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## ART. II.—THE TRUE READING AND IMPORT OF ACTS XV. 23.

Οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν ἀδελφοῖς τοῖς ἐξ ἐθνῶν, χαίρειν.

The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.—A.V.

Οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί, κ.τ.λ.

The apostles and the elder brethren unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting.—R.V.

## 1. PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE INQUIRY.

THERE is a general agreement among English Churchmen that the time has come when their Church, without severing her connection with the State, ought to possess a certain legislative independence. It is felt that some Church assembly or assemblies should have power to make laws for regulating her affairs, subject only to the supremacy of the Crown and the veto of Parliament, if the proposed ecclesiastical measure would be detrimental to the interests of the nation at large. In view of the attempt which undoubtedly will soon be made to obtain for our Church this amount of autonomy, it is of importance to consider what should be the constitution of her legislature. Ought the laity to have a place in it? If so, ought they, as in the Church of Ireland, the self-governing Colonial Churches, and the Church of Japan, to have, as an order, an equal vote and veto with the Bench of Bishops and the clerical order in all matters, including those of discipline and doctrine? Or ought their legislative functions, if they are allowed any at all, to be strictly limited?

The proceedings of the first Council at Jerusalem, of which an account is given by St. Luke in Acts xv., have an important bearing on this question. It was summoned to decide upon a vital point of doctrine and discipline—the truth, namely, or the reverse, of the propositions enunciated by the Judaizing Christians in the infant Gentile Church at Antioch, and in Jerusalem itself, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved;” “It is needful to circumcise [the Gentile converts] and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.” It is quite clear that the laity concurred in the decision which was arrived at upon the matter in dispute; for we are told in verse 22 that it pleased (or it seemed good to) the apostles and elders *with the whole Church* to choose Judas and Silas, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas as the bearers of the decree of the Council. But were the laity actually named in the decree itself as parties to it? The answer to this question is, unfortunately, not free from doubt, and depends on the solution of the problem, What

is the true reading of ver. 23, the variants of which are given at the head of the present remarks.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE ADMITTED FACTS.

In order to form an opinion upon this disputed point, let us first examine the facts in connection with it as to which no doubt is raised.

The institution of the second order of the Christian ministry, the *πρεσβύτεροι*, or elders, is not, like that of the deacons, expressly mentioned. We are not informed when the first were ordained in Jerusalem. The earliest allusion to them is in Acts xi. 30, where we are told that the alms collected at Antioch for the relief of the Christians at Jerusalem was sent to the elders, and not, as we might have expected, to the deacons. The second mention of them is equally incidental, and occurs in chap. xiv. 23, where we learn that Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in the Churches of, apparently, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and the Pisidian Antioch. We then read that they sailed to Antioch in Syria, and there (chap. xv. 1) were confronted with the Judaizers already mentioned, who were teaching "the brethren" (*τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς*) their reactionary doctrine. Ver. 2: After much controversy, they (the brethren) determined that Paul and Barnabas, with some others of their body, should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders (*πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους*) about this question. Ver. 3: The envoys were brought on their way by the Church (*ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας*), and passed through Phenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles, and causing great joy to all the brethren (*πᾶσι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς*). Ver. 4: And when they came to Jerusalem they were received by the Church, and the apostles, and elders (*ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων*), and declared what God had done with them. Ver. 5: But here, too, they were met by Judaizers, who insisted on the necessity of circumcising the Gentile converts, and enjoining observance of the law of Moses. Ver. 6: So the apostles and elders (*οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι*) came together to consider the matter. Vers. 7-11: And after much disputing, Peter rose and gave his voice for liberty in a speech beginning: "Men and brethren" (*Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί*). Ver. 12: And the whole multitude (*πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος*) kept silence and listened to Paul and Barnabas declaring the signs and wonders which God had wrought by them among the Gentiles. Vers. 13-21: After this James gave his judgment against troubling the Gentile converts.

<sup>1</sup> We need not consider the other reading of the verse, which omits *ἀδελφοί*, since the authority for it is insignificant.

