

ST ISIDORE OF PELUSIUM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Chapter IV

ST ISIDORE AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

I. Rules given by St Isidore.

a) Concerning the Interpreters.

Who and what must an interpreter of the Scriptures be? What things has he to take care of? Isidore attributes the highest authority to the Scriptures and therefore he teaches that he who will deal with their interpretation must be qualified to do it. To elucidate this fitness of the interpreter, Isidore says: «He who deals with the brilliant task of attempting to interpret the meaning of the sacred Scriptures must have a *σεμνήν τε καὶ τρανήν*, i. e. prudent and lucid tongue and an *εὐσεβῆ τε καὶ εὐαγῆ*, i.e. pious and pure thought»¹. In other words not everyone could interpret the Scriptures but only he who has certain relations with them and who is qualified for that task. But again, he who is qualified for that task, must know that it is not very easy to understand «immediately those things which are reached after very many pains and struggles. But he must go to the understanding of the meanings of the sacred Scriptures which sharpen our prudence to better sharpness, by starting with pains and prayers»². And, of course, the interpreter must examine the passages accurately in order to obtain the true interpretations. «For interpretations which are ignorant of the questions are blind and they blind»³.

The task of the interpreter of the Scriptures is splendid but he

1. III 292, 965D; cf I 24, 197A where Isidore prevents those who have unworthy hands to touch the unattainable «mysteries».

2. II 106, 548C.

3. III 136, 836A; cf I 24, 197A.

must do this work successfully, for otherwise, if he misinterprets them, he is guilty of a great sin. «Those who dared to falsify or to misinterpret the divine Oracles committed a sin for which there is not any apology or excuse. For, their thought that they have understood something wiser has guided them and those who believed them to a great illiteracy. Because they, having erred in many sayings of the sacred Words, attracted their hearers where they wished and having forced the will of the Legislator sinned against it inasmuch as they did not say those things which appear as good to him, but sanctioned their own will»¹. Concerning the sin of misinterpreters and the fact that there will not be any excuse for them, Isidore dedicates another of his letters declaring a similar idea. Thus he says: «Those who falsify the divine Words and force them that they may agree with their own intention commit a sin for which there is no excuse. For they, having done wrong by wickedness, will not have the defence of the apology that they have done wrong by innocence. Neither will they escape from the calm and gentle Eye, having been filled with enthusiasm for things opposite to Him and having dared to expose their opinion by malice»². Isidore agrees that it is easy to distort the meaning of the Scriptures and that many people tried to do it. «But the truth prevailed, prevails now and will ever prevail against those who maliciously dared to distort or misinterpret the sacred Sayings»³.

Isidore is right when declaring the aforementioned truths, for it is really true that the interpretation of the Scriptures is a brilliant and at the same time responsible task, since other people following this interpretation might avail themselves of it or might be much harmed because of it⁴. But it is clear that Isidore refers to the intentional counterfeiting and misinterpretation of the Scriptures and not to that which may happen by weakness or by a certain degree of unfitness. In cases of unintentional misunderstandings he simply elucidates the true meanings⁵.

1. V 308, 1516B.

2. II 254, 689D-92A.

3. V 293, 1508B.

4. cf IV 130, 1212C-13A.

5. e. g. On Rom. 13,1 (II 246, 657CD) he says to Dionysius: «Ἐπειδὴ γέγραφας τί ἐστιν 'οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ' καὶ ἔφη, τί οὖν; Πᾶς ἄρχων ὑπὸ Θεοῦ χειροτονῆται; Φῆσαιμι ὅτι δοκεῖ μοι (καὶ μοι μὴδὲν ὀργισθῆς· οὐδὲν γὰρ φλύαρον ἐρῶ) ἢ μὴ ἀνεγνωκέναι τὰς ἀποστολικὰς ρήσεις ἢ μὴ νανοηκέναι. Ὁ γὰρ Παῦλος οὐκ εἶπεν, οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἄρχων εἰ μὴ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ πράγματός αὐτοῦ διαλέγεται λέγων... The exposition of Isidore's thought reminds us of Demosthenes: Lept 102: «Ἔμοι δὲ

b) Concerning the interpretation.

The Scriptures always have attracted the interest and the attention of many people. But all these people did not approach them with the same piety, purity or fitness to deal with them, that is to say to understand and to interpret them. So it happened that some people misunderstood and misinterpreted them either by unfitness and weakness or by bad intention. The same held good in Isidore's time. Thus, interpreting the passage from Isaiah (1,22) 'thy wine mixed with water', he complains about this situation and says: « Many times I was astonished by those who misinterpret the divine Scriptures and who attempt to expose their own will rather than that of the divine Scriptures. For they dare to distort divine things by mixing the will of the Scriptures which is unadulterate and sincere and which can rejoice the soul with the wicked and transient water of their own doctrines»¹.

