BENEDICTION AS A NT FORM

TERENCE Y. MULLINS
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In his study of Pauline benedictions and doxologies, L. G. Champion classified these into three groups (to be noted below), but he did not establish a formula for either the benedictions or the doxologies.[1] Furthermore, although he related the origin of NT benedictions and doxologies to the LXX and synagogue worship, he did so on a thematic basis rather than exploring the path of literary relationship; and, in fact, the examples he cites from the LXX are mostly not benedictions at all, either in form or in theme.

The present study proposes, first of all, to elucidate a "benediction formula" which actually appears in the examples called to attention by Champion; and second, to examine whether Champion's statement that Christians adopted the expression "from the Septuagint or the synagogue"[2] applies to the structure of the formula itself.

1. *The NT Form*

Champion's *first group* is an "opening-type" statement, of which he says, "At the opening of each letter a wish is expressed.[3] This statement is χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:3, 2 Cor 1:2, Gal 1:3, Eph 1:2,

---

[1] L. G. Champion, *Benedictions and Doxologies in the Epistles of Paul* (Oxford, 1934).

[2] Ibid., p. 85. By way of contrast, Robert Jewett, "The Form and Function of the Homiletic Benediction," *ATR* 51 (1969): 22, locates the origin of the NT benediction in "some portion of Early Christian worship which was intrinsically flexible—such as the sermon." This certainly seems an interesting possibility to entertain, but I feel that the ultimate pattern of the NT benediction lies in the LXX and the immediate significance lies in its NT use. Jewett, too, sees possible LXX significance, saying, "The concentration of these optatives in benediction units may have been influenced by LXX usage, since the optative is used there mainly for wishes and blessings" (pp. 23-24).

[3] Champion, p. 13.

Php 1:2, 2 Th 1:2, and Phm 3; it is χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν in Col 1:2; and it is χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη in 1 Th 1:1. His *second group* is a "closing-type" statement, of which he says, "At the end of each letter is a benediction, and these show greater variations."[4] He makes reference to the closing benedictions in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. His *third group* is made up of what he refers to as "similar formulas . . . found in other parts of the Epistles,"[5] and he calls attention to thirteen examples (three each in Romans, 1 Thessalonians, and 2 Thessalonians; two in Philippians; and one each in 2 Corinthians and Ephesians).

The three groups of statements called to attention by Champion all contain the same basic elements: *wish, divine source,* and *recipient.* One optional element occurs: *the addressee.* These elements appear in different orders, and consistency in the order may be used to identify or classify the form into "types."

Champion's first group ("opening-type" benediction) reveals the following order in Rom 1:7, 1 Cor 1:3, 2 Cor 1:2, Eph 1:2, Php 1:2, 2 Th 1:2, and Phm 3:

wish	/	*recipient*	/	*wish*	/	*divine source*
χάρις	/	ὑμῖν	/	καὶ εἰρήνη	/	ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν
						καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Gal 1:3 has essentially the same statement, but ἡμῶν follows κυρίου, while Col 1:2 concludes with ἡμῶν, and 1 Th 1:1 concludes with εἰρήνη.

Champion's second group ("closing-type" benediction) has the following order:

wish / *divine source* / *recipient*

The exact wording tends to vary slightly in the different examples. A few times an element is missing, as, e.g., lack of reference to the divine source in Col 4:18. The additional element of addressee, ἀδελφοί, is given in Gal 6:18.

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 14.

Champion's third group may be called "intermediate-type" benedictions. These have several interesting features, none of which appears in all examples: (1) There is a tendency to sublimate the *wish* to the *divine source* so that instead of saying *the peace/of God/be with you*, it says, *the God/of peace/be with you*. Both grammatically and substantially there is a difference between these two statements, yet formally *peace* may be said to be the *wish* factor in each. (2) Another feature is the splitting up of the elements in this "intermediate type." For example, instead of all the *wish* being given at once, it will often be separated by other elements into two or more sections. One of the most fractured benedictions is 2 Th 3:5, where the order is *divine source/first wish/recipient/first wish (continued)/divine source/second wish/divine source*. (3) There is frequent use of the order *divine source/wish/recipient*. This order is present in simple pattern often enough that we may classify it as "sub-type A" of the "intermediate type." From Champion's list, Rom 15:33, 2 Cor 13:11, Php 4:9 and 1 Th 3:11 illustrate this sub-type A.

2. Benediction Form in the LXX

Although Champion did not establish a benediction formula and although the illustrations he has given from the LXX are mostly not benedictions at all, there are in the LXX benedictions which do show a clear structure. The three basic elements—*wish, divine source, and recipient*—are in evidence in these benedictions, and two optional items may also occur—the *addressee*, and the *reason for the blessing*.

