The Customs of the Jews no sufficient Argument

Book V. Ch. xx. 2.

Reading of other profitable instructions; and concerning books Apocryphal.

make known the doctrine of virtuous conversation; whereupon besides those things in regard whereof we are thought to read the Scriptures of God amiss, it is thought amiss that we read in our churches any thing at all besides the Scriptures. To exclude the reading of any such profitable instruction as the Church hath devised for the better understanding of Scripture, or for the easier training up of the people in holiness and righteousness of life, they plead that God in the Law would have nothing brought into the temple, neither besoms, nor flesh-hooks, nor trumpets, but those only which were sanctified; that for the expounding of darker places we ought to follow the Jews' polity, who under Antiochus, where they


Neither the i. lib. 1. p. 196. [157. 158.]

Apostles, are at all to be read in the church. Wherein first it is good to consider the order which the Lord kept with his people in this respect, when he commanded,

Exod. xxx. 29. that no vessel nor no instrument, either besom or flesh-hook or pan, should once come into the temple, but those only which were sanctified and set apart for that use. And in the book of Numbers he will have no other trumpets blown to call the people together, but those only which were set apart for that purpose. Num. x. 2. [See T. C. i. p. 194. [158.]

Besides this, the polity of the Church of God in times past is to be followed; therefore; that for the expounding of darker places, places of more easiness ought to be joined together; as in the persecution of Antiochus, where they could not" (prove the words, were of all most fit to be read in the Church. Seeing therefore, I say, the Church of God then abstinued from such interpretations in the Scriptures contained itself with the Scriptures alone, it cannot but be a most dangerous attempt to bring any thing into the Church which is not contained besides the word of God. This practice continued still in the Churches of God after the Apostles' times, as may appear by the second Apology of Justin Martyr, which sheweth that their manner was to read in the church the monuments of the Prophets and of the Apostles; and if they had read any thing else, it was to be supposed that he would have set it down, considering that his purpose there is to show the whole order which was used in the church then. The same may appear in the first homily of Origen upon Exodus, and upon the Judges.

Acts xiii. 15. xv. 21.

Justin Apol. 2. [i. 8.] Petrine epistle to the Ephesians, h εις τα συγγραμματα των Προφητων αγιωτατα, p. 98, ed. Colom. 1680.]


Concil. Laod. (330?) c. 59. [κα]τα δι' ου διιωςισμων υλικων λεγεται εις τη εκκλησιαν, ου γαρ ακοινωνα ββαινα, αλλα μονα ταις του καιρου και παλαιας λογισεται. tom. i. col. 1307.]

had not the commodity of sermons, appointed always at their meeting somewhat out of the Prophets to be read together with the Law, and so by the one made the other plainer to be understood; that before and after our Saviour's coming they neither read Onkelos nor Jonathan's paraphrase, though having both, but contented themselves with the reading only of scriptures; that if in the primitive Church there had been anything read besides the monuments of the Prophets and Apostles, Justin Martyr and Origen who mention these have spoken of the other likewise; that the most ancient and best councils forbid any thing to be read in churches saving canonical Scripture only; that when other things were afterwards permitted, fault was found with it, it succeeded but ill, the Bible itself was thereby in time quite and clean thrust out.

[2.] Which arguments, if they be only brought in token of the author's good will and meaning towards the cause which they would set forward, must accordingly be accepted of by them who already are persuaded the same way. But if their drift and purpose be to persuade others, it would be demanded,

5 Concil. Vas. 2. (Vaison, 529.) [or 3 can. 3. "Hoc etiam pro adictione omnium Ecclesiarum, et pro utilitate totius populi, nobis placuit, ut non solum in cementibus, sed etiam in omnibus paroecies, verbum faciendo daremus presbyteris et presbyteris: ita ut si presbyteri, qui sunt in Ecclesia, quater innumeraea prohibentes, per se ipsum non poterint predecare, Sanctorum Patrum Homilia, a Dissouthiam rectiuntur." t. iv. 1680. A.D. 525.]

by what rule the legal hallowing of besoms and flesh-hooks must needs exclude all other readings in the church save Scripture. Things sanctified were thereby in such sort appropriated unto God, as that they might never afterwards again be made common. For which cause the Lord, to sign and mark them as his own, appointed oil of holy unction, the like whereunto it was not lawful to make for ordinary and daily uses. Thus the anointing of Aaron and his sons tied them to the office of the priesthood for ever; the anointing, not of those silver trumpets (which Moses as well for secular as sacred uses was commanded to make, not to sanctify), but the unction of the tabernacle, the table, the laver, the altar of God, with all the instruments appertaining thereunto, this made them for ever holy unto him in whose service they were employed. But what of this? Doth it hereupon follow that all things new in the church “from the greatest to the least” are unholy, which the Lord hath not himself precisely instituted? For so those rudiments they say do import. Then is there nothing holy which the Church by her authority hath appointed, and consequently all positive ordinances that ever were made by ecclesiastical power touching spiritual affairs are profane, they are unholy.

