

2Thess 2:2 and 3:17: Some Evidence Against the Non-Pauline Authorship Hypothesis

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1. Introduction: The Authorship of 2 Thessalonians

The debate about the authenticity of 2Thess has a long history. Did the apostle Paul write this letter or is it the work of a pseudonymous author? Today, 2Thess seems to be, after the Pastoral Epistles and probably Ephesians, the most doubted letter in the *corpus Paulinum*.² In the last decades a growing number of exegetes have advocated non-Pauline authorship and declared 2Thess to be an inauthentic

¹ The author acknowledges with gratitude his first teacher of the biblical languages and New Testament exegesis, truly a model of both Christian character and scholarly acumen. — This essay is written in English since the initial research was undertaken in an English speaking context.

² Many scholars would also consider Colossians a pseudo-Pauline writing, yet, overall, the Pauline authorship of this letter seems less disputed than 2Thess. Cf. generally on the so-called Pauline antilegomena Mark HARDING, "Disputed and Undisputed Letters of Paul", in: *The Pauline Canon*, ed. by Stanley E. PORTER, Pauline Studies 1, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 156–164; detailed overviews of research on the Thessalonian correspondence can be found in Wolfgang TRILLING, "Die beiden Briefe des Apostels Paulus an die Thessalonicher: Eine Forschungsübersicht", in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. by Hildegard TEMPORINI and Wolfgang HAASE, vol. II 25.4, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987, 3365–3403; Earl J. RICHARD, "Contemporary Research of 1 (& 2) Thessalonians", in: *BTB* 20 (1990), 107–115; Jeffrey WEIMA and Stanley E. PORTER, eds., *An Annotated Bibliography of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, NTTs 26, Leiden: Brill, 1998; Stefan SCHNEIDER, "Früher Paulus mit Spätfolgen: Eine Bilanz zur neuesten Thessalonicherbrief-Forschung", in: *BibRev* 103 (2007), 267–284.

pseudepigraphon.³ At least within German scholarship, the non-Pauline authorship hypothesis has probably become the majority view.⁴ However, more than a few scholars – especially in the English speaking world – still do not find the case against the authenticity of 2Thess persuasive and thus espouse with noteworthy arguments a Pauline authorship of both canonical letters addressed to Thessalonica.⁵ Indeed, a careful look at a broad variety of contributions to the

- ³ Especially the papers of the 1988 meeting of the *Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense*, published in Raymond F. COLLINS, ed., *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, BETL 78, Leuven: Peeters, 1990, provided a clear indication that an increasing number of authors had begun to opt for pseudonymity. Cf. also earlier John A. BAILEY, "Who Wrote II Thessalonians", in: *NTS* 25 (1978/1979), 131–145; as well as, e.g., Frank W. HUGHES, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, JSNTSup 30, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989, 75–95; Marteen J.J. MENKEN, *2 Thessalonians*, New Testament Readings, London: Routledge, 1994; Earl J. RICHARD, *First and Second Thessalonians*, SP 11, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995; Victor P. FURNISH, *1 Thessalonians*, *2 Thessalonians*, ANTC, Nashville: Abingdon, 2007; Linda McKINNISS BRIDGES, *1&2 Thessalonians*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary, Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2008; HARDING, "Disputed and Undisputed Letters of Paul", 159.
- ⁴ Cf., e.g., Wolfgang TRILLING, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief*, ETHS 27, Leipzig: St. Benno, 1972; Andreas LINDEMANN, "Zum Abfassungszweck des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes", in: *ZNW* 68 (1977), 34–47; Willi MARXSEN, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982, 15–41, 107–117; Peter MÜLLER, *Anfänge der Paulusschule: Dargestellt am zweiten Thessalonicherbrief und am Kolosserbrief*, AthANT 74, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1988, 5–13; Franz LAUB, "Paulinische Autorität in nachpaulinischer Zeit", in: *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, ed. by Raymond F. COLLINS, BETL 78, Leuven: Peeters, 1990, 403–417; Regina BÖRSCHTEL, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität: Paulus und die Gemeinde von Thessalonich in ihrer hellenistisch-römischen Umwelt*, BBB 128, Berlin: Philo, 2001, 35–63; Paul METZGER, *Katechon: II Thess 2,1–12 im Horizont apokalyptischen Denkens*, BZNW 135, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005, 51–91; Udo SCHNELLE, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 6th ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007, 357–367; Stefan SCHREIBER, "Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief", in: *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, ed. by Martin EBNER and Stefan SCHREIBER, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008, 441–445.
- ⁵ E.g., Ernest BEST, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Harper's New Testament Commentary, New York: Harper, 1972, 50–58; Robert JEWETT, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety*, Foundations and Facets: New Testament, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986, 3–18 ("probably Pauline"); Charles A. WANAMAKER, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 17–28; Abraham J. MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AncB 32B, New York: Doubleday, 2000, 350–375; Donald A. CARSON and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 536–542; Gordan D. FEE, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009, 237–341; cf. Paul METZGER, "Eine apokalyptische Paulusschule? Zum Ort des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes", in: *Apokalyptik als Herausforderung neutestamentlicher Theologie*, ed. by Michael BECKER and Markus ÖHLER, WUNT II/214, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, 145–166, 145 n1: "Insbesondere in der englischsprachigen Forschung überwiegt gegenwärtig die Tendenz, den 2 Thess als einen authentischen Paulusbrief anzusehen"; among the German speaking scholars who opt for Pauline authorship are Peter STUHLMACHER, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. 2: Von der Paulusschule bis zur Johannesoffenbarung. Der Kanon und seine Auslegung, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999, 54–59; Karl-Wilhelm NIEBUHR, *Grundinformation*

debate clearly shows that there is still no consensus in sight on the question of the authorship of 2Thess.⁶ Although it has to be admitted that the hypothesis of pseudonymity has gained significant support, the arguments against Pauline authorship have failed to convince a large number of New Testament scholars, so that, especially in light of the external testimony, it seems questionable to shift the burden of proof to the proponents of Pauline authorship as has been repeatedly suggested.⁷

A review of the history of research reveals that four main lines of reasoning have been put forward as serious arguments in favor of non-Pauline authorship. Probably the most influential argument historically is based on the assumption that the eschatological teachings of 1Thess and 2Thess are contradictory and beyond all means of reconciliation.⁸ This focus on the *assumed eschatological differences* between the two letters has then been supplemented by the claim that the theological views of 2Thess constitute a later development of Pauline theology that is different from the teaching manifest in the undisputed Pauline letters.⁹ Against this, proponents of Pauline authorship have argued that it has

Neues Testament: Eine bibelkundlich-theologische Einführung, 3rd ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, 274-276; now also Fritz W. RÖCKER, *Belial und Katechon: Eine Untersuchung zu 2Thess 2,1-12 und 1Thess 4,13-5,11*, WUNT II/262, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009, 522-523.

