

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Epistle of James as a reception of Paul: Rehabilitating an epistle of straw

John-Christian Eurell\*

Stockholm School of Theology, Bromma, Sweden

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [john.christian.eurell@gmail.com](mailto:john.christian.eurell@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The Epistle of James is one of the most overlooked texts in the New Testament. This is partially due to Luther's judgement of the epistle as anti-Pauline. This article suggests that James should rather be seen as an early reception of Paul that brings new insight into the Pauline legacy of the late first century. James also helps us understand more about the theological issues of its day.

**Keywords:** anti-Paulinism; Hebrews; James; Paul; 1 Peter; pseudepigraphy

The Catholic Epistles have long been in the backwater of New Testament research. This is especially true of the Epistle of James, which has had difficulty recovering from Luther's judgement of it as an 'epistle of straw'.<sup>1</sup> Much of the research on James has been devoted to its relationship to the Pauline epistles, as its exposition of the relationship between faith and works is not easily reconciled with the Pauline use of these terms. In recent years, some scholars have attempted to establish a 'New Perspective on James' in which James is read as a text in its own right and freed from its Pauline bondage.<sup>2</sup> Whereas I sympathise with the general intention of reading the Epistle of James on its own merits, I find it highly problematic to disconnect the text from its historical background, in which Paul and his epistles are certainly components of utmost significance. Yet I contend that James must be studied in dialogue with Paul rather than in conflict with him.

The traditional isagogic questions regarding James have been answered in a multitude of ways. With the majority of contemporary scholars, I view James as a pseudonymous composition of the late first century.<sup>3</sup> The discrepancy between James and

<sup>1</sup>Since James receives no further identification in James 1:1, most scholars take the name to refer to James the Just, the brother of the Lord, who is also mentioned in Galatians, although other bearers of this common name cannot be entirely ruled out.

<sup>2</sup>See Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, 'A New Perspective on James? Neuere Forschungen zum Jakobusbrief', *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 129 (2004), pp. 1019–43; Niebuhr, 'James in the Minds of the Recipients', in Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Robert W. Wall (eds), *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition: A New Perspective on James to Jude* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2009), pp. 43–54.

<sup>3</sup>See Manabu Tsuji, *Glaube zwischen Vollkommenheit und Verweltlichung. Eine Untersuchung zur literarischen Gestalt und zur inhaltlichen Kohärenz des Jakobusbriefes*, WUNT II/93 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), pp. 38–44; Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, trans. Eugene

Pauline theology has led some to suggest that James was originally a Jewish text from a Hellenistic synagogue, which was later Christianised.<sup>4</sup> This suggestion has largely been abandoned today, and the language of James is in line with the typically Christian style that arose in the late first and early second century.<sup>5</sup> Yet the epistle is often considered to be of Jewish-Christian origin.<sup>6</sup> James is connected to the Jerusalem church in both Galatians and Acts, so the connection to Jewish Christianity is natural.<sup>7</sup> The autobiographical details of the letter are kept to a minimum. James refers to himself as slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (θεοῦ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοῦλος; 1:1) and includes himself among the teachers (διδάσκαλοι; 3:1).<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the letter is not very 'Jacobian', that is, it does not further elaborate on the characteristics of James known from other New Testament literature and early Christian traditions. The purpose for choosing James as pseudonym thus does not relate to the theological heritage of James as such, but rather associates a teaching of perceived urgency to a significant and recognised leader of the early Church.<sup>9</sup>

The Lutheran legacy of James as an anti-Pauline writing, which according to the influential commentary of Martin Dibelius is a parenetic patchwork with 'no continuity in thought whatsoever', and which 'has no theology', has often placed the epistle in something like solitary confinement in expositions of New Testament theology and reconstructions of early Christian developments.<sup>10</sup> In this article, I wish to rehabilitate the Epistle of James from being the odd bird of the New Testament and place it instead as a unique contribution among the Catholic Epistles. I will argue that James is not only in dialogue with Paul, but also shares significant features with (for example) 1 Peter and Hebrews, whose relationships to Paul are also widely discussed.

