

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*THE ANTI-SABBATIC DILEMMA IN THE
GOSPELS.*

To the EXPOSITOR for May, 1922 (pp. 344-353) Dr. Rendel Harris contributed one of those illuminative short studies for which he has a special charisma. One of the secrets of these studies is that he reads the records of the Gospels so to speak in motion: at the touch of his hand the acting persons in the Gospel drama become living, speaking, discussing, gesticulating, smiling or laughing, angry or compassionate, victims or victors, just as they may be expected to have been in the special *mise-en-scène* in which they play their part.

In the study under consideration Dr. Rendel Harris treats of the debates of Jesus with His adversaries and especially with that kind of controversy which he calls the dilemma. The subject is of paramount importance, because it carries us back behind the records of the Evangelists and enables us to hear the actual speech of our Lord, and even the peculiar tone of His word through the reports of His disciples.

We may, perhaps, be allowed to elaborate a little further one of these instances, viz., the anti-Sabbatic dilemma in Mark iii. 4 and parallels. Dr. Rendel Harris has remarked already that the Synoptics give the stories in an abbreviated or even obscured form. There occurred several collisions of Jesus and His adversaries on account of His Sabbath-breaking, and the Gospels seem to have combined them, not always in the right way. We must be prepared to find the right reply not always attached to the corresponding objection.

For instance: the reference to the sacred bread eaten

by David and his companions belongs to the story of the Plucking of the Ears of Corn. Matthew, however, after having reported this reply, which ends by saying that *only the Priests* were allowed to eat the sacred bread, adds a reference to *the Priests* breaking the Sabbath in the Temple. In this reference, however, there is nothing which suggests any immediate connexion with the story of the Plucking of the Ears of Corn. By mentioning "mercy which is more than sacrifice" this reply seems rather to belong to a story of healing, possibly to the story of the healing of the man with the withered hand, which story follows in Matthew xii. 9.

It seems doubtful whether we shall always be able to put each reply in its proper place. For the present, however, it may be sufficient to keep in mind the remark of Dr. Rendel Harris, that we are dealing with a *series* of anti-sabbatisms, the sharpest of which is reproduced by Mark iii. 4 in this form: "Whether it is lawful on the Sabbath day to 'save' a soul or to kill."

This, however—*ψυχὴν σώσαι ἢ ἀποκτείνειν*—is the Greek form of the dilemma. In the original Aramaic the dilemma was put still more pointedly. The Syriac versions of the Gospels (which in many cases have preserved for us the vernacular speech of our Lord) have for *ψυχὴν σώσαι*, the rendering: "to make alive a soul." In this way we read the dilemma in the startling form: "Whether it is lawful on the Sabbath day to make alive a soul (=somebody) or to kill."

It cannot be denied that this is a very unexpected question indeed, and not at all an obvious reply to those who object to Jesus healing a man on Sabbath. The natural answer to the question would be, of course, that it is never allowable to kill, either on the Sabbath day or on any other day, and that accordingly the question was absolutely out

of place. As a matter of fact, the question could be put in the way in which Jesus puts it, only if Jesus was certain beforehand that it was *in concessis* that the first part of it, viz., whether it was lawful to kill on the Sabbath day, was to be answered in the affirmative. The Pharisees must have decided, somehow, that it was lawful to kill on the Sabbath day. Jesus was sure, in that case, to overcome His antagonists with their own weapons.

Has "killing on the Sabbath" been a topic of Pharisaic dispute and afterwards of early Christian anti-Jewish controversy? It can be shown to have been a subject in the *Book of Testimonies* (cf. Dr. Rendel Harris, *Testimonies*, 2d. part, Cambridge, 1920, p. 104 ff.). In this primitive Christian *vade mecum* there were brought forward as proofs of the lawfulness of killing on the Sabbath the case of Joshua at the siege of Jericho, and the case of the Maccabees. Here, however, something seems to be lacking. That Joshua and the Maccabees "killed" on the Sabbath day could be alleged as subsidiary proofs, but it is scarcely possible to regard these instances as the reason why the topic came into discussion at all. And certainly, killing was not a daily practice in Pharisaic and Jewish life, whatever mischief they, in the eyes of the Christians, may have been in the habit of brewing! And yet, the reply of Jesus loses its "point" if it has no bearing on some well-known decision regarding daily practice.

