

“THE GREATER SIN.”

A NOTE ON S. JOHN XIX. 11.

Οὐκ εἶχες ἐξουσίαν κατ' ἐμοῦ οὐδεμίαν εἰ μὴ ἦν δεδομένον σοι ἄνωθεν διὰ τοῦτ
 παραδοῦς μέ σοι μέγιστα ἁμαρτίαν ἔχει.

(WESTCOTT AND HORT'S TEXT).

“THOU wouldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath greater sin.” So this passage runs in the R.V.; and (reading “authority” instead of “power”) we may accept it as a fair translation of our Lord’s words as recorded by S. John.

To reach the popular interpretation of the passage, we must add to the translation a paraphrase. The apparent meaning, the meaning that most men give to the words, is something like this: “Thou wouldst have no authority to hurt me, if this authority were not given thee from heaven: therefore he-that-delivered-me” (i.e. the traitor Judas) “to thee hath a sin that is greater,” either “because thine authority is a trust from heaven” or “because he delivered me to thee.” A variant of this interpretation is supplied by some critics, who believe that “from above” may mean “from the Roman Emperor, thy superior officer.” With these slight divergences in detail, I think the above paraphrase expresses the popular belief as to the meaning of our Lord’s words.

Obviously, the correctness of this view must be tried by two entirely different tests; the meaning of the individual words used by our Lord, and the bearing of the passage, as a whole, on the context and the facts of the case. Under the second head we may also include another point—the relevance of the second clause to the first. They are joined by *διὰ τοῦτο*, and (in spite of a grammatical difficulty in the use of the Accusative) *διὰ τοῦτο* is undoubtedly sound idiomatic Greek for “therefore.” So we must not

only examine the individual words and the context, but also find such a *nexus* as will justify the use of the causative *διὰ τοῦτο* between the two clauses.

Now we may frankly admit that, at first sight, there are many things in favour of the popular interpretation. There are parallels for the use of *ἄνωθεν* in the sense of "from heaven," and, on the other hand, it is quite possible to apply it to the over-lordship of the Cæsar. The New Testament frankly teaches the duty of obedience to the Emperor as supreme: it also teaches, just as frankly, the dependence of all magisterial authority on God. *Κατ' ἐμοῦ*, too, may mean "against me." The words "*ὁ παραδούς*" with "*με*" or "*αὐτόν*" are almost technical, accompanying the name of Judas in the Apostolic lists and elsewhere. The *δεδομένον* of the first clause might—through that device of "*constructio ad sensum*," by which critics save the grammatical reputation of classical writers—be held to apply to an implied *ἐξουσία*, in spite of the difference in gender. But, even when these admissions are made, it seems to me that there are insuperable difficulties in the way of this interpretation.

(1) First of all, none of these words necessarily bears the meaning thus given to it. *ἄνωθεν* occurs in twelve other places in the New Testament. In two of these—parallel passages in S. Matthew and S. Mark—it means "from the top," in a physical sense. "The veil of the Temple was rent *ἄνωθεν*." S. John also uses the word in the same sense: our Lord's *χιτώνας* was woven "*ἄνωθεν, κ.τ.λ.*" S. Luke uses it twice in reference to time—"from the beginning" (S. Luke i. 3, and Acts xxvi. 5). S. John has it in two verses (iii. 3 and 7), in the sense of "again"; and S. Paul (Gal. iv. 9) with the cognate meaning of "back again." In one other passage in the Fourth Gospel (iii. 31) and three in the Epistle of S. James (i. 17 and iii. 15, 17) *ἄνωθεν* means "from heaven." In the passage

under our consideration it is quite evident that we are not restricted to the interpretation "from heaven," and that the words *may* mean "from Cæsar." But it is quite as evident that they may mean "from a superior authority," whatever that authority may be. *Κατ' ἐμοῦ*, too, may mean either "against me" or "in my case."

Παραδίδομι, again, simply means to "give over" or "deliver"; its use in the sense of "betray" is only a sub-meaning. It is used in the New Testament in several different senses; but the only meanings calling for special notice at present are those which throw some light on our text. The Jews themselves use the verb in describing their own action in bringing our Lord to Pilate (chap. xviii. 30); the same word is used of Pilate's "delivering" our Lord to the Jews (chap. xix. 16). Again, in Acts iii. 13, S. Peter says that the Jews "betrayed" or "delivered up" (*παρεδώκατε*) our Lord. So, too, we may observe that, while "*ὁ παραδούς*" (or *παραδιδούς*) "*αὐτόν*" (or *με*) is a phrase almost technically used of Judas, the phrase here is "*ὁ παραδούς μέ σοι*," which is an entirely different thing.

