

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE APOSTOLIC DECREE AGAINST ΠΟΡΝΕΙΑ.

PROFESSOR SANDAY'S recent article in the *EXPOSITOR* for October, 1913 (viii. 34), entitled "The Text of the Apostolic Decree," is so admirable a presentation of the textual evidence for Acts xv. 29 that one cannot but feel the moment opportune for presenting some further evidence as to the historical sense and bearing of the Decrees, derived from contemporary sources hitherto unaccountably overlooked.

Professor Sanday rightly emphasises the philological argument of Preuschen based on the rare term *ἀλισγήμα* ("pollution") used in Acts xv. 20 as a general and comprehensive term more specifically determined in verse 29 as *εἰδωλόθυστα* ("meats offered to idols"). Both the employment of *ἀλισγήμα*, and the whole context are opposed to the idea now urged by Harnack and others that the Apostolic Decrees have an ethical aim, such as the Western text labours to attach to them. Whether we include, or do not include, *τοῦ πικτοῦ* (*πικτῶν*) in verses 20 and 29 ("things strangled"),¹ we cannot reasonably interpret *ἀπέχεσθαι αἵματος* ("abstain from blood") as anything but a food law; for apart from the absurdity of "the apostles and elders in Jerusalem" thinking it needful for them to prohibit crimes of violence among their Gentile fellow-Christians, neither would *ἀπέχεσθαι* ("abstain") be an appropriate verb for such a prohibition, nor *αἷμα* ("blood" in the figurative sense, i.e. murder) be an appropriate noun. In addition the context as a whole is opposed to the idea that the Council felt called upon to enact moral requirements. The aim of the Western additions is to make the Decrees of "the apostles and elders" cover the whole sphere of human conduct; whereas the discourses show that the Council itself has a much more

¹ Cf. Wellhausen, "Noten zur Apg.," in *Gött. Nachr. phil.-hist. Klasse*, 1907, 19 f.

definite and circumscribed idea of its own purpose and jurisdiction.

To avoid misunderstanding, the present writer must repeat here his frequently entered protest against a harmonistic identification of the Apostolic Council of Acts xv. with either the Conference between Paul and the " Pillars " described in Galatians ii. 1-10, or any subsequent unrecorded visit of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. The story of Acts xv. is neither and both. It is an idealising historian's *combination* of two distinct occasions : (1) the Conference of Paul and Barnabas with the Pillars (Gal. ii. 1-10) issuing in a division of mission fields and the first missionary journey (Acts xiii., xiv.)¹ ; (2) a Conclave at Jerusalem at which neither Paul nor Peter can have been present, and probably not Barnabas. This " Apostolic " conclave *may* be implied in the ἐλθεῖν τινὰς ἀπὸ Ἰακώβου of Galatians ii. 12 ; but it was one whose Decrees cannot have been in force when Peter " ate with the Gentiles " at Antioch. Moreover they are fundamentally at variance with Paul's solution of the problem. For not only Galatians, which Lake and Emmet suppose to have been written *before* the Conclave, explaining thus its silence as to the Decrees—not only Galatians, but even more fully and specifically first Corinthians prescribes a *modus vivendi* between the " strong " and the " weak," those who reject and those who hold to " distinctions of meats," built upon the *indifference* of the distinctions for *all* believers. The Lukan *modus vivendi*, on the contrary, proceeds upon the assumption of the *permanent validity* of the Mosaic distinctions for believers of Jewish birth.

¹ Galatians i. 21, limiting Paul's missionary activity up to the date of the Conference to " Syria and Cilicia," shows that the evangelisation of Cyprus and the trans-Taurus region, in company with Barnabas and (for Cyprus) Mark, had not yet occurred. It is in contemplation at the Conference (Gal. ii. 9 ; cf. Acts xii. 25).

In the present writer's view the Decrees represent the solution which became valid for "Peter and all the Jews" at Antioch, and which "swept away" "even Barnabas." They represent the solution which became authoritative for "Antioch, Syria and Cilicia," and was still authoritative there at the time of composition of Acts, whose author, according to ancient tradition,¹ strongly corroborated by the internal evidence, belonged to the Antioch church. This solution has a just claim to be called "Apostolic"; but in only a limited sense, for it was never accepted by Paul, nor by the Pauline churches beyond the Cilician Gates. It ultimately fell of its own weight; for it was intrinsically impracticable. The reductions of the "burden" found in Revelation ii. 24 (cf. Acts xv. 28), in the *Didaché* vi. 3, in the readings of the Western Text of Acts, and in the second century Fathers generally, illustrate the gradual predominance of another solution—the Pauline solution in a modified form, made concrete and divorced from its mystical factor.

