THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE NEW AND OTHER ESSAYS

STUDIES IN HONOR OF WILLIAM FRANKLIN STINESPRING

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NOTE ON MARK 5:43

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In an article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* Dr. W. F. Stinespring demonstrated that the active infinitive can be and is used with passive meaning in biblical Aramaic. This usage he called the “hidden third-person plural indefinite.” The construction, found most frequently in Daniel, is used in places where someone *commands* that something be done, but the *active* infinitive is used.

It has long been noted though not accepted by all textual scholars that the so-called Western text, especially represented by Codex D (Bezae), is characterized by Semitisms. The late A. J. Wensinck, some of whose work in this area has not yet been published, has demonstrated that there are many Semitisms in Codex Bezae. Matthew Black cites a conclusion of Wensinck’s which is quite apropos to our discussion:

In view of the attestation in Classical and later Greek of λέγειν in the meaning ‘to enjoin’, ‘to command’, it might seem a work of supererogation on Wensinck’s part to trace this usage in the New Testament to Semitic influence. The broad distinction, however, between the two languages appears to be that, whereas in Greek the meaning is (comparatively) rare, in the Semitic group (so in Arabic) it is regular.

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2. Ibid., p. 393.
4. P. 301. Subsequent references to Black are in the text.
The conclusion at which Wensinck arrived from his study of the Semitisms in Bezan Luke holds good for all the synoptics: D represents the Aramaic background of the synoptic tradition more faithfully than do non-Western manuscripts. [p. 277]

In what may be termed the “Bezan redaction” more of the primitive “Aramaized” Greek text has been left unrevised than in the redaction . . . represented by the Vatican and Sinaitic Uncials. [p. 279]

It has been further noted by many commentators of the Gospel of Mark that 5:43 has Semitic characteristics. Vincent Taylor comments:

In καὶ ἔστη δοθήναι αὐτῷ φαγεῖν the verb ἔστη is used in the sense of ‘told’ or ‘command’. Allen . . . sees a Semitism here, corresponding to the late use of ἔρχεσθαι, ‘to command’ followed by ἂν c. infin. . . . The same usage is found in the papyri . . . and in Cl. Gk. the simple infin. is used in a jussive sense after λέγω and ἐπιπορ. . . . These considerations do not exclude the possibility that Semitic idiom is reflected, especially when several elements in the narrative point in this direction. 5

The problem seems to be that there appears to be Semitic idiom here but the exact nature of it is not apparent! Giving added difficulty is the variant reading in Codex D, i.e., δοῦναι (the active infinitive) for δοθήναι (passive). In commenting on this phenomenon Blass, Debrunner, and Funk state that Bultmann “rightly rejects the v. l. δοῦσαι (D) instead of δοθήναι Mk 5:43.” 6 Taylor says, “The passive infinitive δοθήναι is used because the one who is to execute the order is not named . . . .” 7 It may be, however, that the curious variant in D, the active infinitive, is the clue to the Semitism here. For this passage as read in D is an exact copy of the pattern found in Daniel. A figure in authority speaks (ἔστη), ordering that something be done (active infinitive).

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7. Taylor, p. 298.