

Jewish Identity and the Jerusalem Conference: Social Identity and Self-categorization in the Early Church Communities

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The early Jesus movement began as a sect within Judaism. However, within a few decades of its origin (40-50 CE), it began to attract Gentiles to its communities, especially in the Diaspora. These events are recorded in *Acts of the Apostles* 11.19-20. This admission of Gentile believers to a predominantly Jewish movement caused problems, for untraditional contact with Gentiles transgressed the boundaries of Judaism – boundaries which delineated what it was to be Jewish. Many Jewish believers argued that the Gentile believers must be circumcised so taking on Jewish identity (*Acts* 15.1 and 5; *Galatians* 2.4). After all, the Jesus movement promised Gentiles salvation, but salvation was only available within God's covenant with Israel. Around 45-50 CE the Jesus movement gathered in conference at Jerusalem to discuss the matter. Paul reports this Jerusalem Conference and its outcome in his *Letter to the Galatians*, chapter 2.1-10. The issue at hand was the conditions under which Gentiles could be members of the Jesus movement, but this issue also had implications for the social identity of the Jewish believers.

Although a considerable amount of work has been done on the Jerusalem Conference there are still differences of opinion as to what actually happened and what was decided. This paper aims to use the insights of modern social psychology and the contribution it has made to the understanding of group dynamics to attempt to answer some of the outstanding questions concerning the happenings at that meeting at Jerusalem. There has been much research into group processes in the fields of sociology and social psychology but the models which, perhaps, best

incorporate group belonging and identity are the Social Identity and Self-categorization Theory of Tajfel and Turner (2001; also review by Hogg, 2001).

Initially this paper gives a brief overview of Social Identity and Self-categorization Theory and gives examples of relevant group relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the ancient Mediterranean world as a way of validating the use of modern techniques for this field of study. Subsequently the Jewish and Gentile believers within the early church are considered in the context of Social Identity Theory as subgroups of the superordinate group which was the Jesus movement. The implications of this analysis for the events at the Jerusalem Conference are then developed and a conclusion reached. The evidence suggests that significant compromises were needed to reconcile the different stances of the Gentile and Jewish factions. The identity of the Gentile believers was maintained by not insisting on their circumcision and complete law observance. However, contact with uncircumcised Gentiles threatened Jewish identity and provision had to be made to maintain Jewish boundary markers. This was achieved by separating the two factions within a pluralistic superordinate group.

An Overview of Social Identity and Self-categorization Theories

The Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner, with the later development of Self-categorization Theory, proposes that people gain their identity not only from their self-conception and interpersonal relationships but also from the groups to which they belong (Tajfel and Turner, 2001; Turner, 1985; Turner *et al.*, 1987). These theories postulate two reasons for group belonging:

1. People generally seek, and act to achieve, high self-esteem. Groups serve to provide a positive social identity which facilitates self-esteem (Tajfel and Turner, 2001).

2. People seek to avoid anxiety over their behaviour. Belonging to groups provides a set of norms on which to model behaviour and assess the behaviour of others (Hogg and Mullin, 1999).

Members of groups categorize themselves according to the norms and expectations of the group. To the extent that members conform to the norms of the group, they are accepted within the group (Hogg, 2001, pp.63-66; Marques *et al.*, 2001, p.402), but tendencies to act against expected norms are viewed as deviancy by fellow group members and can lead to marginalization and rejection (Hogg, 2001, pp.63-68; Marques *et al.*, 2001). Thus there are strong social pressures to adopt the norms of the group to which members belong (the in-group) for this guarantees acceptance. Knowing the norms of the group also provides members with a code of behaviour which helps to remove anxiety and provides a frame of reference for behaviour (Hogg and Mullin, 1999; Sherif, 2001). Group norms tend to accentuate similarities between members and minimise differences (Hogg, 2001, p.63). Thus an ideal prototype of the group emerges; the closer the member conforms to the prototype the more likely he/she is to receive acceptance and approval from the group as a whole. In-group members have a vested interest in portraying their in-group in the best possible light for this reinforces their own self-esteem. Thus ethnocentricity develops by which in-group members evaluate the norms of the in-group preferentially relative to comparable out-groups (Hewstone, Rubin and Willis, 2002, pp. 578-579).

