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Introduction to the Thessalonian Correspondences

R. Wayne Stacy*

Introduction

The New Testament is thoroughly eschatological. The single most significant perspective of New Testament people was the consistent belief that they were people of the new age who were living between the coming of Christ and the coming of Christ, the second of which they referred to as his *parousia*. They seemed to have acquired this perspective from Jesus himself, having been convinced that in his life, ministry, and supremely in his impending death and resurrection, the kingdom of God had broken through into this world, pressing its claim upon persons, and establishing in its behalf a new society of people who had caught sight of "another world" in which God is king and human beings are God's loyal subjects.¹

That Paul believed in the imminent dawning of the new age of the kingdom is clear from the character of the missionary preaching he did in the churches he established on his three so-called missionary journeys.² Much of his ethical instruction to the churches is incomprehensible apart from the context of his belief in the imminent return of Christ and the dawning of a new age in which contemporary social structures and conventions were to be abrogated in favor of the messianic age of the kingdom of God.³ For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:25ff., Paul gives instructions to the Corinthians regarding marriage in the newly-established Christian community there. Apparently, a problem had arisen among the Corinthians when some of their number, having converted to Christianity from paganism, either found themselves married to pagans who embraced practices repugnant to the new Christians, or were contemplating marriage to pagans which would run the risk of placing them in the daily companionship of ones whose ethical practices were abhorrent to Christians. Some in the community, it seems, were even contemplating divorce in order to extricate themselves from these marital associations which compromised their Christian values. Paul's advice in these matters is instructive:

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I think that in view of the present distress (Greek: *anagken*, technical language for the messianic woes that would precede the advent of the messianic age), it is well for one to remain as one is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. *For the essence of this world is passing away, and I want you to be free from anxieties* (1 Cor 7:26-32a, italics mine).

Paul's advice in this passage takes the form of an appeal to maintain the *status quo* predicated on the assumption that the world as the people now know it is doomed anyway, and systems and structures such as marriage will be abrogated very soon. Hence, Paul says "stay the course" until the new age dawns at which time everything will be swept away in favor of the new society of the kingdom of God.

I do not wish to beat a dead horse here; the observation that the New Testament's perspective is thoroughly eschatological is inescapable even to the casual reader. Moreover, the burden of much of the last century's critical study of the New Testament was to establish beyond refutation this eschatological context for the New Testament as the non-negotiable and inescapable background against which the serious study of the New Testament could be undertaken.⁴ And yet, what had been the bedrock of critical New Testament scholarship for nearly a century is being called into question of late by a spate of scholarly works that challenge this very eschatological perspective. Marcus Borg's *Jesus, A New Vision* would be characteristic of those works.⁵ Borg's rejection of an eschatological perspective as the primary lens through which to understand the New Testament is not motivated so much out of the fact that he disbelieves that the New Testament's message is thoroughly eschatological as it is that he doubts that contemporary persons can make much sense of the New Testament's apocalyptic message of "a new world's a-comin'." It seems too "otherworldly," too "escapist," too "pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by" for Borg. And so, instead of a Jesus who is an eschatological prophet announcing the end of this world and the advent of a wholly new world called the kingdom of God, Borg opts for a Jesus who preaches love, peace, inclusivity, and compassion, who is heavily invested in *this* world rather than in some other, "other-worldly" world, at least in part because this is the kind of "Jesus" he believes most contemporary persons want and can relate to.

And I understand the kind of hesitation to own up to the eschatological character of the New Testament that is manifest in the work of Borg and others. The moment it is determined that the essential character of the New Testament is

apocalyptic and eschatological, the penchant is perpetually present that somebody will “go weird on us” and advocate some bizarre, off-beat, and potentially dangerous brand of religion in the name of authentic New Testament Christianity. From the Hutterites to the Millerites to Jehovah’s Witnesses to the Branch Davidians to the Colorado cult that thought they could precipitate the Second Coming by starting a war in Jerusalem, the history of Christianity is littered with the chaos created by star-struck true believers who were consumed with this “other world” the New Testament talks so much about. The situation is exacerbated for us because we stand on the cusp of a new millennium, and the eschatological fervor that has always been a part of the Christian belief system finds itself magnified exponentially.

It is at times like this that it may help to know that we are not the first generation of Christians to be vexed by the conundrum that as Christians we believe that we are at one and the same time both *in* the world, but not *of* the world. This “in-between-ness” of the Christian existence troubled the Church almost from the beginning, and occasionally some of them, too, “went weird on us.” In the early Church the Pauline community at Thessalonica is the most celebrated example of this tendency. Paul had to write two letters to the church there in order to attempt to set them straight on this business of the timing of the *parousia* and the eschatological context for the life of faith.

It is, therefore, the purpose of this introductory article to examine the two pastoral letters Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica with a view toward understanding the intra-church dynamics that gave rise to the letters. It is the working thesis of this article that millenarianism, the belief that the total transformation of this world in connection with a cataclysmic event is imminent,⁶ was at the heart of the problem that precipitated Paul’s letters to the Thessalonian Christians. In support of this thesis, we will begin by looking at the author of the letters; then we will examine the letters themselves, looking for clues as to their context and purpose. Next we will seek to construct a church profile of the Thessalonian community based on the clues we have gleaned from our examination of the letters. Finally, we will discuss the message (theology) of the letters, attempting, as James A. Sanders advocates, to score the same point with our audience that the text originally scored with its.⁷

The Author

Both 1 and 2 Thessalonians, in the earliest manuscript traditions we possess, begin in precisely the same way: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” That would seem to settle the issue of authorship rather quickly—Paul, in the company of his traveling companions Silvanus and Timothy, was the author of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians.⁸ Moreover, scholarly opinion is virtually unanimous that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians and that 1 Thessalonians is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, among the missionary letters Paul penned, making it, consequently, the earliest writing in the New Testament.

