

FIRST CENTURY GROUPTHINK: AN EXEGETICAL CASE STUDY

R. Mark Bell
Regent University

Abstract: *Certain groups discussed in the New Testament are exegetically tested for the purpose of determining whether or not symptoms of groupthink are evident. Robbins' (1996) methods of social and cultural texture analysis are used along with ideological texture analysis to examine the underlying constructs impacting certain Christian and Jewish groups. The group known as the Sanhedrin is explored considering passages from the Gospel of John. The group called the Judaizers is similarly explored in consideration of passages from the books of Acts and Galatians. Janis' (1982) work on the groupthink theory construct informs the findings of nine separate evidences of the groupthink theory in these first century groups which are summarily categorized. New Testament insight into overcoming groupthink is also briefly discussed.*

Groupthink is a relatively new concept in group, team and organizational studies popularized by Janis' (1982) writings on the subject which focused primarily on political fiascoes from the latter half of 20th century American politics. In this study, groupthink is reviewed in consideration of Janis' original theoretical conceptions, more recent research including qualitative and quantitative findings, historical case studies, and alternative views of groupthink. Case study methodology has become a primary means of studying the theory at work in groups. However, exegetical case studies analyzing the groupthink phenomenon are needed in order to determine the theory's applicability within biblical groups and to provide biblical insight for overcoming groupthink tendencies when they exist. As such, this exegetical case study analysis focuses on two important groups from the first century in order to identify groupthink in a first century context. The Sanhedrin was both political and religious and formed the governing body of the Jewish nation. The Judaizers were a less organized but influential group which impacted the thinking of the early Christian church. Using both of Robbins (1996) social/cultural texture and ideological analysis methods, these groups are studied by examining passages from the books of John, Galatians and Acts for the purpose of establishing whether groupthink existed within each group. These groups are important because of their influence on the development of the early Christian church. Multiple groupthink examples are cited, and certain methods for overcoming groupthink are briefly discussed. Groupthink remains a

relevant concern in modern organizations because of the pervasive nature of its negative realities including systematic ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Biblically-minded individuals benefit from understanding how groupthink tendencies influenced the early Christian church in its first century context.

GROUPTHINK THEORY

A discussion of groupthink theory necessarily includes an overview of one of the theory's pioneering thinkers, Irving Janis. Recent research work has built on Janis' theory from both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Additional research work has been completed examining cases of groupthink from a historical perspective. Other researchers have taken an alternative view of groupthink by rejecting some or all of the theory's tenets. As such, each of these topics is briefly reviewed.

Janis' Theory

Janis essentially conducted the seminal work on groupthink theory. Janis' initial work on the topic was published in book form in 1972 (t Hart, 1991, p. 247). Janis published a second edition ten years later (Janis, 1982) along with many other papers on the subject. The basic premise of Janis' groupthink theory addresses how group decisions are adversely affected by a "detrimental phenomenon" (t Hart, 1991, p. 247). This detrimental phenomenon involved the thinking processes of a group when participating in decision-making pro-

cesses. Groupthink theory includes consideration of antecedent factors, symptomatic realities and the associated outcomes.

Antecedent conditions or the factors initiating the groupthink phenomenon are important considerations. Janis (1982) identified three causal conditions which can lead to groupthink, and these three conditions include high levels of group cohesiveness, faulty organizational structure and situational contexts (pp. 176-177). Of these three, the first antecedent seems to be primary. According to Janis, all three antecedent conditions need not be present for groupthink to exist, but high group cohesiveness is always present when groupthink is observed (p. 176). Janis is essentially stating that highly cohesive groups may not necessarily cause the groupthink phenomenon, but groupthink would not occur in groups with relatively low cohesiveness. Structural faults within the organization include the lack of leadership impartiality, lack of diversity of members' backgrounds, ideologies, etc., protection of the group from outside influences and limited group norms regarding methods and processes ('t Hart, 1991, p. 257). 't Hart further notes significant contextual realities such as highly stressful situations or low levels of group self-esteem are extremely relevant antecedents (p. 257). Therefore, one may observe groupthink as a result of a provocative situational reality coupled with a highly cohesive group or as a result of a highly cohesive group coupled with some structural fault. Although plausible, one need not expect both structural faults and provocative contexts to exist when observing groupthink.

