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How Paul and the Jerusalem Council Might Speak to Division in the Twenty-First Century Church

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**HOW PAUL AND THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL MIGHT SPEAK TO
DIVISION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH**

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A Paper Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University,
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SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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Signature of Director

Dr. Charles Bobertz

**HOW PAUL AND THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL MIGHT SPEAK TO
DIVISION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH**

Description of the Project:

This paper sets forth the first-century Jerusalem Council as a model of hope to address the divisive issues facing the American Catholic Church today. It describes the issues facing this first Christian community as not dissimilar from the issues facing twenty-first century Catholicism. The first step in this endeavor is to describe the underlying issues that are at the root of the division experienced by many, if not most parishes today. The division is described in terms of two opposing polemics relating to each side's approach to the laws and teaching authority of the Church. The second step thoroughly examines what was at stake in the issues surrounding the Jerusalem Council and what was accomplished in its Decree and subsequent developments. The third and final step draws appropriate conclusions and articulates what the Council might have to teach the contemporary Church.

This paper may be duplicated.

July 6, 2006

**HOW PAUL AND THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL MIGHT SPEAK TO DIVISION
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By Mary Birmingham

The world was saddened by the death of Pope John Paul II. Pundits were in their glory analyzing his pontificate. Regardless of how one perceived his contribution to the Church, one cannot deny the impact he had on the world. Never had the world experienced such a charismatic leader of the Roman Catholic Church. One need not list his accomplishments. They were legion! The media provided a virtual smorgasbord of vignettes to elucidate them.

While John Paul's contributions are endless, there are critics who suggest that his pontificate had a polarizing effect on the Church. Regardless of the causative agent, what is certain is the existence of division, not only at the universal level, but particularly at the local parish level.

It is not the intent of this paper to proffer a critique on the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. He was a gifted leader of the Church. My intention is to paint (with broad strokes) a portrait of a Church divided by two ideological camps—the first camp is comprised of people who believe that the aggiornamento of the Second Vatican Council has taken a detour, and the second camp is comprised of those who insist that relativism has watered down Catholic tradition and if it is to survive a strict return and adherence to dogmatic theology is essential.

Nothing is more disheartening than to see the great divide we now experience in our parishes. What is needed in a new papacy is a prophetic voice of epic proportions. A colleague and I were recently musing: "Whom might we consider a prophetic figure in the Church today?" Yes, John Paul II was a prophetic figure for the world. However, the Church needs a new voice.

We need a new apostle Paul who is willing to take his case to the “troika of Jerusalem”¹ and forge a new vision for the future. Sadly, few prominent names surfaced.

My thesis, therefore, affirms that the issues surrounding the Jerusalem Council are not only a paradigm for what is taking place in the Church at present, but also buried within that event are seeds of hope for a future vision of Church. Drawing primarily from the insights of such luminaries as Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, Calvin Roetzel, Walter Brueggemann, Mark Mattison, M.A. Seifrid, Cardinal Francis George, Max Turner, David Catchpole, Charles Bobertz, Craig Bloomberg and Luke Timothy Johnson, I intend to examine the issues surrounding the Council. My hope is to glean the lessons learned from that event and to articulate what that same event might have to teach the contemporary church. The overarching issues of the Jewish Christians involved in the Jerusalem Council are the same overarching issues of those today who are concerned with a lackadaisical approach to theology. I intend to show how they are both issues of maintaining identity of cult. The Church today needs an *apostle* like Paul. However, more than the *apostle* Paul, what the Church needs most is Paul the *prophet*.

In order to paint this portrait, my first approach will be to articulate the overarching issues inherent in each camp mentioned above. Secondly, I will explore the Jerusalem Council—the issues, the antagonists and protagonists--and articulate the way in which the issues of this council are not unrelated to the issues we face today. Following this exploration I will provide a composite portrait of Paul and the theology that underpinned the arguments with his opponents and how those arguments might be brought to bear on issues today. My final task will be to articulate the implications for the future Church and to elucidate the need for a new prophetic voice akin to the voice of Paul.

¹ Murphy-O’Connor, Jerome, *Paul A Critical Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 136

A House Divided. From the perspective of this observer,² the primary discord in the Church today divides people to two ideological camps. Those people with conservative leanings are in one camp, and those with a progressive stance are on the left. Few people today are willing to publicly own a liberal posture. Such an epithet nearly makes one a poster child for all that is base and unholy!

Brought to the lowest common denominator, what divides the two groups in question is each group's approach to law. There are many issues that fall under that very broad umbrella, such as women in the priesthood, gay marriage, married clergy and birth control, to name a few. While people in the camps mentioned above may have strong opinions regarding those issues, they are not what divide communities. What divides communities is the overall approach to the teaching authority of the Church and the implications of each particular approach.

Progressive Catholics are often accused of being cafeteria Catholics. They are accused of taking what they need [or want] from Catholicism and leaving the rest.³ While there are perhaps seeds of truth in that accusation, what many progressive Catholics would prefer to say about their approach to the teaching authority of the Church is that they ascribe to the principle of informed conscience. Such people have a deep love for the Church and they take very seriously its teaching authority. However, while that authority is respected, many progressive Catholics nonetheless believe that they have a responsibility to inform their conscience. Rather than simply accept a Church directive or teaching as an unbreakable tenet of the Church, such people

² One caveat is in order. I call myself an observer. Indeed that is a misnomer. There is no such thing as an unbiased observation. While I intend to make every effort to paint an objective picture of the situation in the Church, it is important to note that since I fall in one of the camps mentioned above, my observation can hardly be considered unbiased. What I do bring to the table is twenty-five years of watching the evolution of these ideological camps in parishes—my own and the hundreds of others I have visited across the United States. I have seen the destructive power of unresolved conflicts between these groups. Any effort to bring unity to parishes is worth the investigation, biased interpretation notwithstanding.

