1 Timothy 1

This first letter of the Pastorals corpus begins with the Pastor, or "Paul," describing the situation Timothy must correct in Ephesus: some members of the Christian community are teaching "a different doctrine," and are engaging in theological speculation based upon material from the Hebrew Bible, especially the genealogies and the law. "Paul" remembers his former life as a "persecutor" of the church, and considers his own transformation a model to which others might look for inspiration. The chapter concludes with comments about two individuals, Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom "Paul" has apparently excommunicated for their misdeeds.

The Salutation (1:1–2; 2 Tim. 1–2; Titus 1:1–4)

All modern commentators note that the superscription, addressee, and salutation portions of the Pastoral Epistles differ in important ways from those of the undisputed Pauline letters. The Pastoral Epistles, like Romans and Galatians, are not of corporate authorship, and like Philemon, are addressed to specific individuals (although Philemon is also addressed to "the church in your house"; Philem. 2). Unlike any letters in the Pauline corpus, however, 1 Timothy and Titus link Paul's apostleship to divine "commandment" and not to God's "will," suggesting perhaps that the Pastor thinks of Paul as having been commissioned for his task (Bassler 1996: 36). Each of the Pastorals also alters Paul's typical salutation formula, "Grace to you and Peace from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ," by adding "mercy" (1 and 2 Tim.), and by switching Paul's possessive pronoun from before "Father" to before "Lord": "God the Father and Jesus *Christ our Lord*" ("*our* Savior" in Titus 1:4). Bassler, thinking of 1 Timothy 1:2 in terms of 1 Timothy 6:13 ("God who gives life to all things"), proposes that the Pastor may have been indicating that while God is universally the father of all, Christ Jesus is the lord only of believers (1996: 36; cf. 1 Tim. 4:10).

One similarity is that neither 1 Timothy nor the authentic Paulines speak of Christ as savior (with the exception of Phil. 3:20). The Pastor uses the designation frequently of Christ and God both, or of Christ only (Titus 2:13), elsewhere, but not of Christ here. Towner, a proponent of Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, argues that the differences in usage reflect differences in intention. 1 Timothy "suppresses" the use of savior for Christ, he argues, because one of the aims of the letter is to foreground Jesus' humanity (e.g., as at 2:5, 2006: 63, 97).

Grace, mercy, and peace (v. 1)

Differences such as those mentioned above can often mark the Pastorals as non-Pauline for the modern reader. But others in the tradition, like Calvin, have noted them as well. It is unusual, first of all, according to Calvin, that "Paul" pronounces himself an apostle in a letter written to Timothy alone. Who less than Timothy needs to be told of Paul's apostolic status? "Paul," then, must have had the others in mind, the opponents, "who were not so willing to give him a hearing, or so ready to accept what he said." Possibly "Paul" expected this letter, like his others, to be read aloud in public service. More problematic is the fact that God is savior instead of Christ, which minimizes, if it doesn't

eliminate, the traditional Christological weight of this term. The problem can be solved, though, if one assumes that God, having given Christ to the world, is the ultimate source of the salvation that comes through Jesus (*Commentary*, Calvin 1964: 187). Still less acceptable to Calvin was the Pastor's "grace, mercy, and peace." Not only does "Paul" here deviate from his other letters, but also he does not observe "the exact order of the words for he has put first 'grace' which ought to come second, since it is from mercy that grace flows. It is because He is merciful that God first receives us into His grace, and then goes on loving us" (188). Calvin simply concludes that there must have been some good, logical reason for the change, without suggesting what that reason was.

My loyal child in the faith (v. 2)

Even though Calvin may have had his concerns with 1 Timothy's opening verses, one should not assume from this that he seriously questioned the letter's authenticity. Readers have traditionally been quite comfortable with the Pastor's "Paul," and have taken a special pleasure in remarking upon "Paul's" relationship with Timothy, his own "son in the faith," his "dearly beloved son" (v. 2; 2 Tim. 1:2, KJV), and with Titus, his "loyal child in the faith we share" (Titus 1:4). Chrysostom, typical of a general tendency among interpreters, comments upon the poignancy of the personal affection "Paul" has for Timothy and Titus, while indicating that their faith qualifies "Paul's" paternity in significant ways:

> Not merely his "son," but, "dearly beloved"; since it is possible for sons not to be beloved. Not such, he means, art thou; I call thee not merely a son, but a "dearly beloved son" . . . where love does not arise from nature, it must arise from the merit of the object. Those who are born of us, are loved not only on account of their virtue, but from the force of nature; but when those who are of the faith are beloved, it is on account of nothing but their merit, for what else can it be?

