Perceptions of Sacred Hamburgers
Alternation Processes Regarding Food Restrictions in the Apostolic Decree and the Clashes of Symbolic Universes

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VT 2013

Teologi: Examensarbete för kandidatexamen
TEOK51, 15 hp
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ABSTRACT

The Apostle meeting in Jerusalem is an important event that leads to the Apostle Decree, condensing all rules into four main ones, in order to include the Gentiles. Regarding food restrictions in the Decree, what could have started a Gentile alternation of their old symbolic universe, in order to internalize a new plausibility structure? The focus seems to have been to describe in what way the Gentiles reacted on different sets of rules, thus disregarding the Jewish faction of Jesus-believers that created them. I will assume another way around perspective, that it made a bigger impact on the Jewish context creating rules in order to include the Gentiles, than for the Gentiles actually following them. The Decree is in itself an implication of an alternation from first century Judaism, which was exclusive, to a more inclusive approach. If Gentile inclusion were seen, due to the will of God, as a natural extension of the Jesus-believing Jews, then they would have no choice regarding an alternation of their symbolic universe. It is then not a matter of if, but how such an inclusion would come to be, thus the Jews were forced to manage the threat of outsiders entering the group.
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1. Introduction

1.1. Aim and Problem
In Gal 2:11–14 there is a conflict between the views of Paul and James, between two different conceptions on reality. Paul accused Peter (Cephas) of hypocrisy, blaming him for suddenly changing his mind regarding dining as equals with Gentiles, from a positive to a negative stance. When facing James’ higher authority, Peter suddenly changed his mind, thus accused being a turncoat. E. P. Sanders presumes the motive to be a smart pragmatic move “in order to win the Jews.” Even though Paul and James based their views on the same set of rules articulated in the Apostolic Decree, instituted during the Apostolic council in Jerusalem, their conclusions on what the rules actually meant and how to act upon them strongly differed. They would certainly have shared the same “symbolic universe”, being Jesus-believing Jews, but they had apparently different interpretations of the same agreement. M. Zetterholm’s opinion on the different accounts on the same council is informative: “the new situation needs halakhic clarification”.

However, I do not think that the two antagonists themselves would have believed a clarification to be necessary, because despite a “halakhic clarification” they still would have interpreted the rules differently. Both being a part of a Jewish context, a Jewish symbolic universe they both expected the other one to be on the same page so to speak. They would have shared a pool of knowledge, believed to be common sense with regard to, e.g. routines, norms and values, taken for granted by Jewish people. The Jewish context was a part of the larger Roman context continuously interacting with each other, but each with their own separate conception and perception on reality, i.e. their separate symbolic universes. The clash between the apostles can be seen as “a new orientation within the same symbolic universe.” I would however like to focus on what happens if two different symbolic universes clash, in this case regarding the Apostolic Decree and

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1 E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 177.
the consequences of it. Recent studies have shown that the older view regarding Paul creation of a “tertium genus” to avoid conflicts within the Jesus-believing group is in itself problematic, because it disregards from the fact that all people and all the members must have interacted with each other regardless of faith or ethnicity, due to practical necessity.

Paul is thought to have toned down the differences between Jews and Gentiles, which would have lead to the occurrence of a “third group,” embodying Jesus-believing Jews and Gentiles. It seem to be a over-simplified description of a problematic issue, that two groups, over night, would abandon their traditions to create a new group, without any difficulties. When people meet, despite of differences, social interaction is unavoidable regardless of faith, ethnicity or rules against it. Of course there may be, for scholars unknown, decrees or rules yet to be discovered, concerning an actual creation of a third genus, but it could never have been implemented over night. It takes time for the mind to achieve coherence when processing new rules and norms and this factor—time—is one that the theory of the “third genus” does not take into account and thus neglecting the presence of a gradual social interaction. Being social beings, humans create their identity as a process of social interaction and not by decrees.

The Jesus-believing Jews and the Gentiles were both inhabitants of the Roman Empire and interacted inside and outside of their separate contexts, within a larger context. Taking into account the problem of defining who was a real Gentile follower of Jesus, I will stretch the definition to also include those, who could be called Pagan-Gentiles, i.e. those not being a part of and not having any prior awareness of any Jewish morals, like those expressed in the Apostolic Decree. If one assume that both factions each had separate symbolic universes and that the inclusion of Pagan-Gentiles into the Jewish Jesus-believing group would create a need for the “Pagans” to reform and re-think their perception on reality, but at the same time changing the perception of the Jewish faction—what would the outcome be and why? This leads me to my question:

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7 Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, 171–179.
8 Zetterholm, “Will the Real Gentile-Christian Please Stand Up.”
• Which aspects in Gentile religion regarding food restrictions in the Apostolic Decree would be objects for a re-interpretation or alternation and how is it likely it impacted the plausibility structure of the Jesus-believing Jews? What I am aware of; this latter aspect has rarely been discussed in contemporary scholarship.

1. 2. Method
I will use the text in Acts 15:19-21 and then use Gal 2:11-14 and 1 Cor 8:1-13 to try to demonstrate occurring clashes in symbolic universes, when using social constructionist theories regarding "norms and rules" and symbolic universes. I am aware that there are problems with using the periscopes together, but I will chose to disregard these problems with e.g. the authors difference in theology and the different timelines and origins of the texts. I will try to get a wider perspective regarding the social context present and the processes of social identity and plausibility structures. I will try to make assumptions in a hypothetic-deductive way, in order to see if it is possible to achieve a somewhat coherent view on Pagan-Gentile religiosity and reactions regarding food restrictions. Temple food was a part of the Roman symbolic universe as well and when utilizing the rules from the Apostolic Decree (another symbolic universe) as a challenge opposing the values and routines of the pagan universe, some sort of reaction should be possible to see. When values, norms and plausibility structure are challenged, it will bring a need for them to be re-thought and re-valued, i.e. making them a subject of alternations. When dealing with the different viewpoints in the texts are there any indications on clashes between universes and in what way. When using social-scientific theories to problematize the texts what can be said? In this process I will use both the primary and secondary sources as equal actors in my discussions, fully aware of the problems this could bring regarding chronology, theology and prejudices. This I do in order to fit the scale of this type of study. A more problematizing approach to the sources would be preferable, but that I leave for the future, for a study with a more substantial scale.

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2. What Does it Mean?