---

Boring (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998), pp. 384–8; Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 862–79. It should be noted that already Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 2.23.25) suggests that the Epistle of James is pseudonymous.

<sup>4</sup>Arnold Meyer, *Das Rätsel des Jacobusbriefes* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1930), pp. 305–6. He argues that it was composed when Paulinism was fading away, around 80–90 (and so before 1 Peter and 1 Clement).

<sup>5</sup>Albert Wifstrand, 'Stylistic Problems in the Epistles of James and Peter', *Studia Theologica* 1 (1947), pp. 170–82.

<sup>6</sup>Gerd Lüdemann, *Paulus, der Heidenapostel II: Antipaulinismus im frühen Christentum* (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), p. 201, argues that James should be placed more specifically in a Diaspora-Jewish context, since it speaks only of moral law and not ceremonial law. However, such a sharp distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism cannot be made; cf. Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2.Jh.s v.Chr.* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1973).

<sup>7</sup>Dale C. Allison, Jr., 'The Fiction of James and its *Sitz im Leben*', *Revue Biblique* 108 (2001), pp. 529–70, suggests a twofold audience for James: it is an apology which serves as edification for those who share his convictions, and a clarification for those who do not (primarily non-Christian Jews).

<sup>8</sup>It is worth noting that the self-designation of James as δοῦλος (Jas 1:1) differs significantly from that of σῦλος in Gal 2:9.

<sup>9</sup>Contra Matthias Konradt, 'The Historical Context of the Letter of James in Light of its Traditio-Historical Relations with First Peter', in *The Catholic Epistles and Apostolic Tradition*, p. 125, argues that the author of James views himself as a legitimate heir of Jacobian theology, thereby reflecting the theological legacy of James. It is, of course, clear that the author who chose James as pseudonym for the letter viewed himself as in line with James and thus in some regard in continuity with his legacy, but there is no indication in the letter that it transmits some kind of specifically Jacobian tradition.

<sup>10</sup>Martin Dibelius, *James*, rev. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1975), pp. 6, 21.

## James and Paul

The relationship between James and Paul is an issue that cannot be ignored. As mentioned in the introduction, this relationship has often been viewed as a significant *crux interpretum* in previous scholarship. The discussion on James and Paul has mainly focused on the relationship between James 2:14–26 and the Pauline teaching on justification.<sup>11</sup> Whereas Paul claims that justification comes by faith apart from works of the law (Rom 3:28), James states that one is justified by works and not by faith alone (Jas 2:24).<sup>12</sup> Martin Hengel argues that James is in fact derived from the circle of James the Just during his lifetime and is a ‘Meisterstück frühchristlicher Polemik’ against Paul.<sup>13</sup> He suggests that James does not know the Pauline epistles, but attacks what he has heard by oral tradition. Gerd Theißen, who prefers a late dating of James, suggests that James is appropriated as a symbol of Jewish Christianity and wishes to defend it against misconceptions that have evolved due to the portrayal of it in the Pauline epistles, rather than a critique of Paulinism itself.<sup>14</sup> Andreas Lindemann, on the other hand, argues that the Epistle of James is in fact an attack on Paulinism.<sup>15</sup> Richard Bauckham suggests that both Paul and James can be understood against their Jewish background without necessarily being antagonists.<sup>16</sup> However, if James was written toward the end of the first century, by which time Pauline theology was widespread, it is naïve to assume that the terminologies of James and Paul are parallel systems with no points of contact. I agree with Lyder Brun that the obvious Pauline connection in James 2:14–26 must be taken seriously, although it is not necessarily directed against Paul and Paulinism as such, but rather against conditions at the time

<sup>11</sup>On the possible implications of the relationship between James and the Pauline notion of ‘works of the law’, in relation to the ‘New Perspective’ on Paul, see Friedrich Avemarie, ‘Die Werke des Gesetzes im Spiegel des Jakobusbriefes: A Very Old Perspective on Paul’, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 98 (2001), pp. 282–309.

