

## ARTICLE

## Naming I Timothy 3.16b: A ‘Hymn’ by another Name?

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### Abstract

Most scholars assume that 1 Timothy 3.16b is a hymn, or a fragment of a hymn, belonging to another context. However, Furley (1995) points out that even the ancients had difficulty categorising their poetic materials. 1 Timothy 3.16b has no metre and neither praises God nor asks him for benefits, which are the usual indicators of a hymn. This article argues that 1 Timothy 3.16b was written by the writer for insertion into the letter, and it was intended to be used in his congregation as a bulwark (1 Tim 3.15) against his opponents. 1 Timothy 3.16b more closely resembles an epigram, normally written to accompany an epiphany of a god.

**Keywords:** 1 Timothy 3.16; Greek hymns; Christian hymns; opponents; flesh

### 1. Introduction

Hymns, says William Furley in his article ‘Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns’, were ‘thought to give the gods pleasure and therefore have the best chance of securing benefits for humans’.<sup>1</sup> An essential aspect of the Greek hymn was its supplication for benefits.<sup>2</sup> Thus the chorus sings in Aeschylus’ *Libation Bearers*, ‘This is the song (ὕμνος) of the gods beneath the earth. Now hear this prayer, blessed underworld powers, and send aid willingly to the children, for victory!’<sup>3</sup>

However, 1 Timothy 3.16b, which most scholars call a ‘hymn’, does not implore God for any benefits.<sup>4</sup> Yet 1 Timothy 3.16b owes a lot to poetics with its repetition of unspirited words and prepositional phrases, and this may give some clue as to its function. Pastoral Paul writes to Timothy about how he is to conduct himself in the ‘household of God, which is the church (ἐκκλησία) of the living God’ (1 Tim 3.15).<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 3.16b is introduced with the adverbial phrase, ὁμολογουμένως μέγα, ‘confessedly great’.<sup>6</sup> The adverb, ὁμολογουμένως, can be rendered ‘by common consent, confessedly, admittedly’

<sup>1</sup> W. D. Furley, ‘Praise and Persuasion in Greek Hymns’, *JHS* 115 (1995) 29–46.

<sup>2</sup> ‘A hymn is a sung prayer’: J. M. Bremer, ‘Greek Hymns’ in *Faith, Hope and Worship* (ed. H.S. Versnel and F.T. van Straten; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 193–215 (193).

<sup>3</sup> Aeschylus, ‘Libation-Bearers’ in *Oresteia* (LCL 146; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009) 475–8; for a Jewish example hymning God, see Philo, *On Moses* (LCL 289; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935) 2.238–9.

<sup>4</sup> J. Quinn and W. C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (ECC; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000) 318.

<sup>5</sup> All Scripture from Holy Bible: NRSV (New York: NCCUSA, 1989) unless otherwise indicated; Greek text from B. Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Author’s translation.

(LSJ).<sup>7</sup> Thus someone must be agreeing (ὁμόλογος) ‘by common consent’, and this ‘someone’ must be ‘the church (ἐκκλησία) of the living God’ (1 Tim 3.15).<sup>8</sup> The implication is that there is an oral acknowledgement of ‘the mystery of piety’ contained in the words of 1 Timothy 3.16b.<sup>9</sup> This paper will consider how the performance of this ὁμολογουμένως ‘great mystery of piety’ contributes to the writer’s aim to persuade ‘certain people’ (1 Tim 1. 3–6; 4.1) to return to the truth (1 Tim 3.15) and not ‘to teach the other instruction’ (ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν) (1 Tim 1.3) nor ‘pay attention to myths and endless genealogies’ (1 Tim 1.4).<sup>10</sup> However, this does not identify the genre of this verse. This article will outline the case that 1 Timothy 3.16b does not conform to the expected features of a Greek hymn. However, given the poetic nature of 1 Timothy 3.16b, two possibilities are proposed: either it is a series of maxims or it is a literary epigram.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Assessment of 1 Timothy 3.16b as a ‘Hymn’ from another Context

### 2.1. Naming a ‘Hymn’

When I name an entity, I am doing something significant. David Timmerman and Edward Schiappa observe in their *Classical Greek Rhetorical Theory and the Disciplining of Discourse*, ‘naming a phenomenon “X” as opposed to “Y” encourages a potentially different set of attitudes and actions toward the phenomenon’.<sup>12</sup> When scholars call 1 Timothy 3.16b a ‘hymn’, they are bringing to this verse a set of attitudes and interpretive actions dictated by the name ‘hymn’. Should we be calling 1 Timothy 3.16b a hymn? Certainly, there are poetic characteristics in this verse one can hear when read in Greek:

Ὅς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

The relative ὅς is introductory, so each phrase begins with a repetition of a passive verb ending in θη, which creates a repetitious sound, and almost each passive verb is followed by a prepositional phrase beginning with ἐν with some close repetitive ‘i’ sounds at the end.<sup>13</sup> These repetitions create a semblance of rhythm.<sup>14</sup> The lack of the prepositional phrase in the line beginning ὤφθη possibly adds emphasis to this verb; it is certainly not, as we shall see, for the rhythmic design.

<sup>7</sup> LSJ=H. G. Liddell, and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (ed. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; London/New York: T&T Clark) 522.

<sup>9</sup> J. F. Strange, ‘A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16: An Essay in Traditionsgeschichte’ (PhD diss., Drew University, 1970) 40; ‘the mystery of piety’ in T. C. Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety: The Rhetoric of Pietas in the Pastoral Epistles and the Roman Empire* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017) 149–51.

<sup>10</sup> On 1 Timothy 1.3–4 as the purpose of the letter see L. M. Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men: Rhetorical Strategies of 1 Timothy 1* (WUNT 526; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020) 61–74, 103–38; on ἐτεροδιδασκαλεῖν (1 Tim 1.3) as ‘to teach the other instruction’, Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 112–20. Cf. Hoklotubbe, *Civilized Piety*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> On the poetic nature of 1 Tim 3.16b, see M. M. Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization of Preformed Traditions in 1 Timothy: An Evaluation of the Apostle’s Literary, Rhetorical, and Theological Tactics* (LNTS 417; London: T & T Clark, 2009) 100–1.