Members of the in-group not only categorize themselves according to the norms of the in-group but also in contrast to the perceived characteristics of out-groups. To strengthen the positive identity of the in-group, the norms and characteristics of out-groups can be vilified, particularly when the in-group feels threatened by the out-group (Hewstone *et al.*, 2002, p.580). Such vilification leads to derogatory stereotyping of out-group members which, then, leads to prejudice. Negative characteristics are

attributed to out-group members to enhance the feelings of superiority of these members of the in-group (Hewstone *et al.*, 2002, pp. 579-580).

But is Social Identity and Self-categorization applicable to the first century Mediterranean world? Hinkle and Brown have proposed two criteria for the application of Social Identity and Self-categorization models (1990, pp.48-70). They argue that, for appropriate use of these models, group identity must be salient for members and in-groups and out-groups must exist in an atmosphere of competition. Malina, studying the ancient Mediterranean world from an anthropological perspective, has claimed that both these criteria apply to the ancient Mediterranean world: he argues that group identity was more important than personal identity for the first century personality was group orientated (2001, pp.58-67). In addition, Malina claims that the pivotal values of the Mediterranean area were honour and shame – such values naturally led to an atmosphere of competition between opposing groups in a time when resources were limited (1993, pp.103-112). Stanley attributes the outbreak of first century CE pogroms to groups ‘competing for scarce social, economic and territorial resources’ (1996, p.115). Esler (1998, pp.45-48), using these insights of Malina, provides an extensive justification for using Social Identity and Self-categorization Theories in his studies on the *Letter to the Romans*.

Social Identity and Self-categorization in Jewish/Gentile Relationships in the Ancient Mediterranean World

The religious beliefs and practices of Judaism marginalized Jewish communities who lived in the Diaspora (i.e. living outside the Holy land) as opposed to Palestine. Thus their belief in monotheism prohibited Jews from being involved in pagan worship and, as worship of gods was often part of civic ceremonies, Jews could be excluded from much of civic life whose ceremonies often took place in temples (Gooch, 1993, p.40). Even outside the temple, sacrifice and libation to the gods was part of any important

family celebration such as marriages, birthdays etc. (Gooch, 1993, pp.28-38). In addition food, particularly meat, wine and oil, which were used in temples as sacrifice to the gods were sold in the market place. The marriage laws also kept Jews apart from the rest of the civic community for the Torah prohibited intimate relations with Gentiles (e.g. *Genesis* 34.14; *Deuteronomy* 7.3-4). All these factors resulted in the Jews being isolated and often shunned by Gentiles. Yet the very isolation and marginalization of the Jews became an important marker of their identity.

The literature of the time contains examples of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Tacitus demonstrates this derogatory stereotyping as he records how Jews

regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies. They sit apart at meals, they sleep apart, and though, as a nation, they are singularly prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women; among themselves nothing is unlawful. Circumcision was adopted by them as a mark of difference from other men. (*Histories* 5.5.2)

Philostratus similarly describes the Jews as

inveterate rebels, not against Rome only but against all human society. Living in their peculiar exclusiveness, and having neither their food, nor their libations, nor their sacrifices in common with men. (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* V.33)

The idea of threat to the Gentiles from the Jews is evident in this extract from Augustine that demonstrates Seneca's low opinion of Jewry.

When, meanwhile, the customs of that most accursed nation have gained such strength that they have been now received in all lands, the conquered have given laws to the conquerors. (*De Civitate Dei* 6.11)

The Jews, themselves, acknowledged their isolation but took pride in it.

But reverencing God and conducting themselves according to the Law, they [the Jews] kept themselves apart in the matter of food, and for this reason they appeared hateful to some. (*Maccabees* 3.3-5)

This tendency for separate meals and food restrictions is evident in Jewish literature too. Joseph, in *Joseph and Aseneth*, accepted the invitation to Aseneth's father's house but, when dining, sat at a separate table (*Joseph and Aseneth* 7.1). Judith, as she set out to dine with and then slaughter Holofernes, took her own food and wine to eat at the table (*Judith* 10.5 and 12.19). During the occupation of Antiochus IV, the old scribe, Eleasar, died rather than eat meat which had been sacrificed to idols (*Maccabees* 6.18-31).

