

# The institutionalization of Jesus' charismatic authority, Part 1: Indirect Christology – direct Christology<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This study concerns an investigation of the evolution of the Jesus tradition. Christological titles are studied in terms of the social theory of the institutionalization of charismatic authority. It makes use of Anthony Thiselton's and Bengt Holmberg's application of Max Weber's social theory. It is argued that the followers of Jesus acknowledged and expressed his authority by means of naming. These "names" developed into "titles" when the post-Easter followers of Jesus allocated power to him. The process of the institutionalization of Jesus' charismatic authority relates to the transmission from the oral tradition of Jesus' sayings and deeds to the written evidence. The article emphasizes the work done by the Jesus Seminar. The following "rules of written evidence" are considered: clustering and contexting; revision and commentary; false attribution; difficult sayings and the process of christianising. In Part 2 of the study, Weber's social theory is applied to the Christological title "Son of Man".*

## 1. INDIRECT CHRISTOLOGY – DIRECT CHRISTOLOGY

In the middle of the previous century Thomas W Manson ([1937] 1949), Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, wrote the

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book, *The Sayings of Jesus*. In this book Manson (1949:39-148) strongly emphasized Q as a very old source of the teachings of Jesus from which the evangelists Matthew and Luke derived a major part of their material. Manson said the following about Jesus the teacher:

The two most certain facts in the gospel tradition are that Jesus taught and that He was crucified. In Mark the verb "teach" occurs seventeen times, and in sixteen of these cases Jesus is the subject. In the same Gospel He is called "teacher" twelve times – four times by His disciples, once by Himself, five times by persons not of His circle but not hostile to Him, and twice by His opponents. Four times also in Mark He is called "Rabbi," the usual name for a Jewish teacher. The narrative parts of the Synoptic Gospels portray Him preaching and teaching in the synagogues and in the open air, instructing His followers in private, and discussing questions of belief and practice with the Jewish religious authorities.

The question now arises: granting that Jesus did teach, was He a teacher in the proper Jewish sense? Was He, so to speak, academically qualified for the title of Rabbi? ... The fact that He was addressed by His opponents as "Teacher" is difficult to explain unless He was in fact recognised by them as their equal in point of scholarship ... It is probable that He knew the Old Testament in Hebrew, and, I think, possible at least that He was acquainted with the Rabbinic Hebrew used in the schools of Law. If Jesus used this language at all, it would be in His controversies with the learned. The impression left by the accounts of His dealings with these men is not that they saw in Him a village craftsman turned amateur theologian but rather a competent scholar who had developed heretical tendencies.

(Manson 1949:11)

Though Manson takes the history of the Jesus tradition in Q and the synoptic gospels into account, these *diachronic* insights do not function heuristically. Manson simply concludes that the (historical) Jesus had "authority" on account of his being a "competent scholar" and therefore he was a Rabbi.

At the end of the twentieth century Christopher M Tuckett, until recently the Ryland Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, paints a somewhat different picture of Jesus the teacher. He also writes a book on Q with the title *Q and the history of early Christianity*. He says the following about Jesus and the situation of conflict in which he found himself:

... Q Christians believed themselves to be in a situation of conflict ... [T]here is a great deal of polemic in Q directed against "this generation", and at times this is connected – at least in Q's view – with "violence" being suffered by the Christian side, a violence which is placed by Q in a line of continuity with the violence suffered by the prophets (cf 6:23; 11:49-51; 13:34f). So too, much of the Christological awareness in Q focuses on the hostility and rejection experienced by Jesus ... and the same experiences will come to his followers. It seems clear that the Q editor sees his/her Christian community as facing some kind of "persecution" situation and a lot of the polemic is directed against the perpetrators of the "persecution".

(Tuckett 1996:283)

The views of Manson and Tuckett as seen in these quotations differ substantially. According to Tuckett not only Jesus, but also the "Christian community" experienced "opposition". The editor of Q draws a parallel between Jesus and his followers and places Jesus and the followers "in a continuous line with the violence suffered by the prophets". Jesus the "teacher" becomes Jesus the "prophet".

Nearly a decade before Tuckett pointed out the development in the Q tradition from the conflict experienced by Jesus to the conflict experienced by Jesus' followers, Vernon K Robbins (1984) explored a similar development in the Marcan tradition. This was the development from the pre-Easter Jesus as teacher, to a reflection of the post-Easter Jesus movements on the relevance of Jesus' teaching for them. Robbins discussed various aspects of this development, for example the "validation" of Jesus' authority in order that the followers of Jesus could be prepared for their own vindication. He also indicated how "Christological titles" were used as a means to validate Jesus' authority

and vindicate the post-Easter Jesus movements (cf Sanders & Davies [1989] 1996:268-270). Robbins (1984:186-187) puts it as follows: “[T]he role of the teacher to prepare the community for future vindication, the mighty works to validate Jesus’ authority, and the title ‘Son of man’ to link the authoritative earthly ministry of Jesus with the authoritative action within the heavenly realm reveal direct influence from prophetic-apocalyptic traditions nurtured within first century Judaism.”