All this forestalls the question: What was the problem which the Decrees attempt to solve? Our answer may not be admitted by those who take a different view; but for the sake of clearness it required to be stated before returning to common ground.

Common ground we hope to find in the statement that Paul and "Luke"² are at one in distinguishing two stages of the controversy with the Judaisers, although Luke, by omitting the painful scene of the conflict between Paul and Peter at Antioch, has greatly blurred the outlines. Even so, however, Acts xv. does not wholly conceal the important distinctions which are made so clear in Galatians ii., by relating in their order the *two* crises in which Paul had stood

¹ Eusebius, *H.E.* III. iv. 7.

² The name is used of the author of Acts without prejudice to the critical question.

fast for the liberty of Christ "that the truth of the gospel might remain" an unimpaired inheritance to the Gentiles.

The first crisis turned upon the circumcision of Titus, a feature conspicuous by its absence from the story of Acts. However the difficulties of text and interpretation be met in Galatians ii. 3-10, one thing is certain: Paul feels that he won his case against the "false brethren who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage." He insists that he won it completely and without reserve, and that he won it by the hearty, unqualified endorsement of the "Pillars." The first crisis issued in hearty agreement; but it was explicitly an "agreement to differ." Its object was disjunctive, not conjunctive, save in "the fellowship of giving and receiving."

"They that were of repute made no supplement to my gospel, but, on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with that of the circumcision, the Pillars, James and Cephas and John, gave me and Barnabas right hands of fellowship that we should go to the Gentiles, but they to the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor."

We cannot too strongly emphasise the fact that this unreserved endorsement, after conflict with the legalists in the case of Titus, makes it certain that the primary question whether the yoke of the law should be imposed upon Gentile converts was settled fully, completely, and without any reserves whatever, as soon as Paul had laid the matter before the Pillars. On this point there is no difference between Paul and Luke. If anything, Luke would seem even to go beyond Paul. For in Acts xv. 10 Peter's protest against the attempt to put this "yoke upon the neck" of the Gentile converts actually characterises the law as one "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." If this could be taken to imply a revolt on Peter's part against the con-

tinued obligation of himself and other Jews to "circumcise their children and obey the customs," it would not only be inconsistent with Luke's standpoint elsewhere, but contradictory even of Paul. For whatever Paul's personal conviction and practice, his own account of the agreement at Jerusalem implies that the Pillars took a different stand from his for themselves and those of "the circumcision." The agreement is reciprocal. The Pillars and their agents will make no proselytes among Paul's converts, and Paul and Barnabas will keep within corresponding bounds. The implication is clear, and corroborates the ancient testimony of Irenæus: "The Apostles allowed the Gentiles to act freely; but they themselves continued in the ancient observances."¹ We may be sure that Luke himself means no otherwise, because his own subsequent narrative is explicit. In the later interview of Paul with "James and the elders" in Acts xxi. 24-26, where the matter is taken up again, the public participation of Paul in the temple sacrifices is said to have been undertaken expressly for the purpose of proving that there was "no truth in" the report that Paul was "teaching the Jews resident among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs." Now Luke's *interpretation* of this act of Paul is incredible. It is irreconcilable with Paul's insistence that Peter when "among the Gentiles" at Antioch should disregard his Mosaic scruples. It is flagrantly contrary to the principle that the cross has made circumcision or uncircumcision a matter of indifference (Gal. ii. 19-21; iii. 13). But the *act* is not incredible. Interpreted as a demonstration of Paul's willingness to "become as under the law to them that are under the law," it supports the principle. It is a proof of Paul's loyalty to his pledge not to conduct a propaganda among "the circumcision."

¹ *Her.* III. xiv. 15.

Acts xv. 10 f. must be understood in accordance with the Lukan *interpretation* of Paulinism, not in accordance with the genuine Pauline doctrine of "justification apart from (*χωρίς*) law." On this basis it cannot be consistently interpreted otherwise than in the sense: *Without the supplementary* "grace of the Lord Jesus" the yoke of the law is unbearable even for Jews. This sense accords with the better interpretation of Acts xiii. 39, and of the Lukan narrative throughout. But even if the other (Pauline) sense be adopted it will only indicate that in Acts xv. 10, as in Acts xi. 3, 20 (*vera lectio*), and some other cases, Luke has been betrayed by a source more universalistic than himself into some unguarded expressions. Luke's own view is that *for Jews* "the grace of the Lord Jesus is a supplement to meet the deficiencies of that justification which is through the law." This is still perhaps the idea of "grace" cherished by "the man in the street." It has naïve illustration in the epitaph of the Englishman whose name is borne by the university whence we write:—

"Much good he did, some ill; so hope all's even
And that his soul, through grace, is gone to heav'n."