³ Since cafeteria-style Catholicism is evidenced on both sides of the aisle, this is hardly a fair accusation! Many conservative Catholics practice birth control and are strong supporters of the death penalty. Progressive Catholics pick and choose what they will observe and what they will not observe as well.

believe that they must study the tenet, explore its genesis, consider the implications, determine how it is in accord with the general corpus of church law and the *sensus fidelium*, prayerfully seek the wisdom and the strength to comply with the directive, and after all such efforts are exhausted, if they are unable to accept the tenet (provided it does not fall under the category of hierarchy of truths or infallibly pronounced teachings) they have a right to object as a matter of conscience. Church teaching, in fact, supports their position.⁴

It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience...Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. 'He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters... Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened.⁵

While the law is important to people in this camp, they would believe in the need to bend it for the sake of a pastoral response to people in need. When it comes to the initiation of new members, this camp would be inclined to espouse an evangelization model in which Scripture, Christian witness and mentoring of the candidates would be seen as the most important elements of formation. Handing down the doctrines of the Church is essential, but they are just one element among other equally important elements.

Another cause for dismay among those in the progressive camp is what they perceive to be a consistent diminishment of the role of the laity in recent years. This is most evident, they insist, in the recently published *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. When new directives insist that the laity not touch sacred vessels, for example, what is communicated is a posture of subordination. People thus experience a diminishment of their status as equal members in the royal priesthood. In the last analysis, progressive Catholics would ask that their voice be heard and not feared, dismissed, or quashed.

⁴ The downside of the informed conscience approach is that many people relegate informed conscience to the arena of opinion without taking the necessary steps required to make a truly informed conscience.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). Second Edition; Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, 1997, #1779, 1782, 1783.

People in parishes who are on the conservative side of the fence are very clear and concise concerning their issues. They too have deep love for the Church and often feel it necessary to be its delegated defender. Some conservative people believe that the Second Vatican Council opened the door to *aggiornamento* too far and the tradition was watered down as a result. The pendulum swung too far to the left. Cardinal George in his article, "Crisis of Liberal Catholicism," charges liberal Catholics with a watered down Christianity, or worse a Christianity which is no Christianity at all, but rather social advocacy disguised as faith.

...modern liberals interpret dogmas which affront current cultural sensibilities as the creation of celibate males eager to keep a grasp on power rather than as the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the successors of the Apostles. The bishops become the successors of the Sanhedrin and the church, at best, is the body of John the Baptist, pointing to a Jesus not yet risen from the dead and, therefore, a role model or prophet but not a savior. Even Jesus' being both male and celibate is to be forgotten or denied once the risen Christ can be reworked into whomever or whatever the times demand. Personal experience becomes the criterion for deciding whether or not Jesus is *my* savior, a point where liberal Catholics and conservative Protestants seem to come to agreement, even if they disagree on what salvation really means. Liberal culture discovers victims more easily than it recognizes sinners; and victims don't need a savior so much as they need to claim their rights.⁶

Cardinal George further insists that "personal conversion, which is at the heart of the gospel, has been smothered by a pillow of accommodation."⁷ The culture, rather than the gospel thus becomes the *raison de très* of Catholic liberal pursuits. His admittedly "unfair" sketch of Liberal Catholicism nevertheless insists that people with liberal leanings have not provided "theological warrants" to convincingly plead their case when it comes to issues they deem worthy of attention.⁸

People of the same mind set as Cardinal George espouse a return to the basics. They complain that many people are ignorant of the tradition. They would insist that unsupervised experimentation and adaptation of the liturgy seriously hampered its appropriate celebration.

⁶ George, Cardinal Francis, O.M.I., "The Crisis of Liberal Catholicism: How Liberalism Fails the Church," in *A Commonweal Forum*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Cf. Ibid.*

They would further insist that the Second Vatican Council is responsible for eliminating a sense of awe and majesty from the liturgy.

People in this camp often decry a return to the Baltimore catechism. They insist that in order to be a faithful Catholic one must obey the commandments and the precepts of the Church. Many conservative parishioners believe that the answer to Christian living is found in strict adherence to the law. One man commented, "Faith is a black and white affair. One either believes, or one does not. There are no gray areas."⁹

The people in the conservative camp insist that relativism (the denial of the existence of absolute values) has the faithful in a choke hold and that a cafeteria approach to Catholicism seriously jeopardizes the witness of the Church in the world. They insist that relativism has spread like a cancer. Nothing is sacrosanct. People in the conservative camp insist that the belief system of the Catholic Church is the primary reason it has withstood two thousand years of history. Apologetics and strict adherence to the Law are their mantras. Regarding conscience they would assert that it is a misunderstood concept and too liberally applied. They would ascribe to the following position.

Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed. This ignorance can often be imputed to personal responsibility. This is the case when a man 'takes little trouble to find out why is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin.' In such cases the person is culpable for the evil he commits. Ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, lack of conversion and of charity: these can be at the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct.¹⁰

⁹ The example of one small Christian community in a suburban Florida parish illustrates this point. The community in question is a microcosm of the wider Church. It too is divided between people on the right and people in the middle. A comment was made about a neighbor who is a professed atheist. A child asked if that person was going to hell. One woman's response was, "Absolutely!" There was no room for an investigation of the psychology that might drive such a posture. It was a simple attestation that the neighbor indeed would be going straight to hell! The more moderate members of the group affirmed their belief in a God whose mercy extends even to professed atheists. They maintained that God knows the neighbor's soul more than we do and it is for God to decide, not for us to judge! The conservative members insisted that God already spoke in regard to this issue and that God's word is definitive. The child's immortal soul was in immanent danger.

¹⁰ CCC, #1790-1792.

This group is very clear regarding its approach to the initiation of new members. They loudly exhort, “Put a catechism in their hands.” To know the tenets of the faith is to be converted to it.¹¹ The Law is the only constant and thus it is what matters most.

Cardinal George also critiques modern Catholic conservatism. He insists that Catholic conservatives pick up the “debate on the wrong terms.”¹² He maintains that conservatism tends to enshrine earlier “cultural forms of faith expression and absolutizes them for all times and all places.”¹³ Conservative Catholics insist on the absolute authority of the hierarchy. Many believe that the laity was given too much autonomy and as a result diminished the role of the priest. Such people place the hierarchy on a shaky pedestal making them responsible for all that is “good as well as for all ills.”¹⁴ The hierarchy is believed to have the power to correct all aberrations by simply asserting authority. Cardinal George thus accuses conservatism of the same cafeteria Catholicism indicative of the liberal position. He chastises such Catholics in their uneasiness with Catholic social teaching and insists that they too challenge the imposition of Law, just as do the liberals. “In religion, liberal pastoring means assuring people that the unconditional love of God means putting aside even moral laws when they get in the way of personal fulfillment; conservative pastoring means insisting on law without linking it clearly to the truths that Christ reveals about the dignity and freedom of the human person.”¹⁵ Cardinal George reminds the reader that the Church’s understanding of what it means to be human emanates from her belief in Christ and living that life together in ecclesial communion. The Cardinal thus situates all Church power in Christ and the authority given to the first Apostles. While the Church preaches Christ

¹¹ There is presently a concerted national effort to draft a nine-month syllabus of systematic theological teaching to be used as the means of initiating new converts to Christianity/Catholicism.