One of the reasons for Jesus’ followers to call him *Teacher, Prophet, Messiah, Son of Man, Kyrios, Saviour* and *Son of God* could be that Jesus spoke and acted in a such a compelling way that they expressed their experience of him by honouring him with these *Würdeprädikationen* (see Thiselton 1994:454; cf also Marshall [1976] 1977:56). What was implicit now becomes explicit. Marshall (1977:56) formulates it as follows: “We have reached the conclusion that *indirect Christology* makes the existence of a *direct Christology* in the teaching of Jesus highly probable” (my italics). Marshall argues that Jesus was in accordance with the content of the *Würdeprädikationen* as expression of what his work was all about (“direct Christology”). However, according to Theissen ([1999] 1999:38) “it is improbable that Jesus related a pre-existing role-expectation to himself” (“indirect Christology”).

Anthony Thiselton (1994:453-472) suggests a useful perspective for studying the titles of Jesus (see also Ellingworth 1994:497). Thiselton (1994:465) “borrows” the concept of *institutional authorization* “from social history or from sociology” and explains the notion of “indirect Christology-direct Christology” from such a sociological perspective. What was “implicit” about Jesus (“indirect Christology”), is what he describes as *a state of affairs about the identity, role, and authority of Jesus* (Thiselton 1994:461). Ellingworth (1994:497) describes Thiselton’s suggestion as follows: “A central strand in Thiselton’s thesis may, at the risk of over-simplification, be summarized as follows. Many statements attributed to Jesus ... presuppose not only ‘causal power’ but ‘institutional authority’ ....”

Thiselton studies the use of titles for Jesus in the Gospel of Luke from this perspective. However, he does not explore “social history” or “sociology”. The model he employs to work out the concept of *institutional authorization* is a literary theoretical one. He explains the development of “implicit Christology” to “explicit Christology” in terms of the “speech-act theory” of J R Searle (1969; 1979:58-75), J L Austin (1962), N

Wolterstorff (1980:198-239), and F Recanati (1987:260-266) (see also Thiselton 1992:26-27, 128-130, 289-290, 352-354, 355-372, 388, 485, 527, 566, 570-575, 598-599, 615-616). The concept *institutional authorization* is explained as follows in terms of the “speech-act theory”:

[T]o *appoint* with operative effectiveness I need to be *the holder of some appropriate institutional office*, such as dean, principal .... The same claim that an authoritative or *authorized status or role* must be *presupposed* if the speech-act is to operate effectively *as a speech-act* (i.e. not merely by the *causal* force of persuasion) applies equally to the subcategory defined as that of “verdictives” by Austin, and as “declaratives” by Searle. The *verdict* of a judge ... *determines* ... whether an accused person *is guilty*. Thus Austin includes “reconing, requiting, ruling, assessing” as “verdictives”, while Searle includes the same examples under his subcategory of “declaratives”.

The force of these utterances as *acts* depends entirely on there being an *institutional* state of affairs in which the judge ... is recognized as having a duly *authorized status and role*. In this case the performative force is identified by Austin and Searle as *illocutionary* force. This is distinct from that of the barrister ... who tries to persuade someone *causally* by *rhetoric* concerning the verdict. This rhetoric, if it was sufficiently persuasive, would constitute an example of *perlocutionary* force ... The distinction is crucial for our interpretation of the christology of the Synoptic Gospels on the basis of the words and deeds of Jesus and how these were perceived by ... (the) Evangelists. Explicit rhetoric urging christological claims risks subordinating illocutionary to perlocutionary force. On the other hand, operative illocutions raise the christological question (which may result in the inquirer’s reaching a christological confession): “Who has the right, status, and institutionally validated role to ‘acquit’, to ‘judge’, to ‘justify’ or to ‘reckon as’? ... [T]he performing of acts on the basis of *causal* force constitutes in essence an *act of power through self-assertion*. On the other hand, illocutionary acts which rest on institutional roles serve the purpose as *acts which point by implication away from the self to some source of authority which lies beyond the self alone*.

(Thiselton 1994:462-463)

Thiselton seems to presuppose that there is a temporal distance between the “state of affairs about the identity, role, and authority of Jesus” and the “source of authority which lies beyond” Jesus. Thiselton (1994:468-469) comments on Jesus’ “state of affairs” when he agrees with J D G Dunn’s emphasis on Jesus as a “charismatic figure” (see Dunn 1975:54) and “Jesus’ sense of sonship” (see Dunn 1980:29). However, he does not attempt to work out the “evolution” of the “illocutionary” (Christological) statements about Jesus as Dunn (1994:437-452) does. A study focusing on such an *evolution*, however, necessitates a *diachronic* (historical-critical) investigation of the Jesus tradition. Though taking his starting point from sociological theory, Thiselton also does not discuss the social dynamics of *institutional authorization*.