Chrysostom adds, with a vaguely comic inconsistency, that Paul "never acted from partiality," but that nonetheless he felt he had to call Timothy "beloved son" to allay fears about his delay (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:4; 4:6–9) in returning to Ephesus (*Hom. 1 Tim.*, NPNF1 13.476; cf. Theodoret, *Comm. 1 Tim.*, 2001: 2.252).

Recent readers have similarly found the relationship between "Paul" and his sons significant, but often in more intensely personal terms (see also Chrysostom at 2 Tim. 4:7). Ellen White appreciates the tender "love" this father feels for his son (*Acts of The Apostles*, 1911: 204), while Ceslas Spicq, in his

commentary, imagines Timothy's devotion to his spiritual father "Paul" as akin to the attraction of "a heavenly body which revolves around a great star" (1969: 1.49–50).

The Opponents: Speculators (1:3–7; 4:1–5, 7; Titus 3:9)

The opening salvo of the letters, this attack upon and warnings about the "vain janglings" (KJV) of "certain people," provides very little concrete information. The references to "myths and genealogies," "old wives' tales," "stupid controversies," especially in conjunction with an interest in the law, suggests, as most recent commentators agree, some combination of a rather ill-defined early Gnostic speculative reading of the Hebrew scriptures (D-C 1972: 17), and the creative, more or less self-consciously Jewish practice of midrash (in which the Pastor himself also engages, Collins 2002: 74; Hanson 1982: 30). The Pastor's message seems to be that speculation is tantamount to teaching false doctrines, to heterodoxy. For some commentators, this is simply one among many indications that the Pastor is no theologian, that he has "a rooted mistrust of all speculative thinking" (Easton 1948: 22), or even that in combating his opponents, he is in fact attempting to stifle a group of truly "creative theologians" (Donelson 1986: 124). Others are more sympathetic to the Pastor's situation, suggesting that the enormous religious confusion of Ephesus and Crete is driving the Pastor's comments (Keck and Furnish 1984: 141). Although some scholars have admirably attempted to paint a full portrait of the opposition facing the Pastor in Ephesus (e.g., Towner 1989), the vagueness of the Pastorals with regard to these opponents is probably as indicative of generalized polemical aims and the pseudepigraphal impulse as it is a response to actual opponents in Ephesus (D-C 1972: 66; Bauer 1971: 89; Donelson 1986: 124; Bassler 1996: 29).

Myths and genealogies (vv. 3–4)

As will become evident in this volume, readers of these letters frequently draw upon the Pastor's tendentious presentation of his opponents either to spar with opponents of their own, or to comment on their own historical moments. Athanasius accuses the Arians of both building upon the kind of false teachings seen in Timothy's Ephesus and Titus' Crete, and even surpassing them "in impiety" (*Hist. Ar.* 8.66, NPNF2 4.294). Other early patristic writers clearly considered the work of these speculative genealogists to be Gnostic in nature

(e.g., Irenaeus AH 1.1, ANF 1.315). Still others assumed that the genealogies in question were Jewish and argued, with Ignatius, that such reflection was a denial of grace (*Magnesians* 8, ANF 1.62). Augustine treats Faustus similarly, suggesting that he "fulfills" the message of 2 Timothy 4:3–4 about believers with "itching ears" rejecting the truth in favor of myths (*C. Faust.* 2.4, NPNF1 4.157). John Milton, himself a latter-day Arian and anti-clerical radical, borrows from these passages to mock the use of scripture and church history supporting episcopal hierarchy in the Church of England. His posthumous opponent, Lancelot Andrewes, is said to "enforce" his position "with much ostentation of endlesse genealogies, as if he were the man that St. *Paul* forewarns us of in *Timothy*" (*Reason of Church Government*, *Complete Prose* 1.774). He might have added, had he had the benefit of citing Erasmus' *Paraphrases* on 1 Timothy 1:4, that the "gift of evangelical salvation" does not "trickle . . . down to us through the corporal branches of family trees" (1993: 7).