Here comes light from a quite unexpected quarter. It was known that the *Diatessaron* of Tatian contained glosses on the Gospel text, some of which found their way even into the Old Latin Gospels. The most famous of these glosses probably was the note that "both Joseph and Mary were from the house of David." Recently the present writer has drawn attention to a primitive form of the Tatianic *Diatessaron* preserved in a Liège MS. containing

a mediæval Dutch translation of an Old Latin Harmony.¹ This mediæval Text contains a great number of glosses. Some of these glosses betray a mediæval character, many others, however, clearly are quite archaic, and sometimes can be shown to be in origin genuine Tatian. The Preface, which in the Dutch text precedes the Harmony, declares that these "glosses" or "expositions" have been added for the purpose of elucidating difficult passages in the Gospel story as briefly as possible, and it seems quite probable that the Preface reproduces Tatian's own words.

Well, the Liège MS. gives in its 86th chapter the harmonisation of Matthew xii. 1-8; Mark ii. 23-28; Luke vi. 1-5. We find here Matthew xii. 5 in this form :

"Ende hebdi oc nit ghelesen in de wet dat de papen op den Saterdag in den temple breken den virte in din dat si dat quic doeden dat men offert ende de kinder besniden ende nimen berespt se daeraf."

If with the help of the Old Latin Gospel texts we try a retranslation it would probably run thus :

"Et nonne legistis in lege quia sacerdotes sabbato in templo violant celebrationem (sabbati) eo quod mactant pecus ad sacrificandum et circumcidunt infantes nec quisquam vituperat eos de hac re."

Of course the particulars of this retranslation are doubtful, but the main thing is clear : two instances are given of breaking the Sabbath by the Priests : the killing of cattle for sacrificial use and the circumcision.

Before discussing further the exegetical value of this gloss, we may be allowed to make a few remarks on its probable origin. In the Harmony of Zachary of Besançon, (printed by MIGNE, *Patrologia Latina*, tom. 186, col. 219 seq.) we find on the Vulgate text, "Aut non legi(s)tis in

¹ *A Primitive Text of the Diatessaron*, by Dr. D. Plooiij, with an introductory note by Dr. J. Rendel Harris : A. W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers maatschappij, Leyden, 1923.

lege, quia Sabbatis sacerdotes in Templo Sabbatum violant, et sine crimine sunt," the following note: "(HIERON.) Sabbatum violant sacerdotes, occidendo tauros, circumcidendo pueros; *hic* non pronomen, sed adverbium loci legendum est," etc.

When we turn to HIERONYMUS, *Comm. in Matth.*, (MIGNE, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 26, col. 79), we find ad Matth. xii. 5:

"Calumniamini inquit discipulos meos cum per segetes transeuntes spicas triverint et hoc fecerint famis necessitate cogente, cum et ipsi Sabbatum violetis in templo, immolentes victimas, caedentes tauros, holocausta super lignorum struem incendio concremantes: et juxta alterius Evangelii finem (Joan. vii. 22) circumcidentes parvulos in Sabbato, ut dum aliam legem servare cupitis, Sabbatum destruatis."

We find in Jerome the same exegetical tradition, only enlarged, much in the same way as we shall find it in Aphrahat, and by its enlargement losing the exact point in Jesus' reply.