In order that misinterpretations of the Scriptures might be avoided, Isidore gave occasionally, when an opportunity was given, some rules concerning it. But we think that Diamantopoulos² is wrong when thinking that Isidore by the phrase «according to the rules and peculiarities of the sacred Scriptures»³ signifies the rules and customs of the interpretation. For it is clear that the words *νόμοι* and *ιδιώματα* in this case indicate the customs and the peculiarities of the Scriptures and by no means the rules of the interpretation. Nevertheless, Isidore gives elsewhere some rules which now we expose:

a) In his first rule concerning interpretation Isidore says that the interpreter «must follow the Scriptures and not precede them and he must not force the mind of the Scriptures in order to agree with his own thought. For there is great danger to the soul of those who dare to falsify and to misinterpret the Scriptures»⁴.

b) Evidently Isidore had a bad experience of the meaning of the Scriptures being forced by other people⁵ and that is why he writes that

δοκεῖ Λεπτίνης (καὶ μοι μηδὲν ὀργισθῆς· οὐδὲν γὰρ φλύαρον ἔρῳ) ἢ οὐκ ἀνεγνωκέναι τοὺς Σόλωνος νόμους ἢ μὴ συνιέναι. It reminds us also of Chrysostom, ad Rom. XXIII I. Montf. IX 752C-53A.

1. III 125, 825D.

2. loc. cit. 1926/618.

3. VI 101, 1165C.

4. III 292, 965D.

5. cf. eg I 371, 393A, where the testimony that Marcio maliciously changes Mtt. 5,17 into «I am not come to fulfil but to destroy the Law»; also IV 112 concerning i Tim. 4,3, where Isidore says that some people rather by unfitness, did not

«if the interpreters can interpret the Scriptures unconstrainedly, let them do it promptly; but if they cannot do so, let them not force their meaning improperly»¹. This appeared more clearly in another of his letters where he declares: «Let us not force the prophesies neither let us make deceitful plays upon words in order to smooth down the prophetic verse but let us understand prudently both those which have been said historically and those which have been said *κατὰ θεωρίαν*, i.e. in a contemplative spiritual sense»². Isidore refers these words to the interpretation of the O.T. of which the 'prophetic' is according to Isidore the main characteristic, but the same is also valid for the interpretations of the N.T.

c) Neither is the interpretation of the Scriptures easy nor is it simple. There are some 'things hard to be understood which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest unto their own destruction'³. Thus an interpreter «is obliged to interpret the Scriptures scientifically and to search their powers prudently and he is not allowed to touch the unattainable mysteries by unworthy hands»⁴.

d) Finally an interpreter must take care to prove⁵ the biblical sayings and not only to declare dogmatically his opinions. «Those sayings which need much testing and investigation are not elucidated *ἀποφάνσει* i.e. by a certain decision, but they are elucidated *ἀποδείξει* i.e. by demonstration. For a *κατασκευή* i.e. a positive way of thinking which tends to ascertain a truth, and a *περίοδος* i.e. a well arranged paragraph, and an *ἀπόδειξις* i.e. a demonstration which is the logical result of some already known phrases, are needed in order that these sayings might be interpreted. For, if someone by simply declaring ideas thinks that he uses demonstration, he is out of the company of wise men»⁶. This is true, says Isidore elsewhere, because «we must not declare dogmatically our thought but we must prove»⁷ what we have to say by other witnesses.

understand the true meaning of the Scriptures. cf also Basil the Great, in Hexameron II 2, Garnier 1,17: «Οἱ παραχαράκται τῆς ἀληθείας, οἱ οὐχὶ τῇ Γραφῇ τὸν ἑαυτὸν νοῦν ἀκολουθεῖν ἐκδιδάσκοντες, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖον βούλημα τὴν διάνοιαν τῶν Γραφῶν ~~δυστρέφοντες...~~»

1. II 68, 508A.

2. IV 203, 1289D-92A.

3. ii Pet. 3,16.

4. I 24, 197A.

5. As for example Isidore proves in IV 101 what he wishes to say concerning Rom. 11,8 by a chain of Biblical passages which prove the arguments.

6. V 64, 1364A.

7. II 66, 509B.

These suggestions of Isidore, or better speaking, his rules concerning the interpretation, are not sufficient if we examine them as we should examine them in a manual of Hermeneutic. But bearing in mind Isidore's unsystematic exposition in this case also and joining the aforementioned rules with his practice of interpretation as we shall see further on, we are allowed to be content with these rules and to give the proper praise to their recommender¹.

2. Methods of Interpretation.

a) Interpretation of the New Testament by reference to the Scriptures.

Since according to Isidore the highest Authority is the Scriptures being the word of God, he often referred to them in order to strengthen his opinion and to prove better what he intended to say. But this is a method of interpretation, moreover since he in some cases¹ says that this or that is true because the Lord said it or the Bible said it or Paul said it and after that the question is finished. Hence we recognize as Isidore's first method of interpretation these cases in which the answer is attempted to be found in the Scriptures and we cite a certain number of them for illustration, starting from Matthew.

