

Bargaining at the Council of Jerusalem  
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During the nineteenth century the American labor movement was characterized by fluctuations largely influenced by the business cycles. Recessions in the 1800s – often called “panics” by historians - reduced union membership. Growth in the economy caused upswings in union membership. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this formative stage of the American labor movement concluded and a relatively more stable era of durable unions was inaugurated. One of its key features was the collective bargaining agreement reducing the terms of employment at a firm to a written agreement between management and labor.

The written agreement, as the eminent labor historian John Commons and his associates wrote, “led the way from an industrial system which alternately was either despotism or anarchy to a constitutional form of government in industry.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the next century collective bargaining became institutionalized within the system of American employment relations.<sup>2</sup> Thousands of labor agreements are bargained each year governing the workplaces of millions of American workers. At its core, collective bargaining is an attempt to reach consensus on important matters through compromise, meeting each side’s interests and trade-offs.

Collective bargaining has several salient features. The physical location of bargaining is important to the process. The members of each side’s bargaining team, their personalities and backgrounds are key to the eventual agreement. The teams represent larger groups of people – usually employees, managers and other stakeholders who are not present in the negotiations. The goal of negotiations is to reach an agreement acceptable to both sides and the fact that both parties know that they will probably have a continuing relationship affects strategy and tactics. Intra-organizational bargaining, trying to meet the interests of stakeholders whom each side represents, is a critical step toward reaching consensus. The process of bargaining usually includes the commitment of money in the form of wages and benefits. Both sides often report the agreement reached differently or at least with different emphases and/or interpretations.<sup>3</sup> The negotiating parties often leave certain tough issues unresolved with the hope that they can solve them later either through arbitration or future bargaining.

Collective bargaining has analogs in other activities of life: buying a house, diplomacy and lawmaking come to mind. It also has important precedents in history. One example is found within the pages of the *New Testament of the Bible*.

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Commons, David Saposs, Helen Sumner E.B. Mittleman, H.E. Hoagland, John B. Andrews, Selig Perlman *History of Labour in the United States*, Volume II (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918, 1946) 520.

<sup>2</sup> The decline of unions in the private sector in the last generation which is not the subject of this article is a threat to the institution of collective bargaining.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Holley, Jr., Kenneth M. Jennings and Roger S. Wolters *The Labor Relations Process*, Seventh Edition (Fort Worth, Philadelphia, San Diego, New York, Orlando, Austin, San Antonio, Toronto, Montreal, London, Sydney, Tokyo: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001) 194-227.

The *New Testament* is a collection of twenty-seven “books” which were written by early Christian witnesses over a period of several generations. The first few were written in the mid-50s CE, the latest some years after the turn of the first century. These books were culled from other Christian writings and finally recognized as an exclusive list late in the fourth century. The majority of Christian traditions today still recognize the twenty-seven books as the *New Testament* canon. It is within these texts that we can find an instance of people, working in a miracle-free atmosphere, establishing an agreement between factions in early Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

Diversity within Christianity is sometimes misunderstood as an historical development that began with the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. In our era, a large amount of variation can be found in Christianity from Pentecostalism, to high church Anglicanism, to the Vatican, to Salt Lake City, to the Watchtower Society, to the *Christian Science Monitor*, between black and white Americans, between Protestants, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, within these large bodies and with other Christian groups around the world. What is less well understood is that the pages of the *New Testament* reveal a significant amount of diversity in the origin of Christianity with the primary divide being that between followers of Jesus who were also Jews and the newer followers of Jesus from Gentile communities. Questions arose between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians around how they would interact together.

It is to the question of how the early Christians negotiated these differences that we now turn.