Chaucer's Parson, although not engaged directly in polemic, hints at the contemporary relevance of the Pastor's criticism of "myths and genealogies" when, in the Prologue to his tale/sermon, he explains:

> thou getest fable noon ytoold for me,
> For Paul, that writeth unto Tymothee,
> Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse
> and tellen fables, and swich wrecchednesse.
> Why sholde I sowen draf out of my fest,
> When I may sowen whete, if that me lest?
> (X [I] 31–36, 1987: 287)

The Parson seems implicitly to condemn the tales preceding his own as wretched insofar as they mix truth and "fables," understood here not as fictions, but as lies – or perhaps, as Calvin will say, "trifles," not wholly untrue, but simply "foolish and unprofitable" (*Commentary* 1964: 189). Indeed, many, like the Parson, find in the Pastor's advice to Timothy a rejection of figurative language as unsuitable for religious discourse. John Bunyan's "Apology" to his *Pilgrim's Progress* reflects upon this attitude, but defensively. Bunyan, citing also from 1 Timothy 6:3 (cf. 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 2:8), explains:

> Sound words I know Timothy is to use,
> And old Wives Fables he is to refuse . . .

Certain of his friends having discouraged the publication of his book on the grounds that "such a stile as this" will only obscure the meaning, Bunyan says he was initially reluctant to proceed. He quite slyly notes, however, that:

> . . . grave Paul him no where doth forbid
> The use of Parables; in which lay hid
> That Gold, those Pearls, and precious stones that were
> Worth digging for [Matt. 13:46], and that with greatest care.

And he goes on to argue, in a traditional vein, that even the Bible "in many places, / Hath semblance with this method," granting to his allegory the imprimatur of "holy Writ" (2003: 7).

Speculations rather than the divine training (v. 4)

The anti-speculative thrust of the Pastoral Epistles is more of a problem for recent commentators than for others in the tradition. Earlier figures in the tradition seem to feel that the Pastor was well within his rights to foreclose debates of this kind. Chrysostom judges that "he who questions cannot believe," rhetorically effecting the impossibility of religiously motivated inquiry. Nevertheless, he seems also to recognize that theological questions not only ought to be acceptable, but in fact are legitimated by Jesus himself, who said: "seek and you shall find" (Matt. 7:7, KJV) and "search the scriptures" (John 5:39). He is forced, then, to circumscribe the very idea of questioning within a tighter compass: "the seeking there [i.e., in the Gospel passages just cited] is meant of prayer and vehement desire, and He bids 'search the Scriptures,' not to introduce the labors of questioning, but to end them, that we may ascertain and settle their true meaning, not that we may be ever questioning, but that we may have done with it" (*Hom. 1 Tim.*, NPNF1 13.410). As long as questioning is more or less equivalent to a careful and faithful exegesis, it is acceptable. Moreover, faith of this sort must be acknowledged not merely as a restriction placed by "Paul" upon Christian intellectual freedom, but as foundational to everyday life too. Without faith, he writes, "everything is subverted. And why do I speak of it in heavenly things? We shall find upon examination that earthly things depend upon it no less. For without this there would be no trade nor contracts, nor anything of the sort. And if it be so necessary here in things that are false, how much more" in those heavenly things, which are true and eternal (*Hom. 1 Tim.*, NPNF1 13.411). Faith, not money, makes the world go around.

Calvin uses 1 Timothy 1:4 as an opportunity to disparage scholastic debates, but he, more than Chrysostom, also wants to allow space for theological disputes. Accordingly he decides that "Paul" in this passage "judges of doctrine by the fruit"; questions leading to "edification" and not to "unprofitable disputes" are perfectly acceptable (*Commentary* 1964: 190).