Referring to Matt. 1,25 'he knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son', Isidore says: «Let the blasphemous and ungrateful people learn that many times we find in the divine Scriptures the word *ὡς* i.e. 'till' in the meaning of 'ever'. For example Gen. 8,12; Ps. 10, 19; Is. 46,9»³. Interpreting Matt. 10,34 'think not that I am come to send peace on earth', Isidore elucidates it, by another of Christ's sayings: «It is clear that Christ by this verse does not disavow each type of peace, but that which has been yoked together with vice; and its proof is that which He says in another case: 'My peace I give you' (John 14,27). Because peace is really that which can be proud of righteousness and piety»⁴. In elucidating the word *μήποτε* which occurs in Is. 6,10 but also in Matt. 13,15, Isidore says: «In this case the *μήποτε* i.e. 'lest at any time' does not indicate abolition of hearing but it does indicate a hope of obedience»⁵ and immediately he goes on to prove his opinion

1. Du Pin (loc. cit. p. 11) finds these rules excellent.

2. V. Supra, p. 9.

3. I 18, 192B-93A.

4. III 246, 924D-25A.

5. II 270, 700BC.

by referring to John 7, 25-26; ii Tim. 2,24-5 and Sirach 13,15. In replying to the question 'wilt thou then that we go and gather them up' (Matt. 13,28) and in vindicating Christ's negative answer, Isidore writes: «Nay; Why? Lest the wheat will root up with the tares, lest a sinner who tries for his rectification will be carried away, lest innocent children will be cut out with cunning parents»¹. But Isidore does not stop here; he recommends us to compare the examples of Esau for Job's sake, of Matthew for Gospel's sake of Peter for his tears which the Lord had foreseen and of Paul who has been left so that the ends of the world might not lose salvation. And, to finish with the examples received from the interpretations of Matthew, let us bring another example relating to Matt. 26,53. Christ said; 'Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?' Isidore declares categorically this thought by referring to the Scriptures: «There was no need for so many angels, since only one angel killed a hundred and eighty five thousand in the time of Ezechias (IV Kings 19, 35). But Christ said that in order to encourage his disciples and to expel their doubt»².

The examples from other Evangelists concerning Isidore's method of interpreting the Scriptures by the Scriptures are fewer in number. We should mention only two or three examples from John. Thus, in telling his opinion concerning the meaning of the title J. N. K. J. on the Cross, Isidore says: «The title which had been fixed by Pilate over³ the Lord's head, was fulfilling the voice of the Lord; 'and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' (John 22,32)»⁴. In his endeavour to elucidate the meaning of the words *νύττειν*, *δέδωκε* and *παρέδωκε* which occur in John 19,34 and in Rom 11,8 and in order to justify his opinion, Isidore cites the following Biblical passages: Rom. 1,26; and 28; Sirach 14,1; ii Cor. 7,8; Song 4,9; Ps. 29, 13 and Ps. 118,27⁵. Again, concerning John 21,25 'I suppose that even the world... written', Isidore says that «this phrase is an exaggeration as it happens in the O.T., viz: Dan, 3,5; Exod. 3,18; and Ps. 106, 26. In the O.T. the exaggeration is a real one; in the N.T. it is restrained»⁶. A good example of interpretation of the N.T. by itself or by referring to

1. I 195, 308BC.

2. III 334, 992C.

3. The text has 'before': *Πρὸ*

4. I 491, 449C.

5. IV 101, 1165C—69A.

6. II 99, 541C.

the whole Scriptures is that relating to Philip who baptized the Eunuch. We cite all Isidore's exposition concerning it in another chapter¹ and here we confine ourselves saying that he solves the problem by referring to Acts 8,1; 8,40; 8,14; and 8,17².

From the Epistles we should bring the following examples: Rom. 8,8 where Isidore elucidates the meaning of the word 'flesh'. «The word 'flesh' has two meanings in the divine Scriptures. The one is the natural according to which flesh means just flesh as in Lk 24,39. As to the other meaning, flesh means carnal mind or carnally minded man, as in i Cor. 15,50. Now, he who wishes to educate his mind subdues the urges of the flesh and while he is in flesh he pleases God and he inherits the heavenly realm in flesh as if he was incorporeal³. Among other explanations concerning i Cor. 6,18 Isidore tries to prove that 'he that committed fornication sinneth against his own body' by referring to the Scriptures. «Inasmuch as those who are married become one body by law (Gen. 2,24; i Cor. 7,14), reasonably a man who commits fornication sins against his wife, that is to say against his own body; and a woman who commits fornication sins against her body, i.e. against her husband who became her body⁴. With regard to i Cor. 11,7 'the woman is the glory of the man', Isidore says: «How did Paul call the woman 'glory of the man?' We shall say that woman from the beginning was equal in dignity to man and she had the same power. But since she had fallen, she diminished and her power decreased and she became subject to man. He says: You did not keep the equality of privilege, then accept the diminution. 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee'» (Gen. 1,26)⁵. In order to elucidate i Cor. 15,33 'evil communications corrupt good manners' again Isidore takes his examples from the Scriptures. He says: «Its proof is the sons of the Psalmist Amnon the elder and Absalom the younger, who lived with debauchery and destroyed their lives miserably. So great a vice is the evil communication⁶. In interpreting ii Cor. 5,16 Isidore once again has recourse to the Scriptures. He says: «Even if we, the believers from among the Jews, were proud of Christ's kinship before, now we are not proud of it but we are proud of his relationship by familiarity

1. V. Supra chapter III § 3.

2. I 447-50, 428D-29A.

3. I 477, 441C-44A.

4. IV 129, 1209D-1212A.

5. III 95,801BC.

6. IV 34, 1085D-88AB.

(κατ' οὐκείνην), which relationship is a fruit of virtue. And this is why Paul was saying 'be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ' (i Cor. 11,1). That is to say, I am proud of the imitation rather than of the carnal kinship¹. A good example is also that relating to Colos. 1,15, which we already have cited².

