

## INFANTICIDE IN THE APOSTOLIC DECREE OF ACTS 15 REVISITED

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**Abstract:** *In a 2009 JETS article, David Instone-Brewer argued that  $\pi\nu\iota\kappa\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  in the prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) is better understood as “smother” rather than “strangle” and relates to the practice of infanticide, specifically the “smothering” of an infant, a practice observed by Gentiles but abhorrent to Jews. Instone-Brewer’s proposal has received little interaction since its proposal. Therefore, this article seeks to outline Instone-Brewer’s argument, indicate why it might be helpful, and then provide a critical examination of it. While Instone-Brewer’s view would solve difficult problems related to the identification and purpose of the prohibitions, it faces significant textual, text-critical, and logical challenges that ultimately call its viability into question.*

**Key words:** *Acts, Apostolic Decree, apostolic prohibitions, infanticide, Jerusalem Council*

Significant disagreement and debate continue over the origin, purpose, and significance of the prohibitions in the apostolic decree of Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).<sup>1</sup> In 2009, David Instone-Brewer<sup>2</sup> made a new and potentially significant contribution to this issue in arguing that  $\pi\nu\iota\kappa\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  in the prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25) would be better understood as “smother” rather than “strangle” and relate not to the killing of animals but rather to the practice of infanticide, namely the “smothering” of an infant, a practice observed by Gentiles but abhorrent to Jews. Unfortunately, Instone-Brewer’s proposal has received little interaction in recent works. Many recent commentaries do not even mention the proposal.<sup>3</sup> Even Craig Keener’s massive four-volume treatment of Acts does not really interact with it.<sup>4</sup> Therefore this article has two primary

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<sup>1</sup> Although in need of some updating, see Charles Savelle, “A Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15,” *BSac* 161 (2004): 449–68.

<sup>2</sup> David Instone-Brewer is senior research fellow in rabbinics and the NT at Tyndale House.

<sup>3</sup> See William S. Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles* (CCSS; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Acts* (EP Study Commentary; Holywell, UK: EP, 2015); Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016); and David E. Garland, *Acts* (Teach the Text; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Craig Keener’s massive 4,640-page commentary devotes almost 100 pages to the Jerusalem Council and yet only one non-engaging footnote to Instone-Brewer’s view: “More nuanced, cf. Instone-Brewer, ‘Infanticide’ (esp. 321), noting Jerusalem’s culinary emphasis but that for Gentile ‘smothering’ could connote infanticide.” (Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 3: 15:1–23:35 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014], 2260 n. 528). Similarly, Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), mentions the proposal several times but does not interact with its merits.

objectives: (1) it will seek to reintroduce Instone-Brewer's view and (2) provide a critical evaluation of it.

### I. INSTONE-BREWER'S ARGUMENT SUMMARIZED

1. *Infanticide*.<sup>5</sup> Instone-Brewer begins by raising the problem of infanticide. He notes that "infanticide was a pressing ethical problem for Jews living in the Graeco-Roman period because it was a normal method of birth control for Greeks and Romans, while Jews considered it to be murder."<sup>6</sup> The Jews strongly condemned the practice even though they lacked a strong textual basis and "post-NT Christian documents do the same."<sup>7</sup> Instone-Brewer considers it "strange" that "the NT, which was written largely for Gentile converts living in the Graeco-Roman world, appears to be silent on the subject."<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Instone-Brewer argues, "the Apostolic Decree specifically refers to infanticide when it condemns 'smothering' (πνικτός)—a rare word which is used especially with regard to killing infant animals—not 'strangling,' which is a very difficult way to kill an animal."<sup>9</sup> Instone-Brewer's essay consists of four major sections: (1) "Infanticide"; (2) "The Apostolic Decree"; (3) "The Meaning of Πνικτός"; and (4) "Why Did the Apostolic Decree Use the Word Πνικτός?" plus a conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

In his discussion of infanticide,<sup>11</sup> Instone-Brewer notes the tension between Gentile and Jewish perspectives on infanticide. For Gentiles, infanticide was the normal method of birth control and the most common means was "exposure" (ἔκθετος, cf. Acts 7:19). But, the horrors of exposure led "conscientious parents" to kill their baby before "exposing" him or her. Jews on the other hand, apparently only "allowed abortion if the mother's life was at stake (*m. Ohal.* 7.6) and their many laws about hermaphrodites, the mute, and imbeciles indicate that they did not practice infanticide even when there was a clear deformity such as genital ambiguity."<sup>12</sup> Even if the Mishnah reflected later Jewish perspectives, this conservative approach was held by first-century Jews who such as Philo (*Spec.* 3.114–15) and Josephus (*C. Ap.* 2.202).<sup>13</sup> This is significant since Philo was "strongly influenced by Hellenism" and Josephus "wished to mediate between Jews and Romans."<sup>14</sup>

Finally, post-NT writings such as the Epistle of Barnabas (19.5; 20.2) and the Didache (2.2; 5.2) are addressed. They, too, follow the conservative Jewish position.