But it is not Paulinism.

Paul and Luke agree, then, in their account of the first crisis. On the question raised by the men who "came down from Judaea and taught the brethren, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses ye cannot be saved" (Acts xv. 1), the Judaisers were immediately and completely ruled out of court. There was no difficulty, no lack of harmony, till a second stage was reached, a problem which, according to Paul, was not raised at the Jerusalem conference,¹ either because not foreseen, or because those who fore-

¹ The subsequent vacillation of Peter at Antioch proves it had not yet been settled. Had we (as some hold) in Galatians ii. 1-10 and 11-27 an inversion of the chronological order Paul would have been bound to explain to the Galatians what was done at Jerusalem about the great issue raised at Antioch.

saw it tacitly assumed each that it would be settled his way.

The new problem was the problem of "the Jews which are among the Gentiles." It was a problem which in the nature of the case could not arise until after the admission to fellowship of Gentiles unburdened by the law. It was the problem how this fellowship should be maintained where one party was under ceremonial restrictions and the other not. The "fellowship of giving and receiving," beyond which the Jerusalem Conference did not go (Gal. ii. 6-10), would promote the right spirit, but it did not grapple with the real issue. The crucial point would be "eating together."

According to Galatians the issue was not drawn till "Peter came to Antioch." Of course it could not be until some representative of the Jewish-Christian interpretation of the disjunctive agreement made between the representatives of the two "apostleships" came among the Gentiles. At first it was not even drawn "when Peter came to Antioch"; because Peter at first quite naturally followed the practice of Paul and other Christian Jews, who among Gentiles became "as without the law." But before long¹ came the delegation "from James," who put the matter in so different a light that Peter and "all the rest of the Jews" drew back, and refused any longer to eat with the Gentiles, until "even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy."

The point at issue in this story of the disagreement at Antioch cannot really be a matter of doubt. The absolute freedom of the Gentile had been conceded in the agreement at Jerusalem, and could not be taken back. What had *not* been conceded at Jerusalem was the freedom of the *Jew*. Must then "the Jews which are among the Gentiles" relinquish their ceremonial purity by eating with their Gentile

¹ Apparently during the absence of Paul and Barnabas on the first Missionary Journey. Mark's return to Antioch (and Jerusalem) (Acts xv. 38) may have given occasion to it.

brethren, ignoring the "distinctions of meats" and the "pollutions of idols"? Paul holds that if occasion really requires they must. They have no right "to *compel* the Gentiles to Judaize" (τί ἀναγκάζεις τὰ ἔθνη Ἰουδαίειν;). His ground is the doctrine of the cross as abolishing the legal relation. Every Christian, Jew or Gentile, "died to the law" when he "put his faith in Christ Jesus to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of law." Therefore, because distinction of meats is not a matter of necessity (*ἀνάγκη*), but a concession to their "weakness" of faith, Jewish Christians must rely on such generous consideration for their scruples as their Gentile brethren ought for Christ's sake to show. In point of fact a very large element in Paul's letters consists of entreaties to these "strong" adherents of his own to show this forbearance, and not "for meat's sake" to put stumblingblocks in the path of the "weak."¹

The delegation "from James" held differently. They laid the Gentiles under "compulsion" in the matter of "distinctions of meats," and seem to have carried with them permanently both Peter, and "all the rest of the Jews," including Barnabas. Even the great Syrian church with its dependencies, which looked up to Barnabas as its leader, sided against Paul. What was the "compulsion" (*ἀναγκάζεις*) instigated by the delegates "from James"?

It is inconceivable that men of this stamp and standing should have dreamed of rescinding at Antioch the action so solemnly taken at Jerusalem, where the "Pillars" had recognised the absolute freedom of the Gentiles. Peter and the Jews at Antioch were not *consciously* "compelling the

¹ So Romans xiii. 8-xv. 13. Purity in xiii. 11-14, consideration for the "weak" in the matter of "meats" and holy days in c. xiv. So 1 Thessalonians iv. 2-12. The greater part of first Corinthians (1 Cor. v.-xi. 1) is taken up with directions about sexual purity and "meats offered to idols." Both—fornication and partaking in heathen banquets—are generalised as "idolatry" in 1 Corinthians x. 14.