[3.] I would not wish them to undertake a work so desperate as to prove, that for the people’s instruction no kind of reading is good, but only that which the Jews devised under Antichus, although even that be also mistaken. For according to Elias the Levite, (out of whom it doth seem borrowed)

the thing which Antichus forbade was the public Reading of the Law, and not sermons upon the Law. Neither did the Jews read a portion of the Prophets together with the Law to serve for an interpretation thereof, because Sermons were not permitted; but instead of the Law which they might not read openly, they read of the Prophets that which in likeness of matter came nearest to each section of their Law. Whereupon when afterwards the liberty of reading the Law was restored, the selfsame custom as touching the Prophets did continue still.

[4.] If neither the Jews have used publicly to read their paraphrases, nor the primitive Church for a long time any other writings than Scripture, except the cause of their not doing it were some law of God or reason forbidding them to do that which we do, why should the later ages of the Church be deprived of the liberty the former had? Are we bound while the world standeth to put nothing in practice but only that which was at the very first?

Concerning the council of Laodicea, as it forbiddeth the reading of those things which are not canonical, so it maketh some things not canonical which are. Their judgment in this we may not, and in that we need not follow.

“second Lesson. And here let me set down what was the occasion of the Hapatrah. According to what I have found written, the wicked Antiochus King of Greece forbade Israel to read in the law publicly. What did the Israelites? They took one section from the Prophets, the matter of which resembled the matter which was written in the section appertaining to that Sabbath. For instance on the Sabbath of Beroeoth, i.e. i. e. in the beginning, they read, Thus saith the Lord which created the heavens, &c. (Is. xiii. 5.) And the section of Noah they read as a lesson, ‘As the waters of Noah so is this to me.’ (Isai. liv. 9.) And so throughout, section by section. And even now that the decrees have ceased, that custom has not ceased, but even at this day they read the Sections of the Prophets after reading of the Law, and it is called the Hapatrah, i.e. Dismission.” (Vid. Prideaux, Connect. p. ii. b. iii. An. A. C. 167.)

Acts xx. 11; xiii. 15.

T. C. lib. i. p. 197. [158.] This practice continued still in the churches of God after the Apostles’ times, as may appear by the second Apology of Justin Martyr. I. 5. p. 198. [159.] It was decreed in the council of Laodicea, that nothing should be read in the church but the canonical books of the Old and New Testament. Afterward, as corruptions grew in the Church, the reading of Homilies and of Martyrs’ lives was permitted. But besides the evil success thereof, that use and custom was controlled, as may appear by the council of Colen, albeit otherwise popish. The bringing in of Homilies and Martyrs’ Lives hath thrust the Bible clean out of the church, or into a corner. The Apocalypse. Can. 60
of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. The cause of their reading first the Old Testament, then the New, and always somewhat out of both, is most likely to have been that which Justin Martyr and St. Augustin observe in comparing the two Testaments. "The Apostles," saith the one, "have taught us as themselves did learn, first the precepts of the Law, and then the Gospels. For what else is the Law but the Gospel foreshewed? What other the Gospel, but the Law fulfilled?" In like sort the other, "What the Old Testament hath, the very same the New contains; but that which lieth there as under a shadow is here brought forth into the open sun. Things there figured are here performed." Again, "In the Old Testament there is a close comprehension of the New, in the "New an open discovery of the Old." To be short,
they will be read in Churches, but not to be alleged as
if their authority did bind us to build upon them our faith.
"Other writings they named Apocryphal, which they would
not have read in churches. These things delivered unto us
from the Fathers we have in this place thought good to set
down." So far Ruffinus ¹.

[8.] He which considereth notwithstanding what store of
false and forged writings dangerous unto Christian belief,
and yet bearing ² glorious inscriptions, began soon upon the
Apostles' times to be admitted into the Church, and to be
honoured as if they had been indeed apostolic, shall easily
perceive what cause the provincial synod of Laodicea ³ might
have as they to prevent especially the danger of books made
newly Ecclesiastical, and for fear of the fraud of heretics to
provide, that such public readings might be altogether taken
out of Canonical scripture. Which ordinance respecting but
that abuse that grew through the intermingling of lessons
human with sacred, at such time as the one both affected the
credit and usurped the name of the other (as by the canon of
a later council ⁴ providing remedy for the selfsame evil, and
yet allowing the old ecclesiastical books to be read, it doth
more plainly and clearly appear,) neither can be construed nor
should be urged utterly to prejudice our use of those old
ecclesiastical writings; much less of Homilies, which were a
third kind of readings usual in former times, a most commend-

