



Reading the New Testament from the perspective of social theory of institutionalization

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Abstract

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*The objective of this article is to approach the interpretation of the Christian Bible from the perspective of the sociological process of the development from **authority** to **power**. Firstly, a hypothesis with regard to a postmodern, demystifying reading of the Christian Bible will be posed. Secondly, the use of terms and concepts will be clarified. Thirdly, the focus will be on the development from **authority** to **power**. Exposing the ideological interests underlying social processes is called demystification. In the article the social theory of Max Weber with regard to institutionalization, power and authority will be discussed and applied in a heuristic model for the interpretation of the New Testament within the framework of social processes. The model focuses on the Jesus movement as a process of revitalization within Judaism.*

1. Hypothesis

Postmodern thinking evolved as a critique on certain values of modernity (cf. Appiah, 1991:360-367). Postmodernism can, for instance, be seen as antifoundational: there can be no absolute truths and the premises on which truth claims are based can never be regarded as *the* one and only starting point (see Adam, 1995:5; cf. West, 1985, 1989). It is also anti-totalizing in the sense that no theory can provide the full and total answer to questions posed. Information contradicting a theory or providing another possible angle can always be found. If a theory claims to be "total", it in effect means that the other possibilities that do exist, have simply been disregarded or that criteria were designed to eliminate them.

These could then be considered as “warped criteria”. *Postmodernism is demystifying* in the sense that it questions the presuppositions that certain things are “natural” and others “unnatural” and can therefore be discarded, seen as untrue or marginalized. Generally accepted values that some things have been legitimated by, for instance God or the Bible, are questioned. These “natural” and “legitimate” values are exposed by postmodernism as concealing underlying ideological motives. Economic or political motives can be camouflaged by claims of universality or necessity (Adam, 1995:5, 11). McKerrow (1999:441) puts it as follows: “The critique of domination has an emancipatory purpose – a *telos* toward which it aims in the process of demystifying the conditions of domination”.

If biblical interpretation does not move beyond the investigation into the traditions behind discourses (historical criticism) or the relations of linguistic and literary patterns within discourses (literary criticism), interpretation will miss its “emancipatory purpose”. For this purpose, interpretation should be carried out from the perspective of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:51) describes a “postmodern version of the hermeneutics of suspicion” as follows:

... a hermeneutics of suspicion is best understood as a deconstructive practice of inquiry that denaturalizes and demystifies practices of domination rather than seen as working away at the layers of cultural sediments [historical criticism] that hide or repress a ‘deeper truth’.

Postmodern deconstruction puts the idea of antifoundationalism into practice. Nothing can be accepted as unassailable simply because it has been legitimated by, for example, an institution. There can be no absolute and authoritative starting point for interpretation, including the interpretation of the Bible. Postmodern interpretation is suspicious of hidden ideological interests, both of the biblical texts and of the interpreters. Take historiography as an example. Modern historicists strive for objectivity, even though they realize that it cannot fully be attained. Postmodern historicists regard objectivity as unattainable and, therefore, a futile endeavour that is to be rejected from the outset. Any interpretation of an event in the past cannot be anything but a conglomeration of clues from the past and assumptions from the present about the past. What postmodern historicists strive for, is to understand the cultural currents of the world of the text, in other words the text within and as part of its context, and to be honest about their own constructs (Adam, 1995:46-47).

Interpreters of the Bible who make use of ideology criticism focus on the social, political and economic setting in which biblical texts were produced in order to shed light on the prevalent ideologies and interests.

They point out that texts that were compiled at about the time Israel changed from a tribal confederation to a monarchical state bear the marks of that transition – marks either of the dominant social class’s efforts to legitimate its newfound centralized power, or of the marginalized groups’ resistance to the new power structure. Because the dominant social classes were in the position to promulgate and preserve texts, there is much in the Bible that serves oppressive interests (Adam, 1995:50).