⁶ Cf., e.g., Eve-Marie BECKER, "Ὁς δὲ ἡμῶν in 2 Thess 2.2 als Hinweis auf einen verlorenen Brief", in: *NTS* 55 (2009), 55-72, 58: "(...) wird die Frage nach der Authentizität des 2Thess in der jüngeren und jüngsten Forschung durchaus kontrovers diskutiert." Also Enno E. POPKES, "Die Bedeutung des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes für das Verständnis paulinischer und deutero-paulinischer Eschatologie", in: *BZ* 48 (2004), 39-64, 40: "Auch wenn seit geraumer Zeit mehrheitlich für den pseudepigraphischen (...) Charakter des 2 Thess plädiert wird, kann nicht von einem Forschungskonsens gesprochen werden".

⁷ E.g., by Glenn S. HOLLAND, "A Letter Supposedly from Us: A Contribution to the Discussion About the Authorship of 2 Thessalonians", in: *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, ed. by Raymond F. COLLINS, BETHL 78, Leuven: Peeters, 1990, 394-402, 395: "Pauline authorship [of 2Thess] can no longer be anything other than a hypothesis whose validity is subject to demonstration, if not to actual proof." In addition to the scholars mentioned above, see also the long list of proponents of authenticity in RÖCKER, *Belial und Katechon*, 228-229 n31; for a more detailed summary of external evidence, see Gene L. GREEN, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, Leicester: Apollos, 2002, 59-60.

⁸ E.g., MÜLLER, *Anfänge der Paulusschule: Dargestellt am zweiten Thessalonicherbrief und am Kolosserbrief*, 20-67; also BÖRSCHEL, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität*, 42-44; LAUB, "Paulinische Autorität in nachpaulinischer Zeit", 405-407; SCHNELLE, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 358; cf. also Gerhard KRODEL, "2Thessalonians", in: *The Deutero-Pauline Letters: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus*, ed. by J. Paul SAMPLEY and Gerhard KRODEL, *Proclamation Commentaries*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993, 39-58, 56, who pointedly considered the Pauline origin of the eschatological passages and therefore the letter as a whole as "historically most improbable, as improbable as it would be to argue that Luther sold indulgences in Wittenberg on Sunday morning and preached on Romans in the afternoon."

⁹ E.g., A.G. VAN AARDE, "The Struggle against Heresy in the Thessalonian Correspondence", in: *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, ed. by Raymond F. COLLINS, BETHL 78, Leuven: Peeters, 1990,

thus far not been convincingly shown that any of the eschatological (or more generally: theological) features of 2Thess are contradictory to what would be considered a genuine Pauline theology.¹⁰ Further, mere differences in emphasis can be observed in other undisputed Pauline letters as well and are not necessarily indicative of a different author.

A second argument that bears significant weight in the case for deuteropauline authorship tries to account for the *literary and structural affinities* between the two Thessalonian letters by assuming a literary dependency of 2Thess on 1Thess. It is then argued that only non-Pauline authorship of 2Thess can reasonably explain such close resemblance. According to this view an imitator must have copied Pauline elements in order to authoritatively convey his teaching.¹¹ However, it has been noticed that, on the one hand, the degree of literary affinity is not as high as is often supposed, and on the other hand, there are several significant differences between the two letters, some of which are striking, e.g., the omission in 2Thess of the more personal references of 1Thess.¹² Thus, it could be argued that the interplay between structural and literary similarities and dissimilarities raises substantial questions as to the veracity of the hypothesis that 2Thess is the work of a pseudonymous forger. One would rather expect him to follow his *Vorlage* more closely. It is part of the main thesis of this essay that a plausible situational and circumstantial background can be provided for 2Thess

403-417, 422: "2 Thessalonians does not (...) reflect Paul's theology." Cf. also TRILLING, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief*, 109-132; MÜLLER, *Anfänge der Paulusschule: Dargestellt am zweiten Thessalonicherbrief und am Kolosserbrief*, 7-10; BÖRSCHEL, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität*, 49-60; and lately METZGER, "Eine apokalyptische Paulusschule?", 151-158. Usually, three theological discrepancies are especially mentioned, namely, a different view on apostolic authority, Christology, and soteriology. Cf. the recent discussion of the eschatology of 2Thess from a non-Pauline authorship perspective in: POPKES, "Die Bedeutung des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes".

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., MENKEN, *2 Thessalonians*, 29-30, who, himself an advocate of inauthenticity, concedes that "Paul is able to express his ideas in various ways, dependent upon the situation of his audiences and of himself" and later adds that "as far as eschatology is concerned, it is possible that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians."

¹¹ Cf., e.g., early William WREDE, *Die Echtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs*, TU 24.2, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903, 3-36; TRILLING, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief*, 67-108; BAILEY, "Who Wrote II Thessalonians", 132-136; MARXSEN, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 15, regards this as the "Schlüsselproblem" and for Menken: 2 Thessalonians, 40, "literary dependence is the decisive argument against Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians."

¹² Structural divergences have been especially pointed out by BEST, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 53; as well as MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 356-359. That the intertextuality between 1Thess and 2Thess (both similarities and differences) is indeed evidence for the pseudonymity of 2Thess is argued by J. Michael GILCHRIST, "Intertextuality and the Pseudonymity of 2 Thessalonians", in: *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice*, ed. by Thomas L. BRODIE, Dennis R. MACDONALD, and Stanley E. PORTER, New Testament Monographs 16, Sheffield: Phoenix, 2006, 152-175.

situational background that accounts both for the relation of 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 as well as the characteristics of the whole letter is a crucial desideratum not only for proponents of inauthenticity, but also for those who remain convinced that Paul wrote 2Thess. It is the purpose of this essay to re-examine the plausibility of the proposed interpretations of 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 by discussing the interpretive issues raised by each verse (2). This will enable us to determine whether 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 lend credence to the view that 2Thess must be regarded as pseudonymous. Building on our argument that 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 do not in fact plausibly lend themselves to a post-Pauline scenario, we will then briefly propose a situational background that can reasonably account for 2Thess as an authentic writing. We will also take into account some of the above mentioned characteristic features often adduced as evidence against Pauline authorship (3).

