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SIMONE TURCO

**ON PAULINE QUOTATION MODES
AND THEIR TEXTUAL-LITERARY VALUE.
A BRIEF NOTE ON “2 TIMOTHY”, 2, 19**

Like most of its kind, the apostle Paul’s second Epistle to Timothy contains several more-or-less overt references to parts of the Hebrew Scriptures reinterpreted in a Christian light. Among these, however, a text is found which includes a twofold quotation not entirely – or directly – ascribable to the Hebrew writings. Even though this text has already been analysed from an exegetical viewpoint, has seldom been considered in the context of textual analysis and authorship studies. The well-known text is 2 *Timothy*, 2, 19, which reads:

“Ο μέντοι στερεὸς θεμέλιος τοῦ θεοῦ ἔστηκεν, ἔχων τὴν σφραγίδα ταύτην Ἔγνων Κύριος τοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ, καὶ Ἀποστήτω ἀπὸ ἀδικίας πᾶς ὁ ὀνομάζων τὸ ὄνομα Κυρίου”¹

¹ B. F. Westcott – F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, American edition, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1882, p. 493. Translation: “However, the FIRM Foundation of GOD stands having this INSCRIPTION, ‘The LORD knows THOSE who are his;’ and, ‘Let EVERY ONE who NAMES the NAME of the Lord depart from

The context in which the words are set is a stern condemnation of apostate ideas that seem to have infiltrated the Ecclesia as early as 65 C. E., when the letter is thought to have been penned.² In chapter 2, the writer advises the recipient how to deal with those who entertained and spread the belief that the resurrection had already occurred (8-13). Subsequently, Timothy is warned against useless debates about words, empty speeches and ungodly rumors that would become as contagious as gangrene, and two early supporters of the doctrine of mere spiritual resurrection, Hymenaeus

Iniquity.’” (B. Wilson, *The Emphatic Diaglott*, New York, International Bible Students Association, 1942, p. 714).

² There has been much dispute as to whether this Pastoral Epistle (out of the three that were given this label) was actually written by Paul. A considerable number of scholars concluded that it was not written by the apostle, but by someone who knew about Paul’s last days. The basis for such assumption is the same as is used to disprove the traditional authorship of other Bible writings, even by the same author (mainly Paul), namely, the fact that the style of this one letter differs from that of others bearing his name. However, by such standards, very few works, not only within the Biblical canon, could be associated with any certain writer, as if an author could not change his style, lexicon and form even considerably depending on his readership. Textual analysis is not conducive to the former conclusion, nor does it leave scholarship free from biased standpoints. Although much stylistic analysis favours the assumption that too wide deviations from the norm should be viewed as a sign of a different authorship, alleged proof of apocryphalness in the case analysed here has usually been inferred on rather weak basis, namely, a difference in ‘tone’ and ‘contents’ in respect of, for example, *1 Timothy*. Interestingly, and paradoxically, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, himself an supporter of the idea that the Pastorals as a whole are not genuine, has come to the conclusion that *2 Timothy* is the only genuine one of the three (*1 Timothy* and *Titus* being, in his view, later inclusions) : see for completeness R. F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, as well as J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 357 and ff. Further, the quotation-style complements Paul’s as expressed in other canonical writings, and the quotation-context in particular follows a pattern of reasoning that is akin to his manner of developing arguments. In this respect, see P. H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans, 2006, pp. 3-9; Towner also provides a detailed bibliography of both ‘supporters’ of and ‘dissenters’ from the assumption of Paul’s authorship of the Pastorals. Besides revealing an inherent weakness in stylistic methodology (the merits of which it is not our aim or duty to expand on here), the case of *2 Timothy* shows how the problem of Pauline textual criticism is still far from being solved; it would call for a reconsideration of stylistic aspects in more comprehensive and unprejudiced terms.

and Philetus, are mentioned by name (14-18). Thereafter, by the adversative conjunction μέντοι ('however', 'indeed', 'to be sure'), the text introduces the expressions of 19 as two quotations put on an equal level.

As to the first one, we have an official source highlighted by most commentators: the words are taken almost *verbatim* from the Septuagint version of *Numbers*, 16, 5: “ἔγνω ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ὄντας αὐτοῦ”.³ The context is the Levite Korah and his crowd of rebels being summoned before the Tabernacle for God to express his judgment on them.

The second quotation has no equally clear source, as no match can be found in any *Old Testament* text. As mentioned earlier, since the writer presents them both as equally direct quotations, the latter one, not being so in the actual sense, must be considered as such from an exegetical point of view.⁴ Explaining the verse, Charles John Ellicott presents us with an exhaustive précis on the major interpretations furnished up to his time (and as they mostly remained even later):

“The thought [of the second quote] is expressed in a wider and more general form in Isaiah 52:11: ‘Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing . . . Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord;’ and for the words ‘nameth the name of the Lord,’ see Isaiah 26:13. ‘Naming the name of Jesus’⁵ must be understood in the sense of the last clause of 1 Corinthians 12:3;⁶ in other words, this sentence of the

³ *Septuaginta; id est vetus testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, Editio altera quam recognovit et emendavit R. Hanhart (Rahlf-Hanhart), Stuttgart, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006, p, 243. Translation: “Jehova will show who are his” (*The Holy Bible. American Standard Version*, [1901], New York, Watchtower and Tract Society – International Bible Students Association, 1944, p. 166 [Old Testament Section]).

