

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:



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



<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for the *Journal of Theological Studies* (old series) can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jts-os_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[1st page of article]

the Epistle that first led me to think of Hippolytus as its author. That it is composed with more attention to literary form than is usual in his writings may be due in part to the fact of its being a letter, and addressed to a cultured pagan. In regard to our Epistle the late Abbot Chapman has said: 'The writer is a practised master of classical eloquence, and a fervent Christian. There is no resemblance to the public apologies of the second century. A closer affinity is with the "Ad Donatum" of St Cyprian, which is similarly addressed to an inquiring pagan.'¹ This analogy is very pertinent to our present enquiry. In the matter of style there is no more difficulty (so it seems to me) in accepting Hippolytus as the author of the *ad Diognetum* than there is in accepting St Cyprian as the author of the *ad Donatum*. The latter treatise is quite as far removed from the ecclesiastical style of St Cyprian as the former is from that of Hippolytus; and the difference in each case may be traced to the same cause.

R. H. CONNOLLY.

A NEGATIVE GOLDEN RULE IN THE SYRIAC ACTS OF THOMAS

IN the JOURNAL for October 1934 (xxxv 351) I pointed out that the negative Golden Rule which occurs in Jewish Aramaic in a famous saying attributed to Rabbi Hillel was widely current in Syriac in the same concise form; also that it is given by Aphraates and Philoxenus in connexion with the commandments quoted by our Lord to the rich man in the Gospel, and that Philoxenus cites it four times as if it were actually part of the Gospel text.

I can now add that the negative Rule in something very like the same form had a place also in the early Syriac *Acts of Judas Thomas*, though it does not appear in the text edited by Dr Wright from a MS of the tenth century. In what follows I assume with Nöldeke, Burkitt, and others that these *Acts* were written in Syriac, or at least that the Greek which we have is a translation from the Syriac. In chap. 83 of the Greek as contained in the Roman MS U we read:—

ταύτην δὲ τὴν ἐντολὴν εἰλήφαμεν παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου, ἵνα ὃ οὐκ ἀρέσκει ἡμῖν ὑπὸ ἄλλου γινόμενον, τοῦτο ἄλλω τινὶ μὴ ποιῶμεν (sic).²

At the corresponding place in Wright's edition of the Syriac there is nothing equivalent to this. I give the context from his translation. The Apostle Judas Thomas says in the course of a discourse to the multitudes:—

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. v, article 'Diognetus, Epistle to'.

² M. Bonnet *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, 1898, p. 199 ll. 20-24. This passage is not included in the collection of texts given by G. Resch in *Das Aposteldecret* p. 133 ff (*Texte u. Unters.* NF. xiii 3, 1905).

'For we are not commanded to do anything which we are unable to do, nor to take up heavy burdens, nor to build buildings, . . . nor to practise the art of hewing stones, . . . ; *but* (we are commanded to do) *something which we can do*,—to refrain from fornication . . . from murder . . . from theft', &c.¹

The words in brackets are not in the Syriac; those which I have italicized stand where the negative Golden Rule comes in the Greek. On the assumption that the Syriac is primary, the natural inference here would be that the Rule in the Greek is a gratuitous insertion. But any such inference proves to be wrong. In 1904 Mrs Lewis published² some Syriac fragments of these *Acts* from a palimpsest at Mount Sinai which is some four or five hundred years older than the MS used by Dr Wright, and in place of the italicized words above the palimpsest (i.e. its underwriting), as read by Mrs Lewis, has the following (fol. 164 b, col. 1):—

ܐܘܢܘܢܐ	ܕܠܐ
ܕܠܐ	ܕܠܐ
ܕܠܐ	ܕܠܐ
****	ܕܠܐ
	ܕܠܐ

That is: 'But we have been commanded | that which [*then an unintelligible word*] | to any (man) . . . not | we should do.'

Before considering how this imperfect text may be restored, I would remark that what is already before us is enough to indicate that the Syriac here stands in close relation to the Greek which we have found at the same point. In other words, the full sentence of the Syriac was doubtless the basis of the Greek, though more tersely formulated, being a form of the negative Golden Rule not far removed from that found in Aphraates and Philoxenus, which runs thus: 'That which unto thee is hateful, to thy comrade³ thou shalt not do.' We may now consider Mrs Lewis's reading of the palimpsest.

The second word of the first line is the verb 'we have been commanded'. For this the Greek has ἐντολὴν εἰλήφαμεν, which certainly translates the Syriac verb, since a few lines before we have εἰλήφαμεν ἐντολὴν for the same verb.

Answering to the second line the Greek has ἴνα ὁ οὐκ ἀρέσκει ἡμῖν.

¹ *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, ii pp. 219-220; in the text, i p. 253.

² As an Appendix to her *Horae Semiticae* No. III. The Introduction and translations are in No. IV. The shorter collection of fragments from the same MS, which were edited in 1900 by F. C. Burkitt as Appendix vii to Mrs Lewis's *Studia Sinaitica* No. IX, does not contain this part of the *Acts*.

³ The word *habhrā* means 'fellow' (-man, &c.). I purposely avoid 'neighbour', for which Syriac commonly uses other words.