Let us take now our last few examples. Isidore is interpreting Hebr. 4, 8-9. In this case also he elucidates the Biblical saying by the Scriptures. He says: «The divine Paul was not speaking about the rest of the Jews which happened in Palestine by the leadership of Jesus the son of Nun. He was not speaking at all about this rest. But Paul looks at the future rest and this rest is the purpose of this speech. And the proof that this opinion is true, is Paul's saying: 'if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God'. In other words, if Jesus the son of Nun had given them rest, then David could not say after so long a time 'today if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts'. Therefore, he says, the true rest is preserved for the people of God., ie. for those who lived honourably according to the Faith and this rest is not in Palestine, but having been prepared, it is preserved in the supermundane Jerusalem³. Even in cases which are not exactly interpretations but just notes on this or that matter, Isidore tries to demonstrate by the Scriptures. Thus in speaking about Paul's way of speaking⁴, he strengthens his opinion from the Scriptures. Finally, to complete the illustration of Isidore's method of interpretation by the Scriptures themselves, we cite our last example referring to James 3,6. 'The tongue setteth on fire the *πορὸν* of nature'. Isidore says: «The sacred Saying says that the time of our life is embarrassed by the tongue for time looks like a circle (*τροχοειδής*) which turns round itself. The Scriptures did not say that the *πορὸς* sets on fire the tongue but that the tongue sets on fire the *πορὸν* i.e. the time which is like a wheel. For the Scriptures accuse intention and prevent audacity⁵. And now Isidore comes to affirm his opinion by the Scriptures. «The guarantee that the Scriptures called time 'wheel' for its circular scheme and be-

1. IV 46, 1097B.

2. V. Supra chapter II § 2.

3. IV 47, 1232CD.

4. V. Supra, chapter III § 2.

5. II 158, 613A.

cause it turns round itself is that which had been said by the Psalmist; 'Thou crownest the year of thy goodness' (Ps. 64, 12)¹.

We have cited so far about twenty examples to illustrate Isidore's method of interpretation of the N.T. by itself or by the whole Scriptures. There are also about ten² examples more which we do not cite because the already cited examples are more than enough to prove that Isidore really interprets a certain number of N.T. passages by the Scriptures. Concerning this method we would say that the same holds good for the interpretation of the O.T., but this we have set aside.

Surveying this method of interpretation used by Isidore, we should say that where there is a possibility of using it, because we cannot do it everywhere, this method is the best one, at least for theologians. Fathers do it widely. Indeed, how much better could some interpretations of the Scriptures be if the interpreters had a better knowledge of the Scriptures and if they tried to find the solution to a problem concerning interpretation in the Scriptures!

Although these interpretations are not excellent in all cases, one cannot say that they are unsuccessful. And although in one or two cases we should prefer a better explanation and we could find it elsewhere, nevertheless they agree more or less with the spirit of the Scriptures and this is more than enough. Besides we must stress the fact that this method of Isidore does not banish his own thought and leaves him sufficient freedom to move freely and to apply this method only when it is possible and profitable.

b) Interpretation of the New Testament by reference to exterior evidences.

Isidore knew very well the ancient Greek literature and he owed this to his excellent education. In his letters he repeatedly refers to names such as Demosthenes, Plato, Isocrates, Homer, Pindar etc. and of course to their ideas. And in many cases he brings their evidences to strengthen his own opinion whereas on other cases he refutes them. Also he knew Philo and Josephus and many times he has had recourse to them for the same reason. And of course he has at his disposal works of some Fathers before him and in many cases he availed him-

1. *ibid.* 613B: cf. St Basil the Great, in *Hexaemeron* II 8 Garnier I 29: «... Τοῦτο δὲ κυκλικόν ἐστι τὸ σχῆμα (τοῦ χρόνου), ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἀρχεσθαι, καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὸ καταλήγειν».

2. e. g. Matt. 5,38-9; 5,44; 10,19; Lk. 13,2; 18,10-4; i Cor. 7,5; iiTim. 3,7; Titus 1, 6.

self of their works, even if in most cases he does not say where he has borrowed from. Thus in a certain case he says indeterminately: «I write what I have heard from a wise man, but I shall write also my own thought in order that you might find that which is more true»¹.

In a chapter of our Doctoral Thesis² we tried to examine and to designate his relations with and his borrowing from other Fathers before him. Here we cite some examples in which Isidore says clearly to which external witnesses he is referring and which might justify us in saying that this is another method of Isidore's interpretations.