2. The Interpretation of 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17

2.1. Interpretive Issues in 2Thess 2:2

In 2Thess 2:2 the author exhorts his readers “not to be easily [or quickly] shaken or disturbed by any kind of spirit [usually considered as prophetic utterances] or word or letter purportedly from us [δι’ ἐπιτολῆς ὡς δι’ ἡμῶν], to the effect that the Day of the Lord is already here [ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου].” The actual content of the false teaching is disputed. As opposed to the translation employed here, several scholars interpret the meaning of the phrase ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου as “the Day of the Lord is imminent.”¹⁷ However, the perfect tense verb ἐνέστηκεν clearly implies a completed past action with results for the present time (see Rom 8:38 and 1Cor 3:22, where ἐνίστημι in the perfect tense is used to describe a present state in contrast to the future [also 1Cor 7:26; Gal 1:4; Hebr 9:9]). Further, it is highly unlikely that the author of 2Thess – whether Paul or a pseudonymous writer – would designate an idea as heresy “to which he himself technically subscribed (a concept of imminence is evident in 1:5-10 and 2:1 [cf. also 2:7]).”¹⁸

¹⁷ LINDEMANN, “Zum Abfassungszweck des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes”, 41; TRILLING, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher*, 79; and now also (with extensive discussion) RÖCKER, *Beitrag und Katechon*, 346-361. Yet, the majority of exegetes is still of the opinion that ἐνέστηκεν has to be translated as “is already here/has come” (cf. NIV, ESV, NET, NRSV, NASB, also the German translations of LUT, ELB, EÜ, NGÜ, et al.)

¹⁸ Colin R. NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 126, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 117.

While there is considerable debate about whether the phrase $\acute{\omega}\varsigma \delta\iota' \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu$ applies to all three possible sources of this false teaching, or only to the latter two, it definitely applies to the last source mentioned: the letter.¹⁹ The basic issue in this verse has to do with the ambiguity of the author's reference to this letter: either the letter in question is a forgery that was wrongly attributed to Paul or the letter actually did come from Paul himself.²⁰

Many proponents of inauthenticity (as well as several proponents of Pauline authorship²¹) have held to the latter view, arguing that the author is referring to 1Thess that had been wrongly interpreted by the Thessalonian believers (probably due to a deceptive misrepresentation by Pauline opponents [cf. v.3]). According to this interpretation, the author would make the point that what his readers now (tend to) believe about the Day of the Lord has been wrongly derived from Paul's earlier writing (and/or from his oral teaching). This contention rests on three main arguments. First, on the assumption that Paul wrote 2Thess, it is said to be highly unlikely that forged letters occurred at this early stage of his ministry. Second, it is argued that if Paul really dealt with a forged letter one would expect a more passionate reaction. And third, it is suggested that several passages in 1Thess (especially 4:13–5:11) would reasonably lend themselves to a misunderstanding in the sense that the Day of the Lord had already come.

¹⁹ Cf. MENKEN, *2 Thessalonians*, 33; A quick sample of authors shows that the answer to this exegetical question does not necessarily influence the argument on authorship, so that we can continue without a detailed discussion of this issue. Moreover, given that any answer to this question would remain somewhat uncertain, it generally seems wise not to build a whole argument on this decision. The different views together with their proponents are laid out in Richard C. BLIGHT, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1989, 232–233. RÖCKER, *Belial und Katechon*, 341, argues that, in any case, the last mentioned letter has probably been the most significant element for the bewilderment of the Thessalonian church.

²⁰ From a non-Pauline authorship perspective, Hanna ROOSE, "A Letter as by Us: Intentional Ambiguity in 2 Thessalonians 2.2", in: *JNT* 29 (2006), 107–124, 122, has argued that the ambiguity in 2Thess 2:2 is intentional: "The [pseudonymous] author, at one and the same time, through his deliberately ambiguous wording, allows his letter both to be taken as pointing back to 1 Thessalonians – thus making it relevant as an attempt to correct the (mis)interpretation of his letter – and to carry the implication that it is, in fact, older than 1 Thessalonians – thus vouching for the letter's (claimed) authenticity." Yet, while pseudepigraphical writings might well contain some ambiguity (cf. our brief discussion of characteristics of epistolary pseudepigraphy under 3. below), it is hard to find plausibility in the claim that the pseudonymous author of 2Thess would try to make two entirely opposing points in one statement.

²¹ Among those who argue that Paul himself reacted to a wrong interpretation of 1Thess are JEWETT, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 181–191; MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 355–356; I. HOWARD MARSHALL, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, NCB, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, 187; Gordon D. FEE, *God's Empowering Presence*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, 72–74; FEE, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 275–276; RÖCKER, *Belial und Katechon*, 346–361. For proponents of inauthenticity who hold to this interpretation see footnote 15.

In direct answer to these claims, we offer the following responses: First, although the argument that we have no evidence of forged Pauline letters at an early stage of his ministry has some force, this does not necessarily exclude the possibility that forgeries could have occurred. Rather, we would suggest that for opponents who wanted to establish their teaching with authority (at a time when Paul was already absent from Thessalonica), one obvious course of action would be to forge a letter of the apostle. Second, the open and unspecific way in which 2:2 is phrased lends credibility to the reasoning that Paul might not have known with any certainty the source of those false contentions. The objection that "if Paul had thought they [i.e., the Thessalonians] had been deceived in this way he would have made his denunciation of the forgery much clearer"²² does not consider the possibility that Paul might have simply suspected that only an authoritative source (such as a letter in his name) could have triggered those false views among the Thessalonian believers. In that case, he was "hardly going to push his speculation any further."²³ Third, we do not believe it to be realistic that 1Thess could be easily misunderstood or misconstrued to support the claim that the Day of the Lord had already come. Rather, 1Thess is clearly future-oriented and emphasizes that the believers will *not* be taken by surprise by God's end-time action (1Thess 5:1-11). More than that, it *reassures* them of their participation in the salvific events surrounding the Day of the Lord (1Thess 4:17) and at the same time links the coming of the Day of the Lord to events that the Thessalonian believers could hardly have missed (1Thess 1:10; 4:16).

Obviously, the link between the claim mentioned in 2Thess 2:2c and a misunderstood 1Thess would be more plausible if ἐνέστυχεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου should be understood as "the Day of the Lord is imminent."²⁴ Yet, we already pointed out the difficulties with this understanding. The concession of Robert Jewett, who himself argues that 2Thess 2:2 refers to a misunderstanding of 1Thess, further reveals the weakness of the entire argument. After working through several passages susceptible to misunderstanding in 1Thess, he states: "None of them, in my opinion, is sufficiently plausible that a theory of misunderstanding could be based on evidence within 1 Thessalonians alone."²⁵ It should be noted in this respect that there is an important difference between (a) deriving a false teaching

²² BEST, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 278. While Best is an advocate of Pauline authorship, several proponents of pseudonymity have made the same point, e.g., BÖRSCHTEL, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität*, 45, and (probably as one of the first) Paul W. SCHMIEDEL, "Die Briefe an die Thessalonicher", in: *Die Briefe an die Thessalonicher, Korinther, Galater, Römer, Philipper*, ed. by Paul W. SCHMIEDEL and Richard A. LIPSIUS, Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1893, 37.

