 100 years after his death. Polycarp refers to them in circa 120 CE. During the second century, Tertullian also made reference to the epistles, reporting that Marcion excluded all three Pastorals from his canon. Scholars even posit that these letters, addressed to Paul’s co-workers in the mission, may have circulated in a small codex during the second century.\(^{42}\)

As well, contrary to claims made by various scholars, the heretical teachings addressed in the Pastorals do indeed fit into the historical period at the end of Paul’s life and the period immediately following. This finding discounts the argument that the Pastorals must have been written in the first half of the second century.\(^{43}\)

Given the evidence compiled in this report, it seems numerous scholars in the field of Pauline writings hooked onto Harrison’s conclusion—that 2 Timothy is pseudepigraphic—prematurely and without much critical analysis. However, the increase of research in recent decades regarding Pauline authorship indicates that the near 100-year debate on the authorship of 2 Timothy is hardly over. Rather, it might just be heating up.

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\(^{42}\) Collins, 2.
\(^{43}\) Marshall, 58.
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