

## ΠΑΡΕΣΙΣ IN DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS AND IN ST. PAUL

THE meaning of *πάρεσις* in Romans iii. 25 (found here only in the Greek Bible) has been frequently debated. Is it a mere equivalent of the frequent New Testament *ἄφεσις*, with the meaning 'remission' or 'forgiveness'? Or does it convey the idea of a 'passing over' of sin, as though ignoring its existence? On the latter interpretation *ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ* probably refers to the pre-Christian epoch of history and the *πάρεσις* of sin characteristic of this epoch implies a contrast to the *ἄφεσις* which has been opened to man by the expiatory work of Christ. We may compare Acts xvii. 30: 'the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.' The former interpretation is adopted in the A.V. which renders the words *διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ* 'for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God', though in the margin A.V. gives 'passing over' as an alternative rendering in place of 'remission'. The interpretation of A.V. has received in recent times the weighty support of W. G. Rutherford in his admirable translation of the Epistle, as well as of other notable scholars. On the other hand, the R.V. has adopted the marginal alternative of A.V. into the text, and Dr. Moffatt in his translation of the New Testament uses the same English verb, 'to pass over', in rendering *πάρεσιν*.

It is not my purpose here to trace the history of the exegesis of the verse or to tell again the story of the controversy which raged in Holland between Cocceius and his opponents<sup>1</sup> in the seventeenth century on the meaning of *πάρεσις*. I only note that opinions still differ as to the meaning of the word and that the difference cuts deep into the exegesis. Thus Dr. Anderson Scott cites Lietzmann *ad loc.* for the view that, though *πάρεσις* and *ἄφεσις* might carry distinct meanings, in fact it is never clear that they are not synonymous; and argues vigorously on this and other grounds that the *πάρεσις τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων* in Romans iii. 25 is nothing else than the forgiveness which Christ's death established for those who believe.<sup>2</sup>

I now pass to the demonstration—for such I think it is—that one of the chief passages which has been habitually cited, from Wettstein<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Cocceius, *Utilitas Distinctionis duorum Vocabulorum Scripturae παρέσεως et ἀφέσεως* (Opera, Amsterdam, 1701, vol. ix, pp. 121 f.) and other works referred to by Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> C. A. A. Scott, *Christianity according to St. Paul* (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 60 ff.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (Amsterdam, 1752), ii, 51.

to Bultmann,<sup>1</sup> as evidence for the equivalence of *πάρεσις* and *ἄφεσις*, is in fact decisive for the conclusion that *πάρεσις* not only may, but in at least one case certainly does, carry a meaning quite distinct from that of *ἄφεσις*.

The passage is Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* vii, c. xxxvii, *παρὰ δὲ τῶν δημάρχων πολλὰ λιπαρήσαντες (οἱ ὕπατοι) τὴν μὲν ὀλοσχερῆ πάρεσιν οὐχ εὔροντο, τὴν δὲ εἰς χρόνον ὅσον ἤξιον ἀναβολὴν ἔλαβον.* It is difficult to believe that any one of the scholars who have cited this passage to illustrate *πάρεσις* in the sense of *ἄφεσις*, 'release' or 'acquittal', has read continuously the narrative in which it occurs. It is the story of Coriolanus. Coriolanus has delivered in the Senate his attack upon the Roman Plebs and its tribunes. The tribunes have denounced the offending noble to the people and sought to arrest him. Coriolanus has resisted the aediles who are sent to seize him and, after the Consul Minucius has made a not unsuccessful attempt to stem the tide of popular indignation, the tribune Sicinius, with the deliberate aim of provoking Coriolanus, appeals to him to stand his trial before the people and acknowledge his fault, suggesting that if he submits to the people's jurisdiction he may hope for lenient treatment. Coriolanus reacts to this appeal as the tribune intended that he should: he promptly repudiates the jurisdiction of the people and declares himself willing to be tried before the Consuls and no one else. The question is then brought back to the Senate, where, on the motion of the Consuls, it is decided to humour the populace by granting their demand for cheaper markets, and then if possible to persuade the tribunes to yield so far to the Senate as to withdraw the demand that Coriolanus should be put on trial; if, however, that attempt should fail, to secure as long a delay as possible in order to allow passions to cool. Then follow the words already cited: 'In spite of their earnest entreaty [the Consuls] failed to induce the tribunes to drop the matter altogether (*ὀλοσχερῆ πάρεσιν οὐχ εὔροντο*), but they did obtain the delay for which they asked.'

