

COMMENTARY – TIMOTHY 1 - Borg

Introduction:

Authorship: In the canonical New Testament, 1 Timothy is the first of three letters known as the “pastoral letters” or “pastoral epistles.” The other two are 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called “pastoral” in part because they are addressed to two early Christian “pastors,” Timothy and Titus. “Pastor” did not yet to an official institutional role, but had its ancient meaning of shepherd, leader of the flock. Their themes are also pastoral, providing practical advice for ordering the community’s life. According to the seven genuine letters of Paul, Timothy and Titus were his associates, perhaps his most important ones. Timothy is mentioned in five of the letters (1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, and 1 Thessalonians; and also in the later letters of Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians), and Titus, in two (Galatians and 2 Corinthians). Though all three letters [1 & 2 Timothy and Titus] claim to be written by Paul, most modern scholars see them as written long after his death in the first decades of the second century. There is a consensus that they were all written by the same person. But was that person Paul? For more than one reason, authorship by Paul has been rejected. ¹

Reasons:

Women: Of many reasons – vocabulary, tone, issues – there is yet another reason for thinking the pastoral are later than Paul – the role of women is very different from that in genuine letters of Paul. There Paul pronounces the equality of male and female “in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), refers to Junia as a prominent “apostle” (Rom. 16:7), and speaks of other women as early Christian leaders (Rom. 16:1-16). He does not object to women prophesying in the community in

¹ Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 563.

Corinth; his issue is whether they should do so with covered or uncovered heads (I Cor. 11:5). The contrast to a particular passage in I Timothy is stark. Because of its importance in Christian history, the whole passage is quoted (2:8-15). It begins with roles for men and women. Men should pray and women should dress modestly: The issue here is the different hierarchical roles assigned to men and women. That this is apparent from the next two verses. They narrowly restrict the role of women and disqualify them from leadership in the community: Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. It is difficult to reconcile this with Paul of the seven genuine letters. Then the author provides the theological justification for this constriction of women's role: For Adam was formed first, then Eve: and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Women were responsible for bringing sin into the world. In the seven genuine [Paul's] letters, Paul never blames Eve; for him, the image of life apart from Christ is in Adam (I Cor. 15:21-22; Rom. 5:12-14). As this text ends, it does affirm that women, despite being responsible for sin, can "be saved." Through childbearing. This does not sound like the Paul of the seven genuine letters. The radicalism of the early Paul is toned down, indeed eliminated.²

The letter is emphasizing the sharing of the material basis of existence. The problem is generated by limits on the community's resources and the issue of "freeloaders" –people who like the sharing aspect and take advantage of it. Hence the need to develop directives, rules, for allocating the community's resources. In the final chapter, this letter deals with the question of wealth. This indicates that in at least some Christian communities by the time it was written,

² Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 564.

there were some who were “rich” –perhaps not superrich, but rich by the standards of the time. The author cautions against wanting to be rich: ³

6:7-10

[for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.] (6:7-10).

Having food and clothing –having what we need –is the basis for contentment. It is enough. Though wealth itself is not condemned, the desire for it is: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” That is very strong language. In almost the last verses of the letter, the author suggests what to say to those who are already rich and yet Christian: *As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share (6:17-18).* This list includes both negative and positives: the rich are not to be haughty or to trust in riches; they are to trust in God, and be rich in good works, generous, and sharing. Thus, even as I Timothy reflects the settling down of Christianity and early stages of accommodation to the dominant culture, it also in its cautions about wealth preserves some of the radical impulse of Jesus and Paul and earliest Christianity. ⁴

³ Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 566.

⁴ Marcus J. Borg, *Evolution of the Word* (N.Y.: HarperCollins Publisher, 2012), 567.