2.1. Symbolic Universe

The way we perceive reality is to a great extent socially constructed and the sociology of knowledge is needed to analyze our concept of it. P. L. Luckmann and T. Berger define “reality” as a quality connected with phenomena that humans recognize, as a being independent of our own will; we cannot “wish them away”. The “knowledge” is our conviction that a phenomena is real and that it possess specific qualities and traits.\(^\text{11}\)

[A] Symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectivated real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place within this universe.\(^\text{12}\)

Reality is created in the interaction between humans and the world they live in, and its influence can be seen on an individual level as well as in society at large. Social order and with it, human perception on reality emerge in three phases, externalization, objectivation and internalization. When a person is confronted with new ideas confronting the old ones; it forces one to legitimate these new ideas often through written text (externalization). In a socialization process these ideas are passed on to a succeeding generation that takes them for granted; they are obvious (objectivation). When ideas are made into doctrine they become parts in a subjective perception of reality (internalization). Every context’s collective subjective experiences have through millennia of history been transmitted from generation to generation, thus creating an objective “accumulation of knowledge”\(^\text{13}\) on what reality is or should be and why. In this transmission of knowledge between generations lays a challenge: the legitimation of the senders self interpreted Sitz im Leben within the symbolic universe and the issue of making it valid for the succeeding generation. This legitimation of the salient elements of the established tradition consists of “explanations” and “justifications,” in order to make them intelligible.\(^\text{14}\) The institutional order is “explained” by ascribing

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cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings and by giving its practical necessities a normative dignity: it is “justified”. I.e. a norm that says why and how one should behave and it is deemed valid due to its practical use. This legitimation for the individual in any context means an access to the knowledge of why an action should be preformed instead of another and why things are the way they are.15

The symbolic universe is one of four different levels that legitimate the explanations and justifications. The first level language constitutes a built-in structure; that, which is “explained,” is legitimized e.g. a transmission of a certain type of religious vocabulary; automatically legitimates the religious structure it defines. The second level contains undeveloped theoretical theories, e.g. moral maxims, myths, stories and legends. These are very pragmatic and directly linked with existing real life situations and actions. The third level consists of complex theories; legitimating the “institutional sectors” in terms of differentiated frameworks of knowledge, hardly understandable for the common human. Nevertheless, these frameworks offer a sufficient and necessary frame of reference of institutionalized conduct within these sectors or contexts; specialized personnel often transmit “its rights, obligations and standard operating procedures” though a formalized modus operandi.16 To summarize the first three levels; the fact that Paul spoke to people (influenced by his inherited “knowledge” on norms and values) put a normative meaning to what he was saying. To enhance the normative status on what he had been talking about, he wrote letters to different groups he had visited earlier; mainly about morals and associated with real life. With the birth of the church, a class of scholars was created, i.e. the Church fathers and other theologians, who were theorizing about these morals, creating rules of conduct based on them. The circumstances for the rules, norms and traditions were ungraspable for common people, but still the formalized norms (2. 2.) controlled the common view on what good behavior was.

The symbolic universe, at the fourth level, contains all of the other levels. They are frames of theoretical traditions that intermingle, trying to unite different conceptions of meaning and to incorporate the institutional order in a “symbolic totality.”17 For humans the symbolic universe is a medium, a way to fuse their own “detached realms of reality” with a “meaningful totality.” Thus explaining and justifying them in order to

15 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 111.
16 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 112.
17 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 113; Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 61.
reach an “ultimate fulfillment”, finding a location, a place within a socially created world. In this process one gets an overall understanding and perception of individual meaning and one’s place in society. And through a social interactive process within the symbolic universe, the individual’s detached realm of reality is rendered as valid and justified. It is important for the individual to get one’s meaningful totality socially enhanced, because without any enhancement it is difficult to maintain. A symbolic universe works at its best when anchored in a social group, with individuals sharing the same conception on reality, i.e. a plausibility structure. That is “the specific social base and social processes required for its maintenance.”

All traditions, social as well as religious, require a social structure within which reality is regarded as self-evident and within which individuals of the succeeding generations can be socialized in such a way that the world becomes real to them. When the plausibility structure is threatened, the concepts of one’s reality are no longer conceived as obvious truths, but are in need of defense or “alternation”, i.e. a re-socialization in order to regain a, for the individual, coherent perception on meaning; to acquire new obvious truths.

2. 2. Norms, Values and Routines

As parts of the Symbolic universe, norms values and routines act as "reality maintenance," both on a subjective and objective level. They uphold the plausibility structure. In a more general way norms can be explained as a contradiction between what you desire, how things are, how it should and should not be and how it must and must not be. As such, norms are the predominant forms in which routines or values become objects of reflexive contemplation. The characteristics of routines are then, in other words, used as the raw material for formulating prescriptive or proscriptive rules. One could say that values and social norms exist in a symbiosis, where both are dependent of each other. Values belong to the internalized symbolic universes, the pre-knowledge used for creating norms and interpreting reality. They are both a medium for

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20 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 174; Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 63.
21 Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 63; Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 176.
22 Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 61.
and at the same time the outcome of the behavior that it recursively organizes—it is both produced and re-produced in an on-going social interaction.\textsuperscript{23}

In this process an individual meaning of reality is constructed and scholars can interpret this process in order to find motifs for human behavior and certain patterns in it. Or as P. Alasuutari expresses it: “Meaning is conceived as the form in which reality exists for us human.”\textsuperscript{24} Routines and values are also handed over knowledge from prior generations,\textsuperscript{25} a kind of institutionalized intelligence that frees each generation to start from scratch, purely in terms of knowledge. Based on this knowledge, learned through a socialization process, it allows different individuals in a society to connect to a prior knowledge of practice, where it is taken for granted that others also know,\textsuperscript{26} e.g. the unspoken rules in a discussion or in a tradition (e.g. in Gal 2). Most routines continues to unconsciously exist and we never ask ourselves why we have them or where they come from, until their validity are questioned and can lead to them transforming in order to meet the current demand, i.e. an alternation. When the perspective of routine is assigned significance and a group of people can agree on the legitimacy of that routine, this can become the “object” around which a community can gather.\textsuperscript{27}

Routines and values help us humans to subjectively interpret different topics; challenges that we may encounter during a lifetime. A topic is a challenge, e.g. a new norm, the starting point for a re-thinking, a re-valuing and re-awareness of one’s values and routines included in our symbolic universe. The bottom line is that we are not aware of our values until they are questioned. When challenged they are, for better or for worse, changed in an interaction with a topic, but at the same time, they are both gradually changing in an interdependent way. Laws and regulations are examples of these topics that can commence contemplations, if we, e.g. are challenged by them.\textsuperscript{28} They are used for upholding the values of a society’s symbolic universe, in maintaining its plausibility structure, thus protecting the “official reality”, anxiously defending it from any competing ones and thus withholding social meaning.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{24} Alasuutari, \textit{Social Theory and Human Reality}, 38.
\textsuperscript{26} Berger and Luckmann, \textit{Social Construction of Reality}, 167.
\textsuperscript{27} Alasuutari, \textit{Social Theory and Human Reality}, 159–168.
\textsuperscript{28} Alasuutari, \textit{Social Theory and Human Reality}, 30–52.
\textsuperscript{29} Berger and Luckmann, \textit{Social Construction of Reality}, 176; See also Tillich, \textit{Courage to Be}, 76.
According to P. Alasuutari social norms should not be regarded as only an analytical tool that explains what social order is, rather normativity should be understood as a phenomenon with different uses and functions in different cultural settings – in my case antiquity. In that respect norms are parts of the social reality and cannot simply be dismissed or rejected. Rather than trying to understand human reality as a whole, one should try to understand how a culture’s fundamental perceptions and notions operate, how and why they make sense and how they guide or force humans to perceive reality and act in a certain way. Any inconsistency in common belief is prevented or defended by the threat of social pressure, e.g. by the fear of the community’s disapproval and the threat of violence and punishments, and by these means dissidents are compelled back in line.