<sup>12</sup>Bernhard Bartmann, *St. Paulus und St. Jakobus über die Rechtfertigung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1897), pp. 151–2, argues that these two verses alone make clear that there must be some kind of literary relationship between James and Paul. Joachim Jeremias, ‘Paul and James’, *Expository Times* 66 (1954–5), pp. 368–71, states that there can be no doubt that James here presupposes Paul.

<sup>13</sup>Martin Hengel, ‘Der Jakobusbrief als antipaulinische Polemik’, in Gerald F. Hawthorne and Otto Betz (eds), *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis for his 60th Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), p. 253.

<sup>14</sup>Gerd Theißen, ‘Die pseudepigraphische Intention des Jakobusbriefes: Ein Beitrag zu seinen Einleitungsfragen’, in Petra von Gemünden, Matthias Konradt and Gerd Theißen (eds), *Der Jakobusbrief: Beiträge zur Rehabilitierung der ‘strophernen Epistel’* (Münster: LIT, 2003), pp. 54–82. He argues that at the time when James was written, works were emphasised also in mainstream Paulinism (cf. the Pastoral Epistles).

<sup>15</sup>Andreas Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), pp. 240–52. Hermann Schammberger, *Die Einheitlichkeit des Jakobusbriefes im antignostischen Kampf* (Gotha: Klotz, 1936), on the other hand, argues that James is anti-Gnostic rather than anti-Pauline.

<sup>16</sup>Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 112–40. See also Rolf Walker, ‘Allein aus Werken. Zur Auslegung von Jakobus 2, 14–26’, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 61 (1964), pp. 155–92; Matthias Konradt, *Christliche Existenz nach dem Jakobusbrief: Eine Studie zu seiner soteriologischen und ethischen Konzeption* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 241–6; Konradt, ‘Der Jakobusbrief im frühchristlichen Kontext: Überlegungen zum traditionsgeschichtlichen Verhältnis des Jakobusbriefes zur Jesusüberlieferung, zur Paulinischen Tradition und zum 1. Petrusbrief’, in J. Schlosser (ed.), *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 171–212.

of the composition of the text.<sup>17</sup> Philipp Vielhauer makes the important observation that James does not portray his teaching as the opposite of Pauline justification, despite the terminological discrepancies in relation to Paul.<sup>18</sup> Manabu Tsuji notes that it is in fact not only James 2:14–26 that connects to the teachings of Paul, but the entire self-understanding of the epistle resembles patterns found in the Pauline and deutero-Pauline writings.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the abundance of Pauline connections has led Kari Syreeni to suggest that James was actually written in Corinth as part of the aftermath of the conflict there.<sup>20</sup> Although I find Syreeni's argument concerning the provenance of James exceedingly speculative, I believe that Tsuji and Syreeni are correct in placing James in a clearly post-Pauline context. Regardless of how one wishes to construct the history and social profile that is associated with the Epistle of James, it is clear that the theological terminology of James is highly influenced by Paul.

Before further discussing how the Epistle of James relates to Paulinism, we must note that the idea of tensions between James and Paul is not unwarranted. Paul is negative about what he refers to as *τινας ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου* ('some from James'; Gal 2:11), despite being in general agreement with James in theory (Gal 2:9; cf. Acts 15:13–21). However, the crucial issue in Paul's dealings with James is not the relationship between faith and works, but rather the relevance of Jewish customs for gentile converts, especially circumcision. This issue is not discussed in the Epistle of James, which appears to be fully in agreement with Paul on this issue. Scholars who read James as a Judaising polemic against some form of Paulinism must (consciously or unconsciously) interpret the Epistle of James in light of Galatians, since the epistle itself contains no Judaising content. There are no references to circumcision, purity regulations or other 'Judaising' practices discussed elsewhere in the New Testament. It is also significant to keep in mind that similarities to that alleged contradiction between the attitude toward faith and works in Paul and James can also be found in a number of other early Christian works.<sup>21</sup>