Ver. 22 : Then it seemed good to the apostles and elders, with the whole Church (ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) to choose out, and send men from them (ἐκλεξαμένους ἄνδρας ἐξ αὐτῶν πέμψαι) to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas and Silas, chief men among the brethren (ἄνδρας ἡγουμένους ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς). Ver. 23 : Writing (γράψαντες) thus, by their hand—then follows the disputed heading of the decree, which proceeds : (ver. 24) : “ Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us (τινὲς ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξεληθόντες) have troubled you,” etc. Ver. 25 : “ It seemed good to us, having come to one accord (ἔδοξεν ἡμῖν γενομένων ὁμοθυμαδόν), to choose out and send to you men with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,” etc. And we are told in chap. xvi. 4, that as Paul and Silas went through the cities (Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium, etc.) they delivered to them, to keep, the decrees adjudged by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem (ὑπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ).

### 3. EVIDENCE OF THE MSS., VERSIONS AND FATHERS.

Having now before us the material circumstances in connection with the question, let us proceed to examine the external authorities upon the reading of the passage. The evidence of the MSS. and Versions may be thus tabulated :

#### EARLY MSS.

| <i>In favour of οἱ πρεσβ. καὶ οἱ ἀδ.</i> | <i>In favour of οἱ πρεσβ. ἀδ.</i>   |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Cod. Sin. (by a later corrector).        | Cod. Sin. (fourth century).         |
| Cod. Laudian. (seventh century).         | Cod. Alexandr. (fifth century).     |
| Cod. Mutin. (ninth century).             | Cod. Vatican. (fourth century).     |
| Cod. Angelic. Rom. (ninth century).      | Cod. Ephrām. (fifth century).       |
| Cod. Prophyrian. (ninth century).        | Cod. Bez. (sixth century).          |
| A large preponderance of cursive MSS.    | Cod. Londin., Tischendorf.          |
|  | Cod. Colbertin. (eleventh century). |

#### VERSIONS.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Peshito-Syriac (second century).               | Vulgate (“seniores fratres”).              |
| Philoxenian Syriac (fifth century).            | Armenian (fifth century) ; Usan’s edition. |
| ” Coptic (fourth century ?).                   |  |
| ” Armenian (fifth century) ; Zohrab’s edition. |  |
| ” Æthiopic (fourth century) ; both editions.   |  |

It will be noticed that while the testimony of the early extant MSS. is against the words καὶ οἱ having been written in the original of the Acts, the testimony of the early Versions, which must have been translated from yet earlier MSS., is in

their favour. The Patristic evidence which we possess on the subject is equally indecisive. In the Apostolic Constitutions καὶ οἱ is inserted in quoting ver. 23, and καὶ τῶ ἐπισκόπῳ Ἰακώβῳ is inserted after ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις in quoting ver. 22. But in the Latin translations which have come down to us of Irenæus (Contra Hæres., iii. 4) and of Athanasius (De Trinit. et Spir. Sanct., 21) the opening words of the decree are given as Apostoli et Presbyteri fratres. Similarly, Pacian (Paræn. ad Pœnitent., 4), at the close of the fifth century, mentions the decree as commencing with the same words. Origen's reference to it (Contra Cels., Lib. viii., p. 396) is too inaccurate to be of any real value in the inquiry. For he says: ἔδοξε τοῖς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀποστόλοις καὶ τοῖς ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ συναχθεῖσιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πρεσβυτέροις καὶ, ὡς αὐτοὶ οὗτοι ὠνόμασαν, τῷ ἀγίῳ πνεύματι γράψαι, κ.τ.λ. Nor does Chrysostom throw any light on the point, since in his Homily on the passage he omits all reference to the presbyters as well as to the brethren. His words are: Τότε ἔδοξε τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, φησὶν, ἀνδρας ἡγουμένους ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς πέμψαι.