¹² George, 9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

crucified, not the Church itself, “Christ cannot be adequately known except from within his Body, the church.”¹⁶

One final post script, just as the people in the former camp need their voices heard and not feared, dismissed, or quashed, so too do people who embrace conservative Catholicism.

It is evident from the two descriptions just presented that there is a crisis in parish life. There is an undercurrent of deep hurt and personal loss. It is a hurt that stems from the deepest love and devotion for Mother Church. Just as a mother hurts when her children grieve so too does Mother Church hurt. She is wounded.

There are many voices vying to be heard midst the clamor of absolutism on both sides of the ideological fence. Voices on the left and voices on the right defend their creeds, both unwilling to bend; both certain that their way to God is the only way. Charity toward one another is often the last victim in the war of posturing and positioning for recruits to one’s way of thinking.

One cannot help but have sympathy for both sides. People with a progressive outlook suggest that the recent emphasis on a more strict approach to the law evidenced in the new *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* and *Redemptionis Sacramentum* and in the overall posture of the last pontificate has stifled the reforms of Vatican II. The diminishment of *aggiornamento* looms like a large wet blanket over a humidity-laden steam room! They feel suffocated.

The conservatives fear that the Church has become syncretistic. What it means to be Catholic has been diluted to the point that the very fiber of the Church is threatened. They fear (and rightly so) that most Catholics have a minimal understanding of Catholic teaching. As a result they worry that Catholic identity has been so weakened that it is no longer the Church of

¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

their parents or ancestors. They cry in dismay, “In a world beset by sin, confusion and secularism, at least the Church stands for absolute truth! What will happen when the Church is unsure what it believes?”

Each camp demonizes the other. There is often little Christian charity shared. Yet each Sunday both progressive and conservative people process to the altar as brothers and sisters carrying their secret animosities with them, while ever so sure that their posture is the only correct and divinely inspired posture to embrace.

An Ancient House Divided. Having given an overview of the generalized polarization in the Church today, let us scroll back to an ancient time when similar issues were the proverbial thorn in the Apostle Paul’s already scarred flesh. The scene is the Jerusalem Council. The early Church was no stranger to division. Paul sparred with the conservative element of the Christian movement and the fruits of that joust echo to us from ancient manuscripts. One cannot help, however, sympathizing with the Jewish Christian posture regarding the Law and the practice of it. They feared that their Jewish identity was at stake. M.A. Seifrid concurs: “Luke indicates that the movement of Gentiles into fellowship of believers brought a crisis of identity to the early Church.”¹⁷ Great numbers of Gentiles suddenly were converted to the Lord (Acts 11:20, 21, 16; 13. 49; 14.1). The influx of new converts posed an instant threat to Jewish Christians. Fear of syncretization brought the issue of Gentile conformity to the Law to the fore.

Circumcision was an absolute sign of membership in the covenant people of Israel.

Charles Bobertz insists that practice, not creed defined Judaism:

The fundamental issue here is what to make of the fact that Paul apparently eliminates practices that enacted the basic physical distinctions that established Jewish religious identity. To be a Jew would have been to practice circumcision, to not eat certain foods, to not worship other Gods, to keep the Sabbath distinct from other days, to pray at certain times of the day etc. Put simply, what defined Judaism was practice rather than creed.¹⁸

¹⁷ Seifrid, M.A. “Jesus and the Law in Acts,” in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 30, (1987), 44.

¹⁸ Bobertz, Charles A. Class notes: “Once Again: Paul and the Law.”

Paul and Barnabas attended the conference in Jerusalem in order to deal with the conflict raised by the Judaizers who insisted that circumcision was necessary for Gentile converts to Christianity. Paul avowed that he did not go as part of a delegation, but that he received a revelation from God as his mandate. However, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor is wont to accept Luke's version ¹⁹of the details rather than Paul's. Murphy-O'Connor points out that it was necessary for Paul to hint at his distance from the Antioch church (Gal 2, 11-14). Antioch had adopted Jerusalem's preaching, teaching and practice regarding circumcision. For Paul to be their representative while at the same time disagreeing with its stance regarding this issue "would have been to give arms to his opponents in Galatia." ²⁰

Paul's mission to the Gentiles hung in the balance. Paul's own psychology would never have allowed the appearance of his subordination to the Jerusalem apostles or that he was subject to their orders. However, it was imperative he attend the conference to plead his case. Paul refused to concede on the issue of circumcision yet had to subliminally know that his opponent's case was strong. The points would be difficult to argue:

- A general acceptance that salvation was given by God to the chosen people to whom the Messiah was sent.
 - Jesus obeyed the Law, extolled its value, and exhorted obedience to it. What higher authority than Jesus would there need to be to commend its virtue and adherence?
 - If Gentiles were accepted into the messianic reign of God, why would they not adhere to the same obligations of the Law as Jews and Jewish Christians? ²¹
- One can hear a similar argument in the Church today. Those who favor strict adherence

to the teaching of the Magisterium might say: "The teachings of Catholicism are the foundation of what it means to be Catholic. If a person cannot accept those teachings, why would they want

¹⁹ Luke relates that Paul and Barnabas were appointed as part of a delegation to argue their position with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Acts 15,1-2

²⁰ Murphy O'Connor, p. 133.

²¹ Ibid. p. 134.

to be Catholic? When a person professes membership in the Catholic Church they agree in essence to follow its teachings.” There is certain logic in their argument.