However, we might perhaps be inclined to regard both Zachary's note and the gloss in the Dutch Harmony as finding its origin in Jerome. It is, however, doubtful whether Zachary's note is rightly labelled: his words: '*hic* non pronomen sed adverbium loci legendum est' exactly reproduce Jerome's further comment; but the gloss on "the killing of cattle and the circumcision of children" is so much more pregnant than Jerome's extensive remark, that we scarcely can imagine that Zachary is simply abbreviating. Zachary's notes, as Dr. Rendel Harris has shown, in many cases presuppose an Old Latin text instead of the Vulgate which he prefixes to his commentary. And in this case the wording of Zachary's note and that of the Liège MS. (which by the way is an entirely independent witness) so closely resemble one another, that we venture the suggestion that Zachary (or his pre-

decessor-commentator) is working on a Gospel text which contained the gloss.

That this suggestion is not a too bold one may be seen from the *Capitularium* to the Vulgate MSS. AUVY of Matthew, which Wordsworth and White have printed in their Oxford Vulgate. Cap. xli. in these MSS. runs :

“Discipulorum Sabbato spicas vellentium reprehensores exemplo dauid *et circumcissione* redarguit.”

The words : *et circumcissione* are an instance of those frequent cases where a remnant of an Old Latin Gospel text is preserved in the *Capitularium* but “corrected” in the Gospel Manuscript itself. Accordingly we come with our gloss to a textual tradition *before* Jerome ; and though as yet a decisive proof that our gloss is really Tatianic cannot be given, it seems quite probable that it is, and at all events it represents a very early exegetical tradition.

This exegetical tradition provides us, it seems to me, with the key of the problem we are concerned with. The anti-sabbatic dilemma in this case finds its background and starting-point in one of the two great Sabbath problems given by the office of the Priests in the Temple :

1. *Quaeritur* : Are the Priests excused for breaking the Sabbath law when killing (cattle) for sacrifice in the temple ?

2. *Quaeritur* : Are the Priests guiltless when circumcising a child on the eighth day if this day is a Sabbath ?

The second problem is not referred to in the Gospels except in John vii. 23, where it is a sign both of the historical value of St. John's Gospel and of its anti-Judaic character that the topic is treated here in the correct form of anti-Judaic controversy. For the present we may leave this point undiscussed. But it seems worth while observing that here circumcision, as a local and partial operation, is contrasted with Jesus' healing of a whole man ; and that circumcision on the Sabbath was an item in the early

anti-Jewish propaganda (cf. Dr. Rendel Harris, *Testimonies*, ii., p. 195 seq.).

At present we are concerned with the former question as to the lawfulness of "killing" on the Sabbath. It is immaterial to our purpose whether the "Tatianic" gloss be based on early tradition or is simply an instance of Tatian's gift as a commentator and exegete. At all events the occurrence of the word "doeden" in it suggests that it refers to an occasion in which the problem of "killing" on the Sabbath played a rôle, though the word itself occurs only in Mark iii. 4. Evidently it should be a word which could be used for "killing" sacrificially and for ordinary "killing" as well. As for instance *mactare* in Latin.

That really "killing" was one of the things which were explicitly allowed on the Sabbath in the Temple may be seen from the instances quoted by SCHÜRER, *Gesch. d. Jüd. Volkes*, II⁴, 1907, S. 552 ff. The daily sacrifice was offered on the Sabbath. A special sacrifice even was ordered for that day. Among the thirty-nine acts mentioned in Mishna, Sabbâth vii. 2, as annulling the Sabbath is nr. 26: the killing of a gazelle. (Why a gazelle is mentioned especially I do not know; the act of killing was allowed for other victims as well, of course.) Also in *Jubilees* c. 50, among very severe warnings against doing any work on the Sabbath, sacrificing is explicitly excepted from the general rule. It is, however, worth noticing (and explains in part why the sacrificial argument afterwards is dropped in the Anti-Jewish propaganda), that both in the Mishna and in the Babylonian Gemara¹ the remark is made that these regulations regarding the lawfulness of work needed for sacrificing were valid only as long as the sanctuary in Jerusalem was standing.