However, when we turn to 2 Thessalonians the scholarly consensus dissolves. Indeed, since the early 1970's, the tide of scholarly opinion has been turning in favor of the view that 2 Thessalonians is a forgery.⁹ Though first raised at the turn of this century by the Tuebingen School, recently the case against Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians has been made most compellingly by Wolfgang Trilling.¹⁰ The objections to the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians are both theological and literary, and rest on five key concerns:

1. perceived dependence upon 1 Thessalonians,
2. perceived contradictory eschatologies (e.g., 1 Thessalonians is characterized by the belief in an imminent *parousia* whereas 2 Thessalonians has an elaborate Jewish apocalypticism; cf. 1 Thess 5:1-11 with 2 Thess 2:1-12),
3. lack of personal references in 2 Thessalonians,
4. references to forgery in 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 3:17 (some scholars suggest this amounts to special pleading—the forger is attempting to deflect attention from the fact that 2 Thessalonians is, in fact, a forgery)
5. the vocabulary, style, and tone of 2 Thessalonians are noticeably different from 1 Thessalonians.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to mount a thorough defense of Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians with a point-by-point rejoinder to Trilling's argument, two points need to be made. First, the linguistic (statistical) argument against Pauline authorship is not as compelling as it first appears. The essence of Trilling's argument is that if Paul is indeed the author of 2 Thessalonians, he employed a radically different vocabulary and style than he used in 1 Thessalonians. He then cites seventeen examples of phrases used in 2 Thessalonians not used elsewhere in the New Testament.¹¹ The problem with this line of argument is that, proportionately speaking, Paul employs a similar number of unique words in 1 Thessalonians, and no one, including Trilling, doubts Paul's authorship of 1 Thessalonians. Paul's writing style and choice of language is situational in character, dictated by the needs of the audience. Hence, arguments against Pauline authorship based on vocabulary and style are not, upon further reflection, as convincing as they first appear.¹²

The second thing which should be said is that arguments against Pauline authorship based on a presumed theological inconsistency are predicated on an assumption that is problematic at best. Typically in this line of argument the essence of Paul's theology is extracted from his later letters such as Romans and then retrojected back on all of Paul's writings without regard to the cultural, ecclesiastical, and theological exigencies driving Paul's writing at the time. Then, when that quintessential Pauline theology is not found in the letter under examination, it is declared to be non-Pauline. Moreover, the theological bias of the scholar often determines what is "quintessentially Pauline theology." It is not surprising that most German Lutheran scholars, for example, identify the Lutheran principle of "justification by faith" as essential to Paul's theology, and that the absence of this principle calls into question the authenticity of a document. To be sure, 2 Thessalonians is missing the key Pauline emphasis on "justification by faith," but then again, so is 1 Thessalonians, and again virtually

no one regards 1 Thessalonians as non-Pauline. Paul's theological emphases, like his writing style and language, are situation-specific. To extract a Pauline "gospel" from one of his letters and then absolutize it and lay it like a template over all of his letters to see if they measure up ignores Paul's most basic missionary methodology; namely, that the "gospel" preached in Thessalonica must be a "Thessalonian gospel" not a Roman or a Corinthian or a Galatian "gospel," else it would not have been heard by the Thessalonians as "gospel" at all.

The most serious, and oft repeated, theological argument of substance against Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is Trilling's contention that 2 Thessalonians (specifically 2:1ff.) contains a non-Pauline eschatology characterized by an elaborate Jewish apocalypticism replete with "Day of the Lord" imagery that reflects the period after Paul when the Jewish-Christian church was promoting a post-Pauline form of apocalypticism in order to assuage concern over the fact that the *parousia* (preached as imminent in Paul's letters) had been delayed.¹³ The problem with this line of argument is that it is predicated on a now discredited assumption that Paul was thoroughly Greek in his thinking and that nothing Jewish could possibly be authentically Pauline. Scholars such as W. D. Davies and E. P. Sanders have decisively refuted this notion.¹⁴ To be sure, Paul was a hellenistic Jew, but he was Jewish nonetheless. Though the language he uses to express himself is Greek, his thought-world is thoroughly Jewish. He was at home in the world of Jewish apocalypticism.¹⁵ Indeed, Paul frequently employs "Day of the Lord" imagery in his letters.¹⁶

But even if one regards both 1 and 2 Thessalonians as authentically Pauline, the question of *when* Paul wrote them remains problematic. Some scholars date the letters in the 40's, whereas others date them in the early 50's.¹⁷ The problem is basically one of correlating the information about Paul's missionary activities which we learn from Luke's account in Acts with what we learn about those same activities from Paul's own letters. Scholars have tended to address these chronological discrepancies between Acts and Paul's letters in two different ways. Traditionalists assume the basic chronological framework of the Acts of the Apostles and then try to fit Paul's letters into that framework.¹⁸ The other approach is to give priority to Paul's own letters (after all, he was there; Luke wasn't), and when Acts differs significantly from Paul's letters, one follows Paul rather than Luke.¹⁹

The chief sticking point is the date assigned to the so-called Jerusalem Conference described by Luke in Acts 15. According to Acts, Paul's missionary ministry in Thessalonica occurred *after* the Judaizer controversy dealt with at the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15, and yet no mention is made of the controversy, the issues that engendered it (circumcision, torah-obedience, etc.), or Paul's theological response to the controversy in terms of his insistence upon "justification by faith alone."²⁰ It is difficult to believe that Paul could have been writing to the kind of community Acts depicts (predominantly Jewish) and not even mention the Jewish controversy which formed the focus of so much of Paul's theologizing in the period after the controversy (see Romans and

Galatians). In Galatians 1:18-2:10 Paul gives the most complete account of his associations with the Jerusalem church. According to Paul's account, he visited the Jerusalem church twice. However, according to Acts, Paul visited the Jerusalem church five times: once following his conversion; once for what Luke describes as a famine relief visit; and once following each of his three missionary campaigns.²¹ The problem is this: which of the five visits in Acts correlates to the visit Paul describes in Galatians 2? It is critical because according to Acts Paul established the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary campaign *after* the Jerusalem Conference described in Acts 15 had dealt with the Judaizer controversy. If that is true, however, why doesn't Paul mention either the controversy or the Conference in his Thessalonian letters?