Similarly the Jewish attitudes to Gentiles were unfavourable as can be seen in New Testament extracts. Paul exhibits derogatory stereotyping as he compares Jews and Gentiles: 'We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners' (*Galatians* 2:15).

Paul stereotypes non-believing Gentiles as fornicators driven by lust.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication: that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God. (1 *Thessalonians* 4:3-5)

Ethnocentricity is evident in Paul's writings. The attribution of virtues to those living by the Spirit (the in-group) in contrast to the vices of those not led by the Spirit (the out-group) is clearly defined in Paul's *Letter to the Galatians*.

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (*Galatians* 5:22-23)

Those who are not led by the Spirit perform works of the flesh:

fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. (*Galatians* 5:19-21)

The Jesus Movement and Superordinate Groups

The examples above indicate the difficulty of incorporating Gentile believers into the community of the early church without prior circumcision.

For Jews circumcision was the physical mark which ensured that the person belonged to the covenant which God had made with Israel through the patriarch, Abraham.

God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring.’
(*Genesis* 17.9-12)

Circumcision indicated that a man worshipped the one true God, did not indulge in idolatry and lived within the boundaries of the covenant (*Deuteronomy* 30.6). Gentiles who were prepared to undergo circumcision were regarded, henceforth, as Jews. Both Philo and Josephus have numerous passages which ‘praise the proselyte and enjoin upon Jews the equitable treatment of those who have entered their midst’ (Cohen, 1989, p.29). Josephus claims kinship with proselytes for ‘kinship is created not only through birth but also through the choice of the manner of life’ (*Against Apion* 2.210). Jews had no objection to association with, or even marriage to, circumcised Gentiles. Paul and his followers, however, strongly opposed circumcision for Gentile believers, maintaining that the salvific work of Christ was sufficient to redeem the Gentile believers as Gentiles without conversion to Judaism (see *Romans* 10.12 and *Galatians* 2.16). For the Pauline group, Jewish and Gentile believers must co-exist as parts of the one body of Christ despite their differing and opposing identities (1 *Corinthians* 12.12).

Recent research on reducing inter-group hostility provides data on how such problems may be overcome. The principal means of overcoming

inter-group bias/conflict seems to be Recategorization. Recategorization attempts to establish a higher level of group categorization which is inclusive of both the in-group and out-group (Brewer and Gaertner, 2001, pp.459-461; Hewstone *et al.*, 2002, p.590). The origins of the recategorization theory derive from observations/experimentations by Sherif (2001). In situations of inter-group hostility, the provision of superordinate goals, to which all factions could contribute, significantly reduced the conflict. These superordinate goals appear to operate by providing another social identity beyond the normal group identity. This recategorizes the members of both the in-group and out-group as members of one superordinate group, so giving them all a common in-group identity (Gaertner and Mann, 1989). Co-operation within the one super group transformed members' representations of the membership from "Us" and "Them" to a more inclusive "We" (Brewer and Gaertner, 2001, p 459).

Recategorization is evident in Paul's writings as he attempts to remove or downgrade previous group identity, replacing it with the new, more inclusive, identity. Thus, in the *Letter to the Romans*, he replaces the distinction between Jew and Greek by the new identity which is the all-encompassing Lordship of Christ.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.
(*Romans* 10.12)

In the *Letter to the Galatians*, Paul uses the ritual of baptism into Christ Jesus to unite Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, man and woman, extending that idea of belonging to include descent from Abraham, which was previously an identity marker of Jews only (*Galatians* 3.27-29). In the first *Letter to the Corinthians*, he uses the imagery of one body with many parts to portray the common identity of all members (1 *Corinthians* 12.11-14). Thus Paul creates a superordinate group which gives a new identity to his Gentile converts and unites them to, and reduces conflict with, the

existing group of Jewish believers. Paul also favourably contrasts this superordinate group with out-groups such as non-believing Gentiles (see 1 *Thessalonians* 4:3-5; *Galatians* 5.19-23; 1 *Corinthians* 6:9-11; *Romans* 1.28-31).