<sup>5</sup> This paper will follow Instone-Brewer's headings.

<sup>6</sup> David Instone-Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," *JETS* 52 (2009): 301–21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> There appears to be a typographical error, in that the headings are numbered i, ii, iv, v, but no iii. There is a "3" but it is not formatted in the same manner.

<sup>11</sup> Instone-Brewer, "Infanticide," 301–4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>13</sup> Instone-Brewer also references Pseudo-Phocylides, a Jew of the first or second century who reflects a similar position (*ibid.*).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

For Instone-Brewer then, “It is therefore surprising that the NT appears to have nothing to say about infanticide, especially when the practice was so widespread in the Gentile world, and the opposition to it was so strong within Judaism and early Christianity.”<sup>15</sup> So, Instone-Brewer believes that infanticide is addressed implicitly in the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).

In sum, Instone-Brewer makes three major points. (1) Infanticide, typically accomplished through “exposure,” was a prevalent and generally acceptable pagan Gentile practice in the Greco-Roman world. (2) Infanticide, including “exposure,” was rejected on moral grounds by first-century Jews and post-NT Christians. (3) Since it would be surprising for the NT to ignore the issue, one might find it implicitly in the Apostolic Decree.<sup>16</sup>

2. *The Apostolic Decree.* Instone-Brewer begins with a basic explanation of the Apostolic Decree as “rules for Gentile converts concerning some issues.”<sup>17</sup> The Decree consists of four prohibitions (with minor variations) that occur three times in Acts (15:20, 29; 21:25). Instone-Brewer discusses briefly the text-critical issues and syntactical, lexical, and order variations related to the prohibition’s three occurrences. He summarizes that “the Apostolic Decree therefore prohibits four things: idol offerings, ‘blood’ (i.e. eating blood and/or bloodshed), sexual immorality, and ‘smothered things’” and notes that “various attempts have been made to find a common theme or source to explain why these four, and only these four, were singled out as prohibitions which were especially relevant for Gentile converts.”<sup>18</sup>

Instone-Brewer then addresses the origin and purpose of the prohibitions. (I believe that it would be better to keep these issues separate but they are discussed together here.) Here, he identifies some common explanations and then raises significant problems with the views, especially as they relate to the term *πνικτός*.<sup>19</sup>

Concerning the “meal-time prohibitions” view, which relates to eating or what could be eaten in the context of a shared meal between Jewish and Gentile believers. Instone-Brewer states that a major weakness is the rarity of the term “smothered” (*πνικτός*) and that “smothering is an unlikely way to kill an animal.”<sup>20</sup> He adds, “A hunter, farmer, or priest normally slits an animal’s throat and it would be very strange to kill an animal by smothering or choking it. It is difficult to strangle a lamb and almost impossible to strangle an ox; and it is much easier to kill a bird by breaking its neck.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>16</sup> This observation seems valid. Perhaps the only other prominent issue that the NT does not explicitly address relates to whether Christians can or should serve in the military.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 306. See Savelle, “Reexamination of the Prohibitions in Acts 15,” 449–468.

<sup>19</sup> Since Instone-Brewer’s argument relates to *πνικτός*, the focus on those points will be in the summary.

<sup>20</sup> “Infanticide,” 306.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

In the “Gentile temple activities” view, the four prohibitions are cultically linked.<sup>22</sup> Instone-Brewer admits that this view accounts for all four prohibitions but questions why these four would have been chosen. He notes,

Two of them were carried out only by the priests—i.e. killing without draining the blood and killing by suffocation—so there was no need to warn individuals not to carry these out. And there would be no need to add prohibitions about eating pagan sacrifices which were “smothered” or which still contained some “blood” because the first prohibition against idol offerings included these. It is also surprising that the list did not warn converts to avoid other more common activities within heathen temples, such as ritual drunkenness and non-sacrificial worship such as dancing, and prayers to the gods. Therefore, although all four of these can perhaps be linked to activities in pagan temples, only the warnings against eating offerings and temple prostitution were of any relevance for individual believers.

