

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 QUESTION OF THE APOSTOLIC DECREE:
A REPLY.*

IN view of the tendency, inaugurated and furthered by the painstaking labours of Professors Ramsay and Harnack, to assign a high decree of historical accuracy to the author of the Third Gospel and the Acts, any theory which tends to throw still further light on the historicity of the Lucan writings is deserving of careful consideration and discriminating criticism. Such a theory, it seems to us, is the view developed by G. Resch in his work *Das Aposteldekret nach seiner ausserkanonischen Textgestalt*.¹ Briefly stated, this theory assumes that the omission of the word *πικτῶν* in the Western version of the Apostolic decree (Acts xv. 28) is original, and that the decision of the Council therefore resulted in a victory for the liberal or pro-Gentile party. The text, thus emended, reads as follows :

ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρους πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες, ἀπέχεσθαι εἰδωλοθύτων καὶ αἵματος καὶ πορνείας [πορνείας· ἐξ] ἐξ ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὖ πράξετε.

If this reading gain acceptance, what was a four-clause food law in the received text is converted into a three-clause moral law respecting idolatry, murder, and fornication.

In the March number of the *EXPOSITOR* appeared an article from the pen of the Rev. Maurice Jones, entitled "The Apostolic Decrees in Acts xv. : a Compromise or a Triumph?" Mr. Jones began his article with a statement of the central importance of the story of the Apostolic Council in the criticism of the Acts, and proceeded thence to a summary of the views of eminent modern scholars. From this survey it became apparent that the question of the date

¹ *Texte und Untersuchungen*, N.F. xiii. 3, 1905.

of the decree has in recent years become less urgent than the more fundamental question of its contents. Mr. Jones then set about to sketch the history of the above-mentioned theory of Resch, showing that it had received the support of Wellhausen¹ and Harnack² in Germany, and of Professor Kirsopp Lake³ among English scholars. For convenience we shall hereafter designate that theory the Resch-Harnack theory. Due credit must be given, however, to Hilgenfeld,⁴ who advanced a similar view as early as 1896.

The main purpose of Mr. Jones's article was to point out what he considered to be fatal objections to such a reconstruction of the Apostolic decree. Upon purely textual grounds he admitted that "there would seem to be no insuperable objection to the adoption of the shortened version of the Western text as the original form in which the decree appeared."⁵ He had reached this conclusion after a thoroughly impartial weighing of the textual variants, but he found it necessary to add the qualifying clause, "although it is a somewhat large order to give the preference to D in the matter of the omission of 'things strangled' as against the evidence of all the other Uncials." But, if the textual evidence was inconclusive, he found the difficulties of historical reconstruction on the basis of the new theory well-nigh insuperable. These difficulties were summed up under the following five heads: (1) that the theory renders the circumcision of Timothy by St. Paul after the Council "absolutely unthinkable"; (2) that it does not remove the difficulty connected with Galatians ii. 6; (3) that it leaves the Epistle to the Galatians entirely "in the air";

¹ Wellhausen, *Noten zur Apostelgeschichte*, iii. 19 f.

² Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 249 f.

³ Kirsopp Lake, *O.Q.R.*, January, 1911, pp. 353 ff. *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, pp. 48-80.

⁴ *Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie*, 1896, p. 625 ff.

⁵ P. 248.

(4) that it destroys the relevancy of St. James' reference to the decrees in Acts xxi. 25; and (5) that it fails to account for the continued existence of the Judaistic controversy. The article concluded with a welcome plea for a saner estimate of the character of St. Paul and an adverse judgment against the Resch-Harnack theory.

To these five objections Mr. Jones might, we think, have added another, drawn from the Pauline discussion of *εἰδωλόθυρα* in 1 Corinthians viii. 1-xi. 1. This objection can be made very strong, if it is assumed that the received text is the genuine one and that the purpose of the decree was to facilitate social intercourse between Jewish and Gentile believers. According to that theory a *modus vivendi* was to be established by forbidding such minor Gentile practices as would be especially offensive to Jewish scruples. One such practice was the eating of *εἰδωλόθυρα* ("idol-meats"). Now the question had arisen in the Corinthian Church as to the essential validity of the prohibition of *εἰδωλόθυρα*. Clearly there was a feeling abroad that it was wrong to eat the idol-meats, though whether this feeling arose because of an injunction of St. Paul on the subject is not stated.¹ Clearly, too, there was a party in the church who were galled by this restriction. Confident in their *γνώσις* that no idol was anything in the world, they felt the prohibition of idol-meats to be an encroachment on their freedom. This was their complaint to St. Paul. How does he meet it? Not, to be sure, by referring

