

**How Pauline are the Pastoral Epistles?  
...and why does it matter?**

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## **The Epistle to Titus: Towards a Christian Humanism<sup>1</sup>**

*How would it be if human nature could be founded upon some secure rock, in order that then the architect might start to build once more, and build, this time, with a conscience void of offense? Such is the Christian ideal, the ideal of a loftier humanism — a humanism as rich and as joyful as the humanism of Greece, but a humanism founded upon the grace of God.<sup>2</sup>*

• J. Gresham Machen

*This is why St. Paul — this is one of the finest accomplishments of his genius for adaptation — presents Christian ethics under the heading of beauty (kalos) defines it by good sense and the golden mean, and preaches order, decency, and deportment. ... His disciple ... is convinced that piety is useful for everything; it possesses promises for the present life as well as for the future. Christ Jesus has illuminated life! The pastoral epistles are the charter of Christian humanism.*

*If the Pastorals state as strongly as the earlier epistles the contrast between Christianity and paganism, they no longer isolate the church from the profane world; to the contrary, they plant within it a remarkable optimism and security. ... Exhortations such as “that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed” (1Tm 6:1), “that the Word of God not be blasphemed” (Tit 2:5; cf. vv. 8,10) can be understood as litotes, and explain how, despite all obstacles and opposition, the world was so swiftly won to Christianity.<sup>3</sup>*

• Ceslas Spicq

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this lecture is adapted from Reggie M. Kidd, “Titus as *Apologia*: Grace for Liars, Beasts, and Bellies,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 21.2, Dec. 1999, pp. 185-209. (Available in .html or .pdf format via [http://www.rts.edu/Site/Staff/rkidd/rkidd\\_writings.aspx](http://www.rts.edu/Site/Staff/rkidd/rkidd_writings.aspx).)

<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (Eerdmans, 1925), p. 224

<sup>3</sup> Ceslas Spicq, *Les Epistres Pastorales* (Gabalda, 1969), pp. 295-296, and translated at Reggie M. Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles: A “Bourgeois” Form of Early Christianity?* (Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 26-27.

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## The Rosetta Stone of Titus — 1:12 & 2:12

**A. Always liars (1:12),**

**B. vicious beasts (1:12),**

**C. idle bellies (1:12).**

**C1. To live sensibly (2:12)**

**B1. and justly (2:12)**

**A1. and piously (2:12).**

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### The (Sometimes 3-fold, Sometimes 4-fold) Catalog of Virtues in Contemporary Greek Thinking

Xenophon's final sketch of the virtues of Socrates in *Memorabilia* 4.8.11: “so *religious* [*eusebēs*] that he did nothing without counsel from the gods; so *just* [*dikaios*] that he did no injury, however small, to any man ...; *self-controlled* [*egkratēs*] ... *wise* [*phronimos*]”).

Philo (early, mid-1<sup>st</sup> cent. Jew), *Prot.* 329c; “Virtue (*hē aretē*) is something that is one (*hen*); and its parts are justice (*dikaiosunē*) and sensibility (*sōphrosunē*) and holiness (*hosiotēs*).”

Dio Chrysostom (late 1<sup>st</sup> & early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent.), *Oration* 23.7: “... to live justly and prudently and sensibly” (*dikaiōs zēn kai phronimōs kai sōphronōs*).

Dio Chrysostom describes the virtuous person using the older fourfold canon: “prudent and just and holy and courageous” (*phronimos kai dikaios kai hosios kai andreios* — *Or.* 23.8). In the same sentence he expresses the converse in threefold form: the evil person is “unjust and unholy and cowardly” (*adikos kai anosios kai deilos*).

**Crete's Vices: Vicious Beasts (Lack of Justice)** — Crete was an island reputed to lack predatory animals.

Pliny (late 1<sup>st</sup> cent. Roman) asserts the absence of “wolves, bears, any noxious animals at all except a poisonous spider, wild boars, and hedgehogs” (*Natural History* 8.83)

Plutarch (early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. Greek) introduces an address on profiting from one's enemies by contrasting Crete's reputation for being a region without wild animals (*chōran athēron*) with the sad fact that there is no polity anywhere free of the passions that produce enmity: envy, rivalry, and contention (*Moralia* 86C). "Alas," to paraphrase Paul's Cretan prophet, "it is true of Crete as well: our being known for having no wild animals stands in condemnation of us. We have no need of predatory animals, we have predatory humans!"

**Crete's Vices: Idle Bellies or Lazy Gluttons (Lack of Self-Mastery)** — the critic indicts his fellow Cretans for uncontrollable appetites that underlie social viciousness. It's a statement not without irony, because there is nothing "idle" or "lazy" about Crete's reputation. The island was (in)famous during the Hellenistic period as a supplier of soldiers of fortune and during the early Roman period as a haven for pirates.