In interpreting Matt. 13,15 and elucidating the meaning of the word *μήποτε* Isidore says: «It is a custom for wise men, of whom Philo seems to be one, to put the word *μήποτε* instead of *ἴσως* i.e. 'perhaps' or 'in lieu of' (*ἐσθ' ὅτε*)»³. This explanation is combined with what the Scriptures say and thus the result is certain. A better example is found in what Isidore says concerning Mk 6,18 'it is not lawful to thee...'. «Why is it not? Some say that he had profaned the law of Moses. For although his brother had a child, he got his brother's wife, which was not permissible. Some others of whom Josephus⁴ is one say that he had got the woman although her husband was living and had a daughter. There was not any divorce, because, if there was, then John could not call it a transgression, since it would be permissible by the law. Finally others say that Herod killed his brother lest he would get the power and after that he got his brother's wife. But if this is correct why did John not blame Herod for the murder? Moreover John would blame Herod since he should then be a fratricide. I think the first opinion is correct»⁵. In this case Isidore names only Josephus but of course his evidence that others say this or that is useful. And the more important is that Isidore does not only refer to them but he refutes them since they do not agree with his own opinion. Finally, we cite one more example relating to Colos. 1,15 in which Isidore again has recourse to external evidence. He writes: «If the word *πρωτοτοκος*

1. III 152, 844A.

2. St Isidore of Pelusium with special reference to his use of the N.T., Glasgow 1961, p. 84ff.

3. II 270, 700C. Isidore names Philo four times (II 134:270; III 19:81), but it is true that the former many times borrowed from the latter, as Fruechtel (PhW 58, 764-66) has proved.

4. Isidore esteems Josephus and names him five times; III 19; II 66; III 81; III 257; IV 96.

5. IV 96, 1160B-61A.

takes the accent on the second syllable from the beginning πρωτότοκος it means he who was born first; again, if this word takes the accent on the second syllable from the end, πρωτοτόκος, it means he who first gave birth. In Homer e.g. she who brought forth firstly is called πρωτοτόκος. Then it is easy to understand or rather it is necessary to understand that the divine Paul used this word in such a meaning...»¹.

These examples are very few but they could show that Isidore had in mind some other suggestions and that he knew what other people were saying and that he tried to avail himself of them. Just this intention of Isidore justifies this section as his second method of interpretation; and if we take into account other examples from the O.T., this would be clearer².

An interpreter of the Scriptures must be somehow broad-minded and he must get what good he can find even outside of the Church as St Basil should also say. So does Isidore in some cases, where it is possible and profitable, and he does it successfully, and we are content with him.

3. Types of Interpretation.

With regard to the interpretation of the Scriptures the term 'method' signifies many times also the types of interpretation. Thus Scholars speaking about the allegorical or literal interpretations are referring to them as methods of interpretation. But it is true that the method, that is to say the way of interpretation gives us this or that kind of interpretation. Thus there is a close relation between method and type concerning interpretation; but still they are different things and we must not confuse them.

Since the term 'types' is wider than 'methods' and since our intention here is to include as many types of Isidore's interpretations as possible, we have preferred the heading 'types' and along with the literal and allegorical interpretations we shall include a kind of combination of both these types, alternative and unsuccessful interpretations.

a) Literal Interpretations.

The number of Isidore's literal interpretations of the N.T. is more than two hundred. Thus we can say that Isidore prefers rather the

1. III 31, 749C. V. Supra chapter II § 2. Isidore names Homer in seven of his letters: II 31, 4749B; II 89, 533A; III 70; IV 30; IV 205, 1295B; V 444 and V 546.

2. cf. III 84, 789D; Εἰ δὲ βουλῆθεις καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἔξωθεν ὠφεληθῆναι...

method of the School of Antioch concerning interpretation, without re-jecting of course the allegorical interpretation as we shall see in the next paragraph. We cite here some characteristic and representative examples of Isidore's literal interpretations to illustrate his method and ability.

Matt. 5,20: Isidore says that the real meaning of this verse is: a) «For Christians to acquire more righteousness than that which the Scribes and Pharisees ought to have. Because those having more righteousness than the condemned. are not worthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But those are worthy to enter into the kingdom of heaven who much more exceed those who were in good repute according to Law and showed heavenly life»¹. b) «If you shall not exceed those who were in good repute in the O.T.; Because I do not mean those who will be judged»². c) «If you will not turn the appearance into work the kingdom of heaven will be closed for you. Because this kingdom is true and is opened to those who seek it truly»³.

Matt. 6,22: The light of the body is the eye. Why? Isidore replies: «For the eye rules all the body, cheers up and adorns the face and it is a light for all members, this is the reason why it has been established on one royal place, has got the highest portion and is provost of the other sensations. Because as the sun is in the universe so is the eye in the body. And like the sun if it will be extinguished by word everything will be disordered, thus the eye, too, if it will be extinguished will also make the feet and hands and almost all the body useless»⁴.

Referring to Matt. 10,41 Isidore writes: «He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. This verse in short means the following: If someone does good for a certain gain or for honour, he will not share in the glory of the good. But he will be glorified with the good who honoured it for its own sake⁵. For many people honour prophets or righteous men either for human glory or vital profit. And if someone, seeing the good, would sincerely honour the saints, he would be glorified with them⁶.

Explaining how 'he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is great-

1. IV 246, 1309BC.

2. IV 204, 1292D.

3. I 79, 273B.

4. II 112, 552D-53A.

5. Ἐπειὶς τῷ ἀγαθῷ συνδοξασθήσεται, ὁ αὐτὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν δι' αὐτὸ τοῦτο τιμῆσας... of Chrysostom: ad Theodorum Lapsus I 11 Montf. I, 14DE.