Many different symptoms of groupthink may be observed in relation to the phenomenon. Janis (1982) claims at least eight different symptoms may be observed and noted all eight symptoms need not be present for the condition to exist (p. 174). To further clarify the various symptoms, Janis classified them into three types including the group's overestimations, close-mindedness and pressures to conform (pp. 174-175). Each of these three types include differing sorts of these observable symptoms. According to 't Hart (1991), the overestimations of the group can be observed by the group's illusion of an invulnerable status or by the group's belief in its own inherent morality (p. 257). 't Hart notes how the closed-mindedness type can be seen through stereotypical considerations of outsiders or through the group's own collective rationaliza-

tion processes (p. 257). These two types include half of the overall groupthink symptoms while the final type includes the other half. In the third type of groupthink symptom, groups tend toward self-censoring behaviors, self-declared mindguards, the exercising of pressure on those who dissent, and, finally, the illusion of group consensus ('t Hart, 1991, p. 257). What Janis is saying and 't Hart is clarifying is that specific, observable symptoms will be present when groupthink is occurring. Much like how a medical diagnosis of some physiological symptom indicates a disease or injury, a groupthink symptom is indicative of a group suffering from the groupthink phenomenon.

Understanding the causes and symptoms of groupthink naturally leads to a discussion of its consequences. Janis (1982) called these consequences "symptoms of defective-decisionmaking" (p. 175) which would ultimately lead to lack of successful outcomes for the group. What Janis offers as consequences for group decision in groups affected by groupthink should not arbitrarily be considered as an exhaustive list, but the consequences are nonetheless staggering in their rationale. Janis details seven different likely defects in decisions which include major oversights in understanding of objectives and alternatives, lack of proper research, biases in information processing, failure to consider alternatives and risks associated with preferences, and lack of proper planning, implementation, and oversight of plans (p. 244). Obviously, any of these alone would be a major weakness in any group's decision-making processes. It is plausible to expect several of these defective decision practices to be present and generate several negative consequences for any group involved in a groupthink scenario.

Building on Janis' Theory

Janis' theory has been tested and studied in many research endeavors since its conception. The focus of many of the studies has varied along cultural, personal, and behavioral aspects. A brief survey of some of these studies provides insight into the wide range of both qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in recent years concerning groupthink while simultaneously demonstrating the lack of exegetical case studies.

Goby (2007) considered groupthink from a multicultural perspective using graduate students in a university located in Northern Cyprus (p. 425). Goby

purposed to determine whether multicultural groups were more or less likely to engage in groupthink based on the diversity of the group. Mok and Morris (2010) researched groupthink in view of bi-cultural or multi-ethnic individuals (p. 1114). Similar to Goby's purpose, Mok and Morris attempted to better understand how ethnicity and, specifically, individuals of multiple races would operate in groupthink scenarios. Packer's (2009) research considered how individual feelings of either weak or strong group affiliation would impact their susceptibility to groupthink (p. 546). As such, Packer's work would serve to confirm Janis' first antecedent condition relating to highly cohesive groups. In a similar study, Peoples, Sigillo, Green and Miller (2012) considered the impact of personal friendships within a group as related to those individuals' tendencies toward groupthink (p. 178). The Peoples et al. study would again seek to better understand Janis' first antecedent. Tsikerdekis (2013) took a different approach by studying whether an individual's perception of anonymity would contribute or constrain that individual's propensity toward groupthink (p. 1001). The study addressed an interesting occurrence where group members would remain anonymous and how that would affect feelings of high cohesiveness. Troyer and Youngreen (2009) focused more on the negative decision-making process associated with groupthink by testing whether the implementation of intentional conflict would serve to minimize groupthink tendencies (p. 409). This study serves as an application-based or problem-solving approach to groupthink theory. Hällgren (2010) attempted to better understand whether high cohesiveness would be manifested in what he called "temporary organizations" (p. 94). In other words, Hällgren studied whether high cohesiveness could be rapidly established in groups where an end to the group was pre-planned or scheduled. Marler and Marett (2013) studied the effects of computer-mediated communication processes on the development of groupthink tendencies (p. 172). This study sought to understand how highly cohesive groups can form in an age where communication practices among group members is less likely to be in-person than in previous times. Overall, each of these studies accepted the tenets of Janis' groupthink theory and attempted to study the theory with specific variables.

Historical Cases of Groupthink

Case study methodology was a primary method used by Janis to document the causes and symptoms of groupthink. Following this approach, recent research work has been completed examining groupthink from a historical perspective. These cases all examine groupthink by exploring the available evidence relative to several well-known events from recent history. These studies demonstrate the value many contemporary researchers place on case study methodology as a useful tool for examining groupthink. As with other methods of studying the groupthink phenomenon, the recent historical research does not include any exegetical case studies.

Badie (2010) reviewed numerous public documents and other available writings to better understand the build-up to the inclusion of Iraq in the Bush administration's execution of the War on Terror (p. 277). This case study did not include any personal interviews as it only focused on what had been previously published on the subject. Badie cataloged the groupthink symptoms evident in the Bush administration and its decision-making efforts and determined that groupthink was present (pp. 282-293). Redd and Mintz (2013) studied the Kennedy administration's handling of the now infamous Bay of Pigs invasion. Redd and Mintz considered published material on the subject as well as public documentation (p. 22). According to Redd and Mintz, the Kennedy administration suffered from several groupthink tendencies leading to a set of faulty decision outcomes relative to the incident (p. 20). Both the Bush and Kennedy administrations' apparent groupthink tendencies had adverse effects and long-lasting negative results.

