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"Peace on Earth to Men...." (Luke 2.14)

Kevin Smyth

The translation "And on earth peace to men of goodwill" going back to the Old Latin and Vulgate reading "Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis" is out of favour among exegetes. The Revised Standard Version has "On earth peace to men with whom he (God) is well pleased" and only offers in a footnote the now practically outcast "On earth peace, goodwill among men" (Byzantine or Majority text). This is also preferred by the New English Bible translators with their translation "On earth peace for men on whom his favour rests" and their footnote "On earth his peace, his favour towards men" (Cf AV) Similarly "La Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible (Paris 1972) gives "Sur la terre paix pour les hommes, ses bien-aimés". and whereas Luther reflects the AV "Friede auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlfallen" ("On earth peace, favour towards men"), the modern edition would modify according to "a better attested reading" ie "Friede auf Erden bei den Menschen seines Wohlfallens" thus rejoining the RSV and NEB. In none of these fairly representative translations does the Old Latin or Vulgate rate a mention.

Part of the problem rests with the meaning given to the Greek word eudokia = good pleasure. It is argued that the dominant meaning was the "divine good pleasure" linking up with the book of Ecclesiasticus where the notion was most fully developed. /1 Such "purely linguistic" considerations were reinforced by theological ones: "The understanding of the Latin Church, namely, men who are of good will, implies legalism if a good will is regarded as decisive for salvation. Since this is completely rejected in the Gospel, eudokia here means 'the unfathomably gracious and sovereign good pleasure of God'!" / 2

The linguistic argument did not however always convince. W. Bauer, /3 still put in the first place "the goodwill of men", citing Paul eg "Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but other with goodwill(eudokia)"(Phil.1. 15) (Cf also Phil 2.13; 2 Thess 1.11) Bauer could have added a sentence from an intertestamental writing from the first century BC, the "Psalms of Solomon", "With approval(eudokia) and happiness support my soul" (16.12),

but he was not being exhaustive. "This" (ie as "goodwill of men") "may be the place to classify Luke 2.14". Others Bauer noted in the second place would prefer "favour, good pleasure" meaning people on whom divine favours rests. (So often LXX; cf Enoch 1.8) Bauer leaves out the theological consideration; the linguistic evidence is presented with contemporary usage, first from the NT and second, from the more ancient usage, the LXX. And whereas Schrenk /4 said that the human will was intended "only twice", Bauer gave three examples and possibly four. Of the meaning "divine will" there are really only two instances in the NT: Matt 11.26 and Luke 10.21 are parallel; Eph 1,5 and 9 are in the same breath. But the numerical argument, the ratio say of four to two, cannot clinch a case. The question was considered still open.

After the publication of the Qumran texts, however, one commentator could write: "The Vulgate translates, slavishly 'Bonae voluntatis', probably thinking of men's goodwill. The centuries-old debate may be laid to rest now that the Qumran texts have finally provided "proof" ie for the modern renderings (RSV, NEB etc). /5 The fourteen odd pall-bearers cited in this scholar's (H. Schürmann) notes have their views summarised in I.H. Marshall: "Earlier scholars...suspected that the unusual phrase here was the equivalent of 'anše rāšōn or bene rēsōnō or the corresponding Aramaic phrase. This guess has now been raised to virtual certainty by the attestation of such phrases at Qumran....The phrase means "Those upon whom God's will/favour rests", and expresses the thought of God's free choice of those whom he wills to favour and save. Hence the older translation "men of goodwill" (homines bonae voluntatis, Vulg., Zahn, Lagrange), unlikely on theological grounds with its suggestion of human merit, can be dropped from consideration." /6

This now popular conclusion is reached by errors of fact and needs to be re-considered.

Schrenk /7 said "'Men who are of good will' implies legalism if a good will is regarded as decisive for salvation." Since he neither verifies nor falsifies his protasis, the sentence is non-performative, that is, says nothing. But he goes on as if he had said something (see above). Marshall is not much different. Schürmann,

ignoring the Pelagian overtones, considers theology only in a footnote and agrees that no far-reaching conclusions as to Luke should be drawn from the Qumran notion of predestination. /8 Predestination came up apropos of the translation, "voluntas dei eligen et praedestinans" ie

"God's will choosing and predestining" /9 But before theology comes exegesis, explanation of the text as it stands. And here too errors have been made.