Polybius (mid 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC Greek historian of the rise of Rome) berates the islanders for a sordid love of gain and lust for wealth; so greedy are they, he maintains, that Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful (*hōste para monois Krētaieusi tōn hapantōn anthrōpōn mēden aischron nomizetai kerdos* — *Hist.* 6.46.3).<sup>4</sup> According to classical historian A. M. Eckstein, Polybius portrays Cretan turbulence, injustice, and ignoble behavior as having "at the center of the web of evil" uncontrolled avarice and the lust for gain (*aischrokerdeia kai pleonexia*) — "the besetting Cretan vice (Polybius 6.46.3; 6.46.9; 6.47.4)."<sup>5</sup> In the Cretan prophet's juxtaposition of viciousness and gluttony, Paul finds a similar assessment: unbridled appetites make for bestial behavior.

### **Crete's Vices: Inveterate Liars (Religious Dissembling)**

In the Greek speaking world, the verb "to Cretize" (*krētizein*) means "to lie" (*pseudesthai*).<sup>6</sup> But what underlies the characterization is Crete's infamous religious prevarication, a misstep of first principles.

The late 2<sup>nd</sup>-early 3<sup>rd</sup> century Christian, Clement of Alexandria, maintained that Paul got the saying from the Cretan myth-collector Epimenides (ca. 7<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.). Fact is, though, that Titus 1:12 marks the first appearance of the saying in its entirety in any extant source. Prior to the letter to Titus, the first member of the saying appears for the first time, and that in this precise

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<sup>4</sup> As backdrop to his censure, Polybius appeals to the Hellenistic canon of virtue: in their private lives people ought to be "pious" (*hosios*) and "self-controlled" (*sōphrōn*), and in their public lives they ought to be "tame" (*hēmeros*) and "just" (*dikaios* — 6.47.2). Though the form is fourfold, the content is threefold, since "tame" and "just" are synonyms.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 71-72.

<sup>6</sup> Suetonius, *On the Right Insult*, 13.253, as cited in C. Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales*, 2 vols., 4<sup>th</sup> revised ed. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1969) 608 (with other references).

wording — “Cretans are always liars” — in Callimachus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. librarian of Alexandria. Callimachus explains exactly what he finds so offensive about Cretans:

“Cretans are always liars. For a tomb, O Lord, Cretans build for you; but you did not die, for you are forever” (*Krētes aei pseustai; kai gar taphon, ō ana, seiō Krētes etektēnanto; su d’ ou thanes, essi gar aiei* — *Hymn to Zeus* 8-9).

Though it is used in classical texts, the epithet “unlying” (*apseudēs*) is never applied to deity in either Jewish or Christian scriptures, except at Tt 1:4. And the nuance Paul intends here is dramatically foreshadowed by the term’s use in another saying from the same Callimachus. In a prayer to the god Demeter, Callimachus asserts that it is a matter of “speaking without lying” (*apseudea legōn*) to say that one “knows the Cretan tomb is empty” (*tapho[n to]n K[r]ēta ginōskein kenon* — *Iambus* 12 [Fragment 202] 15-16).

A little background in the history of religion: himself the champion of a transcendent Olympian view of the gods, Callimachus takes as his point of departure an immanentistic Cretan heritage that maintains the gods of the Greek pantheon to have originally been but men and women.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Cretans were the original Mormons — and it is probably no accident that Nikos Kazantzakis, the author of *The Last Temptation of Christ* (a tale of the ascendancy of a human to deity through the route of self-denial) was himself from Crete.

Emblematic of the original humanity of the gods is ancient Crete’s claim to have a tomb for Father Zeus, perhaps on Mt. Juktas (though there are other claimants), a mountainous ridge south of Cnossus, resembling a human face oriented upwards in profile and long thought of as Zeus in repose.<sup>8</sup> Cretans had their own angle of vision: their race had emerged from the earth, and so, of course, they were the original Greeks (Diodorus Siculus 5.64.1). In the face of Olympus’ claim to be the seat of the gods, Crete countered that those very gods were but men and women of Crete elevated to deity by virtue of benefactions bestowed upon the human race (Diodorus 5.64.2). Cretans held their island to be the birthplace of the majority of the gods, and in the case of the preeminent man-become-god, Zeus, the burial place as well. Of course, this also made Crete the launching pad of the worship of the gods (Diodorus 5.77.3).

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<sup>7</sup> At play here is a longstanding contrast between the transcendent Olympian portrait of the gods and the immanentist Cretan portrait. Cf. the discussion in W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston: Beacon Free Press, 1950) 40-42; in the spirit of the Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, Reformed theologian H. O. J. Brown contrasts “sensate” early Cretan-Mycenaean culture with the “ideational” culture of Homer’s Greece (*The Sensate Culture* [Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996] 43). Thanks to my colleague Al Mawhinney for calling my attention to this dynamic.