Beyond political realities, groupthink can cause individual loss of life or other forms of human tragedy. The theme of human tragedy is the subject of several recent case studies where group members or stakeholders lost their lives. Burnette, Pollack and Forsyth (2011) used a case study approach to analyze the group characteristics and decision-making outcomes of the 1996 Mount Everest climbing team disaster. Burnette et al. used various evidences including survivor accounts, interviews, media reports and other published research to determine whether the antecedents and symptoms of groupthink were present in the disaster (p. 29). Several of the climbers died while trying the ascent, and the au-

thors determined that the highly cohesive nature of the group coupled with the collective need for achievement led to the disaster (Burnette et al., 2011, pp. 29-30). This would seem to conform to Janis' theory of groupthink concerning highly cohesive groups operating in stressful situations which abandon rational evaluation for a collective sense of unity. Hughes and White (2010) reviewed the available information regarding what has become a recent representation of groupthink theory at work—the 1986 Space Shuttle Challenger accident. In their study, Hughes and White focused on the timing and sequence of events which led up to the disaster and found significant organizational faults coupled with tightly knit and highly achievement-oriented groups as contributors to the disaster (pp. 67-68). The description of the Challenger accident as provided by Hughes and White certainly seems to conform to the groupthink theory as the first two of Janis' causal agents were at work in the case. In a different outcome than the Mount Everest disaster, the decision makers in the Challenger disaster were not the victims of the tragedy. Another case study in which stakeholders became the human tragedy of groupthink tendencies was Valentine, Valentine and McMinn's (2012) study of what has been dubbed the Ford/Firestone Tire fiasco. In the study, Valentine et al. considered all the available material concerning the evolving events which led to many fatal car crashes (p. 154). Valentine et al. claim that five of the eight groupthink symptoms as described in Janis' work were present in the Ford/Firestone debacle (pp. 155-157). Limited communication between the responsible parties in each organization seemed to be related to high cohesion in each group and the out-group view that each held for the other (Valentine et al., 2012, p. 157). As these various research endeavors demonstrate, case study methodology is quite useful in understanding the antecedents, symptoms and consequences of the groupthink theory.

Alternative Views

Some researchers have taken an alternative view of Janis' theory or simply rejected its basic constructs. Aldag and Fuller (1993) seem to almost fully reject the view that groupthink theory exists and can be observed. According to Aldag and Fuller, their research led to a disbelief in “the validity of the groupthink phenomenon” (p. 533). The rejection of the groupthink theory

seems to be based on a rejection of its underlying assumptions. Aldag and Fuller claim that groupthink was established on case studies which viewed events retrospectively and seemed to lack support through laboratory studies (p. 536). Indeed, the early writings of Janis concerning groupthink primarily involved case studies within the realm of political science. As previously mentioned, numerous empirical studies have been conducted since the time of Janis' conception of the theory in order to more fully study its basic assumptions. Aldag and Fuller are also clear in rejection of the idea that groupthink leads “to negative outcomes” (p. 533). Instead, the authors assert the need for a model which more generally addresses how groups engage in problem solving (Aldag & Fuller, 1993, p. 533). Although the authors make a strong case for why they believe that groupthink should not be arbitrarily associated with negative results, they do not offer any examples of any potential positive outcomes which might occur as a result of groupthink. They do mention the potential benefits of highly cohesive groups developing positive group synergies (Aldag & Fuller, 1993, p. 540). However, it is worth noting that this fact does not contradict Janis' original conception of groupthink because highly cohesive groups must exist for groupthink to occur, but groupthink does not necessarily occur because a highly cohesive group exists.

While not rejecting groupthink as a theory, Neck and Manz (1994) do offer a consideration for an alternative viewpoint. As such, Neck and Manz claim this alternative viewpoint should be called “teamthink” (p. 1). In a teamthink construct, groups would use the potential negative realities of groupthink as a springboard for potential positives. According to Neck and Manz, teamthink serves “as a catalyst of positive as opposed to negative outcomes” (p. 1). As a term, teamthink may be automatically associated with positives while groupthink as a term is generally construed as a negative. Neck and Manz developed five symptoms of teamthink including encouraging differing viewpoints, openness in individual expression, realistic awareness of threats, recognition of the individualistic nature of members and open discussion of group members' doubts (pp. 4-9). Teamthink may offer a more positive feel for how good decision-making can occur in groups, but it seems to fall short of contradicting the groupthink theory. In fact, teamthink may be the plausible outcome of highly

cohesive groups which do not engage in groupthink. This would remain consistent with Janis' theory.