The end of the commandment (v. 5)

The Pastor everywhere indicates that questioning the faith is not only unprofitable for faith and "contrary to the sound teaching" (v. 10), but unethical as well, for by asking questions and engaging in disputes his opponents have "deviated" from "the end of the commandment [which] is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of a faith unfeigned" (v. 5, KJV). This verse is frequently cited by Augustine in any number of contexts. For example: Adam and Eve loved God with precisely this love (*caritas*) prior to the Fall (*De civ. Dei* 14.26, 2000: 474); "[F]aithful women who are married [and without children], and virgins dedicated to God," whose dedication and devotion derive from "the end of the commandment," charity, are to be understood "spiritually" as "mothers of Christ" (*De virg.* 6, NPNF1 3.419); and indeed this love, like proper attire at the wedding in the parable (Matt. 22:11), is the love that distinguishes true Christians in community from others who, although they may participate in communities of their own, have only fruitlessness and vanity to show for it (*Serm.* 40.6, NPNF1 6.394). Augustine also, and perhaps most significantly, takes "the commandment" to refer to "all the divine precepts" of the "law and the prophets," the "Gospels and the apostles," concluding that "every commandment has love for its aim" (*Enchiridion* 121, NPNF1 3.275).

The verse is not simply indicative of the paramount importance of love in Christian life, however. It also provides Augustine and others a way out of an exegetical bind. Aquinas, for instance, notes a tension between "the great commandment" (Matt. 22:36–40, KJV), which enjoins love of God and love of neighbor, and Paul in Romans 13:9, who seems to suggest that the single most important commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself," apparently to the exclusion of the love of God. The solution proposed by Aquinas, with the help of 1 Timothy 1:5, is to understand that "every law aims at establishing friendship [*amicitiam*], either between man and man, or between man and God. Wherefore the whole Law is comprised in this one commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' as expressing the end of all commandments: because love of one's neighbor includes love of God, when we love our neighbor for God's sake" (ST FS Q[99] A[1]).

Calvin, on the other hand, finds the verse puzzling, a problem in itself, for "we have to begin with faith," rather than love; the resolution is simply to parse the verse's theological grammar, as it were, which then can seem to posit faith as the cause of an effect like love (*Commentary* 1964: 191). Kierkegaard too finds the priority of love unusual, but unlike Calvin he feels that "a good conscience" rather than "sincere faith" is the ground for the other two elements in the verse ("Love is a Matter of Conscience," *Writings* 16.138).

His poignant reflection upon love, however, gives the latter a lyrical if not a logical primacy: "a pure heart is not a free heart . . . a pure heart is first and last a bound heart. For this reason it is not as delightful to speak about" as freedom in love. "The heart, if it is to be pure, must without limit be bound to God. . . . The free heart has no history; when it gave itself away, it gained its history of love, happy or unhappy. But the heart infinitely bound to God has a prior history . . . the one and only history of love, the first and the last"; every other kind of love one experiences "is only an interlude, a contribution to this" other love (148–49).

A wonderful literary echo of 1 Timothy 1:5 is to be found in Cervantes' satirical *Dialogue of the Dogs*. Two dogs, named Scipio and Berganza, are discussing their experiences with philosophical wit, when the former complains:

> The Lords of this world are very different from the Lord of heaven. When the former take a servant they firstly scrutinize his lineage, then they test his skill, take a good look at his appearance, and even want to know what clothes he possesses. To enter God's service, on the other hand, the poorest is the richest and the humblest comes from the most distinguished line. As long as he's willing to serve him with a pure heart his name's written in the wage ledger and the rewards are so rich in quantity and proportion that they surpass his wildest dreams.

After this Berganza, possibly recognizing the echo from 1 Timothy, complains that his friend is preaching, to which Scipio replies "I agree, and so I'll be silent" (1998: 260).

The Opponents: On the Law (1:8–11)

In castigating opponents, the Pastor relies upon stock forms of slander, such as the vice list here associated with "the lawless," to cast as broad a net as possible, making his criticisms potentially viable for any number of circumstances across a relatively generous span of time (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1–5). The specific vices enumerated are less important than the overall effect. Indeed, as Collins suggests, "it is often quite useless to try to distinguish one vice from another" (2002: 30; cf. Karris 1973).

Efforts have been made to read this vice list in terms of the Decalogue, given both its contextualization in a discussion of the law and the consonance of some of its terms with material from Exodus 20:1–18; but the overall imprecision of the connections between the two has led some modern commentators, like Towner, to conclude that "correspondence is rather to be found in the impression of opposition to God" than between the commandments and all the vices listed here (2006: 125). Commentators also note that the Pastor's

reflections on the law are quite radically distinct from Paul's own. In fact, it is difficult to find in these remarks any theological content at all, as if the Jewish law were merely a set of penalties for criminal behavior and were not at the heart of a covenantal relationship with God. Although v. 8 begins with an echo of Romans (7:12, 16), Paul's argument that "the law . . . disclose[s] the paradoxical situation of man without faith" is entirely absent (D-C 1972: 22; cf. Hanson 1982: 58–59; Bassler 1996: 41–42).