¹ Cf. Paul Fiebig, in the great Mishna edition by Beer und Holtzmann, II. 8, Giessen, 1914, S. 79.

Accordingly the question "whether killing is lawful on the Sabbath" had its normal origin not in the two cases of Joshua and the Maccabees, but in the necessary practice in the Temple. Therefore the sacrificial "killing" on the Sabbath is dropped in nearly all the quotations regarding "lawful killing" after the time of the destruction of the Temple, whilst Joshua and the Maccabees as "biblical proofs" continue to be mentioned. It survives, however, like many other archaisms, in Aphrahat's *Homily on the Sabbath*. Aphrahat's Homilies, especially those *on the Circumcision, on the Passover and on the Sabbath* are one of the richest mines for anti-Judaic Testimonies. His Church, living in permanent contact and controversy with the surrounding Jews, was obliged to defend itself continually against the Jewish arguments, and so the anti-Jewish controversy, which in other parts of the Church became more and more a thing of mere theory, in Eastern Syria remained a vital interest of the Church.

Now, in the *Homily on the Sabbath* we find the argument that Israel in vain boasts of its Sabbath keeping. Aphrahat brings forward the cases of Joshua and the Maccabees in the traditional way. But then he proceeds: "And not these only profaned the Sabbath, but *the Priests in the Temple profaned the Sabbath and were not blamed for it*. For on the Sabbath day the Priests offered the sacrifice, they killed and they flayed, and they clove wood, and they kindled fire, and were not blamed for profaning the Sabbath because they were ordered to do so."

I draw attention both to the agreement with the Dutch Diatessaron and with Jerome's comment on the passage of Matthew. Evidently Aphrahat is expanding the original dilemma of "killing" on the Sabbath day much in the same way as Jerome does. On the other hand it is quite clear that both Aphrahat and Jerome have lost the imme-

diate connexion of the dilemma with an actual case of controversy, as we find it presupposed in the Gospel of Mark. In the Syrian as well as in the Latin Father it is merely a survival of an early Christian Anti-Sabbatism which has lost its significance, since the Jews could ask like Johanan ben Zaccai did: "Now that the Temple is no more standing, is there any sacrifice still extant?"

The preceding observations justify, I think, the thesis that the sharp question put by Jesus, Mark iii. 4, as to whether it be lawful on the Sabbath to kill or to make alive (=save), constitutes the very centre of the group of Testimonies on the subject. We now may proceed to try to understand the whole situation as it is presupposed in the controversy of Jesus with the Pharisees on the anti-Sabbatic dilemma.

On some occasion Jesus was confronted with the necessity of healing on the Sabbath some one or other, probably the man with the withered hand (Mark iii. 4). Quite unexpectedly He asks: "Is it lawful to kill on the Sabbath day?" He uses the word which in the disputes on "killing" in the Temple has been used for the slaying of victims. What this word was is irrelevant. In Mishna, Sabbâth, it is שחט; Aphrahat uses the word נכח; it may even have been the word זבח, which word is used in Hosea vi. 6 and which may signify both *mactare* and *sacrificare*. At all events the word used was generally known from the discussion on "killing" in the Temple on the Sabbath.

Nobody, however, would have thought of the word in connexion with killing men! But we can imagine the utter embarrassment of the Pharisees when Jesus, by adding: "or to make alive" (translated by *σῶσαι* into Greek, but preserved in the vernacular tongue by the Syriac Versions) at once unexpectedly brings down the sacrificial act to ordinary "killing"! This equalisation already of

a ritual sacrifice with common slaughter is exceedingly significant for Jesus' opinion on Temple and sacrifice.

But the Pharisees do not follow Him in this. They are embarrassed, but not yet beaten. They cannot but concede that in some cases "killing" has been declared lawful on the Sabbath; if so, how much more, one would say, "making alive." The sequel is in Matthew xii. 5-7. "Did you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the priests in the Temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? I say unto you that something greater than the Temple is here. If you had but understood what it means: 'I want mercy and no sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the blameless."