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES BACKGROUND

Several New Testament passages need examination in order to clarify context. Considering the background of John 3:1-10, 7:45-51, and 19:38-42 provides insight regarding the Sanhedrin and the role of Nicodemus. Reviewing Galatians 2:1-14 and Acts 15:1-5 adds value in understanding the role of the Judaizers in the early Christian church and Paul's response.

The Gospel of John

John's gospel provides the only biblical account of Nicodemus, and this account is heavily impacted by his membership in the Sanhedrin. In John, Nicodemus visits Jesus under the cover of darkness to question Him regarding His teachings. In John 3:1 (NASB), Nicodemus is introduced as "a man of the Pharisees" and "a ruler of the Jews" demonstrating his connection to the Sanhedrin. In the interview, Jesus clearly understood Nicodemus as a member of the Sanhedrin by referring to him as "the teacher of Israel" (John 3:10, NASB). Nicodemus' affiliation with the Sanhedrin is also clearly stated in John 7:50 where the author refers to him as "one of them." The night interview with Jesus was lengthy, and Nicodemus' verbal questions were not as clearly answered as were his heart questions. The answers provided by Jesus demonstrated the need for a new birth in Christ as well as pointing to Jesus as the only means by which one can enter heaven. John 3:2 states plainly that Nicodemus visited Jesus by night. Readers are reminded of this point in John 19:39. Visiting under the cover of darkness seems to indicate the fear experienced because of the power and influence of the Sanhedrin. John addresses the reality of this fear in John 19:38, claiming that Joseph of Arimathea, who Nicodemus helped to bury Jesus, was a disciple of Christ but in secret "for fear of the Jews." Nowhere is the power and influence of the Sanhedrin more evident than in their group meeting as recorded in John 7:45-51. These verses demonstrate the Sanhedrin as the dominating force and a tightly knit group which did not appreciate individual deviants. The officers of the Sanhedrin court were belittled for failing to bring Jesus before the court as they had been instructed (John

7:45-49, NASB). These verses also demonstrate how this group believed in their own ability to discern truth and their distaste for those who might believe differently. Nicodemus offers a procedural defense for Jesus by calling for the Sanhedrin to allow Jesus to speak for Himself before being convicted of any crime (John 7:51, NASB). However, the group flippantly rejected the request because they were of one accord. Although the Sanhedrin is mentioned in several New Testament passages, these selected verses from John's gospel provide detailed insight into their thinking as a group and the thinking of Nicodemus as a high ranking group member.

Galatians and Acts

The early Christian church, not unlike the modern church, was segmented into various groups which espoused certain thinking. Having obvious roots in the Jewish nation and faith system, certain groups of Christians began attempting to institute a legalistic system akin to that of the Jewish faith. One prominent group espousing these legalistic virtues has been commonly referred to as the Judaizers. Luke refers to these as men from Judea who began teaching circumcision (Acts 15:1, NASB) and then more specifically as "some of the sect of Pharisees who had believed" (Acts 15:5, NASB). In Acts 15:1-5 (NASB), Luke seems to be clearly indicating these individuals are believers in Christ but are also adamant in their position. Acts 15 relates the account of the confrontation between these Judaizers and the church at the council in Jerusalem. In fact, Luke indicates the council was called into session specifically because this group had gone behind Paul and Barnabas, teaching that salvation required circumcision as required by the Law of Moses. These Judaizers united in their group's position to the point of stating that Gentile believers could not be included in the Christian church without circumcision, and these Gentiles must be directed to "observe the Law of Moses" (Acts 15:5, NASB). The group was convinced their position was correct to the point of mistreating those who did not agree with their position. This is abundantly evident when examining Paul's writing in Galatians 2:1-14. Paul begins by identifying the Judaizers as the same group mentioned by Luke in Acts. In Galatians 2, Paul calls them "those who were of reputation," (v. 2) "the false brethren," (v. 4) those of "high reputation,"

(v. 6) “certain men from James,” (v. 12) and, finally, “the party of circumcision” (v. 12). Their influence was powerful at Antioch because their teaching there even led Peter to disassociate with the Gentile believers at that church. Galatians 2:12 records before the arrival of these Judaizers at Antioch Peter had table fellowship with the Gentile believers there, but upon their arrival, Peter began to separate himself and take meals with the Judaizers apart from the Gentiles. Paul notes that Peter’s capitulation influenced others including Barnabas to succumb to the pressures of being a member of the in-group (Galatians 2:13, NASB). Paul rebuked Peter for his capitulation, and the Jerusalem Council decided Gentile believers could be included without following the Law of Moses. Both Acts 15:1-5 and Galatians 2:1-14 demonstrate the thinking, actions and outcomes associated with the group of Judaizers and their influence on other early Christian believers.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