Logic notwithstanding in the Jerusalem accord, one must also not forget the point Seifrid makes regarding Peter’s subtext in convening the Council. “It should not be forgotten that both Peter’s vision and objections for Jewish believers are bound up with the matter of Jewish concern to avoid defilement by contact with Gentiles (10.14; 11.3). It accords with Luke’s interest in the unity of the Church (e.g. 15.25) that the discussion of the Gentile question which affirmed salvation apart from the Law, should conclude with practical measures, meant to protect Jewish sensibilities.”²²

The fore-mentioned issues were hot-button issues for both sides at the Jerusalem Council. Jerusalem’s position was understandable. Eschatological fervor was at a fever pitch. The perceived immanence of the Parousia made it unlikely that anyone might usurp the authority of the Jerusalem church. The inclusion of Gentiles was expected at the *great Day of the Lord*. There was hardly time for a massive missionary effort to the pagans.

Such a perception, however, was a major misperception. The Jewish Christians could not have been more surprised by the success of the missionary effort in Antioch. If all that was required for admittance into Christianity was professed faith in Christ, then what would a Law-free Christianity do to this small Christian movement whose Jewish ethos was still part and parcel of its being? Murphy-O’Connor puts it succinctly:

If things were permitted to continue as they were, they foresaw themselves becoming an even smaller minority in an institution whose only ties to Judaism were (1) the racial identity of its founder and of the first generation of his disciples, and (2) recognition of the Old Testament as they record of God’s preparatory word for the advent of Jesus Christ. Thus, they decided must not be permitted to happen.²³

²² Seifrid, 49.

²³ Murphy O’Connor, 135.

One should not be surprised that the Jewish Christian response was to initiate converts not only into Christ, but also into the Law, especially the practice of circumcision. Such Jewish Christians would have no problem with the idea of converting Gentiles since the Law itself legitimated their inclusion (LXX Gen 12,3; 44, 21; cf. Jer.4: 2). However, it would seem unconscionable for those same Christians not to expect those same Gentile converts to observe the Law as would any observant Jew or Jewish Christian of the promise.

Paul relates his meeting with Peter, James and John in the second chapter of Galatians. He acknowledged the authority of what Murphy-O'Connor refers to as *the troika* by referring to them as "men of eminence" (Gal 2, 2b).²⁴ One cannot help but wonder if such a term exhibits traces of sarcasm, given the way he repeatedly bristled over issues concerning his own right of apostleship.

Paul refused to dilute his gospel. Succinctly put, faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. All other requirements are secondary and irrelevant.²⁵ Obedience to the Law is not wrong as far as Paul was concerned; it is simply unnecessary. Craig Bloomberg affirms Paul's assertion: "The Law was not abolished but it was no longer directly relevant for the Church *apart from* its fulfillment in and interpretation by the Lord Jesus."²⁶

A Divided House United. One can only imagine the level of stress as Paul awaited the decision of the three. His life's-work hung in the balance. Paul refused to accept the gospel of his opponents that obedience to the Law was necessary for salvation. Jewish Christianity must have bristled at Paul's thesis that insisted that Jewish Christianity was no longer central in

²⁴ Ibid. 136.

²⁵ Ibid, cf. p. 136.

²⁶ Bloomberg, Craig, "The Law in Luke-Acts, *JSNT* 22, (1984), 80.

Israel's redemptive history. According to Max Turner, Jewish Christianity was simply "not to be imposed on Gentiles, and it was theologically irrelevant to the salvation of Jewish Christians."²⁷

It is interesting to note, however, that regardless of the outcome, Paul did respect the authority of the Jerusalem leadership. While he bemoans that had the decision gone against him his life's work would have been in vain, one cannot help but wonder, given Paul's tenacity, if that would have been the last word. One hardly doubts it! Apostles might be silenced but prophets are akin to those biblical stones that can do no less than cry out! If Paul was anything, he was first a foremost a prophet!

However, it would be a grave error to dismiss Paul's willingness to submit to the Jerusalem decision. There is a huge responsibility involved in not submitting to Church authority. Those who ascribe to a moral conscience approach to the teaching authority of the Church must keep in mind that human beings are creatures of denial. Discernment takes place within the community and it flourishes when the community yields to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. When someone believes they are called to dissent or choose not to embrace a specific teaching they are walking on thin ice. Prayer, discernment, study and steadfastness is required to insure that what is motivating their dissent is not uninformed personal opinion or their own personal psychological agenda. While Paul would not have submitted quietly, he probably would have submitted while at the same time planning his next persuasive argument and round of attack.

No one could convince Paul that he was wrong. For Paul, Christ himself was the primary witness of his gospel. Seifrid once again maintains that the Decree of Jerusalem confirms that Luke sets forth an ethic that not only exceeds the "stipulation of the Law apart from Christ, but it

²⁷ Turner, Max, "The Sabbath, Sunday and the Law in Luke-Acts, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, (ed. D.A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 114-124.

also frees Gentile believers from direct obligation to the Law. Mosaic Law does not serve as governing force in Luke's ethic."²⁸ Luke's ethic can thus be encapsulated in one word—freedom. He presents a new ethic—a new prism. Luke's ethic is the messiahship, lordship and sovereignty of the risen Lord—not the Law.

While Paul could not be convinced of his error, the Jerusalem leadership could, however, destroy his efforts. They could discredit him among his churches as an unbridled dissident who was responsible to no one and who refused obedience to the Law, a necessary requirement for faithful followers of Christ (according to them). Paul was acutely aware that his communities could be easily swayed to believe that he was in error.

Murphy-O'Connor cites political motivations for the Jewish Christian's insistence on circumcision and adherence to the Law. Jews were in constant threat of persecution and annihilation. The Jews in Egypt were experiencing severe oppression. Jews under Roman rule lived in constant tension and fear of persecution. As far as Jewish Christians were concerned the only difference between them and their Jewish brothers and sisters was their faith in Jesus Christ. They too would be subject to the same fate as the Jews. It is logical to assume that their tension would give rise to questions. Circumcision was regarded as the traditional sign of incorporation into the covenant people. Circumcision of Gentile converts was their public acceptance into the Judaism to which they had no attachment.²⁹ Hints of Jewish persecution made it all the more important that Jewish identity not be diluted.

The dilemma in which this placed politically conscious Jewish Christians is obvious. They were first and foremost Jews. All that separated them from their brethren was their acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. Even without pressure from their co-religionists, their own instincts would have told them that the beginning of the 50's was a time to affirm, not dilute Jewish identity.³⁰

²⁸ Seifrid, 47.