<sup>12</sup> On the unit 16b beginning with Ὅς, see Strange, ‘A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16,’ 40–4; nature of a hymn: D. Timmerman and E. Schiappa, *Classical Greek Rhetorical Theory and the Disciplining of Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 5.

<sup>13</sup> Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 319; on the relative pronoun as introductory (W. D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 2000) 215); more on ὅς in later sections. On sounds in Koine Greek, see C. R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015) 196–200.

<sup>14</sup> P. H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006) 277.

## 2.2 James Strange and the Ill-fitting Category ‘Confessional Hymn’

Interestingly, Jerome Quinn and William Wacker were not so sure that this piece is a hymn. They based their reticence on the doctoral work of James Strange. Strange used six features he identified from Greek hymns to test the hypothesis that 1 Timothy 3.16b was a hymn.<sup>15</sup> The first feature he identified was that the opening ὄς of 1 Timothy 3.16b intersects partially with the ‘relative participial style’ that has characterised some ancient texts that have been called hymns. Second, the parallelism of the members is a characteristic of the hymns in the Hellenistic world. Third, there is something of a rhythm based on two stresses per line, although he acknowledges that there is no particular pattern ‘in the distribution of the unstressed syllables’. Fourth, there are rhetorical devices such as assonance,<sup>16</sup> homoioteleuton<sup>17</sup> and chiasm. Fifth, there is the third person singular style; and sixth, reportorial narrative form is ‘perhaps also characteristic of hymnic composition’.<sup>18</sup> Overall, Strange found that 1 Timothy 3.16b only bore a marginal similarity to known Greek hymns. However, he opted for a blended genre, a ‘confessional hymn’.<sup>19</sup> However, there is no evidence that there was such a genre for early Christians: it is Strange’s attempt to create a category to cover the various literary elements that he sees in this verse. A significant problem is the lack of metre.

## 2.3 Mark Yarbrough and 1 Timothy 3.16b as a Preformed Tradition

In a later study, Mark Yarbrough, in his *Paul’s Utilization of Preformed Traditions in 1 Timothy*, argues that 1 Timothy 3.16b is a preformed tradition based on his critical evaluation.<sup>20</sup> Yarbrough’s object is to identify preformed traditions in order to ascertain their function in the letter, which he proposes strengthens the literary cohesion of the letter, provides rhetorical leverage, and presents theological directives that ‘combat counter-mission doctrine’ of the opponents.<sup>21</sup> His work is not focused on the underlying traditions themselves nor their function and performance in the community before their insertion into 1 Timothy. He identifies 1 Timothy 3.16 as a preformed tradition based on three of his criteria: structure, content, and style.<sup>22</sup> In regard to ‘structure’, his first finding is that there is a formulaic introduction, ‘and by great confession’, and secondly, that verse 16 is a self-contained unit. In regard to ‘content’, his primary finding is that there is ‘a high theological presence with a detailed Christological expression’; and, under ‘style’, his main finding is that verse 16 ‘develops a unique, assonant rhythmical pattern that serves an elaborate poetic function’.<sup>23</sup> There can be no doubt that 1 Timothy 3.16b with its highly structured short phrases and rhythmic qualities stands apart from the surrounding text.<sup>24</sup> However, Yarbrough assumes, along with the scholars he is relying on, that 1 Timothy

<sup>15</sup> Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 319; Strange, ‘A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16’, 79.

<sup>16</sup> ‘The repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds in the stressed syllables (and sometimes in the following unstressed syllables) of neighbouring words’, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (C. Baldick, ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 87.

<sup>17</sup> Closely related to rhyme, ‘denoting the repetition of the same ending among words of the same grammatical category’: V. Allen, ‘The Embarrassments of Rhyme’, *Shakespeare Studies* 49 (2021) 128–38 (129).

<sup>18</sup> Features one to six based on Strange, ‘A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16’, 53–79 and elaborated upon by Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 319.

<sup>19</sup> Strange, ‘A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16’, 89–95.

<sup>20</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 95–102.

<sup>21</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 96–102.

<sup>23</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 96–102.

<sup>24</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 97–9.

3.16b is a hymn.<sup>25</sup> Little is done to argue that 1 Timothy 3.16b is a ‘hymn’ according to his own ‘hymnic criteria’.<sup>26</sup> Further, the opening formula ‘a confession’ does not spark an analysis as to whether 1 Timothy 3.16b fulfils the confessional criteria or the hymnic criteria as it did for Strange.<sup>27</sup> Yarbrough’s careful analysis of the structure and style of 1 Timothy 3.16b provides insights into use of poetical devices which are clearly described. However, his analysis is limited, as is the whole study, since Yarbrough has not considered the possibility that the identified preformed traditions may be composed by the writer for use as a tradition within the corporate life of the body of believers (Eph 5.19; Col 3.16). After all, a poetical piece composed for the purpose of insertion into the prose of 1 Timothy will meet Yarbrough’s criteria of preformed tradition, but it is an assumption that this piece belongs to another time and setting.<sup>28</sup> There is plenty of evidence that one trained in letter writing and oratory would be able to compose a rhythmic piece to enhance his argument.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. The Case that 1 Timothy 3.16b was Composed for the Letter

The writer of 1 Timothy was trained both in rhetoric and the art of letter composition.<sup>30</sup> A young man in the Roman empire could go on from learning to read and write with a teacher to learning to compose and give speeches with a rhetor or sophist.<sup>31</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus said that ‘young people need, at the beginning, much prudent supervision and guidance ... to select words which are both pure and refined and to arrange them in a combination which unites grace and dignity’.<sup>32</sup> Quintilian saw that understanding the nature of rhythm and metre used in poetry could aid a written composition.<sup>33</sup> Even school boys were aware of rhythm.<sup>34</sup> However, Quintilian argued against the use of verse in compositions, while Julius Victor, in giving advice about letter writing, thought that to use ‘a familiar proverb, a line of poetry, or a snatch of verse’ would add pleasantness to a ‘friendly letter’.<sup>35</sup> The insertion of 1 Timothy 3.16b does break ‘the rules’ of Quintilian’s good composition, and it is doing far more than adorning 1 Timothy with a note of pleasantness as was allowed by Victor.<sup>36</sup> The context of 1 Timothy 3.16b is ‘the church (ἐκκλησία) of the living God’ (1 Tim 3.15); it is the meeting of the believers to which this piece belongs, as Yarbrough’s work suggests. A similar context is described by Philo in his description of the practices of the Therapeutae.<sup>37</sup> After prayers and the speech by the President:

[he] rises and sings a hymn (ῥύμνον ᾄδει) composed as an address to God, either a **new one of his own composition** or an old one by poets of an earlier day who

<sup>25</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 97.

