

## Second Generation Factionalism

Randall C Webber  
 Wayside Christian Mission  
 (29 Nov 2015)

Models derived from social theory suggest that Jesus' relatives, his lifetime followers, and individuals who entered the movement after his death, brought differing orientations to the development of a leadership structure within the early church. The way representatives of each of these groups addressed the issue of succession, subject to examination by historical-critical methods, elucidates a story of factionalism in emergent Christianity with implications for later controversies within the movement.

### Theories of Succession

Jesus' execution created a leadership vacuum. The sources agree that the event called into question the legitimacy of his movement. The Gospels (Mk 14:50 / par) note that Jesus' closest followers fled when he was arrested and, in most cases, did not hang around to witness his crucifixion. Paul conceded that crucifixion should render Christ scandalous to Jews and ludicrous to Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23).

Jesus' followers eventually reconvened and resuscitated their movement. Acts, a later source with an idealized, retrospective approach, divided these early constituents into the following three categories: lifetime followers (1:12-13), blood relatives (1:14), and latecomers like Paul and most of his associates (9:1ff). The positions of the first two groups in the narrative suggest possible textual stratification. Nevertheless, persons in each category reappear as leaders throughout Acts.

Weber's well-known typology describes types of legitimate authority which may prove informative to the consideration of the succession issue in emergent Christianity. Jesus is one of the models for Weber's concept of charismatic authority.<sup>1</sup> He displayed qualities that some of his contemporaries found commendable, and recruited his own followers (Mk 1:16-20 / par; Jn 1:35-51). His family apparently gave him little encouragement, and he was not appointed to his position by a social or political superior. In short, Jesus exercised leadership on the basis of his own abilities and without the benefit of a patriarchal or political mandate.

By definition a charismatic leader is a one-of-a-kind individual. In order for some aspects of the individual's leadership to persist, a structure must be institutionalized. In many cases, a movement may accomplish this objective by reverting to the more stable patriarchal forms of leadership.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally, a successor who is a charismatic leader in his/her own right may emerge.

<sup>1</sup>Weber **Economy** 2/1111-1120.

<sup>2</sup>Weber **Economy** 2/1121-1127.

More recent bereavement theory reinforces Weber's observations about the routinization of charisma. Therese Rando's model contemplates the recollection of the deceased and the relationship, the relinquishment of old attachments, and the move into a new assumptive world without forgetting the old as aspects of adaptation to object loss.<sup>3</sup> In Rando's framework, as in Weber's, the deceased leader is unique, and the ensuing adaptive process both alters the group's leadership and integrates some aspects of the former leadership into the group's continuing existence. Since different contenders have different concepts regarding the particulars of a leadership transition, conflict is normal, particularly in the agonistic culture of the Mediterranean basin.<sup>4</sup>

### Second-Generation Christian Factions

The theoretical discussion above suggests the following two assumptions about the development of leadership structures within emergent Christianity. First, the parties competing for primacy were executing strategies they considered conservative and defensive. The protagonists saw themselves as trying to preserve and further develop the movement they inherited from the deceased founder. Second, each group's attempts to preserve the movement and its status within the movement brought that group into conflict with other internal groups pursuing similar objectives. With these two assumptions in mind, we turn to a brief consideration of the leadership interests of the three constituent groups identified by Acts.

One of Paul's letters confirms the accuracy of the identification in Acts of the three constituent groups that contended to set a course for emergent Christianity. Paul opened a letter to his Galatian constituents by designating himself "an apostle not by human orchestration or appointment but by divine fiat" (1:1). Later in that same letter, he described his meetings with the acknowledged leaders in Jerusalem and his showdowns with Cephas/Peter and the representatives of Jesus' brother in Antioch (1:18-2:14). Elsewhere, Paul acknowledged the presence of both Pauline and Petrine factions in Corinth (1:12).

In the autobiographical introduction to Galatians, Paul emphasized the non-human origin of his gospel. He did not confer with his predecessors regarding its content, but only reviewed the gospel with the acknowledged leaders in Jerusalem after he had developed congregations in Gentile areas for many years (2:1ff). In other words, Paul claimed to have been given a grant of charismatic authority and discretion to expand the movement by including Gentiles without requiring them to follow Jewish customs (Torah).

Paul's gospel emphasized human weakness. His *theologia crucis* elevated the object of his constituents' worship by contrasting that object's exalted status with the humble conditions in which most constituents found themselves (1 Cor 1:18-30). In subsequent correspondence with the same constituents, he mocked his opponents, whom he labeled hyper-apostles, with a catalogue of the tribulations to which he had been subjected (2 Cor 11:21-29).

<sup>3</sup>Rando **Treatment** 45.

<sup>4</sup>Malina **World** 71-90.