For some scholars, the best solution to the problem is to follow the principle that in matters of chronology priority should be given to Paul's letters over Acts. Hence, the Judaizer controversy was not mentioned in the Thessalonian Letters because it had not yet occurred. Luke was simply wrong, or more precisely, was pursuing a different agenda than merely providing precise information about Paul's movements.²²

The difficulties in correlating the Acts narrative with Paul's letters are many and should not be minimized. However, it is not at all as clear as some would have it that Paul didn't say anything about the Judaizer controversy in his Thessalonian correspondences. He does mention in 1 Thessalonians 2:14ff. that the Jews "... hinder us from speaking to the Gentiles in order that they might be saved," perhaps an oblique reference to the controversy. To be sure, some scholars regard this section of the letter as a later interpolation; but again that seems to be begging the question in that the reason they so regard it is because it addresses the "Jewish issue."

In light of the above, then, I would argue in favor of the traditional dating of the Thessalonian Letters in the early 50's. Paul wrote from Achaia on his second missionary campaign. While the issue of the date of the Jerusalem Conference remains difficult (Did it occur following Paul's first or second missionary campaign?), I see no reason to doubt that the Thessalonian Letters could not have been written *following* the Conference as Acts suggests. Given the situational character of Paul's letter writing which in this case, as we will argue below, was driven more by Gentile issues than Jewish, and given the fact that Paul does seem to mention, at least obliquely, the Judaizer controversy, the argument that the Thessalonian Letters could not have been composed after the Conference does not appear compelling.

The Letters

Interpretations of the Thessalonian Letters fall into two large camps: theological/thematic approaches and literary/formal approaches. The former looks for key theological or thematic emphases in the letter and then seeks to organize the development of Paul's thought in the letters around these themes or emphases.²³ The latter assumes that there were certain patterns or structures

inherent in ancient letter writing that informed if not determined a letter's content.²⁴ To put it more precisely, the former places the emphasis on content as the key to form, while the latter places the emphasis on form as the key to content.

Both approaches are serviceable, and both have their respective strengths and weaknesses. But in my view, the literary/formal approach offers the best hope of recovering the author's original intention with the least amount of potential bias to influence the interpretation. This is because one tends to find what one is looking for. If an interpreter is captured by a particular theological emphasis or theme in a letter, that fixation can so paralyze the exegete that s/he hears little else in the text.²⁵

On the other hand, theological/thematic approaches, even when they focus on what is universally agreed to be the central issue of the Thessalonian Letters, namely, eschatology, can become so fixated on the primary theological emphasis of the letters that they regard as egregious, or even problematic, anything in the letters that does not speak to that issue. For example, more than one scholar following this approach has observed with some exasperation Paul's rather long thanksgiving in 1 Thessalonians (1:6-3:13), and impatiently regarded it as an unwelcome intrusion on the way to the real subject of the letter (eschatology) that Paul curiously fails to take up until chapter four.

For these reasons, I will employ a literary (more precisely, rhetorical) exegetical method in examining the letters predicated on the assumption that the cultural, social, and historical circumstances of Paul's particular audience-situation influenced, and perhaps even determined, the rhetorical genre or form he chose by means of which to speak to that situation. In what follows, I acknowledge heavy reliance on the work of Robert Jewett.²⁶

As a result of William Doty's work on the ancient letter-writing form, it is now widely recognized that ancient letters, much like their modern counterparts, employed formal literary types and fell into predictable patterns.²⁷ Those types included what Doty called the "common letter," the "business letter," the "official letter," the "public letter," the "non-real letter," and the "essay letter."²⁸ Moreover, ancient letter-writing also employed predictable features that included typically, but not invariably, the following: an opening greeting, a prayer of thanksgiving, the body of the letter, exhortative material, greetings and personal words, and a benediction or doxology.²⁹ Even a cursory reading of Paul's letters is sufficient to demonstrate that he, by and large, follows this basic form of ancient letter-writing. So widely accepted now is Doty's analysis that even a theological/thematic approach, such as Bruce's treatment of Thessalonians, manifests dependence upon Doty's observations. Bruce's outline of 1 Thessalonians reveals the following major sections: prescript (1:1); thanksgiving (1:2-10); apostolic defense (2:1-12); further thanksgiving (2:13-16); plans for a second visit (2:17-3:13); exhortation (4:1-5:24); letter closing (5:25-28).³⁰ Doty's basic divisions for ancient letters are assumed by Bruce. Moreover, from an epistolary perspective, 1 Thessalonians is what can be described as a "thankful letter," in which "approval is expressed, encouragement is given, and

gratitude is shown.”³¹ The long, extended thanksgiving which occupies so much of the first half of 1 Thessalonians, and which troubles many scholars anxious for Paul to get on to the “real issue” of eschatology, vindicates this description.

From a rhetorical point of view, 1 Thessalonians belongs to a type of ancient rhetoric known as “demonstrative” or “epideictic” rhetoric.³² The focus of this kind of writing style was praise and blame, typically with a prominent thanksgiving to the gods as the primary emphasis of the praise part of the letter.³³ In this approach, the author seeks to persuade his/her audience to hold fast to that which they are doing well while denouncing some person or quality that the author regards as potentially problematic. As in the old “I’ve got good news and bad news” jokes, this type of rhetoric is a kind of “good news/bad news” approach. The author affirms what s/he can about the audience, and then moves on to address behaviors that threaten the community’s stability. A quick read of 1 Thessalonians reveals that this analysis not only correlates well with what one discovers in the letter (cf. 1 Thess 5:21: “hold fast what is good”), but also helps to explain the troublesome extended thanksgiving with which Paul opens the letter. Typical of demonstrative rhetoric, Paul praises the Thessalonians (“good news”), before he blames them (“bad news”).