<sup>26</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 33–5.

<sup>27</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 32–5, 96–102.

<sup>28</sup> Yarbrough, *Paul’s Utilization*, 6–11; the writer of 1 Timothy demonstrates he is capable of composing ‘neologisms’ and therefore poetry as described by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Critical Essays, Volume II: On Literary Composition* (LCL 466; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 25.

<sup>29</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Literary Composition* 20; Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education* 9.4.

<sup>30</sup> C. R. Hutson, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019) 5–8.

<sup>31</sup> G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003) ix–xii.

<sup>32</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Literary Composition* 1.

<sup>33</sup> Quintilian *The Orator’s Education* 9.4.45–71.

<sup>34</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education* 9.4.47.

<sup>35</sup> Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education* 9.4.72–8; except, one presumes, when discoursing on music: Plutarch, *On Music*; A. J. Malherbe, ed. *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 65.

<sup>36</sup> Bremer’s note perhaps gives some insight into the motivation of the writer, ‘Even Philosophers took to writing hymnic poetry when they wanted to convey thoughts and sentiments that prose was unfit to express’, ‘Greek Hymns’, 213.

<sup>37</sup> S. Levarie, ‘Philo on Music’, *The Journal of Musicology* 9.1 (1991) 124–30 (128).

have left behind them hymns in many measures and melodies, hexameters and iambs, lyrics suitable for processions or in libations and at the altars, or for the chorus whilst standing or dancing, with careful metrical arrangements to fit the various evolutions. After him all the others take their turn as they are arranged and in the proper order while all the rest listen in complete silence except when they have to chant (ᾄδειν) the closing lines or refrains, for then they all lift up their voices, men and women alike.<sup>38</sup>

The president of this association composes both a discourse discussing ‘some question arising in the Holy Scriptures or solves one that has been propounded by someone else’ and possibly a new hymn.<sup>39</sup> This hymn is ‘addressed to God’, suggesting a character similar to the Greek hymn that Furley describes. The congregation does not sing the hymn, but stays silent only to ‘chant (ᾄδειν) the closing lines or refrains’. The word translated as ‘chant’ could be translated as ‘sing’, as it is in the earlier line (cf. ἀείδω, LSJ).<sup>40</sup>

This could suggest that 1 Timothy 3.16b is a closing line or refrain composed for a Christian hymn sung by the believers (Eph 5.19; Col 3.16) in a meeting similarly described by Philo. Moreover, Philo’s president demonstrates that an educated man could compose a hymn to be sung on behalf of a congregation. But the question still remains: is 1 Timothy 3.16b a hymn?

## 4. I Timothy and the Category of ‘Hymn’

### 4.1 What is a Hymn? Preliminary Considerations of I Timothy 3.16b

The question that needs to be answered in order to make a decision is: what is a hymn? But this question might be harder to answer than one might think. As Furley noted, Greek hymns sung ‘during worship of a god on a public or private occasion have received less than their due attention from modern scholars’.<sup>41</sup> His object was to examine some common features of the available hymnic texts, but before he does this he notes that ‘There is, and was in antiquity, some confusion as to what, precisely, a “hymn” (ῥυμος) was’.<sup>42</sup> This means that we need to be cautious in what we label as a ‘hymn’ when even the ancients found it difficult to distinguish between ‘threnoi, paeans, dithyrambs and nomes’.<sup>43</sup> Furley, in his article, examines a number of works he believes can be securely identified as hymns and sums up his findings: ‘The entire strategy behind hymn-composition and performance was to attract the attention of the divinity addressed in a favourable way; ritual and choral worship combined to flatter, woo, charm and persuade a single god or a group of gods that the worshipper(s) was deserving of sympathy and aid.’<sup>44</sup> Thus it is hard to see how the lines of 1 Timothy 3.16b, which gives affirmations about the

<sup>38</sup> Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* (LCL 363; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941) 80; emphasis mine.

<sup>39</sup> Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 75, 80; Plutarch says that in days gone by shepherds, ploughmen and fowlers composed poetry: *The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse* (LCL 306; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936) 406B–E.

<sup>40</sup> ἀείδω here perhaps means ‘singing together in unison’, see Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 84; ἀείδω as ‘chanting’ see Plutarch, *The Ancient Customs of the Spartans* (LCL 245; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931) 237C–D, it is distinguished from speaking in Philo, *de Somnis* 2.38. This suggests a rhythmical quality, Plutarch, *Table Talk* IX, 748B–C.

<sup>41</sup> Furley, ‘Praise and Persuasion’, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Furley, ‘Praise and Persuasion’, 31; Bremer’s discussion on the hymn genre also focuses on the hymn being addressed to a god or gods like a prayer; he also found that ‘most hymns contain a petition on behalf of the community’, ‘Greek Hymn’, 193–197.