¹ There is no reason, if the traditional theory of the decree be accepted, why this feeling cannot have been caused by a definite laying of the terms of the decree on the Corinthians by St. Paul. The local and provisional nature of the decree has been much exaggerated. It is true that only the Gentiles of Antioch and Syria and Cilicia are mentioned (Acts xv. 23); but we know that the decree was laid also upon the Churches of South Galatia (Acts xvi. 4), which was the only other region of St. Paul's missionary jurisdiction at the time. St. James in Acts xxi. 25 assumes the decree to be valid for all St. Paul's converts.

to the decree—on Mr. Jones's theory it may be said that it was the decree itself which caused the protest. What St. Paul actually does is to reaffirm the principle upon which the decree rests, the principle of foregoing minor rights for the sake of weaker brethren, Granting the abstract right of the Corinthians to eat *ειδωλόβυτα*, he warns them to take heed lest this liberty of theirs become a stumblingblock to the weak (viii. 9). This principle he enforces by his own example in this (viii. 13) and other (ix. 5; ix. 12; ix. 19) matters, warns against spiritual pride (x. 1 ff.) and idolatry (x. 14 ff.) likely to be fostered by eating, but concludes by conceding that there is no need for the rule to be interpreted with too much literal rigour. It is not, however, always expedient to insist on abstract rights (x. 23 ff.); regard must be had for the consciences of others. And it must be observed that St. Paul is not here concerned only with the question of the relations of Gentiles one to another; the principle is expressly extended to the relations of Gentiles *and Jews* (x. 32).

It may plausibly be said by the advocates of the compromise theory that we have here a detailed statement by St. Paul of the philosophy which underlay his acceptance of the ceremonial restrictions of the decree. Certainly the passage cannot be held to contravene the received text, It harmonises equally well, however, with the view that the Council decided in favour of Gentile liberty, and in this connexion will come in for subsequent reference.

Now in considering the objections which Mr. Jones himself has raised it is a pleasure to be able to travel over the same road with him as regards the textual evidence. Even with his unwillingness to give the preference to D against the evidence of all the other Uncials we are inclined to sympathise. Nevertheless it seems to us that there are several phenomena which Mr. Jones has either minimised or over-

looked—phenomena which, taken together, have the effect of weakening, if not altogether removing, the objections to the Western form of the decree. At the risk of repeating what has been better said by others we take the liberty of enumerating these data as briefly as possible.

(1) Codex Bezae (D) omits the reference to “thing(s) strangled” not only in the text of the decree (Acts xv. 28) but also in xv. 20 and xxi. 25. *This threefold omission, of course, removes the shortened Western form from the sphere of the fortuitous or accidental.* But it is possible to go a step further. The Bezan Codex is notorious for its expansions of the received text of Acts, and *its omissions thereby obtain a double significance.* “Western non-interpolations” have long been a recognised phenomenon in the Gospels and Acts. One is at once reminded of the numerous cases occurring in the last three chapters of St. Luke’s Gospel, which have been so thoroughly dealt with by Dr. Plummer.¹ The classic instance, of course, is the important omission of xxii. 19b, 20, which most recent scholars, following Westcott and Hort² and Plummer,³ agree in considering an interpolation for the purpose of harmonising St. Luke’s account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper with St. Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians xi. 24 f. Another example, which is perhaps more to the point because found in the Acts, has been treated by Sir William Ramsay.⁴ In Acts xix. 28, where Codex Bezae reads *Μεγάλη Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων* instead of the received *Μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων*, thus converting a formal assertion into an invocation, the Bezan text coincides remarkably with numerous inscriptions in Asia Minor, while the received text might easily have grown up from the reduplication of the final *η* in *Μεγάλη*.

¹ Plummer, *St. Luke* (I.C.C.), p. 566 ff.

² Westcott and Hort, ii. App. p. 64.

³ Plummer, *op cit.*, pp. 496-7.

⁴ Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire*, p. 139 f.

Arguing from the analogy of these striking "non-interpolations," we are surely justified in asserting that a certain presumption of originality is created in favour of the shortened Western text of the decree. This presumption rises to the pitch of certainty if no motive can be adduced for altering the received text into the Western text and if it can be further shown that the Western form of the decree is in more complete harmony with the context.