According to Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:54)

... a critical rhetorical-emancipatory process of interpretation challenges practitioners of biblical studies and readers of the Bible to become more theo-ethically sophisticated readers by problematizing sociopolitical locations and functions in global structures of domination. At the same time, it enables them to struggle for a more just and radical democratic *cosmopolitan* articulation of religion in the global polis. ... A critical hermeneutics that is ... emancipatory, therefore, insists that we must analyze language as an instrument of power and ideology” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:54, 60).

Political or ideology criticism points out how the shaping and the interpretation of texts are influenced by social, political and material circumstances.

The objective of this article is to continue the discussion on demystification by viewing the Christian Bible from the perspective of the sociological process of the development from *authority* to *power*. Firstly, the use of terms and concepts will be clarified. Secondly, the focus will be on the development from *authority* to *power*. Thirdly, some implications of the social theory of institutionalization for understanding the New Testament will be demonstrated.

2. Terminology

In order to clarify what is understood by “dominating” institutions, the concept of “rule” or “authority” will be briefly discussed. Some related terms in English are: dominion, rule, command, power, authority. In Latin the terms *dominium*, *potestas* and *auctoritas* describe the concept of rule. The rule of the *pater familias*, however, be it the father of the household, the monarch or God, was supposed to be a benevolent rule aimed at protecting the subjects and contributing to their wellbeing (see Gunneweg & Schmithals, 1982:9). In different times authority and power were gained in different ways. In an industrial society the possession of capital or the skills with which it can be acquired are ways in which power and authority can be attained. In agrarian pre-industrial societies people who possessed land had authority. They were organized in collective

units such as families, extended families, clans, tribes and dynasties. In industrial societies, on the other hand, power is often centred in individuals. However, in these societies authority is not only in the hands of individuals, but is also exercised by more abstract entities such as, for example, power structures, the mass media, technical, political and social processes. People also often submit to the abstract power and authority of custom and tradition.

Max Weber (1968a:15-16) defines “authority” within narrower confines. He sees authority as “the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group or persons”. He poses the question as to when the authority of the ruler over the ruled is legitimate. Is it ever acceptable and legitimate for some to rule over others, for some people to exert power over others? Weber indicates three types of legitimate authority.

- The first type is *traditionalist* authority, which pertains to the authority of the *pater familias*, the patron or royal figure who see to it that order is maintained.
- The second type is *charismatic* authority, which appears when the given order is changed by revolution. This happens when a charismatic leader (such as a sage or a prophet figure) opposes the traditional order and finds a following among people who become convinced that his vision and ideas promise a better life for them. The acts and deeds of such a charismatic leader can, in time, become traditionalised and normative.
- *Legal* authority is the third type of legitimate authority and it is exerted by means of the codification and enforcement of laws by power structures.

In order to distinguish between the more nurturing and the more official aspects of authority (with the innate possibility of the abuse of power), Latin, rather than Western languages, provides the most useful terminology. In Roman thought a distinction was made between the terms *potestas* and *auctoritas*. *Potestas* implied the power of officials who were legally invested in their office. Their authority and limits were determined by law. *Auctoritas*, on the other hand, was not based on an office or a given position. It was acquired on account of a person's attributes and capabilities, as well as the recognition of others (see Gunneweg & Schmithals, 1982:16-17). *Auctoritas* could be a quality of a person with insight, wisdom and charisma, with the power to influence and convince, and it could also be a quality of tradition, holy scriptures and accepted rules of wisdom. *Auctoritas* can, therefore, be a great asset to someone with *potestas* (an official position of authority such as a priest

or a scribe), but it does not automatically come with the position. A person with *potestas* can be someone without *auctoritas*. For example, according to Seneca, the Emperor Claudius was not someone with authority, though he was the emperor of Rome. In his satire *Apocolocyntosis* (13:12), Seneca calls the emperor a “pumpkin” and states that it would be ridiculous to revere him as a god (see Eden, 1984: 1; Schönberger, 1990:54).