### **The COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM**

Within the first decade or so after the death of Jesus, the Christian faith was spreading into non-Jewish settings. The leaders of the Jesus movement met in Jerusalem in about 49 CE<sup>5</sup> to consider this development. The precipitating issues were disagreements between representatives of James the brother of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul who was Christianity’s most famous first century evangelist. There were conflicting views on whether non-Jewish Christians needed male circumcision to be a legitimate part of the Christian movement and whether these non-Jews should conform to Jewish dietary guidelines. As discussions developed, however, the more fundamental question became one of how to manage differences among Christians. This conclave was crucially important, one of the turning points in world history.

This Council is described in the *New Testament* in two of the twenty-seven books. One account is the *Book of Acts*<sup>6</sup> which was presumably written by a man named Luke and is a type of early history book on Christianity. The other is the *Book of Galatians* which was written by Paul to a group of Christians in the region of Galatia which was a Roman province in modern Turkey.<sup>7</sup> *Acts* was written about thirty years after the event and *Galatians* was written within three or four years after the event.

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<sup>4</sup> The *New Testament* lists about forty miracles that it claims were performed by Jesus with an emphasis on calming storms, healings and exorcisms. The *New Testament* also claims that Jesus’s key followers, Peter and Paul, performed miracles. Further, there are instances in the *New Testament* in which the crucified but risen Jesus is said to have appeared to his followers. But the *New Testament* reports no miracles or special appearance in the bargaining that we will be discussing here.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Simon and Schuster, A Touchstone Book, 1976) 3. This was about two decades after the crucifixion of Jesus.

<sup>6</sup> *Acts* 15: 1-33.

<sup>7</sup> *Galatians* 2: 1-10.

In my analysis I recognize the literary power of these texts. It may be, as some commentators assert, that the Council of Jerusalem happened in quite a different manner than described in the *New Testament*<sup>8</sup> or even that it did not happen at all.<sup>9</sup> I take a neutral view toward these questions and focus, instead, on the written descriptions within *Acts* and *Galatians*.

## AGREEMENT

The Council reached an agreement and communicated it to the non-Jewish Christians in a written document. It is embedded in the fifteenth chapter of *Acts* verses 23 through 29 as follows:

*“The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings. Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”*

This is a message of freedom - so much so that the letter to the Galatians, Paul's description of this historic event, has been called the *Magna Carta* of Christian liberty.<sup>10</sup> It stripped Christianity of ethnicity<sup>11</sup> and made it a universal religion. The four prohibitions - eating animals sacrificed to idols, eating meat with its blood, eating animals killed by strangulation and fornication - seem to be drawn from the Jewish *Bible* which Christians call the *Old Testament*, specifically the *Book of Leviticus*, which sets down guidelines for non-Jews living who chose to live among Jews.<sup>12</sup> By incorporating this language into the agreement, the negotiators at the Council of Jerusalem were recognizing a status for non-Jewish Christians within what

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<sup>8</sup> Robin Griffith-Jones *The Gospel According to Paul: The Creative Genius Who Brought Jesus To The World* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco A Division of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2004) x. Griffith-Jones asserts that Luke may have combined decisions made over several years into the Council of Jerusalem in *Acts* 15.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Grant *Saint Peter A Biography* Michael Grant Publications Ltd. 1994 (New York: Barnes & Noble) 2009 133-135. Grant asserts that the Council of Jerusalem probably never took place, that it was probably invented by the writer of *Acts* to show unity. But if it did take place, Grant asserts that the *Galatians* 2 account and the *Acts* 15 account of it are "hopelessly at variance." Finally, Grant asserts that if the meetings occurred they may have been small and private.

<sup>10</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan *Jesus Through The Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New York, Cambridge, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, London, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Singapore, Sydney: Harper & Row, Publishers Reprinted by arrangement with Yale University Press, 1985, 1987) 209.

<sup>11</sup> I owe this concept to: Rodney Stark. *The Rise of Christianity A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 213 and regret it if I have misstated Stark's point of view.