Max Weber ([1947] 1968a:15-16; 1962:71-83; cf Hekman 1983:38-60) points out three ideal types by which authority is legitimated within the relationship between the ruling and the ruled. The first is *traditionalist authority*. In an agrarian society the lord of the house, the patron or prince maintains and perpetuates traditional social values that help to create an orderly society. A change of this order can be brought about only by means of “revolution”. According to Weber this change occurs through *charismatic authority*, which is the second type of legitimate authority. Extraordinary persons (prophets, leaders, charismatics) act in accordance with their own inspiration and conviction, and find a following or evoke faith in themselves. What “charismatics” say and do become tradition and the traditions become normative. A third type is *legalized authority*.

Thiselton (1994:465) refers to the third type as *institutional authorization*. This happens when the oral traditions are codified in written records. Faith in the charismatic figure shifts to faith in the written records. In other words the charismatic authority is institutionalized by means of the establishment and codification of norms, legitimated and maintained by conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom was subverted by charismatic leaders who exposed the oppressive quality of traditional authority. The charismatic was seen as a “new saviour” and people started believing in him. The followers allocated symbols of power to the charismatic leader. As a result conventional values were supplanted by “new values” which, in turn, became conventional values.

This is what Max Weber (1968a:16) refers to as “the institutionalization of charismatic authority”. In part two of this study it will be demonstrated that the use of the title *Son of Man* for Jesus can be seen as one of the ways in which charismatic authority was institutionalized. Part 1 focuses on the social dynamics of institutional authorization, making use of Bengt Holmberg’s (1978) application of Max Weber’s social theory.

## 2. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

### 2.1 The impetus

The process of the development from a charismatic group to a body with an organization such as a church, is called the *Veralltäglicung des Charisma* by Weber (1968a:246-254, 1121-1148; cf Lemmen 1990:137-145; Mödritzer 1994:277-284) and the *institutionalization of charismatic authority* by Holmberg (1978:162-195). According to Weber (1968a: 246) charismatic authority cannot remain as it is for a longer period of time, but must become either traditionalized or rationalized. People have the desire that the charismatic blessing should be available on a permanent basis in everyday life. The “staff” of the charismatic leader must also make the transition to an administration suited to everyday life.

The process of development and change from charismatic to something more permanent is influenced by different forces, especially economic interests. Holmberg (1978:162) describes the process as follows: “The ordinary adherents become paying members in an organization, the message develops into dogma and law, the staff into a paid hierarchy. So are gradually united the utterly antagonistic forces of charisma and tradition.” However, in a pre-industrial agrarian society economic interests did not function independently in society. If this general development toward “officialdom” was applied to an agrarian situation and to the founding of a cult, the emphasis would not be on officials receiving a salary, but rather on the honourable positions the officials (priests and scribes) would occupy. According to Weber the death of the leader often provides

the impetus for the process to begin, because decisions have to be made about the future of the group. It cannot just continue as is was.

The staff needs and develops a consistent administrative practice, with rules for making decisions, the limitation of spheres of competence, and some sort of hierarchy within the staff itself. Moreover it is necessary to develop a fiscal organization for the financial support of the staff and for the movement as such. This type of motive can be called the community's systemic needs, i.e. needs that must be met if the movement is not to disintegrate. The real driving force of the routinization process is the staff and its strong ideal and material interest in the continuation of the community.

(in Holmberg 1978:163)

The group that depended totally on the leader and lived in a spontaneous community life with the leader now had to become ideologically, socially and economically independent. In order to achieve this the staff "appropriate positions of power and economic advantage to themselves, and regulate recruitment to the stratum of the group that alone may exercise authority. Charisma now belongs to the staff only, the officeholders, and serves to legitimate their acquired rights" (in Holmberg 1978:163).

Holmberg (1978:164-166) criticizes Weber's view as too one-sided and negative. He does not believe that only the death of the leader and the material interests of the staff should be seen as the motivation for institutionalization. He would also include an investigation of the leader's possible interest in creating a lasting community, as well social forces such as "the traditionalization and rationalization of the community's doctrine, cult, ethical behaviour, and order of common life" (Holmberg 1978:165). He sees the charisma and charismatic message as compelling in itself. The aim to establish a new society could also provide a strong motivation for continuing the charismatic movement and could contribute to setting the process of institutionalization in motion.