There is an error of fact. The new translation appeals to the Qumran writings. But there is in fact no exactly matching phrase there. One finds "men of his good pleasure", "sons of your good pleasure", "the time of his good pleasure" /10 but not the simple "men of good pleasure". The lack of a suffix indicating the divine will was seen as a difficulty by Schürmann /11, who countered by saying that there were "enough examples of the translator economizing on the suffix." /12 However, the LXX gives twenty-nine occurrences of eudokia. /13 And comparison with the Hebrew, where possible, shows no example of the omission of the Hebrew suffix in the Greek translation. But the check is really superfluous. The real point is that when Schürmann says there was a (pronominal) suffix in the Hebrew, he is committing a petitio principii. He has to prove that the phrase means "his good pleasure" - and grants himself what is precisely in question.

An error of method, to compound the factual, is the appeal to the Hebrew. It was "to abandon the data for a hypothesis" - to substitute a guess, no matter how well educated for a fact. /14 At best appeal to the Hebrew to modify a Greek translation can suggest a possibility. It cannot offer proof. On Matt.5.3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit") Dupont considers "poor in spirit" with the Qumran anšē ruah in mind, said it was conceivable" and would not be "rash" to translate a Greek phrase as if it were Hebrew - "to suppose. that, reading the Greek word ptōchoi in his source, Matthew recognized there the anāwim of the Bible, and that he wished to indicate the spiritual import of the term by having recourse to the procedure which led the people of Qumran to speak of the anweh ruah...."the humble of spirit" (des humbles d'esprit)" /15 So he concludes, /16 , after discussing the prominence of the humble poor in the OT and Qumran (as if then they had to appear here

in Matt), that "the evangelist uses a Greek expression in the sense it would have in Hebrew" /17. However that may be Dom Dupont is right in saying that the sense is inaccessible to the ordinary reader of Greek ("pas perceptible au niveau du grec ordinaire"). So too with Luke 2.14.

This brings up a second matter of method. To appeal to "the Hebrew" is not merely to indulge in the speculation of which the historian R. Collingwood says, "Conjectures and the assertions of mere possibilities are so much romancing and poetry, an expression of the wilful thinking of the historian". /18 The evocation of the mythical Hebrew (as in the semantics of the LXX) is wrong, misguided and unwarranted. "Words written in Greek are, just as they stand, in their Greek meaning, fully operative" (völlig gültig) /19 This can be illustrated especially from the methods used in ancient education. But there is an example at hand for all: Matt 1.23, "The virgin shall conceive" (RSV "A virgin....." translates the Hebrew of Isa 7.14, not the Greek) relies on the LXX. The Hebrew had "young (marriageable) girl". Matt knew no one would question his text. So too Luke. Who would think of re-translating Ps 15, quoted according to the LXX at Acts 2:25-28, in the light of the Hebrew original? As Dorrie says; "the question of whether [in the Lxx] important Hebrew concepts were properly rendered, was not asked for a time [between LXX and Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion] at all...This basic rule should be remembered above all in treating many problems in the NT" /20 - to use the overworked phraseology: a Greek phrase is a Greek phrase is a Greek phrase. The readers of Luke, like Luke himself who knew no Hebrew (there is no proof that he did, or that he had the Angels Song before him in any but its Greek form), were not reading the Greek as if it were encoded Hebrew. Who would think of solving a problem in Horace by reference to the Sappho or Anacreon he was translating-imitating? Who would indeed seek the meaning of the LXX by reference to the Hebrew? The term for "soul" underwent change in the translation from the Hebrew. /21 "In classical and post-classical Greek both meanings ["vital force", "seat of spirit/wind"] are connected by the common idea of the soul as an immaterial or at least invisible essential core

of man that can be thought of as distinct from the body. It gives worth and duration to the human self beyond the limits of physical existence. This idea is in every way alien to the OT." /22 The Greek is on its own. What it does not succeed in saying, is just not said. [But of course it was rich and subtle enough to absorb foreign idioms. The Galatians understood Paul's "flesh and blood" (1.16) without being told of the Hebrew idiom]