Before dealing with the problematic passages in James, it is of importance that we recall that James was by no means unknown to Pauline Christianity. In Galatians he is mentioned as the only one apart from Peter that Paul met during his first visit in Jerusalem after becoming Christian (Gal 1:18–19). James is identified as *τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου* ('the brother of the Lord'; 1:19), but also as one of the *στῦλοι* ('pillars') of the Jerusalem Church (2:9). This rather positive presentation is somewhat tainted by the fact (noted above) that Paul's opponents in Antioch are identified as 'from James' (2:12). Since Paul presents James as a brother of the Lord in Galatians, it is likely that he has James in mind also in 1 Corinthians 9:5, when he portrays the apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas as adhering to a married norm from which Paul voluntarily defers. James is also mentioned in the list of resurrection

<sup>17</sup>Lyder Brun, *Jakobs brev* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1941), p. 111.

<sup>18</sup>Philipp Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1978), p. 576.

<sup>19</sup>Manabu Tsuji, *Glaube zwischen Vollkommenheit und Verweltlichung: Eine Untersuchung zur literarischen Gestalt und zur inhaltlichen Kohärenz des Jakobusbriefes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), pp. 134–86.

<sup>20</sup>Kari Syreeni, 'James and the Pauline Legacy: Power Play in Corinth?', in Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett, and Kari Syreeni (eds), *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflict in Early Christianity. Essays in Honour of Heikki Räsänen* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 397–437.

<sup>21</sup>Kurt Aland, 'Der Herrenbruder Jakobus und der Jakobusbrief', in Kurt Aland (ed.), *Neutestamentliche Entwürfe* (Munich: Kaiser, 1979), pp. 233–45, gives the example of the *Epistle of Barnabas* 13:7 in relation to *Epistle of Barnabas* 4:12; 19:1, as well as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vis. 8.10.3; 9.2.1.1–2; 10.4.

appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:7.<sup>22</sup> However, Paul never refers to James in his own right, but always in relation to someone else.<sup>23</sup>

Let us for the moment leave aside the problematic passage in James 2:14–26 and first consider other points of contact between James and Paul. There are a number of passages in James and Romans that express a fundamental agreement between James and Paul.<sup>24</sup> Both letters speak of the necessity of being doers rather than mere hearers of the word (Jas 1:22, 25 || Rom 2:13) and speak of fulfilling the law through love of one's neighbour (Jas 2:8–11 || Rom 13:8–10). A more remarkable parallel is the shared use of Abraham as an example of faith. Both state that ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην ('Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'; Gen 15:6, LXX). However, James points out that Abraham was justified through sacrificing Isaac on the altar (Jas 2:21–4), whereas Paul is satisfied with the literal meaning of the quotation that Abraham was justified by faith (Gal 3:6; Rom 4). As contradictory as this may seem, it is significant to note that James speaks of works in a general sense, whereas Paul speaks of works of the law and especially circumcision. Jack T. Sanders argues that the occurrence of faith/works and Abraham together must be due to more than a coincidental usage of common Jewish material: James is obviously commenting on Paul in some way.<sup>25</sup> The discrepancy in the use of Abraham as an example necessitates a further discussion of the significant passage James 2:14–26.

Despite the significance of this passage, it is important not to isolate it from its context. As pointed out by Andrew Chester, the discourse must be put into the context of the connection between hearing and doing (Jas 1:19–26; 3:12–18).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the immediately preceding passage (2:1–13) deals with the significance of compassion and speaks of the νόμου ἐλευθερίας ('law of freedom'; 2:12). If James knew Pauline theology, he would be acquainted with the Pauline concept of freedom (ἐλευθερία). In fact, it is quite probable that Galatians 5:13–15 serves as background for James 2:8–13. Paul speaks of ἐλευθερία as the basis of the Christian lifestyle of serving one's neighbour. He states that the entire law is summed up in the commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself (Gal 5:14).<sup>27</sup> James uses the exact same argument as preface to the disputed section James 2:14–26. Shortly before James quotes what he