<sup>12</sup> See *Leviticus* 17-18. The sexual behavior prohibited in *Leviticus* largely has to do with incestuous sex and this may therefore have been the emphasis in *Acts* 15. See John P. Meier *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroads, 1991) 255-56.

was at that time the larger Jewish community. They were drawing from their historical context or, as it were, past practice. In this context, James cited a text from the *Old Testament* which appears to forecast that non-Jews would one-day seek the Jewish God and averred that that time has come.<sup>13</sup>

The agreement was reached in Jerusalem, then the headquarters of the church. Christians at that time and now recognize it as the place where Jesus died and rose again and went up to Heaven after forty days and where his followers initially gathered. Reaching agreement on the path of expansion from the hub of the church was highly significant to the success of the agreement.

Beyond this agreement and the locale where it was reached, the process has additional elements similar to modern collective bargaining.

## TEAMS

These great personalities of early Christianity were in attendance:

- Peter, whom Jesus said he would make the very cornerstone of the church. Peter is recognized as the first Pope. Church tradition holds that he lived until the 60s CE when he was martyred in Rome.
- Paul, the first century figure whose life and writings still heavily influence the world. His initial fame came from his switch from persecutor of Christians to a chief evangelist for the new religion. Church tradition holds that he lived until the 60s CE when he was also martyred in Rome.
- James, the brother of Jesus who was by that time the leader of the Jerusalem Church. Although James had not been one of Jesus's twelve apostles, he had come to believe in him after his death. Church tradition holds that he lived until the 60s CE when he was martyred in Jerusalem.
- Barnabas, the individual who helped bring Paul into the Christian movement. Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus and is mentioned in Paul's letters. Church tradition holds that he lived until the 60s when he was martyred in Cyprus.

Paul's account to the Galatians acknowledges the presence in the Council of the same four individuals and adds two more:

- Titus, whom the *New Testament* portrays as a member of Paul's inner circle and a Christian leader on the island of Crete. Of note here in *Galatians*, Paul spells out that Titus was a Gentile and was not required to be circumcised.<sup>14</sup> There is a *New Testament* letter purportedly from Paul to Titus many years after the Council.
- John, of the original twelve apostles.<sup>15</sup> Paul links John with Peter and James the brother of Jesus as "Pillars" of the church.

All of the men (no women were listed) in the Council except Titus were Jews and all had endured hardship for the new faith. James and John had lost their brothers.<sup>16</sup> The situation for Christians in Jerusalem in the past decade or so had grown more dangerous. The twelfth chapter of *Acts* records that

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 15:13-19. Verse 19 reads: "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles."

<sup>14</sup> *Galatians* 2: 1, 3.

<sup>15</sup> The twelve apostles of Jesus are listed four times in the scriptures: *Matthew* 10:2-4, *Mark* 3:16-19, *Luke* 6:14-16 and *Acts* 1:13. The order and names vary only slightly. The twelve were apparently important associates of Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> James had lost Jesus. John had lost another James according to *Acts* 12:1-2.

one of the leaders of the movement had been murdered by the authorities and there had been arrests of others. Barnabas and Paul had been on the road for years.

In the sense of collective bargaining they made up the “teams.” What were the line-ups?

Paul portrayed three elements at the Council and he used both invective and condescension in his descriptions:

- “False brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.”<sup>17</sup>
- “Those who were of high reputation” or “Pillars” – or at least reputed Pillars. Paul adds, “(what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)”<sup>18</sup>
- Himself and Barnabas.

A word of caution is in order. When Paul described his opponents in unflattering or marginalizing terms, he of course was giving his side of the story and we hardly, if ever, hear the other side. To be unsubtle, the “false brethren” would not use that term to describe themselves. This was a pattern with Paul. In other parts of the *New Testament* Paul condemned those who preached “another Jesus” or a “different gospel.”<sup>19</sup> He called those who would find the message of Jesus closer to Judaism, “dogs.”<sup>20</sup> He talked of an opposition that caused his followers to keep on “biting and devouring” each other.<sup>21</sup> He said these types of people “bewitched”<sup>22</sup> his converts and caused them to “(fall) from grace.”<sup>23</sup> He labeled his enemies in Corinth as “false apostles”<sup>24</sup> and sarcastically as “eminent apostles.”<sup>25</sup>

We will use the term “false brethren” with a great deal of reservation and nonjudgmentally.