3. Roman Religiosity

3. 1. The Problem with the Word Religion

There is no problem with religion in any true sense, rather with the understanding of the word in itself. In a modern Christian or any monotheistic context a religion should be seen as something that “implies the studies of different sets of core beliefs and principles together with all the features that accompany them.” This view on religion is incompatible with religion during and in the Roman Empire depending on the different understanding of the word religion. The word “religio” in a Roman context meant to be diligent, reverent and dutiful towards a higher authority, not exclusively the gods. To be religious did not only mean to respect the sacredness of the gods, but to be dutifully obliging towards other humans as well. Religio stood for that which was national and authentic. It was the tradition handed down by the ancestors and was rarely questioned and it was given authority due to its old age. Anything outside the box was considered as “superstitio”— exotic and suspect, e.g. mental ecstasy, occultism and imagined direct contact with the supernatural. Any contact with the divine outside the different layers of religious mediators was considered as a violation against the ancestral tradition and a violation against the “lares”— the ancestors. In the Greek

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30 Alasuutari, Social Theory and Human Reality, 50–52.
phrase νομίζειν θεοῦ lays a meaning similar to that of religio: “To acknowledge the gods by engaging in customary practices”34

According to I. Gradel a study in pagan religion should always emphasize the “act” as a constitutional factor to avoid Christian concepts such as “faith” and “inner feelings”. 35

The most useful definition, … interprets the concept of ”religion” as defined by action of dialogue – sacrifice, prayer, or other forms of establishing and constructing dialogue – between humans and what they perceive as ”another world”, opposed to and different from the everyday sphere in which men function.36

The modern concept of “a religion” does not seem to have been part of the Roman culture; there is simply no word for it. The existing concepts are more “action” orientated: how to show εὐσέβεια towards that which is considered as ἱερός or ἔχθρος. The Greek terms λατρεία and θρησκεία, literally means service and worship or ritual. The Latin equivalent words “colere”, meant to tend or to look after something or someone, often in reverence towards the sacred and “cultus” meant the worship of it. 37

3. 2. Gods, Cults and Rituals

Roman religion was built on the exercise of traditional or local rituals, processions, prayers, festivals and sacrifices and not on a coherent belief system or common Holy Scriptures.38 Roman religiosity can be and have been seen as very pragmatic and lacking, not having supernatural deities in contrast to the monotheistic faiths, e.g. Judaism and Christianity.

But religion imbued every part of life and had a strong influence on both the private and public sphere. The gods were usually asked for when needed, e.g. for advice, for aid in war and for health and success.39 The cosmos was eternal, the sun, the moon and the stars were seen as ”eternal” gods, while gods like Jupiter and Neptune were

34 Rives, Religion in the Roman Empire, 13.
36 Gradel, Emperor Worship and Roman Religion, 5.
37 Rives, Religion in the Roman Empire, 13.
39 Mitternacht and Runesson, Jesus och de första kristna, 85.
"immortals". The common view was that the gods were created, as well as mankind, and often being described with anthropomorphic features. The gods were above humans being wiser and more powerful, but not almighty, but even so like humans subordinated—μοῖρα—fate or destiny. There was a difference in “status,” not in nature or species; divinity was a relative and not an absolute category.  

The Roman relationship with the gods can best be described as a temporary ceasefire between gods and humans. The religiosity was based on the concept on “pax deorum”—peace with the gods, which meant that when the gods became angry it affected the human realm. Thus humans had to conciliate them with prayers and sacrifices, carefully monitoring everything in the natural world to predict and decipher the will of the gods, and never give to them an oath or a promise they could not keep. Both the sake of the people and the protection of a city or town depended on accurately executed rites of purification and processions to repel any adverse event, e.g. an invading army or misery due to the wrath from the gods. Salvation or rescue in a Roman context meant protection from unpleasant changes in this life and the prospects of a better life for the soul in the next. However the word for salvation—σωτηρία—had no theological implication. A key feature in Roman tradition was the integration of religious cults into the political and social structures in a city, meaning that religious positions were seen as political, thus a governing body politically added them.

3. 2. 1. Sacrificial Meat
To sacrifice literally meant to “make something holy, setting it aside from all common usage and handing it over to the gods.” All things sacrificed had to contain the “principle of life,” e.g. wine, grain, cheese and honey, but animals were regarded as the most effective offering. They were believed to contain the most vital organs. The gods were considered to be fairly active, controlling every aspect of life, thus needing their vitality sustained or renewed with the sacrifices. If weakened by faulty or wrongly executed offerings, the gods would loose their benevolence towards the humans and

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40 Gradel, Emperor Worship and Roman Religion, 26.
41 Mitternacht and Runesson, Jesus och de första kristna, 90–91.
42 Mitternacht and Runesson, Jesus och de första kristna, 90–91; Gradel, Emperor Worship and Roman Religion, 23.
43 A. Tripolitis, Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001), 16; Gradel, Emperor Worship and Roman Religion, 24.
44 Rives, Religion in the Roman Empire, 85.
45 Ogilvie, The Romans and their Gods, 41.
punish the people for not honoring their part in an imagined contract between humans and gods – the *pax deorum*. There was considerable variation in what kinds of animals that were sacrificed, due to the multitude of deities in the pantheon. But there were two invariable principles; male animals were offered to gods, female animals to the goddesses and white animals for the upper deities in the air and black animals for deities in the underworld. After the sacrificial act the animals’ intestines were removed and scrutinized for any flaws, which would have ruined the ceremony or proved to be a bad omen, “especially since these organs were the most vital parts of the animals, the parts which were ear-marked for the god’s [or goddess’] consumption.” The intestines were cut into small pieces and put on an altar for the deity to consume, through fire. The rest of the meat where either eaten by the priest and the person offering the sacrifice or given to butchers, who sold it to common people, as can be seen in 1 Cor 8 where Paul address the issue with sacrificial meat.