Robbins (1996) notes how a text reflects a society or culture’s established “attitudes, norms, and modes of interaction” (p. 126). The second category of social/cultural analysis described by Robbins, common social and cultural topics, provides the primary exegetical tools used for the social/cultural aspect of this analysis. This method involves discovering the common social and cultural topics present in a text offering clues concerning families, patron-client interactions, cultural norms and the cultural symbolism involved in daily life (Robbins, 1996, p. 184). This analysis considers these norms, symbols, and interactions providing a clearer understanding of both the Sanhedrin and Judaizer groups. In addition to social/cultural analysis, Robbins’ method of ideological analysis is used concerning the ideologies involved within the text. Robbins clarifies these methods as involving the discovery of how the ideologies within the text affect individuals including emerging conflicts, systems of differentiation, dominant and submissive groups, individual objectives being pursued, the institutionalization of power, etc. (p. 196). Therefore, these ideological areas are also considered in the exegetical analysis.

Using Robbins (1996) methods, the exegesis considers both the social/cultural and ideological aspects present within the text. Both the Sanhedrin and Juda-

izer groups are considered from each aspect. The ideological analysis is useful because it considers the beliefs and values systems presented within the narrative of the text (Robbins, 1996, p. 191). Robbins also notes the usefulness of social and cultural texture analysis in understanding the broad areas of daily life which are commonly at work in the text (p. 184). These exegetical analysis methods are useful for establishing the existence of groupthink from clues within the text. Janis (1982) claims only one causal condition always exists when groupthink is present—highly cohesive groups (p. 176). The primary purpose of establishing groupthink in these New Testament texts is aided by analyzing the ideologies and social/cultural variants which interact in the text.

The Sanhedrin

From the social and cultural perspective, three primary themes underscore the passages from John considering the Sanhedrin. These three themes include the desire for adherence to Torah law, ritual purity and considerations of fellowship with common people. According to deSilva (2004), the first century Sanhedrin was dominated by the Pharisees which adhered to a traditional application of Torah law (p. 82). As the governing body of the Jewish people, the Pharisees’ view of the law affected the entire social and cultural structure of first century Judaism. Zavada (2014) classifies the Sanhedrin’s application of the law as a dissatisfying legalism (p. 1). The Sanhedrin’s quest for the application of the law in one’s life extended to the whole life, the whole person, and the whole of the nation. The Sanhedrin, as the chief priests, held themselves as set apart from the everyday Jew and held themselves to the highest standards of ritual purity (Malina, 2001, p. 164). Deffinbaugh (2013) claims this group considered itself to be “the pure remnant of Judaism” (p. 10). Holding themselves to the highest standards of purity as pure Judaism, the group separated itself from fellowship with those deemed unclean. This separation extended beyond foreigners to include the other less prominent Jews. deSilva makes the point that the Pharisees’ manner of keeping Torah law caused the development of distinct social boundaries between the Sanhedrin and the common Jew (p. 83). The Sanhedrin group’s influence on the Jewish social and cultural construct was dominated by their view of proper application of To-

rah law and the methods of differentiation established in the larger society.

There are four primary themes evident from an ideological perspective when considering the Sanhedrin's dominance of Jewish life. The four themes which emerge involve authority, power, conflict and institutionalized boundaries. The authority of the Sanhedrin was undeniable in Jewish life. Deffinbaugh (2013) claims the Sanhedrin was "the highest legal, legislative and judicial body of the Jews" (p. 2). With such great authority comes great power to enact the will of the group's ideologies. The Sanhedrin's power extended throughout the nation and even included the ability to exclude Sanhedrin members from the synagogue if they were to dissent from the will of the group (Farely, 2013, p. 36). Power consolidation by this group gave them the ability to enact their will. Dissension among the people or within ranks produced conflict. The conflict was characterized by hostility among the group's membership (Bible Study Tools, 2014, p. 1). With great power and authority, the Sanhedrin attempted to eliminate those who opposed them, including Jesus. The Sanhedrin created institutionalized boundaries separating themselves from the common Jew while maintaining power and control. The institutionalized effect was clear as the general populous understood the distinct separation between themselves and the holiness of the Sanhedrin (deSilva, 2004, p. 83). Besides their view of their own holiness, the Sanhedrin also institutionalized Torah training. This was a chief complaint of the Sanhedrin against Jesus because they claimed He lacked the proper education to be a teacher (Harrison, 1949, p. 52). The ideologies present in the text demonstrate the Sanhedrin's institutionalized power and authority and the conflict which stemmed from that institutionalization.