²³ NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 210; cf. also FEE, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 275.

²⁴ Cf., e.g., the well argued case of RÖCKER, *Belial und Katechon*, 346-361.

²⁵ JEWETT, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 191.

from a misconstrued or misunderstood 1Thess and (b) believing a teaching that is based on an allegedly authoritative source (e.g., a forged letter) without giving enough consideration to the actual message of 1Thess (as our own interpretation below would imply).

It seems then that a reference to a forged letter still is the most natural interpretation. The preposition ὡς with genitive was used when ancient authors referred to writings that were not written by those who pretended to have composed them.²⁶ Additionally, it seems that 2Thess 2:2 is an intentional, contrastive parallel to 2:15, which would imply that the readers should reject the teaching that came from an inauthentic letter (δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν [2:2]), but they should embrace the traditions that they had been taught by an authentic letter (δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [2:15]). Further, one wonders why the author of 2Thess did not refer more clearly to the misunderstood teaching of 1Thess in order to show that these interpretations are mistaken. The fact that no further trace of any misconception of an earlier Pauline letter can be found in 2Thess (but see, e.g., 1Cor 5:9-10!) seems to be a major obstacle for such a hypothesis.

We may thus conclude that attributing the false claim in 2Thess 2:2 to a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of 1Thess is neither an impossible interpretation nor a very likely one. Yet, even if we assume that this interpretation is correct, this would still not be a sufficient argument for non-Pauline authorship of 2Thess. For proponents of this view have failed to convincingly show why it would be more probable that a pseudonymous author after Paul's lifetime had to deal with such misunderstandings than Paul himself.

The German scholar Andreas Lindemann is in general agreement with our assessment that 2Thess 2:2 probably refers to a forged letter. Nevertheless, he still identifies the letter mentioned in this verse with 1Thess, arguing that 2Thess was designed to discredit 1Thess as a forgery and to replace what the author of 2Thess regarded as the heretical over-imminentist expectation of 1Thess, which was being advocated by his opponents.²⁷ However, if the teaching of the oppo-

²⁶ Walter BAUER and Frederick W. DANKER, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG)*, 3rd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 1105, takes the phrase δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν as "a letter (falsely) alleged to be from us" and refers to similar statements by Diodorus Siculus 33.5.5 and Diogenes Laertius 10.3. Our interpretation is further supported by Ernst G. HOFFMANN and Heinrich von SIEBENTHAL, *Griechische Grammatik zum Neuen Testament*, 2nd ed., Riehen: Immanuel, 1990, 446.

²⁷ LINDEMANN, "Zum Abfassungszweck des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes", 45, revives the argument already made by Hilgenfeld [1875] and Holtzmann [1901] and states his case as follows: "Der Vf des 2 Thess hatte nicht die Absicht, seinen 'Brief' ergänzend oder korrigierend neben 1 Thess zu stellen; er wollte diesen vielmehr wegen seiner 'gefährlichen' Eschatologie ersetzen. So übernahm er zwar das Formular, teilweise auch die Gliederung und einzelne Begriffe und Wendungen des 1 Thess, ersetzte jedoch die ihm anstößige Eschatologie vollständig." MARXSEN,

nents was not that the Day of the Lord is imminent, but that it had actually come, then the reference to 1Thess becomes unlikely. Moreover, this hypothesis faces the insurmountable problem that 2Thess 2:15 (and possibly 3:14) refers to an earlier, genuine epistle; almost certainly a reference to 1Thess.²⁸ To argue, as Lindemann has done, that 2:15 refers to the letter at hand (i.e., 2Thess) is almost impossible since the verb ἐδιδάχθητε is past tense and every reader would have automatically interpreted this as a reference to the already established first Thessalonian letter.²⁹

It is thus apparent that an interpretation of 2Thess 2:2 under the assumption of non-Pauline authorship creates more difficulties than it solves. Although we have no evidence elsewhere that Paul himself reckoned with the existence of forged letters, this remains the most plausible explanation both in light of 2Thess 2:2 and the whole epistolary context. This is further confirmed by 2Thess 3:17, to which we now turn.

2.2. Interpretive Issues in 2Thess 3:17

A second epistolary comment that has proved to be relevant in the authenticity debate is 2Thess 3:17. In the postscript of the letter the author adds the remark: "The greeting [is] in my own hand, Paul [τῆ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου], which is a sign [σημεῖον] in every letter, this is how I write." This reflects a common practice in Greco-Roman letter-writing, where the author would add an autographed closing to a letter written by a secretary. Similar postscripts can be found in 1Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; and Phlm 19.³⁰

Based on the assumption that 2Thess 2:2 counters a misinterpretation of 1Thess, it has been proposed that 2Thess 3:17 is meant to merely authorize the content

Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief, 33, takes a similar position: "Auf diese Weise entsteht dann ein Schreiben, in dem unmittelbar an das Wirken des Paulus in Thessalonich angeknüpft werden kann. Es entsteht also ein neuer erster Thessalonicherbrief. Dieser aber entsteht am 1. Thess. vorbei. (...) Dadurch nun (...) sollen die Leser, wenn sie den 2. Thess. lesen, zur Annahme geführt werden: Dieses Schreiben ist der '1. Thess.'" Similarly CRÜSEMANN, *Die pseudepigraphen Briefe an die Gemeinde in Thessaloniki*, 243. Note that proponents of this view must also presuppose that those who represent the claim of 2Thess 2:2c twist (or interpret) the content in 1Thess in favor of their own (false) teachings. Therefore, several of the criticisms raised above against the likelihood of such an assumption apply here as well.

²⁸ So also BECKER, "Ὡς δι' ἡμῶν in 2 Thess 2.2", 67, et al.

²⁹ Theodor ZAHN, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1953, 1:247, further criticized early proponents of this view by arguing that "to cast suspicion upon a recognised work of Paul's was the worst possible way in which to introduce a forgery which had to establish its own claims."