Auctoritas provides the safe space in which a person can grow, whereas legal authority provides the order and safety for people to live together. In this sense authority is necessary for human life, while anarchy (a total rejection of all forms of authority) would be detrimental to life. On the other hand, to turn away from authority in order not to remain dependent, is also a natural and normal phenomenon. An irrational and harmful protest against authority is often brought about by a situation where *auctoritas* has been supplanted by *potestas* (see Gunneweg & Schmithals, 1982:20). This means that force has taken the place of persuasion and coercion has destroyed freedom. In English this negative aspect of authority could be indicated by the term “authoritarian”, whereas the positive, nurturing form of authority can be described as “authoritative”.

Max Weber (1968b:53) distinguishes between the terms “power” and “domination”. “Power” is the ability to execute one’s will regardless of whether the other party or parties agree or resist. The relationship is coercive. “Domination”, on the other hand, is when the other party or parties have at least some interest in obeying the person or institution with power. They therefore do so voluntarily (see Weber, 1968b:53, 212). One of the reasons for compliance is when the leader’s authority is accepted as legitimate. In such a relationship power plays a role and authority is legitimate and becomes institutionalized (Holmberg, 1978: 125). It is therefore necessary to distinguish between “power”, “domination” and “authority”. “Domination” and “authority” are on the same level, whereas “power” functions in a different sphere. The term “domination” is used for the authority of a social system, whereas “authority” pertains to people. In a relationship where there is authority, the ruler’s behaviour is such that the ruled obey willingly because the authority is accepted as right and good (Holmberg, 1978:131).

The reason (rationality) for obeying authority is not because it is mandatory, but because the ruled agrees. “Authority rests upon the ability to issue communications capable of reasoned elaboration ... which relates actions to opinions and beliefs, and opinions and beliefs to values” (Holmberg, 1978:131). On the level of authority and domination obedience is, therefore, given voluntarily because the authority is

regarded as legitimate. When people obey for reasons other than the legitimacy of the authority, for instance under threat of physical harm, it can then be seen as “power” rather than authority. Coercion is termed “violence” and this use of “power” is a perversion of authority and domination. As far as the legitimacy of authority is concerned, a distinction should be made between “legality” which means “being in accordance with the law” and “legitimacy” which is the quality of the “rightness” of something (see Holmberg, 1978:128; cf. also Friedrich, 1963:234; Schelsky 1970:23).

According to Holmberg (1978:130) the following components make up a relationship of authority:

- the ruler;
- the ruled;
- an expression of the ruler’s will to influence the behaviour of the ruled;
- the compliance of the ruled;
- the subjective acceptance of this by the ruled.

The first four components are also to be found in the realm of exerting power, but the last point is distinctive of authority, over against power. Authority is a social relationship based on domination where the ruled comply with the ruler’s wishes on the grounds of conviction. The authority is accepted because the insights of the ruler are trusted and therefore the commands of the ruler regarded as legitimate. This kind of relationship requires “transparency”, in other words the ruled must be able to see reasons for regarding the domination as legitimate. If the ruled should come to the realization that the beliefs and values of the ruler are no longer valid in society, the authority of the ruler will cease to exist (see Holmberg, 1978:132-135).

It has been indicated that Max Weber (1968a:215; cf. Holmberg, 1978: 136-150) distinguishes between three types of legitimate authority (*legitime Herrschaft*):

- rational-legal authority – the ruled believe that the rules and the persons who have authority under these rules, are legitimate;
- traditional authority – the ruled believe that the traditions are sacred and the authority of persons acting under these traditions, is legitimate;
- charismatic authority – people accept the authority of an exceptionally holy or heroic person of exemplary character and consider the normative instructions of this person to be legitimate.