The law is good (vv. 8–9)

Still, something of a paradox remains in the idea that the law can be used legitimately, by the faithful, even though it is meant exclusively for the lawless. This odd tension has given rise to creatively productive speculation. Clement of Alexandria agrees with the Pastor "that the law was not made for the sake of the good" (*Str.* 4.3, ANF 2.411). The reason is not moral, however, but psychological in that "when you take away the cause of fear, sin, you have taken away fear; and much more, punishment, when you have taken away that which gives rise to lust." The faithful, or in this case the truly philosophical soul (he has Socrates in mind), has been purged of that which the law governs, even if it is still true that the law "by menacing with fear, work[s] love" and thus is good (410).

A similar idea holds for Augustine as well, according to whom the righteous man "lawfully uses the law, when he applies it to alarm the unrighteous" (*De spir. et litt.* 16, NPNF1 5.89). The righteous man ultimately owes his salvation to God's unmerited grace, but the law may nevertheless prompt the unrighteous to "flee for refuge to the grace that justifies" (90). Augustine also deploys allegory in his reading of the Gospel of John (chapters 11–12) to untangle the Pastor's paradox. Lazarus, he writes, represents those who are "dead under that stone, guilty under the law. For you know that the law, which was given to the Jews, was inscribed on stone. And all the guilty are under the law [whereas] the right-living are in harmony with the law. The law is not laid on a righteous man" (*Jo. ev. tr.* 49.22, NPNF1 7.277). The righteous man, thus, can use the law legitimately, but does not experience its crushing, mortal force.

A related, and quite common, understanding of the legitimacy of the law can be found in Bernard of Clairvaux. In Bernard's view, the righteous do indeed need the law too, but the difference between sinners and saints is that "the law . . . is not imposed on [the latter] against their will, but freely given to them when they are willing, and inspired by goodness" (*On Loving God*, 1987: 203). The righteous have the goodness intended by the law already in their hearts. That this is so leads Francis de Sales to imagine how things must stand

with "the Blessed in Paradise . . . since from their enjoyment of the sovereign beauty and goodness of the well-beloved, a most sweet yet inevitable necessity in their spirits of loving eternally the most holy divinity, flows and proceeds"; he concludes from this that "we shall love God in heaven . . . not as being tied and obliged by the law, but as being allured and ravished by the joy which this object, so perfectly worthy of love, shall yield to our hearts" (*Treatise on the Love of God*, 1971: 413).

Slave traders (v. 10)

The reference to "men-stealers" (KJV) or "slave traders" in v. 10 has been extremely significant, especially during periods when slavery was legal and practiced by Christians (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1). John Wesley, linking in criminality "most traders in negroes, procurers of servants for America, and all who list soldiers by lies, tricks, or incitements," argues that men-stealers are "the worst of all thieves, in comparison of whom Highwaymen and house-breakers are innocent!" (*Explanatory Notes* 1850: 439). We should note that although Wesley unfortunately indicts only *most* slavers here, he was certainly opposed to all slavery. The American abolitionist George Cheever seizes upon 1 Timothy 1:10 and declares that "a more tremendous passage against slavery does not exist than this"; if Christians followed Paul's instructions, Cheever feels, "slavery would be abolished from our land" (in Harrill 2000: 157). Harriet Beecher Stowe notes an even more egregious hypocrisy in an appendix to her anti-slavery novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. The Presbyterian *Book of Discipline* from 1793, which she reproduces, cites this verse as biblical proof for the injustice of slavery. According to Stowe, however, the 1816 version of the same document suppresses the reference to 1 Timothy, and the 1818 text, although coming out strongly against the institution of slavery, renders the slave trade slightly less reprehensible to good Christian souls by insisting that slaves are not yet ready to be freed (Stowe 1856: 2.362).