³⁰ Cf. Chris KEITH, "In My Own Hand': Grapho-Literacy and the Apostle Paul", in: *Bib 89* (2008), 39–58.

of 2Thess as the legitimate interpretation of 1Thess.³¹ However, there is now a general consensus that such postscripts have to be understood as “ancient indicator[s] of authenticity (or simulated authenticity in pseudonymous letters).”³² Moreover, any interpretation of 3:17 as simply an authorization of the apostolic content cannot reasonably explain the relevance of the relative clause, τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου would have been sufficient.³³

Yet, it is exactly this unique insistence on the identifying and authenticating purpose of the handwriting (ὃ ἐστὶν σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ· οὕτως γράφω) that has generated suspicion against Pauline authorship.³⁴ Several proponents of the inauthenticity of 2Thess have claimed 3:17 as support for their contention that 2Thess was meant to replace 1Thess (see discussion on 2Thess 2:2 above). According to their view, the pseudonymous author – in his intention to cast doubt upon the authenticity of 1Thess – employs a sign of genuineness (“Echtheitszeichen”) and assures his readers that all Pauline letters bear such a sign which

³¹ So, e.g., BÖRSCHTEL, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität*, 48-49 (who calls 3:17 a “Amtssiegel”); at least in his earlier work TRILLING, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief*, 106-107; and MARSHALL, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 232-233 (from a Pauline authorship perspective). Cf. also Franz SCHNIDER and Werner STENGER, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular*, NTTS 11, Leiden: Brill, 1987, 160-164, who understand postscripts in the author’s own hand in a juridical sense as an enforcement of the message of the letter.

³² E. Randolph RICHARDS, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, WUNT II/42, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991, 175; now also KEITH, “In My Own Hand”, 44-45. BDAG, 920, takes σημεῖον as a “mark of genuineness,” and a case can be made that σημεῖον corresponds here to the term σύμβολον which was frequently used for a handwritten addition to a letter as proof of authenticity (cf. Ps.-Pla., Ep. 13, 360a; Karl H. RENGSTORF, “σημεῖον κτλ...”, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard KITTEL and Gerhard FRIEDRICH, vol. VII, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 200-269, 259). Even Trilling himself admits in his later commentary that he cannot maintain his earlier interpretation of 2Thess 3:17 as a “Legitimierungszeichen”, see TRILLING, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher*, 158 n61.

³³ Similarly, NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 177. RICHARDS, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 175, even argues that postscripts as merely signs of authority were not necessary at all “since summary postscripts were not used in private letters, the letter’s content was assumed the author’s by nature of the author’s accountability. He checked the draft.”

³⁴ E.g., FURNISH, *1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians*, 182-83, here 183: “Paradoxically, this emphatic assertion of Pauline authorship may itself be cited as one reason to question the letter’s authenticity.” Similarly Outi LEPPÄ, “2 Thessalonians among the Pauline Letters: Tracing the Literary Links Between 2 Thessalonians and other Pauline Epistles”, in: *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice*, ed. by Thomas L. BRODIE, Dennis R. MACDONALD, and Stanley E. PORTER, New Testament Monographs 16, Sheffield: Phoenix, 2006, 176-195, 192. Pace Stanley E. PORTER, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 341, who writes: “(...) one of the genuine idiosyncracies of New Testament scholarship is that those who deny that Paul wrote this letter use this greeting as their ultimate evidence to condemn it as *not* from him.” [italics his].

would enable them to distinguish between authentic letters and forged letters.³⁵ Consequently, it is argued, since 1Thess does not contain such a handwritten sign, a comparison between the letters would ultimately reveal the inauthenticity of 1Thess and establish 2Thess as a genuine Pauline epistle. Yet, apart from the difficulties of this hypothesis mentioned earlier, we do not find these implications drawn from 2Thess 3:17 significantly compelling. The problem with this view is that it rests on the questionable presupposition that 1Thess lacked a postscript in Paul's own hand. However, Maarten Menken, in many respects a remarkably balanced proponent of inauthenticity, rightly concedes that in light of Paul's frequent usage of a secretary and in light of the common practice of autographed letter endings "it is quite probable that he added some words in his own handwriting to all his letters, not only to those in which he drew special attention to his own hand."³⁶ If, now, the Thessalonians were familiar with Paul's handwriting from the greeting in 1Thess 5:25-28 (or the latter part of it), then Paul's emphatic reference to an authenticating sign could be most plausibly explained as an indirect refutation of a forged letter that might have given rise to the eschatological misconceptions in Thessalonica. This would cohere to the interpretation of 2Thess 2:2 that has been advocated above.

Wolfgang Trilling has argued that the remark ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ was the fatal mistake of the pseudonymous writer that reveals his post-Pauline environment.³⁷ The remark would presuppose knowledge about several Pauline epistles, which is impossible if we consider 1Thess as the first letter written in the *corpus Paulinum*. This argument, however, wrongly assumes that all Pauline letters are preserved, which is certainly not the case and it is entirely possible that Paul had written letters prior to 1Thess. If the South Galatian theory is adopted, Galatians would even be one of them, and 2Thess 3:17 would tie in perfectly with Gal 6:11. John C. Hurd has further countered this type of argument by insisting that 3:17 has to be considered as a rather bold statement if attributed to a post-Pauline author.³⁸ If he did not actually know Paul's handwriting, he would have had to fear that one of the early congregations could compare it with a preserved original. But, even more importantly, how could he have been absolutely sure that every Pauline letter ended with a handwritten greeting? He would have had to reckon with the fact that there might have been exceptions that would disprove his claim.

³⁵ E.g., LINDEMANN, "Zum Abfassungszweck des Zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes", 39-40; MARXSEN, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 103-106; LAUB, "Paulinische Autorität in nachpaulinischer Zeit", 409; CRÜSEMANN, *Die pseudepigraphen Briefe an die Gemeinde in Thessaloniki*, 243.

³⁶ MENKEN, *2 Thessalonians*, 36.

³⁷ TRILLING, *Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher*, 159; similarly MARXSEN, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 104-105.

³⁸ John C. HURD, *The Earlier Letters of Paul — and Other Studies*, New York: Lang, 1998, 159.

Finally, it is not convincing to argue, as has frequently been done, that the emphasis on authenticity in 3:17 is far too heavy to have originated with Paul, so that one has to suspect that it was the product of a pseudonymous author who wanted to establish the authenticity of his work by all possible means.³⁹ It seems intrinsically inconsistent to expect a more passionate reaction had Paul himself suspected a forgery (see on 2Thess 2:2 above), while at the same time saying that 3:17 is too emphatic to be considered a Pauline attempt to protect the Thessalonians from false teaching. Against this, we would insist that 3:17 is exactly what one would expect in a situation where Paul had reason to presume that a forged letter in his name had found its way into the Thessalonian community.⁴⁰ It is thus reasonable to conclude that a careful interpretation of 2Thess 3:17 (especially in relationship to 2:2) by no means demands (or even urges) the assumption of non-Pauline authorship. As we shall see, a general *Sitz im Leben* in Paul's ministry can be plausibly articulated from these epistolary comments, while none of the proposed interpretations are sufficiently compelling to bolster support for the claim of inauthenticity.