Gentiles to Judaize." They were simply interpreting the agreement made at Jerusalem as every man would naturally interpret it who did not appreciate Paul's doctrine of the cross as *abolishing the legal relation*. If Jewish believers are still under divine *obligation* to hold to the law, then they have a right to lay down certain requirements as "necessary" (ἐπιναγκές) conditions of such acts of fellowship as eating together, though only such as are for the protection of their own ritual purity. They may stipulate before consenting to sit at a Gentile's table that nothing at it shall bring involuntary defilement upon them. If the stipulation go beyond what is necessary for the Jews' protection, it will justly be resented. If it be confined to this, it may be regarded as reasonable and fair, not because it is "necessary" to the Gentile's salvation, but "necessary" to the Jew's ceremonial purity. Paul does not mention a single Christian of Jewish descent at Antioch who stood out with himself against the reasoning that held it right to "compel the Gentiles to Judaize" to this extent. The most probable explanation of this remarkable silence is that Paul's paradoxical reasoning (Gal. ii. 18-21) that the Law, valid and obligatory (for Jews) up to the date of Calvary, had ceased from the moment of the crucifixion to have binding force, was not accepted by any influential element in the Syrian church; as indeed it remained unintelligible to the fathers of the second century.

Thus far we have sought merely to make clear the situation implied in Galatians ii. 11-21. It is more difficult, because of the omission by Luke of the intervening step of Peter's coming to Antioch and his vacillating conduct there, to find in Acts xv. the same clear distinction of the first from the second stage in the conflict. Luke represents the whole controversy as settled by "the apostles and elders in Jerusalem" at one sitting; so that all Pauline disagreement is

obliterated, just as in Acts no trace is left of the long and bitter subsequent conflict between Paul and the Judaisers, save the representation in Acts xxi. 21-26, already referred to, that Paul repudiated as a slander the statement that he did not himself set the example to "the Jews *among the Gentiles*" of "walking orderly, keeping the law." Nevertheless there remains enough even in Acts xv. to show that here too the Decrees are enacted in the interest of Jewish-Christian ritual purity. They are not proposed as a minimum of Mosaism imposed upon Gentile believers as a condition of their admission; still less as a new Ten Commandments formulated for babes in the faith. They are proposed as "necessary" for the protection of those who thus far have relied on Mosaic distinctions of meats against the involuntary defilement they will be liable to incur as a consequence of the new conditions. In short, the agreement with the Pillars had been primarily disjunctive, the proposal of James is intended to be conjunctive.

This deeper confirmation of Galatians ii. by Acts xv. appears in three ways. It appears (1) in the separation of the proposal of Peter from that of James, making in reality two stages of the discussion, though brought within the limits of a single Council. (2) It appears (obscurely) in the motive supplied by James in verse 21 for his proposal. It appears (3) in the intrinsic character of the Decrees enacted. To make this clear we must devote some attention to each of these points of evidence, laying principal stress, however, upon the third.

(1) The proposal of James to enjoin upon Gentile converts "to abstain from the pollutions of idols" is represented by Luke as separate from, and supplementary to, the proposal of Peter. It is not offered, however, in opposition to any part of it, as though James felt it to be too sweeping in its recognition of Gentile independence. On the contrary, it

is prefaced by an unreserved acceptance of Gentile Christianity as a long predetermined work of God. God, as foretold in prophecy, has "visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name." They are, then, an independent people of God, upon whom His earlier people cannot presume to impose a yoke.

The critical word here is the word *ἐπιναγκές*, "necessary." Why, and on whose account, are these four kinds of abstinence proposed as "necessary," even for Gentiles? Why does recognition of a second "people of the Lord" free from the law require a supplement?

The only answer in Acts to this question is the difficult utterance of James in xv. 21, which we are about to discuss. It is important, however, to observe meantime that the fact that Luke also regards the Decrees as a corollary to the proposal of Peter, and not in conflict with it, confirms the distinction of Paul's narrative between the unqualified acknowledgement of Gentile equality, independence, and freedom from the law obtained by him at the Agreement in Jerusalem, and the attempt to regulate relations between the two independent peoples which provoked the Disagreement at Antioch.

(2) The motive placed by Luke (Acts xv. 21) in the mouth of James to justify his proposal is confessedly obscure.¹ The only fact apparent upon the surface is that the proposed enactments have something to do with "the Jews which are among the Gentiles" and their proselytes. For brevity's sake we may attempt to bring out by paraphrase what appears to be the logical relation of the discourse of James to the context.