4. The Apostolic Decree

4.1. The Context

While Paul were preaching in Antioch among the Gentiles, people came from Judea, probably from the congregation in Jerusalem, claiming that true salvation for the Gentiles only could be achieved if they were circumcised. Paul and Barnabas argued against this and felt the need to go to Jerusalem and settle this matter once and for all. The hard liner Pharisaic sections of the Jesus-believing Jews argued that it was necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised and have the Law of Moses (νόμον Μωϋσέως) imposed on them. After much argument Peter rose and talked in favor for the Gentiles joining the group; claiming it was against God’s will not to include them.

50 See Acts 15:5–11.
Why are you putting God to the test (πειράζετε)—to tease or provoke) by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?\footnote{H. Seesemann, “πειράζω,” TDNT 6:32.}

With that said James,\footnote{Acts 15:10} the brother of Jesus, talked in favor as well, by quoting the text from Amos 9:11–12. As seen below, the author of Acts writes quite harmoniously about the event, maybe too harmoniously when compared to Paul’s account of the event in Galatians, where the picture of James is quite the opposite.\footnote{Zetterholm, Formation of Christianity in Antioch, 143.} The dividing issue was not whether the Gentiles could join “the messianically renewed Israel,” but whether they could join the Jesus-believing movement without becoming Jews.\footnote{B. Witherington, History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 168.} The solution to the problem with the Gentiles and the Law reflects the concerns of the Jesus-believing Jews and their wish for upholding of the authority of the Law. Thus the Jesus-believing Gentiles, even though they were not obliged to become Jews and fully observe every part of the Law, “the Law itself envisages them and legislates for them,”\footnote{Witherington, Society in the Book of Acts, 179.} i.e. by upholding the four rules in the decree the Gentiles upholds the Law, because the rules are imposed by the Law—because it is commonly recognized that the four prohibitions in the Apostle decree are influenced by the text in Lev 17–18, where the recipients are “the alien who sojourns in your/their midst.”\footnote{Witherington, Society in the Book of Acts, 172.}

In another perspective an inclusion of the Gentiles into the Jesus-believing Jewish group could be seen in itself as a natural progression of the group\footnote{Zetterholm, Formation of Christianity in Antioch, 139.} i.e. when viewing e.g. the text in Acts 15:16–17 (said by James in reference to LXX, Amos 9:11–12):

After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David [σκηνὴν Δαυιδ], which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so all other peoples [πάντα τὰ ἐθνη] may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things.\footnote{Acts 15:16–17; Witherington, Society in the Book of Acts, 156.}
This could be seen as a prediction or prophesy of the Gentiles joining the “eschatological people of God” and thus it was meant for them to be included. The restoration of σκηνὴ Δαυιδ can be interpreted and it is interpreted in Lucan theology (Gospel of Luke and Acts), as a prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; having affinity to the house of David and thus being the fulfillment of God’s eschatological promise, which then also should include πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. This could easily have been understood by a Jesus-believing Gentile, as an “extension of Israel’s covenant status and privileges to the Gentile nations.” On the assumption that inclusion of Gentiles were seen as a natural progression for the Jesus movement, due to the prophecies e.g. in Amos et al., then the obvious question to be solved was not whether the Gentiles should be included, but rather how they should be included in the table community. There seem to be different opinions on how to include the Gentiles and what status they should have. The decree was the originated solution, but the interpretation of it differed, as can be seen when viewing the incident in Antioch. Both Acts and the Gospel of Luke probably have the same author. The theology in Acts 15:19 is coherent to the main message in both the Lucan works – the Gentiles should be included and nothing should hinder them to join the Jesus movement. “The kingdom of God is for both Jews and None-Jews – all according to God’s plan for salvation.” Like all authors, Luke has a perception of reality and an agenda with his writing, bound to his context. Is Acts a truthful story of the travels of the Apostles, with Luke as a witness, or was he just a copyreader, in retrospect editing the whole thing to fit his own values? As said above (1. 2.) I will somewhat disregard these problems in my discussion and my usage of the texts and use them as equals in a discussion – treating all as a Thou.

4. 2. The Text
In Acts 15:19–20 there is a problem on what to do with the Gentiles, i.e. how to turn the Pagans into Gentiles. What to do with their “soteriological status,” if they are not going to be compelled to be circumcised to become Jews in order to be saved? The text

63 Gal 2:11–14
64 Mitternacht and Runesson, *Jesus och de första kristna*, 228-229: My translation.
65 In reference to M. Buber
66 Zetterholm, *Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, 143.
says that it is decided not to make it hard for the gentiles (τῶν ἑθνῶν) to turn to God, (τῶν θεῶν) for reasons mentioned above (4. 1.). Instead letters would be sent to the different Jesus-believing groups, stating that observing four rules was enough and in honoring them the Gentiles would get access to the community. If they abstained from the pollution from false gods (τῶν ἀλίσγηματων τῶν ἑιδώλων), from adultery (τῆς πορνείας), from the strangled (τοῦ πνεκτοῦ) and from blood (τοῦ αἵματος) they would be accepted into the group and have access to God’s eschatological promise as well.

As seen above (3. 2. 1.) I chose to focus on sacrificial meat and it is partly because it is an issue e.g. in 1 Cor 8:1–13 due to misunderstandings on how to act regarding meat and partly because all the four prohibition’s influence can be seen in Paul’s arguments on why not to eat sacrificial meat. When viewing some key words in the Greek text it could open up for different interpretations. The word ἑθνος is commonly known as Gentile and in M. Zetterholm’s study “Will the Real Gentile-Christian Please Stand Up,” are the problems regarding the word’s meaning and what people to include or not clearly shown. Its presumed original meaning is an undefined amount of “people,” which could be perceived as if the rules could apply to anyone that wanted to look for God, not only the selected few. Thus ἑθνῶν in verse 19 can be translated as anyone, but this would probably add to the problem with defining what a Gentile was.

The word εἰδώλων is a good example on a clash between two different perceptions on reality, two understandings of a word. The literal Greek meaning is “copy” or “picture”, thus e.g. statues in the Roman context were merely a “copy of the man depicted, but not the man himself” i.e. it is not a term for a cultic “image” for worshipping a god or goddess, it is only a picture of him or her. In Jewish tradition any depiction or copy was strictly prohibited, lest it would lead to idol worshipping and thus violate the commandments according to tradition given to Moses, thus disrespecting the “God of Israel.” The understanding of the word in the New Testament mirrors the Jewish and is used for describe “heathen gods and their images.” The word and its descendant phrases do not occur in the Gospels, but are only used in a few places in

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70 Exod 20:3–5; Deut 5:7–11.
72 F. Büchsel, TDNT 2:378.
Acts and in some of Paul’s letters, implying that it was not a matter of importance before the time of Paul addressing the Gentiles.