<sup>43</sup> Furley, ‘Praise and Persuasion’, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Furley, ‘Praise and Persuasion’, 32.

nature of God, could function as a hymn. There is little here that acts to persuade God; it neither praises him nor implores him for benefits, rather it is intended to persuade the hearer.<sup>45</sup> Some scholars argue that it is a ‘fragment’ of a hymn so we do not have the complete form, but given that we have few examples of complete Christian hymns to go on this is a precarious position to take.<sup>46</sup>

That 1 Timothy 3.16b is directed at the audience lends credence to Strange’s idea that this is some type of a creed or confession. However, while it is almost universally agreed that this verse, whether hymn or creed, belongs to another context altogether, I want to argue that the writer has composed this piece.<sup>47</sup> The content is ‘confessedly great’ (ὁμολογουμένως μέγα). Judging by this content, the piece is being used in order to correct the distortions in Christology that have grown up in the church because of the emphasis on asceticism in the ‘other instruction’ (1 Tim 1.3; 4.1; 6.1).<sup>48</sup> Verse 15 suggests that the context of this confessing is conducted by the congregation (ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζῶντος) in the ‘house of God’ (ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ).<sup>49</sup> When spoken out loud it does something; or as John Austin described, it is an illocutionary act.<sup>50</sup> Something is being achieved in this speech act.<sup>51</sup> While this informs us of the utility of this piece, it does not identify its genre.

#### 4.2 The Poetic Characteristics of 1 Timothy 3.16b and Early Christian Hymning

In order to make a decision as to whether 1 Timothy 3.16b is a hymn, the poetic metre of the piece needs to be considered. To begin, it is best to look at a line of poetry introduced with a relative pronoun from Hephaestion’s *Handbook on Meters*:

‘The converse of that (i.e. the Platonic metron) is this one called the “Pindaric”:

– – √ – – | – √ √ – √ √ – | – – √ – –  
 ὃς καὶ τυπεῖς ἀγνῶ πελέκει τέκετο ξανθὰν Ἀθάναν.<sup>52</sup>  
 who, struck with a sacred ax, gave birth to fair-haired Athena.<sup>53</sup>

This, says Hephaestion, is an example of two iambic penthemimers on either side and a dactylic penthemimer in the middle.<sup>54</sup> A hymn would usually have a pattern of metre

<sup>45</sup> A purpose to which the whole letter is directed, Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 274–9.

<sup>46</sup> As a hymn see M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) 61; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 224–5; Towner, *The Letters*, 276; as a confession fragment see J. Herzer, *Die Pastoralbriefe und das Vermächtnis des Paulus: Studien zu den Briefen an Timotheus und Titus* (WUNT 476; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) 261–2.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Towner, *The Letters*, 284–5.

<sup>48</sup> Towner, *The Letters*, 294–5; P. H. Towner, ‘Gnosis and Realized Eschatology in Ephesus (of the Pastoral Epistles) and the Corinthian Enthusiasm’, *JSNT* 31 (1987) 95–124 (103, 107); L. M. Kidson, ‘Fasting, Bodily Care, and the Widows of 1 Timothy 5.3–15’, *Early Christianity* 11.2 (2020) 191–205.

<sup>49</sup> Hutson, ‘House of God’, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019) 102–3; ‘the house of God’ parallels to the congregation (ἐκκλησία), Herzer, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 282–3.

<sup>50</sup> J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (ed. J.O. Urmson; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 14, 22, 40–1, 98, 104, 127.

<sup>51</sup> On the performance of 1 Timothy, see Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 275–9.

<sup>52</sup> *Heph.* p. 51.16, Consbruch ed.; the metre by J. M. van Ophuijsen, *Hephaestion on Metre* (MBCBSupp. 100; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987) 150.

<sup>53</sup> Pindar, *Fragments*, 34, in *Nemean Odes, Isthmian Odes, Fragments* (LCL 485; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Ophuijsen, *Hephaestion on Metre*, 150.

within a line and through the piece.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, 1 Timothy 3.16b has no rhythmic pattern at all:

ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί,  
 ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι,  
 ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις,  
 ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν,  
 ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ,  
 ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.<sup>56</sup>

This is a completely arhythmical piece of writing; but the case is not closed yet: a fragment of an early Christian hymn, P.Oxy.15.1786, which is dated roughly to third century CE, has musical notation.<sup>57</sup> The relationship of this notation system to Greek music has been hotly debated. A. Holleman argued it does not correspond to Greek musical notation, saying, 'P.Oxy.15.1786, far from being an eminent piece of evidence for the continuity between music, must be considered as an obvious demonstration of the necessity of creating and organizing an entirely new notation-system for the new Christian music.'<sup>58</sup> Holleman argues that, while P.Oxy.15.1786 does have musical notation, the rhythm is not relying on Greek musical theory.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, W. J. Porter points to M. L. West, who argued that this argument is mistaken and that P.Oxy.15.1786 is 'expertly recorded in the Greek notation itself [and] suggests a composer with a Greek musical education'.<sup>60</sup> West goes on to say that Greek hymns in the second and third centuries were becoming more florid, and this hymn displays these features. Porter describes how some biblical scholars feel compelled to argue for an exclusive Jewish influence in the music of the primitive church.<sup>61</sup> However, he concludes from the data that there is no clear picture, 'instead there is an intermingling of cultural and religious influences on the music of the early Christian church'.<sup>62</sup> So might 1 Timothy 3.16b be a Christian hymn after all? A closer look at the hymn of P.Oxy.15.1786 is needed:

'... together all the notable of God (sing?)  
 ... or the day (?), let it be silent. Let the lu-

<sup>55</sup> It should be acknowledged that Greek poetry did not always adhere to strict meter.

<sup>56</sup> The criteria for deciding if a syllable is considered long (or heavy) is if (a) it contains a long vowel, (b) it contains a diphthong, (c) it is followed by two consonants or a double consonant (e.g. ξ). A syllable is considered short (light) if it is a short vowel followed by a single consonant or no consonant. The phonemic distinction of vowel lengths appears to have dropped out in the Koine period, probably earlier than our text (e.g. ω and ο were being pronounced the same, more or less); however, Greek poetry and song of the period nevertheless tended to preserve vowel length distinctions, and we could expect to see them in poetry and song.

<sup>57</sup> B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1922) 21–6.

<sup>58</sup> A. W. J. Holleman, 'The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786 and the Relationship between Ancient Greek and Early Christian Music', *Vigiliae Christianae* 26.1 (1972) 1–17.