The Judaizers

As a sub-group of the early Christian church, the Judaizers professed a very legalistic understanding of the social and cultural construct which should characterize those first century believers. Three primary considerations emerge including circumcision, table fellowship and the social integration of Gentiles. The Judaizers' social and cultural beliefs were heavily shaped by continued adherence to Jewish traditions including Torah law (deSilva, 2004, p. 504). According to Deffinbaugh

(2004), deeply ingrained ethnic prejudices also affected the Judaizer's view of Gentile believers (p. 6). This was clear when considering the important role of table fellowship. Being a social focal point of fellowship among believers, the sharing of meals together developed into a point of contention for Judaizers (Brehm, 1994, p. 15). Torah law required adherents to not associate with non-adherents during meals in order to remain pure. Perhaps the biggest obstacle noted by the Judaizers against the purity of the Gentiles related to circumcision. According to Malina (2001), uncircumcised Gentiles were at the very lowest level of the Jewish cultural standards (p. 174). In their view, refusal to circumcise was a direct offense to the God of Abraham. Parsons (2000) notes how the Judaizers literally insisted on the circumcision of Gentiles who desired to become Christians in order to symbolize their cleanliness before God (p. 269). Deffinbaugh (2004) cites the impact on the early church's social order claiming many Gentile believers capitulated to the Judaizers in regard to circumcision (p. 4). In their desire to fulfill Old Testament law, the Judaizers placed significant requirements on Gentile converts regarding circumcision, dietary restrictions, table fellowship and the like. Stewart (2011) notes the Judaizer's desire to compel Gentiles to their social convictions (p. 7). Although their attempts eventually failed, the Judaizers were a strong social and cultural force within the early Christian church.

The ideological slant of the Judaizer group is evident when considering the power, influence and conflict which encompass their interactions within the text. The Judaizers demonstrate their power and influence over other sub-groups within the first century Christian church. The leaders of the church in Jerusalem were significantly influenced by the Judaizers. According to deSilva (2004), this powerful influence is apparent when considering the significant and intense debate in the Jerusalem council (p. 364). A group which had no support or power would not have been able to bring the issue of circumcision to the highest levels of the church. Esler (1995) notes how the Judaizer group used "strong pressures" (p. 289) on the Jerusalem leaders in order to advance their ideology. In addition to the church leaders, the Judaizers had significant influence over Gentile converts. Judaizers began to teach Gentiles that circumcision and other aspects of Torah law were required for conversion to Christianity (deSilva, 2004, p. 366).

Judaizers essentially banned Gentiles from dining with those who had been circumcised and demanded circumcision as part of salvation (Esler, 1995, p. 286). These teachings led to confusion among Gentile believers and to confrontations between Judaizers and other Christians. These confrontations, such as what occurred at the Jerusalem council, also developed into significant conflicts such as the conflict at Antioch. Wiarda (2004) claims it was the “tension” (p. 243) brought on by the Judaizers at Antioch which led to the conflict between Peter and Paul. The group of Judaizers’ impact on the early church was based on an Old Testament ideology of salvation and was demonstrated through the power, influence and conflict surrounding their interactions with other groups within the Christian faith.

FIRST CENTURY GROUPTHINK

When considering the contextual realities of the verses from John, Acts and Galatians and the social/cultural and ideological implications of the texts, there is ample evidence of groupthink. Janis (1982) claimed that eight distinct symptoms of groupthink may be observed but clearly noted that all eight do not have to be present for groupthink to occur (p. 174). Nine examples of groupthink are found in the texts related to the Sanhedrin and Judaizer groups.

The Sanhedrin

Direct pressure on dissenters to conform. According to ‘t Hart (1991), placing direct pressure on any member who may stray from the will or thinking of the group is a groupthink symptom (p. 257). The pressure to conform placed on Nicodemus by the Sanhedrin is apparent in the method by which he came to meet Jesus. Speaking of Nicodemus, John 3:2 (NASB) states “this man came to Jesus by night,” and John reminds his readers of this fact in John 19:39 where he again refers to Nicodemus as the one “who had first come to Him by night.” Visiting Jesus under the cover of darkness provides protection against being discovered as a potential dissenter. Nicodemus’ concern in this matter relates to the pressure he felt to conform to the will of the Sanhedrin. Zavada (2014) notes the night visit was likely due to Nicodemus’ fear of being reported had he visited Jesus during daylight (p. 1). If Nicodemus had felt no pressure to conform to the group’s thinking, he

would not have used the cover of darkness to hide his visit with Jesus.

Unquestioned belief in inherent group morality. The unquestioned belief in the group’s morality is symptomatic of groupthink (Janis, 1982, p. 174). The Sanhedrin certainly believed in their morality and the morality of their cause. In questioning the officers of the court who had failed to bring Jesus to them, the Sanhedrin questioned whether these men had been led astray from the teachings of the Pharisees (John 7:47, NASB). The point they were making concerned their belief in the correctness of their moral stance related to Jesus. They did not question their own belief but that of their subjects. Blank (2015) notes this unquestionable belief in their group’s morality was both “the greatest irony and tragedy” (p. 2) of the group’s operating environment because their belief in themselves had blinded them spiritually. Apparently, it simply did not occur to them to question their own morality as it was based on a system of both law and tradition which they held in high esteem.