Whom did these teams represent?

Paul and Barnabas had a following that had been built up in their travels and with which they made contact on their way to the Council of Jerusalem. *Acts* 15:3 describes their journey: “Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.” These two territories were populated by nonorthodox Jews, some of whom had accepted the Christian message. Samaria is known to *Bible* readers through Jesus’s famous story about the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were a group adhering to an ancient form of Judaism with a different scriptural canon, and were often viewed with disdain by orthodox Jews.<sup>26</sup> Phoenicia was a haven of Greek-speaking Jews with tenuous connections, to Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> These sympathetic Jews and the Gentiles over whom they rejoiced were Paul’s natural constituency, the people he represented at the Council.

The “false brethren” and the Pillars had constituents in Jerusalem. They are not mentioned in detail at the Council. However, some years later as related in *Acts* 21: 20-21 a description emerges as Paul was

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<sup>17</sup> *Galatians* 2:4.

<sup>18</sup> *Galatians* 2:6, 9.

<sup>19</sup> *II Corinthians* 11:4.

<sup>20</sup> *Philippians* 3:2.

<sup>21</sup> *Galatians* 5:15.

<sup>22</sup> *Galatians* 3:1.

<sup>23</sup> *Galatians* 5:4.

<sup>24</sup> *II Corinthians* 11:13.

<sup>25</sup> *II Corinthians* 11:5.

<sup>26</sup> *Luke* 9: 54 and 10: 29-37

<sup>27</sup> *Acts* 11:19

warned about them: “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.” These were the original followers of Jesus who saw Christianity as a variant of Judaism.

It was noteworthy that when the agreement was reached, two men from Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, were sent with Barnabas and Paul to “report the same things by word of mouth.”<sup>28</sup> We don’t know much about either of these two men. Some tradition holds that Judas was the brother of an individual who had been considered for promotion into the original group of the twelve apostles after the suicide of the more famous Judas who betrayed Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Silas’s name was later Latinized to Silvanus. He later traveled with Paul and assisted in some of the writing of *New Testament* letters. Both men were representatives of either the “false brethren” or, more likely, the Pillars. This parallels the common practice in modern labor relations in which after a settlement is reached joint announcements are made about the terms of the new contract with spokespersons from each side of the table communicating together.

## EXCHANGES AND INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL BARGAINING

Paul was able to win the Council – or at least the Pillars - to a statement supporting his mission to the Gentile Christians. One of Paul’s tactics was the use of money and it undoubtedly stemmed from intra-organizational bargaining.

In his account of the Council, Paul claimed that the only thing that the Jerusalem leaders wanted of him was to “remember the poor” as he was already inclined to do.<sup>30</sup> As to remembering the poor, the *Acts* account is silent and the money may have been for the Jerusalem community rather than poor people *per se*. (Why would the poor in Jerusalem have special status over other poor?<sup>31</sup>) We know that Paul was capable of amassing money and in one instance he was entrusted with funds in Antioch, an ancient city that was located in modern Turkey, to transport to Jerusalem, a journey of about 350 miles.<sup>32</sup> His extant letters within the *New Testament* show his determination to continue fundraising.<sup>33</sup>

The money that he raised may have been a *quid pro quo* for keeping silent about circumcision, demonstrating that the Jewish Christians were the strongest element within the early movement. They, in turn, may have explained to “false brethren” and other Jews that Paul’s payment was the Gentile equivalent of a Temple Tax required by Jewish males.<sup>34</sup> They may have redefined the settlement from one of freedom to merely managing the terms that Gentile Christians could join with Jews without

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<sup>28</sup> *Acts* 15: 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Acts* 1: 23. See WRF Browning *Oxford Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, Kindle Edition, 1996) Location 932 and 8180.