<sup>59</sup> Holleman, 'The Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1786', 14.

<sup>60</sup> M. L. West, 'Anaecta Musica', *ZPE* 92 (1992) 1–54 (50), in W. J. Porter, 'Misguided Missals: Is Early Christian Music Jewish or Is It Graeco-Roman?' in *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries* (ed. S.E. Porter and B.W.R. Pearson; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 202–27 (223–6).

<sup>61</sup> Examples of Greek hymns at this time: P.Oxy.25.2436 and P.Oxy.44.3161; Porter, 'Misguided Missals', 225–6.

<sup>62</sup> Porter, 'Misguided Missals', 226.

minous stars not... [Let the winds(?) and] all the flowing rivers [be silent],  
 while we sing, Father and  
 Son and Holy Spirit, let all the powers  
 respond, "Amen, amen." Strength and praise  
 [and glory forever to God], the sole giver  
 of all good things, "Amen, amen."<sup>63</sup>

We should note that this is a hymn in terms of the genre, in that it praises God, and the triune one at that. As we noted earlier, 1 Timothy 3.16b does not praise God but is directed to the audience.<sup>64</sup> I suggest that the introduction of 1 Timothy 3.16b provides the key to grasping the genre and so the purpose.

### 4.3 Confessing | Timothy 3.16b and the Audience

As noted earlier, the writer introduces the piece with 'ὁμολογουμένως great is the mystery of piety' (1 Tim 3.16a). The adverb ὁμολογουμένως can be glossed as 'by common consent', 'confessedly', or 'admittedly' (LSJ). The mystery is 'confessedly great' and is contained in the content that follows. This adverb was often used in courts of law and in civic assemblies when setting out agreed upon facts. A particularly helpful example is Demosthenes, in arguing for a certain course:

If you cannot preserve your maritime possessions by your might that once saved Hellas, but rely on any jury to whom you refer it, and whose verdict is final, to preserve them for you, provided always that Philip does not buy their votes, is it not an open confession (ὁμολογουμένως), when you adopt this policy, that you have abandoned everything on the mainland, and are you not advertising to the world that there is not a single thing for the sake of which you will appeal to arms.<sup>65</sup>

Demosthenes is putting before his audience the uncomfortable but inescapable facts, which their behaviour openly shows. It is a confession of the truth. In other forensic speeches, it indicates facts that are so obvious they are agreed upon by all. A participial phrase is instructive in Aeschines' 'On the Embassy', when he says in appealing to the king:

And if, in my peril, you allow me to speak as I wish, you will be able to save me, if I am innocent, and that on good and sufficient grounds; and you will also have before you the facts that are acknowledged (ἐκ τῶν ὁμολογουμένων) as you proceed to examine the points that are in dispute.<sup>66</sup>

The things that are acknowledged are the facts, which are agreed upon by all. In 1 Timothy 3.16b, the writer is setting out the facts that are or should be agreed upon by all in the house of God.<sup>67</sup> He has appealed to commonly agreed upon terms a number of times throughout the letter before he gets to this point. At 1 Timothy 1.5, he begins

<sup>63</sup> L. H. Blumell and T. A. Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018) 323.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Timothy 3.16b's un-music like qualities include not only its lack of metre but also its lack of praise; for example, 'See, Homer tells us, the proper way of employing music: for to sing the praise of heroes and the prowess of demigods befitted Achilles': Plutarch, *On Music* 1145E-F.

<sup>65</sup> Demosthenes, 'On Halonnes', *Orations* 7 (LCL 238; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930) 7.7-8.

<sup>66</sup> Aeschines, *Speeches* (LCL 106; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919) 2.44.

<sup>67</sup> 'A confession used in church meetings': Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 522.

the ethical digression by appealing to love which is from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.<sup>68</sup> Love should be agreed by all Christians as the ethical touchstone and therefore can be appealed to as the goal of the command issued in 1 Timothy 1.3-4.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, 1 Timothy 3.16b is in concise form an acknowledgement about what should be the agreed upon facts.

### 5. The Structure of 1 Timothy 3.16b: Parallelism and Opposing Spheres

As noted earlier, Strange pointed to the parallel nature of 1 Timothy 3.16b, which was a feature of both Jewish and Greek poetry. So, the agreed upon facts can be arranged in the following three pairs, each belonging to an opposing sphere,

[God] was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit,  
Seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles,  
Believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.<sup>70</sup>

The sphere of the present age (1 Tim 6.17), God in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί), nations, and the world, is balanced by another sphere without flesh: spirit, angels, and glory.<sup>71</sup> The relative masculine pronoun ὃς is taken to reach back to θεοῦ ζῶντος (1 Tim 3.15), which is the antecedent in masculine belonging to a person in the introductory material before 1 Timothy 3.16.<sup>72</sup> As Towner describes, ὃς is unlikely to be referring to the neuter antecedent μυστήριον ('mystery'), rather it is introducing the truth about God.<sup>73</sup> Thus God, who rightly belongs in the sphere of the spirit, is present in the flesh. A parallel schema of spheres can be found in Philo, *On Virtue* (72–75). Moses hymns 'God in song':

He convoked a divine assemblage of the elements of all existence and the chiefest parts of the universe, earth and heaven, one the home of mortals, the other the house of immortals.<sup>74</sup>

The angels, says Philo, marvel at Moses' music skill that 'any man imprisoned in a corruptible body could like the sun and moon and the most sacred choir of the other stars attune his soul to harmony with God's instrument, the heaven and the whole universe'.<sup>75</sup> This strongly suggests that angels in 1 Timothy 3.16 see '[God] revealed in the flesh' from heaven, 'the house of immortals', which is paired, as it is in *On Virtue*, with

<sup>68</sup> Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 173–6; 181–3; 240–63.

<sup>69</sup> Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 240.

<sup>70</sup> Opposing spheres: Hutson, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, 104; parallelism reflecting both Greek and Hebrew poetics: Strange, 'A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16', 53–62.