#### 4. INFERENCE FROM THE ACTUAL WORDS.

In this conflict of external evidence we are driven to weigh carefully the internal evidence in favour of the alternative readings. There can be no doubt that if οἱ πρεσβ. ἀδ. is the true reading, it is a ἀπαξ λεγόμενον of a very remarkable character. The word πρεσβύτερος is found in the New Testament sixty-six times, or, if we include the feminine form, sixty-seven times. In twenty-eight of these passages it clearly refers to a distinct order in the Jewish Church, and in sixteen (without counting the present passage) to the second order of the ministry in the Christian Church; while in the twelve passages in which it occurs in the Apocalypse it denotes a symbolical order of twenty-four individuals in the heavenly Church. In four other places it means the men of old time; and there are only six or (if we include the present passage) seven places in which the word can possibly have an adjectival sense; and even in some of these it is a question whether it is not used in its more common technical sense. Among the whole sixty-seven instances of its occurrence there is, apart from the present passage, only one in which it is used to qualify a substantive, namely, in the parable of the Prodigal Son where the father's other son is styled ὁ υἱὸς ὁ πρεσβύτερος (Luke xv. 25). If we refer to the LXX. we find a similar usage. The word is mostly employed substantively; but where it is used merely as a qualifying adjective it is *never* once inserted between the article and the noun; but always,

as in Luke xv. 25, follows the noun, being preceded by a repetition of the article (compare Gen. xxiv. 2; xxvii. 1, 15, 42; Job i. 13, 18; Ezek. xvi. 45; xxiii. 4).<sup>1</sup> If, therefore, *καὶ οἱ* was not in the original of the decree, we should have expected, from a grammatical point of view, *οἱ ἀδελφοὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι*, and not *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί*.

But the expression is equally strange when we consider it in reference to the word *ἀδελφοί*. That word is continually used in the Acts and Epistles in the sense of Christians, in accordance with our Lord's own declaration, "All ye are brethren" (Matt. xxiii. 8). But it is nowhere else so used with a qualifying adjective to denote an official class or order of Christians. *Οἱ ἀπόστολοι ἀδελφοί* and, but for this one possible exception, *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί*, would be inconceivable forms of speech to denote the Christians of the apostolate and the Christians of the presbyterate. The words of the angel in Rev. xxii. 9, *εἰμὶ . . . τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν, καὶ τῶν τηρούντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου*, are not analogous; for the brotherhood there referred to is either that which exists between prophet and prophet, or that which subsists between all the servants of God, and is certainly not that between Christian man and Christian man. Similarly, when a clergyman nowadays talks of his clerical brethren or a layman of his lay brethren, it is not the common Christian brotherhood which is signified, but the relationship subsisting between men of the same order. Of course, too, the use of the words *ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί*, in addressing an audience, like our "gentlemen," has no bearing on the point; they were employed in speaking to Jews as well as to Christians. Some have suggested that the commencement of the decree without *καὶ οἱ*, means "the apostles and the presbyters, brethren." This, however, is clearly untenable, and if those two words had originally no place in the decree, we are driven to the conclusion that it contains an expression which has no parallel elsewhere in Christian literature, and had already become obsolete before St. Luke wrote the Acts. But, if this was so, we can hardly avoid the further conclusion that the expression represents a state of things which had also passed away before that time.

##### 5. INFERENCE FROM THE REST OF THE DECREE.

The language of the rest of the decree appears to harmonize better with the assumption that the promulgators of it are

<sup>1</sup> This assertion, of course, does not apply to such passages as Gen. xxiv. 1, *καὶ Ἀβραάμ ἦν πρεσβύτερος*, where the word forms part of the predicate. Its use in these passages has no bearing upon the present discussion.

the whole Church than that it is put forth by the apostles and elders. "Certain men," the decree says, "have gone forth from us." It is nowhere hinted, and it is very unlikely, that the Judaizing teachers were either apostles or presbyters. The "us," therefore, is probably the whole Church. Again, "It seemed good unto us, having come to one accord, to choose out," etc. What the decree here states as having seemed good to the promulgators of it, is precisely what is stated by St. Luke a few verses before to have seemed good to the apostles and elders with the whole Church. Further, the decree mentions their having come to one accord (R.V.). Undoubtedly the accord in the matter was come to by the whole Church. If the apostles and elders alone promulgated the decree, so that the "we" in it did not include the whole Church, would they not have expressly mentioned the fact that the Church concurred with them in the decision?