6. IV 135, 1216C-17A.

er than John', Matt. 11,11 Isidore says: «He who is perfect in Law, as John was, is by all means lesser than he who has been baptized into Christ's death. Because the kingdom of heaven is for those interred with Christ who descended to vanquish death and for those risen with him, who gives victory against death. Inasmuch as John was greater than any other born of all women¹ and has been beheaded before the realm of heaven was given, he became blameless as to the righteousness of the Law, but having died before the era of grace, he became the least of those who became perfect according to the spirit of the life in Christ»².

Concerning blasphemy against the Son of Man and the Holy Spirit, Isidore gives us a good literal interpretation: «Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son, it shall be forgiven him' the Lord said (Matt. 12,32). For, to those who do not see well with the eye of the mind, the ineffably united God with the cheapness of the apparent flesh is with difficulty conceived and is difficult to look at, since the hidden Godhead is not known³. And for this reason blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is inexcusable: Inasmuch as His deeds being apparent prove those making the blasphemies foolish and ungrateful. Because whereas the passions were being cut out and demons expelled by the Godhead's power the grumbling Jews calumniated that these miracles were made by Beelzebub. Now this blasphemy which is clearly against the divine essence is, the Lord said, inexcusable»⁴.

Referring to Matt. 19,7-8 and concerning divorce, Isidore interprets: «Why did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement? Not as it is necessary to put away those women who transgress the institution of marriage, but wishing to prevent a bigger and worse evil, he did not enact the lesser but he allowed it. He not only considered the manifest marriage better than the secret adultery if some woman would do it, but he considered it better for those women to be put away or to be slain. He separated those who could not be together. For, those who ate prophetic blood, would not spare hated women. So Moses preventing the bigger evil, allowed the lesser one rather than ordered it... Moses commanded it because of the hardness of your hearts, that is

1. but not from those born of the Spirit... as other codex has.

2. I 68, 228BC.

3. I 59, 221C: 'Ἐπειδὴ τοῖς λημῶσι τὸν τῆς διανοίας ὀφθαλμὸν δυσκατάληπτος καὶ δυσθεώρητος ὁ ἡνωμένος ἀρρήτως Θεὸς τῇ εὐτελείᾳ τῆς φαινομένης σαρκός, ἀγνοουμένης τῆς κρυπτομένης Θεότητος.

4. I 59, 221AB. cf also I 60, 221BC.

to say for your disobedience and malignity¹. But from the beginning it was not so. Also Christ ordered those women who transgress against the institution of marriage to be put away. But when such a thing does not happen, He ordered the toleration of all other vices of women and rather he declared that it is necessary².

«That which has been said on virginity 'all men cannot receive this saying save they to whom it is given', says Isidore, has been said not because this has been given κατὰ ἀποκλήρωσιν i. e. by drawing lots, for, then, he would not put before hand a prize, but in order to show: a) that those who had stripped for a wondrous struggle need the divine help. b) then, that this council descends from heaven decreeing not as a law but using admonition. c) that gift is given to those who are not intemperate, who call the heavenly alliance, who preserve this gem by fasting and vigilance and who do not throw themselves to the devil by reason of indolence. Because if this gift has been given by drawing lots, the prize is unnecessary. It has not given by grace, but it is given to those who want it. For no one gives anything to those who do not wish it³.

What does Christ signify by 'watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation'? «This verse does not say, writes Isidore, that if someone watches and prays he will not enter at all into temptation, since this life is a trial and many people, even the best (Prophets, Apostles) have entered into many and great temptations. Not to enter into temptation is perhaps, impossible, whereas to be undefeated by it, is possible. Christ by saying this council, hinted: be not defeated by temptation⁴. In this case Isidore seems to be wrong since the word εἰσέρχομαι never means to be defeated. But a more careful examination justifies Isidore because the word εἰσέρχομαι may mean occupy⁵. Thus we must agree that Isidore's interpretation here is intelligent and denotes his classical education.

'Who is my neighbour?'. This is a good question; and the answer from Isidore is a good one. «The Saviour defined the meaning of neighbour not with regard to the works nor the authority but with regard to nature... For proximity is decided by nature, not by virtue; by essen-

1. Διὰ τὸ ἀπειθεῖς ὁμῶν καὶ ἀνάγωγον.

2. III 76, 784BD.

3. IV 165, 1253C-56A.

4. II 76, 517D-20A.

5. cf. that of Herodotus, VI 425, quoted in Liddel-Scott: Dictionary II 42: «... ἰδόντα δὲ τὸν Κροῖσον γέλωσ ἐισῆλθε...»

ce not by dignity; by sympathy, not by place; by the manner of curing not by the proximity of place. Consider as neighbour he who is in need and go spontaneously to help him»¹.

Concerning Lk 16, 25 Isidore says: «The Bible by saying not merely ἐλάβες, i.e. you received, but ἀπέλαβες i.e. you received as a right (for the former means grace and the latter means reward), explains and elucidates the whole meaning. Besides, not only those who reached the higher stage of virtue have a certain human fault (for only God is sinless), but also those who have descended to the depths of vice have some goods»². Hence, «if you, the rich man, have done any good, you have been paid by living in luxury without troubles. And if he (Lazarus) has committed any fault he has been punished by living in great need and misery»³.