<sup>30</sup> *Galatians* 2:10.

<sup>31</sup> John Dominic Crossan *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Death of Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco a Division of HarperCollinsPublishers, 1998) 473-4.

<sup>32</sup> *Acts* 11: 27-30.

<sup>33</sup> *Romans* 15:25-6; *I Corinthians* 16: 1-3; *II Corinthians* 8: 1-8.

<sup>34</sup> *Matthew* 17: 24. Jesus himself paid it.

violating the consciences of the Jews.<sup>35</sup> Like most bargainers they may also have stressed what they had in common with the other side - that with all their differences, Paul and they still agreed on a simple formula (which itself is subject to many interpretations) that Jesus was the Lord.<sup>36</sup> In short, James and his colleagues had a tricky problem with Paul. They probably did not want their cash cow to either stray too far or to get slaughtered. They wanted him at the circumference of the movement but not at the center. Until the end of their lives they probably saw him as a negotiating partner whose administration of the agreement needed to be monitored.

Did Paul buy a seat at the table for his brand of Christianity? Perhaps, and if the scenario I have described is not precisely how the financial arrangement worked, there is an alternative. Perhaps the money Paul collected was for an ascetic community in Jerusalem under the leadership of James. As shown in *Acts* 2:44-45 and *Acts* 4:32 - 5:11, there was at least one such community within the Jerusalem Church. They may have been known as the "Poor Ones" although private ownership also seems to have existed. In any event, the money situation was a touchy one. In *Romans* 15:31, Paul expressed a fear that the Jewish Christians might not accept his collection and according to *Acts* 21: 17-24, Paul's reception by Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was highly problematic.<sup>37</sup>

Money then was a bargaining chip. Further:

- It was handled carefully. Money was not mentioned in *Acts* 15 but only in Paul's account in *Galatians*.
- As noted, collecting money for Jerusalem was a major thrust for Paul but he worried about how it might be received.
- When it was received, we have only the *Acts* account and it was barely mentioned in an apparent attempt to downplay it. The writer of *Acts* has Paul saying: "*Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.*"<sup>38</sup>
- Finally, Paul may have held back some of the money. *Acts* 24:26 suggests that he still had money later when he was in prison and *Acts* 28:30 indicates that still later he rented living quarters in Rome for two years.

## INTERPRETING THE AGREEMENT

The differences in the interpretation of the agreement reached at the Council of Jerusalem can be seen in the varying descriptions of the initial reason to hold Council at all and in some of the rhetoric. Paul reports this event as one in which he attended on his own volition or because of a "revelation," that a two-way dialog occurred and that his views were completely endorsed. He makes the gratuitous remark about how unimpressive the Christian leaders far senior to him were which was his way of asserting equality between his team and that of the Jewish Christians.<sup>39</sup> The account in *Acts* is much more like a subpoena

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Justo L. Gonzales, *Acts The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001) 176.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Marty, *The Christian World: A Global History* (New York: The Modern Library an Imprint the Random House Publishing Group, A Division of Random House, Inc. A Modern Library Chronicles Book, 2007) 15.

<sup>37</sup> Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (New York: HarperOne An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2009) 217-18.

<sup>38</sup> *Acts* 24:17.

<sup>39</sup> *Galatians* 2: 1-6. See Dieter Georgi, *Remembering The Poor The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965, 1992)

to a hearing as it had been occasioned by men from Jerusalem coming openly into the city of Antioch to teach where Paul was residing. (Paul called them spies.)<sup>40</sup>

We also see evidence of differing interpretations in fractious relationships. We read in *Acts* that after the Council of Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas had a conflict about whether to include an individual named John Mark<sup>41</sup> on their next convert-seeking trip and the two bargaining teammates parted company over this. However, it may have been more complicated. We know from the *Galatians* account that they had a major disagreement in Antioch over the application of the Council's agreement where Paul wrote that Barnabas was a hypocrite and a compromiser.<sup>42</sup> But we don't know what Barnabas thought and he may not have been acting hypocritically. At an earlier period in his life Barnabas had made a sizable financial donation to the new Christian movement.<sup>43</sup> Further, Paul notes in *I Corinthians* 9:6 that Barnabas stayed on the mission field and even supported himself financially. We read also in *Galatians* that Paul broke with Peter over the agreement.<sup>44</sup> Again, we lack Peter's perspective.