#### 6. INFERENCE FROM THE CONTEXT.

The context does not lead us to take a different view. No doubt St. Luke tells us that the Gentile Churches desired to obtain the opinion of the apostles and presbyters at Jerusalem upon the question which the Judaizers had raised, and in chap. xvi. 4 he refers to the decree as the judgment of those apostles and presbyters. But this does not negative the concurrence in it of the lay members of the Church. In fact, while in the verse just quoted the resolutions of the decree—the *δόγματα*—are ascribed to the apostles and presbyters, it is expressly stated in chap. xv. 22 that they were resolved by (*ἔδοξε*) the apostles and presbyters, *with the whole Church*. It would be of supreme importance if we could determine to whom the Greek word in ver. 23, which we translate "and they wrote," refers. But it is an unattached participle, which cannot, in strict grammar, be connected with any of the foregoing nouns. It appears, however, on the whole, to be more natural to refer to it all the three, *ἀπόστολοι, πρεσβύτεροι*, and also *ἐκκλησία*. Those who would confine it to the first two must justify the limitation by some other consideration. Taken by itself, the form points to *ἐκκλησία* being included.

It is noticeable that in chap. xv. 6 it is only stated that the apostles and presbyters came together to consider the matter. That the laity, however, were present when the discussion took place is clear, not only from the concurrence of the whole Church in the resolutions arrived at (ver. 22), but also from the mention of the whole multitude (*πᾶν τὸ πλῆθος*)—see ver. 12). That this expression must refer to the whole Church, and cannot be confined to the whole body of the presbyters, is clear from its use elsewhere in the Acts.

## 7. INFERENCE FROM CONTEMPORANEOUS PRACTICE.

The view that the laity at this time were consulted and took part in the formal proceedings of the Church is corroborated by other details which are recorded in the Acts and elsewhere. The whole Church (*τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν*) was consulted as to the first appointment of deacons (chap. vi.). The whole Church (*οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί*) deliberated upon St. Peter's conduct in baptizing and eating with the uncircumcised household of Cornelius (chap. xi. 1-18). It may be said that these instances occurred before any presbyters were appointed. But from chap. xxi. 18-24, it appears that long afterwards the general body of the laity, as distinguished from the elders, considered themselves entitled to call St. Paul to account for his conduct and teaching among the Gentiles whom he had visited in his missionary journeys. He first had an interview with St. James and "all the elders," but was distinctly told that this interview would not satisfy the many myriads of Jewish believers, who were all zealous for the law. According to some MSS. the multitude (*πλῆθος*) of these was certain to come together upon the question. But it is clear that the elders did not feel able of their own authority to pass upon St. Paul a sentence of acquittal and approval which would bind the entire Church.

The evidence of the Epistles points in the same direction. In 1 Cor. v. 3-5 St. Paul directs the whole Corinthian Church to inflict discipline on the incestuous person. Archbishop Benson in his posthumous work on Cyprian (pp. 427-431) has reminded us that this practice survived even into the third century. It is true that he treats the words *καὶ οἱ* as an early intrusion into Acts xv. 23; but he regards their interpolation as showing that, when they were added, it did not seem impossible that, as the laity had been clearly consulted even by apostles, so they should join with them and with the presbyters in a formal decree. He proceeds to mention a grave decision on the question of keeping Easter, written by Irenæus in the name of the brethren over whom he presided in Gaul, and the formal condemnation of Montanism by "the faithful throughout Asia." And he adds that "Origen, in a passage which would not be conclusive if it stood alone, uses an expression which, side by side with others, hints that the consultation of the laity by the bishops, though disused in his day, had its place in the traditions of the past as well as in reason." Cyprian, therefore, was acting in accordance with ancient precedent when, in the earlier years of his episcopate, he consulted the laity on the terms of communion to be