The Pharisees, we understand, are supposed to reply to the dilemma put before them by Jesus: "Ay, but 'killing' of that kind is done by the Priests in the Temple, and for sacrifice." Jesus answers: "Is it the Temple that excuses for breaking the Sabbath? Well, something greater than the Temple is here and makes me blameless for breaking the Sabbath. And you would have known what that greater thing is, if you only had understood what is written: I want mercy, *no sacrifice*."

Jesus makes the quotation from Hosea to have a double edge: "You blame one for breaking the Sabbath out of pity for this poor creature. But your blame is wrongly addressed; for it is written: I want mercy, not sacrifice. Not I am the wrongdoer, for I fulfil the divine Word; but you, with your sacrifices and Temple, are the wrongdoers, for God does not want sacrifice but mercy."

In this light the whole scene becomes full of life and of consequence. The adversaries are beaten with their own weapons, and this all the more admirably because it is not only by acute skill of debating, which in Eastern discussions (and not there only!) so often takes the place of persuasive

argument, but the whole debate is at once placed on the high level of spiritual service towards God, which service does not consist in keeping commandments of ritual Law or of sacrifices, but in divine mercy.

Two conclusions of the greatest importance may, I think, be drawn.

We understand that from that moment not only the Pharisees, but the priests as well, were Jesus' mortal adversaries. *The anti-Sabbatic argument turns out to be an argument against the Temple and its sacrifices as well.* When Jesus cleansing the Temple turns out everything necessary for *sacrificial* worship, He quotes from Jeremiah vii. 11 a word which in Matthew xxi. 13 (as well as in the Septuagint) is rendered by *λησται*. It seems to me that Jesus used the corresponding Aramaic word with the same connotation of rejection which lies in His use of the word "killing" for a sacrificial act. When at the trial of Jesus He was accused of having spoken words of a direct tendency against the Temple, the accusers were certainly right in so far that Jesus condemned a Temple which was merely a place of ritual sacrifices and not a House of Prayer. And St. Stephen certainly walked in Jesus' steps when he "did not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place"—like this word spoken by his Master:

"I do *not* want *sacrifice but mercy.*"

The second inference is, I think, this: we have found decidedly a word of Jesus Himself which has grown out into a group of Anti-Judaic Testimonies. We can see it growing and found the historical scene from which it originated. At the same time we find that following generations have been more cautious in their judgment on the Temple and its ritual than Stephen was. *The anti-Temple and anti-sacrificial argument has been dropped from the anti-Sabbatic argument regarding the lawfulness of killing on the*

Sabbath. The text Hosea vi. 6 is found no more in the cycle of "killing" testimonies. It has been preserved only in Irenæus, *Adv. Haer.* IV. xvii. 4, and in the *Apostolic Preaching* c. 96. And here it occurs in the remarkable form which confirms our argument: "The Law will not command any one to pass the Sabbath in quiet and idleness who keeps Sabbath every day, who *in the godly Temple of the human body* serves God worthily and does justice every hour; for it is said: I want mercy and not sacrifice, knowledge of God and not holocausts." The orthodox Church had accepted the whole old Testament, and so, if only theoretically and as a doctrine, has to defend both Temple and Sacrifices.

D. PLOOIJ.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GRACE OF GOD IN FORGIVENESS.

I.

(1) THE grace of God is His personal activity, and forgiveness is the restoration of personal relation to Him. We must avoid all language that would depersonalise what God does in this relation. What God does, and how man is related to Him, is determined by what God Himself is. We are in no way concerned with the abstract conception of the philosophical schools, which has so injuriously affected the theology of the Christian Church. It is with the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ with whom alone we have to do. While the Fatherhood of God is partially revealed in Creation and Providence, in His care and bounty towards all men (Matthew vi. 25-34), yet it is in Redemption that the Fatherhood alone finds its full expression. Here God's Fatherhood is His com-