(2) *That Western dislike of food laws caused an original food-law text to be altered into one involving moral regulations only has been shown by Harnack¹ and Lake² to be extremely improbable.* Mr. Jones, in our opinion, gives too slight a recognition to their arguments. The silence of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists as to the existence of such a Christian food-law is, in itself, of neutral value. On the other hand, Irenaeus unquestionably knew of a food-law concerning "blood" in the Gallican Church³; and Tertullian not only of, but laid stress upon, a food-law dealing with the prohibition of blood and of things strangled.⁴ Yet neither Irenaeus nor Tertullian connects such laws with the decree of the Council of Jerusalem. On the contrary, they agree in interpreting that decree *as a moral or ethical rule*. The very ambiguity of the short form can well explain the origin of the expanded form of the decree in the received text, whereas, if the received text be original, it becomes impossible to explain the origin of the Western version. From this we conclude, in the words of Lake, "that the argument on purely textual grounds is against the four-clause text, and in favour of the shorter form."⁵

(3) This inference is strengthened when we discover that

¹ Harnack, *op. cit.* p. 258 f.

² Lake, *O.Q.R.*, Jan. 1911, p. 356.

³ Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne.

⁴ Tertullian, *Apol.* 9; *De Monog.* 5; *De Jejun.* 4.

⁵ Lake, *Earlier Epp. of S. Paul*, p. 53.

the four-clause regulation of the received text is itself extremely difficult. It has always proved a puzzle to commentators and has never been satisfactorily explained. Hort, taking the received text for granted, despaired of a solution of the problem.¹ Rackham, whom we may take as typical of more recent commentators accepting the four-clause form, confesses that he is "startled to find joined with these purely ceremonial matters a fundamental moral command, abstinence from fornication," and embarks upon an unsatisfactory attempt to develop a close connexion between idolatry and fornication.² Moreover, the four-clause rule is tautologous. Not only are "things strangled" included in the prohibition of "blood," but both alike are implicitly included in the *εἰδωλοθῦτα*, if that word be taken in its narrower sense of "idol-meats."

(4) *The interpretation of the three-clause moral law, on the other hand, is self-consistent and harmonises with the context in a way that the four-clause food-law does not.* At the opening of the Council there had been some disputing (*ζητήσεως*, xv. 7), obviously on the part of the party who upheld the Mosaic law; but their contentions had been effectively silenced by St. Peter, who, recalling the Divine approval which had been manifested on the occasion of his own mission to Cornelius (Acts x. 44-48), rebukes those who were attempting to "put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear (xv. 10)." The Divine approval had been no less manifest in the case of the labours of St. Paul and St. Barnabas, as was shown by their own testimony (vs. 12). If there were any doubt that the *ζυγός* against which St. Peter protested consisted of the regulations of the Law in general, and not

¹ Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*, p. 73.

² Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 264 f. Cf. Harnack, *op. cit.* note p. 256.

the ordinance of circumcision in particular, it is put at rest by the whole tenour of the speech of St. James which followed. How is his judgment "that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God" (vs. 19) consistent with a regulation which enjoined the observance of a Judaic food-law? Where is the appropriateness of his remark, "For Moses from generations of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath (vs. 21)"? Can we conceive of the adoption of a decree imposing upon Gentile converts certain ceremonial requirements as "necessary things," after such a policy had been deprecated by the great Apostle of the Circumcision and the head of the Jerusalem Church? In short, the theory that the decision of the Council resulted in a compromise and that the decree was designed to establish a *modus vivendi* can be sustained only by doing violence to the tone of the recorded speeches and at the cost of the historicity of the entire narrative. The three-clause version of the decree, on the contrary, not only appears the natural and logical outcome of the liberal policy recommended by St. James, but also adds a special significance to the rejoicing of the Antiochene Christians when they had received the decree (vs. 31).

Mr. Jones, we feel, has failed to appreciate the cumulative weight of these various considerations, all of which point to the adoption of a moral, rather than a ceremonial or food, law, by the Council of Jerusalem. He avoids the difficulties of his own interpretation, however, not by directing his attack against the textual and exegetical phenomena upon which the Resch-Harnack theory is founded, but by adducing what he feels to be insuperable historical difficulties. It now becomes our task to examine these difficulties in order.