imposed on those who had lapsed from Christianity to heathenism.<sup>1</sup>

#### 8. CONCLUSION.

Our foregoing examination of the question may not enable us to arrive at an absolute decision as to the original wording of Acts xv. 23, but it will assist us to appreciate the grounds for adopting or rejecting the two alternatives, and to realize the small practical importance of the question which of them is in fact the true reading. We cannot expect to find in the infant Church, any more than in a primitive political community, a fully developed and completely organized legislative body. The assemblies of the Churches in Apostolic times, like the meetings, or motes, of the Teutonic tribes at the same period, were doubtless frequented by those who happened to be on the spot and were at leisure or disposed to be present; and their attendance was reckoned as that of the whole body. Nor need we wonder if it appeared a matter of indifference whether the resolutions of those ancient assemblies went forth in the name of the whole assembled body or of its president or more important members. The fact that some of our early Acts of Parliament purport to be issued by the authority of the King alone, or of the King and the Lords, is not inconsistent with their having been duly enacted with the consent of both Lords and Commons. As regards the case under consideration, we may assume that when St. Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles, he had in his hands a correct copy of the actual decree of the Council. With this copy before him, he tells us that Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and elders upon the subject on which it was made, and afterwards refers to the decree as that of the apostles and elders. But he also tells us that the decree was resolved on by them "with the whole Church." If, then, his copy contained the *καὶ οἱ*, it follows that (a) the wording of the decree itself accounts for St. Luke's statement that the whole Church assented to the decree; and (b) his subsequent allusion to it as the decree of the apostles and elders must be explained either by his considering them the important

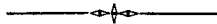
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<sup>1</sup> It is true that, subsequently, on the question of admitting to communion persons who had been schismatically baptized, Cyprian left the laity unconsulted. But, as the Archbishop points out, the alteration was not for the better. "'The contrast' (it is said) 'is very striking.' That is most true. Cyprian's first view disappeared from his mind. His early pledge was not redeemed. But when we look to the ennobling success of his former councils, and the collapse of the later ones, rescued only by the sweet grandeur of the man from creating wide diunion, we cannot but think the change disastrous. The course of history affirms this conclusion of Christian reason."

parties to it, or else by his having known *aliunde* that the Church at Antioch had in the first instance desired the opinion of the apostles and elders, and that the Gentile Churches treated the decree on receiving it as their opinion; and (c) the subsequent omission of *καὶ οἱ* in some MSS. must be ascribed to an accidental and pardonable error of a copyist, since no one could have deliberately altered an intelligible phrase into such an awkward and abnormal expression as *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί*.

If, on the other hand, the original decree had *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί*, then it follows that (a) St. Luke knew *aliunde* that the whole Church, though not named in the decree, had assented to it; and (b) *οἱ πρ. ἀ.* was, at the date of the Council, the accurate designation of the body of men who, by the time when St. Luke wrote the Acts (twelve or more years after the Council), had come to be called *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι*, and were then, or afterwards became, the second order in the Christian ministry; and (c) *καὶ οἱ* cannot afterwards have been inserted by accident, but must have been introduced deliberately, either to make the wording of the decree harmonize with the statement that the whole Church assented to it, or else to get rid of an expression which had become obsolete and unintelligible. If we accept the former hypothesis, the decree itself corroborates the conclusion which we draw from ver. 22, that at the date of the Council of Jerusalem the Church was considered as consisting, for legislative purposes, of three orders, and that the consent of the third order, that of the laity, was asked and given upon all subjects. If, on the other hand, we prefer the second hypothesis, the inference is forced upon us that, at the time when the Council was held, the presbyters had not crystallized into a separate order. But the statement in ver. 22 will remain unshaken, and will, of itself, prove that in the first recorded Council of the Church the opinion not only of the elder brethren, but of the whole body of the laity, was taken upon a solemn question of doctrine and discipline.

PHILIP VERNON SMITH.



### ART. III.—MY OLD PARISH REGISTERS.

I ALMOST love my old registers, they seem to talk to one of such strange times and strange people. I often wonder how many sheep it has taken to make all the musty, fusty, greasy leaves of parchment which make up the aged books. And one wonders who dressed the old skins and tied