

Martin Robertson

The Betrayal

“To God” He answered “those things which are God’s,
and what is Caesar’s render unto Caesar,”
But did He not thereby, Himself being God’s
son, God Himself, defraud Himself? Is God’s
a share only? They thought by a trick question
to have Him on the horns. It was big odds
against His twisting free. But was it God’s
wit gave Him that smart answer? He was Steward
of a vast trust, and a far-sighted steward
may have to sacrifice some bargains. God’s
terms, His best friends admit, are long-term—Plato
no less than Paul, Buddha no less than Plato.

I am no follower of Paul or Plato,
of Buddha or Mahomet, God or gods.
Paul’s song of charity I love, in Plato
the passionate search. Great spirits, Paul and Plato,
but the long hopes they hold and bid me seize are
not mine. My soul cries (child) to stay up late—“Oh
don’t send me to bed yet—I want to play, to
read, finish this. . . *Can’t I wait up?*” The question
falls. Plato, Paul, ask the (for me) wrong question,
find me no answer. So much for Paul and Plato?
So much for me—an ineffective steward
myself, I still must be my own soul’s steward.

Reading the story of the unjust steward
I find myself a world away from Plato
and in a most strange world. What is this steward
who wins such commendation, because as steward
he tried to cheat his master? Were I God's
(if I believed in God), were I His steward
would He have me use tricks on Him this steward
tried on his master?... Render unto Caesar...
Perhaps there's some thought links steward to Caesar
which glimpsed might both throw light on the praised steward
and make His answer to the priests' spies' question
more than a trick answer to a trick question.

Why do I feel that answer to that question
such a betrayal of His trust as Steward?
It was, when all is said, a cheating question.
The head He had them show Him was, no question,
a copy's shadow in the terms of Plato.
Yes. But, though by so answering their question
He fooled the spies and priests, the Christian's question
"Should not my life, my actions, all be God's?"
by this gets answered "No. Not wholly God's.
If Caesar give you arms, yours not to question
when he gives orders. Render unto Caesar
your armed and ordered self, and cry *Hail Caesar*."

That He did not say. But by setting Caesar
over against God He allowed the question
to be reframed in terms of God and Caesar
as equal powers. So Christians can make Caesar
their scapegoat. Might we, though, construe the steward
(a clever thought) as double-crossing *Caesar*?
No. The steward's master is God, not Caesar.
From the good city bravely back old Plato
framed laws for shadow-men. Does He (like Plato?)
hope that, though cheating Him, our serving Caesar
may yet bring Caesar back with us to God's
service—what's Caesar's in the end be God's?

"Only the worldly-wise can manage God's
affairs. Go down into the cave with Plato.
Make friends with Mammon, make Mammon your steward."
But who serves whom?... Well, there's the jackpot question:
Will Caesar die in God or God in Caesar?