(1) *The Case of Timothy.* Mr. Jones considers it "un-

thinkable" that St. Paul would have circumcised Timothy after the Council had decided altogether in favour of Gentile liberty. But he fails to make it clear how the Pauline acceptance of the food-law would explain the circumcision of Timothy by St. Paul. In either case St. Paul had won the point as regards circumcision of Gentile converts. If St. Paul then circumcised Timothy he must have done it on entirely other grounds, without reference to the conciliar decree. These grounds are not far to seek. St. Luke is careful to explain that Timothy's mother was a Jewess (Acts xvi. 1). His father, according to the Western text, was no longer alive, and this might be inferred from the received text. 2 Timothy iii. 15 seems to imply that Timothy had been brought up with careful regard for the Jewish faith. His uncircumcision is explicable by the fact that his father would not have acquiesced in the (to him) degrading rite; and there was no synagogue in Lystra. Now for St. Paul, wishing to take Timothy with him, it became a point of great practical importance whether Timothy was to be regarded as a Gentile or a Jew. In the words of Dr. Hort, "As a private person it might not be necessary to decide whether Timothy was to count as a Jewish or as a Gentile convert; as a missionary he must in practice choose, and the choice could not be doubtful. If by the side of the Pharisee of Tarsus he stood as a Gentile convert on the strength of being uncircumcised, he would throw away every chance of influencing Jews without any corresponding gain of the Gentiles, for his true history would be known. Yet, if he went forth to preach as a Jew without circumcision, he would scandalise the Jews even more: he would be regarded as the thin edge of a Pauline wedge for casting a slight on circumcision for Jews no less than for Gentiles."¹ That the author of Galatians v. circumcised Timothy is

¹ Hort, *op. cit.* p. 86.

proof enough that he considered Timothy not a Gentile but a Jew. We may contrast the case of Titus (Gal. ii. 3) whom St. Paul apparently refused to circumcise, even under pressure (vs.5), the explanation being that Titus was a Greek.

Timothy then, being a Jew, did not come within the purview of the conciliar regulations at all; and it is quite as easy to explain his circumcision if those regulations concerned morality as it is if they concerned food.

(2) *The Question of Galatians* ii. 6. There is, on the face of it, some difficulty in harmonising the account of Acts xv. with St. Paul's statement in Galatians ii. 6 that James and Cephas and John *imparted nothing to him*, but when they saw the grace which was given him, simply designated him for the Gentile work (vs. 9) with the *proviso* that he should remember the poor (vs. 10). But we cannot agree with Mr. Jones that the difficulty is greater if the moral law text of the decree be preferred to the food-law text. Under the latter we have, it is true, a compromise; but a compromise is not necessarily "ambiguous," as Mr. Jones assumes. Where the principle of *quid pro quo* is adopted,¹ a well defined *quid* is exchanged for an equally tangible *quo*. In this case the provisions concerning "idol-meats, blood, things strangled, and fornication" are clear and definite to the point of redundancy. So clear and definite are they that it is difficult to see how St. Paul could ignore them and say that nothing was imparted to him—especially since the whole argument of Galatians is about ceremonial regulations and about nothing else. If, on the other hand, no ceremonial regulations were imposed, there was no need to mention moral requirements which had never been called in question, and St. Paul could very properly say that nothing was imparted to him. In other words, St. Paul had completely won his case. What more could Mr. Jones have expected

¹ P. 247.

the Apostle to say? One feels that Mr. Jones is misled by the dictionary definitions of the terms *compromise* and *victory*, and reasons deductively from them rather than from the data of the problem.

(3) *The position of Galatians under the Resch-Harnack theory.* In the first part of this section Mr. Jones urges that there would have been no occasion for St. Paul to write to the Galatians if the Council had determined in his favour. What he says under this head really falls under (5), the continued existence of the Judaistic controversy, and will be considered there. But some attention must be given to the strange actions of St. Peter as recorded in Galatians ii. 11 ff. Mr. Jones asks, "What justification can there be for his (i.e. St. Peter's) conduct if we believe that the Apostolic decrees had freed the Antiochene Christians from all restrictions whatsoever, and had deprived the Judaic party of every claim and demand upon them?" No justification whatever, if we can trust St. Paul, who resisted him to the face "because he stood condemned"! St. Peter had come to Antioch (vs. 11) and, under the influence of the spirit of freedom prevailing there, he and other Jewish Christians had eaten with Gentile Christians (vs. 12)—Gentile Christians, by the way, who obviously were not observing the food-law of our received text. All things went along blithely, it seems, until there appeared certain of the rigorous Judaic party from Jerusalem. St. Peter and his companions, knowing that their course would, if known, make them unpopular with the extreme party (whatever the decree of the Council), not only ceased eating with the Gentiles but pretended that they never had done so (vs. 13), and even began to join in the attempt to enforce the Law on the Gentiles (vs. 14). It was this that made St. Paul angry—so angry that he forgets even to finish the narrative of the episode. We have in the Gospels a classic instance of St.