John 5,19: 'The Son can do nothing of himself'. This is an interesting point and so is Isidore's interpretation: «This phrase does not mean a weakness of the Son, but on the contrary it signifies strength, for it is impossible for Him to do something opposite to the Father. Christ said this because of some people who were looking at Him as if He was ἀντίθεος i.e. against God. Do not think that I cannot do something without the Father's consent; it is impossible. It is not possible for me to do something opposite to the Father's purpose; it is not excusable to set myself against the Father»⁴.

Also interesting is the interpretation concerning John 10, 29: «If 'no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand' why are many lost? I say that no man can pluck out from the strongest and invincible Right Hand those who have prepared themselves by orthodox faith and by best life and are familiar with God. But someone could deceive them. That is to say, no one can pluck them by force and tyranny; but he could do it by false thought and deceit. But it is done not because of the invincible Hand, but because of the indolence of the independent men. For perdition does not happen because of weakness in him who guards, but it happens because of indolence in those who are guarded»⁵.

On 'Jesus wept' (John 11,35) Isidore says: «Why? Because Lazarus was a friend of the Saviour and hence Lazarus was a righteous man, otherwise he could not be a friend of the holy Righteousness,

1. IV 123, 1197A, cf Chrysostom: De compactione I 3 Montf. I 154B.

2. IV 116, 1189C.

3. V 221, 1465A.

4. III 335, 993-96A. cf also I 353, 384BC.

5. III 122, 824D-25A.

i.e. of Christ. For Christ does not love by grace but by judgement. And since Lazarus was righteous and had finished gloriously the arena of this life, he by all means was in rest and honour. Then Christ would raise him up and for that reason He wept. As if He was saying: I call again to stormy life he who had entered the port; I call again for struggles he who had been crowned»¹.

Referring to Acts 4,16 Isidore notes; «The Jews having caught and imprisoned and struck the Apostles, were in perplexity and they were speaking as if they were defeated; they had been defeated by those means which they thought that they could overcome. For, what they were thinking would be the humiliation of the Apostles, that was becoming the glory of the Apostles»².

Let us take some more examples from the Epistles:

Rom. 8,18 is concerned with the future glory; Isidore says; a) «If someone can gather all the prosperity from the beginning of men's existence till now and compare it with the glory of the future, he will find the former countless times lesser than the latter. For as soul is more honourable than body, so much the future glory differs from the present prosperity»³. And in another of his letters Isidore says: b) «Inasmuch as Paul could not describe the future prosperity either clearly or in part, he named it with regard to what is the most amiable to us, i.e. glory. For it seems to be the summit of virtue. c) Paul by saying that the glory shall be revealed means that it is now hidden and that it awaits the sufferings of triumphant combatants»⁴.

Rom. 12,18: 'if it be possible live peaceably with all men'. Isidore interprets as follows: a) «When you see piety being harmed or weak men being injured, do not prefer peace to truth»⁵. b) «Do not think that peace is always good. For many times it is more fearful than all war»⁶. «If it be possible. For some times it is impossible, e.g. when the matter concerns piety or righteousness or sobriety or virtue in general. For how could a pious man be at peace with an impious one or a righteous with an unjust or a chaste with a lewd?»⁷ d) «What does 'if it be possible' mean? Do not either give ground for hate or have within reason an enemy»⁸.

1. II 173, 624C-25A.

2. III 182, 873A.

3. V 72, 1369A.

4. IV 63, 1120D-21A.

5. III 284, 960B.

6. IV 36, 1088C.

7. IV 220, 1313D-16A.

8. *ibid.* 1316A.

Rom. 13,1: 'There is no power but of God'. Isidore interprets: «Paul did not say there is no ἄρχων i.e. ruler or prince but of God, but he speaks of the essence of the matter and says: there is no ἐξουσία i.e. power but of God. For the existence of powers in men is a work of God and likewise for some men to reign and for others to be reigned is the work of God. Now I say that power and reigning had been established by God, so that the order of the world be saved¹. And if any wicked ruler has got power we do not say that he has been established by God, but that God permitted him to get it»².

i Cor. 6,10: Isidore says: «Paul did not say that all whom he mentions shall be equally punished, but that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words: All these shall be excluded from the future glory, but they shall be judged according to the quantity and quality of their sins. For the accuracy of the divine tribunal is great»³.

i Cor. 9,21: 'I became as without law'. Isidore interprets: «Paul became as without law when speaking to the Athenians he did not start from the Prophets or from the law but he gave his instruction from the altar, that is to say, converting them by dogmas which were familiar to them. Hence he did not say 'without law' but 'as without law'»⁴. 'Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ': «Paul said it for two reasons: a) Because it is an impartial matter (ὡς ἀδιάφορον) -for in one essence there is no difference-; b) Because he behaved not only according to the law which is attributed by everyone to the Father, but also according to the heavenly and perfect law of Christ. That is to say whereas I became not ἄνομος i.e. without law according to the old Law, I became ἔνομος i.e. with law according to the Gospel; Not out of the law, but also according to Grace»⁵.

i Cor. 15,29: The meaning of baptism for the dead. Isidore says: «The divine Apostle said it so calling the nature of bodies and comparing it with the pure nature of the soul. For the latter is immortal and without end and the former is liable to ruin and change. Now we are baptised for the bodies which are naturally dead because we believe we will turn them into incorruptibility. And this is the meaning of

1. ἵνα μὴ ὁ κόσμος εἰς ἀκοσμίαν ἐμπίσῃ.