²⁹ Murphy O'Connor, cf. p. 141

³⁰ Ibid. 141.

Could converts to Judaism or Jewish Christianity be trusted in time of persecution? Would they be willing to risk their lives if need be for other nationalistic Jews, Jewish Christians or the Temple and the Law?

Those who held the conviction that Jewish Christians must remain true to their Jewish practices did so in the service of strengthening and protecting Jewish identity. It is not the first time that strict adherence to the law was ordered for the purpose of bolstering Jewish identity in Israel.

Allow a brief excursus. The Jewish Christian's need to strengthen Jewish identity evokes the memory of the story of Ezra and Nehemiah and the return of the expatriated Jews following the exile. Syncretism had crept into the religious practice of those who were not exiled. When the exiles returned, Judaism was in danger of collapse. Ezra and Nehemiah set forth a strict regimen and return to observance of the Law. Scholars suggest that Judaism was preserved as a result of this strict enforcement of the Torah. A group's identity is distinguishable and ultimately bound through strict upholding of its cult. A great deal was perceived to be at stake when it came to the insistence on circumcision.

Both the story of Ezra and Nehemiah and the situation of the Jewish Christians echo to the conservative issues in the Church today. There is some merit in their argument. Candidates for Christian initiation repeatedly attest to ritual and creed as the primary attractions in their decision to become a Catholic—how Catholics pray and what Catholics believe. Fear of dilution is a major issue for conservative Catholics. When people live their lives by a certain creed, their world collapses when that creed is rendered meaningless.

One would love to have eavesdropped on this august body of ministers in Jerusalem! One can only imagine the repartee, posturing and arguing that took place. We know little of the

details. We know only the outcome. Once the agreement between Paul, Barnabas and the Jerusalem leadership was forged, Paul and Barnabas were given carte blanche approval to take their gospel to whomever they wished. In like manner, the Judaizers were similarly free to do the same. Jerusalem agreed that Paul exacted nothing more than conversion to Christ from the Gentile as well as Jewish converts. The Law was wisely maintained for Jewish Christianity but Jewish converts were free to observe or not observe it. Seifrid suggests that Luke affirms the Law for Jews because “he is deeply concerned with unity in the fellowship of believers. (Acts 1.4; 2.46; 4.24; 5.12; 15.25). It is in this mood that the Decree is framed.”³¹

The downside to this situation was disparate communities with varied practices! The possibilities for upheaval and tension were limitless! One can only imagine the stress experienced by such communities. Perhaps the stress is not unlike the stresses in today’s communities that are embroiled in vitriolic controversy. Tension is palpable between those who insist on rigid adherence to liturgical norms versus those who favor interpretation and adaptation. Parishes often become battlegrounds for those vying for the most correct position! To think that such stresses did not exist in the Pauline communities is to proffer fantasy! Murphy-O’Connor states the obvious:

Often what was important to one part of the community was irrelevant to the other. If they blended to the point of creating genuine unity, it can only have been because of conscious concessions by both sides. Such arrangements were a permanent source of tension because they were continually negotiable...³²

One such stress centered on the issue of table-fellowship. (It is interesting to note that issues surrounding the Eucharistic meal are strong stress points in the contemporary church as well.) When people in antiquity shared a meal a permanent bond was created. Community life demanded that in addition to sharing the Eucharistic meal a common meal would be shared as

³¹ Seifrid, 52.

³² Murphy O’Connor, 144.

well. The Law, however, insisted that Jews not eat or drink with Gentiles. How was this dilemma resolved? (Recall the subtext posited earlier by Seifrid.) The way unity was forged in the Antioch church was for both sides to make accommodations. Gentiles ate kosher food and Jews trusted Gentiles to serve Jewish food and drink. Such a concession was a monumental gesture on the part of Jews as it was a well-accepted lore that if a Gentile had the opportunity to pollute Jewish food he would do so.

A United Church Separated. These concessions were short lived. The Jewish (probably from Jerusalem) contingency eventually upset the delicate applecart by refusing to eat with Gentiles. The Jewish Christian's refusal to believe that Gentiles would not honor the dietary codes was a direct affront, a challenge to their integrity and a severe insult. The underlying reason for their action was the same reason they insisted on circumcision for converts—the preservation of Jewish identity.

Tension mounted and Jewish Christian antagonists were wreaking havoc in the Antioch church. The dietary issue was causing serious friction. The outcome was devastating to Paul. The ultimate blow came when Peter, who had previously eaten with Gentile Christians, ceased doing so once the agitators arrived (Gal 2,12). He sided with the Judaizers. When Barnabas followed suit insult was added to injury and Paul felt nothing but betrayal (Gal 2,13).

One can understand Peter's predicament; it was precarious at best. The Gentile church was flourishing whereas the Jewish church was struggling. The Jews needed a leader to close the ranks and rally the troops. Nothing less than a return to their Jewish roots would provide the anchor Peter's community needed. He trusted that the Gentile mission was in good hands and would survive his action. Separation of the communities ensued.

It is a tragic paradox that James inherited conviction that separation was the only way to preserve Jewish identity was reinforced by the very argument on which Paul had insisted so passionately during the

circumcision debate, namely that belief in Jesus as the Messiah was the one essential condition for membership in the church.³³

One can see in Peter's situation a correlation to the situation in the Church today.

Relativism and dilution have been serious concerns. Those who need the strength of a tightly-run mother-ship need someone who is willing to stay the course for the safety of the ship. They expect someone to follow the maritime laws necessary to get the ship safely to its destination. Those who do not have such a need, are willing to come along for the cruise yet are not all that concerned about the norms surrounding their voyage. The Church perhaps wisely understands that the first group is more prone to disillusionment. For their sake and the sake of the ship they must not take detours or alter their course in any way. Peter understood this. He knew the Gentile mission would go forward. But he also knew that those who needed the anchor of Judaism needed strong leadership from him.

It would do well for people on the left to realize this crucial need for those on the right. The more a people understand what motivates issues, the more likely they are able to find a common ground and make accommodation for one another.