<sup>71</sup> The present age is part of the PE writer's eschatological framework of now/not yet, which suggests parallel spheres. On the eschatological framework: P. H. Towner, 'The Present Age in the Eschatology of the Pastoral Epistles', *NTS* 32.3 (1986) 427–48. Pairing the lines: Dibelius and Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 61–2; Strange, 'A Critical and Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3.16', 55.

<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Ignatius, 'To the Trallians', *The Apostolic Fathers* (LCL 24; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 9:1–2: see discussion below. For a discussion on this conundrum see J. Herzer, *Die Pastoralbriefe und das Vermächtnis des Paulus: Studien zu den Briefen an Timotheus und Titus* (WUNT 76; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) 261.

<sup>73</sup> Towner, *The Letters*, 278; implicitly about Christ, Herzer, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 261; Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 523, argues for μυστήριον as the antecedent, but the manuscript evidence supports the masculine relative pronoun: ὃς is supported by κ\* A\*(vid) C\* G<sup>BF</sup> 33 365 442 2127. In support of the antecedent as θεοῦ some manuscripts have Θεός, which appears to be clarifying the referent, appears in <sup>2</sup>κ A<sup>c</sup> C<sup>2</sup> D<sup>2</sup> K L P Ψ 81 330 614 1739; ὃς Θεός 69; ὁ D\* 061. As a formula for introducing a truth about a god, Hephæstion, *Handbook on Meters* 34: *Heph.* p. 51.16, Consbruch ed.

<sup>74</sup> Philo, *On the Virtues* (LCL 341; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939) 73.

<sup>75</sup> Philo, *On the Virtues* 74; Levarie, 'Philo on Music', 128.

earth, ‘the home of mortals’. Yet, in these lines, God from the realm of the immortal (1 Tim 1.17; 6.15–16) enters into the realm of the mortal.

## 6. The Theology of 1 Timothy 3.16b

These poetic lines of 1 Timothy 3.16b attest to an in-breaking of God, ‘the King eternal, immortal, invisible’ (1 Tim 1.17, 6.15) into the present sphere of the mortal.<sup>76</sup> This, however, brings dangers from the spiritual realm. In the eyes of the writer of 1 Timothy, the ‘other instruction’ (1 Tim 1.3; 6.3) derives from the spirits and is the instruction of demons (1 Timothy 4.1). From the description of the ‘other instruction’, it can be supposed that the other teachers are in contact with spiritual beings that the writer calls spirits and demons (1 Tim 4.1), they are rejecting the flesh (1 Tim 4.2–4), and they are seeking their own glory (1 Tim 1.13; 4.2; 6.4).<sup>77</sup> These are words targeted at healing the damage done by Hymenaeus and Alexander and their other instruction (1 Timothy 1.3, 20).<sup>78</sup> Hymenaeus and Alexander have been removed from the community because of the damage that was being done in the corporate life of the church,

Whoever teaches [the other instruction of Hymenaeus and Alexander] and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6.3–5)<sup>79</sup>

The confessional piece of 1 Timothy 3.16b must be seen in the context of this other instruction which is an ascetic programme.<sup>80</sup>

## 7. 1 Timothy 3.16b in Comparison to Ignatius’ Poetic Rebuttal of his Opponents

A similar poetic piece is found in Ignatius’ *Letter to the Trallians*. Ignatius’ object in using the quasi-creedal form, as William Schoedel describes it, is so that the believers in the church can ‘be deaf when someone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ’.<sup>81</sup> Ignatius too uses the relative ὅς, as well as a series of aorist passives. It shares striking similarities with 1 Timothy 3.16:

[Jesus Christ] was from the race of David and from Mary, who (ὅς) was truly born (ἐγεννήθη), both ate and drank, was truly persecuted (ἐδιώχθη) at the time of Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified (ἐσταυρώθη) and died, while those in heaven and on earth and under the earth looked on.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Phil 2:5–11; on the relationship between the doxologies 1 Tim 1.16 and 1 Tim 6.13–16, see Herzer, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 264–5.

<sup>77</sup> Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 122–3, 218–20; Towner, *The Letters*, 294–5; T. M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 2–3, 98.

<sup>78</sup> A. J. Malherbe, ‘Medical Imagery in the Pastoral Epistles’, in *Light from the Gentiles: Hellenistic Philosophy and Early Christianity: Collected Essays, 1959–2012* (ed. C. R. Holladay et al.; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014) 117–34.

<sup>79</sup> On the expulsion of Hymenaeus and Alexander, see A. G. White, *Paul, Community, and Discipline: Establishing Boundaries and Dealing with the Disorderly* (Paul in Critical Contexts; London: Lexington Press/Fortress Academic, 2021) 217–19, 222–8.

<sup>80</sup> Although it is difficult to tell what exactly is ‘the other instruction’, it is apparent ‘dass letztlich eine konkrete Gruppe im Blick ist’ despite the pseudonymous nature of 1 Timothy (Herzer, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 304–5).

<sup>81</sup> W. R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) 152.

He was also truly raised (ἠγέρθη) from the dead, his Father having raised him. In the same way his Father will also raise us in Christ Jesus, we who believe in him, apart from whom we do not have true life.<sup>82</sup>

Ignatius goes on to say:

But if, as some who are atheists—that is, unbelievers—say, he only appeared to suffer (it is they who are the appearance), why am I in bondage, and why also do I pray to fight the wild beasts?<sup>83</sup>

It is immediately obvious that he is reacting to those who are denying the corporeality of Christ and that he only seemed to suffer in the flesh.<sup>84</sup> Ignatius has built his creed from commonly acknowledged material, but reworked to counter those who deny the truth of Christ's humanness.<sup>85</sup> John Marshall persuasively argues that Ignatius' opponents believe Jesus to be an angel.<sup>86</sup> Likewise, in 1 Timothy 3.16 the writer has drawn upon commonly confessed Christian 'truth' (1 Tim 3.15b; John 1.1–18; 1 John 1.1–3) and worked it into a punchy poetic piece to counter the ascetic teaching of the other teachers.