To find the meaning of Luke 2.14b, the usage of the phraseology, concrete noun with abstract genitive must be registered, in the LXX, the NT and, above all, in Lk/Acts. [Too much attention has been paid to the single word eudokia without reference to its situation in a phrase] Such phrases are common in Hebrew eg "man of bloodshed", meaning a murderer; RSV "man of blood"; KJV "bloody man" - compare "Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial" with the more modern "Begone, begone, you man of blood, you worthless fellow." The construction is described as a genitivus qualitatis - "taking the place of an adjective". /23 This adjectival use is apparent without reference to the Hebrew: LXX Psalm 54 (55), 23 andres haimatōn kai doliotētos (= men of blood and treachery) corresponds to the andra haimatōn kai dolion of Psalm 5.6 (RSV, "men of blood and treachery" ie "bloodthirsty and deceitful men." )

This "adjectival genitive" /24 was freely adopted by NT writers. So the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2.3) becomes "the lawless one" (2 Thess 2.8) This is also Lucan usage. "A horn of salvation" (1.68) is a saving horn - in English, a mighty Saviour. "Knowledge of salvation" (1.77) is salvific knowledge (it is hardly "experience of salvation" ie for John the Baptist). The "spirit of weakness" (13.11) is the weakening spirit ie an infirmity. Luke himself explains the idiom when after the sentence "Make for yourselves friends through the mammon of unrighteousness" (16.9), he writes, "If then you have not been faithful with the unrighteous mammon, who will trust you with the true?" (RSV uses the adjective in both sentences). In 18.6, the "judge of unrighteousness" is the judge who "neither feared God nor regarded man"(v2,4) and therefore "the unrighteous judge" (So RSV for v6) . There

are fewer examples in Acts, where Luke is less tied to tradition; but "gall of bitterness (8.23) ie "bitter gall" and "vessel of election" ((.5) is "choice instrument". Here of course the "election" is God's, but "election" is, so to speak, a reserved word for the divine choice; and, in any case, the sentence leaves no doubt: "He is a vessel of election for me" ie "my chosen instrument.". Our text (Lk 2.14) is considered under the heading genitivus qualitatis /25 as an obvious candidate but switched then to "genitive of belonging, origin" on the strength of the Qumran text. Leaving this aside, we can say that Lucan usage shows that "men of good will" are "well disposed men" just as the "judge of unrighteousness" was the unjust judge.

It is a pity that Hunzinger /26 tried to treat the matter of Luke 2.14 as fuel for denominational controversy when he welcomed Vogt's translation /27 as Catholic exegesis falling in line with the Protestant. Such considerations are out of place in the exegesis of NT texts /28 If Luke did write a phrase with Pelagian overtones, the only legitimate reaction in exegesis would be "too bad". Or, rather, that there is no principle of exegesis which requires Luke to write in the terminology of later orthodoxy, or of debates enunciated only centuries later. "Vobis non adhuc disputantibus, securius loquebantur" as Augustine said to adversaries brandishing old writers at him.

If indeed Luke 2.14 were an example of "early Catholicism" (Frühkatholizismus) which some have held against Luke/Acts, it would be extremely early Catholicism, very different eg of the Council of Orange - "If anyone thinks that without the grace of God, when we believe, will, desire, strive, pray, watch, study, beg, seek, knock: mercy is granted to us by God, and does not confess that it is by the inspiration and infusion of the Holy Spirit that we believe, will and all the rest," - anathema sit, (let him be anathema) /29. The Council was making sure that such NT commands as, "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you" (Matt 7.7) should not be seen as making prayer simpliciter as "decisive for salvation" - to use Schrenk's phrase.