Next, Instone-Brewer addresses the so-called “Noachian commands” (a.k.a. Noahic Precepts; e.g. *Jub.* 7:20–21) which some Jews regarded as universal. But one of the problems with this identification is the addition of “smothering,” which does not find a close correspondence with the common listings of the “Noachian commands.” A similar problem relates to the view Instone-Brewer calls “Three ‘mortal’ sins” (b. *Sanh.* 74a, cf. *Did.* 3)<sup>23</sup> and “laws for resident foreigners,” which Instone-Brewer understands is the scriptural basis for the Noachian and three “mortal sins.” However, in the latter, he finds possible textual support for “smothering” in the prohibition against child sacrifice to Molech (Lev 18:21; 20:2–5).

The “Sibylline universal law” (*Sib. Or.* 3.757–766) does not have a corresponding prohibition of blood but does have a prohibition against killing children and thus might correspond to what Instone-Brewer sees as the meaning of *πνικτός*.

Instone-Brewer’s textual support for the Noachian and three “mortal sins” views in Lev 18:21 and 20:2–5 is reiterated in his discussion of the “Laws in Leviticus 17–18” view.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, he argues that, “if ‘smothering’ is related to Molech infanticide, there is a very good fit between the Apostolic Decree and the laws for foreigners in these two chapters.”<sup>25</sup> Instone-Brewer suggests that the “abominations” of Leviticus 17–18 “includes sexual immorality and infanticide because ‘abomination’ (תועבה) is used concerning homosexuality in these chapters (18:22), and it is also frequently used concerning Molech infanticide” (Deut 12:31; 18:9–12; 2 Kgs 16:3; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:2–6).<sup>26</sup>

After a fairly extensive discussion which I have only summarized here, Instone-Brewer concludes that the “three ‘mortal’ sins” view plus one (a “new em-

<sup>22</sup> This view is most often identified with Ben Witherington III (“Not So Idle Thoughts about *Eidolobuton*,” *TynBul* 44 [1993]: 237–54).

<sup>23</sup> “They can perhaps be called the three ‘mortal’ sins because they are offences which one must not commit even when a life is at stake” (*ibid.*, 308).

<sup>24</sup> This is currently the most widely-held view.

<sup>25</sup> “Infanticide,” 312.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

phasis”) would be the “most easily recognized by a first century Jew.”<sup>27</sup> The plus one “was probably based on the repeated phrase in Amos, “For three sins, and for four ...” (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6), in which Amos cites only the fourth sin. The purpose of adding a fourth was to emphasize a sin which might not normally be considered to be serious by linking it to these three heinous sins.”<sup>28</sup> This fourth addition also seems to be supported by rabbinic literature, although as Instone-Brewer notes there is actually nothing in the literature that corresponds to “smothering.” Furthermore, “One problem with regarding ‘smothering’ as an additional fourth sin is that we would then expect it to be the emphasis of the whole passage, but the apparent obscurity of the term would suggest that it was in fact less important than the others.”<sup>29</sup>

3. *The meaning of πνικτός.* The problem raised in the previous section of the “three ‘mortal’ sins” plus one view is now addressed by a word study of πνικτός in extrabiblical Greek literature. This section is probably one of the better discussions anywhere of this term.

Instone-Brewer begins with the observation that the absence of an explanation of the term πνικτός suggests the recipients were expected to understand the meaning even though the term is relatively rare (only 20 occurrences before the third century AD).<sup>30</sup>

He argues that the typical English translation for πνικτός, “strangled,” has been influenced mainly by its cognates, especially πνίγω.<sup>31</sup> According to Instone-Brewer, πνικτός has a fairly narrow range of usage in extrabiblical literature and is used in two broad senses: (1) engineering; and (2) culinary: “In the early centuries it was used as an engineering term for something which is airtight, and as a culinary term for animals which are killed in infancy in order to create very tender meat. In later centuries it came to mean something which is tender by being lightly cooked.”<sup>32</sup> The second sense is the most significant for Instone-Brewer’s argument. He notes,

The general meaning of πνικτός in culinary usage is therefore “tender.” It appears that this word was used because of a rare process by which meat was prepared in an especially tender form. Instead of killing grown animals, they smothered infant animals to produce extremely tender meat. The core meaning in culinary circles is therefore meat prepared from infant animals which were “smothered” with the secondary meaning of “especially tender.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> πνικτός is only used three times in the NT, all in relation to the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25).