Moreover, the classification of 1 Thessalonians as “demonstrative rhetoric” fits nicely with the purpose of the letter as identified by more theological/thematic analyses. For example, Bruce comments:

The report brought back by Timothy from the church of Thessalonica was so generally encouraging that the missionaries sent off a letter there and then, expressing their joy and relief. If they had feared that the Thessalonian converts were disillusioned or discouraged. . . they were assured that, on the contrary, their converts were enthusiastically propagating the new faith on their own initiative.³⁴

However, the church was also experiencing problems that required the Apostle’s attention:

But Timothy brought news not only of their faith and charity, and of their steadfastness under persecution, but also of the failure of some of them to grasp the ethical implications of the gospel.³⁵

The strength of this approach is that it addresses the two major problems scholars have with 1 Thessalonians: (1) Why the long, extended thanksgiving in the letter? and (2) Why does Paul wait until 4:13ff. to get to the main point of the letter? The answer to the first question is: long, extended thanksgivings are part of the communicative strategy of demonstrative rhetoric. The answer to the second question is: he didn’t. The issue of the *parousia* was, to be sure, the primary problem addressed in the letter, but not the “main point,” provided one understands how demonstrative rhetoric works. Employing a demonstrative rhetorical strategy prevents Paul from moving straightway into the primary

problem being addressed in the letter. First, the "good news," then the "bad" was the strategy of demonstrative rhetoric.

The strategy is different with deliberative rhetoric. There one does indeed move straightway into the primary problem to be addressed in the letter because the purpose and goal of deliberative rhetoric is fundamentally different than that of demonstrative rhetoric. Galatians is the purest example of deliberative rhetoric among the letters of Paul, and in that letter Paul has barely finished his salutation before he moves into the attack mode: "I am amazed that so quickly you have abandoned the one having called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel!"³⁶

Working from the hypothesis, then, that 1 Thessalonians is an example of demonstrative rhetoric, the following rhetorical structure emerges:

- I. *Exordium* (1:1-5). The purpose of the *exordium* was to introduce the subject in such a way so as to engender sympathy from the audience and to affirm what can be affirmed in the audience's situation. In that regard, note how Paul commends the Thessalonians for their "work of faith," their "labor of love," and their "steadfastness of hope" (1:3).
- II. *Narratio* (1:6-3:13). The purpose of the *narratio* was, by means of autobiographical references (cf. 1:6-10; 2:1-12; 2:17-3:10), to establish the grounds for the praise/thanksgiving with which the author opens the letter.
- III. *Probatio* (4:1-5:22). The *probatio*, turning from praise to blame, from "good news" to "bad news," introduces the major problem to be addressed in the letter, interlacing exhortation and argument. Here Paul addresses the primary difficulty in the church; namely, a crisis of faith brought about by the fact that, though Paul had led them to believe otherwise, some in the congregation had begun to die before the *parousia* (cf. 4:13ff.).
- IV. *Peroratio* (5:23-28). The *peroratio* (cf. epilogue), frequently, but not always, recapitulates (summarizes) the major point(s) of the argument and seeks to arouse the audience to take the desired action.³⁷

When it comes to the genre of 2 Thessalonians, one is immediately struck by the somber, sonorous tone of the letter when compared to 1 Thessalonians. Second Thessalonians has a much more sober, strict, and critical tone than does 1 Thessalonians. It is felt right away with the opening thanksgiving (1:3ff.), in which Paul, unlike his effusive praise of the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians, prays that the Thessalonians "... should be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering," and "... that God may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfill every good resolve and work of faith by his power."

Moreover, in contrast to the long, extended thanksgiving of 1 Thessalonians, Paul moves immediately into the problem which precipitated the latter:

Now concerning the *parousia* of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brothers [and sisters] not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come" (note the use of the perfect tense in Greek: *enesteken*; that is, "it has come and we are living in it").³⁸

This means that 2 Thessalonians is composed in a different rhetorical style than is 1 Thessalonians. The rhetoric of 2 Thessalonians is deliberative rather than demonstrative. In deliberative rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to take some action in the future, "... which," as Robert Jewett remarks, "in the case of 2 Thessalonians involves a reassessment of the eschatological expectation and a stiffened policy toward the 'disorderly'" [*ataktoi* in the Greek].³⁹

When one compares the various outlines of 2 Thessalonians in the major theological/thematic commentaries, there is more agreement on the major divisions of the letter than was the case in 1 Thessalonians. For example, most all of them place major divisions at 2:1 and 3:1. This probably reflects the fact that 2 Thessalonians is more content-driven than was 1 Thessalonians; that is, Paul is in a "response mode" rather than initiating conversation as was the case in 1 Thessalonians. Moreover, this observation also supports the canonical order of the letters, an assumption challenged by some commentators.⁴⁰

All of this suggests that Paul is employing deliberative rhetoric in 2 Thessalonians in order to respond to an exacerbated eschatological dilemma precipitated in all likelihood by a misunderstanding created by his earlier correspondence. As Jewett points out:

The typical emphasis in the deliberative genre is on "the question of self-interest and future benefits," which matches the extensive discussion of the status of the Thessalonians in relation to the apocalyptic events already experienced (1:3-12) as well as those yet to come (2:13-3:5).⁴¹

A rhetorical analysis of 2 Thessalonians based on the assumption that it was composed in the style of deliberative rhetoric, therefore, would yield something like the following:

- II. *Exordium* (1:1-12).
- III. *Propositio* (2:1-2). The function of the *propositio* was to introduce the major issue to be dealt with in the letter, or to state the central thesis to be defended.
- IV. *Probatio* (2:3-3:5).
- V. *Exhortatio* (3:6-15). The function of the *exhortatio*, as the term implies, was to exhort the audience toward the desired behavior, based on the arguments adduced in the *probatio*.
- VI. *Peroratio* (3:16-18).⁴²

Robert Jewett's analysis of the purpose behind the writing of 2 Thessalonians, and the choice of the rhetoric utilized, is on target:

2 Thessalonians is a tightly organized deliberative letter with a combination of reproof, denial, and encouragement that reveals a complex situation of misunderstanding a previous piece of correspondence that had attempted to deal with apocalyptic confusions and congregational disorders.⁴³

But exactly what was that “misunderstanding,” and who was behind it? To those questions we now turn.