Though there are other typologies (cf. Blau, 1963:313-314; Eschenburg, 1976), Holmberg (1978:136) chooses Weber's as his basic point of departure. This study is interested in how Holmberg applies Weber's theory to biblical interpretation; therefore Weber's typology will feature prominently as well. Criticism against Weber's typology is that it does not include some modern forms of legitimate authority (see Hartmann, 1964:4; Sternberger, 1968:247), that the three types overlap since all three types build on tradition to some extent (see Winch, 1958:238; Friedrich, 1963:235; Sternberger, 1968:247), that all authority has charismatic elements, in other words that it has something to do with the value system and the social order of society (see Shils, 1965; Eisenstadt, 1968). Weber (1968a:262-264) admits that it is not likely that "pure" types could ever exist, but that his typology is a classification meant to assist the process of analysis. Holmberg (1978:137; cf. also Blau, 1963:309-311) points out that this debate illustrates how difficult it is to construct "ideal types" since elements overlap or are dependent on elements in other types. He considers Weber's classification to be of analytical value "especially in non-modern historical situations". These are the situations relevant to this article.

Holmberg (1978:137-150) proceeds to describe charismatic authority, starting with the insights of Max Weber. David Horrell (1999:313), cites from Weber's work and describes the concept "charismatic authority" as follows:

Charismatic authority ... resides not in a person's occupation of a particular role, office, or social position, but in his or her individual qualities, 'by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated and endowed with ... exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin ...' [Weber, 1968b:241]. Charismatic authority is, for Weber, a 'revolutionary force' (1968[a]:244). However, it cannot remain stable, but becomes 'routinised': 'traditionalised or rationalised'

Holmberg's description and the application of his findings on the Bible are of interest to this article. Weber (1968a:241) expresses his view of "charismatic" as follows:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or treated as a 'leader' (cf. Lemmen, 1990:135-145).

He points out that this assessment is value-free because the "super-human abilities" of the charismatic are not evaluated. The acceptance of

others that the charismatic person has these powers, is taken as the point of departure.

Charisma is not an individual psychological trait but a strictly *social* phenomenon; without acknowledgement from a group of believers charisma simply does not exist. Thus it is a quality characterizing some authority relations thereby distinguishing them from other types of authority relations (Holmberg, 1978:138; cf. Lemmen, 1990:135-137).

In pre-modern societies some form of magical (religious) activity would attract followers to the charismatic leader. Some followers would be closer to the leader, also on account of their “charisma”, and would become the “disciples”. There is no system of organization or set of formal rules governing the group. Eventualities are treated in a charismatic way. They are often regarded as having a divine origin, be it judgments or revelations. According to Holmberg (1978:139) charismatic authority is *extra-ordinary (außeralltäglich)* and are contrary to the rational and *traditional authority* which are everyday forms of authority. The wisdom instruction of a charismatic teacher is therefore inclined to subvert *conventional wisdom*. Charismatic groups tend to reject forms of traditional authority and establish a new way of life. Charismatic change is revolutionary and comes from within. It is a totally new orientation towards life, the world, values and norms. It is

... foreign to everyday routine structures, it is anti-economic, anti-organisational and highly personal. And that is why charisma in its pure form is an unstable, short-lived type of authority which very soon becomes either traditionalized or rationalized or both (Holmberg, 1978:139).

This is the process of institutionalization.

Different types of charisma that Weber, nonetheless, also acknowledges as *charisma*, are not personal, but can be found in objects and institutional roles. He calls them “hereditary charisma” (e.g., that of royal families) and “office charisma” (e.g., the priesthood). They are still seen as “charismatic” even though impersonal, on account of their quality of extra-ordinariness.

Holmberg (1978:140) goes further than Weber and develops a “modified and complemented version” of Weber’s work. He first examines charisma from a psychological and sociological perspective. He distinguishes between the psychology of charismatic leadership and how charismatic authority functions socially. Holmberg then expands on Weber’s idea that charismatic authority emerges within social situations that are distressful and intolerable. People yearn for change. The charismatic leader brings

a new vision and directly or indirectly promises change. Such a leader is seen as a saviour figure.