In this context, it seems possible that Paul distorted the agreement and extended it further than the negotiators may have intended. He set the dietary regulations aside in the context of the *New Testament* itself writing his followers: "*Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.'*"<sup>45</sup> So Paul abrogated three-fourths of the written decision of the Council of Jerusalem. This made him lasting enemies.

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<sup>40</sup> *Acts* 15:1 and *Galatians* 2:4.

<sup>41</sup> John Mark was a major figure only slightly below the elites Paul, Barnabas and Peter:

- He was related to Barnabas – *Colossians* 4:10.
- He appears later in scripture: as Paul's companion in Rome (*Colossians* 4:10; *Philemon* 24; *II Timothy* 4:11) and as noted Peter's companion in Rome (*I Peter* 5:13). ) Note: *II Timothy* 4:11 reads: "*Only Luke is with me. Pick up **Mark** and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.*" Emphasis added).
- James D. Tabor suggests that the presumed gospel author Mark was an associate of Paul. See James D. Tabor, *Paul and Jesus How the Apostle Transformed Christianity* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi: Simon and Schuster, Kindle Edition. 2012 Location 282.
- According to Papias, a second century church leader in Hierapolis, an ancient city located in modern Turkey, Mark was the "interpreter" of Peter.

Whether any of these accounts are historically accurate, they at least show John Mark's importance in the early church and thus the significance of this break.

<sup>42</sup> *Acts* 15:36-41 covers the break over John Mark. *Galatians* 2:13 covers the break in Antioch. Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer estimate that these two events were about two-and-a-half years apart. See Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch The Unknown Years* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997 Translation by John Bowden, 1997) 216.

<sup>43</sup> *Acts* 4: 36-37.

<sup>44</sup> *Galatians* 2:11-14.

<sup>45</sup> *I Corinthians* 10: 25-26.



The Pillars also seem to have made interpretations. Some years later they softened the four prohibitions of the Council as less than scriptural commands. This is not unlike modern labor-management negotiators downplaying certain aspects of an agreement later through interpretation. The Pillars did this in their own headquarters.<sup>46</sup> The context is Paul's last visit to Jerusalem and the formula was announced by James and other past participants of the Council at a meeting in which they encouraged Paul to visibly respect the Jewish rituals to ease concerns of Jewish Christians. James and the elders labeled the Council dietary formula as "**our judgment**" rendering it as less than a command of the Lord and more as a good faith attempt to bridge differences.<sup>47</sup> This is a downgrade from the description of the origin of the requirements in *Acts 15* which was: "*For it seemed good to **the Holy Spirit** and to us...*" (Emphases added).<sup>48</sup>

Finally, we see evidence of slanted interpretation in the obscure *New Testament Book of Titus* mentioned earlier. First, some historical background is necessary. Paul's Jewish Christian enemies persisted within the Christian movement for many years. A group called the Ebionites were "the descendants of Paul's Judaizing opponents (who) maintained that the Mosaic Law was universally obligatory. Their gospel was written around the middle of the second century. They believed that Jesus so fulfilled Jewish law that God chose him as Messiah."<sup>49</sup> The fourth century church historian Eusebius said of the Ebionites: "they considered him [Jesus] a plain and common man, who was justified only because of his superior virtue, ...In their opinion the observance of the ceremonial law was altogether necessary, on the ground that they could not be saved by faith in Christ alone and by a corresponding life."<sup>50</sup> These were, a couple of centuries downstream, the inheritors of the traditions of the "false brethren."