The Church

The city of Thessalonica commanded strategic importance in the Greco-Roman world. Situated on the Via Egnatia, its prominence is evinced by the fact that the Roman governor of Macedonia (proconsul), had his office in the city. Because the city had supported the winning side (Octavian’s) in the Roman civil war following the assassination of Julius Caesar, it was rewarded with “free city” status which meant that it enjoyed a measure of independent rule. The city was governed by a group of wealthy, leading citizens known as “politarchs” (literally, “rulers of the city”), along with a council and popularly elected assembly. However, the politarchy was the real power in Thessalonica and was dominated by Greek and Roman immigrants much to the displeasure of the displaced, indigenous Macedonian population. To curry favor with the Romans, the politarchy established an impressive imperial cult in the city conjoining the old indigenous mystery religion of Cabirus with the worship of the personified city goddess, Roma, again much to the displeasure of the indigenous Macedonian population who chafed under Roman rule.⁴⁴ This situation tended to create two rather distinct socio-economic groups in Thessalonica, the wealthy, empowered Greek and Roman immigrants, and the poorer, divested indigenous Macedonians. The result was a rather predictable class-oriented political antipathy. The church at Thessalonica appears to have been made up predominantly of the poorer, disaffected Macedonian population.

It should be noted that this community profile of the church at Thessalonica conflicts at points with the church profile one gains from Luke’s account in Acts, specifically two: (1) Luke’s assertion that the church had a significant Jewish population (note that Acts 17:1-4 suggests that the church began as Paul’s preaching in the synagogue gained a following), and (2) Luke’s implication that the church was made up of persons (specifically women) of means (Acts 17:4, “not a few of the *first* [that is, “leading”] women”).

A comment about this divergency seems in order. When Luke differs from Paul in describing Paul’s church-starting missionary activity, it is always more defensible to go with Paul. His was a first-hand account; Luke’s was not. Moreover, Luke had his own agenda in writing Acts, namely, to demonstrate the triumph of the gospel over what he believed to be the narrow ethnic nationalism of the early Jewish-Christian movement. In support of that agenda, Luke stereotypically portrayed Paul’s antagonists as Jews. Luke’s pattern, time and again, was for Paul to begin preaching in the local synagogue to a receptive audience of Jews from which a church (usually meeting in someone’s home) was established. Then, when jealousy evoked the ire of the local Jewish establishment, Paul was forced to leave for friendly confines.

However, when one considers the problems that surfaced in the church at Thessalonica using only the descriptions of the Thessalonian Letters as our

guide, a rather different picture emerges. The audience addressed in the Thessalonian Letters appears to be a disaffected, marginalized community of predominantly menial laborers largely outside of, and excluded from, the power structures of the city.⁴⁵ Furthermore, it is far more likely that the kind of moral lapses addressed in the Thessalonian Letters (cf. 1 Thess 4:1ff; 5:12ff; 2 Thess 3:6ff.) were the result of misunderstandings generated by eschatological confusion on the part of the indigenous Macedonian membership, rather than positing that a predominantly Jewish audience would have engaged in these kinds of activities.⁴⁶

To be sure, then, there was some distance between the church community at Thessalonica and the power structures of the city. But was there also some distance between Paul and the Thessalonian congregation, or was the relationship one of all “sweetness and light?”

Because of the long, extended thanksgiving with which 1 Thessalonians begins, many scholars treat the letter as primarily positive, a marked contrast to the somber, stark tone of 2 Thessalonians. The statement of F. W. Beare about the Thessalonian community is typical: “The very absence of controversy enables the positive aspects of the new faith to shine forth all the more clearly.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the problems addressed in 2 Thessalonians, eschatological confusion (2:1ff.) and “idleness” (3:6ff.), seem at first glance to be completely without provocation. However, if one remembers that one of the primary communicative strategies of demonstrative rhetoric was to begin with “good news” so as to gain the credibility and trust of the audience in order to prepare them to hear the “bad news,” then the radical dissonance disappears. Indeed, both issues (eschatological confusion and “idleness”) were already present in 1 Thessalonians.⁴⁸ Hence, whatever exacerbated problems Paul had to deal with in the second letter, their roots already lay in the situation addressed in the first.

This, therefore, naturally leads to the question: what situation in the church at Thessalonica could be posited, given the information available in the letters, that would account for the style and substance of Paul’s corrective epistles? The best answer is a millenarianism, ostensibly derived from Paul’s own eschatological missionary preaching, exaggerated and radicalized by the peculiar cultural situation of the Thessalonian community, which eventuated a crisis when things didn’t “pan out” as they expected. They had misunderstood Paul’s eschatological emphasis on the “new age” of the kingdom of God and the imminence of the *parousia* of Christ to mean that they were already children of the new age and, as such, were exempt from life’s exigencies, demands, and vicissitudes.

The supporting evidence from the Thessalonian Letters follows:

1. The sense of surprise and shock that persecution and suffering should be the “lot” of the Thessalonians. “We sent Timothy, our brother and God’s servant in the gospel of Christ, to establish you in your faith and to exhort you to the end that no one be shaken by these afflictions. You yourselves know that this is to be our lot” (1 Thess 3:3).
2. The sense of shock and despair over the death of members of the

community. An overly realized eschatology had given rise to the belief that death had been abolished in the new age, and that no one in the community would taste death in advance of the *parousia*. "But we would not have you ignorant, brothers [and sisters], concerning those who are asleep, that you might not grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess 4:13).