The situational background for a pseudonymous 2Thess proposed by Frank W. Hughes deserves at least some brief comments.⁴¹ Hughes questions our interpretation of 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 and suggests from a rhetorical perspective that "even if Paul was convinced of the existence of a forgery – which as far as anyone knows was unheard of during the life of Paul – it would be to Paul's rhetorical disadvantage to suggest that false Pauline letters were in circulation, because this would bring the authority of all other genuine Pauline letters into question."⁴² He then goes on to argue that this is exactly the background of 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17: the (pseudonymous) author of 2Thess is trying to cast doubt on other interpretations of Pauline Christianity. According to Hughes, the "false letters" mentioned in 2Thess 2:2 are most likely two other deutero-Pauline documents, namely Ephesians and Colossians, which teach a realized eschatology that the author of 2Thess did not consider as truly Pauline. 2Thess 3:17 should thus be understood as an attempt to authenticate the eschatology of one strand of Paulinism against other forces in the post-Pauline church. Two criticisms have to suffice at this point: (1) It seems psychologically mistaken to suppose that Paul would have ignored the existence of forgeries for rhetorical reasons. The forgery

³⁹ So, e.g., (with some reservations) MENKEN, *2 Thessalonians*, 35-36, and COLLINS, *Letters that Paul Did Not Write*, 223, who states that "the modern reader [!] has the impression that the author of 2 Thessalonians (...) protests too much." Similarly, Christina M. KREINECKER, *2 Thessaloniker*, Papyrologische Kommentare Zum Neuen Testament 3, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010, 218-219.

⁴⁰ NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 178.

⁴¹ HUGHES, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians*, esp. 56-57, 66-67, 75-96.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 120n41.

and not Paul's reaction to it has to be considered as a threat for his authority. (2) As Marshall has rightly noted, it is simply impossible to argue that the claim "the Day of the Lord has come" (2Thess 2:2) represents the outlook of Ephesians or Colossians and "it is incredible that anybody misunderstood Ephesians and Colossians so crassly as the author of 2 Thessalonians is said to have done."⁴³

Lately, Eve-Marie Becker has made a suggestion similar to that of Hughes. She argues that the pseudonymous 2Thess dealt with a wrong interpretation of Pauline teaching that, according to 2Thess 2:2, originated, among other sources, in a probably pseudo-Pauline letter.⁴⁴ She rightly maintained that the phrase $\delta\iota' \epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\eta\varsigma \omega\varsigma \delta\iota' \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu$ in 2Thess 2:2 does not refer to 1Thess. However, it is hard to see why not Paul himself could have reacted against such misinterpretations. Becker's line of reasoning itself does not seem to necessarily require the assumption of pseudonymity for 2Thess. For her only explicit argument against Pauline authorship is the supposedly all too vehement insistence regarding the apostolic autograph in 2Thess 3:17, an argument whose weaknesses were pointed out already.

3. The Situational Background of 2 Thessalonians: A Proposal

The remarkable difficulties one encounters when trying to fit 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 (as well as 2:15) into a post-Pauline *Sitz im Leben* ultimately point to a more general problem that thoroughly undermines the credibility of the non-Pauline authorship hypothesis in its entirety: Proponents of inauthenticity have failed to provide a historically probable occasion for a pseudonymous 2Thess written after the death of Paul.⁴⁵ While a reasonable situational background for 2Thess can be found at an early stage in Paul's ministry (as we will suggest in this section), it is far more difficult to imagine a post-Pauline setting in which such a pseudonymous writing with these particular characteristics could have established itself as a genuine work of the apostle. Numerous attempts have been made to provide a plausible *Sitz im Leben* for a pseudonymous 2Thess (which would usually be dated between A.D. 70 and 110), but the very number of differ-

⁴³ I. Howard MARSHALL, "Review of 'Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians', by Frank W. Hughes", in: *JTS* 41 (1990), 197.

⁴⁴ BECKER, "Ως δι' ἡμῶν in 2 Thess 2.2", 61-69.

⁴⁵ CARSON and MOO, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 541, state it clearly: "If the reasons why scholars reject the Pauline authorship of 2 Thess are not persuasive, even less persuasive are their explanations for an alternative origin of the letter."

ent hypotheses testifies to the difficulties of this undertaking.⁴⁶ Several decades after Paul's stay in Thessalonica, it seems to be almost a historical impossibility that the letter would gain acceptance and canonical status in such a short time. Around the end of the first century many people who had been there when Paul founded the Thessalonian church would still be alive. And although they might have been quite young at the time of Paul's visit they had almost certainly received (through inner-congregational transmission) a firm knowledge of the extent of such an important correspondence as that of the esteemed apostle with their local church. Yet, since Paul's letters were widely circulated at this point, a pseudonymous 2Thess would sooner or later have come to the attention of the Thessalonian Christians. Now, knowing that there had never been a second letter written by Paul, the Thessalonians would have certainly been "suspicious of a letter written to them but whose delivery was delayed for more than forty years."⁴⁷ And the fact that a letter addressed to the Thessalonians had apparently circulated elsewhere before it came to the knowledge of the church for which it was meant would have raised serious questions. The improbability of a forged 2Thess being accepted in such a scenario seems to be obvious.

At this point, the question needs to be at least briefly addressed, as to whether 2Thess does indeed qualify as an epistolary pseudepigraph. Richard Bauckham pointed out that the readers of a pseudepigraphal letter cannot read it as though they were being directly addressed; rather, the pseudonymous author pretends that his letter was written by another author (in our case, Paul) to other people (in our case, the Thessalonians), in the past.⁴⁸ Yet, the letter would have to carry some relevance for the audience it was intended for. If we apply Bauckham's categories to 2Thess, we conclude that in order to qualify as an epistolary pseudepigraph, it needs to be either a general paranaetic and didactic tract or

⁴⁶ The vast majority of proposals assume that 2Thess was written far away from Thessalonica either as a general tract or for a specific situation with the purpose of countering what the author would consider a heretical teaching. The exact nature of this teaching is hotly debated and remains somewhat uncertain even under the assumption of Pauline authorship. Some have identified the teaching with (proto-)Gnosticism or a form of over-realized apocalypticism (to mention only two of numerous hypotheses), but the argument that this would necessarily point to a post-Pauline setting is not compelling. Cf., e.g., the recent, methodologically unconvincing proposal by METZGER, "Eine apokalyptische Paulusschule?"; for a good overview of the "Search of a Sitz im Leben for 2 Thessalonians" (including a brief critique) see Todd D. STILL, *Conflict in Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and Its Neighbours*, JSNTSup 183, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, 55-58.