<sup>31</sup> This is not unusual and should be expected in light of the previous footnote.

<sup>32</sup> “Infanticide,” 314.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 316. Instone-Brewer’s understanding does find some support in the recent *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* which suggests “suffocated” as a possibility for Acts 15:20 (Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* [Leiden: Brill, 2015], 1690).

4. *Why did the Apostolic Decree use the word πνικτός?* In this section, Instone-Brewer builds upon the previous assertion that outside of the NT prior to the end of the first century, πνικτός had two broad senses (engineering and culinary) and three related meanings: “(1) smothering of very young animals for tender meat: 7 times by 6 authors; (2) gentle cooking of very tender food: 3 times by 3 authors; and (3) smothering a joint to make it airtight: 10 times by one author.”<sup>34</sup> Instone-Brewer also asserts that,

Of these, the only meaning which easily fits into the context of the Apostolic Decree is that of “smothered [meat]”—i.e. extremely tender meat made by suffocating animals when they were very young. This was apparently so rare that Ulpian, a widely experienced diner, had to admit that he had never heard of this type of meat. If this is the meaning, it would imply that one of the prohibitions of the Apostolic Decree was concerned with forbidding a delicacy similar to veal but much less common, which few believers would ever come across. It is therefore more likely that πνικτός has a wider interpretation. The most likely one is infanticide, which was implied by a word describing the killing of infant animals.<sup>35</sup>

However, πνικτός is not one of the commonly used terms for “exposing” or “expelling” an infant (rather see ἐκβολή, ἐκβάλλω, ἐκθετος, ἐκθειμαι, ἐκτίθημι, ἐξορίζω, ἐγχυρίζω). For Instone-Brewer this is not a problem because the use of these more common terms could be misleading since they all have other meanings which could prove misleading and the use of πνικτός could be euphemistic.

The essay moves from πνικτός to a discussion of two possible meanings of the Apostolic Decree. Instone-Brewer summarizes the issue fairly well:

In the context of Acts 15, the Apostolic Decree was a response to those who demanded believers should be circumcised (vv. 1, 5) which the apostles regarded as “troubling” and “disturbing” for Gentile believers (vv. 19, 24). The reason given for making these restrictions was that practicing Jews were found in every city (v. 21), which implied that at least one of the purposes for this Decree was to aid the relations between Gentile believers and Jews.<sup>36</sup>

In light of what has proceeded, Instone-Brewer suggests two probable purposes for these prohibitions: (1) rules for meal preparation; or (2) moral guidelines.<sup>37</sup> Rules for meal preparations would help remove barriers between Jewish and

<sup>34</sup> “Infanticide,” 316–17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 318–319.

<sup>37</sup> Instone-Brewer helpfully lays out his understandings of these two options as follows (*ibid.*, 319):

“(1) How to prepare food when eating with Jews:

- idol offerings: i.e. do not buy meat which may have been an idol offering
- blood: i.e. do not buy meat which has not been properly drained—including smothering—i.e. from animals which may have been killed by asphyxiation
- sexual immorality: i.e. do not let a woman in her menses prepare the meal

(2) How to avoid the immorality of the Gentile world

- idol offerings: i.e. avoid idolatry including social functions in temples

Gentile believers even if Jews might not be able to partake of all the food Gentiles brought to communal meals. If the decrees were rules concerned with morality then Gentiles could avoid scandalous behaviors that would hinder relationships with Jews. But both purposes have a problem with *πνικτός*. However, for Instone-Brewer, a possible answer is found in understanding the four prohibitions morally and seeing the word *πνικτός* as a reference to infanticide.

At this point, the discussion takes an interesting turn. Instone-Brewer suggests that the “difficult and ambiguous meaning” of *πνικτός* may have been a deliberate choice.<sup>38</sup> The ambiguity would allow some to regard it as further teaching about food laws (presumably Jewish believers), while others could regard it as a prohibition of infanticide (presumably Gentile believers). The ambiguity (and the true intent) would be clarified by the letter carriers who would “interpret the Apostolic Decree in a way which deemphasized the food laws” and that “it is very likely that this is exactly what James intended.”<sup>39</sup> This would fulfill the purpose of unity, by avoiding the institution of food laws on Gentiles and “mollify[ing]” Jewish believers because they interpreted it to refer to “culinary regulations.”<sup>40</sup> Instone-Brewer states,

When Paul and his company went round telling Gentile converts about the Apostolic Decree, the natural force of the passage would highlight the presence of “smothering” as the emphasis of the Decree. This item would be emphasized in two ways. Firstly “smothering” would naturally be regarded as a fourth item in the normal structure of the three “mortal sins” plus one. Secondly, the use of the rare word *πνικτός* would necessitate some explanation.

