

SHORT NOTES

GLEANINGS FROM THE GOSPELS IN MALTESE*

*sed tantum dic verbo
amar biss b'kelma waħda*

These words were said by the centurion entreating Christ to heal his servant (Matt. 8,8; Luke 7,7). What is the meaning of the dative or ablative *verbo*? The rendering '*Għid kelma waħda*', though reproducing the sense, is inaccurate, because *verbo* is not the object of the verb. Some make *verbo* in the ablative and translate 'Say with a word' or 'Say in a word'. This translation will be greatly improved if the verb *legein* is translated 'to command'. The sense would be: 'Command with a word' or 'Give a one-word command'. This sense is borne out by the centurion's own words: 'I have under me soldiers, and I say to this: Come, and he comes; and to another: Go, and he goes; and to my servant: Do this, and he does it'. As in the case of the centurion a single word as 'Go, come, do' is enough to secure obedience, so in the case of Christ a one-word command must be enough to secure the healing of the servant.

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*excepta causa fornicationis
barra minn rabta ħażina.*

A difficult and perplexing text which has long exercised the ingenuity of theologians. Christ is apparently making an exception to the law of the indissolubility of the marriage-bond. Now the difficulty has been easily solved. The word '*fornicatio*', Greek *porneia*, is not used in its ordinary sense of an illicit intercourse between two unmarried persons, but in a particular sense that was common in the time of Christ, namely an unlawful marriage. Therefore the sense of Christ's words is: No one can put away his wife, except in the case of an unlawful union. A marriage within the prohibited degrees must be dissolved, because it is no marriage at all. This is the reason why I have translated *fornicatio* by *rabta ħażina*.

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*These notes are especially intended for those readers of the Maltese Gospels to whom the Latin text of the Vulgate is more familiar than the original Greek or its underlying Aramaic substratum.

*adiicere ad staturam suam cubitum unum
itawwal ghomru b'tul ta' driegħ wiehed.*

The Greek word *helikia* means both 'stature' and 'age'. In Matt. 6,27 the latter meaning is more appropriate. Hence I have translated *ghomor*.

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*in his quae Patris mei sunt
f'dar Missieri.*

To Mary's question: 'Son, why hast thou done so to us?' Jesus answered: 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?' The Greek neuter article *ta* in this context admits of two renderings: 'my Father's house', which is the Temple, and 'my Father's business', which is Christ's mission. Interpreters are divided. My translation has been suggested by the historical context. Since Christ was found in the temple, it is natural to expect that he meant the temple, not his mission.

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*tenebrae exteriores
dlam ta' barra.*

The expression occurs only in Matthew. What is the outer darkness? The literality of the Latin translation has obscured the sense. The *tenebrae exteriores*, *to skotos to exoteron*, is in reality the dark place outside the banquet hall or the royal palace (Matt. 8, 12; 22, 13; 25, 30). Hence I have translated *id-dlam ta' barra*. If the illuminated royal palace denotes the kingdom of heaven, the dark place is hell.

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*ad quid venisti?
ghalhekk ġejt?*

Although I have maintained the interrogative form, Christ's words are an exclamation rather than an interrogation. Christ did not ask Judah the purpose of his errand; he expresses his astonishment at Judah's effrontery and rebukes him: 'Is it for this purpose i.e. to kiss me, that thou hast come?' This explains my translation *ghalhekk* 'for this purpose' instead of the familiar *Għaliex* 'Why.'

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iustificatus ... ab illo.

dan ... bla htija; mhux dak.

The Latin *ab illo* is sometimes considered to denote comparison. The sense then would be: 'the publican went home *more* justified than the Pharisee'. But this is against the context, because the Pharisee was not justified, not even in the least degree; so that any comparison is excluded. It is by far preferable to take the preposition *ab* as the literal equivalent of the Greek *para* which is used idiomatically to express comparison in an exclusive sense. The sense therefore is: The publican went down to his home justified, rather than (or 'not') the other.

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