⁴⁷ MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 374. Note that this is even more the case if a pseudonymous 2Thess is understood as being addressed directly to the Thessalonian church as MARXSEN, *Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief*, 34-35, has suggested.

⁴⁸ Richard BAUCKHAM, "Pseudo-Apostolic Letters", in: *JBL* 107 (1988), 469-494, esp. 475.

a typological pseudepigraph.⁴⁹ However, 2Thess does not seem to fit into either of these two categories:⁵⁰ (1) 2Thess does not appear as a general tract (as, e.g., Trilling has claimed). 2Thess 2:2-3 clearly points to a specific occasion for the letter. Further, 2Thess 3:6-15 is more likely to address a particular moral problem within a local church (cf. esp. 3:11, "we hear"), and the letter ending in 3:16-17 is better understood assuming a specific situation. Moreover, as Bauckham maintained,⁵¹ there is no good example of a generalized tract among Jewish pseudepigraphal letters or noncanonical, pseudo-apostolic letters. (2) 2Thess also does not seem to be a typological pseudepigraph. It might be possible to think of a late first/early second century eschatological heresy that could be presented as a renewal of what Paul might have encountered (often considered along the lines of apocalyptic enthusiasm; yet, the letter points more to a state of distress than enthusiastic joy; cf. footnote 54 below). However, we would also have to assume that *at the same time* the real readers suffered persecution and had to face the problem of idleness within their congregation. Nicholl says it well: "The problem with three different points of correspondence (...) between the supposed and real situations is that the more there are, the less credible it becomes that a given letter is pseudonymous, for it requires increased boldness and sophistication on the part of the real author and increased gullibility on the part of the real readers."⁵² It is thus fair to conclude that (in light of the categories laid out by Bauckham) 2Thess does not qualify as an epistolary pseudepigraph. This supplements our general observation that a convincing historical setting for a pseudepigraphal 2Thess is hard to find.

We now finally want to briefly propose a situational background that has the potential to reasonably account for several characteristic features of 2Thess as a Pauline writing.⁵³ From 1Thess 3:1-6 it is clear that Paul wrote 1Thess in response to a report from Timothy whom he had sent to the Thessalonian church not long after his first stay in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:1-9 for the details of this visit). Apparently, the purpose of Paul's first letter was to commend and further

⁴⁹ "General tract" describes a writing that is so general as to apply in different situations and circumstances. "Typological pseudepigraph" means that the letter was written to supposed addressees who were predecessors to the real readers in a situation that has not changed or in a situation that can apply typologically to the real readers, see BAUCKHAM, "Pseudo-Apostolic Letters", 476-477.

⁵⁰ For a more detailed treatment of this issue see NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 214-218.

⁵¹ BAUCKHAM, "Pseudo-Apostolic Letters", 487.

⁵² NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 218.

⁵³ We can give here only a brief suggestion of a plausible scenario. For more information on the situational background of the Thessalonian correspondence see (besides the relevant sections in the major commentaries that advocate Pauline authorship) STILL, *Conflict in Thessalonica*, 55-60, and NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, passim. Our own reconstruction is especially influenced by Nicholl's work.

strengthen the faith of the converts, to deal with their eschatological insecurities that had arisen in the wake of the apparently unexpected deaths of fellow believers, and to address some other moral and practical issues. 2Thess now presupposes a somewhat similar, yet further developed situation. In regard to their eschatological insecurities, it seems that the false claim that the Day of the Lord had already come had caused even more despair and confusion, "presumably because it meant that God had abandoned 'the Thessalonians' and that they had missed salvation."⁵⁴ In light of this, the main purpose of 2Thess is to correct the eschatological errors while at the same time further commending and encouraging the believers to persevere in the midst of persecution and opposition. Besides this, the problem of idleness seems to have become worse and needed a more detailed treatment.

When exactly this new situation occurred (and thus how soon after 1Thess 2Thess was written) remains an open question. Two scenarios seem possible: (1) If we assume that at least a somewhat significant time span (i.e., at least a couple of weeks, maybe months) was needed for the situation underlying 2Thess to develop, we may reasonably conjecture that Paul sent a co-worker to Thessalonica some time after writing 1Thess in order to check whether his letter has been effective in fulfilling its purpose. Having been informed about the present problems in the church, Paul then decides to write 2Thess.⁵⁵ (2) Yet, as has been compellingly suggested by Colin R. Nicholl, it seems equally possible that the new situation developed before 1Thess arrived at Thessalonica. This would imply that the new information Paul received might have been gathered by the person who delivered the first letter.⁵⁶ In favor of this scenario, it could be ar-

⁵⁴ NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 185. Against the majority of scholars, we are not convinced that the Thessalonians reacted to the false claim with eschatological excitement. While the letter does not give any evidence for such excitement, it seems that 2Thess 2:2 is more naturally read as a reference to the Thessalonians' fearful and despairing reaction (cf. esp. BDAG, 460 on ἡποέω [also Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7 and Luke 24:37] as well as the careful exegesis of this verse by NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 126-132). Moreover, in light of the ongoing persecution (2Thess 1:4) that Paul tries to put into perspective (2Thess 1:5-12), it seems more likely to imagine the Thessalonian converts having difficulty in integrating the arrival of the Day of the Lord with their continuously unjust circumstances. These could easily have led them to doubt their salvific status.

⁵⁵ Among those who would advocate a situational background similar to this (although often less specifically) are MALHERBE, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 349-350; MARSHALL, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 24-25; LEON MORRIS, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*; NICNT, *Grand Rapids*: Eerdmans, 1991, 11-12, et al. Note that those who argue that a misunderstanding of the 1Thess played a role in the rise of the false eschatological teaching necessarily assume that the Thessalonian church possessed 1Thess when the eschatological heresy arose (but see scenario [2] below).

⁵⁶ NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 191-195. He also rightly mentions the possibility "that the report underlying 2 Thessalonians was delivered to Paul by someone else, after 1 Thessalonians had been sent but before it had arrived at its destination" (193). Cf. also STILL, *Conflict in Thessalonica*, 59.

gued that despite the new converts' gullibility toward unorthodox teaching (cf. Acts 17:11; 1Thess 5:18-22; 2Thess 2:1-3), they would not have so easily believed and been distressed by the false eschatological teaching had they already received 1Thess with its reassuring content. Further, 2Thess 3:4 (cf. especially the present tense *ποιεῖτε*) could well mean that Paul "did not *know* how the community had responded to 1 Thessalonians, but was confident that its content would help turn the situation around, especially when reinforced by 2 Thessalonians."⁵⁷ And finally, 2Thess 3:17 makes most sense if Paul could be absolutely sure that a forger could not possibly have seen his handwriting in the first letter.