Πορνεία literally means “prostitution” and can refer to some kind of cultic prostitution present in Persia, Syria and in Canaanite cults, with contact with the Jewish context. When used in the Hebrew Bible it refers to fornication and that which leads to it. That which make people “whore after other gods” or the restrictions of fornication only allowing it inside wedlock. With reference to sacrificial meat, the meat itself could be that which leads people into adultery, making them unfaithful to God. Is it plausible that it could, as well as e.g. money and “prostitution”, be perceived as a tool, with which the dark powers tried to turn people from God? In my opinion it is an interesting thought and perception of the word.

The words for, that “which is strangled and blood” are those closest joint with the issue of sacrificial meat, but at the same time they could have nothing to do with it at all. Πνικτός most probably refers to a restriction of meat per se. The issue is not whether the meat is sacrificially strangled or not but whether the meat came from an animal that died in the correct ritual manor, with the blood still inside it. The word does not even occur in the LXX and if it would be a matter of sacrificial meat, the practice of strangling animals for ritual purposes would be found in the common Roman cultic rituals, which it cannot. It is evident that Lev 17–18 and its present rules of conduct supports that it is a prohibition imposed by Jesus-believing Jews on Jesus-believing Gentiles, parallel to the command “not to eat meat of αἵματος.” Whether strangled or not, the meat that came from the Roman temples were not slaughtered in a correct way, from a Jewish perspective.

In a Jewish context there was a belief in the sanctity of blood underlying the disallowance of eating αἷματος of animals. Blood was the “bearer of life” and as such it functioned as “means for expiation before God.”

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81 J. Behm, TDNT 1:173; See also Malina and Pilch, Commentary on the Book of Acts, 109.
To shed blood is to destroy the bearer of life and therefore life itself. Hence αἷμα signifies “outpoured blood,” “violently destroyed life,” “death” or murder.  

This could mean that there is a possibility that αἷματος is not about food, but instead could be a variation on the sixth commandment; “thou shall not kill” or with αἷμα in mind; you shall not spill blood. There is a possible association between sacrificial meat and blood. The animals in Roman context were commonly sacrificed as an *immolatio* offering, a blood sacrifice that was a common ritualistic way of sacrificing animals and the practice that gave the most prestige.

5. Discussion

As noted above (3. 2. 1.) the sacrificial meat was deemed holy, by the ritualistic act of the sacrifice. For a Pagan-Gentile it was natural to eat this meat if offered at festivals or bought at the butchers. It was food and the offering sanctified it and thus being a possible link to the gods. In reference to chapter 3, the Pagan-Gentile had a more pragmatic view to the problem with sacrificial meat; the fact that it was food was more important than the holy part of it, especially when being poor. Paul somewhat agree to this when saying:

Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “no idol in the world really exists”, and that “there is no God but one.”

What he is saying is that there is no problem eating the meat per se, because gods that does not exist cannot sanctify it. However, there is a hidden aspect to it.

The idols themselves are dumb and nothing, but they are used by the powers of darkness to enslave human minds and hearts.

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84 1 Cor 8:4.
85 B. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 188.
Paul stresses though that all people do not have this “knowledge,” thus making them vulnerable and exposed to this false belief. I.e. there is nothing wrong with the meat; only people’s perceptions of it and the real possibilities that it could be used by dark powers.

The eating of meat sacrificed to idols is present in Corinth. The fact of the subject being apart of one of Paul’s letters makes this subject obvious. But is there a situation of Paul over-reacting to the situation? When looking at the word for idol as it says in 1Cor 8 εἰδωλοθύτων, it literally means “idol food”. The meaning of this food, is open for interpretation depending on what symbolic universe one has, but referring to the above description of the word (4. 2.), it does not mean the same thing in a Roman context, as in Paul’s more Jewish context. Εἰδωλοθύτων is not a Pagan-Gentile word. It is a polemic phrase used by the Jesus-believing group as opposed to the “sacred food eaten in pagan temple precincts after a sacrifice”. The term ἱερόθυτον used in 1 Cor 10:28, meaning temple- or sacred food, was used by Paul for food that came from a temple but was bought and then eaten at home. It was approved to eat as long as one did not know where it came from, as long as one did not ask. But if one learned its origin one should not eat it out of consideration for one’s neighbor, “the one who informed you,” for the sake of his or her conscience.

It is problematic to really know whom Paul is addressing, when talking about temple meat. One could question if it concerns all the members in the Jesus-believing group in Corinth, or just those who could afford to buy meat? It is implied that there were a group with more than average wealth.

For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.

This would mean that there was a group of wealthier inhabitants that had the means to buy temple meat, but that there was a group that was poorer as well and could not afford any meat. One could question how great a problem it really was or which problem was

86 1 Cor 8:7.
87 Witherington, Conflict and Community, 189.
88 Zetterholm, “Will the Real Gentile-Christian Please Stand Up,” 390
89 Witherington, Conflict and Community, 189.
90 1 Cor 10:23–28.
91 See Witherington, Conflict and Community, 190.
92 1 Cor 11:21.
greater: the temple meat or the unwillingness to share? G. Theissen and B. Witherington emphasize that the average Pagan-Gentile person in ancient times was not a “meat eater” and thus only had meat during big festivals, when he or she got it for free from the temples. Thus the middle or low status people in Corinth would seldom have bought any meat because they could not afford it, unless it was given. This could suggest that the “weak” in Corinth where in greater danger of being mislead by the εἰδωλοθύτων lest they had stronger religious connections or associations to it, because they only ate meat during religious festivals.⁹³

I do not believe this to be correct or at least too simple of an assumption, because it assumes that Roman religion had the same foundation or symbolic universe as the Jesus-believing group, with its Jewish inherited traditions. As I write above (3. 1.), the Roman religiosity was not founded on sacred texts or core beliefs. The Romans had a more pragmatic⁹⁴ approach to gods and religion. The Pagan-Gentile perception on sacrificial meat seems to have been this pragmatic as well, thus making both Paul’s concern in 1 Cor 8:7 and G. Theissen’s concerns about the “weak” in Corinth invalid. It seems to be an over-interpretation of the role sacrificial meat really played for Pagan-Gentiles. Both Paul and G. Theissen make the same mistake; they both interpret Roman religion according to their Jewish and Christian frame of reference and that is why they seem to believe that both Roman religion and the ἐκκλησία of the Jesus-believing Jews had the same foundations. In their view sacrificial meat should have had the same importance for the Romans as for the Jesus-believing Jews. It was rather a non-issue for the Pagan-Gentiles and both G. Theissen and Paul interpreted this non-issue as a lack of knowledge, which left the weak defenseless against the dark powers of sacrificial meat. I want to emphasize that I do not view or believe any tradition or religiosity as inferior to the other or in any way a progression on another. Both traditions wanted to have good religious adherents, but they put focus on different objects to achieve the same thing. In my opinion: in the Roman religion good acts with εὐσέβεια to traditions, people and the gods proved a person to be religious. In the Jesus-believing group, influenced by Jewish tradition, the correct belief and approved faith resulted in good acts.

