Celebrating Arthur Darby Nock

Choice, Change, and Conversion

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Do ΜΕΤΑΝΟΕΩ and ΜΕΤΑΝΟΙΑ in Second Clement Signify “Repentance” or a Change in Mindset Tantamount to Conversion?*

James A. Kelhoffer

He [God] repented on the euell, which he sayde he wolde do vnto them, and dyd it not.¹

I do repent the tedious minutes I with her have spent.²

Refuge in sanctified vagueness, despite the patina of centuries of usage, is not a lexical gesture devoutly to be greeted. Indeed, such practice may invite liability to the charge of linguistic interest.³

A. Introduction

This essay takes up a perennial assumption in studies and commentaries on the so-called Second Letter of Clement, an assumption which, I suggest, merits reconsideration. It will be argued that in 2 Clement the usual translations for μετανοέω and μετάνοια – in English, “repent” and “repentance” respectively, and, in German, “Buße tun” and “Buße” – are anachronistic and, in addition, theologically loaded. A more plausible alternative, attested in classical Greek

* In memoriam Lars Hartman (1930–2019), whose suggestions only months before his passing enriched this essay. Earlier versions of this study were presented in the Patristics Seminar at the Newman Institute (Uppsala), at the 2019 SBL Annual Meeting in San Diego, and to the Beyond Canon Collaborative Research Group at the University of Regensburg. My thanks to the seminar participants for helpful feedback, especially from Carl Johan Berglund and Tobias Nicklas.

¹ The Coverdale Bible (1535), translation of Jonah 3:10 (where “fayde” stands for “sayde” or, in modern English, “said”), discussed in §B.1. Cf. the translation of that verse in the King James Version (1611): “God repented of the euill that hee had sayd [sayd], that he would doe unto them, and he did it not.”

² Lysander speaking of Hermia in Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream 2.2.770 (see §B.2).