<sup>8</sup> See A. B. Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion*, Vol. 1, *Zeus God of the Bright Sky* (NY: Biblo & Tannen, 1964 reprint) 157-163; and Vol. 2, *Zeus God of the Dark Sky (Thunder & Lightning)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925) 939-940, and photograph of Mt. Juktas at Plate 43; and Lewis Cottrill, *The Bull of Minos: The Discoveries of Schliemann and Evans* (NY: Facts on File, 1953) 112. More reserved about the identification of any of the places designated as the “tomb of Zeus,” and especially about Mt. Juktas, is Martin P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (NY: Biblo & Tannen, 1950, 1971) 461-462.

The Cretologist Stylianos Spyridakis suggests that Callimachus' bile against Cretans is a result of their complicity in the anthropocentric religious ideas of Callimachus' contemporary, Euhemerus of Messene. Euhemerus co-opts the ancient Cretan notion of deity emerging from humanity in support of a teaching that the gods themselves are nothing but a projection of the human spirit (sort of a proto-Feuerbach, if you will). This, maintains Spyridakis, is as close to blasphemy as pre-Christian Greek religion is capable.<sup>9</sup>

By claiming a tomb for Zeus, Cretans have always walked right up to a line between divinity and humanity that, despite being ever blurry in Greek thinking, had nonetheless always at least in principle been there. But in the Hellenistic age Crete's heritage of maintaining a tomb for Zeus emboldens rationalists, who, in light of his having been thus cut down to human proportions, are prepared to go the rest of the way and claim: "Zeus is dead."<sup>10</sup>

It would be the incorporation of Epimendes' and Euhemerus' views into the writings of the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (ca. 90-27 B.C.) at the birth of the Roman Republic and about 100 years before the letter to Titus, that would govern the general understanding of Cretan religion at the beginning of Christian era.<sup>11</sup> Though it goes beyond the evidence to argue for direct literary influence of Diodorus on the epistle to Titus, it should be noted that Titus' specific concern to counter Jewish "myths" and "genealogies" finds a counterpoint in the fact that Diodorus' section on Cretan religion is woven together by words from the *mutholog-* root and that it is framed as genealogies of gods and heroes. Diodorus thinks of himself as merely the popularizer of longstanding traditions (the verb *paradidonai* courses through the sections on the early Greeks). The strong likelihood is that Diodorus' *History* contains precisely the sort of "myths" and "genealogies" Paul's rival Jewish teachers seek to accommodate with their own torah-based apologetic "myths" and "genealogies."<sup>12</sup> Titus' Paul wants none of it.

Interestingly, Callimachus' protest against Euhemerus will be renewed by Plutarch (fl. ca. 80-120 CE) not long after the New Testament era. Plutarch will insist that the Euhemeran mythology is predicated upon a lack of faith and is a deliberate fabrication. It amounts to "atheism," to a

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<sup>9</sup> Spyridakis, *Cretica*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Thus the title of Spyridakis' essay: "Zeus is Dead."

<sup>11</sup> Diodorus himself says his section on Crete is dependent in part "upon Epimenides who has written about the gods" (5.80.4). And Diodorus provides the most extensive account we have of Euhemerus' utopian island, Panchaea, to which the human Zeus was supposed to have migrated from Crete to establish his thoroughly humanistic and enlightened worship (5.42-46).

<sup>12</sup> Quinn is probably correct in identifying Titus 1:14's "Jewish myths" as a rival *haggadah* ("...the homiletic, narrative embellishment of the Pentateuchal history ...") and "commandments of truth-bereft humans" as a rival *halakah* ("...the 'oral law' or further explanation of how to carry out the commandments of the Torah ..." [109]). He further lays out suggestive lines of analysis for the rival Jewish teachers' appeal to genealogies (245-247) alongside the mythical interpretation of Scripture, all in order to "to bridge the gap between the Scriptures of Israel and the apostolic faith (109)." I suggest, albeit in passing, that Diodorus' Cretan myths and genealogies may merit study for insight into the religious preunderstanding of those whose beliefs both Titus' Paul and his rival apologetic storytellers seek to mold.

“degrading of things to the human level,” and to an assault on piety and reverence and faith (*Isis et Osiris* 359-360). And Lucian the satirist will play off the popular association of Crete with such deicidic ideas late in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (*Philopseudes* 3; *Timon* 6).

So, let’s talk about the challenge facing a Christian community that wants to communicate to a culture with a religious memory like Crete’s just what it means for God to have walked among us.

OK, this is where you talk.....

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## Lifestyle as *Apologia*

### Jesus

Jesus counters our “worldly passions” (2:12) and “enslavement to passions and various pleasures” (3:3) with his own disposition of “grace” and “kindness” and “man-lovingness” (Tt 2:11; 3:4). His own mastery of self enables him to “give himself for us”(2:14).