Did they emphasize that Gentiles should avoid “smothered meat,” or that they should avoid infanticide? There is little doubt that they would take the opportunity to point out to the new converts that the practice which Gentiles considered to be a normal method of birth control was, for Jews and Christians, a forbidden act.<sup>41</sup>

5. *Instone-Brewer’s conclusion.* Here are Instone-Brewer’s conclusions slightly reworded and enumerated:<sup>42</sup>

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- blood: i.e. avoid bloodshed and violence – especially including:
  - smothering: i.e. infanticide (or abortion) used for birth control
  - sexual immorality: i.e. all *πορνεία*, from prostitutes to homosexual practice”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Here is the full quotation of Instone-Brewer: “The purpose of the Apostolic Decree was to help promote unity in a church where some Jewish believers wanted all Christian believers to become Jews by following the law of circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5). Presumably they also wanted them to obey all the food laws and laws of cleanliness as well, as implied when Peter referred to the entire Jewish oral law as ‘placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear’ (Acts 15:10). It is possible that these believers would be mollified by the Apostolic Decree because although James was clearly not in favor of imposing Jewish oral law on Gentile believers, he did propose a list of prohibitions which they were able to interpret as a list of culinary regulations.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 320–21.

1. “The survey of *πνικτός* in ancient Greek literature has failed to produce a clear meaning for this term in the Apostolic Decree.”
2. None of the normally suggested meanings fits the context of Acts 15 well.
3. Jewish literature of the time speaks of choking sacrifices in pagan temples and smothering infants.
4. Reading between the lines of Acts 15, we may conclude that this list was written in a deliberately ambiguous way.
5. The concerns of the Christian Pharisees were not fully addressed by the Decree but were mollified by the use of the traditional three-fold list of “mortal sins” and the Decree was written in such a way as to emphasize the application of this list to food requirements.
6. For the Christian Pharisees, “smothering” would convey culinary connotations but for Gentiles the connotations of killing infant animals would raise the issue of infanticide.
7. The official meaning of the Decree (i.e. infanticide) would be conveyed by carriers.
8. The adjective “smothered” was chosen as a deliberately pejorative reference to infanticide.
9. “Jewish and early Christian authors were outspoken critics of abortion and infanticide ... even though the Christian Bible appeared to be silent on the subject, except for a semi-obscure reference in Exod 21:22–23.”
10. “It is likely that none of the authors of the NT felt it necessary to forbid infanticide or abortion because this was clearly forbidden in the Apostolic Decree that had been propagated to the Gentile churches.”

## II. EVALUATION OF INSTONE-BREWER’S VIEW

1. *Strengths.* Instone-Brewer is to be commended for making a genuine contribution to our understanding of the Apostolic Decree. The argument is clearly and carefully articulated and his attempt to more accurately identify the meaning of *πνικτός* in its Greek literary context is admirable. If he is correct, then a well-known conundrum concerning the four prohibitions in the Apostolic Decree has been resolved. For example, this proposal resolves the issue of redundancy between *αἷμα* and *πνικτός* in the more traditional reading. Furthermore, a puzzling moral lacuna has been filled in addressing the issue of infanticide.<sup>43</sup>

2. *Weaknesses.* However, there are several weaknesses that seriously call into question Instone-Brewer’s proposal.

First, although *πνικτός* is without parallel apart from the prohibitions in the NT, the cognate terms *πνίγω*, *ἀποπνίγω*, *συμπνίγω* seem to provide sufficient support for the meaning of *πνικτός* as something strangled or choked to death. But what does this mean in the prohibitions? The answer for most interpreters is to understand *πνικτός* in light of the Mosaic regulations prohibiting the consumption

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<sup>43</sup> This would also be helpful in addressing current moral issues such as abortion.

of animals that have not had their blood drained properly (Lev 17:13–14; Deut 12:16, 23).<sup>44</sup> The argument is that an animal killed by strangulation does not allow for the blood to drain from the carcass. An additional factor may be, as Bietenhard suggests, “The reason behind the prohibition was possibly that among the heathen, animals were often killed by being strangled especially in the sacrificial cultus.”<sup>45</sup> In any case, evidence from Philo, the first-century Jewish philosopher and teacher, suggests that the prohibition of strangled food was still being observed in his day. Thus, the traditional view of as “strangled” or “choked” makes sense contextually and historically.