"Paul" (1:12–17; Titus 3:3–4)

The Pastoral Epistles can sometimes take a broad view of sin and of the possibilities for redemption (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25). In fact, one commentator even suggests that the Pastor may evoke, by describing "Paul's" sinful past, the current sins of his opponents in Ephesus in order to hold out hope for "a future act of divine mercy for the present blasphemers as well" (Bassler 1996: 44). Paul offers

himself as the perfect model of repentance and conversion, proving, in Lewis Donelson's wonderful expression, that "today's blasphemers are tomorrow's good Christians" (1986: 103). It is possible to read Titus 3:3–4 as a personal confession of Paul's as well, although more likely that text is meant as a generalized statement of sinfulness prior to conversion, "one of the most common topics in early Christian preaching" (D-C 1972: 147).

On the other hand, that "Paul" actually refers to himself as a blasphemer provides additional evidence for many scholars that 1 Timothy is not authentically Pauline (see D-C 1972: 28). Even those who hold that Paul authored these letters find this a difficult verse to deal with. Towner, for example, abruptly dispatches "blasphemer" in a meager two sentences, concluding that the term refers both to Paul's "scorn for the messianic claim about Jesus and his hostility" toward the earliest Christians (2006: 139).

Because I had acted ignorantly and in unbelief (v. 13)

Despite the difficulties of this material for modern commentators, for readers such as Augustine this passage only helps to situate "Paul," and contemporary Christians, within a complex theological and psychological context. "Paul" is in a sense like David, another great sinner, according to Augustine. The difference is that David could not claim ignorance. Nevertheless God has mercy for both David and "Paul," even if David requires the greater share (*En. ps.* 51.6, NPNF1 8.191). In Augustine's theology, however, "Paul's" former state matters not at all because "God . . . returns good for evil by His grace, which is not given according to our merits" (*De gr. et lib. arb.* 12, NPNF1 5.449). Nevertheless, the Pastor's "Paul" is not especially privileged, for all that. Indeed, in Augustine's view, young, "wholly chaste" Christian virgins have a certain advantage not available to "Paul," namely to be unable to report that their past lives ever were lives of sin (*De sancta virg.*, NPNF1 3.430). Differences and similarities between certain figures or groups and the Paul of 1 Timothy 1:13–16 have thus encouraged productive reflection upon the moral diversity of believers, even if, in general, the attitude of readers has been that God much prefers to reach out to the innocent and ignorant than to the knowing sinner.

Sinners – of whom I am the foremost (vv. 15–16)

"Paul" positions himself in the Pastorals self-consciously as an example (v. 16) or pattern for others to follow. Chrysostom resists "Paul's" own self-disclosure

as the worst of sinners: he does not "condemn his own life as impure, let not this be imagined." Rather, comparing his worth to the infinite superiority of God, "Paul" necessarily comes up short. Still, he can pattern the gift of salvation for others by thus rhetorically exaggerating his own sinfulness. And to show how the patterning works, Chrysostom produces the following imaginative analogy:

> Suppose a populous city, all whose inhabitants were wicked, some more so, and some less, but all deserving of condemnation; and let one among that multitude be more deserving of punishment than all the rest, and guilty of every kind of wickedness. If it were declared that the king was willing to pardon all, it would not be so readily believed, [unless] they were to see this most wicked wretch actually pardoned. (*Hom. 1 Tim.*; NPNF1 13.420)

John Bunyan, whose *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* recounts his own, seemingly endless temptations to blasphemy, certainly assumes, unlike Chrysostom, that if "Paul" models both the hope and inner turmoil of believers like him it is precisely because "Paul" himself was so deeply sinful prior to his conversion. John and Charles Wesley, poetically inhabiting the pattern such a sinful "Paul" provides, embrace the very generous view of salvation found in the Pastoral Epistles. One may begin with an honest, if truculent, despair:

> What have I Thy grace to move?
> Beast and devil is my name;
> God I hate, and sin I love,
> Sin I love, and sin I am.

But soon enough one recognizes that:

> Jesus is the Sinners' Friend,
> Sinners Jesus came to save.

Salvation is thus possible even for the "captain" of sinners, the blackest of souls ("1 Timothy 1:15," *Poetical Works* 1868: 2.147–48).