<sup>22</sup>Adolf von Harnack, 'Verklärungsgeschichte Jesu, der Bericht des Paulus (I. Kor. 15, 3ff.) und die beiden Christusvisionen des Petrus', *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1922), pp. 62–80, argues that the resurrection appearances to Peter and the twelve, and to James and the apostles are formulas that originate from communities seeking to legitimate Peter and James, respectively. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Tradition and Redaction in 1 Cor 15:3–7', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981), pp. 582–9, argues that 1 Cor 15:6–7 was appended to the traditional formula in 1 Cor. 15:3–5 by Paul himself in order to make a smooth transition into speaking of his own revelation of the risen Christ; but David M. Moffitt, 'Affirming the "Creed": The Extent of Paul's Citation of an Early Christian Formula in 1 Cor 15,3b–7', *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99 (2008), pp. 49–73, argues convincingly that the references to Peter and James are in fact part of the same creedal formulation, which Paul relates to his own resurrection experience (1 Cor 15:8–10).

<sup>23</sup>William R. Farmer, 'James the Lord's Brother, According to Paul', in Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (eds), *James the Just and Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 134.

<sup>24</sup>Edgar J. Goodspeed, *New Solutions of New Testament Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 40, argues that James is influenced by Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians and probably Ephesians.

<sup>25</sup>Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (London: SCM, 1975), p. 121.

<sup>26</sup>Andrew Chester, 'The Theology of James', in Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin (eds), *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 21.

<sup>27</sup>Paul speaks of the obligation to obey the entire law (Gal 5:3) and continues by claiming that the only thing that matters is not circumcision or uncircumcision but πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη ('faith

calls the 'royal law', he speaks of the law of freedom (Jas 1:25). This is hardly a coincidence. James is alluding to Paul's ethical teaching and enforcing it – not questioning it. Paul speaks of τὸν νόμον τοῦ Χριστοῦ ('the law of Christ'; Gal 6:2), which in James has become 'the law of freedom' (2:12) or 'the royal law' (2:8). Paul makes clear in Galatians that everyone must examine his own works (τὸ δὲ ἔργον ἑαυτοῦ δοκιμαζέτω ἕκαστος; Gal 6:4), and that one will reap what one sows (Gal 6:7–10). He clearly opposes gentile circumcision (Gal. 6:12–15), but also acknowledges that works are a natural part of living according to the law of Christ. Also in Romans Paul makes clear that works have a significant place in Christian soteriology (Rom 2:6–16). On these points James is not in opposition to Paul, but rather in continuity with him. Circumcision is not an issue in James, but the works of which he speaks are present already in Galatians. The greatest difference between James and Paul is not directly theological but pertains to the time and context of composition. When James writes, circumcision is not a major problem.<sup>28</sup> What is significant for James is the construction of a Christian ethic that prescribes good works. Whereas Paul addresses justification from a theoretical perspective, circumcision being the practical point of conflict, James addresses a specific phenomenon in his own time.<sup>29</sup>

A problem with much of previous scholarship on James is that it more or less only allows for two possible scenarios: either James is criticising Paul or his later followers, or he has no knowledge of Paul and the many parallels are coincidental. We have found no direct criticism of Paul despite the rather different use of Pauline terminology in the epistle. It is unlikely that James developed a parallel (totally unrelated) terminology of his own, and this suggests that James knows of Pauline traditions in some form.<sup>30</sup> The fact that he does not give verbatim quotations from Galatians or Romans does not mean that he is not acquainted with their basic message and terminology. James does not seek to engage in the debate of Paul's day, but addresses relevant issues in his own time.<sup>31</sup> Sanders argues that James has misunderstood Paul, but he is not alone since the deutero-Paulines and 1 Peter do the same; I do not agree.<sup>32</sup> The issue is not that James has misunderstood Paul, but rather that he writes significantly later than Paul in an environment where early Christian writers address different needs. The discrepancy between Paul on the one hand and James and the deutero-Pauline writings on the other hand is not based on a misunderstanding, but on changed circumstances that require doctrinal development.