Holmberg (1978:167-175) examines institutionalization from a general sociological point of view. He chooses the perspective of an anthropological analysis of human



interaction as worked out by scholars such as Helmut Schelsky (1965a, 1965b, 1970) and especially Peter Berger & Thomas Luckmann (1975).

## **2.2 The beginning of the institutionalization process**

Human beings are creatures of habit, in other words their behaviour follows certain repetitive patterns. Habit provides the impetus for institutionalization. Another human trait is typification, the mental activity of classifying according to typical acts or characteristics. When the typification is done collectively rather than individually, it can be referred to as roles. An institution is represented in and by roles. Role expectations are formed when people come to expect typical behaviours. "And the longer one participates without opposition and without proposing another course of action, the firmer becomes the consensus on what is demanded of the actors by the interaction. Institutionalization ... expands and confirms actual consensus" (Holmberg 1978:168; cf also Luhmann 1970:30-31). An institution exercises social control. This means that it has no formal control, but its power lies in how difficult it is for individuals to go against the system. On the one hand this social control has the effect of limiting an individual's freedom. But on the other hand institutionalization also has the effect of creating a structured world for individuals. Not having to invest an enormous amount of energy in structuring their world, increases the freedom of individuals. This dual effect of institutionalization can be experienced on different levels of life, among others in marriage and religion.

As long as only two parties are involved, changes can still be made to the system with mutual agreement. When more people become involved, this flexibility changes. "The next 'generation' ... experiences the institution as much more massive and opaque, part of the solid, factual structure of the outer world. And then, by means of a mirror-effect, the given patterns or institutions become more of a solid, unchangeable fact for the creators themselves – the product acts back on the producers" (Holmberg 1978:170). Those contributing to institutionalization become increasingly anonymous, are vaguely referred to as "they" and the more anonymous the authors of institutionalization become the more difficult it is to question the system, since nobody is responsible.

### **2.3 Legitimation**

Legitimation occurs when the fundamental belief and value-systems that function within the institutionalized world are used to explain and validate the system. The new generation receives these explanations and in the process they are socialized into the system. According to Holmberg (1978:171; cf also Berger & Luckmann 1967:92-104), legitimation happens on different levels. The first level of legitimation is part of the vocabulary. The second level consists of simple wisdom, often in the form of proverbs, moral maxims, legends and songs. The third level displays theories that validate the institution. This knowledge is often preserved and imparted by "experts". The fourth level consists of symbolic universes, in other words traditions that provide a unifying frame of reference. When it is forgotten that human beings create their social world, systematize and institutionalize, then institutions are *reified*. Then the institutions are seen as a given reality beyond human control. The result is that power interests become camouflaged and ideology "naturalized". A process of demystification, that is a deconstructive reading or "denaturalization", can expose these power interests (see Adam 1995:51). Insight in how ideology operates is helpful. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:64) refers to John B Thompson in this regard:

John B Thompson has pointed to three major modes or strategies that are involved in how ideology operates: legitimization, dissimulation, and reification (literally: to make into a thing) ... The first strategy is an appeal for legitimacy on traditional grounds, whereas the second conceals relations of domination in ways that are themselves often structurally excluded from thought ... The third form of ideological operation is a reification or naturalization, which represents a transitory, culturally, historically, and socially engendered state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time, or directly revealed by God.

### **2.4 Cumulative institutionalization**

Cumulative institutionalization refers to the process of an institution growing and changing, becoming increasingly complex as a system. If this does not happen, the institution will deteriorate. A particular example of this cumulative effect can be seen in

what Holmberg (1978:173) calls “the institutionalization of the institutionalization process” or double institutionalization. The first part of the process can be seen in institutionalized interpretations, offices and official procedures in, for example, the church. The other part is invisible and “takes place in the elementary processes of socialization and forming of public opinion. The latter part of the institutionalization process legitimates the former” (Holmberg 1978:173; cf Luhmann 1970:34). Law is an example of double institutionalization. Custom consists of norms and rules to which people adhere in everyday life, in other words they regulate already institutionalized behaviour. Law is custom that has been “re-institutionalized at another level” (Holmberg 1978:73). Another example is “the authority of church leaders in doctrinal, cultic and disciplinary matters, or even the existence of specific rules for how to treat those who deviate from a given norm of belief or conduct” (Holmberg 1978:173).

## **2.5 The role of the élite in institutionalization**

The first level of institutionalization is a natural result of the interaction among people who are social creatures and creatures of habit. This, however, is not the case when it comes to higher levels of institutionalization. Eisenstadt (1968:413) puts it as follows: “... [T]he development and institutionalization of new types of political or economic organizations or enterprises is greatly dependent on the emergence of various entrepreneurs who are able to articulate new goals, set up new organizations, and mobilize the resources necessary for their continuous functioning.” Holmberg (1978:174) calls these “entrepreneurs” an “active élite able to offer solutions to the new range of problems by verbalizing the collective goals and norms, establishing organizational frameworks and leading this process of innovation (political entrepreneurs, if successful, become new emperors and their entourage)”. He sees charismatic leaders and their staffs in the role of the entrepreneurial élite, in other words as those who create the new institutional structures (Holmberg 1978:175; cf Eisenstadt 1968:55). Even if their idea is not to create a new structure, but rather to create a new way of living, an institutionalized structure is the outcome nonetheless.