As has been discussed, the relative ὅς of 1 Timothy 3.16 refers back to 'the living God' (1 Tim 3.15). In Ignatius' *Letter to the Trallians*, the ὅς refers back to Jesus Christ since it cannot possibly be referring to Mary or David. In 1 Timothy 3.16b, God was revealed in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί). In Pauline theology σάρξ is normally aligned with the passions, which are unruly (ἐν τῇ σαρκί; Rom 7.5).<sup>87</sup> The ascetic programme of the other teachers, on the other hand, was designed to control and even strip away the flesh and the passions.<sup>88</sup> They 'forbid marriage' (1 Tim 4.3), indicating that they believed as Tatian did that sexual relations were sinful.<sup>89</sup> I would argue that the writer of 1 Timothy believed that he was repudiating a view held by the other teachers that they were emulating Christ, who they believed was a spiritual being, an angel.<sup>90</sup> The opening of this poetic piece is confrontational – God was in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί) and thus had passions (Rom 7.5). He repudiates the lengths to which the other teachers were going because it did not reflect the true state of affairs in regard to Christ's body.

I propose that we can paraphrase 1 Timothy 3.16b as,

[God] was revealed in flesh and was vindicated in spirit (even though he had flesh)  
He was seen by angels (but was not an angel), he was proclaimed among Gentiles  
(because Paul was appointed a herald, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim 2.7)),

<sup>82</sup> B. D. Ehrman, 'To the Trallians', *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache* (LCL 24; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003) 9:1–2.

<sup>83</sup> Ehrman, 'To the Trallians', 10.1.

<sup>84</sup> Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 20–1; 152–5; J. W. Marshall, 'The Objects of Ignatius' Wrath and Jewish Angelic Mediators', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 56.1 (2005) 1–23 (6).

<sup>85</sup> Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Marshall, 'The Objects of Ignatius' Wrath', 12–7.

<sup>87</sup> J. Longarino, 'Apocalyptic and the Passions: Overcoming a False Dichotomy in Pauline Studies', *NTS* 67.4 (2021) 582–97 (596–7).

<sup>88</sup> Kidson, 'Fasting, Bodily Care', 200–2; cf. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 98–9.

<sup>89</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 3.81.2; P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 92; D. G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 18–9.

<sup>90</sup> Marshall, 'The Objects of Ignatius' Wrath', 3–4.

He was believed in throughout the world (in Ephesus and Macedonia), he was taken up in glory (Jesus Christ in the flesh will return as the manifestation of the only sovereign, the king and lord (1 Tim 6.14–5)).

So, we come to the question: what has the writer composed here? The writer of 1 Timothy was an educated man, and as such would have been trained to compose his own rhetorical devices.<sup>91</sup> Chreiai come in a number of species, which include gnomic sayings (maxims), prayers, and tropes (metaphors).<sup>92</sup> The lines of 1 Timothy 3.16b could be a series of maxims, like the maxim at 1 Timothy 1.15.<sup>93</sup> The other option is that it is a literary epigram.

## 8. The Genre of 1 Timothy 3.16b: Options

### 8.1 1 Timothy 3.16b as a Series of Maxims

Since 1 Timothy 3.16b is introduced with a formula, *ὁμολογουμένως*, without reference to a ‘speaker’, it could be described a series of maxims.<sup>94</sup> Maxims are pithy universal statements that urge the reader towards a particular action or attitude.<sup>95</sup> An example is from Homer’s *The Iliad*, ‘A man who is a counsellor should not sleep all the night’ (2.24).<sup>96</sup> They tend to have no context nor a speaker, but are extremely valuable, says Plutarch, against the influences of poetry, so ‘let us equip the young from the very outset to keep ever sounding in their ears the maxim’.<sup>97</sup> However, 1 Timothy 3.16 is directed at a particular audience and is not urging or dissuading from a particular action.<sup>98</sup> So while not exactly like maxims, the pithy statements of 1 Timothy 3.16 are performing a similar function as Plutarch’s maxims: they are designed so they will keep on resounding in believers’ ears. This type of function suggests that 1 Timothy 3.16b is designed to be at least heard in or even performed by the *ἐκκλησία* ‘of the living God’.<sup>99</sup>

### 8.2 1 Timothy 3.16b as an Epigram

Another more likely option is that this piece is an epigram. Epigrams were originally short lines of poetry ‘originally written to be “inscribed” (by chiselling, cutting, hammering, casting, painting or scratching) upon or near objects such as stelai, pinakes, metal plaques, dedications to gods, works of visual art, and structures.’<sup>100</sup> However, during the Hellenistic period they became gathered into anthologies, as Verity Platt describes ‘like the literary hymn, epigrams were one of the most overtly decontextualised genres of the period’.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 176–7; C.A. Gibson, ‘Better Living through Prose Composition? Moral and Compositional Pedagogy in Ancient Greek and Roman Progymnasmata’, *Rhetorica* 32.1 (2014) 1–30; Quintilian, *The Orator’s Education* 9.4.121.

<sup>92</sup> ‘The Exercises of Aelius Theon’, 99, in *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (ed. G. A. Kennedy; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 17.

<sup>93</sup> Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 228–30.

<sup>94</sup> ‘A maxim is always a saying...uttered impersonally’, in ‘The Preliminary Exercises of Aphthonius the Sophist’, in Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 26 (100).

<sup>95</sup> Craig A. Gibson, *Libanius’s Progymnasmata Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) 87.

<sup>96</sup> Trans. in ‘Aphthonius the Sophist’, in Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 25 (99).

<sup>97</sup> Plutarch, *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* (LCL 197; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) 17D–E.

<sup>98</sup> A maxim used to persuade: ‘Aphthonius the Sophist’, in Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 25–7 (99–101).

<sup>99</sup> This is supported by a variation in the word division in verse 16 (D\* 1175) that reads *ὁμολογουμένως* as *ὁμολογοῦμεν ὡς*, ‘we confess that’: Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 214.

<sup>100</sup> F. Cairns, *Hellenistic Epigram: Contexts of Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 15.

<sup>101</sup> V. J. Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 181.