"Brethren, you are about to recognise Gentile believers

¹ For a detailed exegetical study of the passage of much value, see *Journal of Bibl. Lit.*, xv. (1896), pp. 75, 81, art. "Acts xv. 21," by J. H. Ropes.

as a second 'people of God'; and this action is necessary and right, for God has both foretold the conversion of the Gentiles in the prophets, and also set the seal of His approval on this present work. He has put His Name upon these converts by pouring gifts of the Spirit upon them, though baptized in uncircumcision. We and they have received the same Spirit of Adoption. But much depends on how our recognition and acknowledgment is made. The Christian propaganda is not first in the field. A mission to the Gentiles already exists co-extensive with the civilised world. For generations this propaganda has been in progress in every city where a Jewish synagogue exists, and there can be no concealing the difference between it and that of Barnabas and Saul; because every Sabbath in the synagogue the Mosaic law is read, which provides for the separateness of God's people from all pollution of the world. The question turns upon the attitude of the new propaganda to the old. If we stop with the simple recognition of a 'people of God' without the law, we break down the wall of separation which excludes the pollution of the idolatrous world from the household of God. Having free access to the Court of the Gentiles it will be impossible to exclude it from the Court of Israel. Since, then, we acknowledge the necessity for such as already believe under the forms taught by the synagogue, of protecting our purity by the distinctions of Moses, some corresponding law of 'purity' is a necessity for all Christians. Let it be so framed that 'pollutions' (*ἀλισθήματα*) from the idol world cannot penetrate from them to us. It is a duty to ourselves, as a people separate from the world, and to the life of God in us, to guard the wall of separation."

Our paraphrase is expanded because the obscurity of the original seems to be chiefly due to condensation. But however concise, Luke makes apparent (*a*) that the proposal

of James is made in the expectation of perpetuating the distinction of a Christianised people of the Lord (Jews and proselytes) among the Gentiles who shall continue the observance of the law from a Gentile-Christian people who will be free from it. (b) It is also apparent that the object of the proposed enactments is that the relations of these two peoples of the Lord shall be cordial, without degenerating into obliteration of the distinctions which separate both from the world of the "idols" around—distinctions which, as we shall see, have a quasi-sacramental character, so that he who violates them as it were pollutes by alien contact the indwelling life of God. The key-words of the verse are *κηρύσσοντας Μωσῆν*, and *ἀναγιγνωσκόμενος*. They justify our interpretation of the proposal as having mainly in view the two objects just defined. In what sharp contrast they stand to the ideals of Paul will be apparent from a glance at Galatians ii. 15-21; iii. 16, 26-28; Eph. ii. 13-22, and similar passages.

(3) The ultimate decision regarding Luke's solution of the problem of Jew and Gentile in the Church must rest with the intrinsic character of the Decrees themselves. That they constitute no fiction of the author of Acts but have as their basis some authentic document is apparent from the superscription of the "letter." The enactments are addressed to "the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia," indicating that the trans-Taurus mission field has not yet come into view. This represents the source. *Luke* gives them universal application and even makes Paul and Silas distribute them in the cities of *Galatia* (Acts xvi. 4). As emanating from James and "the Apostles," as accepted by Antioch, including "Peter and all the rest of the Jews," not "even Barnabas" excepted, they have a right to be called the "Apostolic" Decrees; but unless their intrinsic sense is quite different from that which a truly historical exegesis

seems to us to impose, they could never have had the assent of Paul nor of the Pauline churches.

As regards questions of text the discussions of Preuschen, Wellhausen, Lake, Sanday, and others may be deemed to have established the reading of our ordinary text with a bare possibility that the references to "things strangled" should be omitted. With regard to interpretation, especially in the light of early Jewish-Christian literature, the case is different. Here we know of no study more thorough than that of K. Six, S.J., entitled *Das Aposteldekret* (Act. 15, 28. 29). *Seine Entstehung und Geltung in den ersten vier Jahrhunderten* (Innsbruck, 1912). Six has brought together a host of patristic citations showing the bearing of the Decrees as food-laws, and in particular has shown from the *Clementina* that the connective idea which unifies the group is the danger of "communion with demons" (cf. 1 Cor. x. 20) They are not moral. They are not a portion of Mosaism retained at the sacrifice of the rest. They are a purity law intended to meet the same object of protection against the *ἀλισγήματα τῶν εἰδώλων* which the Mosaic is understood to aim at; but from the standpoint of men under a new dispensation. If Preuschen, Sanday, Lake, and others have vindicated (as the present writer holds) the priority of the received text over the Western form, Six has done equal service in establishing this "connective idea." Ancient testimony, Jewish, Christian and heathen, proves that the Decrees, in sharp distinction from Paul, rest upon a sacramentarian, or quasi-magical, conception of the value of "distinctions of meats." Paul holds that "there is nothing unclean of itself." Pollution can only be moral and voluntary. "To him that esteemeth anything to be unclean" or that "eateth with offence," to him it is polluting, because his own will is involved. Not so with the Jewish-Christian view, and the common post-Pauline idea. It interprets food-laws in