While Paul claimed charismatic authority and struck out on his own path, Jesus' lifetime followers perpetuated the movement with a more traditional approach. Acts actually narrates a presumably fictional election of Matthias as a twelfth apostle to replace Judas Iscariot (1:21-267), with participation in the Jesus movement for its entire duration being the prerequisite for candidacy. The Gospels, which may be considered artifacts of the lifetime followers' successors, portrayed Jesus in terms of the divine man imagery familiar in their culture of deified emperors. This tendency starts slowly with a few miracles and parables in the Markan narrative, but picks up steam with each successive Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

At one time, the sons of Zebedee were among the leaders. Mark includes an apparent *vaticinia ex eventu* suggesting that they were killed (10:35-40), and Acts indicates that Jacob Zebedee, in fact, met that fate (12:2). Galatians confirms the status of the Zebedees, identifying Jesus' brother Jacob, Cephas (Peter), and John Zebedee as "pillars" of the church, but remaining silent about Jacob Zebedee (2:9).<sup>6</sup> In any case, as the Johannine appendix (Jn 21) acknowledged, Cephas became the leader of that constituent group. In light of the Gospel portrayals of Jesus as a divine man, it makes sense to consider the hyper-apostles whom Paul ridiculed in 2 Cor, and possibly the Petrine faction in 1 Cor, as proponents of a sort of triumphalism appropriate to the constraints of their culture, and anathema to Paul's vision.

Paul described his showdown with Cephas in Antioch over the issue of table fellowship with Gentile believers (Gal 2:11-14). In light of this fact, the account in Acts of Cephas going into exile after his escape from Jerusalem (12:17) might be accurate. In any case, Jesus' brother Jacob was already present in Jerusalem, and Cephas' departure left that field to him entirely. In fact, both Galatians and Acts portray Jacob as the supreme leader to whom both Paul and Cephas owed obeisance. Paul blames Jacob's emissaries for Cephas' reversion to ethnically exclusive dietary habits (Gal 2:11-13). A letter written in Jacob's name addresses the faith vs works issue in a manner opposite to the Pauline formulation (Ja 2:14-18). Acts portrays Jacob as prescribing terms for table fellowship reminiscent of the requirements that the Israelites/Judahites placed on resident aliens. Finally, the 4c Pseudo-Clementines depict Jacob arguing that the books of the Hebrew scriptures classed as Torah were of prime importance (Rec 1/69:1). The prophetic books, which Pseudo-Clementine audiences believed pointed to Jesus, needed to be consistent with the Torah.

With Jesus' death, Jacob presumably became the family patriarch, and eventually the top leader in emergent Christianity. Given his dual roles, he may have considered a more observant, conservative faith and practice a way to return to a defensive strategy and quell suspicions in the homeland regarding the movement which his crucified brother had initiated. The divine man and joint Jewish-Gentile forms of Christianity, each flamboyant in its own way, thrived in diaspora and Gentile communities respectively.

<sup>5</sup>One account of this process may be found in Brooks **Divinization** – The Editors.

<sup>6</sup>For another solution to the difficult problem of the identities of Jacob Zebedee and Jacob the Brother of Jesus, see Brooks **Epistle** 113-114 – The Editors.

### Conclusion

Jacobite Christianity barely survived its leader's stoning<sup>7</sup> during an interregnum between procurators, followed by the abortive uprising of 66-73. That version of the movement, limited primarily to the Jewish homeland, persisted only among a small group of Ebionites for a few centuries. Meanwhile, Paul's faith and that of Jesus' lifetime followers continued to interact further west, as had the early protagonists of those two versions of Christianity. As the versions merged into an institutional church, the original contest was updated and fought repeatedly in a new key, in the Christological controversies of the subsequent centuries.

### Comment

#### *The Editors*

Further layers might be added to the leadership picture. (1) In the leadership itself, the succession by Jesus' blood relatives at Jerusalem nicely parallels the K'ung family takeover of the Confucius movement from the first disciple successors of Confucius. (2) Elsewhere, the disciple succession strengthened itself by the institution of the Twelve which multiplied Jesus' successors, the better to enforce doctrine in the many local churches. (3) In those churches, the authority model (between Apostolic visits) was surely the synagogue, with its loose government by elders. Once the Apostolic Age had ended, local leaders acquired the right to speak authoritatively on behalf of (4) the doctrine, which by that time had been largely reduced to a set of propositions. That is, the evolution of doctrine paralleled the evolution of authority *in* the doctrine.

Paul's oft-mentioned sufferings seem to be offered as a validation in themselves. In addition to the deaths of leaders such as Jacob Zebedee (the last disciple leader at Jerusalem; killed by Herod Antipas I in 44),<sup>8</sup> Paul's trials may have contributed to the growth of the cult of martyrs, by which individual believers might certify themselves, and indeed sanctify themselves, in the Jesus movement and in the future life.

### *Works Cited*

- E Bruce Brooks. The Epistle of Jacob. Alpha v1 (2017) 58-70  
 E Bruce Brooks. The Divinization of Jesus in Mark. Alpha v2 (2020) 78-89  
 Bruce J Malina. The New Testament World. John Knox 1981  
 Therese A Rando. Treatment of Complicated Mourning. Research Press 1993  
 Max Weber. Economy and Society. 4ed, tr 2v California 1978

<sup>7</sup>Josephus Ant 20/9:1.

<sup>8</sup>This is the picture of the Jerusalem leadership argued in Brooks **Epistle** 113-114. It identifies Jacob Zebedee as the liberal leader who ruled against observance of the purity laws by Gentiles, and assigns the liberal Epistle not to Jacob the Lord's conservative Brother (who later contravened Jacob Zebedee's liberal ruling at Antioch, cowing Cephas and angering Paul), but to Jacob of Alphaeus, brother of the original disciple Levi of Alphaeus.