2. II 216, 657D-60B. cf Chrysostom: ad Rom. XXIII 1 Montf. IX 752C-753A.

3. IV 42, 1093B.

4. II 138, 580D-81A. cf also III 346, 1004B.

5. II 138, 581AB.

the aforesaid. If our bodies rise not at all why do we believe in turning them into incorruptibility by baptism?»¹.

ii Cor. 12,9: 'My strength is made perfect in weakness'. Isidore interprets this as follows: a) «The divine strength is made perfect in weakness, as the Chosen Vessel said, because illiterate men excel orators and custom officers preach poverty. And even our Lord corrected the alteration of things to a heavenly state not by a royal authority but κατ' οἰκονομίαν i.e. by 'economy' by a slavish poverty»². b) The divine strength is made perfect in weakness because the Apostles while whipped had the whip of the whippers, while persecuted were masters of the persecutors and while dying were conquering the living»³.

With regard to Gal. 4,4 'made of a woman' Isidore with liveliness expresses his opinion as follows: «What are you doing Paul? Do you call the Virgin 'woman'? Yes, he says, I call her 'woman' for the nature, but I keep her in my mind as a virgin. For the virgin is woman even if she is untouched. She is woman because of her sex and structure; and she is virgin because of her integrity and purity»⁴.

Concerning ii Tim. 4,1 'Jesus shall judge the quick and the dead', Isidore says that he can interpret this in three ways: a) Both the soul and the body will be judged not separately but together. As they had been united here, so they will be judged there being united. b) Jesus on the one hand will διακρίναι i.e. separate the living, that is to say those who lived the ever-living life and that beloved by God, and He will give them as a reward everlasting rewards; and on the other hand He will κρίναι i.e. judge those who have been dead by sinning and who through their indolence buried the talent which had been given to them and He will punish them. c) Jesus will judge those who will still be alive and also those who had died before them»⁵.

Hebr. 2,15: 'And deliver them who through fear of death were... bondage'. We understand it, says Isidore, in four ways: a) «It is not death but judgment after death which anticipates sins. For if men will keep in mind the divine Court and consider it always, then they could not dare to do any bad action. b) Since men would die, they committed a lot of sins and therefore they were afraid of death. And this is why Christ came, to deliver them also from this bondage. c) Christ came

1. I 221, 321B.

2. I 428, 420AB.

3. III 482, 872C.

4. III 176, 868C.

5. I 222, 321CD.

to deliver them from the fear of death which was equal with non existence and to enable them to understand the perfect Court after death. For thus they eagerly followed the way which leads to virtue being encouraged by the hope of the wreaths and they were avoiding sin because of the fear of future punishments. d) Inasmuch as many people being afraid of death because they believed that death was leading to non-existence, were accepting to do and suffer many disgraceful acts unwillingly and in order that these men might not be punished by those who were stronger, Christ came to men to teach them that death is preferable to vice and that men ought to prefer death rather than do and suffer some disgraceful action. For death will be destroyed by the resurrection whereas disgraceful actions will finish with punishments»¹.

And now our last example concerning James 2,20: 'Faith without works is dead'. Isidore says: a) «Although piety precedes and is first, nevertheless it needs the accurate life, so that the perfect and highest success and prosperity will be apparent. Therefore we must with all our power care for the accurate life in order that we, showing the accuracy of our life, will be victors in everything and even keeping silent we might muzzle our opponents who would dare to speak against us»². How could Faith stand without virtue by which it might act? As the best musician could not show his art without a flute, so piety being shown without works seems dead and inactive not only to those out of the Church but to the divine Scriptures as well. For they say 'faith without works is dead'»³.

These examples we have so far cited concerning the Literal Interpretation of Isidore, twenty five in number, are few out of the total number. But perhaps one could say that they are many. But how could we say otherwise about this type of interpretation and how could we ascertain Isidore's success if we should not cite a certain number of examples? Thus we think that the cited examples are just sufficient. And let it be noted that these examples are not carefully selected so that our esteem of Isidore may increase, but they are just a part of the whole and represent the Literal type.

Surveying these examples we may say that in spite of Isidore's laconic way of thinking and writing, they are rather extensive interpretations. A contemporary systematic Exegete would be briefer. But

1. IV 146, 1229B-32B.

2. IV 226, 1321B.

3. V 162, 1420C.

Isidore was interpreting only some passages and he ought to prove his opinion and not express it dogmatically, according to his rule. Also we must say that this was a custom of the age. And, of course, these examples show us Isidore's facility in dealing with Exegesis and his theological equipment.

We judge these examples as successful; and we could say the same for all the literal interpretations of Isidore of the N.T., although some examples would need a little more elucidation or extension.

(Continued)