Peter's sensitiveness to criticism, from whatever source (Mark xv. 66-72).

(4) *The Speech of St. James in Acts xxi. 18 ff.* Mr. Jones cannot understand the relevancy of St. James' reference to the decrees if they referred to the rudimentary principles of morality. The relevancy is perfectly clear if we realise, as Mr. Jones apparently does not, the exact nature of the charges brought against St. Paul to which St. James referred. The discussion was not "concerning his (i.e. St. Paul's) observance or non-observance of the provisions of the ceremonial law."¹ No one who knew the facts questioned St. Paul's own fidelity to the Law. The specific charge was that he was leading *Jews of the Diaspora* to forsake the Law, as is perfectly obvious from verse 21. This charge was totally false, and St. James recommends St. Paul to prove it so by assisting needy Jews to fulfil their Levitical vows. St. Paul had not been teaching *Jews* to forsake the Law, though he had been teaching *Gentiles* that they need not come under the Law. This, St. James goes on to say, is quite in accord with what had been decided. There is no irrelevancy about verse 25. A contrast is drawn between Jewish observance and Gentile non-observance. St. James then concludes: "All shall know that there is no truth in the things whereof they have been informed concerning thee [viz., that thou teachest all *the Jews who are among the Gentiles* to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children neither to walk after the customs (vs. 21)]; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, keeping the Law. But as touching *the Gentiles that have believed*, we wrote, giving judgment that they should keep themselves from idolatry, and from bloodshed, and from fornication" (vs. 24b, 25). There appears nothing irrelevant here. Can it be that Mr. Jones is serious when he urges that insistence

¹ P. 252.

upon the observance of an elementary code of morality could no longer be necessary after the lapse of more than seven years ? ¹

(5) *The Continued Existence of the Judaistic Controversy.* Underlying all Mr. Jones's objections to the Resch-Harnack interpretation of the decree, there seems to be the assumption that, if a definite decision in favour of Gentile freedom had been arrived at in the Council, the spectre of Judaic legalism would for ever have been laid to rest. Therefore, we must conclude that no definite decision in favour of one side or the other could have been reached. This reasoning would be valid in a world of mechanics ; how valid it is in a whirl of bitter theological prejudices now falls to be examined.

It may be that an historical analogy will help us. Supposing, for the time being, that only one record of the great Council of Nicaea had come down to us, and that record were of such doubtful textual purity as to render it uncertain whether a thoroughly Trinitarian formula had been adopted, or the uncertain compromising formula submitted by Eusebius of Caesarea had won the day—what conclusion would the historian of a later day arrive at as to the decision of the Council ? In the first place, he would observe that the decision of the Council, whatever it was, was accepted with remarkable equanimity by the Church generally. A few extremists were deposed and banished, to be sure ; but even in spite of this there was no absolute breach in the Church. In view of the excited state of feeling that prevailed at the time, the fact that there was no breach, but simply an extension of the controversy, would form strong evidence that the Council did not result in the actual

¹ Cf. 1 Pet. ii. 1 ; iv. 3 ; 2 Pet. ii. 9-14 ; Rev. ix. 20, 21 ; xvii. 3-6 ; xxi. 8 ; xxii. 15, and the numerous extra-canonical passages recorded by Resch, *op. cit.* pp. 108-24.

triumph of the one party or the other. This conclusion our hypothetical historian might feel to be corroborated by the fact that the debated word *ἁμοούσιος* seldom occurs in the writings of St. Athanasius, whose party was alleged to have won the day. To crown all, the historian would discover that the Arian controversy continued to lead a strong and healthy existence for fifty-six years. One Council overturned the acts of another until 381, and the defeated party continued to be active long after that date. If our historian worked out his conclusions along the lines used by Mr. Jones in discussing the persistence of the Judaistic controversy, he would be forced to the conclusion that the Nicene Council could not have decided altogether in favour of either of the contending parties.