Some of Holmberg's (1978) conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- Institutionalization is not a process that begins later, but starts when human interaction begins .
- The process of institutionalization is not controlled by the conscious efforts of people, but rather by forces inherent in human interaction.
- Group life necessitates a measure of systematization and rationalization irrespective of personal interests.
- Institutionalization serves the systemic needs of the group.

“The charismatic person is a creator of a new order as well as the breaker of routine order. Since charisma is constituted by the belief that its bearer is effectively in contact with that is most vital, most powerful, and most authoritative in the universe or in society, those to whom charisma is attributed are, by virtue of that fact, authoritative” (Shils 1968:387). The charismatic's authority goes against the prevailing social system and is revolutionary. Gradually the charismatic group develops its own social system with its own customs, rituals, doctrine, tradition, ethos and order. The intensity of the charisma is “diffused into the group”.

Holmberg (1978:179) describes institutionalization as a gradual process that can be traced right back to the leader. Initially the authority and control reside with the leader. This remains the case as long as he lives. After his death authority transfers to a social construct: the leader's words, message, example, rituals and institutions that previously had some authority now become the main bearers of the absent leader's authority. These elements are organized and unified for the benefit of the group (secondary institutionalization) and the verbal tradition develops into normative texts, ways of living become normative codes of behaviour and the teaching tradition transforms into worship. The former disciples (staff/assistants) of the leader now become the leaders who take responsibility for the group, its policies, decisions and direction of growth (cf Lemmen 1990:139).

Holmberg (1978:180) does not agree with Weber that the interests of the staff are the main motivation for the direction institutionalization takes. He does concede,

however, that the actions of the élite constitute the decisive influence in the process of transforming charisma. The élite are the ones who consolidate the organization begun by the leader. They do not come up with a totally new direction but “conserve, expound, develop and systematize what has already been given .... [T]heir authority is of necessity traditional and rational and can by no means be purely charismatic, resting within themselves only” (Holmberg 1978:180). During the process of institutionalization of charismatic authority the charisma loses its direct force. It can now only be accessed indirectly, by means of representatives, offices, traditions and rituals.

According to Holmberg (1978:181) the primary institutionalization of the Jesus movement began when Jesus was still there. The group would have developed its own dynamic and social structure even if it had not existed for very long. The authority of Jesus would have been diffused and retained in his teaching, his ways of doing things, his outlook on life and in the people with whom he lived and worked. Secondary institutionalization would have begun after his death and in this more active phase the people who were closest to him would have played the greatest role. They can be regarded as the “entrepreneurial élite” of second order institutionalization. “They are simply the leaders of the ‘church’ in Jerusalem during its early days, recognized as such both within the group and outside of it” (Holmberg 1978:182). In a short time a system of doctrine was formed, a cult organized, a missionary zeal exhibited and a sense of an own identity developed.

This was the group that Paul encountered when he arrived in Jerusalem. “Very early the kerygma was given typical patterns, and different kerygmatic formulas such as we find in 1 Cor 15:3-7 were formulated. The church had a christologically determined tradition concerning their interpretation of the Scriptures ...” (Holmberg 1978:182). The missionary activity of this group led to Jesus communities that developed in Damascus and Antioch in Syria. The Gentiles converted by those Judean Jesus followers who were ousted from Jerusalem, first had to become “Israelites” and be circumcised before they were accepted into the community. The first Jesus followers saw themselves as the beginning of the new dispensation brought by Jesus *Messiah* which they then established further and expanded. Though the Jerusalem faction of Jesus followers participated in temple worship, they also had their own initiation rite, namely baptism, their own ritual communal meal and their own cultic traditions (see Van Aarde [2001]:363).

*The institutionalization of Jesus' charismatic authority, Part 1*

As the uniting and governing factor in this élite-conscious, charismatic group, which, while awaiting the parousia of Christ Jesus, shared a *κοινωνία* that may have included a common central fund and a communistic sharing of incomes, Paul knew that he would find the apostles, with Cephas at their head. From the beginning of the Church's existence after Easter this collegium of plenipotentiaries had enjoyed an undisputed role of leadership, both in the mission directed outwards and in the inwardly directed functions of teaching and governing.

