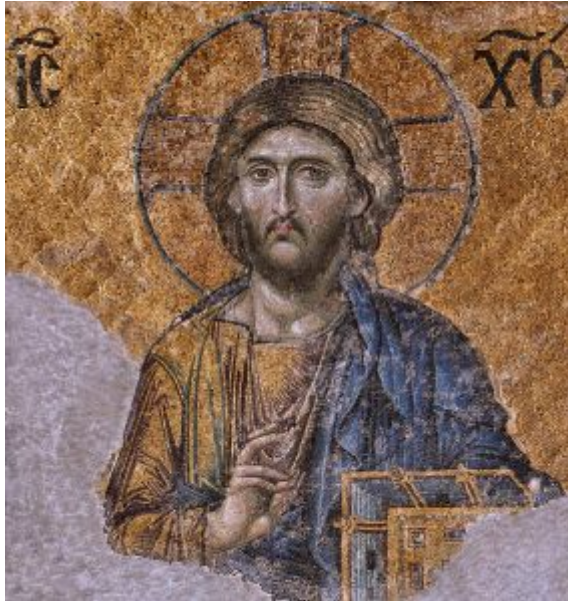


A Sacramental Link?



Would being connected again to the 'source of grace' through the Catholic sacrament of confession and Holy Communion provide expiation for past transgressions and be cathartic? Possibly, given that certain passages from the gospel of John have somewhat resonated with me since I began the task, in 2017, of translating that Gospel.

Among the passages were, in my translation, "aware as he [Jesus] was of the person within" (2:25) and "receive the Halig Spiritus [Holy Spirit]. If you release anyone from their errors, they are released; if you hold onto them, they are held onto," 20:22-23. [1] [2] With, according to my fallible understanding, the second quotation the genesis of one of the founding principles of the Roman Catholic Church: of an ordained Priest having the religious authority to give absolution for the errors [1] a person has committed, and the authority to specify what penance is required for expiation. There is thus a sacramental, a living, link to the message of Jesus.

Which reminds me of what you mentioned in previous correspondence about the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church toward a having a partner of the same gender. In my experience, the attitude at the Parish and monastic level is often more understanding and compassionate than some past or ancient announcement or some work emanating from the Vatican perhaps suggested and suggests.

Having endeavoured to translate the gospel of John what I found was, to quote what I wrote in the *Introduction* to my translation of chapters 1-5 of the Gospel of John, that

"it imparts something important regarding the teachings, and the life, of Jesus of Nazareth: something quite human, something rather different from a stern preacher preaching about 'sin'; something which seems to express what the Beatitudes express, and something which individuals such as Julian of Norwich, George Fox and William Penn many centuries later tried to say and write about Christianity and about the teachings and the life of Jesus of Nazareth."

Which is that it is the way of humility, of forgiveness, of love, of a personal appreciation of the divine, of the numinous; and a spiritual, interior, way somewhat different from past moralistic interpretations based on inflexible notions of 'sin' and hence on what is considered 'good' and what is considered 'evil'.

It seems that such an appreciation - perhaps more correctly, re-appreciation - of this is slowly permeating, at the Parish level and around most of the world, the Roman Catholic Church.

As for me, and in respect of Catholic sacraments, perhaps I am weakening as my last mortal days seem to near, just as the libertine and poet Earl Rochester confessed on his death-bed, and just as the character Lord Marchmain, portrayed by Laurence Olivier, symbolically did in his last moments in that wonderful 1981 adaptation of *Brideshead Revisited*.

David Myatt
September 2023

A slightly revised extract from a letter to a personal correspondent

[1] I translated ἀμαρτία not by the conventional *sin* but rather as 'error' or 'mistake' for reasons I attempted to explain in my commentary and in various essays such as *Exegesis and Translation*. One of the reasons relates to how Julian of Norwich perceived the teaching of Jesus; another to the c. 880 AD translation of the c. 525 AD text *Consolatio Philosophiae*; another to something Thomas Aquinas wrote.

As explained in my *Exegesis and Translation*,

One of the prevalent English words used in translations of the New Testament, and one of the words now commonly associated with revealed religions such as Christianity and Islam, is sin. A word which now imputes and for centuries has imputed a particular and at times somewhat strident if not harsh moral

attitude, with sinners starkly contrasted with the righteous, the saved, and with sin, what is evil, what is perverse, to be shunned and shudderingly avoided.

One of the oldest usages of the word sin - so far discovered - is in the c. 880 CE translation of the c. 525 CE text *Consolatio Philosophiae*, a translation attributed to King Ælfred. Here, the Old English spelling of syn is used:

ƿæt is swiðe dyslic & swiðe micel syn ƿæt mon ƿæs wenan scyle be Gode

The context of the original Latin of Boethius [i] is *cogitare*, in relation to a dialogue about goodness and God, so that the sense of the Latin is that it is incorrect - an error, wrong - to postulate/claim/believe certain things about God. There is thus here, in Boethius, as in early English texts such as *Beowulf*, [ii] the sense of doing what was wrong, of committing an error, of making a mistake, of being at fault; at most of overstepping the bounds, of transgressing limits imposed by others, and thus being 'guilty' of such an infraction, a sense which the suggested etymology of the word syn implies: from the Latin *sons, sontis*.