The Opponents: Excommunication (1:18–20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14–15)

The shipwreck imagery in v. 20, with roots in Greek philosophy (D-C 1972: 33), and the enigmatic figures of Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus in 1 and

2 Timothy, account for some of the more creative uses of these letters. Who are these characters? What have they done to their faith? What does it mean that "Paul" will turn them over to Satan? There is no hint in Acts or the authentic Pauline letters that Paul knew men named Hymenaeus and Philetus, although their focus on the resurrection in 2 Timothy 2:18 is not dissimilar from problems Paul encountered elsewhere (1 Cor. 15:12). There is an Alexander in Acts 19:33 who emerges and disappears quite suddenly in the chaos of a dispute instigated by one Demetrius, a silversmith of Ephesus; but his identity, and his relationship with the Alexander of the Pastorals, is entirely unclear. In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul commands the faithful in the community to "deliver" a man guilty of incest "unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh." Precisely what that verse means is an open question (Towner 2006: 161; Martin 1995: 168–69), but in 1 Timothy 1:20, we find similar, and similarly ambiguous, language; Hymenaeus and Alexander have been "delivered unto Satan, [so] that they may learn not to blaspheme." These men are expelled from the community, clearly. Perhaps the hope is that they will do whatever they can to return, for outside the church "the avenues of social support were severed and there was no divine protection against the cosmic forces of the devil" (Bassler 1996: 47).

Shipwreck in the faith (v. 19)

The image of a shipwrecked faith has received a variety of interesting literary treatments, even in theological contexts. In a magnificently self-conscious extended simile, Basil compares the competing rhetorical and exegetical forces in the Trinitarian controversies of his day:

> . . . to some naval battle which has arisen out of time old quarrels, and is fought by men who cherish a deadly hate against one another, of long experience in naval warfare, and eager for the fight. Look, I beg you, at the picture thus raised before your eyes. See the rival fleets rushing in dread array to the attack. . . . Fancy, if you like, the ships driven to and fro by a raging tempest, while thick darkness falls from the clouds and blackens all the [scene] so that watchwords are indistinguishable in the confusion, and all distinction between friend and foe is lost. . . . From every quarter of heaven the winds beat upon one point, where both the fleets are dashed one against the other.

This vivid conclusion to his *On The Holy Spirit* creatively imagines "whole churches" as ships with their "crews and all, dashed and shattered upon the sunken reefs of disingenuous heresy, while others of the enemies of the

Spirit of Salvation have seized the helm and made shipwreck of the faith" (30, NPNF2 8.48).

John Donne connects the Paul of 2 Corinthians 11:25 with the Pastor's Hymenaeus in a prayer which contemplates the risks of backsliding into sin. In the prayer, Donne reminds God that "Thy holy *Apostle*, *Saint Paul*, was shipwrackd *thrice*; & yet *stil saved*. Though the *rockes*, and the *sands*, and the *heights*, and the *shallowes*, the prosperitie, and the adversitie of this world do diversely threaten me, though mine owne *leakes* endanger mee," he petitions: "O *God*, let mee neuer put my selfe *aboard* with *Hymeneus*, nor *make shipwracke of faith, and a good Conscience*" (*Devotions* 23, "Prayer," 1624: 629–30).

The metaphor becomes at once more sophisticated and intimate in Kierkegaard's appropriation of it. He depicts the body as a ship and asks "whether there are any spikes that in particular can be said to hold the ship's structure together, I do not know, but this I do know – that this faith is the divine joint in a human being and that if it holds it makes him the proudest sailing ship, but if it is loosened it makes a wreck of him." The faith of which he speaks is specifically "faith in God's love" and a person who gives it up "is suffering the shipwreck of eternity's joy of living" ("Gospel of Sufferings," *Writings*: 15.269).

Hymenaeus and Alexander (v. 20)

Readers have commented upon both the theological positions, and the characters, of these men. Athanasius, conflating different Pastoral passages (v. 20 and 2 Tim. 2:17–18), considered both Hymenaeus and Alexander, along with the Sadducees, to have "scoffed at the mystery of the resurrection"; and because they dared to engage in theological speculation Athanasius casts them both as spiritual heirs of Satan (*Ep.* 2.5, NPNF2 4.511). Augustine worries about an apparent similarity between the heresy of 2 Timothy 2:18 and Jesus' proclamation in John 5:25 that "the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead . . . shall live" (KJV). However, he feels that in the Gospel Jesus, unlike Hymenaeus and Philetus, was not speaking of bodies, but minds, thus preserving the futurity of the promised physical resurrection (*Jo. ev. tr.* 19.14, NPNF1 7.128). In Erasmus' *Paraphrases*, which is vaguely sympathetic to these shadowy heretics of Ephesus, the idea behind the past resurrection is that "we are somehow reborn and given new life in the children who resemble us" (1993: 47).

