CHRISTIANITY AND THE COMPUTER by A. Q. Morton and J. McLeman; *Hodder & Stoughton*, 5s.

This book is intended as a 'simple and non-technical explanation' of the authors' work in determining the authorship of the Pauline Epistles using stylometric techniques and a computer, with a discussion of the 'wider issues' which arise. Four chapters deal with 'The Bible of Today', four with 'The Church Today', and there are five tables of figures. It is concluded that five epistles are genuine. The remainder being deprived of Paul's personal authority, which was 'second only to that of Jesus' (p. 44), leads the authors to the conclusion that it is impossible to accept the final authority of either Church or Bible (p. 77).

Theological considerations are secondary here. First, one must criticize the cruditiy of the 'scientific' approach, the basis of the dramatic conclusions. Though only superficially described in two small chapters (with the computer hardly mentioned), their stylistic procedures are clearly inadequate to bear theological weight; they are, in fact, pseudo-scientific, being coloured by the crucial pre-scientific assumption that Galatians is Pauline (p. 27).

A linguistic viewpoint shows some fundamental weaknesses in their method. Stylistic analysis requires a comprehensive, empirical description, of *all* potentially significant formal features in a text; but the authors ignore semantic, phonological and lexical patterns, and choose only two (*kai* and sentence-length) out of the grammatical range. (The Junius experimenters were not satisfied with 450 tests).

Again, 'if the test (*sc.* of authorship) is to be a habit, it must be something simple' (p. 24) . . .'In fact you need to look at things which you will find, on the average, on any page of Greek prose'. This does not follow. Frequent, essential linguistic items (such as *kai*) are least valuable as stylistic indicators, because an author has less choice in their use – and choice is the essence of stylistic individuality – than with the lexically-full words of language, and the internal structure of word-groups, both of which are ignored. Single words are very inadequate criteria – especially when frequency of occurrence is given without positional information. As for gross sentence-length, without even a definition of sentence . . . ! (C. C. Fries estimates that there are at least 100 ways of defining this theory concept.)

Environmental and psychological pressures, which cause change in stylistic habits, are also omitted. The authors' claim that their tests have produced uniform results regardless of time and subject-matter is most unrealistic. Similarly, the variation in time, subject-matter and stylistic level of other Greek authors referred to makes them an impossible norm.

A central weakness is the failure to define what is meant by the 'accepted limits' (p. 23) which distinguish the idiosyncratic from the general use of language. When are differences 'slight anomalies' and when are they 'mathematically significant'? (pp. 26, 32). It is hardly enough to say 'there were technical problems' (p. 28) in determining variation, without ever specifying the proportions more than comparing them to a game of bridge! (Incidentally, how do you isolate 'ingrained habits'? How do you know when a feature represents an *unconscious* tendency, when not?)

One should also note: the fallacy behind 'Hebrew is a simple language', and the circularity in 'with a small vocabulary' (p. 15); the confusion of time-bound, changing, formal metaphorical expression with permanent, unchanging theological content (p. 43); the dubious negative premiss which doubts the genuineness of initial and concluding ascriptions (p. 22); and, How do you divide a text into parts? (pp. 30, 85).

Lastly, stylistic judgments rely on positive data, not on negative inference. The absence of features in a text does not mean that Paul did not write it.

In short, let us have no more premature, over-dramatic popularization, with simplifications and bad analogies, but a technical monograph, with less awe-ful emphasis on the adding-machine, and more information about stylistic principles and interpretative procedures.

David Crystal