By the third century BCE, the term epigram came to mean ‘a short poem on almost any subject written in elegiac couplets or some form of stichic metre’.<sup>102</sup> The stichic metre are verse lines of the same length and metre, which are not divided into stanzas.<sup>103</sup> As observed by Quinn and Wacker, 1 Timothy 3.16b is loosely composed in stiches.<sup>104</sup> If we set aside the metre of 1 Timothy 3.16b, for the reasons discussed above, then 1 Timothy 3.16b emerges as a short poem, with lines arranged in couplets on the nature of God.<sup>105</sup> As Platt discusses, epigrams were used in temples to enhance the viewing of the idol in order to facilitate an epiphany of the god or goddess.<sup>106</sup> In the Roman era, these epiphanies could be expected in the domestic sphere.<sup>107</sup> 1 Timothy 3.16b enshrines the epiphany of God (ἐφανερώθη) who becomes flesh (ἐν σαρκί). Unlike the carved idol in a Greek temple or in a home, this fleshy God was proclaimed among the nations (ἐκκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν), and yet was seen by those who inhabit the spiritual sphere (ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις). This kind of parallel phrasing and antithesis became a feature of these kinds of poems from the Hellenistic period on.<sup>108</sup> In an epigram ascribed to Philip, the sculptor Phidias is said to have had an epiphany of Zeus,

Either God came down from heaven to earth to show you  
His image (εἰκόνα), Phidias, or you went to see God.<sup>109</sup>

But as Platt discusses, the image (εἰκόνα) of the god involves a degree of ambiguity, ‘implying representation, shadow rather than the “thing itself”’.<sup>110</sup> The claim, however, in 1 Timothy 3.16b, and also by Ignatius, is that Jesus Christ is not an image, like an idol, but God himself made flesh.<sup>111</sup> Jesus Christ is not representative of God, but is God in the sphere of the present age and the age to come (1 Tim 6.12–6). As God in flesh, the manifestation of Jesus Christ in this present age makes the ascetic efforts of Hymenaeus and Alexander futile.

The last line of the poem caps off the rebuttal of their Christology, God in the flesh ‘was taken up in glory’, and puts an end to their own striving to renounce the flesh in order to seek that same glory.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>102</sup> G. L. Fain, ‘Catullus, Callimachus, and Martial: Composition in Greek and Latin Epigram’ (PhD diss., UCLA, 2005) 3, 182–7: an elegiac couplet is a pair of lines consisting of a dactylic hexameter and a pentameter, which became a popular metre for an epigram by the Roman period.

<sup>103</sup> Baldick, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 321.

<sup>104</sup> Quinn and Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 318–20.

<sup>105</sup> An epigram could be composed in very irregular metre, Fain, ‘Catullus’, 88.

<sup>106</sup> Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 180–93.

<sup>107</sup> J. R. Clarke, ‘Constructing the Spaces of Epiphany in Ancient Greek and Roman Visual Culture’, in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch* (ed. A. C. Niang and C. Osiek; Eugene: Pickwick, 2012) 257–79.

<sup>108</sup> Fain, ‘Catullus’, 89, 187.

<sup>109</sup> Trans. Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 204; other examples of epigrams concerning the gods: ‘Paris, Anchises and Adonis saw me [Aphrodite] naked. I know only those three. But how did Praxiteles contrive it?’ (Trans. Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 201); ‘This is not Aphrodite of the People; when you pray to the goddess, you should address her as Heavenly. She was set up here by the chaste Chrysogona in the house of Amphicles, with whom she shared her children and her life. By making first sacrifices to you, Lady, they flourished more each year. Mortals do better when they have care for the gods’. (Theocritus, *Greek Anthology* 13 (LCL 28; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) 427).

<sup>110</sup> Platt, *Facing the Gods*, 204.

<sup>111</sup> Ignatius, ‘Smyrnaeans’ 5.2; ‘Trallians’ 9.1–2; Marshall, ‘The Objects of Ignatius’ Wrath’, 18.

<sup>112</sup> The ending of verse written in elegiac couplets or stichic meters was likely to be dependent on the thematic content of the poem; further, a large proportion of Catullus’ epigrams end, ‘without ring composition, point, or change of address, of syntax, or of verb mood’: Fain, ‘Catullus’, 4. Basil of Ancyra wrote ‘those who practice virginity are angels, going about through human life in incorruptible flesh’ *De virg.* 51 (PG30.772A–B)

## 9. Conclusion

I would argue that 1 Timothy 3.16b was written to be spoken and heard in the assembled meeting of believers, the ἐκκλησία (1 Tim 3.15). As we noted in the discussion on maxims, it is in the hearing that they have their persuasive effect. In either performing this poem or hearing it performed, the believers are rehearsing the theology that the author believes will act as an antidote to the ‘other instruction’ (1 Tim 1.3; 4.1; 6.3). It is an illocutionary act which the writer believes will heal the rift between the believers in the house of God (1 Tim 3.15).<sup>113</sup> It is composed in order to be remembered, in pithy stiches, with repetitive sounds and contrasting spheres of action. Each member of the congregation is to return to their own home with an ‘ever sounding’ synopsis of faith firmly lodged in their ears so they can ‘be deaf’, as Ignatius puts it, ‘when someone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ’. In this way they will be deaf to the ‘other instruction’ of Hymenaeus and Alexander. But it is more than a piece of persuasive writing, 1 Timothy 3.16b is, at the very least, reminiscent of an epigram, and this suggests that in its performance the ἐκκλησία (1 Tim 3.15) are to have an epiphany of the God, who came in the flesh.

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translation and discussion in T. M. Shaw, ‘Creation, Virginitly and Diet in Fourth-Century Christianity: Basil of Ancyra’s on the True Purity of Virginitly’, *Gender & History* 9.3 (1997) 579–96 (583). Confidence in controlling the flesh through an ascetic regime can be seen in the Stoics, Plutarch, and Clement of Alexandria: Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, 92.

<sup>113</sup> That the central problem addressed in 1 Timothy is factionalism: Kidson, *Persuading Shipwrecked Men*, 217.

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