### Giving James a context

The examination above suggests that there is some kind of relationship between James and Paul. James represents something of an implicit reception of Paul that testifies to

---

working through love'; 5:6), culminating in the fulfilment of the law through love to the neighbour (5:14). Thus, we can find a positive correlation between faith and works already in Paul.

<sup>28</sup>This might indicate that James is not, as is often argued, a Jewish Christian text.

<sup>29</sup>See Roman Heiligenthal, *Werke als Zeichen. Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung der menschlichen Taten im Frühjudentum, Neuen Testament und Frühchristentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), p. 50.

<sup>30</sup>Todd C. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology. Re-reading an Ancient Christian Letter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 51; cf. p. 60, where Penner despite this does not consider James to be dependent on Paul.

<sup>31</sup>Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), p. 210, argues that the differing use of in James in Paul is due to their differences in time and context.

<sup>32</sup>Sanders, *Ethics*, p. 122.



the influence of the Pauline writings. However, in order to enhance our understanding of the epistle it is important to examine whether there are in fact other early Christian writings that show similar tendencies and thereby help us contextualise James. Todd C. Penner aptly describes the Epistle of James as the ‘Melchizedek’ of the Christian canon, who appears without precedents and descendants and is incomprehensible in a number of ways.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the isolation of James in reconstructions of early Christianity is mainly due to its claimed anti-Paulinism,<sup>34</sup> but also because the influential commentary of Martin Dibelius claims that James has no theological message.<sup>35</sup> And yet the fact that James was at some point included in an early Christian letter collection is in itself an indication that James is not automatically predestined to be read as a non-theological and anti-Pauline tract.<sup>36</sup> Once these misleading preconceptions concerning James are dismissed, it can be noted that James has a number of affinities with other early Christian writings. Apart from Paul, the most significant similarities can be found in 1 Peter and Hebrews.<sup>37</sup> These similarities will be touched upon briefly, not with the purpose of establishing a literary or sociological relationship, but in order to analyse the Jacobian text-type.

The relationship between James and 1 Peter is not easily evaluated, since most connections are allusions or thematic similarities.<sup>38</sup> Whereas there are a number of striking parallels between the letters, it is unlikely that these are due to a direct literary dependence between the two texts.<sup>39</sup> The first similarity appears already in James 1:1 || 1 Peter 1:1, where both texts are characterised as diaspora writings. Parallels continue concerning rejoicing in the midst of suffering (Jas 1:2–3 || 1 Pet 1:6–7) and an urge to do away with wickedness (Jas 1:21 || 1 Pet 2:1–2). Both letters note that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6–7 || 1 Pet 5:5–6).<sup>40</sup> It is also possible that both letters allude to being named ‘Christians’ (Jas 2:7 || 1 Pet 4:16). Yet none of these

<sup>33</sup>Todd C. Penner, ‘The Epistle of James in Current Research’, *Currents in Biblical Research* 7 (1999), pp. 257–308.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. not only Luther, but also Ferdinand Christian Baur, ‘Die Christuspartei in der Korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der apostel Paulus in Rom’, *Tübingen Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831), pp. 61–206. It is remarkable that Michael Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions* (London: SCM, 1994), does not pay much attention to James, despite placing him in the Peter-camp in his relaunch of Baur’s dichotomy of Christian origins.

<sup>35</sup>Dibelius, *James*, p. 21.

<sup>36</sup>See Karl Wilhelm Niebuhr, ‘Der Jakobusbrief in ökumenischer Perspektive: Ein Vorgriff auf meine Kommentierung im EKK’, in Ulrich Luz, Thomas Söding, and Samuel Vollenweider (eds), *Exegese – ökumenisch engagiert: Der ‘Evangelisch-Katholische Kommentar’ in der Diskussion über 500 Jahre Reformation. Ein Rückblick und ein Ausblick* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), pp. 137–46.