⁹⁴ See Rives, Religion in the Roman Empire, 86–87.
The reverence of higher authority was interwoven into Roman society e.g. in the patron—client system, between people as well as between gods and humans. Everyone was linked to someone with higher authority i.e. the patron got support for giving advantages and protection to the client. This would have made it natural for the wealthy to give free meat to the less fortunate, gaining support e.g. for a politic career. And it would be natural for the client to support the patron in this case in order to get meat and possibly be more in danger of polluting one’s soul and conscience, lacking the “knowledge” as G. Theissen and B. Witherington imply. But more plausible is that they were lacking the right type of knowledge, lacking the right type of plausibility structure in order to interpret and be a part of the Jesus movement’s subjective reality, according to Paul anyway. The Decree could be seen as an externalization in itself, in order to get the Gentiles to internalize the rules into their values and perception on reality—e.g. one should abstain from polluted meat. It may not be understandable right now, but God legitimates the rules and over time it will be better for the sake of one’s salvation.

In letting the Gentiles gain access to the Jesus movement, the movement itself had to define itself i.e. what do we have that others lack? What do they have to change to be a part of us?

[The] moment [for building walls] could in fact be argued to be the very moment that a people or a cultural group is born in the sense of becoming self-conscious of themselves as a people or culture amongst other cultures.

It is natural for a group when meeting others or facing crises, to build walls around themselves so to speak, to define what they are, to define their social identity. It is necessary to use therapy within the group, i.e. reinforcing actions to enhance the groups perception on reality and plausibility structure, or to use nihilation on any alterative perception, i.e. to deny its existence or validity.

95 See Rives, Religion in the Roman Empire, 24.
97 Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 61.
98 Alasuutari, Social Theory and Human Reality, 44.
99 Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 66.
Social identities direct that behavior which relates to groups. That is, they regulate and motivate the sorts of behavior in which members or groups engage as members. Such behavior may include conformity with the group and cohesion within it; the stereotyping of members of other groups; favoritism towards members of one’s own group; and discrimination against members of other groups.¹⁰⁰

Thus in this view the Apostolic Decree tries to regulate and motivate a certain way of behavior within the group, adding conformity and cohesion to the group of chosen Jesus believers, based on a created collective social identity. To enhance the chosenness of the group there is a difference in knowledge that is exaggerated: before we did not know, but now we know. Before we were sinners, but now it is different. In stereotyping everyone outside the group as sinners, discrimination of other groups is supported, as well as enhancing the own group’s chosen status. Of course this is a very cynical description of a plausible meaning of the Decree, in creating a social identity. It is plausible from a strictly sociological and theoretical view, but it should not be seen as any universal truth, depending of the very subjective nature of truth (2. 2.). One must also assume that a whole lot of faith and belief would have been included when it comes to religion, in the Jewish context anyway. Though while I believe it to be different reasons or motivations for starting these kinds of processes, I also believe that the mechanisms quoted above to be standard whether or not the motivator for different self-proclaimed-chosen-groups is secular or religious, e.g. Civil religion in the USA¹⁰¹ or belief in religious chosenness in Israel, both in present times.

The fact that εἰδολόθυτος does not appear in the Gospels and do not seem to be of any importance before Paul and the Gentiles, implies that this phrase was deemed important in a social defining process—we versus them. Made important just as much for the Jesus movement, in order to define itself, as for the joining Gentiles. Thus creating an “official reality” upholding the validity of the symbolic universe and the plausibility structure (2. 2.). Thus creating a meaning both for the adherents of a group and those wanting to join i.e. answers to the questions: why stay, why join and why follow the rules?

In my opinion it is a document consisting of a set of rules functioning as “explanations” and “justifications” which through therapy try to define the Jesus movement, in short enhancing the re-valuation or alternation of the their old symbolic universe, creating a new one in order to be able to include Gentiles into the movement. It was also an instrument for a Gentile internalization process, an expression for the Apostles’ subjective processes, made subjectively meaningful for the Gentiles. The rules are also the reflexive topic, challenging the routines and values of the Gentiles (2. 2.). Often an incident of great importance is needed to commence an alternation process and in this case it is possible that the Jesus-believing Jews believed it to be influenced by God, thus being a natural continuation or extension for them to include the Gentiles.

It is somewhat problematic that inside a symbolic universe there are other symbolic universes within it i.e. different people within the same value system could have different interpretations of situations or texts, depending on various personal traits and experiences. It is a “sub world” within the big world. This is possibly the case in Gal 2:11–14, where the Decree rules are interpreted in three different ways, two being within the same symbolic universe, if I assume that the problems in Antioch were the same as in 1 Cor 8. Though it has not been commonly believed among scholars, I believe that some of the problems in Antioch could plausibly have been due to a fear of tainted food, brought to the dining table by Gentiles. The main focus seems to have been on overall theories on e.g. status or purity, thus neglecting that it could have been a matter of Jewish prejudices against the Pagan-Gentiles’ eating habits. Of course this cannot fully explain the reasons for the conflict, due to the difficulties in really knowing why a person behave in a certain way, but it is possible that these prejudices were present in the build up for it. When viewing the problem, adding this perspective, one can open up new understandings (2. 2.) of it and thus possibly avoiding oversimplifying theories of reality. The Gentiles seem not to have had any problem with eating temple food, for them it probably was viewed as ἱερόθυτον. Paul and the “certain people [that] came from James” shared the same tradition, but still had different views regarding eating with the Gentiles. Paul emphasized the equality through “the

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102 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 111.
103 Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 62.
104 Zetterholm, Formation of Christianity in Antioch, 139.
105 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 158.
106 For an overview see, Zetterholm, Formation of Christianity in Antioch, 130–136, including references.
107 Gal 2:12.
faith in Jesus Christ”\textsuperscript{108} and that “it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person,”\textsuperscript{109} i.e. he expected the Gentiles “not to observe the Jewish dietary laws.”\textsuperscript{110} James seem to have emphasized the fact that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised, thus not being enough Jewish and thus being second rate Jesus-believers and thus not eligible to eat with, unless circumcised. These different views regarding the Gentiles are clearly shown by M. Zetterholm.\textsuperscript{111}

In order to make the two accounts, in Acts and in Galatians, of James coherent, I will make the assumption that both are correct and the discrepancy between them could be an example of a clash within a symbolic universe as mentioned above (1. 2.). In this case depending on differences in their perception and in their interpretation of reality, in interpreting and deciphering the meaning of the Apostolic Decree.