It is obvious that *πάρεσις* cannot here be used in the judicial sense of release or acquittal, for the point at issue is not whether Coriolanus shall be acquitted or condemned, but whether or not the trial itself shall be allowed to take place. The words *ὀλοσχερῆ πάρεσιν* take up the primary aim mentioned above, viz. to induce the tribunes not to bring Coriolanus to trial (*μὴ παράγειν τὸν Μάρκιον*), and they can only mean 'to let the whole matter drop'.

Even Trench, who in general supports a distinction in meaning between *πάρεσις* and *ἄφεσις*, has been misled by his predecessors;

<sup>1</sup> *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum N.T.*, ed. G. Kittel (Stuttgart, 1933- ), vol. i, p. 507.

for, assuming that it is judicial acquittal or release which is here in question, he argues that it is only because *δλοσχερήs* is joined with *πάρεσιs* that this meaning is conveyed. He concedes too much. Neither *πάρεσιs* nor *πάρεσιs δλοσχερήs* means the same as *ἄφεσιs*, and this passage falls into place with the general trend of Trench's argument.

This conclusion is further confirmed by Dionysius's language elsewhere in this very narrative, for he has occasion more than once to speak of acquittal or release and then he consistently uses *ἄφεσιs*, *ἀφιέναι*. Thus, in describing the motive of the tribune Sicinius in making his appeal to Coriolanus, he writes: *ταῦτα δὲ ἔλεγεν οὐκ ἄγνωῶν ὅτι μεγαλόφρων ἀνὴρ οὐχ ὑπομένει κατήγορος ἑαυτοῦ γενόμενος ὡs ἡμαρτηκῶs ἄφεσιν αἰτεῖσθαι τῆs τιμωρίας* (c. xxxiv). Compare also cc. xlvi, and lx.

We have seen then that in one of the very few places where the word *πάρεσιs* occurs<sup>1</sup> it is certainly not the equivalent of *ἄφεσιs*. If we turn to the usage of the corresponding verb *παριέναι* a similar distinction in meaning from *ἀφιέναι* is usually perceptible. This is certainly the case in Ecclus. xxiii. 2, notwithstanding Bultmann's statement to the contrary. As Trench well observes: 'when the Son of Sirach prays that God *would not "pass by" his sins*, he assuredly does not use *οὐ μὴ παρῆ* as = *οὐ μὴ ἀφῆ*, but only asks that he may not be without a wholesome chastisement following close on his transgressions';<sup>2</sup> and, though the cases are not all equally clear, a similar nuance may be found in Xenophon *Hipparch.* vii. 10, in Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ant. Rom.* II, c. xxxv, in Josephus *Ant.* xv. 48, and in the Egyptian inscription printed in Dittenberger *O.G.I.S.* 669. 50 (*παρέντες αὐτῶν τὴν ἀπαίτησιν*). (In the Ephesian inscription published in Dittenberger *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 742, 33 and 39 *παρίημι* is used of the remission of debts with the debt as direct object.)

In the light of this evidence taken as a whole, we conclude that 'passing over' not 'remission' or 'forgiveness' is likely to be the true meaning of *πάρεσιs* in Romans iii. 25.

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#### A NOTE ON PHILO'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

IN Philo's Greek writings there are according to Leisegang's index to the Cohn-Wendland text 55 allusions to and quotations from the text

<sup>1</sup> In Plutarch, *Comp. Dion. Brut.* 2 *πάρεσιs* occurs with the meaning 'allowing to escape'. In Appian *Reg.* fr. 13 (quoted by Suidas) it means 'negligence', *ἀμέλεια* (Suidas). In Hippocrates and elsewhere *πάρεσιs* is found as a medical term for 'paralysis'. Other occurrences are Phalaris, *Ep.* lxxxii. 1, where it is used of remission of debt, and B.U.G. 624. 21, an obscure papyrus of the time of Diocletian, where it probably has the same meaning.

<sup>2</sup> op. cit., p. 110.