Paul and the Law. This was a turning point for Paul in the development of his theology concerning the Law. The actions of the Jerusalem leadership were unchristian as far as Paul was concerned. His tolerance of the Law was replaced by his suspicion of it. Based on his experience at Antioch Paul came to believe that the Law was a hindrance and a distraction. Murphy-O'Connor points out: "...he now recognized that if the Law was given the tiniest toe-hold in a local church it would ultimately take over, as it had in fact done at Antioch."³⁴

Paul's heated response in the second chapter of his letter to the Galatians articulated his new perspective concerning the Law. He systematically posited his argument. The actions of the

³³ Ibid., p. 152.

³⁴ Ibid. 153.

Jerusalem delegation virtually rendered Gentiles sinners even though they professed faith in Christ. Mark M. Mattison asserts: “Paul’s use of the term “Gentile sinners” in verse 15 buttresses our observation. In the various factions of second-Temple Judaism, to be a “sinner” was to be excluded from the covenant people; hence by definition Gentiles were “sinners”...They were outside the law which marked the boundary between the “haves and the have nots”.³⁵

The Law, therefore, insisted that Gentiles were sinners. From that one must conclude (and the delegation inferred), insisted Paul in verse 21, that Christ’s death had no effect whatsoever. Like a skillful adjudicator who step by step builds his case for the jury, Paul posited his argument. Jews profess participation in the life of Christ. Gentiles do the same. That same profession makes Jews one with Gentiles. The bottom line for Paul? If Gentiles are sinners, so are Jews. That ultimately makes Christ an agent of sin.

The absurdity of his conclusion speaks for itself. If Jews are deemed righteous, so are Gentiles. If Gentiles do not know the Law and thus cannot be justified by it, what then is the agent of their justification? If the Law is incapable of justifying Gentiles it cannot be the justification for Jews either. Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead is the sole agent of justification. Faith in Christ is the means of achieving justification for Jew and Gentile alike. Seifrid’s theology takes his reader to the next logical progression: “According to Luke, the Law is not the authorization for the Decree, rather it is the Holy Spirit and the Council (15.28)...The Spirit serves to empower witnesses for the proclamation of Jesus to the Gentiles, a mission clearly connected to Jesus’ reign. (1.8; 10.19; 11.12; 13. 1-4).”³⁶

³⁵ Mattison, Mark M. The Paul Page: Confronting Legalism or Exclusivism? Reconsidering Key Pauline Passages, <http://www.the-paulpage.com/Passages.html>, p. 4

³⁶ Seifrid, 50.

Returning to Bobertz' statement above that "what defined Judaism was practice rather than creed," one cannot help but muse, if that is true, then could it be that their creed is their practice? If so, does that not prove Paul's case—the Law is in serious danger of superceding God? Seifrid's assertion that the Spirit's endorsement of the demands placed on the Gentiles indicates an ethic based on the lordship of Christ—not the Law—is indeed correct. The Law does not save—Jesus saves.

Paul made the claim that inclusion of the Gentiles was ordained by the Law itself when he posited an exegesis of Genesis in the third chapter of his letter to the Galatians. Paul insists that Abraham's seed was heir of the covenant. Paul translated *seed* in the singular. He confirmed that Abraham's seed was Christ (Gal 3, 16). Paul maintained that rather than Torah observance, it was the faithfulness of Christ by which Gentiles became Abraham's children.³⁷

The Law held ultimate pride of place in the Jewish ethos concerning salvation. Paul could no longer accept what he held inviolable as a Pharisee. The Law cannot save. Christ is the only means of salvation. To suggest that the Law is the ultimate authority, insisted Paul in Gal 2, 20, is to deny Christ.³⁸ The last nail on the Law's coffin was Paul's assertion that "to obey the Law is to make oneself a transgressor" (Gal. 2:18).³⁹ Mattison puts it another way: "So then, in Paul's own language, there are those who keep the law and those who don't. Ironically, those "under the law" performing the "works of the law" are the ones who *don't keep the law.*"⁴⁰

What a shock that insight must have been for one whose roots as a Pharisee ran deep. Paul's revised theology of the Law was borne out of the pain of betrayal and the chaos caused in the debacle in the community at Antioch. From thenceforward Paul avoided issuing orders. He

³⁷ Roetzel, Calvin, *Paul, The Man and the Myth*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, cf. p. 123.

³⁸ Murphy-O'Connor, p. 153.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Mattison, 3

insisted that people respond to Christ in faith in complete freedom. Murphy-O'Connor maintains: "But his experience at Antioch had taught him that to operate through binding precepts would necessarily bring him and his converts back into the orbit of the Law."⁴¹ For Paul, God's will now resides in ordering one's life according to the self-sacrificing pattern of Jesus Christ who suffered died and rose again for all humanity. Love is now, for Paul, the new precept.

It is important to ask what would make the Gentiles want to conform to the Law in the first place. Circumcision was painful and the dietary Laws were burdensome. Gentile converts were given freedom and autonomy to work out for themselves the best way to live the gospel. Freedom is a frightening proposition. Some people who insist on certitude run away from freedom. The Law provided such certitude. One no longer had to think for one's-self. All a person now had to worry about doing was following the 613 precepts of the Law.⁴² Paul never returned to Antioch and his mission to the Gentiles continued.

While the issue of Paul and his approach to the Law have been grist for two-thousand years of debate, it would appear to this observer that perhaps we have missed something. Forgive a certain naiveté and over-simplification as one ponders. How is it that Paul's theology concerning the Torah is used as a polemic concerning the observance of Christian law? It appears to this student that the issue Paul was addressing was situational. Paul was addressing the Torah and its strict observance. It seems a little like taking the exhortation for slaves to be obedient to their master as proof text for acceptability of slavery in the twenty-first century. The *Sitz im Leben* was different then from what it is now and cultural consciousness has changed.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 156.

⁴² This is commonly observed in some people in the Church today. They often say, "Just tell me what to do and I will do it." They do not want the burden of discernment. They want a formula. Only then can they feel assured that they are doing all they need to do to insure their salvation. They are following the rules. A common statement heard is, "Why did this happen to me? I followed all the rules. I did everything I was supposed to do."

Paul was addressing a situational need—the inclusion of Gentiles into Jewish Christianity and the inherent implications of that inclusion. To use Paul’s theology of the Torah as a polemic for making the claim that Paul espoused a “faith without works” approach to religious law for all time seems to this student, the height of literalism and fundamentalism. What can be gleaned from Paul’s teaching, however, is the caution not to make the law an end unto itself. It is a caution for our time as well as it was for Paul’s time.