Even if readers cannot say precisely what these men are guilty of, still many find quite creative ways to slander their imagined characters. Alexander is, in Theodoret's *Eranistes*, "a man of no sort of distinction at all, – no nobility of birth, no eloquence of speech, who never led a political party nor an army in

the field; who never played the man in fight, but plied from day to day his ignominious craft, and won fame for nothing but his mad violence against Saint Paul" (Prol., NPNF2 3.160; Robert Hill, in a fitting metacommentary on Theodoret's elitism, points up the inappropriateness of such a "snobbish remark about manual workers from a successor to a band of artisans assembled by a carpenter," in Theodoret 2001: 2.248). Ralph Waldo Emerson comments that contemporaries who challenged the New Testament text, specifically nineteenth century German biblical scholars, were like these opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy. "Historical speculators" undermine the faith just as surely as do heretics, according to Emerson, and they create a situation in which "every drunkard in his cups, and every voluptuary in his brothel will loll out his tongue at the resurrection from the dead . . . the unassailable virtues and the traditionary greatness of Christianity." He feared that in fact all morals would collapse as a result of their "attack," and that the resulting breach would "let in the ghastly reality of things" (*Sermons*, 1989: 4.259–60). In the sermon of another nineteenth century American minister, Alexander and Hymenaeus are also a corrupting social force. However, James Axley, an itinerant Methodist frontier preacher, rugged and perhaps illiterate, couldn't have been more different from Emerson. In his reading of, or rather midrash on, the relevant verses, Axley has "Paul" convince the community to beat its brandy stills into "bells and stew-kettles." Alexander, one of the foremost still-makers, joins "Paul" by becoming a "class-leader" in this "new society," and everything proceeds wonderfully until the next peach harvest, when there are so many peaches, of such good quality, that Alexander begins building stills again, and the townsfolk renew their brewing and drinking of brandy. When "Paul" finds out he expels both Alexander and his partner Hymenaeus. The latter pair has the last laugh, however, because they immediately "flew off the handle and joined the [New Light] Schismatics" (in Finley 1854: 238–40).

The character of Alexander in particular is parodied and impugned in Thomas Hardy's Alec d'Urberville, who seems in fact to have gotten his first name from the Pastor's Alexander. After seducing and ruining Tess, d'Urberville finds religion and becomes an itinerant minister, only to abandon his faith as soon as Tess reenters his life later in the novel. He jokingly invokes the names of Hymenaeus and Alexander to explain his own inconstancy (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1998: 319).

Whom I have turned over to Satan (v. 20)

Whoever these men are, and whatever they have done, "Paul" reminds Timothy that he has "turned" them "over to Satan, so that they may learn not to

blaspheme" (v. 20). Augustine, ventriloquizing Pelagius, asks if such a disciplinary procedure could really work; consigning sinners to Satan to cure them of sin seems rather like fighting fire with fire. In response Augustine uses analogies from medicine to the effect that poisons are sometimes used to heal poisonings, that the "heats of fevers are sometimes subdued by certain medicinal warmths" and that therefore it is not impossible that exposure to Satan may be spiritually salutary (*De nat. et grat.* 32, NPNF1 5.132).

But perhaps the more important question asks whether or not it is legitimate to consider a relationship between God and Satan for the maintenance of a spiritually healthy community. Using Job's testing by Satan as a paradigmatic case, both Tertullian (*De fuga* 9.2, ANF 4.117) and Chrysostom (*Hom. 1 Tim.*, NPNF1 13.425) argue that the devil in fact does operate at the behest of God for the sake of the elect. The principle, in Tertullian's formulation, is that "righteousness may be perfected in injustice, as strength is perfected in weakness"; and the devil, since he serves at the pleasure not only of God but also of God's servants, is indeed weak, having no power he can use on his own (*De fuga* 9.2, ANF 4.117–18).