general as protecting the life of God resident in the member of His household from contamination by intermixture with demonic life. The sexual act transmits life, assimilation of food sustains it. Both acts are sacramental in the heathen religions, uniting the life of the participant with the life of a *daimon*. Therefore in Jewish and early Christian belief they are capable of a kind of *ἄλισγῆμα* which is more than moral, and borders on the magical. Jewish belief of the type represented in the *Clementina* and the Decrees places the eating of *εἰδωλόθυτα* and fornication on the same footing, because he who surrenders the protection of the food-laws exposes himself to the same danger of "alienation from the life of God" (to use a Pauline phrase) as he who "makes his members the members of a harlot." With Paul only the voluntary participation in an idol feast can be grouped with fornication, because there can be no involuntary union with the life of a demon. The Decrees add a prohibition of "blood" and (probably) "things strangled" to *εἰδωλόθυτα* and fornication, not because some Old Testament "distinctions of meats" are regarded as more important than others, but because the current understanding of "distinctions of meats" is that they protect the indwelling divine life from union with demonic. The Old Testament itself reflects the ancient belief that "the blood is the life." According to current ideas ¹ "demons feed on things strangled," as well as "on blood"—doubtless because the breath (*πνεῦμα*) not being permitted to escape to its own source (Eccles. iii. 21), as the blood according to Leviticus xvii. 10-14; Deuteronomy xii. 23 f., must be, furnishes sustenance to the demon; for the demon, of course, is nourished by the invisible, not

¹ Origen (*Contr. Celsus*, VIII. 24 ff.) explains the exception of *εἰδωλόθυτα*, things strangled and blood, from the freedom of Christians from food-laws on the ground that eating of *εἰδωλόθυτα* gives communion with demons, things strangled are, "as they say," the food of false gods, and the same is true of blood.

the visible part. Thus the unifying view-point of the Decrees is not to be found in the Old Testament, but in a sacramentarian conception of *life* as uniting men either to God or demonic powers.

Those who have been baptized into the Name become thereby sharers in a mystical divine life. In the language of Paul, their life is "hid with Christ in God." This life is sustained by the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. But sacramental mysticism is not merely Pauline. It is as old as the sacraments themselves. The influence of Paul was exerted to raise pre-existing conceptions of a more magical character to a purely moral level. It was so in regard to the spiritual gifts. It is so in the case of the Decrees. They represent the attitude of the "weak," afraid to rest on purely moral union with the life of God, afraid of *involuntary* contamination.¹

The parallels adduced by Six go far to show why "fornication" is grouped with the three other food abstinences in the Decrees. The four represent the mystical or sacramentarian doctrine of the new religion on its negative side. The two prohibitions which are later dropped (Rev. ii. 14, 20, 24; cf. *Did.* vi. 3) are the two in which no moral factor appears. Paul's "moral view" had some ultimate effect. But the distinction so clearly made by Paul is not here drawn. The authors of the Decrees think them "necessary" (*ἐπιναγκαίης*), because they are afraid (as even second and third century Christians remain afraid) that the life of God in which they have become sharers may suffer contamination with, *and also without*, their consent.

There remains, however, one point on which Six has failed

¹ According to *Clem. Recogn.* IV. 36, mortal sins pollute the garment of baptism (*indumentum baptismi*), "but the things which pollute soul *and* body together are these: partaking of the table of demons, that is, eating things offered to idols, or blood, or things torn of beasts, or strangled, or whatever else is offered to the demons." Cf. 1 Corinthians vi. 18.

to throw adequate light. Indeed he strongly opposes the idea that the Decrees represent legislation enacted for the purpose of furnishing a *modus vivendi* between the two "peoples of the Lord" recognised in the discourse of their propounder. And yet considerations (1) and (2) have surely given some ground for holding that the propounder recognises the independence of the new people without the law from the old, and the restriction of the "burden" to what is "necessary" suggests that he recognises limitations of jurisdiction. We cannot but feel that a few further passages from that Ebionite literature which Six has examined to such advantage would have made it clearer why the older people of the Lord feel justified in making certain stipulations as "necessary" to mutual intercourse, and why the four stipulations include one which, as apparently purely moral, should seemingly be left to the conscience of their Gentile brethren.