Making laws an end unto themselves is a strong temptation for those who possess a deep affinity for commandments and precepts. Their mantra often is: “They are not ten suggestions, they are Ten Commandments—commandment being the operative word!” It is similarly a temptation for those who have a cavalier approach to commandments and perceive them as outmoded and irrelevant in today’s society. Teaching authority has a necessary place within any body politic.

Portrait of Paul. Before drawing conclusions and exploring lessons learned from the event just explored, let us turn to Paul himself. It was earlier stated that the issues that beset the Church today need nothing short of a Pauline apostle and prophet. Calvin Roetzel’s reconstruction of Paul in the book, *The Man and the Myth* suggests that there is value in seriously investigating Paul’s humanity. Roetzel insists that tradition has so mythologized him that his humanity was obscured. Paul is a person with whom we all can identify. Those on the right would admire his tenacity and passionate love of Christ to the renunciation of self. Those on the left would admire his willingness to challenge the leadership in Jerusalem and to forge a new path in spite great opposition.

He is a man whose idiosyncrasies, psychology and vulnerabilities stood in opposition to the common image that has come down to us of Paul, the “super-Apostle”. Paul was not

impressive in stature or speech. Yet he defended his ministry with unrivaled tenacity. Paul posits the image of one who was brazen and bold, particularly when engaging in polemic arguments. This irascible, quick-tempered, impassioned, ardent, blazing, fervent and brazen apostle was just what was needed to set the first church in motion. Had the agenda of the Jerusalem contingency daunted him, one can only wonder where the Church would be today. Would it have spread as it did?

Paul was a man who relied on his instincts as well as on his trust in God. He often “improvised as he journeyed” rather than set forth an organized plan of evangelization. Paul’s theology developed as he had to deal with situations in the churches he founded. The development of his position on the Torah is one such example. Much of his theology developed as he argued with his opponents, responded to criticism and as a result of tensions arising from his marginal position in the Christian movement. Paul did not easily back away from an argument!

The Paul who so desperately needed to defend his apostleship is the same Paul who refused to be daunted when that same apostleship was questioned. Paul’s intense suffering is nearly palpable as Roetzel sets forth Paul’s argument for apostolic authenticity as the grounding context for his theology.

Paul contrasts his desperation with the Corinthian sense of self-sufficiency. Speaking autobiographically, he recalls suffering so intense in Asia Minor that he despaired of life itself...Paul admits his own inadequacy and credits God instead...He realized that, compared to the robust spirituality of the rivals that radiated vitality and power, his mortal weakness, suffering, vulnerability, and even ineptness might appear to some to give off an odor of decay...Paul invites those swayed by the rival apostles to think of human frailty and impotence in quite a different way—not as the source of acid stench of death but as the origin of the ‘sweet aroma of the [resurrected] Christ’ (2 Cor 15).⁴³

Nothing deterred Paul from defending his apostleship and furthering his mission to the Gentiles.

His was not an easy task.

⁴³ Roetzel, p. 156.

Roetzel invites us to imagine the persuasive power of this man. Imagine the compelling power needed to convince a largely Jewish/Christian community to embrace a paradigm that stood to threaten the Torah itself! Paul's wounded psyche seemed to be a contributing factor in his ongoing polemic against the super apostles. One can almost hear the very human need to "measure up" and to be included in their number. How difficult it must have been to stand on an equal ground with the super apostle Peter and vociferously fight for his gospel of Gentile inclusion. There is much grist for contemporary reflection in such imagining!

One of Paul's legacies is his teaching on the value of suffering. "Ironically, Paul portrays the apostle here as a superordinate of suffering who participates in Christ's suffering and becomes a model of suffering for new converts."⁴⁴ Paul taught that believers are not just to participate in the suffering of Christ, but they are to follow in his footsteps and suffer for others. Paul's gospel of weakness and suffering connects even today with our own.

If there is one issue upon which people from divided camps can unite is that we all share the pain of life's sufferings. Paul gives us a hint at the way in which we can bridge the animosities that divide us. Offering one's suffering for one's friends is an obvious, logical endeavor. Offering one's suffering for one's opponents is quite another. Paul insisted that where love is lacking nothing exists to take its place. Paul who knew betrayal as Christ knew betrayal still preached a gospel of love.

Did he give up on his mission? No he did not give up. Did he strike out in hatred and vengeance to his enemies? No. He stayed the course, followed his call, and let God manage the tent he once pitched in Antioch.

Paul the prophet. While much is said about Paul the apostle, this reflection must also include images of Paul the prophet. Walter Brueggemann in his book, *The Prophetic*

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 53.

Imagination, asserts that prophets evoked “consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture.”⁴⁵ Prophets challenged world views and were persecuted as a result. Paul challenged the world view of Jewish Christianity and the betrayal he experienced as a result cut him to his core. Paul’s life very much mirrors the life of the prophet Jeremiah who found himself thrown into a cistern for preaching a just word. Paul knew well what Jeremiah experienced when his detractors plotted against him.

‘Come’, said Jeremiah’s enemies, ‘let us contrive a plot against Jeremiah. It will not mean the loss of instruction from the priests, nor of counsel from the wise, nor of messages from the prophets. Let us destroy Jeremiah by his own tongue; let us carefully note his every words. (NAB, Jer 18, 19) They set out to destroy him using his own words against him. The people did not want to hear his message. The prophets of the time were preaching a word the people wanted to hear—the priests were not challenging them—a creeping complacency had settled in. They did not want to hear that their actions were cause for great concern. That would mean they would have to change. They wanted a comfortable gospel. Someone once said that the challenge of the gospel is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. Jeremiah afflicted the comfortable and was thrown in a cistern for his efforts.

Paul was willing to afflict the comfortable—in this case—he challenged strict adherence to the Torah which was the bone marrow of Jewish existence. Brueggemann maintains that “the grieving of Israel—perhaps self pity—is the beginning of criticism. It is made clear that things are not as they should be, not as they were promised, and not as they must be and will be. Bringing hurt to public expression is an important first step in the critique that permits a new reality, theological and social, to emerge.”⁴⁶ Paul insisted that faith in Christ and a life of self-

⁴⁵ Brueggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*. Second Edition; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001, p. 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

sacrificing love takes precedence over the observance of the Law. The Torah was in fact a distraction. Paul brought a new reality to public expression.