Whereas Paul's efforts to create a superordinate group may have reduced the ethnic prejudice of Gentiles towards Jews, the problem of the Jewish abhorrence of Gentiles still remained. Paul tried to implant the superordinate identity of believers in Christ into Jews also.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. (*Galatians* 2.15-16)

But in so doing, Paul inevitably undermines the observance of the Mosaic Law. This observance is one of the principal indicators of Jewish identity. Thus, by inculcating the identity of the superordinate group, Paul undermines Jewish identity.

Modern social psychologists have recognized this pitfall of recategorization. Prolonged co-operation between sub-groups can result in a blurring of boundaries and loss of identity within sub-groups. Although this seems desirable as a way of reducing inter-group hostility, over time members of the sub-group tend to resent their loss of identity and take steps to reassert it (Brewer and Gaertner, 2001, pp.460-461; Hewstone *et al.*, 2001, p.591; Hornsey and Hogg, 2002, pp.204-205). Forcing individuals to focus only on the new superordinate identity threatens sub-group identity and sub-group members can become aggressive in attempting to restore the original group boundaries (Hornsey and Hogg, 2000b, p.254). To overcome these difficulties of lost identity, a more complex model of dual identity has been proposed in which the superordinate group is introduced but the

original in-group and out-group categorization is sustained (Gaertner and Dovidio, 2000, pp.155-183) Some studies have shown that this dual identity produces less inter-group conflict than membership of a superordinate group alone (Hornsey and Hogg, 2000a; 2000b).

The Jerusalem Conference, with its demands by some Jewish believers that the Gentile believers should be circumcised (*Galatians* 5.2-3; 6.12-13; *Acts* 11.2; 15.1,5) probably originated in the feeling of threat to the Jewish identity. The identity of the Jewish believers was not confined to the Jesus movement; they were Jews too. Jewish believers were still in close contact with other Jews who were not members of the Jesus movement, as can be seen in *Acts* 2.46-47.

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

The Jewish believers, therefore, cut across two groups: as Jews they were a subgroup within the Jesus movement but, as members of the Jesus movement – still a sect within Judaism – they were a subgroup of Judaism. In practice, cross-cutting categorization can provide a means of retaining a salient identity in situations where another, conflicting subgroup gains undesirable influence within the superordinate group. Where the threatened in-group can also identify with another, separate, superordinate group to which the conflicting sub-group does not belong, the threatened in-group experiences less threat to their identity because their identity is not solely dependent on membership of this particular superordinate group (Hornsey and Hogg 2000a, p.151). This is applicable to the Jewish believers. As the number of Gentile converts increased, it is reasonable to assume that the more law-observant Jewish believers began to experience a threat to their Jewish identity. Firstly, Jewish believers were now more likely to be involved in frequent but irregular contact with uncircumcised Gentiles.

Secondly, Gentile believers were baptized into Christ (*Galatians* 3.27) and this baptism brought the promise of salvation to Gentiles (*Galatians* 3.8; *1 Thessalonians* 2.16) – a salvation which previously had been the exclusive to God’s covenant with Israel. In an environment in which honour and shame were pivotal values (Malina, 2001, pp.27-57), in which resources were perceived as limited (Malina, 2001, pp.81-107) and envy prevalent (Malina, 2001, pp.108-133), this extension of salvation beyond the confines of circumcised Israel could be crucial. This perceived threat to their Jewish identity would, therefore, tend to increase their self-categorization as Jews, with the danger that Judaism would become the dominant, and possibly only, identity. Hence, the total observance of the Torah would become more, not less, important to law-observant Jewish believers.

The Jerusalem Conference (*Galatians*, 2.1-9)

Before looking at the *Letter to the Galatians* as a report on the Jerusalem Conference, some preliminary comments are appropriate. Paul describes the Jerusalem Conference tersely (*Galatians* 2.1-10), in a section of the letter in which Paul is animated by his topic and, as a result, is not very logical (Martyn, 1997, p.195). As Barclay argues, his language is polemical (1987, pp 73-93). He mentions derogatorily fellow believers as ‘false brothers’, and uses pejorative language to refer to the principal apostles (*Galatians* 2.6). Dunn sees Paul as walking a narrow path (1993, p.102); Paul emphasises his independence from the Jerusalem church, claiming that his gospel came from Christ Jesus (*Galatians* 1.11-12; 15-17), but he also wants to show that he preaches the same gospel as the Jerusalem apostles (*Galatians* 1.6-9). Thus, Paul’s motives in writing this section are questionable.