3. Problems of moral laxness related to ecstatic enthusiasm associated with the belief that already in Christ they were participants in the "joys" of the age to come. "So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober. . ." (1 Thess 5:6f.; see also 1 Thess. 4:1-8). In this regard, Paul's admonishment to the "idlers" (Greek, *ataktous*) is germane (1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6ff.).

A misunderstanding on the part of the Thessalonians of the eschatological character of the missionary preaching of Paul alone would have been sufficient to precipitate the kind of radicalized millenarian perspective reflected in the life situation of the Thessalonian Letters. However, a curious cultural affectation in the Thessalonian community exacerbated the problem. A highly successful mystery religion in Thessalonica was the cult of Cabirus. According to numismatic evidence, the Cabirus cult was the most popular religious movement in Thessalonica, especially among the poor and marginalized Macedonians.⁴⁹ The parallels with the apocalyptic Christ of Paul's preaching were striking. Cabirus was a martyred hero, murdered by his brothers, buried with symbols of his royal power, and expected to return to help the poor and dispossessed. Moreover, the heroic Cabirus was believed by some to have returned to life, powers fully restored, to dwell among (and within) his faithful followers bestowing upon them powers, good fortune, and blessings.⁵⁰ However, Rome, wanting further to ensconce the imperial cult in the provinces, coopted the Cabirus cult conjoining it to the cult of Roma. This cooptation of the old indigenous religion was seen to benefit primarily the well-heeled Greek establishment who desired to curry favor with the Romans in any case. They could now boast that the city was completely loyal to Mother Rome, even giving up its local cultus to the worship of Roma. It left the poor, marginalized day laborers of Thessalonica, however, without a spiritual champion. Jewett comments:

A religious and social vacuum was thereby created, which may have made possible the remarkably rapid acceptance of a particular type of Christian proclamation and piety that offered in a new and more viable form many of the features that had been provided in the now discredited Cabiric cult.⁵¹

It was precisely among these people that the church at Thessalonica was formed. Theirs was a curious admixture of Pauline Christ-apocalypticism conjoined with the rituals and belief system of the old Cabirus cult. Again, as Jewett remarks:

In Thessalonica it was perceived to be politically provocative to believe that a new age had dawned outside of the jurisdiction of the civic cult, that a new savior was present, and that the frustrated yearnings for a genuine benefactor for the poor were now fulfilled. . . . the situation was ideal for the rise of a millenarian movement that took such beliefs with a literalism and immediacy not evident elsewhere in Pauline churches.⁵²

With the unexpected death of some of the members of the Thessalonian community their belief system began to unravel, precipitating a crisis in the community (1 Thess 4:13ff.). Paul responded with the letter we know as 1 Thessalonians in an attempt to reassure them regarding their faith in the *parousia* of Christ and to correct some misunderstandings associated with the more radical elements of the former Cabirus cult (the *ataktous*). His letter, however, had the opposite effect, heightening and further radicalizing the church's millenarian fervor. Paul, therefore, wrote 2 Thessalonians in a different rhetorical style, deliberative, somber, sonorous, to correct the theological misunderstandings and, with a firmer hand, to bring some order to the chaos they had created. How they responded to the second letter we can only guess.

The Message

I began this article with the comment that the New Testament is thoroughly eschatological. It is concerned with the *end* of things, the final direction toward which God is moving the world. The earliest New Testament people believed that the end of things, the *eschaton* and the *parousia* that would usher it in, was imminent, that it would occur in their own lifetime. That it did not, and that this fact created something of a crisis among the earliest Christians, is neither denied nor evaded in the New Testament. The delay of the *parousia*, far from undermining the value of the community of faith, however, actually served to underscore its centrality. It soon became very apparent to them that the church was here "for the long haul," and that living as they did between the coming of Christ and the coming of Christ, they were all the more dependent upon the resources the community made available to them.

Chief among those resources was the church's *eschatological vision*. The term "eschatological" commonly has two meanings among theologians. It can mean, strictly speaking, the "last things." But it can also mean a "breakthrough," an "epiphany," a glimpse into another world. It is in this second sense, chiefly, that the New Testament is an eschatological document: it gives us a glimpse into another world; it reveals the true nature of things; it tells us something about the direction in which things are really moving, all appearances to the contrary.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Imagine, for the sake of argument, that the room in which you currently reside is the only room in the whole world, and the people with whom you occupy that room the only people in the world. There are no windows or doors in your room; hence, you have no concept of anything outside your little "world." Indeed, the word "outside" doesn't exist in your

language. You would be forgiven, in such a situation, for believing that your room and the people with whom you occupy it were the entire universe. However, unbeknown to you, there is another floor above your room in which there are other people living other lives and doing other things. You are not aware of them, because you've never been outside your own little world, but they're there nonetheless. Suppose somehow a hole were torn in the ceiling of your "world," the floor of the "world" above, so that for the first time you were to become aware of this "other world" just above you. And suppose some in your "world" began to call up to the people in the room above, interacting with them, learning about all sorts of strange and wondrous things, things utterly inconceivable in your room. Indeed, you discover, to your amazement, that the people in the room above live their lives according to entirely different "rules" than those which govern life in your room. And the more you discover about the "world" above, the more you are drawn to it. Indeed, some in your room are so drawn to this new room and this new way of living, that even though they still live in your "world" they start to conceive of themselves as citizens of this other "world." Even though they yet remain in your room, they start to conduct themselves as though they were living in the room above. Though they are still *in* your "world," they are no longer *of* your "world." The knowledge of the room above, having broken through into their "world," has changed them forever.

