TORAH QUOTATIONS COMMON TO PHILO, HEBREWS, CLEMENS ROMANUS AND JUSTIN MARTYR: WHAT IS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR?

Gert J. Steyn

ABSTRACT

Certain Torah quotations are common to Philo, to the unknown author of Hebrews and to some of the early Church Fathers. These quotations represent a similar reading in the different groups of literature, which in some instances jointly differ from the reading in the lxx. One is thus confronted with the question: What is the common denominator? The possibilities explored in this paper include (a) the common Hellenistic milieu, (b) literary interdependence upon each other, (c) independent use of a “testimony book”, (d) sharing the same oral tradition, (e) independent use of a common Vorlage in the literary tradition, (f) the role of a Christian editorial hand, and (g) geographical proximity of the authors. It is argued that the answer to this question is probably to be found not in any single possibility, but rather in a combination of some of these. It is suggested—regarding the Torah quotations—that the author of Hebrews wrote from Alexandria to Christians in Rome and, being familiar with the works of Philo, made use of Philo’s Torah tradition. Clement of Rome (ca. 95) and Justin Martyr (ca. 165) all wrote later from Rome and, being familiar with the work of Hebrews, made use of his tradition in turn.

1. Introduction

In reading the late first century book of Ad Hebraeos (ca. ad 80–95), it soon becomes clear that almost all the quotations from the Torah are to be found in Philo’s writings (except for Gen 47:31 and Deut 9:19)—with most of these in his Legum Allegoriae. The relation between Philo and Hebrews has long since been identified (e.g. Carpzov 1750 and Loesnerus 1777).1 More difficult to establish though, is the specific nature of this relation between Philo and Hebrews.

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1 So also H.-F. Weiss (1991, 178): “Daß hier in der Tat Zusammenhänge bestehen,
When turning to the Apostolic Father Clemens Romanus (1 Clement) and to the Apologist Justin Martyr, it is striking that some of these very same quotations re-appear—either with the same reading and presented as an explicit quotation, or in the form of an allusion. Even more striking, though, is that some of these quotations which represent the exact same reading amongst each other, differ with the known readings of the LXX and the MT. What are the reasons for these similarities and why do they exist?

Scholars dealt differently with this phenomenon in the past. Weaknesses in dealing with this issue in the past run mainly along three lines:

(i) Most studies concentrated either on the relation between Philo and Hebrews, on the one hand, or on the relation between Hebrews and the early Church Fathers, on the other hand. Intertextual connectivity between Philo, Hebrews and the Church Fathers as three consecutive phases very seldom receive attention.

(ii) Emphasis on the mutual differences in the application and interpretation of Scripture between Philo and the unknown author of Hebrews is usually applied as an argument against literary interdependence. However, literary interdependence does not assume necessarily that an author should “carbon copy” both the quotation as well as the application from his pretext (cf. the important contribution of Ellingworth [1979, 262–269] in this regard). There is enough evidence amongst the NT writers (particularly Hebrews) of how the same quotation that occurred in literature before their time, has been reinterpreted, or used differently, by themselves. Hebrews, in fact, is a case in point of how one NT writer used the same quotation differently in different contexts within the very same document!

(iii) Different solutions were presented for this intertextual phenomenon. These include the existence of a possible “Testimony Book” (Thurston 1986, 133–143), the fact that Hebrews knew and used Philo’s writings (Spicq 1949, 542–573; 1952) and the role of a shared oral tradition from which both used certain subject matter (Thurston 1986, 133–143) and philosophies, such as Gnosis (Pearson 1990, 165–182). Most of the time these options are

ist schon angesichts dessen nicht zu bestreiten, daß gewisse Übereinstimmungen zwischen Hebr und Philon bei der Benutzung der Schrift festzustellen sind.”