The Jerusalem Conference met to consider whether Gentile believers could be members of the early church without circumcision. Their deliberations were not easy for the two opposing sub-groups – the Pauline faction and the law-observant Jewish faction – held strong but opposing

views. Paul and his colleagues pressed for a superordinate identity for the Jesus movement in which ethnic or cultural subgroups were no longer relevant. Thus:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (*Galatians* 3.28)

It is easy to understand Paul's stance when the situation of Gentile believers is considered. Gentile believers, who converted from paganism to faith in Christ Jesus, left behind much of their previous identity. The shift from polytheism to monotheism entailed a complete change of life-style. The prohibition on worship of idols caused alienation from much of their previous existence. Family meals with non-believers bore the danger of idolatry (Gooch, 1993, pp.28-38). For those Gentile believers who had previously sought companionship in voluntary associations, similar problems occurred. Many voluntary associations were formed for cultic worship of the gods. Those which were initiated for other reasons, funeral associations or groups based on trade, included celebrations of festivals of the gods (Kloppenborg and Wilson, 1996, p.7). The Gentile believers' identity, based on such group membership, would be lost when they converted to the Jesus movement. Nor would those who had connections with philosophical groups be in a better position as Paul makes it clear that worldly wisdom is opposed to the teaching of Christ (*1 Corinthians* 1.21-25; 3.18-20 and *Colossians* 2.8). Opportunities to maintain their previous identity as Greeks were, therefore, limited. Their social identity must now be derived solely from association with the Jesus movement.

If the Pauline faction pressed for a completely assimilated community, the evidence suggests that the aims of the more law-observant Jewish believers were different. In the *Letter to the Galatians* (2.4), Paul complains about 'false brothers' who spied on the freedom that he and his associates had 'in Christ Jesus'. Such 'freedom' must refer to freedom from

the Torah/Law (see Martyn, 1997, p.196; Esler, 1998, p.74; Dunn, 1993, p.99). Although Paul speaks of them in language which is pejorative, his opponents would probably have described themselves differently. Their education and upbringing in Judaism had taught them to respect and value the Torah; keeping of the Torah was what defined the Jewish people as the people of God; it was integral to their identity as Jews and their part of the covenant made between God and Israel – a covenant that brought salvation. Dunn sees the motives of the ‘false brothers’ as ensuring that

the new movement within Judaism remained true to the principles and practices of the covenant clearly laid down in the Torah. (1993, p.99)

The law-observant Jewish believers might, therefore, understand the relationship between the early church and Judaism in terms of what Hornsey and Hogg call crosscutting categorization (2000a, pp.150-151). The Jesus movement represented a superordinate group containing both believing Jews and Gentiles but, in addition, there was the second superordinate grouping, Judaism, to which believing Jews belonged (and derived their social identity) but from which believing, but uncircumcised, Gentiles were excluded. Unfortunately, these two groupings are incompatible. If Gentile believers were accepted as full members of the early church, Jewish believers would be exposed to unconventional contact with uncircumcised Gentiles which could jeopardize their identity as Jews – contact such as intimate table fellowship which proved problematic at Antioch (*Galatians* 2.11-14). In addition, baptism into Christ Jesus now promised salvation to the uncircumcised – a promise which had previously been exclusive to God’s covenant with Israel.