Scholars believe that the *Book of Titus* was written from about 120 AD – 130 AD to rebut this point of view and to consolidate Pauline teaching.<sup>51</sup> It purports to be from Paul but was most certainly pseudonymous. It is quite blunt, teaching that "*there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.*"<sup>52</sup> This is a direct put-down of the Jewish Christians and a rejection of their hardline position years from years earlier at the Council as enunciated in their opening statement: "*(S)ome of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.'*"<sup>53</sup>

Both the pro-Paul comment in *Titus* and the anti-Paul comment in *Acts* shun the complexity of arguments and simply spout the party lines. But they are artifacts of the tough negotiations that must have occurred around the issue of male circumcision. In the final settlement, as recorded in *Acts* and as alluded to in *Galatians*, the issue of whether Gentle converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised was – like many

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990) 74-106. In Bauckham's take on the ancient historian Eusebius, James the brother of Jesus was the first bishop of the church in Jerusalem.

<sup>47</sup> *Acts 21: 18-26.*

<sup>48</sup> *Acts 15:28.*

<sup>49</sup> Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr. ed., *Gospel Parallels: A Synopsis of the First Three Gospels* (Toronto, New York and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949, 1957, reprinted April, 1960) xvi.

<sup>50</sup> Eusebius Book III Chapter 27. Writers like AN Wilson, John Dominic Crossan, Hyam Maccoby and Gerd Ludemann have all seen Ebionitism, or "Jewish Christianity," as the religion of Jesus. See Charlotte Allen *The Human Christ The Search for the Historical Jesus* (Oxford: Lion Publishing plc, 1998) 103-4, 308.

<sup>51</sup> L. Michael White *From Jesus to Christianity* (San Francisco Harper Collins, 2004) 430.

<sup>52</sup> *Titus 1: 10-11.*

<sup>53</sup> *Acts 15:5.*

issues in modern labor negotiations - left unresolved. To put it in labor relations terms, the agreement was silent and the issue was left to be worked out in practice. As with many issues in modern labor relations, the practice varied. Paul later circumcised a young Christian whose mother was Jewish and whose father was a Gentile.<sup>54</sup> But Paul was inconsistent as circumstances - in his view – warranted: In his letter to the Galatians, he went so far as to lash out at Christians who urged circumcision saying, in effect, that he hoped they would mutilate themselves.<sup>55</sup>

There is a final point and it derives from a principle of interpreting labor agreements. When language is unclear or silent on a point, labor relations specialists recognize that there is both a letter and a spirit to consider. Reading the agreement reached at the Council of Jerusalem and the account of the negotiations, one has a sense that the spirit of the agreement favored Paul's view that circumcision was not required. The Pillars who authorized the agreement viewed the "false brethren" and Paul quite differently as evidenced in the very text of the agreement cited earlier. The "false brethren" are described in these unflattering terms: "*We have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls.*" In obvious contrast, Paul and Barnabas are called "*beloved.*"

In short, in the final proceedings of Council of Jerusalem the spirit of the agreement privileged Paul over the "false brethren" (and no doubt encouraged him to refer to them by that term).

## SUMMARY

As noted, the Council of Jerusalem negotiators reached an agreement without the aid of miracles and even though they initially maintained that the agreement seemed in accord with the Holy Spirit they were content to place it in the realm of human judgment. They also do not appear to have even prayed together to reach the outcome, although *Acts* reports that they prayed on nearly all other important occasions: When they first gathered after Jesus left; When they had the decision to appoint a replacement Apostle; When they gathered together after interrogations; When they selected additional leaders; When they met new Christians; When they did healings; When Peter was in prison and made an escape and was sent into hiding; And, when Paul was in prison.<sup>56</sup>

At the Council, however, rather than pray, they negotiated. They did trade-offs, made commitments and reached consensus. The result was distortable and led to some level of acrimony but in the long run the differences were managed and the agreement they reached must be considered a success in that it incubated Christianity as we know it.