(Holmberg 1978:183)

The Jesus faction in Jerusalem had by this time clearly been institutionalized. Though development still took place, the community settled into a basic pattern of life and worship. The authority of the leaders in Jerusalem was seemingly undisputed because it was believed that the risen Lord himself had commissioned them and that their authority was derived directly from him. Other early Jesus communities that developed in Antioch and Damascus remained dependent of the authority of Jerusalem (see Acts 13:1; Gl 2:11-14). The reason for this Holmberg (1978:184) sees in the greater charismatic authority of the Jerusalem faction because they were closer to the origin. The changes in the greater Jesus community and the dissolution of the Jerusalem faction of Jesus followers on account of the war and the destruction of the temple in 70 CE effectively ended the supremacy of this group. Holmberg (1978:185) concludes: "Therefore, the supremacy of Jerusalem and its apostles over the Gentile churches and their apostles (notably Paul) ... is not merely a theological idea or a moral obligation but an institutionalization of its charismatic authority. And its institutionalization makes it a solid fact in the social life of the Church".

The components of this process can be summarized as follows:

*The leader's person and way of life*

- has a personal calling directly from God;
- has magical powers;
- is the group's personal "saviour";

- lives *außeralltätlich*: has no work, family life, property and does not conform to traditional custom and belief.

*The leader's mission*

- God-given mission;
- radical, destructive and innovating;
- aims at a new social order.

*The relationship leader/followers*

- followers regard the leader as a hero with superior insight, strength and goodness;
- followers see the leader as partaking in the divine reality;
- devotion, awe and absolute trust in the leader;
- obedience to and support of the leader.

*The charismatic group*

- believe in, support and obey the leader;
- have been converted to the “new life”;
- awareness of being holy and elect, in possession of “salvation”.

*Differentiation within the charismatic group*

- outer group: people who continue their ordinary way of life;
- inner group: people who share the “extraordinary” existence of the leader;
  - are personally called by the leader to be his disciples;  
abandon family, occupation, property and tradition to live in a community;
  - have no authority independent of the leader;
  - self-awareness: they are the élite of the élite.

The social theory of the institutionalization of charismatic authority does not apply only to the development of the tradition from Jesus to Paul, but also to the development of the Jesus tradition that led to the gospel tradition in the New Testament.

### **3. TRANSMISSION FROM ORAL TRADITION TO WRITTEN EVIDENCE**

#### **3.1 The Jesus Seminar**

The process of the institutionalization of Jesus' charismatic authority relates to the transmission from the oral tradition of Jesus' sayings and deeds to the written evidence. In this regard Funk & Hoover (& the Jesus Seminar) (1993:16) note: "Because the evidence [see Geyser 1999:3-21] offered by the gospels is hearsay evidence, scholars must be extremely cautious in taking the data at face value." The criteria are based on "observations regarding the editorial habits of Matthew and Luke as they make use of Mark and the Sayings Gospel Q" as well as on "a scholarly assessment of the general direction in which the tradition developed" (Funk & Hoover 1993:17, 19).

Funk & Hoover (1993:19-25) list the following as some of what they call "the rules of written evidence":

- clustering and contexting;
- revision and commentary;
- false attribution;
- difficult sayings;
- christianizing Jesus.

Following Funk & Hoover, the "rules of written evidence" or criteria for distinguishing earlier from later strata in the Jesus tradition, will be briefly discussed:

#### **2.3 Clustering and contexting**

After some time had passed and the sayings of Jesus had been repeated many times, these sayings would probably not have been remembered in the exact context in which Jesus spoke them. In order to remember the sayings, they were clustered together according to themes or forms. This already happened fairly early on in the oral stage. This means that the sayings were not transmitted in their original context. In the process of grouping the "contextless" sayings, new contexts were created and with that new meanings and new



interpretations of saying were inevitably created. "The tendency to cluster and compound often obscures the original sense of particular sayings or parables" (Funk & Hoover 1993:19). This was not only a passive process of something *happening to* the sayings. It could also be actively controlled. The grouping of sayings and parables could be used to control the interpretation. An example is how the phrase "son of man" (meaning humanity) was clustered (e.g., first within the theme of discipleship) and "reclustered" (referring to the title *Son of Man*).

The clusters already present in the oral stage, were expanded in the written stage. In the process of writing the gospels, new *narrative* contexts were created for the sayings and deeds of Jesus. Their placement within the story serve the purpose of the narrative line and the author's intention (theology/ideology). The location of sayings and deeds are therefore different in the different gospels. That the contexts were created artificially, becomes obvious in that certain elements of the story are not congruent with what scholars know about the actual situation. There are, for example, instances in the gospels when the disciples were criticized for seeking positions of power. In reality this did not happen until after Jesus' death. The conflict revealed by this "new context" indicates a post-Easter setting and a process of institutionalization of the Jesus movements. Another example: In the gospels the Pharisees are depicted as Jesus' opponents, but in actual fact the Pharisees as a group only came onto the scene in Galilee after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Jesus' opponents would rather have been groups such as the pre-70 CE village leaders and scribes. Another indication of an artificially created context is when proof texts are cited from the Hebrew Scriptures in order to claim authority for the argument. This points to scribal activity. Funk & Hoover (1993:21) calls this "the community's search in the scriptures for legitimacy". Legitimacy was an ideological concern which would have been of more importance to the later Jesus followers than to Jesus himself. In the process of institutionalization the ideological concerns of the followers of Jesus led to their attributing authority to Jesus.