Again, both scenarios are conceivable and, in any case, it is reasonable to assume that 2Thess was written relatively soon after 1Thess, and that both were written during Paul's stay in Corinth.⁵⁸ We thus propose that Paul, after having received report that the eschatological confusion as well as particular moral problems had reached a second stage, penned 2Thess (with secretarial assistance) in order to address these issues. If we take scenario (2) into consideration, Paul might have been uncertain whether the reception of 1Thess would be sufficient to solve the problems. In any event, it seems reasonable to assume that Paul feared (possibly by mere conjecture) that a forged letter (or another [pseudo-] authoritative source) was responsible for the Thessalonians' eschatological despair.⁵⁹ The authenticity sign in 2Thess 3:17 can thus be easily understood as an indirect refutation of this forged letter.

who seems to at least reckon with the possibility that the courier of 1Thess was the source of the new information.

⁵⁷ NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 194. This kind of scenario also weakens the objection of RÖCKER, *Belial und Katechon*, 356-357, against the understanding of *ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου* in 2Thess 2:2 as "the Day of the Lord has already come." Röcker argues that the false teaching mentioned in 2Thess 2:2 refers to the imminence of the Day of the Lord (see above) not least because to him it seems utterly implausible that an entire church could have been deceived by a message to the effect that the Day of the Lord has already come while none of the accompanying signs mentioned in 1Thess 4:13ff were visible. Yet, if the false eschatological teaching occurred even before 1Thess arrived, it becomes more likely that the Thessalonian Christians were alarmed by it.

⁵⁸ Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months after probably spending a couple of weeks in Berea and Athens (cf. Acts 17:10ff.; 18:11). Corinth is the only place where Paul was certainly in the company of his co-senders Timothy and Silas (cf. Acts 18:5).

⁵⁹ As we stated earlier (cf. footnote 46) it seems impossible to reconstruct where this false teaching came from and what exactly it contained. It could have been an erroneous claim by an enthusiastic group outside or inside the community that actually had positive intentions. Yet this is unlikely due to the simple fact that the Thessalonians do not seem to have perceived it that way. Although the verb *ἐξαπατάω* in 2Thess 2:3 is ambiguous and could refer simply to the fact that the claim resulted in deception rather than being intended to be deceptive, the explicit mentioning of a forgery suggests that Paul had sufficient reason to suspect that the Thessalonians had been deliberately deceived. It thus seems more likely that the introduction of the false teaching was an attempt to undermine the faith of the Thessalonians, who were already disturbed by the death

Further, the seemingly close resemblance between the situations underlying both Thessalonian letters provide considerable grounds to explain certain peculiarities of 2Thess as a Pauline writing. In light of the proposed situational background (with the major difference between 1Thess and 2Thess being the changed eschatological problem), it is entirely plausible that 2Thess contains thematic material similar to 1Thess (i.e., repeated thanksgivings, re-enforcement of the believers' assurance of salvation, ongoing encouragement in persecution etc.) as well as a different emphasis in its eschatological teaching. Given the probability that a copy of 1Thess was retained,⁶⁰ the situational background makes it further reasonable to suggest that Paul and his companions consulted 1Thess before writing 2Thess in order to make themselves aware of what they had already communicated and to envision the things that needed to be re-emphasized, re-enforced or explained differently. That this would lead to certain verbal agreements (yet with slightly different emphases) is hardly surprising.

4. Conclusion

The assumption of pseudonymity with regard to 2Thess has been frequently substantiated by the argument that 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 make most sense if 2Thess was not written by Paul. However, a re-examination suggests that these verses do not support the non-Pauline authorship hypothesis. Neither can it be made plausible from 2Thess 2:2 that a pseudonymous 2Thess was intended to correct a misinterpretation of 1Thess nor that a pseudonymous author wrote 2Thess in order to discredit 1Thess. Rather, the phrase δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν in 2Thess 2:2 most likely refers to a forged letter written in Paul's name containing false eschatological teaching. Moreover, 2Thess 3:17 can be best explained as an indicator of authenticity used by Paul, since he had reason to assume that such a forged letter had led to confusion in Thessalonica. While we thus find that it is difficult to in-

of fellow community-members. The opponents from the Jewish synagogue (cf. Acts 17:1-9) are possible (though probably not the only) candidates for such an action.

⁶⁰ ZAHN, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1:250, was one of the first to propose that Paul had a copy of 1Thess in his possession which became the basis of 2Thess. Yet, his suggestion was frequently dismissed as highly improbable by both proponents of non-Pauline and Pauline authorship, e.g., TRILLING, *Untersuchungen zum 2. Thessalonicherbrief*, 24 ("Verlegenheitslösung"); BÖRSCHTEL, *Die Konstruktion einer christlichen Identität*, 61; NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair*, 7. Recent research in ancient letter-writing, however, has affirmed Zahn's hypothesis. That Paul retained copies of his letters seems to be a matter of course to most scholars of Greco-Roman letter-writing today; cf., e.g., RICHARDS, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, 2-7; E. Earle ELLIS, *The Making of New Testament Documents*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, 86; HARRY GAMBLE, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, 101; JEROME MURPHY-O'CONNOR, *Paul, the Letter-Writer*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995, 12, 36-37.

tegrate 2Thess 2:2 and 3:17 into a historically plausible post-Pauline setting, our interpretation of these two pivotal verses can be supplemented by a situational hypothesis for 2Thess as a Pauline letter that harmonizes well with the data provided by the Thessalonian correspondence itself. Further, it accounts for some of the particular features of 2Thess that are often used to support pseudonymity (such as different emphases in eschatological teaching and several literary and structural affinities). A plausible scenario is that not too long after writing 1Thess Paul received news about further eschatological despair among the Thessalonian community. Following Nicholl, this new eschatological confusion might well have developed even before 1Thess reached its addressees. Knowing or assuming that the believers' despair was evoked by a pseudonymous letter (2Thess 2:2), Paul writes 2Thess and concludes it with an example of his authentic handwriting to distinguish it from any forgery in his name (2Thess 3:17). Although this brief reconstruction of the occasion and circumstances of 2Thess cannot be more than a proposal, it nevertheless adds some credibility to the supposition that Paul is indeed the author of this letter.