My main question is about the alternations of the Gentiles, but I also feel it to be necessary to show that it is a two way process; in an alternation process you alter that which alters you and vice versa. The question is rather how big of a deal this alternation was, i.e. whether it was a “routine maintenance” of reality or “crisis maintenance”\textsuperscript{112} for the Jesus-believing Jews. Though it is not possible to exactly know I can assume that an alternation of some sort was needed to create a document like the Apostolic Decree, which in my opinion deviated from Jewish tradition and customs. The absence of \textit{εἴδωλον} in the Gospels and its presence in the Apostolic Decree is implying that there could have been an alternation process among the Jesus-believing Jews regarding values (2. 2.) when facing the outside threat of a Gentile inclusion. This came to underlie the need for a discussion at the meeting in Jerusalem and which ultimately led to the creation of the Decree. In reference to the dual opinion of Paul and James, the Decree could be a compromise (or not). But the creation of it gave those who seek God, rules to relate to and made it possible for interested Gentiles to commence their alternation process. Without the alternations of the Apostles, the Gentile ones would not have been possible or at least much more difficult, not having the guidelines that the Decree gives.

Society was based on static hierarchies, one died with the same identity as one was born with. A knight was a knight and a peasant was a peasant. “Identity then [was] highly profiled in the sense of representing fully the objective reality within which it is

\textsuperscript{108} Gal 2:16; See also Sanders, \textit{Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People}, 172.
\textsuperscript{109} Matt 15:11.
\textsuperscript{110} Sanders, \textit{Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People}, 177.
\textsuperscript{111} See Zetterholm, \textit{“Will the Real Gentile-Christian Please Stand Up,”} 378–383; See also Sanders, \textit{Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People}, 172.
located.” Whether one change identity or not the opinion of people within one’s primary socialization changes at a much slower rate, i.e. one is perceived as one always has been. A good example is when Jesus comes back to his hometown preaching in the synagogue and the people present identify him mere as the carpenter’s son and as such he could not be a preacher. This problem would be present for a Gentile as well when trying to alter his or her identity within the symbolic universe or completely change identity, in order to join the Jesus movement.

Paul’s problems, in my opinion, with people eating idol-polluted meat in Corinth could have to do with this matter. As newly converted Jesus-believing Gentiles, they still had some old habits left probably enhanced by the opinions of their friends and family, still having the old plausibility structure. They still had obligations to act and behave in a certain way depending on their old identity and Sitz im Leben in society. It is unclear how organized the ἐκκλησία was during this time and without a solid platform, an organized group enhancing the new plausibility structure, an alternation would be difficult, living up to Paul’s standards anyways. Without constant re-fueling from the new significant others, i.e. the Jesus movement, it would have been easy relapse back into old ways, e.g. go back into eating sacrificed meat. If I assume that eating sacrificial meat was of great importance in social life, a ban on it would have impacted the Gentile social life, maybe creating a stigma. Gentile adherents to the Jesus-believing group could have been excluded from the society, thus losing their identity, which depended on their roles in that society. Thus having doubts on the new identity within the plausibility structure. But eating sacrificed meat was probably not that big of a deal for the Gentiles and the Decree probably made it into a bigger deal, being influenced by Jewish food regulations. A poorly socialized person into a static type society would feel an asymmetry between the identity and the reality, which he or she de facto lived in.

[This] asymmetry will, however, have no cumulative structural consequences because it lacks a social base within which it could

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114 Matt 13:55.
crystallize into a counter-world, with its own institutionalized cluster of counter-identities.\textsuperscript{117}

There would be no alternative identity to replace this asymmetry, thus it could function as a control mechanism, keeping people in line (2. 2.). Assuming that eating temple meat was an important act in Pagan-Gentile religiosity refraining from it could provoke negative reactions from the members of the society.

Incipient counter-definitions of reality and identity are present as soon as any such individuals congregate in socially durable groups.\textsuperscript{118}

Maybe the Jesus-believing group was one of these durable groups and brought a new view on identity and reality. The process of going from an identity based on what one did for a living, to the possibility of becoming children of God, must have had some impact on people’s view on reality, especially on marginalized groups, e.g. slaves and women, groups of people often addressed by Jesus in the Gospels. Of course it is hard if not impossible to say anything final about the role this possibility to an alternative identity had. But I assume that the chance to a new identity in some cases could have been a staring point to an alternation process, bringing an interest for the marginalized groups to join the Jesus movement.

As long as such individuals, even if they number more than a handful, do not form a counter-community of their own, both their objective and subjective identities will be predefined in accordance with the community’s institutional program for them. They will \textit{be} lepers, and nothing else.\textsuperscript{119}

Before the Jesus-believing groups could form stabile ἐκκλησίας in a city, e.g. in Corinth, maintaining a new plausibility structure would be difficult for the Gentiles joining the group and relapses would be frequent. Being hindered to change into a new identity by the old institutional predefined social identity. Being lepers could be in a

literal sense as well as meaning a marginalized group, i.e. without a support system enhancing the new beliefs Gentile members would retain their old roles in society and nothing else. And without an enough sizable group being able to maintain a new plausibility structure, the words of the missionaries propagating this new identity would probably not have become anything more than words.

But within a counter-community, being a leper could be defined as having a divine mark, being chosen as the children of God, i.e. the new plausibility structure functioned as “counter-definitions of reality—and of the fate of being a leper.”120 Of course at an early stage in this alternation process, the larger community is unaware of this: that lepers really are the children of God and it still identifies them as just lepers.

It is safe to assume that alternation remains a lifelong threat to whatever subjective reality emerges from such a conflict as the result of whatever options, a threat posited once and for all with the introduction of the alternating possibility into primary socialization itself.121

Once the knowledge of the possibility of existing alternative subjective realities emerges it becomes a threat122 to the one present, achieved in the process of the primary socialization. In order to maintain the perception of reality, it needs to endlessly change and adapt itself to different threats, enhanced by the context within which it exists. With therapy and nihilation a harmonious identity within the symbolic universe must be created, in order not to lose grasp on the subjective reality within the plausibility structure. In order to achieve harmony one must make the new plausibility structure one’s whole world repelling all other worlds, especially the previous one, the world before one’s alternation. To make this happen the individuals needs to separate themselves from inhabitants from other worlds, especially from the fellow inhabitants in the world he or she just left.123 Often using conforming methods according to the above quote of P. Herriot.124

120 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 186.
121 Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, 190.
123 Geels, Wikström, Hermanson and Junus, Den religiösa människan, 65.
It seems implausible that the creation of third conformal group consisting of both Jews and Gentiles and call them Christians would be possible. Especially in reference with groups defining themselves against other groups, viewing them as threats. Nothing else than a social process would make two separate group come together when discovering similarities in their symbolic universes, but still through a slow process. It would be possible to decide on and share the same set of rules, but the problems in interpreting them, due to individual symbolic universes and plausibility structures within the formal social identity would make it impossible to get a uniform interpretation of them. Here as well only a social process would create a plausibility structure that both could agree on and feel safe identifying themselves with.