There are three types identifiable by the order in which the basic elements appear, but these are not functionally different. The choice of one type rather than another seems largely a matter of style.

Type I presents the basic elements in the order *divine source/wish/recipient* and may be elaborated considerably. A simple example of this type is 2 Ki (2 Sam) 24:23:

divine source	/	*wish*	/	*recipient*
ὁ θεός σου	/	εὐλογήσαι	/	σε.

Type II presents the basic elements in the order *wish/ recipient/divine source*. Again, this type may be elaborated with optional elements, with further description of the *wish* after the *divine source*, or with other ornamentation. A simple example of Type II is Ruth 2:4:

wish	/	recipient	/	divine source
εὐλογήσαι	/	σε	/	κύριος

Probably the best known benediction in the OT is Num 6:24, which begins as a Type II benediction but exhibits, in verses 25 and 26, some interesting variations which probably represent a distinct Type III, with the order *wish/divine source/recipient*.[6] This particular benediction thus consists of three distinct benedictions. Their structure is as follows:

wish	/	recipient	/	divine source
εὐλογήσαι	/	σε	/	κύριος
καὶ φυλάξαι	/	σε,	/	

wish	/	divine source	/	wish (continued)	/	recipient
ἐπιφάναι	/	κύριος	/	τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ	/	ἐπὶ σὲ
			/	καὶ ἐλεήσαι	/	σε,

wish	/	divine source	/	wish (continued)	/	recipient
ἐπάραι	/	κύριος	/	τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ	/	ἐπὶ σὲ
			/	καὶ δῴη	/	σοι
				εἰρήνην.		

3. Correspondence between the LXX and NT Types

That the LXX was used by first-century Christians is generally recognized, and it seems clear that the LXX benediction forms must have been familiar to the Christian writers and worshippers of that century. It is a matter of interest and importance, there-

[6] Here, of course, I differ with Robert Jewett, who says of Num 6:24-26 (p. 31): "The form here is typically Hebraic, and the differences with New Testament formulas are so great that the possibility for formal influence would seem to be eliminated." The reason for our different conclusions lies

fore, to note that the following correlations exist between the several basic types of benedictions, as determined by the order in which the basic elements first appear:

LXX Type	NT Type	Order of Basic Elements
Type I	Intermediate Sub-Type A	Divine Source/Wish/Recipient
Type II	Opening Type	Wish/Recipient/Divine Source
Type III	Closing Type	Wish/Divine Source/Recipient

NT examples of Type I ("intermediate, sub-type A") are Rom 15:33, 2 Cor 13:11, Php 4:9, 2 Th 2:16, 17; also Rom 15: 5, 6, Rom 15:13, 1 Th 3:11, 1 Th 5:23, 2 Th 3:5, and 2 Th 3:16. Also qualifying on the basis of beginning with mention of the *divine source* would be Rom 16:20, 2 Tim 4:22, Heb 13:20, and 1 Pet 5:10.[7]

NT examples of Type II ("opening type") are those so designated by Champion and already indicated above; but in addition, the list may be expanded to include Eph 6:23, 2 Tim 1:18, 2 Tim 2:7, 2 Tim 4:18, and Rev 1:4. Additions to the Type-III ("closing type") benedictions listed by Champion are the following further NT examples: Php 4:7, 2 Tim 1:16, and Rev 22:21.

Two further points should also be mentioned here: (1) On surveying the NT benediction in light of the analysis of the LXX benediction, we find that five or six NT benedictions have the fifth element, the *reason*. These are Rom 15:5, 6, Rom 15:13, 1 Th 3:12, 2 Tim 1:16, Heb 13:20, and perhaps 2 Tim 1:18. (2) If we look for significant differences between the LXX benedictions and the NT benedictions, we find that the NT benediction is often a distinctive epistolographic form. This is especially true of the opening-type and closing-type benedictions, both of which are uesd in lieu of traditional elements of

in our meaning of "form." I see form in terms of the functional elements of a set formula; Jewett describes the form of the benediction in terms of colonmetric thought segments and strophes.

[7] Here and in the following listings I go beyond Champion's data in the Pauline epistles, and I also include other NT materials.

the opening and closing forms. In any case, the use of the benediction in a letter is functionally different from its use in a narrative.

4. *Conclusion*

In conclusion it may be stated (1) that in the NT there is discernible a basic benediction form, differentiated into several "types" by the order in which the essential elements occur; (2) that the several types representing this form appear also in the LXX; and (3) that in view of early Christian use of the LXX, it seems reasonable to conclude that the NT form was patterned after that of the LXX, the OT used by the early Christian church. Thus Champion's opinion that the NT benediction derived "from the Septuagint or the synagogue" does apply to the structure of the formula itself.