Holmberg (1978:141-142) criticises Weber for not distinguishing sufficiently between *charismatic leadership* and *charismatic authority*. Charismatic leadership focuses on the relationship between the leader and the followers. It is an intensely personal and emotional relationship in which

... affection becomes devotion, admiration becomes awe, respect turns into reverence, and the feeling of trust approaches blind faith. The leader can do nothing wrong, everything he says, wishes or prescribes is absolutely true and right as he is considered to be a source of goodness, truth and strength in himself (Holmberg, 1978:142).

Charismatic authority is not as intense or emotional.

It rests upon the group's shared belief that it is *legitimate* for the superior to impose his will upon them and that it is illegitimate for them to refuse obedience. In a religious context the inevitable conceptualisation of this attitude to the leader is the belief that he is more than an ordinary human being, that he has a divine gift and calling and is consequently closer to God than the rest of [hu]mankind (Holmberg, 1978:142).

"Supernatural" abilities place the charismatic leader closer to the sacred. Therefore, when the charismatic brings a "new message" to the people, existing institutions and traditions can be left behind or expressly rejected. The message has to be relevant and acceptable to the specific culture for it to have authority. The intention of the message is that a new society will be constructed. The mission of the leader also becomes the task of the group. Their task is to transform reality. From this self-understanding a group identity develops and the group is seen as "an anticipation or prototype of the new society or Kingdom to come, and in intense missionary zeal" (Holmberg, 1978:147-148). The group now generates a charisma which ensures its existence after the death of the leader.

3. The institutionalization of charismatic authority

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). In my opinion these terms pertain to what was called *demystification* earlier in the study. According to Weber (1968a:246) charismatic authority cannot remain as it is for a longer period of time, but must become either traditionalized or

rationalised. 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. Weber (in Holmberg, 1978:163) formulates it as follows:

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.

The group that depended totally on the leader and lived in a spontaneous community life with the leader now has 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 office-holders, and serves to legitimate their acquired rights (Weber, 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 institutionalisation. 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 and Thomas Luckmann (1975).

- **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, it 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.

- **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 takes place 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 it, 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 “naturalised”. A process of demystification, that is a deconstructive reading or “denaturalization”, can expose these power interests. Insight in how ideology operates is helpful (see Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:64).

- **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).

- **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 organisations 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 institutionalised structure is the outcome nonetheless.

Some of Holmberg’s (1978) conclusions can be summarised 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, 1965:387).

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.

4. The Christian Bible

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 Israelite/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. “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 institutionalised. 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 on the authority of Jerusalem (see Acts 13:1; Gal. 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.

Gerd Theissen (1999:26) refers to this process as “the millenarian interpretation of the Jesus movement”. He compares it with similar millenarian movements in the Third World and also with millenarian movements of modern time:

A comparison with them is illuminating. We keep finding ourselves in the field of conflict between two cultures, one of which advances imperialistic claims and makes an indigenous culture dependent on politics. Charismatic figures keep appearing in this situation of conflict who proclaim a change in everything and mobilize supporters for this change. There are always tensions with the political authorities. But whereas in the Third World cultures encounter one another which are in quite different stages of development, at that time in Palestine there was a clash between two highly-differentiated, equal cultures, Romans and the Jews. Each was aware of a historical calling and each had a marked sense of history, a great tradition of law, writings and a financial economy. That explains some differences from the other millenarian movements of modern time.

Certainly the Jesus movement begins as a movement of revitalization within Judaism. In keeping with this, the Jesus movement differed from “nativistic” reactions against foreigners by being open to them – at first in eschatological dreams of a meal shared by the Gentiles with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and soon also by the acceptance of Gentiles in reality (Theissen, 1999:26-27). The leading position of the Jesus faction in Jerusalem resulted in conflict with both the “official” temple and synagogue authorities, and with other early Jesus movements. The conflict with the temple-oriented Judeans resulted in the institutionalization of the “charismatic authority” of Jesus, and the conflict with other Jesus movements can be seen in the implicit accusation that the Jesus faction in Jerusalem acquired power for themselves by attributing titles to Jesus (see *inter alia* Mark 10:35-45 – esp. v. 43).

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