New Testament people had a sense that they had witnessed such an eschatological "breakthrough," and though they were *in* the world, they were no longer *of* the world. It informed their sense of identity, their sense of community, their ethics, and their social and political agenda. They believed that they had caught sight of the world's true future, of the destiny toward which God was irrevocably moving things, and they were both encouraged by that vision and guided by its portrayal of the way things *really* are, now that God has redeemed the world in Jesus. This is the sense in which New Testament people were eschatological—*in* the world, but not *of* the world.

But when the church, then or now, abdicates its eschatological vision and fails to keep creative the tension between *in* but not *of*, it loses its way. When the emphasis is placed on the fact that, though we are in the world, *we are not of the world*, the church runs the risk of becoming too "otherworldly," too "escapist," too "pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by." It just goes weird on us. That was the error of the Thessalonians and of all radical millenarian Christians who abdicate their Christian responsibility to be "light" and "salt" and "leaven;" to be Christian *in the world*. The church of Jesus Christ does indeed have a stake in social, economic, environmental, racial, and gender justice. Shame on the church when it runs for eschatological cover in order to defend the political or economic or social *status quo*, or worse, to provide a theological rationale for the continued exploitation and disaffection of the marginalized and the voiceless. Though we are not *of* the world, we are most certainly *in* the world. The question is not whether the church is to be *in* the world or *of* the world. That's a sham. For now, this is the only world we've got. The real issue is whether or not the church will be the church *in* the world.

On the other hand, the church also errs when it becomes so invested in this world that it forgets that though it is *in* the world, it is not *of* the world. While the church must work, and work hard, at being the church in the world, it must never forget that *finally* this world is not our true home. The church is not here to "fix" the world or to "save" the world or even to "transform" the world, apologies to H. Richard Niebuhr.⁵³ Finally, the church is here to announce the *end* of this world and the advent of a whole new world called "the kingdom of God," a world that some have seen and have begun to live as though they are already citizens of. This is the error of much mainline Protestant Christianity that settles for too small a gospel, that reduces the kingdom of God to social or economic or political justice. Stan Hauerwas and Will Willimon are on target when they say:

... we have been conditioned, by our very best theologians like Niebuhr [H. Richard], to be deeply suspicious of eschatology. Despite nearly a century of biblical scholarship having demonstrated how utterly eschatological is the teaching of Jesus, we mainline Protestants have charged eschatological thinking with being "other worldly," "escapist," "pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by" thinking, which is inimical to Christian activism today. How curious that liberals have always charged that eschatology destroys ethical behavior when the biblical evidence suggests that eschatology is the *very basis* for Jesus' ethical teaching.⁵⁴

No. Authentic New Testament eschatology maintains the balance and keeps the tension creative. The church called to be the church in the world is the gospel's claim upon the people of God; to remember that though we are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world.

But we *are* "in the world." And in this world the cross comes before the crown, Lent before Easter, death before resurrection. It is the way of things in this "room." And in this "room" we shall remain until that Day when we wake to discover that it was only a dream after all, that this "room" was never our home really. Then the bad dream will be over. It will be morning, and we shall be home.

¹ Note that Mark characterized the essence of Jesus' proclamation as relating to the imminent in-breaking of the kingdom of God associated with Jesus' own activity: "The time (time as to quality and significance rather than merely chronological time) has been accomplished; the kingdom of God has arrived. Repent and trust the Good News," Mark 1:15. See also Mark 9:1; 13:32ff. For a complete survey of the New Testament teaching about the kingdom of God, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), *passim*.

² The literature documenting the significance of eschatology in Paul's thought is voluminous. The following are representative: Robin Scroggs, *Paul for a New Day* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), see esp. 397-413; J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia:

Fortress Press, 1980), see esp. 16-19; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

³See A. C. Purdy, "Paul the Apostle," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3 (1962), 702-3, for a good summary of the importance of eschatology in Paul's thought.

⁴Cf. Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, trans. and ed. R. H. Hier and D. L. Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1910); see also, Eduard Schweizer, "The Significance of Eschatology in the Teaching of Jesus," *Eschatology and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of George Raymond Beasley-Murray*, ed. W. Hulitt Gloer (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988). To be sure, the New Testament bears witness to a creative tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the kingdom, but its perspective is thoroughly eschatological nonetheless; cf. W. G. Kuemmel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (London: SCM Press, 1957), and George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future* (London: Macmillan, 1954). Some New Testament scholars have tended to emphasize the "not yet" of the kingdom (Schweitzer and Weiss), while others place the emphasis on the "already;" cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961); Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971). Among both groups of scholars, however, there is the clear recognition that the message of the New Testament is incomprehensible apart from the belief that in Jesus of Nazareth the "new age" of the kingdom was about to [had already] dawned.

⁵*Jesus, A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). For a very different interpretation of the Jesus of the New Testament, compare E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁶Yonina Talmon, "Millenarism," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. D. L. Sills, Vol. 10 (New York: Free Press, 1968), 349-62.

⁷Cf. *God Has a Story Too: Sermons in Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 1-27. Sanders' comments on interpretation in the introduction to this collection of sermons may be the finest summation of an authentically biblical hermeneutic I have read.

⁸The fact, however, that it isn't Paul's habit to begin letters to the same congregation with identical salutations has led some scholars to raise a question about the authorship of 2 Thessalonians; cf. Pheme Perkins, "2 Thessalonians," *Harper's Bible Commentary*, ed. James Luther Mays (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 1234.

⁹I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 29.

¹⁰*Untersuchungen zum zweiten Thessalonicherbrief* (Leipzig: St. Benno, 1972). Most modern commentators who repudiate Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians are, to varying degrees, dependent on the arguments set forth by Trilling. A more recent attempt to attribute 2 Thessalonians to a Paulinist on both theological and linguistic grounds is the commentary by Earl Richard in the *Sacra Pagina* series, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1995).

