CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

OVERSEERS AS HOUSEHOLD MANAGERS IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES*

Forty years ago, David Balch, always the thorough researcher, examined ancient philosophical discussions of household management in his study of the domestic code in 1 Peter.1 He recently returned to that literature in a study on wealth.2 Jens Herzer, seeking to describe the ecclesiology of the Pastoral Epistles (henceforth PE), has lately appealed to the same material.3 It is timely, then, that I offer David some brief remarks on two texts from the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 3:2–7; Titus 1:6–9) which betray traces of the same literary tradition.

Martin Dibelius found the origin of the listing of virtues in the two passages in lists of virtues of ancient professionals (e.g., a military tactician, a physician, a dancer), which had no explicit relationship to their actions.

---


1 David L. Balch, Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter (SBLMS 26; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 21–62. See also, independently, Dieter Lührmann, "Wo man nicht mehr Sklave oder Freier ist. Überlegungen zur Struktur frühchristlicher Gemeinden," WD 13 (1975): 53–83; "Neutestamentliche Haustafeln und Antike Ökonomie," NTS 27 (1980): 83–97. Karin Lehmeier, a student of Lührmann, treated this material extensively in her learned dissertation, which was published as Oikos und Oikonomia: Antike Konzepte der Haushaltsführung und der Bau der Gemeinde bei Paulus (MThSt 92; Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 2006). Lehmeier does not treat the PE. I only became aware of this book while this article was in editorial process and could therefore not benefit from it.


The virtues were attached to the professionals, he thought, in a manner that suggests that a fixed schema or pattern existed. Despite the sketchiness of Dibelius’s proposal, he has been followed, with some modifications, by commentators.⁴

My offering to David in these few pages is more modest: I neither construct a schema nor describe an ecclesiology. I merely wish to illustrate briefly that 1 Tim 3:2–7 and Titus 1:6–9 share much with widespread ancient descriptions of professional leaders, particularly of household managers. In this I share the conviction of Luke Johnson that, “[t]he concept of ‘good management of a household’ provides the best access to the particular virtues of the supervisor.”⁵

1 Timothy 3:2–7

Before proceeding to this text, a couple of matters should be remarked upon.

The Language Used

The qualities of an overseer are introduced in 1 Tim 3:2 with a stock phrase, δεῖ οὖν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι. The generic singular with δεῖ is also used, for example, in specifying the qualities of a ruler (δεῖ τὸν ἀρχοντα),⁶ and of a dancer, whose qualifications are stated in an inclusive manner (ἀνεπίλημπτον), as the overseer’s are here. In general,

the dancer should be perfect in every point (δεῖ πανταχόθεν ἑκομισθῆναι), so as to be wholly rhythmical (τὸ πᾶν ἑρμοῦμον), graceful, symmetrical, consistent, unexceptionable, impeccable, not wanting in any way (ἀνεπίλημπτον, μηδαμῶς ἐλλιπές), blent of the highest qualities, keen in his ideas, profound in his culture, and above all, human in his sentiments. (Lucian, Salt. 81; trans. A.M. Harmon, LCL)


⁶ See Plutarch, Princ. iner. 781CD; cf. δεῖ in Praec. ger. rei publ. 800A.