Illusion of unanimity. Another symptom of groupthink occurs when the group demonstrates an illusion of unanimity in its beliefs (‘t Hart, 1991, p. 257). It seems apparent that the Sanhedrin had no doubts in their solidarity and even appealed to this unanimity as evidence of their correctness. In John 7:48 (NASB) while still questioning the officers of the court, the members asked them whether any of the rulers had believed in Jesus. This was their way of stating that since they all believed in one way then that must be the correct way. Farelly (2013) does note that this appeal to a unanimous opinion was delivered a bit hastily (p. 37). Their illusion of unanimity concerning belief in Christ was embraced by the silence of the remaining members of the group. As such, the Sanhedrin clearly believed that they all agreed since opposing views were not voiced.

Stereotyping of out-groups. According to Janis (1982), a groupthink symptom is evident when the group casts negative stereotypes on out-groups (p. 174). The Sanhedrin made no effort to mask their opinions of other groups who may not conform to their system. Referring to crowds of onlookers at the court proceedings, the Sanhedrin made clear their opinion of these other people. In John 7:49 (NASB), the Sanhedrin

claim that the crowd of people is “accursed” because they do not know “the Law.” This was certainly not a new position for the Sanhedrin to take as it was their custom to separate people groups socially in consideration of their commitment to the Torah law. These are the same people groups which, according to deSilva (2004), the Sanhedrin refused to eat or fellowship with because they were not of “like mind” (p. 83). Therefore, the Sanhedrin clearly stereotyped these people as cursed outcasts who were full of sin and did not deserve consideration.

Rationalizations of warnings. Janis (1982) claims another symptom of groupthink involves the rationalizing of any warnings which might contradict the thinking of the group (p. 174). During this meeting of the Sanhedrin as described by John, Nicodemus did step forward to offer a warning concerning judicial proper procedure under the law. In John 7:51 (NASB), Nicodemus warns the group to remember how the law requires a man to be able to offer testimony before conviction. However, the Sanhedrin return Nicodemus’ warning with a flippant comment rationalizing their position based on Jesus’ origins. In John 7:52, the Sanhedrin remark to Nicodemus how “no prophet arises out of Galilee.” In other words, the argument has no warrant because Galilee produces no teachers of value. Harrison (1949) confirms this lack of official education as a chief complaint by the Sanhedrin against Jesus (p. 52). The Sanhedrin quickly dismissed Nicodemus’ procedural warning as it challenged the entrenched assumptions of the group.

The Judaizers

Direct pressure on dissenters to conform. The Judaizer group certainly applied direct pressure on dissenters to conform. This was evident in several New Testament passages but hardly more clearly than in Acts 15:5. The group was present articulating arguments at the Jerusalem council. In Acts 15:5 (NASB), Luke records that “some of the sect of Pharisees” claimed that Gentiles must be directed to be circumcised and to observe the “Law of Moses” in order to receive standing in the new Christian church. It was this group’s contention that Gentiles could not be saved or called Christians if they did not follow these directives. Parsons (2000) notes Judaizers “begin insisting” (p. 269) publicly and privately that Gentiles follow the Torah regulations in

order to become Christians. This legalistic view of the faith was being forced on Gentiles who did not wish to conform to the Judaizers form of Christian belief.

Stereotyping of out-groups. The Judaizers also made a conscious effort to stereotype Gentiles based on their lack of desire to conform. In fact, the Judaizers stereotyped the uncircumcised Gentile believers as unsaved outcasts with whom true believers should not associate. Paul’s confrontation with Peter at Antioch after the arrival of the Judaizers provides ample evidence. In Galatians 2:12 (NASB), Paul claims that Peter “began to withdraw and hold himself aloof” from the Gentile believers at Antioch after the “men from James” arrived. Peter had previously lived with and liked these Gentiles, but knew this group of Judaizers viewed them as societal outcasts. Esler (1995) notes the “Jewish-Christian” (p. 287) or Judaizer demanded no table fellowship with uncircumcised Gentiles because they were unclean and impure. This creation of division was based solely on the stereotypical view of Gentiles held and espoused by Judaizers.

Self-censorship. The self-censorship symptom of groupthink is evident when individuals suppress ideas or opinions which do not conform to the consensus of the group (t Hart, 1991, p. 257). Galatians 2:12 demonstrates an example of Peter’s self-censorship under pressure. Paul clearly notes that Peter “used to eat with the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:12, NASB). He only stopped after the arrival of the Judaizers. Peter withdrew from his convictions regarding the Gentiles and apparently kept silent in order to not deviate from the apparent consensus of the Judaizer group. Wiarda (2004) claims this self-censorship of Peter was essentially Peter’s coping mechanism as he was trying to create resolution for the tension which developed upon the arrival of the men from James (p. 243). Other instances exist where Peter no longer self-censored, but when the Judaizers visited Antioch, he certainly seems to have avoided any conflict by refraining from offering any dissenting viewpoint.