### 3.3 Revision and commentary

Whereas the first criterion discussed is concerned with *context*, revision and commentary are concerned with *content*. According to Funk & Hoover (1993:21-22), the evangelists modified sayings or controlled their interpretation in the following ways:

- The evangelists expanded sayings, or provided them with an interpretative overlay or comments.
- The evangelists revised or edited sayings to conform to their own individual language, style or viewpoint (Funk & Hoover 1993:21).

An example of this is Jesus calling God “Father” against the background of his *Vaterglaube*. Under the influence of Hellenism in a post-Easter setting the followers of Jesus called him “Son of God” (Mk 5:7). In a different setting, for example a more Judean environment, Jesus was called the “Holy One of the Mighty One” (Mk 1:24).

### **3.4 False attribution**

Jesus as a *holy man* was regarded by his followers as a sage (see Borg [1987] 1991, 1994). It was general practice to attribute common wisdom to people who were deemed especially wise. This means that some of the sayings attributed to Jesus can also be found in secular sources. An example is the saying “it is better to give than to receive”, which can be found in the wisdom of the moral philosophers of the time (see Acts 20:35; cf Theissen 1999:90). By expanding Jesus’ wisdom in this way, his authority was inflated. Therefore, in focusing on the phraseology of a particular gospel writer, it is possible to separate what is distinctive of Jesus’ speech from the general wisdom attributed to him and from the narrative creations of the author. A general rule is that what can be expected to come from the culture and the traditional wisdom, has no claim to be from Jesus. On the other hand, that which is unexpected and goes against the grain, obviously did not originate from the traditional. The rules of evidence developed by the Jesus Seminar in this regard are the following (Funk & Hoover 1993:31):

- What Jesus said went against what would have been socially and religiously acceptable.
- Jesus’ sayings often called for a reversal of roles.
- What Jesus said went against the ordinary and the expected.
- Exaggeration, humour and paradox are characteristic of Jesus sayings.
- Jesus used vivid images and often refrained from explaining his metaphors.

Examples of such images and metaphors can be found in the stories of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) and the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32). Samaritans were culturally unacceptable and therefore it is unusual for a Samaritan to be the hero of the story. The father of the prodigal son would have lost honour in his society if he responded positively to a son who treated him badly. His response to his younger son is therefore unusual.

Jesus' reticent manner is unusual in a culture where it is important for a man to increase his honour any way he can. The Jesus Seminar makes three generalizations about Jesus' manner (Funk & Hoover 1993:32):

- Jesus does not take the initiative concerning conversations or healings.
- Jesus rarely speaks of himself in the first person.
- Jesus does not claim to be the *Messiah* (or, for that matter: *Son of Man*, *Kyrios*, or *Son of God*).

Another instance of false attribution is when scribes who became followers of Jesus, quoted from the Septuagint either presenting it as words of Jesus, or using prophecies to "prove" that an event in their time was the fulfilment of God's promises. A third example of false attribution is when statements of the followers of Jesus, influenced by their experiences of resurrection appearances, were attributed to Jesus.

### 3.5 Difficult sayings

Embarrassing or harsh sayings were sometimes modified in order to make them more acceptable. This can be seen in sayings that vary from evangelist to evangelist, especially when the saying could clearly have been cause for embarrassment. "Variations in difficult sayings often betray the struggle of the early Christian community to interpret or adapt sayings to its own situation" (Funk & Hoover 1993:23). An example is the saying that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Mk 10:24). The embarrassment is softened by Mark's addition of: "all things are possible with God" (Mk 10:27). By bringing God's infinite grace into the discussion, the harshness of the saying is toned down. A disputable saying could compromise Jesus' honour. By removing the embarrassment, Jesus' authority is protected.

### 3.6 Christianizing Jesus

Funk & Hoover (and the Jesus Seminar) (1993:24) state rather strongly that Jesus “is made to confess what Christians had come to believe” and elucidate this by explaining that “[s]ayings and narratives that reflect knowledge of events that took place after Jesus’ death are the creation of the evangelists or the oral tradition before them”. This evidence of contextualization at a later level can, at the same time, be an indication of a process of institutionalization. “Features of stories that serve Christian convictions directly are likely to be the product of the Christian imagination” (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:35). Signs of later “Christian” ideas attributed to the first followers of Jesus would indicate anachronism. The opposite is also true: data that, though embarrassing to the later Jesus factions, was nevertheless retained in the written text, could be an indication of authenticity. This means that the gospel writers included the material in spite of the embarrassment, because it could be traced back to Jesus. The baptism of Jesus by John is such an “embarrassing” incident. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar are also “sceptical of stories that undergirded the authority of particular leaders of the Christian movement” (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:35).