<sup>37</sup>It is often suggested that James knew Q; see Paul Foster, ‘Q and James: A Source-Critical Conundrum’, in Alicia J. Batten and John S. Kloppenborg (eds), *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Early Jesus Traditions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 3–34. See also Patrick J. Hartin, *James and the Q Sayings of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). Adolf Schlatter, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1932), pp. 19–29, noted that there are significant affinities between James and Matthew’s Gospel.

<sup>38</sup>See Wiard Popkes, ‘James and Scripture: An Exercise in Intertextuality’, *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), pp. 213–29.

<sup>39</sup>These parallels are especially interesting, since 1 Peter is often regarded the most Pauline and James the least Pauline of the non-Pauline epistles; see James Hardy Ropes, *The Epistle of St. James* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1916), p. 22.

<sup>40</sup>In this instance, it is significant to note that James and 1 Peter agree against the LXX; see Wiard Popkes, ‘The Composition of James and Intertextuality: An Exercise in Methodology’, *Studia Theologica* 51 (1997), pp. 97–112.

parallels are verbatim quotations, and Dibelius is in some regard correct in concluding that the relationship between the texts is often overestimated.<sup>41</sup> Still, a number of scholars have noticed that the themes that are parallel to the two texts are somewhat more developed in 1 Peter.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to James, 1 Peter turns exhortation in a christological direction.<sup>43</sup> If there exists a literary connection between the two texts, it is 1 Peter that uses James, since 1 Peter elaborates further on the common themes.<sup>44</sup>

Although the parallels between the texts are too inexact to suggest a literary relationship between the texts, the common themes should not be dismissed too quickly. Matthias Konradt argues that James and 1 Peter are in fact different witnesses of the same branch of tradition.<sup>45</sup> Although I disagree with this conclusion, I agree that there are a number of significant similarities. For example, presbyters appear to serve a central leading function in both of the communities (Jas 5:14 || 1 Pet 5:1). Likewise, James's self-designation as one of the teachers (Jas 3:1) somewhat resembles the depiction of Peter as a co-elder (1 Pet 5:1). The eschatological section with its focus on enduring sufferings (Jas 5:7–11) also resembles 1 Peter to some degree, although the sufferings in 1 Peter are primarily paralleled by trials in James (cf. Jas 1:2–4).

The Epistle to the Hebrews, very much like James and 1 Peter, is of ambiguous origin and is related to Paul in some secondary sense.<sup>46</sup> Outside the Pauline *Hauptbriefe*, the connection between Abraham and faith as an example for Christians can only be found in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:8, 17 and James 2:21, 23. It is likely that both Hebrews and James are dependent on Paul for their use of this analogy.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Hebrews also refers to the faith of Abraham in relation to the act of bringing forth Isaac as an offering (Heb 11:17 || Jas 2:21). Hebrews resembles James in mentioning Rahab as an example of faith (Heb 11:31 || Jas 2:25).<sup>48</sup> On a more general level,

<sup>41</sup>Dibelius, *James*, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup>Arthur Temple Cadoux, *The Thought of St. James* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1944), pp. 39–43, suggests that 1 Peter is an adaption of James with the purpose of widening its scope to speak also to the situation of gentile Christians. This suggestion is implausible not only due to the unfortunate use of a Judaism/Hellenism dichotomy, but mainly because there is no reason to view 1 Peter as a revision of James. In the case of Jude and 2 Peter, such a suggestion is warranted, but in James, the significant parallels are limited to certain passages.

<sup>43</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>44</sup>Gerald H. Rendall, *The Epistle of St James and Judaic Christianity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1927), pp. 96–7. See also Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. cii; Arnold Meyer, *Das Rätsel des Jakobusbriefes* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1930), p. 78.

<sup>45</sup>Matthias Konradt, 'Der Jakobusbrief im frühchristlichen Kontext: Überlegungen zum traditions-geschichtlichen Verhältnis des Jakobusbriefes zur Jesusüberlieferung, zur paulinischen Tradition und zum 1. Petrusbrief', in Jacques Schlosser (ed.), *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 207–11; Konradt, 'The Historical Context of the Letter of James in Light of its Traditio-Historical Relation with First Peter', in Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Robert W. Wall (eds), *The Catholic Epistles and the Apostolic Tradition* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), p. 110.