But the truth is that the victory at Jerusalem, as at Nicaea, was snatched by a determined and energetic minority with the aid of half-convinced allies. At Nicæa the majority of the bishops were, like Eusebius of Caesarea, conservatives, who would have preferred to accept a compromise creed, but were prevented by the vigorous insistence of the Athanasian party. So, too, the Council of Jerusalem was dominated by conservatives—men who were driven by the logic of circumstances to concede to the demand for Gentile liberty. In both cases a reaction was inevitable. The plots and intrigues of the Arianising party after the Council of Nicaea remind us that the decision of Jerusalem had hardly been made and communicated to the Gentiles before the Judaising party set in motion schemes to subvert St. Paul's mission and unsettle the minds of his converts. In both cases the hatred of the malcontents was directed against the men who had stood in the way of compromise. St. Athanasius vindicated himself in his *Apologia contra Arianos* and *De Synodis*. The insidious attacks against St. Paul elicited that masterly series of Epistles to the Galatians,

Corinthians and Romans. In both cases moral grandeur and dignity in the end prevailed. St. Athanasius lived to see the final triumph of the Homoousion assured. St. Paul survived long enough to see the Judaistic controversy dwindle to insignificance.

One feels that there is a great deal of truth in Mr. Jones's criticism of those who take an exclusively hard and inflexible view of St. Paul's character. We gladly acquiesce in the insistence upon "the most precious elements of his character, his wonderful tenderness, his unflinching tactfulness, and his readiness to sacrifice so many of his own cherished ideas for the sake of peace and to promote the general welfare of the Church."¹ Yet it seems to us that in making this criticism Mr. Jones is attributing to the advocates of the Resch-Harnack theory a view of the great Apostle which they would be the first to repudiate. In fact, Mr. Jones himself seems to us to fall unwittingly into this very error in his discussion of the circumcision of Timothy. We quote his words. "If the Apostolic Council ended in a complete triumph of the Antiochene party, the circumcision of Timothy by St. Paul, after the Council, becomes *absolutely unthinkable*."² And again, "the event is nothing less than an anti-climax and it is impossible to imagine the Apostle being capable of such weakness or St. Luke recording it." Is this the gracious, gentle, magnanimous St. Paul for whom Mr. Jones pleads? Is this the same St. Paul who "was not above making an effort to conciliate opponents when the interests of peace and of the Church demanded it?"³ In the case of Timothy, if ever, the Apostle would have the opportunity to illustrate his policy, as described by himself in 1 Corinthians ix. 20-22. But Mr. Jones has deprived us of the privilege of appropriating this side of St. Paul's character at all.

¹ P. 254.² P. 249.³ P. 255.

We cannot agree with Mr. Jones that no deep question of principle was concerned in the decree. The Council was confronted with two alternatives. Must the Gentile, in order to become a Christian, observe the requirements of the Jewish Law, or would it suffice for him to observe the requirements of a fundamental morality? The Council decided once and for all in favour of Gentile liberty. Where this principle was called in question, as it had been by the Judaising envoys to the Galatians, St. Paul could be stern and severe (cf. Galatians v.). But where the same principle was abused, as it had been by the party of *γυνῶσις* at Corinth, there emerged the tactful, conciliatory St. Paul to whom the harmony of Christians was before all things. This, it seems to us, is the true explanation of the apparently changed tone of 1 Corinthians as compared with Galatians. On the other hand, the Council had also promulgated a specific moral decree forbidding forms of sin which were only too common in the Gentile world, but which were inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity. The burden of enforcing its provisions fell largely upon the shoulders of St. Paul; and, when we discover in his Epistles numerous passages in which he strongly insists upon moral requirements,¹ we are surely justified in believing that they are reminiscent of the decree.

In conclusion, we believe it has been shown that the foregoing objections to the Resch-Harnack theory will not stand the test of a critical examination, and that the three-clause version of the Apostolic decree not only satisfies the conditions laid down by Professor Kirsopp Lake,² but furnishes the key to what has hitherto been an insoluble difficulty in the criticism of the Acts. If, in reconstructing the history of

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 3-6; Gal. v. 19-21; 1 Cor. v. 11; vi. 9-11; 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21; Rom. xiii. 13; Col. iii. 5-9; Eph. v. 3-5.

² *C.Q.R.*, Jan., 1911, p. 358.

82 THE QUESTION OF THE APOSTOLIC DECREE

Apostolic Christianity on the basis of this interpretation of Acts xv., "whole libraries of commentaries and investigations" are closed "as documents of the history of a gigantic error," surely we can joyfully accept the result without being ungrateful to those who have laboured for it in the past.

E. H. ECKEL and S. A. DEVAN.