6. Conclusion

6. 1. Which aspects in Gentile Religiosity Regarding Food Restrictions in the Apostolic Decree Would be Objects for a Re-Interpretation or Alternation?

It is problematic to get a straight answer to this question, depending on the absence of material dealing with the status of sacrificed meat after the offering. Either this is because of me lacking in gathering material or it was not an important question in the Pagan-Gentile context. As seen above (4.) it was crucial in what manner a sacrifice or offering was conducted and it seemed to be a natural act to sell, buy and eat the meat afterwards. The only restrictions were on the entrails and the blood, both reserved as food for the gods. Eating meat seems more to be a treat on festival days than it having any real ritualistic importance. But with a larger material, maybe this would be different, but for now this is a plausible answer. The question about idol-polluted meat seems to have been of greater importance for Paul and the Apostles, than for the Gentiles among them. The problem that Paul addresses in the letter Corinth about temple meat is as he says about knowledge, but not in the way he believes. It is obvious that they do not have the “accumulation of knowledge” (2. 1.) Paul is after. It seems not to have been important for them. Their perception, influenced by their pre-knowledge, (2. 2.) on norms and rules do not seem to have collided with the rules in the Decree. For them it does not exist any polluted idols or gods; they revered all. That was their knowledge and their perception of it, and who can judge on whom having the lesser knowledge in this matter; what if Paul was paranoid?

In my opinion, despite the pragmatic approach regarding Paul’s opinion on sacrificial meat and false gods many Gentiles seem to have accepted the rules in the Decree. In the Gospels, Jesus seem to use a lot of time, risking his social status talking to and helping marginalized groups in society, giving them a sense of worth and a chance acquiring a new social identity based on a new plausibility structure. I assume that among the first Pagan-Gentile converts; a lot of them had belonged to various marginalized groups, e.g. slaves or women. In a static hierarchic society a slave’s identity was a slave and nothing else, and the identity was based on what he or she did. There had to be symmetry between the identity and what the slave de facto was, because there was no alternative, otherwise than being an outcast in the eyes of society. The Pauline rhetoric that everybody was a child of God must have set something in motion, giving an alternative meaning to the old plausibility structure within the old identity. In my view it is here that the real reason for Pagan-Gentiles’ interest for being a part of the Jesus-believing group lies. They got a chance in getting a new alternative identity and a new plausibility structure. As mentioned in the discussion a new identity is very vulnerable if it is not maintained by a group of new significant others. In the beginning of the Pauline travels the groups in the cities around the Mediterranean would not have been that big thus resulting in relapses of the converts, e.g. in Corinth, making it plausible that the problems in Corinth was due to ill maintenance of a new identity, resulting in relapses. The unawareness of a new identity of the people in the old plausibility structure fueled the old identity instead of the new one and thus triggered the relapses. An alternation regarding the food restrictions was not the main reason for the alternation. I assume that it came with the bargain. In getting access to a new identity, having to alter the opinion on sacrificial meat was a small price to pay. It was an alternation to a new perception on reality that changed the view on meat, not the meat that changed the new perception. If one is to be able even to speak of a “tertium genus” (1. 1.), in my opinion it is self-evident that the Jesus-believing group functioned as a gradually growing support group for a new plausibility structure (in this case regarding the food rules), which over time could be internalized into the Gentiles perception of reality. In this and in every social process, time is of the essence and it does not include a problem-free Disney ending.
6. 2. … And how Did it Impact the Plausibility Structure of the Jesus-believing Jews?

The plausibility structure that was experiencing the biggest changes, according to my material was that of the Jesus-believing Jews. My conclusion is that the Apostolic Decree served a dual purpose, as a set of rules for converting Gentiles as well as rules for the Jews of the Jesus movement. Even though it restricts who can access and be a part of the group and functions as a tool for controlling the adherent’s behavior, it can be seen as a deviation from the views and customs of first century Judaism, that were even more restrictive. A deviation of this sort must have been the outcome of an alternation, which in my view must have been the result of an opinion that an inclusion of the Gentiles was the prophesized Will of God. It made the Jesus-believing Jews believe that an inclusion of the Gentiles was a natural extension of their movement. The absence of εἰδώλων in the Gospels and then it appearing in Acts and in some of Paul’s letters imply that there had been an alternation regarding values when facing the outside threat of the Gentiles, which underlies the need for an discussion at the meeting in Jerusalem, which ultimately led to the Apostolic Decree.

There was a conflict between Paul and James on how, in which way and which status the Gentiles would get and it can be read of in Galatians. This conflict would possibly lead to another alternation even finer defining the plausibility structure and social identity within the group. If God chooses one’s group, it is needed to define why that is so, in order to lay down rules on others. In the letter to the Corinthians, a large part is about sacrificial meat that is polluted of idol gods. At first Paul says that idol gods does not exist, but later he seem to change his mind when he fears for the conscience of people with lesser knowledge, not knowing or understanding these facts. To attribute lesser knowledge is one of the ways to define an identity for the own group, which is about downgrading others in benefiting one’s own group. Other ways are e.g. stereotyping and discriminating other groups, in order to make one’s own group appear as better than other groups, thus holding the identity of the group intact. Anyone wants to belong to a winning team. Paul thought he had all the answers, being chosen by God, and believed his knowledge to hold an absolute and universal truth, as do all leaders in self-proclaimed-chosen-groups, examples of this can be seen even in present time.

A growing community struggle to keep and uphold a stabile identity and plausibility structure. If an inclusion of Gentiles are seen as a extension of the Jesus-believing group due to the fact of a divine command to grow in numbers, there is no choice weather to grow or not. The only possibility is to solve the problem. The Apostolic Decree in my
opinion could be seen as a part of this solution, i.e. as a short version of the Law, partly simplifying the social identification within the group itself and partly showing the Gentiles what to expect. The transition from Pagan to Gentile was needed to be as smooth as possible, thus keeping the threat against the perception of the Jesus-believing identity and its meaning to a minimum. In my opinion regarding sacrificial meat, the Jewish concepts on food restrictions (πνικτος and αἵματος) and the concepts on εἰδώλων in the Apostolic Decree could all be seen as misinterpretations of the Roman religion (3. 1.), not sharing the same religious foundation with the Jesus-believing Jews. Meat was not that of an important issue for the Gentiles. Referring to this it is plausible that the rules rather mirrored matters within the Jesus-believing Jewish group, i.e. projected threats to be met and dealt with, if the group would come to expand with strangers with another symbolic universe. And because it rather was a non-issue for the Gentiles they accepted the rules, due to the benefits.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