The Jerusalem Conference decided against circumcision for Gentile believers. This can be inferred from Paul’s report that Titus, a Greek and delegate from Antioch, was not compelled to be circumcised (*Galatians* 2.3). Paul also affirms that nothing was added to his gospel (*Galatians* 2.6)

– a gospel which he received by revelation for the purpose of preaching to Gentiles (*Galatians* 2.15-16). However, the main finding of the Jerusalem Conference seems to be reported by Paul in verses 7-9 where he says:

when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised ... they [Peter, James and John] gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Thus two separate missions appear to have been recognised: one mission to the circumcised and a second mission to the uncircumcised/Gentiles. Most commentators agree that here Paul seems to be quoting an outside source – some recognized formula derived from the Jerusalem meeting (Betz, 1979, pp.96-98, 100-101; Dunn, 1993, pp.105-106; Longenecker, 1990, p.55). However, exactly what was intended by this division of missions is unclear. Commentators have disputed whether the division was intended to be ethnic or geographical (Betz, 1979, pp.78, 100-101; Martyn, 1997, pp.213-216; Longenecker, 1990, pp.58-59). Neither seems appropriate as the initial impetus for the Conference was the situation in the church at Antioch – a mixed church containing both Jewish and Gentile believers (Dunn, 1993, p.111).

If the Conference allowed the admission of uncircumcised Gentile into the early church, the two missions solution must, in some way, offer a way out of the perceived threat to Jewish identity of law-observant believers. The understanding gained from Social Identity and Self-categorization Theories suggests that maintaining pluralism by affirming the identity of both sub-groups within the super-ordinate grouping of the early church was likely to provide the most satisfactory solution. The ‘two missions’ solution would appear to do that. The principal problem, however, with maintaining pluralism within the early church was that the Jewish identity was generally defined over and against the Gentiles as the

comparable out-group. Jewish identity was delineated by its difference from paganism in its monotheism, food laws, circumcision and ethical rules. Even allowing for changes in the behaviour of Gentiles as they converted, the derogatory stereotype of the Gentile would still be active in the minds of law-abiding Jews. Provision had to be made for law-observant Jewish believers to preserve their Jewish identity by maintaining the traditional boundaries between Jews and Gentiles. The separate missions must, consequently, have provided for some separation of law-observant Jewish believers from 'Gentile sinners' (*Galatians* 2.15). But the division cannot be seen as operating purely on ethnic grounds for, as Sim notes, the principal leaders of the mission to the Gentiles were Jewish – Paul and Barnabas (1998, p.85). The Jerusalem Conference could not have demanded that the Gentile believers be full members of the early church on condition that they existed as a separate entity and did not mix with any Jewish believers. Therefore, a more likely solution would seem to involve a compromise by which those law-observant Jewish believers, who considered their identity as Jews to be threatened by irregular contact with Gentile believers, could exist as members of the Jesus movement under circumstances which fulfilled Torah observance and in which their contact with Gentile believers was not significantly greater than that normally experienced by any law-observant Jew. As such law-observant Jewish believers were more likely to be found in Palestine, where Jews formed the majority, rather than in the Diaspora where frequent contact with Gentiles was more common, the mission to law-observant Jewish believers would be conducted mainly from Jerusalem where the 'pillars' lived, whereas the mission to the Gentiles (and those Jews who exhibited a more tolerant approach to contact with Gentiles) would be concentrated in the Diaspora (as implied in *Galatians* 2.7-9). However, the concession existed that, whether in Palestine or the Diaspora, any Jewish believer who experienced a conscientious objection to irregular contact with Gentile believers was at liberty to withdraw, so maintaining his

Jewish identity intact. The ‘two missions’ solution may have resolved the identity issue relating to unconventional contact with Gentiles but the issue of shared salvation with Gentiles remained and was to surface again in future in Philippi and Galatia (*Philippians* 3.2-3; *Galatians* 5.3-6).

Conclusion

The decision of the Conference – to instigate separate missions – fits well with the current appreciation of how superordinate groups can overcome inter-group bias and conflict, but only when the need to preserve identity in sub-groups is also appreciated. The solution of separate missions seems to be a way to preserve Jewish identity. It was a compromise which allowed those law-observant Jewish believers, who experienced a threat to their identity by untraditional contact with Gentiles, to remain within the superordinate group of the Jesus movement whilst maintaining the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles which defined Jewish identity. At the same time the social identity of the Gentile believers was also maintained through the concession that circumcision and law-observance were not essential requirements for their membership of the Jesus movement. This pluralistic solution appears to have been received well by both factions, satisfying their categorization as members of the Jesus movement without jeopardising their social identities as Jews and Greeks.

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