As regards the horror felt by the "weak" against involuntary "pollution" from foods, Six gives a long series of parallels which throw light upon the Pauline distinction between eating meats over which the thanksgiving (*εὐχαριστία*) to God has been pronounced, which may be done with impunity (Rom. xiv. 3, 6); and partaking of *εἰδωλόθυστα* at a heathen feast, which is a "communion with demons," estranging from Christ and subjecting to the demons (1-Cor. x. 7 f., 14-22). But we may properly add one from the heathen philosopher Porphyry, who, according to Eusebius (*Prep. Ev.*, iv. 23) held the common view that

"bodies are full of evil spirits; for they particularly delight in foods of various kinds. So, when we eat they approach and seize upon the body. Hence the dedications (libations, thanksgivings, etc.). . . . They particularly delight in blood and impure foods, and take advantage of them to slip into those who use them."¹

¹ Quoted by Heitmüller, *Relig. in Gesch. u. Geg.*, s.v. "Abendmahl." The "strong" Christian naturally holds that the *εὐχαριστία* to God ut-

But we are principally concerned with the distinctively Jewish-Christian view. Thus in *Clem. Hom.*, ix. 9 Peter warns his hearers against the orgies of idol-worship, explaining that

“the demons, having power through the food given to them, are admitted to your bodies by your own hands; and lying hid there for a long time they become *blended with your souls.*”

We are here on a low plane of superstition as compared with the lofty rebukes of Paul. But there is a point of resemblance in the fundamental idea. Paul himself does not rebuke fornication as a sin against the family. He puts his prohibition, like that of the *εἰδωλόθυτα* at the heathen banquets, on mystical and religious grounds. “Every (other) sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” The act of union with a harlot (usually a temple harlot acting in the service of Aphrodite) in one body, is the opposite of union to the Lord in one spirit (1 Cor. vi. 13-20). Thus the parallel between “meats” and “fornication” rests ultimately even in Paul upon a heathen mysticism which regards the two functions of nutrition and reproduction as special means of union with divine life, and consequently gave both a place in its ritual. Neither the Decrees nor the Pauline rebuke of fornication can be understood by mere recourse to the Old Testament. Both require such insight into the general background of ancient belief as the *Clementina* afford when compared with contemporary heathen belief and practice. Paul and the Jewish-Christian writer both acquiesce in the current mystical conception of the phenomena of nutrition and reproduction. But there is a vital difference. Paul, as we have seen, denies the possibility of con-

tered over the food which sustains his life dispels all possibility of its becoming to him a “communion with demons,” just as he holds that in the transmission of life the “holy” predominates over the “unclean” (1 Cor. vii. 14).

tamination of the life which by divine grace dwells in the Christian without his conscious act. The union cannot occur without consent. The Clementine writer, adopting the same equivalence, heathen god=demon, holds that a Christian may come into union of life with a demon if he neglect divinely ordained distinctions of meats, more particularly if he eats those which demons are supposed to subsist upon. In like manner for Paul true marriage is a "great mystery" (Eph. v. 25-32), partaking of the nature of the union of "Christ and the Church." It is well on the way toward becoming a Christian sacrament. Conversely fornication "makes the members of Christ members of a harlot." In this, and the wilful participation in an idol feast, one may celebrate a Satanic sacrament. But with Paul ceremonial protection is not "necessary," because there is no union without moral consent. Just as food dedicated to God cannot harm the Christian (Rom. xiv. 6), so there is no demonic power which can separate from the love of God in Christ (Rom. viii. 38 f.). Union of life whether with God or demon must be *moral*.

But we have more to learn from the *Clementina*. In particular Peter's instructions to the mother of his convert in *Hom.* xiii. 4 throw light upon the word *ἐπιαναγκές* in the Decrees, about which doubt was raised. Here too withdrawal from table fellowship is excused on the ground of religious "necessity" :—

"I wish you to know, O woman, the course of life involved in our religion. We worship one God, Who made the world which you see; and we keep His law, which has for its chief injunctions to worship Him alone, to honour our parents, to be chaste, and to live piously. *In addition to this*, we do not live with all indiscriminately; nor do we take our food from the same table as Gentiles, inasmuch as we *cannot* eat along with them, because they live impurely (i.e. in religious relation to hostile powers). . . . For not even if it were our father, or mother, or wife, or child, or any other person having a claim by nature on our affection, can we venture to take

our meals with him ; for *our religion compels us* to make a distinction. *Do not then take it as an insult* that your son does not eat with you until you adopt his belief and practice."