In order to uncover the layers of tradition *behind* the written text, the development of the oral tradition has to be investigated. In this endeavour scholars make use of “rules of attestation” (see Funk & Hoover 1993:26):

- Sayings of Jesus attested to in two or more independent *sources* are older than the sources in which they are embedded.
- Sayings attested to in two different *contexts* probably circulated independently at an earlier time.
- The same or similar content attested to in two or more different *forms* has had a life of its own and therefore may stem from an old tradition.

The Jesus Seminar has done some research on the transmission of oral tradition, how oral memory works and formulated the following “rules of oral evidence” (Funk & Hoover 1993:28; Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:27):

- The oral sayings and stories are short, concise, often repeated, have simple plots, few characters and are self-contained.
- The words of Jesus most often reproduced in writing have been transmitted as aphorisms and parables.
- The earliest layer consists of single aphorisms and parables that were transmitted orally.
- The gist of the stories are remembered, rather than the precise words.

These rules for oral evidence explain the variations of sayings and stories in the Jesus tradition. These were the sources used by those who eventually put the Jesus tradition into writing. The authors of the gospels did not have a unified source. They had to choose from different variations. This and how they utilized these sources, account for the differences in the final product, the written documents.

In order to tell the story, the narrator creates dialogue for the characters. Funk & Hoover (1993:29-30) call this “the storyteller’s license”. Though events and words may have come from sources containing the actual words of Jesus, the final dialogue would not be the “authentic words of Jesus”. This can especially be seen in the controversy dialogues between Jesus and the Pharisees. These dialogues are often based on an authentic Jesus *logion*, but the controversy refers to the conflict between the “Christian” scribes and the post-70 CE Pharisaic scribes. In many cases the controversies are about the Pharisees questioning Jesus’ authority. Dialogue that had been created for Jesus could have had the following intent:

- To express what Jesus could have said in specific circumstances.
- To express Jesus’ message as understood by his followers.
- To forecast what was still going to happen in the story.
- To express Jesus’ message as understood by the community at that time.
- To express the evangelists’ own views.
- To provide words for Jesus when no one was present to hear him speak.

The creation of dialogue contributes to the biographical nature of the narrative gospels. Dialogue reveals characterization, which sheds light on the ideologies of the characters and the narrator. The sayings and deeds of Jesus were changed considerably in the process of the transmission of the Jesus traditions. These changes took place in the oral phase and on the written level. Only the written texts, of course, are available for analysis.

### **3.7 Showing and telling**

Funk (& The Jesus Seminar) (1998:27) point out the difference between enactment of stories, which they call *showing*, and recounting or *telling*. *Showing* is when something in the story can be *seen* and *heard*. The senses are directly engaged by the story and the language of experience is used. These experiences come from the imagination of the gospel writer or could have been created by a post-Easter "Christian" community of which the writer would have been a member.

In the process of institutionalization forms (*Gattungen*) were needed for rites. The stories of Jesus were recounted in the faith communities. The authors of the gospels who could have been members of these communities could have incorporated the enactments of the community in their "biographies" of Jesus. "For enacted scenes to be convincing historically, they must be dramatically plausible" (Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:28). A story is plausible when the elements, such as time, place, characters and actions are realistic. Anachronisms, for instance, detract from their plausibility and are an indication of a creation by the narrator. In other words, a story can consist of historically reliable information as well as embellishments by the author. This means that the story as a whole cannot simply be classified as "historical" or not. In order to distil the historical information, the Jesus Seminar would break up a story into its narrative components and assess each component separately (see Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:30-31).

The Jesus Seminar (see Funk & The Jesus Seminar 1998:32-34) saw a *profile* of Jesus emerging in the course of their work. This they could use to assess which actions and words would be congruent with the profile. During the phase of the New Quest and the Renewed Quest for the historical Jesus, researchers called this the "criterion of

coherency" (see Borg 1999:8-9). Some of the characteristics of Jesus that the Jesus Seminar identified, are that he was an itinerant, that conventional family ties did not mean much to him, that he was seen as demon-possessed, that he socialized with undesirable people, that he did not adhere to the purity regulations of his society, that he was a healer, that he was reticent. Discrepancies with these characteristics would raise suspicion concerning the authenticity of the words or deeds in a story. In part two of this study it will be argued that the use of title *Son of Man* for Jesus can be seen as such a discrepancy.

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