(2) But the common interpretation has to face worse difficulties.

(a) The order of the words "*ἐξουσίαν κατ' ἐμοῦ οὐδεμίαν*" certainly emphasises "*κατ' ἐμοῦ*." The point is not that Pilate's jurisdiction, as a whole, was derived, usurped, or restricted; but that it was so in this particular case. Moreover, the emphasis laid on *κατ' ἐμοῦ* seems to bear a relation to a similar emphasis laid by Pilate on *ἐμοί* in the question "*ἐμοὶ οὐ λαλεῖς*;" It appears, too, to refer to the latter part of Pilate's question, in which he claims a power of life and death over our Lord. The statement that the Roman *Legatus* was answerable to God, or that he was merely the deputy of Cæsar, would neither have met the case nor accounted for Pilate's subsequent action,

(β) Again, the use of the neuter *δεδομένον* is quite in accordance with Greek usage, if we suppose that it refers to a subject omitted but easily understood. It can hardly refer to a feminine subject already used in the first part of the sentence.

(γ) Yet, again, Judas had neither betrayed nor in any way delivered our Lord to Pilate. Base as was his crime his action is spoken of by Christ Himself and by the Evangelists as a betrayal *to the Jews*; and his whole action seems to show that he never thought of the intervention of the Roman power. If, again, the theory now generally held as to the motives of Judas be sound,—if he were the son of Simon “the Kananæan,” and had grown up with wild visions of a renewed Jewish kingdom working in his mind,—he would naturally have had dealings with the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, but would have avoided the Roman Governor as a visible emissary of the Devil. The whole consistency of the history is destroyed, if we suppose Judas to have, either in thought or deed, moved a finger towards transferring the trial of Christ from the Jewish authorities to Pilate; yet it is to this very transference that our Lord’s words naturally apply.

(δ) Taking these points into account, we may add another. If we suppose that our Lord referred to Judas, the *nexus* of the two clauses is absolutely destroyed. Neither the dependence of Pilate’s power on the Almighty, nor his position as a subordinate of the Emperor, nor the transference of the case to the Roman tribunal, could have added one iota to the sin of the traitor. So, too, if we suppose that the final words mean “a sin greater than thine,” it is impossible to see how any of these conditions could have either lessened Pilate’s guilt or aggravated that of Judas.

This destructive process might be continued further, and one might show how the few words of our verse literally

bristle with difficulties, if we interpret either of its clauses in the usual way. But it seems unnecessary to use any more dialectic, seeing that the context, and the story as told us by S. John, give ample materials for a self-consistent and better rendering. This rendering, too, brings certain facts in the story of our Lord's trial into their true perspective, and helps us to apportion the relative guilt of the persons who helped to bring about the Tragedy of Calvary.

Taking the antecedent clause first, it is obvious that *κατ' ἐμοῦ* may mean either "against me" or "in relation to me." As, however, Pilate had not shown any bias against our Lord, and also because it agrees best with the context, I prefer the latter rendering. So, too (seeing that, of all things, a feminine substantive occurring a few words before is the least likely "subject understood" before the neuter *δεδομένον*), one is obliged to answer the question, "What was given to Pilate *ἀνωθεν*?" by reference to something that would at the time be clear to the Roman Governor himself. I can find no possible answer but one. The trial of our Lord had been transferred to the Roman Court. All this seems plain enough; the use of *ἀνωθεν* may present a greater difficulty. We have seen, however, that this word is used in many senses in the New Testament; and—for the matter of that—is classical Greek. One very clear meaning is, "from a higher source." Taking account of the context, it seems here to mean, "from a higher Court." The Court thus referred to can be none but the Sanhedrin.

It is perfectly consistent with our Lord's usage that He should treat the Sanhedrin as, in this particular case, "the court above."¹ He always sharply distinguished the

¹ My friend, Mr J. Henry Harris, of Mevagissey, who is a competent authority on Syriac, has kindly sent me a communication on this text. He considers that (1) the rendering in the Peshito makes it quite certain that the Syriac translators did not consider that *ἀνωθεν* here means "from heaven": and (2) that the word they use is best susceptible of a

personal characters of both the Pharisaic teachers and the Sadducean priests from their official duties. At His trial before the Sanhedrin He stood mute before the personal mockery of Caiaphas; but, when the High Priest used the accepted formula for "putting Him on His oath," He answered immediately. True, He also taught the duty of obedience to the Roman power; but there is no sign in the Gospel story of His recognising in any way the jurisdiction of Pilate in His own particular case. He dealt with Pilate sympathetically, when that rough and brave "ex-private" found himself face to face with the greatest difficulty of his life; but it was with the *man* Pilate, not with the Roman Governor. He paid no respect to the *man* Caiaphas; but He recognised the jurisdiction of the High Priest.