Unquestioned belief in inherent group morality. The group of Judaizers seems to have no doubt in their convictions regarding the morality of their group and cause. These are the men who preached to Gentiles in Acts 15:1 (NASB) that “unless you are circumcised...you cannot be saved.” They did not state their wish for the destruction of Gentiles, but, rather, they

seemed to genuinely believe in the moral accuracy of their position. They were essentially explaining to Gentiles what salvation required. Hoerber (1960) claims the Judaizers were making a “perfectly sincere attempt to save Christianity” (p. 490). Paul and ultimately the Jerusalem Council dissented from the view of the Judaizers. Paul claimed them to be false brethren and teachers of a false gospel. Within their group, however, the Judaizers were clearly convinced in the inherent morality of their group and their cause.

OVERCOMING GROUPTHINK

The basic research question of this exegetical case study concerns whether groupthink existed in the first century Christian and Jewish faith systems. The evidence from the analysis demonstrates that groupthink did exist. With this question answered in the affirmative, one cannot escape from a brief consideration of how certain leaders within these faith systems were able to overcome their groups’ groupthink tendencies. While not an exhaustive consideration of this topic, it is worth noting how the actions of Nicodemus and Paul are tutors for individuals today who find themselves in a groupthink scenario.

From Within

Nicodemus began within the group affected by groupthink. Janis (1982) advises that one step in the prevention of groupthink involves the necessity of examining all effective alternatives (p. 265). The exploration of these alternatives should consider all rational perspectives (‘t Hart, 1991, p. 249). Nicodemus seems to provide an example of an in-group member who pursued the exploration of all effective alternatives from a very rational perspective. The very fact that Nicodemus found it vitally necessary to meet Jesus in John 3 provides ample evidence. Nicodemus clearly understood the potential penalties associated with his quest for understanding. However, he also clearly understood the great benefit of exploring alternative viewpoints. Nicodemus’ exploration seemed to have changed him. He offers a tentative defense of Jesus in John 7 and finally helps to bury Christ in John 19. Farelly (2013) claims that Nicodemus was clearly “not entirely one of them anymore” (p. 39). Therefore, Nicodemus’ desire

to explore alternatives may have led him to completely disassociate with the Sanhedrin group.

From Outside

Paul was opposed to the Judaizers but as an outsider or a member of a rival group. As with many large organizations, the early Christian church developed several sub-groups which did not entirely agree. These sub-groups are actually very effective in combating groupthink tendencies. According to Janis (1982), organizations should establish several independent groups which would all focus on a common problem or task (p. 264). While the Christian church did not purposefully set up the various groups in its midst to solve the problem of how to include Gentile believers, the groups did develop nonetheless and served a similar purpose. In Acts 15:1 (NASB), Luke records the men from Judea and separately the brethren clearly differentiating the two groups. Paul as a leader of the group of brethren took charge of combating the Judaizers’ views even to the point of confronting the Apostle Peter at Antioch. ‘t Hart (1991) refers to the process of creating independent groups with a common focus as “organizational choice” (p. 249). The point being that the independent groups will produce viable options for the greater organization to consider. The Judaizers presented the choice where salvation depended on circumcision and adherences to the law, whereas Paul and the brethren presented salvation through faith in Christ alone. In Acts 15, the larger organization’s governing body, the Jerusalem Council, is presented with the two alternatives by each group and a course of action is embraced.

CONCLUSION

This exegetical case study considered the groupthink evidence in the first century Jewish and Christian faith systems both from a social/cultural method and from an ideological perspective. This study has limitations and opens avenues for future exploration. The primary limitation of this study involves the fact that groupthink antecedents or causal agents were not addressed. This study does not attempt to ascertain what caused the groupthink in either group. Rather, the symptoms of groupthink were explored for the purpose of establishing the existence of groupthink only. This provides a future research opportunity where the

accepted groupthink antecedents could be exegetically tested considering these two groups' groupthink situations. Another limitation exists in this study relative to the section where overcoming groupthink is discussed. Again, the primary purpose of this analysis was to discover groupthink in the New Testament but not to address in detail the ways in which these groups overcame the phenomenon. As such, yet another excellent opportunity for future research is developed. Although the groupthink theory was not introduced into organizational and group studies until the latter half of the 20th century, the evidence clearly indicates its existence in the first century.

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Mark Bell is a faculty member with Bethel University's (TN) College of Professional Studies teaching in the Management and Organizational Development and Organizational Leadership degree programs. He is completing his PhD studies in Regent University's Organizational Leadership program. His research interests include Christian faith integration into organizational contexts including biblical exemplars of leadership, followership, and organizational realities.