<sup>46</sup>See Knut Backhaus, 'Der Hebräerbrief und die Paulus-Schule', *BZ* 37 (1993), pp. 183–208; Clare K. Rothschild, *Hebrews as Pseudepigraphon: The History and Significance of the Pauline Attribution of Hebrews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>47</sup>Roy A. Harrisville III, *The Figure of Abraham in the Epistles of St. Paul: In the Footsteps of Abraham* (San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), p. 39.

<sup>48</sup>In light of the possible connection between James and Matthew's Gospel mentioned in n. 37, it is worth noting that Rahab is mentioned as an ancestor of Jesus in Matt 1:5.



Hebrews shares the idea of faith being manifested through works, as well as the theme of eschatological suffering (Heb 11–12).<sup>49</sup>

Although the similarities between these texts might point toward common traditions, the differences between them make it implausible that they originate from the same milieu. The main gain of pointing out the similarities between them is not that one can establish a ‘school’ of Catholic Epistles, but rather that these texts together witness to different ways in which Paul was appropriated in the late first century. In relation to other early Christian pseudonymous works, we may note that the Pastoral Epistles also place some emphasis on good works.<sup>50</sup> However, the Pastoral Epistles place more emphasis on submission to various hierarchies. In this regard, 1 Peter can be seen as occupying a kind of middle ground between James and the Pastorals, since it also contains *Haustafeln*.<sup>51</sup> The Epistle of Jude is also of some interest, since it claims to be written by ‘Jude, servant of Christ, brother of James’ (Jude 1). Since Jude is written later than James, it is possible that the author of Jude had in mind not only the legacy of James the Just, but also the Epistle of James when using this designation for creating legitimacy for his text.<sup>52</sup> It is also a remarkable coincidence that the generally acknowledged dependence of 2 Peter on Jude leads to the result that both canonical epistles claiming Petrine authorship may be partially dependent on early texts that claim to be written by Jesus’ siblings.

## Conclusion

The Epistle of James deserves a more prominent place in scholarly reconstructions of early Christian thought. Once the text has been freed from its Lutheran bondage, it emerges as an example of reception of Paul that is no less significant than the rest of the Catholic Epistles. James, just like 1 Peter, Hebrews and even the deutero-Pauline epistles, is a document that illustrates the reception and development of Pauline theology. Far from being anti-Pauline, James presupposes Paulinism in his argument. The background to the epistle should not be sought in its choice of pseudonym. In the same manner as 1 Peter, James contains nothing that links it to its alleged author, whereas it presupposes Pauline theology in some form.<sup>53</sup> The Epistle of James is a document that illustrates a post-apostolic practice of attributing an urgent text to a prominent figure in early Christianity without necessarily claiming a certain theological profile on this basis. James is a writing with ambiguous connections to Paul that gives us insight into the development of Pauline Christianity in the late first century.

<sup>49</sup>It should also be noted that Heb 12:11 is rather similar to Jas 3:18.

<sup>50</sup>See Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Epistles* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 28–31. Gerd Theißen, ‘Pseudepigraphie intention’, p. 73, mentions the examples 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10, 25; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Tit 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14.

<sup>51</sup>It is interesting to note that Abraham, who is such a significant link between Paul, James, and Hebrews, is used in 1 Pet. 3:6 in order to argue for submission of wives.

<sup>52</sup>See Dibelius, *James*, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup>It is not insignificant that Cephas, James, and Paul, who are the only three individuals that are named in 1 Cor 15:1–11 (Paul’s name is not explicit but implied) are those to whom pseudonymous epistles are ascribed (James is also mentioned as a pillar in Gal 2:9, but is not mentioned in Gal 1:19).

**Cite this article:** Eurell J-C (2020). The Epistle of James as a reception of Paul: Rehabilitating an epistle of straw. *Scottish Journal of Theology* 73, 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930620000332>