Jesus comes “to redeem us from all lawlessness” (2:14),<sup>13</sup> thus re-establishing a righteous relationship between God and us (3:7) — and places us in a community of people (“a people of God’s possession,” Tt 2 14; see Ex 19:5) who model relationships that “fit sound teaching” and “adorn sound teaching” (2:1, 10).

Jesus, one might say, is the embodiment of godliness (*eusebeia*) — as God’s “grace ... kindness ... and *philanthropia*” he is the divine response to our godlessness (*asebeia*, 2:12)

### Church Leaders & Their Families

1:8b, “sober, just, holy, self-controlled”

Children: “faithful (*pistos*, that is, pious), and neither leave themselves liable to a charge of prodigality (*asōtia*, that is, being “idle bellies,” the converse of being self-controlled) nor are living insubordinately (*anupotaktos*, that is, being “vicious beasts,” the converse of living justly).

**False Teachers** — Cretan Christians are being presented with a mythic recasting of old covenant heroes and an adaptation of torah and kosher that are the moral equivalent of the Cretan legends that cut divinity down to human size.

Thus Paul writes off their “Jewish myths,” their “commandments of human origin,” and their distinctions between “pure & impure.” The false teachers, Paul believes, put forward an eschatologically anachronistic and irrelevant route:

to godliness or *eusebeia* (“Jewish myths” ... “foolish disputes and genealogies, and disputes and battles over the law” — 1:14; 3:9),

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<sup>13</sup> See the “redemption” theme in Lk 1:68; 2:38; 24:21; Ac 7:35 — Paul’s more oblique approach to this theme in his earlier letters takes Rom 3:21-26 as its locus.

to justice or *dikaiosunē* (“commandments of humans bereft of the truth” — 1:14),

and to self-mastery or *sōphrosunē* (via a regimen of kosher that leaves the pollution of mind and conscience unaddressed — 1:15).

**Community as *Apologia*** — The apologetic thrust of the letter as a whole is evident in that the most characteristic way of relating the virtues is in the order in which they are presented in 2:12: a God-taught right relationship to self enables right relationships with others; these in turn promote a right relationship with God among onlookers. The general portrait is one in which “healthy” teaching (as defined in 2:11-14; 3:4-7) will promote an expression of self-mastery or sensibility as the linchpin of a communitarian ethic (note the fivefold appearance of the *sōphron-* (“self-mastery”) root in chapter 2 [vv. 2,4,5,6,12]). Communal *dikaiosunē* (“justice”) is, in its turn, realized through the right ordering of the church under able leaders, and as members pursue “good and noble deeds,” in service both of one another (presumably 3:14, though not necessarily exclusively so) and the larger community (3:1,8). And in a feedback loop, the communal lifestyle of self-mastery and justice serve piety by commending the “teaching of God our Savior” to the outsider (see the *hina* [“in order that”] clauses of 2:5,8,10).

## In Sum

Titus should be interpreted as an antidote to cultural deficiencies its writer would expect contemporary non-Christians themselves to recognize. Paul quotes a Cretan prophet as having critiqued his own culture for its impiety, injustice, and intemperance. Accordingly, by insisting upon the opposite of these qualities among their leaders (1:8b) and by highlighting grace’s education in sobriety, justice, and piety for Christians in general (2:12), the letter to Titus challenges Cretan Christians to live out a kind of community that coheres with the social self-criticism of an important strand of Greek thought.

Israel’s covenant Lord has previously brokered his presence through one historical people, but this God is not a reflection of any people’s corporate ego, and he will not be confined by “Jewish myths or commands of humans” (Titus 1:14). At the same time, the biblical God does not lie (1:2), pretending to be a human so, as in some Zeus legends (Cretan or Olympian), he can get a woman.<sup>14</sup> In times so ancient their days cannot be numbered, the God whom the canonical Paul represents made a covenantal promise of life eternal to humankind (1:2). In recent days this promise has been kept: God’s grace, *philanthrōpia*, and kindness toward all humankind (2:11; 3:4) have been revealed in person, in the self-giving of “our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” And this revealing of the divine brings in its wake not relics — e.g., tombs to visit — but rather lives undergoing transformation and a community under construction.

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<sup>14</sup> Diodorus allows as how the Cretan Zeus’ human name had been Picus; he had been king of Italy for one hundred and twenty years, and had had many sons and daughters because he was a debaucher of comely women (6.5.1). It is because of Picus’ “assuming mysterious aspects” so as to “be looked upon as a god” by the women he was seducing, that this mortal was thought godlike. He was interred on Crete at his own instructions in a temple built by his sons: “This monument exists even to the present day, and it bears the inscription, ‘Here lies Picus whom men also call Zeus’” (6.5.3).