And this would have been perfectly clear to Pilate. The much-abused Gallio seems to have quite understood the limitations of his office. He was, possibly, a little careless about maintaining order; but he may well have preferred the risk of a slight riot to the greater danger of exceeding his constitutional powers. Pilate—though he was no lawyer, but simply a brave soldier pushed into a position for which he had no capability—cannot have been unaware that the political offence with which our Lord was charged was "trumped-up." Everything in the story shows his knowledge of the fact that the real cause of trouble was "a matter of" the Jewish "Law," and therefore outside his jurisdiction. It was perfectly natural that our Lord should speak of the Sanhedrin as "a higher court," and that Pilate should acquiesce in this view of that court's functions.

local sense—The latter suggestion is ingenious, and it is quite consistent with the fact that the Temple, in one of whose courts the Sanhedrin would sit, stood on higher ground than the rest of the city, and therefore than the Prætorium: still, I think that, while both the Greek and the Syriac are capable of being rendered "from a higher authority," the context makes this the better translation.

So we may paraphrase the first clause thus: "Thou wouldest have had no jurisdiction in this case of *Mine*, if the case had not been transferred to thee from a higher court." Thus understood, the words are an answer to Pilate's question, "Dost thou not answer *me*?" Thus understood, they exactly meet Pilate's claim to jurisdiction in that particular case. Thus understood, they explain the "therefore" that follows, and throw full light on the meaning of the consequent clause.

To show this, we must remember that the Fourth Gospel throws special emphasis on one particular side of our Lord's betrayal and trial. S. John tells us that the idea of putting our Lord to death originated with Caiaphas, and cites the words in which that cynical Sadducee embodied his cold-blooded purpose. Later on he again refers to this incident. He also shows us Caiaphas as the ruling spirit of the Sanhedrin, and emphasises the fact that Caiaphas delivered up Christ to Pilate because this was the only way in which he could carry out his intention. Excommunication would not have met the case—from the point of view of Caiaphas. Through the whole story in the Fourth Gospel we see clearly how "the Jews"—with Caiaphas as their prime instigator—took advantage of Pilate's perilous condition with the Roman authorities in order to bring about our Lord's execution. We have seen that the verb *παραδίδομι* has been already used by S. John to describe the transference of the trial. Taking account of the whole circumstances, "*ὁ παραδούς μέ σοι*" can be none other than Caiaphas.

This interpretation fulfils everything requisite in the case. It puts our Lord's words in agreement with the context. It shows why, from the moment the words were spoken, Pilate grew more anxious to release Him. All the while the Legatus seems to have been impressed with the Personality of Christ; those words showed him more

clearly that he was simply being used as a tool. He had killed many men, both in warfare and in a cruelly harsh use of the *ἐξουσία* on which he dwelt so proudly. But we can well realise that there was a rough conscience under that rough man's oppressiveness, and that his pride and his conscience were both humbled at the part he had to play. And, finally, it throws a full light on the words "greater sin."

The sin of Caiaphas was greater—greater in itself and far greater than that of Pilate,—*because* he had sent the case on to the Roman Court. He had abandoned his lawful jurisdiction simply in order to inflict a punishment beyond his legal power. Plainly—and we can hardly excuse this cynical unbeliever on the score of religious zeal—he had plotted, planned and carried out a murder. I confess that Judas himself—in spite of the aggravations implied in his intimacy with our Lord—looms less guiltily in my eyes than does Caiaphas, and that the Traitor's kiss seems no more repulsive than either the deliberate suborning of that Traitor in order that he might enable his purchaser to carry out his cold-blooded cruelty, or the deliberate driving of Pilate to commit legal murder against his will and his knowledge of the law. And one's sense of justice is satisfied by finding that our Lord Himself spoke one sentence which may help us to fix on the right man the "greater guilt" in "the greatest crime that has been done in the world."

ALEX. R. EAGAR.

THE SUFFERING OF GOD.

FOR some years this thought has been haunting our theological consciousness. Some tentative discussions have taken place, for the greater part, on the circumference of the subject. My claim to the right to intervene is that for