¹¹Trilling, 50.

¹²An example is Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, the authenticity of which no one doubts. And yet, scholars recognize that Paul employs, and employs uniquely so, technical business language in Philippians, language such as "debts and assets," "profit and loss," etc. Paul does not typically use this kind of language, and yet he does so in Philippians because it suited his purpose in communicating to a church comprised of wealthy business women to whom such language would be both welcome and comprehensible.

¹³Trilling, 132.

¹⁴See W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, rev. ed. (London: S. P. C. K., 1958); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

¹⁵Cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

¹⁶Cf. Rom 8:18ff.; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:29ff.; 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2ff. It is true that some scholars who tend to doubt Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians also argue that 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff. is an interpolation, but that begs the question.

¹⁷Gerd Luedemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology*, trans. E. S. Jones (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), would be characteristic of the former, while Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), would be characteristic of the latter.

¹⁸G. B. Caird, "Chronology of the NT," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 599-607.

¹⁹This is the approach championed by John Knox, *Chapters in the Life of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), and with some modification, Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

²⁰Cf. Gal 2:15-21.

²¹9:26ff.; 11:30; 15:1ff.; 18:22; 21:17ff.

²²Knox, 86; Jewett, 59-60.

²³Examples of this approach would be Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, "Word Biblical Commentary," Vol. 45 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982); I. Howard Marshall, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983); Beverly Gaventa, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, "Interpretation" (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998). I include Gaventa's interpretation in this category, even though some would not call her approach "theological/thematic," but would prefer "feminist" instead. However, the feminist's exegetical method is nonetheless "theological/thematic" rather than rhetorical or literary in that it looks at the text through a preselected theological/thematic "lens" by means of which what is "central" or "essential" in the letter is determined.

²⁴Examples of this approach would be William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973); Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). On the relationship between the selection of a form and the subject matter to be taken up as well as the effect desired on the audience, Lloyd Bitzer's comment is instructive: "The situation controls the rhetorical response in the same sense that the question controls the answer and the problem controls the solution;" cited in Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 34.

²⁵For example, some interpreters of 1 Thessalonians have been seized by Paul's use of the feminine image in 2:7 that he had been to them "like a nursing mother taking care of her children" to the extent that this becomes the guiding and governing metaphor for interpreting the entire letter. Such an approach fails to take notice of the fact that Paul also describes his relationship with the Thessalonians as being "like a father with his children" (2:11), and that in any case, the central issue which the letter addresses is the crisis created in the church by the death of certain members among a congregation who believed, probably due to Paul's own eschatological preaching, that they would be alive when the *parousia* occurred.

²⁶*The Thessalonian Correspondence*.

²⁷Doty, 4ff.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hendrikus Boers, "The Form-Critical Study of Paul's Letters: 1 Thessalonians as a Case Study," *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 22 (1975-76), 140-58.

³⁰ Bruce, 3.

³¹ Jewett, 71.

³² Aristotle identified three types (he called them "species") of rhetoric: judicial, deliberative, and epideictic. In judicial rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to make a judgment about events in the past. In deliberative rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to take some action in the future. In epideictic rhetoric, the author seeks to persuade the audience to hold onto and reaffirm some point of view in the present. Praise or blame is regarded by Aristotle as the outstanding characteristic of epideictic rhetoric. Cf. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, 19. While Kennedy regards 1 Thessalonians as an example of deliberative rhetoric (cf. p. 142), his own description of the various types of rhetoric seems to support the classification of 1 Thessalonians as epideictic (or demonstrative) rhetoric.

³³ Jewett, 71.

³⁴ Bruce, xxxv-xxxvi.

³⁵ Ibid., xxxvi.

³⁶ Galatians 1:6. For an excellent example of rhetorical analysis applied to Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*.

³⁷ Jewett, 72-76. See also Kennedy, 3-38, for an excellent summary of rhetorical forms.

³⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2.

³⁹ *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 82.

⁴⁰ Eg., T. W. Manson, "The Letters to the Thessalonians," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 35 (1952-53), 428-47. Of course, it should be noted that the canonical order of the letters reflects length rather than sequence. However, it should also be noted that there are three references to a previous letter in 2 Thessalonians (2:2; 2:15; 3:17), and none in 1 Thessalonians.

⁴¹ *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 82.

⁴² Jewett, 82-85.

⁴³ *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 87.

⁴⁴ F. W. Beare, "The First Letter to the Thessalonians," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4 (1962), 621ff.

⁴⁵ Cf. "But we exhort you, brothers [and sisters] to abound all the more, to seek to live quietly and to mind your own business, and to work with [your own] hands. . . so that you might walk respectfully with those outside [the community?] and owe no one anything" (1 Thess 4:10-12).

⁴⁶ In this regard, it is important to note that Paul in 1 Thessalonians refers to the gospel's antagonists as "the Jews" (2:14), highly unlikely if the congregation had a significant Jewish population. To be sure, both in 1 & 2 Thessalonians Paul employs a Jewish-style eschatology. However, he does so not because he's writing predominantly to Jews, but because *he* is a Jew and the eschatology he delineates is his. He taught that eschatology to the predominantly Macedonian congregation of Thessalonica because it was the only eschatology he knew and, irrespective of its origin, he believed it to be the truth.

⁴⁷ "The First Letter to the Thessalonians," 621. See also comments by Bruce, xxxv-xxxi; and William Neil, *The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1957), xv.

⁴⁸ See 1 Thess 4:13ff; 5:12ff.

⁴⁹ Jewett, 127-28.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁵¹ *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵³ *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), see especially 190ff. Niebuhr calls his theology "conversionist," but it is apparent that by "conversionist" he does not mean what the New Testament means. The New Testament concept of conversion is thoroughly eschatological; that is, "otherworldly" and dualistic (see, e.g., John 3:6), something Niebuhr rejects.

⁵⁴ *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 86.