In favour of the translation, "men of good will" is,

of course, the fact that it is, or rather was, for over seventeen centuries, in possession. Only totally unimpeachable arguments could dislodge such a title-holder. Then, too little account has recently been made of the testimonial value of the Old Latin text which was made when Greek was still the lingua franca (even in Africa where King Battos of Cyrene had been feted by odes of Pindar). The presumption is that the Old Latin got its translation from the "Greeks" who presumably knew what their Greek meant. But there is possibly an even stronger argument than the Old Latin that the human good will was envisaged universally from the start. It is found in the "Byzantine, Antiochian, Majority" reading: "on earth, among men good will". The poorer reading points to the true meaning.

Only two modern translations come to mind which still leave room for "men of good will" - not an endangered species as long as the Missa Solemnis of Mozart is sung. One such translation is the Gloria of the Mass when said in Irish: "lucht a pháirte" - the people of his party - either the people who chose God or the people whom God chose, so, just "the people of God"; no telling how they got there. It seems deliberately ambiguous; typical Irish deviousness, some might unkindly say. A modern German translation of Luke 2.14b has it /30 "seine Friede gilt allen auf der Erde // die sich von ihm lieben lassen" = "His peace is for all on earth who let themselves be loved by him". This, however, is commentary rather than translation or even paraphrase. It explains what a man of good will is: one who puts no obstacle in the way of grace. The "men of good will" are acknowledged, their presence felt. The translators do not tread so delicately with Luke 1.50 (misericordia eius a progenie in progenies timentibus eum = His mercy is upon those who fear him from generation to generation) which is no less deserving of their care - and perhaps a warning from the Council of Orange.

#### Notes

1. Cf G. Schrenk, "Eudokia", TWNT 2 (1935); TDNT 2 (1964) 742-751, esp. 750.
2. ibid 750
3. DAG (1952) 319-320
4. ibid



5. Cf H. Schürmann, Das Lukasevangelium 1(HTKNT 3/1; Freiburg - Basel - Wien: Herder 1969) 114
6. Gospel of Luke, (Exeter: Paternoster Press 1978) 112
7. op.cit 115, n.146 referring approvingly to H. Braun, Qumran und das NT I, 831
8. Braun, *ibid*
9. E. Vogt, "voluntas dei eligens et praedestinans" Bib 34 (1935) 428
10. Cf I QH 4:23; 11.9; 1Q 34 fr 3 II 5-6 respectively.
11. *ibid*
12. He did not however quote examples; his reference to H. Sahlin, Der Messias u das Gottesvolk (Uppsala 1945) 225 n.4, only shows, when spelled out, that the possessive indicator can be omitted where the whole phrase makes it clear whose good will it is: Ps 68.14 LXX, "the time of good pleasure"; - "my prayer is to thee, O Lord, at an acceptable time (KAIROS EUDOKIAS), O God, in the abundance of thy steadfast love, answer me(RSV). The hour of favour, like the love, is obviously God's. Symmachus: "favour towards the just" (Prov 14.8); "to us and our children favour for ever" (same comment) (Ps Sol 8.33); Test Benj "The beloved of the Lord doing EUDOKIAN" (same comment); "Every man doing what was right in his own eyes" (his human EUDOKIA) (Deut 12.8) was anathema to the OT.
13. E. Hatch & H. Redpath, Concordance to the LXX (Oxford, 1987 reprint 1954) 569
14. Cf E. Lohmeyer, Matthäus, ed. W. Schmauch (Göttingen: Vandenkoeck & Ruprecht 1956) 356
15. J. Dupont, Les Béatitudes (3 vols: Paris 1973) 3.465
16. *ibid*
17. *ibid*
18. The Idea of History, (Oxford 1946) 56
19. H. Dorrie, "Zur Methodik antiker Exegese" ZNW 64 (1974) 121-138, esp. 136
20. *ibid.* 136
21. A. Dihlé, "Psyche", TDNT 9, 616
22. *ibid*
23. F.W. Funk, ed. Greek Grammar of the NT(Cambridge 1961) par 165
24. Cf E. Jay, NT Greek: An Introductory Grammar (SPCK 1958) 269
25. Funk, op.cit.
26. C. Hunzinger, ZNW 44 (1952/53) 85-90
27. *ibid*
28. W. Marxsen, Introduction to the NT (Oxford 1968) 152
29. DS (1965) no.376
30. Die Gute Nachricht(Stuttgart 1971)