Paul took the agreement of the Council and ran with it. In *Acts* 16:4 we read: "*Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.*" The Council kept the nascent movement from hardening into different factions.<sup>57</sup> By placing minimal requirements on the Gentile believers, Jesus's own brother James allowed the Christian movement to flourish and in the centuries ahead it came to dominate Europe. The Council's written decision quoted in its entirety above, is one of

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<sup>54</sup> *Acts* 16:3

<sup>55</sup> *Galatians* 5:12.

<sup>56</sup> *Acts* 1:14; 1:24; 4:31; 6:6; 8:15; 9:40; 12:5,12 13:3; 14:23; 16:25.

<sup>57</sup> It certainly took centuries for Paul's version of Christianity to become orthodox. But Jewish Christianity may have been nearly wiped out in the Roman Wars of 66-70 and the 130s.

the most important documents in Western Civilization.<sup>58</sup> The Council's significance for modern times is that it showed discussion and the building of consensus among different types of Christians.<sup>59</sup> Within this concoction, James who offered the compromise and Peter who later may have waffled may be perceived as centrists, the "false brethren" about whom James later warned Paul<sup>60</sup> as hard-liners and Paul as a radical.

The linkages between the proceedings of the Council of Jerusalem and modern collective bargaining may be seen in a final – if metaphorical – point. Just like leaders of a management and union bargaining team, the leaders of the two teams at the Council, Peter and Paul, were bound together in the aftermath of the settlement in the eyes of all constituents. In the labor relations world this gets played out in the worksite. In world history, Peter and Paul are two of the most recognized people in historic Christianity. Places and jurisdictions throughout the world are named for them. It is likely that even at the time of the Council of Jerusalem Peter and Paul realized that their fates were intertwined and that they needed to work together and blend their perspectives. Two little-observed sections of the *New Testament* when read together report that they had met privately years before the Council, shortly after Paul joined the movement.<sup>61</sup> This confidential coming together can be seen in a bargaining context as a pre-meeting to build relationships or even a caucus. Although they apparently sparred in the aftermath of the settlement, they appear to have been somewhat on the same wavelength since Paul wrote in another section of the *New Testament* about Peter and some of his cohorts and himself a statement of unity that "*whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.*"<sup>62</sup>

Church tradition holds that they met again in Rome and were executed by the authorities in the 60s CE. But, their agreement at the Council of Jerusalem lived on.

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<sup>58</sup> David Klinghoffer, *Why The Jews Rejected Jesus: The Turning Point in Western History* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 2005) 98.

<sup>59</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1998 by arrangement with HapersSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. Published by Hyam Maccoby, 1986) 144.

<sup>60</sup> *Acts* 21: 20-25.

<sup>61</sup> *Acts* 9:26-30 and *Galatians* 1:18-20. Luke the author of *Acts*, has Barnabas furtively taking Paul to "the Apostles" in Jerusalem. In *Galatians*, Paul writes that he stayed at Peter's house for two weeks and did not see any other apostles except for James the brother of Jesus. Verse 20 makes this emphasis: "*Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.*" From the words of these verses, we should assume that these two weeks with Peter constituted a crucial series of meetings and they must have reached some level of consensus. Paul must have learned something about the life of Jesus as Peter had been close to Jesus and it appears unlikely that Paul had ever known him. Peter, for his part, must have learned something about Paul's more universal views. The evidence for this is seen in that Peter later had his own mission to the non-Jews (*Acts* 10-11) and still later was supportive of Paul at the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15). Moreover, Paul assumed Peter had knowledge of the inclusion of the non-Jews in *Galatians* 2. Without this initial meeting between Paul and Peter, the Council may not have been a success.

<sup>62</sup> *I Corinthians* 15: 11.