In the process he risked rejection for the gospel he was compelled to preach. Like Jeremiah, Paul's friends plotted against him (or so it seemed) and the agitators used Paul's own words against him. Nothing, however, would keep him from his intended purpose.

Implications. How then do we draw corollaries and insights from the experience of the first Christian church in order to speak to the division in our Church today? I am surprised by my own conclusions. I expected to use the Jerusalem Council as a model of how two groups might be compelled to set aside their differences in order to forge a common unity. The decision of the Jerusalem Council, however, was a short lived solution and unity did not ultimately last. There are incredible seeds of wisdom in that event if people from both ends of the religious spectrum might be humble enough and willing to see them.

Paul was divinely ordained to preach his gospel to the Gentiles. Of that there is no doubt. His polemics concerning their inclusion were sound and irrefutable. It simply made no sense for new converts to be compelled to observe the constraints of the Torah. However, one can hardly dismiss or be unsympathetic of Peter's situation. It would be tantamount to the arrival of some self-proclaimed prophet today arriving on the doorstep of Catholicism to announce that the laws of the Church were now null and void. That the Jews considered inclusion at all is nothing short of miraculous. Peter had a flock to shepherd. Had he left them and aligned himself with Paul, what would have happened to the Jewish Christians? Peter did what he had to do.

Perhaps there is a lesson in that for today's Church. Traditional (not rigid) leadership is necessary. Those whose lives depend on the structure of that foundation require a leadership unwilling to bend with the wind. Cardinal George proffers a final caveat:

Within the Church, the bishops are the reality check for the apostolic faith. They are not free to change established dogma or create new dogma, unless they want to become heretics. In being presented as a revolution rather than a development of doctrine, the Second Vatican Council has left some Catholics with the impression that bishops control rather than preserve the apostolic faith. If bishops won't change, it must be fear or willfulness or perhaps stupidity that prevents their being enlightened. It is then up to Catholics with an agenda to force them to change or to make the changes themselves, in a separate peace. But a church of such factions not only cannot evangelize, it cannot think. That is the greatest practical difficulty, it seems to me, in the use of the terms "liberal" and "conservative." When they are applied now, or even as they were sometimes applied in papal documents in the last century, people stop thinking things through. In thinking things through in the church, bishops are the verification principle in the development of doctrine.⁴⁷

One would agree in principle that to the episcopal office belongs the charism of safeguarding doctrine. However, one might also respectfully suggest that such a role is discerned in league with the teaching authority of the entire Church—the full Magisterium—the discerning wisdom of all the faithful—hierarchy and faithful. One might also suggest that true episcopal leadership should be guided more by the image of Christ as Shepherd, not as Christ who used his whip to overturn the tables in the Temple precinct (fear of accommodating relativist liberal agenda notwithstanding).

Those who would prefer that the sweeping wind of *aggiornamento* continue in the Church, however, must stay the course, and strive to be a prophetic voice that will allow Paul to speak a new word to the Church today. They must be willing to echo Paul's insistence that the Church dare not to get so caught up in the observance of law that it forgets the focus of the Christian life—faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing short of Paul's brazen courage is called for if one is to be such a prophet. Following Paul's example, those same people must be willing to suffer a prophet's fate.

People who espouse a staunch adherence to dogma, must ask if Christian charity suffers in the campaign to enforce it. Perhaps the greatest contribution this group has to offer is its willingness to soak the Church in prayer. People on the other side of the polemic fence must

⁴⁷ George, 10.

discern whether their approach is evocative of love or vain cynicism. Christ insisted that the greatest commandment is love. If love suffers—if reputations are destroyed, if people are demonized and if there is no attempt toward honest dialogue, then perhaps charity is the primary victim and division sinks further into the abyss.

Ultimately both camps are needed in the Church. Perhaps that is how the Church maintains balance and perhaps that is where necessary correctives exist. When the Catholic ethos swings too far to the left, the right serves as a prophetic check and when it swings too far to the right, the left reaches for the reins and tugs.⁴⁸

Luke Timothy Johnson wonders why the story of the Jerusalem Council has not been a more significant paradigm for providing significant insight into how Christian communities should address difficult issues. *Etched-in-stone ideologies* often cause blindness to the work of God's Spirit. Yet still the Spirit invites the Church to refresh its vision. Peter, Paul and Barnabas opened their eyes to a new way of seeing and allowed the Spirit to move them in a new and daring direction. "The Scripture will be heard to say the same thing over and over again eternally, unless our hearing is renewed by the story being told us now by the Spirit. Without the narrative of the experience of God, discernment cannot begin, and decisions are theologically counterfeit."⁴⁹ Christians today have much to learn from the work of those daring first apostles. One shudders to think what would have happened to the spread of Christianity if Paul and Peter had not worked out a compromise solution to the issues that divided them.

Whether right or left, conservative or progressive each person is entrusted through baptism with a sacred, role—the role of prophet. It is a challenging, often painful role. It is a role in which we are called to ignite dreams that have been burned out by the stresses of life and

⁴⁸ Many wait with bated breath for the latter to catch hold and pull.

⁴⁹ Johnson, Luke T. *Decision Making in the Church*. New York: The Free Press, 1977, 93.

failure to live the covenant. It is the prophet's responsibility to touch the corporate memory, to find the deep seeds of conversion in the souls of the weary and to offer hope that only a messenger of Christ can give. Unity is fostered when the people of God are willing to lay down their lives (as Paul laid down his life) for those who are dogmatic opponents. It is the responsibility of all baptized people to challenge and confront all that stands in the way of bringing Christ's compassionate love to the world. When people fight within their own house, there is little energy left to go beyond its borders.

Yes, Christ's Body is broken and God weeps. Jesus longs to say today, "Father, see how they love one another. Father that they all may be one as you and I are one." Jesus went to the cross to unite a human race divided, fractured and scattered by sin. The example of Paul and those early communities he forged is a reminder that there is room in this house for diversity. No one has to sacrifice what they hold dear, they simply have to be true to their baptismal call and live and promote the gospel in charity. Such is the hope for a brighter future.

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