calc. Fel.] Scientificum tamem
"est, quod et illi libri sunt, quia
non Canonici, sed Ecclesiastici a
majoribus appellati sunt: ut est
Sapientia Solomonis, et alia Sa-
pientia que dicitur filii Syrach,
qui liber apud Latinos hoc ipso
generali vocabulo Ecclesiastico
appellatur; quo vocabulo non
auctor libelli, sed Sacramentum
quaestiones cognitam est. Eiusdem
ordinis et libelli Tobi, et
Judith, et Maccabaeorum libri ...

² Vide Gelias. Decret. tom. Con-
cil. 2. p. 462. [- iv. 1256. A.D.
494.]

³ Circa an. Dom. 356.

⁴ Concil. Carth. iii. c. 47.

"Præter Scripturas canonicas nihil
in ecclesiis legitur sub nomine
divinarum scripturarum." Circa
an. Dom. 401. ["Placuit ut præter
Scripturas canonicas nihil in Ec-
clesiis legitur sub nomine divina-
rum scripturarum ... Liceat
etiam legi passiones martyrum,
cum anniversarii dies eorum cele-
brantur," t. ii. p. 1177. A.D. 397.}
able institution, as well then to supply the casual, as now the necessary deficit of sermons.

[9.] In the heat of general persecution, whereunto Christian belief was subject upon the first promulgation thereof throughout the world, it much confirmed the courage and constancy of weaker minds, when public relation was made unto them after what manner God had been glorified through the sufferings of Martyrs, famous amongst them for holiness during life, and at the time of their death admirable in all men’s eyes, through miraculous evidence of grace divine assisting them from above. For which cause the virtues of some being thought expedient to be annually had in remembrance above the rest, this brought in a fourth kind of public reading, whereby the lives of such saints and martyrs had at the time of their yearly memorial solemn recognition in the Church of God. The fond imitation of which laudable custom being in later ages resumed, was when there was neither the like cause to do as the Fathers before had done, nor any care, conscience, or wit, in such as undertook to perform that work, some brainless men have by great labour and travail brought to pass, that the Church is now ashamed of nothing more than of saints. If therefore Pope Gelasius did so long since see


versi fierint cum effectu cause, ante confessionem itipus Dei Apostoli, pro vestra sospitate . . . . . Fundere valeamus preces.”] 3 Tom. Concil. ii. p. 461. [t. iv. 1256. Among the writings which the church of Rome suscipit non prohibet, are reckoned “Gesta Sanctorum Martyrum, qui multiplicibus tormentorum cruciatibus, et mihrabilibus confessionum triamphibus iradians. Quia iste ecclesiae catholicae dubius et majora eius in agonibus fuisse perpessos, nec suis viribus, sed gratia Dei et adjunctio universa tolerasse? Sed id secundum antiquam consuetudinem singuli caetera in sancta Romana Ecclesia non leguntur, quia et eorum qui conscripserit nominis penitus ignoti sunt; et ab infidelibus aut idiotis superflua, aut minus apta, quam rei ordo fuerit, scripta esse putantur: . . . . .

Apocryphal Lessons no Slight to the Scriptures.

those defects of judgment even then, for which the reading of the acts of Martyrs should be and was at that time forborne in the church of Rome; we are not to marvel that afterwards legends being grown in a manner to be nothing else but heaps of frivolous and scandalous vanities, they have been even with disdain thrown out, the very nests which bred them abhorring them. We are not therefore to except only Scripture, and to make confusedly all the residue of one suit, as if they who abolish legends could not without incongruity retain in the church either Homilies or those old Ecclesiastical books.

[10.] Which books in case myself did think, as some others do, safer and better to be left publicly unread; nevertheless as in other things of like nature, even so in this, my private judgment I should be loth to oppose against the force of their reverend authority, who rather considering the divine excellency of some things in all, and of all things in certain of those Apocrypha which we publicly read, have thought it

“sicut Georgii, aliorumque hujusmodi passiones, quae ab hereticis perhibentur compositae. Propter quod est dictum, ne levius subversione sanctandiorioret occasio in sancta Rom. Ecclesia non leguntur.”


4 In errorum barathum facili iter ruunt, qui conceptus pro priis tamar definitionibus ante ponunt. “c. un. de relig. do. in Extra. [r. et capit. unico (Tituli VII.) de Religiosis Dominibus, in Extra- garnibus (Ioannis xxii.) Corp. Juris Canon. t. iii. App. 74. Lugd. 1584.]