⁴ The exegetical issue is discussed at length in C. R. Erdman, *The Pastoral Epistles of Paul: An Exposition*, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1923, pp. 82-130. See also, much more recently, R. F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, cit., pp. 214-238.

⁵ “The Lord” can here be intended as referring to God himself, the application to Jesus possibly being result of confessional leanings [my note].

⁶ *The Holy Bible. American Standard Version*, cit., p. 192 (New Testament Section): “Wherefore I make known unto you, that no man speaking in the Spirit of God saith, Jesus is anathema; and no man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit” [my note].

inscription signifies that no man confessing with the heart that Jesus is Lord can commit iniquity deliberately—the two things are utterly incompatible. ‘Iniquity’ here includes the teaching of those false men above alluded to, as their teaching led away from the truth, and resulted in a lax and evil way of life.”⁷

Timothy’s correspondent actuates here a refined textual operation. He presents the recipient with a direct quote he may well have been acquainted with (since it was taken from a well-known version that widely circulated in the Hellenized world) and then interpolates a statement which acquires equal force due to the former one – certainly canonical – but which is the result of his own theological gleaning. In fact, the second statement is the distilled product of various Bible texts and contexts put together to resemble a genuine quotation whose sense might ideally match the first one and, most importantly, provide a suitable climax for the reasoning expressed in the chapter.

This operation, of a textual kind, takes on even greater significance considering the letter’s peculiar target-readership as well as text-economy. The epistle’s frame hinges on two key aspects. Firstly, Paul felt his death was imminent; the effort he poured out into his writing amounted to a concentration of reasonings and admonitions that had to be carried out in a reduced time-space frame. Secondly, the epistle was addressed to Timothy, who already knew Paul’s style and general line of reasoning, and who would thus be able to use it to convey a powerful, direct reminder to the Ecclesia, which had to be spurred on to take definite stand against then-flourishing apostasy. In such a context, the letter, of a private kind and evidently not meant for wide distribution at first, was to be brief,

⁷ *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, edited by C. J. Ellicott, London – Paris – New York, Cassel, 1884, vol. III, p. 230. See also J. M. Bassler, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2011, p. 147, where the interpretation’s sole focus is on the theological significance, without references to the textual problem.

straightforward, succinct and substantial enough both to be completed before the writer's death and to be quickly interiorized by a Christian recipient acquainted with the holy writings as well as with his mentor's ability to synthesize on doctrine and divinity.⁸

The problem of this quotation was taken into consideration and broadly commented on by many – especially Protestant – exegetes and commentators,⁹ but the study of it in the economy of the work, not only from a religious point of view, has seldom, if ever, been carried out to a minimally satisfactory degree. This little cameo can well be seen as one of the letter's foci, as a sort of melting pot shedding light on the work's manner, time, and environment of composition. It might be a good starting point to reassess Pauline scholarship, especially as concerns the Pastoral Epistles, in two different ways: 1) to highlight a quotation and reasoning pattern that might hide in other works attributed to the same author and – by an unbiased analysis – it can thus serve as a touchstone, albeit minimal, to evaluate other dubious attributions; 2) to provide a key to understanding even better the cultural *humus* in which the epistle was written.¹⁰

Therefore, the epistle should also be considered an achievement in which both the attitudes of the writer and his need to condensate deep and urgent Christian-life and theological messages are revealed in the forging of a literally 'unmatchable' but 'sensibly' genuine quotation whose

⁸ See P. H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, cit., pp. 10-30.

⁹ See A. W. Meyer – J. E. Huther – G. Lünemann, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to Timothy and Titus and to the Epistle to the Hebrews*, with a Preface and Supplementary Notes to the American Edition by T. Dwight, New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1885, pp. 236-237 and pp. 243-245. On the issue of Paul's quotation modes, see A. H. Wakefield, *Where to Live. The Hermeneutical Significance of Paul's Citations from Scripture in "Galatians", 3, 1-14*, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2003, pp. 11-49. Early criticism of the subject was carried out by J. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, Paris (Ark.), the Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989 [1st ed. 1810], vol. IX, pp. 320 ff.

¹⁰ See C. B. Puskas – M. Reasoner, *The Letters of Paul: An Introduction*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, pp. 227-240.

position, in the economy of the verse, of the chapter and finally of the whole work makes it absolutely genuine and truthfully canonical in the reader's eyes, as a literary piece is supposed to be. In this light, quotation stands out as a way of forming the text, a veritable way of writing, which we know Pauline writings (most often not so covertly) not very rarely hinge on. It is a way of directing the reader's perception and understanding; it 'creates' textual truthfulness by acquainting him to novelty, mainly in doctrinal dialectics, using known material and by persuading him about the gist of the reasoning. It encloses here in one dense formulation a vast array of traditional perspectives reinterpreted and reapplied according to the circumstances, to be easily, and aptly, caught in by a single glance and by virtue of sheer epistolary immediacy, and thus to be subjected to further, and deeper, examination.

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