The relative δ represents ܕܘܕܗܘܢ , which means 'that which' or 'anything' (*quod* or *quid*) as the context may require. But after 'we have been commanded' the particle ܕ , 'that' (= *iva* of the Greek), is expected; and as the beginning of ܕܘܕܗܘܢ is bracketed as not clearly read I have little hesitation in restoring ܕܘܕܗܘܢ , 'that that which'.

The second word in line 2, ܕܘܕܗܘܢ , bears no meaning which would make it possible in the present context, and it was surely a mistake to print it at all. In her Introduction (p. xi) Mrs Lewis has a note in which she says that she is 'somewhat doubtful' about this word, and adds: 'The three final letters may be seen in my photograph, but there is a possibility that the word ought to be ܕܘܕܗܘܢ .' That would be either *haubā*, 'debt', or *hubbā*, 'love', but it is difficult to see how either word could be fitted into this context: the latter part of the line should express in one or two words what it is that we are not to do to others. After reading the note I am left with the impression that all but possibly the last letter of the word is really quite uncertain. It will be observed also that the line as it stands is a very short one, of only seven letters, and unless a word of three or four letters has quite disappeared from the middle of it there is no evident reason why the short word at the beginning of the next line should not have been written at the end of line 2: when such short lines occur it is usually because a following word is too long to be included, which is not the case here. There is reason, therefore, to suspect that line 2 originally had *three* short words.

In a case of such uncertainty we may legitimately turn for help to the Greek and to the form of negative Golden Rule given by Aphraates and others. The latter begins ܕܘܕܗܘܢ ܕܘܕܗܘܢ , 'that which unto thee is hateful', and of this the Greek in the *Acta Thomae*, δ οὐκ ἀρέσκει ἡμῖν (with change only of 2nd pers. sing. to 1st pers. plur.), would be a very good rendering, since the passive participle ܕܘܕܗܘܢ (*sēnē*), lit. 'hated' or 'hateful', has here no stronger meaning than 'displeasing'.¹ Moreover, οὐκ ἀρέσκει, for the usual μὴ θέλεις, is not found to my knowledge in any other Greek text of the negative Golden Rule, and so would hardly have suggested itself unless the translator were attempting to render some Syriac phrase before him. But again, both in Wright's text and in the Sinai MS the phrase 'that (or anything) which is hateful' (ܕܘܕܗܘܢ ܕܘܕܗܘܢ) actually occurs farther on in the same discourse, where the Apostle says of the virtue of temperance

¹ The word has many shades of meaning, from odious, hideous, to merely disagreeable or amiss; e.g. it renders ἀτοπον in Lk. xxiii 41, and both κακόν and ἄτοπον in Acts xxviii 5, 6, where 'no harm', 'nothing amiss', came to St Paul from the viper's bite.

that it ever sits in tranquillity, *because* it does not do 'anything that is hateful'.¹ That appears to mean that temperance is always at peace because it does nothing displeasing to others which would provoke them to opposition; and, if that be the sense, it is natural to regard the words as a reference back to the negative Golden Rule already given.

Subject to correction, therefore, from any one who will give me assurance that I am wrong, I venture to suggest as probable the following restoration of line 2 above:—

ܘܢܗܘܝܢ ܗܘܢܝܢ (ܘܢܗܘܝܢ) ܘܢܗܘܝܢ ܘܢܗܘܝܢ

'That that which to (or unto) us is hateful. . . .'

In line 3 the print indicates that the middle word is quite illegible. The line begins with 'to any (man)' and ends with 'not'. The corresponding Greek is ἄλλῳ τινὶ μὴ, which shews that the Syriac word to be supplied is in all likelihood ܘܢܗܘܝܢ, 'other'. The expression ܘܢܗܘܝܢ ܘܢܗܘܝܢ, 'to any *comrade-of-ours*', would be possible as Syriac, and would give us the word found in Aphraates, &c.; but it is safer here to follow the Greek.

I believe, therefore, that the original Syriac of the *Acta Thomae* at this point was very nearly as follows:—

'But we have been commanded *that* that which *to us is hateful*, to any *other* we should not do.'

The Greek translator has enlarged this merely by inserting, for clearer formulation, the words ὑπὸ ἄλλον γινόμενον, τοῦτο after ὃ οὐκ ἀρέσκει ἡμῖν.

I suggested in the former note that Aphraates and Philoxenus, who quote the negative Golden Rule at the end of the commandments recited by our Lord to the rich man, may have found it there in the Diatessaron; and it will be seen that in the *Acta Thomae* also it is connected with warnings against adultery, murder, theft, and other vices. The late Professor Burkitt has shewn, I think, that the Syriac of these *Acts* implies acquaintance with the Separate Gospels; still, it would be strange if the author was not also familiar with the Diatessaron, which until the first quarter of the fifth century enjoyed so wide a popularity. But in any case I did not press my suggestion about the Diatessaron, and I am not adducing the *Acta Thomae* in support of it now. The Golden Rule in a negative form is a moral axiom of sufficient historical interest to justify a note which merely points to another example of its use in early Christian literature. It is pre-Christian in origin (Tob. iv 15), and even after our Lord had intensified its force by giving it a positive form it is the earlier saying, in one shape or another, which meets us time after time in Christian writings, from the 'Western' text of Acts to St Benedict's *Rule*, and after.

R. H. CONNOLLY.

¹ The Greek renders here: οὐδὲν γὰρ παράτοπον διαπράττειται.