

## **The Council of Jerusalem: “The Holy Spirit and Us” November 6th, 2023**

### Prologue: Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-12

*“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that told you...” - John 14:26*

- I. Church history.
  - A. In particular, ecumenical councils
    1. 21 Church councils: events, characters (both holy and unholy), and doctrines.
  - B. The Council of Jerusalem and the post-apostolic era in the Church.
    1. The Scriptural template and the Church’s first major crisis.
    2. “The Holy Spirit and us”.
  - C. The role of the Church’s leaders as teachers and pastors.
    1. The apostles and the post-apostolic era
- II. What is an ecumenical council?
  - A. In short it is a Church meeting of the highest authority.
    1. Bishops from throughout the universal Church gathered with the Pope, or...
    2. Doctrine and discipline
  - B. So, the Church is governed by the Pope and Bishops
    1. “He who receives you receives me...”
    2. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, #22
  - C. There are 21 such councils as recognized by the Church.
    1. The Council of Jerusalem is the pattern.
    2. From Nicea in 325 to the Second Vatican Council from 1962-65.
    3. The first eight stand apart.
    4. Many types of Church meetings.
- III. The question of following the Mosaic Law in the early Church.
  - A. Some Jewish Christians insisted that new converts had to follow the Old Law.
    1. They were called Judaizers and severely criticized by St. Paul — Galatians 5
    2. The community in Antioch appealed to Jerusalem.
  - B. Wasn’t it settled by the life and teaching of Christ? Yes and no.
- IV. Acts 15
  - A. The Council
    1. “No little dissension and debate.” “Apostles and presbyters”
    2. St. Peter and St. James speak.
    3. The letter: “It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to



- idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right.” (15:28-9)
- B. Both doctrine and discipline.
    - 1. Doctrine: one does not need to keep the Old Law in order to be saved.
      - a) Division of the laws of the Old Covenant: moral, ceremonial, and judicial
      - b) Only the moral laws are permanent — e.g., Ten Commandments
    - 2. The disciplinary or pastoral part are the rules about food.
      - a) In order that Jewish and Gentile Christians could eat at table together.
  - C. “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us”
    - 1. A principle of transition into the post-apostolic life of the Church
- V. The era of the early Church
- A. The Catholic Church is recognizable from the beginning
    - 1. The role of the Bishops and the centrality of the Mass:
      - a) St. Ignatius of Antioch (died ca. 110): “For all who belong to God and Jesus Christ are with the bishop...”
      - b) St. Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna (died 155 A.D.)
    - 2. St. Clement of Rome, the fourth Pope (died ca. 99 A.D.)
    - 3. Apostolic fathers; apologists like St. Justin Martyr (died ca. 165)
    - 4. Devotion to saints — e.g., SS Perpetua and Felicity, ca. 203
  - B. Church councils began to happen early on — not necessarily ecumenical.
    - 1. “Ecumenical councils were the keystone of the whole synodal structure.”
  - C. Events and trends in the early Church
    - 1. The Church dealt with heresies — the idea of orthodoxy developed.
      - a) Gnosticism — a blending of Neo-Platonic philosophy, paganism and religion with Christianity
      - b) Montanism — “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”
    - 2. Development of the canon of Scripture
      - a) Marcionite heresy
      - b) Principles: “1, the book had to go back to apostolic times, 2. the book had to be highly esteemed from an early date, and 3. the guarantors of this were the bishops, who could trace their origins back to the apostles.” (Vidmar 36)
    - 3. Doctrine develops in opposition to heresies.
- VI. A Church that thrived and suffered.
- A. In the mediterranean world of the Empire
  - B. But with periodic outbursts of persecution.
  - C. The fourth century will be an epochal one for Christianity and the Church.

### Sources

Jedin, Hubert. *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: an Historical Outline*. Hassell Street Press, 2021.

Vidmar, O.P., John. *The Catholic Church through the Ages, Second Edition: A History*. Paulist Press, 2014.