Here is found still in full force, at least to the close of the second century, the stipulation exacted by "Peter and all the Jews" at Antioch after the coming of the delegation "from James." But the utmost is done to avoid wounding the feelings of the mother. Religious necessity "compels" the separation. "It is unavoidable under pain of their souls' salvation. This is the counterpart of the situation in Acts xv. 28. The older people of the Lord have recognised the full and equal rights of the younger. They do not presume to impose any moral yoke upon them. It is what they themselves are obliged to observe "in addition" which prompts the "further burden." In *self-protection* they will be obliged to withhold fellowship until the four rules are observed. They are "necessary" to protect the purity of the Jew.

Why, then, is "fornication" included? A final extract from *Clem. Hom.*, iii. 68, will dispel this last remaining perplexity. This too is "necessary" for the protection of the purity of the *Jew*. After commending marriage as a protection against burning lust (cf. 1 Cor. vii. 9), which might otherwise "bring a plague upon the Church by reason of fornication or adultery" (cf. 1 Cor. x. 8), the Ebionite writer continues:—

"For above every other sin the wickedness of adultery is hated by God, *because it not only destroys the person himself who sins, but those also who eat and associate with him.* For it is like the madness of a dog, because it has the nature of communicating its own madness. . . . For the sin of him who commits adultery necessarily comes upon all."

Compare with this mystical treatment of sexual immorality the declaration of Paul (1 Cor. vi. 15-20) that every other sin but this is "without the body"; whereas "he that

committeth fornication sinneth against his own body," because his members are perverted from being a "sanctuary of the Holy Ghost" and "members of Christ" and made "the members of a harlot." Compare his command to "have no company with such an one (the fornicator), no, not to eat;" (1 Cor. v. 9-11). Compare, from a date midway between Paul and the *Clementina*, a passage illustrative of the same sense as in the *Clementina* (but *not* in Paul) of the necessity of guarding against it even in others lest one be oneself contaminated by the "pollutions of idols." It appears in the direction in Mandate IV. 1 of *The Shepherd* of Hermas:—

"If, therefore in such deeds as these (adultery and fornication) a man continue, and repent not, keep away from him and do not live with him. *Otherwise thou also art a partaker of his sin.*"

We need not add further references. Sexual immorality is classed with the "pollutions of idols" because, like the use of sacrificial food, it unites to alien life, especially of the demons. It may properly be included among self-protective stipulations made in the interest of those for whom God has appointed a wall of separation to keep them unspotted from an impure world, because unlike all other sins it involves not only the guilty man, but "those who eat or associate with him."

Thus understood the Apostolic Decrees form a consistent group. They are the self-protective regulations "necessary" to the preservation of the "purity" of the people of the Lord that are under the law, in their intercourse with the new people of the Lord without the law. They cannot have been in force "when Peter came to Antioch." But the limitation of their address to Antioch and its *παροικία* suggests that the time of their enactment was *before* the results of the first Missionary Journey were known in Jerusalem, perhaps the time when the delegates came "from James,"

and brought Peter, Barnabas, and the Antioch church over to the "Apostolic" way of thinking.

B. W. BACON.

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE GOSPEL.

A GERMAN philologist once, when summarizing scientific method, posed the principle that one good argument is better than any number of bad arguments. By a good argument he probably meant one which could not be rejected without violation of something like natural law. For the study of the transmission of the Gospel such an argument has been provided by the late Professor Nestle in an observation dealing with Matthew xii. 19, where Isaiah xlii. 2 is thus quoted: "He shall not strive nor cry," *οὐκ ἐρίσει οὐδὲ κραυγᾶσει*. The Hebrew text offers, "He shall not cry nor lift up [his voice]";¹ the LXX, "He shall not cry nor raise [the pitch of his voice]";² whence comes the word "strive" in the Greek text of Matthew? It comes, as Nestle observed, from the *Peshitta of the Old Testament*, quoted in the Lewisian Syriac: which indeed means, "He shall not cry nor shout";³ but the Syriac *n'rīb* would be rendered by any one who was more familiar with Hebrew than Syriac by "he shall strive," because *rīb* is a common Hebrew word for "strive," whereas the Syriac word is not quite common. Nestle's observation gives us a simple and convincing explanation of the source of the word *strive* in the Greek text of Matthew, and it is an observation of the utmost importance. For the *Peshitta* Old Testament is elsewhere employed in the Lewisian text of Matthew, where quotations from the Old Testament are introduced, and it is only from this Syriac text that one

¹ לא יצעק ולא ישא

² οὐ κεράξεται οὐδὲ ἀνήσει.

³ לא נקעה ולא נריב.