Thus, this early usage of the English word syn seems to impart a sense somewhat different from what we now associate with the word sin, which is why in my translation of John, 8.7 [iii] I eschewed that much overused and pejorative word in order to try and convey something of the numinous original:

So, as they continued to ask [for an answer] he straightened himself, saying to them: Let he who has never made a mistake [Ἀναμαρτητος] throw the first stone at her.

ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες αὐτόν, ἀνέκυψεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν πρῶτος ἐπ' αὐτὴν βαλέτω λίθον.

Jesus here is not, in my view, sermonizing about sin, as a puritan preacher might, and as if he is morally superior to and has judged the sinners. Instead, he is rather gently and as a human pointing out an obvious truth about our human nature; explaining, in v.11, that he has not judged her conduct:

ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· οὐδεὶς, κύριε. εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐδὲ ἐγὼ σε κατακρίνω· πορεύου, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε

[And] she answered, No one, my Lord. Whereupon Jesus replied "Neither do I judge [κατακρίνω] you, therefore go, and avoid errors such as those". [iv]

Such a translation avoids the rather contradictory nature of most other translations which have Jesus clearly stating that he also does not judge her but then have him go on to say that she should 'sin no more' with the obvious implication that he has indeed judged her in that in his judgement she had indeed sinned before.

Understood and appreciated thus, sans the now culturally-biased word sin, these passages from the gospel according to John - together with passages such as Luke 19.10 and Romans 13.10 [v] - perhaps usefully summarize the evangel of Jesus of Nazareth; the (in my view) rather human message of avoiding judging others because we ourselves are prone to error, the message of love, and the message of redemption (forgiveness) for those who in the past have made mistakes but who have thereafter tried to avoid making such mistakes again, those hitherto perhaps damaged or lost.

Footnotes:

[i] Quare quod a summo bono diversum est sui natura, id summum bonum non est; quod nefas est de eo cogitare, quo nihil constat esse praestantius. *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Liber Tertius, pr. x

[ii] *Beowulf*, 2470f, where the spelling synn is used:

eaferum læfde, swa deð eadig mon,
lond ond leodbyrig, ƿa he of life gewat.
ƿa wæs synn ond sacu Sweona ond Geata
ofer wid wæter, wroht gemæne,
herenið hearda, syððan Hreðel swealt

[iii] qv. Myatt, *Fifty Years of Diverse Peregrinations*. 2013

[iv] The conventional interpretation of ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε is "from now on sin no more".

[v] (a) Luke 19.10:

ἦλθεν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός. "The arrivance [ἔρχομαι] of the Son of Man was to seek and to save what was lost.

However, a more interesting interpretation is:

The arrivance of the Son of Man was to seek and to repair [σώζω] what had been damaged [ἀπόλλυμι]

and which interpretation is suggested by (i) the sense of σώζω: keep safe, preserve, maintain -

whence repair, and (ii) the sense of ἀπόλλυμι: destroy, ruin, kill, demolish, and - metaphorically - damaged, lost, and die.

(b) Romans 13.10:

ἡ ἀγάπη τῷ πλησίον κακὸν οὐκ ἐργάζεται· πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ ἀγάπη

love brings no harm to the neighbour; love is the completion of the law

[2] As I noted in my commentary on John 1:33 regarding the Holy Spirit, which I translated as Halig Spiritus:

ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. *in Halig Spiritus*. I have here used the Old English word Halig - as for example found in the version of John 17.11 in the Lindisfarne Gospel, 'Du halig fæder' - to translate ἅγιος rather than the later word 'holy' derived as that is from halig and used as it was by Wycliffe in his 1389 translation of this phrase, "in the Hooly Gost", which itself echoes the ASV, "on Halgum Gaste."

The unique phrase *in Halig Spiritus* - in place of the conventional 'with the Holy Spirit' - may thus express something of the numinosity, and the newness, of the original Gospel, especially as the word 'holy' has been much overused, imputes particular meanings from over a thousand years of exegesis, and, latterly in common parlance, has become somewhat trivialized. In respect of ἐν, while most translators have opted here (as in respect of 1.26 ff) for "with", I have opted for "in", given that John baptized "in water" - for example, in Aenon - and given that Jesus baptizes "in, with" (in the name of) Halig Spiritus.

Related:

The Gospel According To John

Chapter 1 - 5

Translation and Commentary

<https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2023/08/myatt-gospel-john-1-5.pdf>

Exegesis And Translation

<https://davidmyatt.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/exegesis-and-translation-partsone-two.pdf>

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