Who was the Author of the book of Hebrews?

Although the Letter to the Hebrews clearly was written to address a spiritual crisis in a specific community of Christians by one well known to them, one cannot determine with certainty the identity of the author, the specific recipients or the location of their community, or the precise date of the letter's composition.

Though the letter has been ascribed to Paul from at least the end of the second century in the Eastern church and nearly universally in Christendom from Augustine to the Reformation, the arguments against Pauline authorship now appear to be decisive. Chief among them are the following: (1) the letter is anonymous, which is uncharacteristic of Paul; (2) the style of Greek is significantly different from that of Paul's letters; (3) the statement of Hebrews 2:3 seems impossible to reconcile with Galatians 1:12; and (4) the ambiguous testimony of the early Fathers: Clement of Alexandria and Origen accepted Hebrews as Pauline but with major qualifications; Tertullian named Barnabas as the author and gave no hint of a controversy on that point—difficult to explain if the author were none other than the great apostle to the Gentiles.

The reference to Timothy (Heb. 13:23) and the ancient but inconsistent testimony to Pauline authorship have led to the widespread opinion that the author was at least a member of the Pauline circle. Origen suggested that he was a pupil of Paul who wrote what he had learned from the apostle. Others have proposed Luke either as the author or, as Clement of Alexandria supposed, the translator of Paul's Hebrew original. Most modern scholarly opinion, however, is divided between Barnabas and Apollos. Barnabas was a Hellenistic Jew, a Levite in fact, a prominent member of the apostolic circle (even called an apostle in Acts 14:14; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5–6), and has the considerable support of Tertullian's unqualified assertion that Barnabas was the author of Hebrews (*On Modesty* 20). Likewise Apollos, a highly educated Alexandrian Jew, a gifted controversialist, and a participant in the apostolic ministry (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:6), could well have written a work such as Hebrews with its sophisticated use of Scripture and its elegant Greek. If the author of Hebrews was neither of these men, he was surely like them, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24) and "a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24; cf. v. 28). Plausible arguments can be advanced in favor of either of these and some others, but presently a firm conclusion remains unobtainable.

Certainly apostolicity was a prerequisite of canonicity, but this requirement could be satisfied by authorship by a member of the apostolic circle, as in the case of Mark or Luke–Acts. In any case, canonicity does not depend upon the church's present certainty as to the authorship of a particular biblical work (e.g., Judges, Chronicles). Furthermore, the author of Hebrews would be among the first to insist that the human authorship of Scripture is of secondary importance, being only the instrumentality of its divine inspiration. As he reminds his readers (3:7; 4:7), David may have written Psalm 95, but the Holy Spirit was the primary author and the one who speaks to us in it.[1]

---

[1]Rayburn, Robert, "Hebrews." Ed. Walter A. Elwell, vol. 3, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, Baker reference library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1996, c1989), Heb 1:5.

Create PDF files without this message by purchasing novaPDF printer (http://www.novapdf.com)