Second, it seems unlikely that previous scholarship would have missed the connection now made by Instone-Brewer between *πνικτός* and infanticide, especially given the widespread practice of infanticide and the extensive exegetical attention given to the prohibitions.

Third, Instone-Brewer’s moral view also relies on understanding *αἷμα* as “bloodshed.” However, understanding *αἷμα* as a metonymy for murder seems unlikely for at least two reasons. (1) When *αἷμα* is employed with the sense of murder, the context usually makes this sense obvious (e.g. Acts 5:28; 22:20). However, contextual indicators are lacking in the prohibitions. Hunkin notes that *αἷμα* “is not found by itself as equivalent to *φόνος*. . . . In every case it is some other word in the context like ‘human’ or ‘shedding’ which defines the reference to murder, and not *αἷμα* by itself alone.”<sup>46</sup> (2) It seems strange that something as basic and obvious as prohibiting murder would be included in such a selective list.

Fourth, Instone-Brewer’s view fails to account for the omission of *πνικτός* from some Western texts.<sup>47</sup> Most textual critics will argue that the absence of *πνικτός* is best explained as an attempt to give the prohibitions a completely moral flavor.<sup>48</sup> Why would this fairly early textual change have been introduced if blood related to bloodshed and *πνικτός* related to infanticide, both moral issues? One could argue that infanticide was no longer an issue after the first century but there is good evidence to suggest that it was a problem until at least the fourth century.<sup>49</sup>

Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, is the argument that the ambiguity inherent in the term allowed the Pharisaic Christians to view it as relating to the food laws and yet be explained to the Gentiles by the carriers of the decree as a prohibi-

<sup>44</sup> Philip Maertens offers a novel view suggesting a figurative meaning for *πνικτός* that does not relate to animals but to human relationships. That is, the prohibition relates to avoiding what harms others relationally (“Quelques notes sur ΠΝΙΚΤΟΣ,” *NTS* 45 [1999]: 493–96). But Maertens’s view has not proven persuasive and seems to give *πνικτός* a too ambiguous and generic meaning in an otherwise very specific list. If Maertens is correct, then *πνικτός* would better serve as an overall principle governing the other prohibitions than a specific prohibition.

<sup>45</sup> H. Bietenhard, “*πνικτός*,” *NIDNTT* 1:226.

<sup>46</sup> J. W. Hunkin, “The Prohibitions of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:28, 29),” *JTS* 27 (1926): 279.

<sup>47</sup> See the earlier text-critical discussion of the Prohibitions.

<sup>48</sup> See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 379–83, and Roger Omanson’s “revision” of Metzger (*A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* [Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006], 257–59).

<sup>49</sup> Infanticide was legally prohibited in the Roman Empire in AD 374.

tion of infanticide.<sup>50</sup> There are at least three difficulties here. One difficulty with this view is that it would seem to make James, Paul, and other leaders disingenuous at best. Another problem is that even if one sets aside the ethical problem, it is difficult to see how this verbal sleight-of-hand would not have gotten back to the Pharisaic believers further exacerbating the Jew-Gentile tensions. Finally, it is not clear why this duplicity is necessary. If Jews rejected infanticide and found it abhorrent then why would they object to having it as a prohibition<sup>51</sup> and the issue of blood consumption would still be addressed by *αἷμα*.

In sum, Instone-Brewer's effort has been admirable and if correct, game-changing, but there are serious difficulties with the view. Ultimately, he has made more of a possible case than a probable one. Infanticide may have been an apostolic concern but it was not an Apostolic Decree.

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<sup>50</sup> "Infanticide," 321.

<sup>51</sup> The problem here is that if one accepts this point then it is hard to explain why *πικτός* is used rather than one of the more common terms for "exposure" (*ἐκβολή*, *ἐκβάλλω*, *ἐκθετος*, *ἐκθειμαι*, *ἐκτίθημι*, *ἐξορίζω*, *ἐγχυρίζω*).