



What are some examples of strengths and shortcomings of social identity theories? This issue features them both respectively, first on the topic of Pauline leadership in the pastoral epistles and second on that of orthodoxy and heresy according to Justin Martyr.



1 Timothy and Titus as Pauline Instruments of Leadership Maintenance

An Exposition from the Social Identity Theory of Leadership

Leadership structures in 1 Timothy and Titus, as compared with Paul's early letters, are typically interpreted as requiring a late date. The lively dialogue of Paul's early letters has made place for a depersonalized tradition, where opponents are stereotyped and simply denounced rather than rebutted through argumentation. Moreover, ecclesial structures point to an institutionalization process in which the author accommodates Christian ideals to the real world. But, do these observations really require a late date? Is a simple projection of these differences onto a timeline our only recourse for interpretation, or can we incorporate additional variables to explain them?

Social identity theory offers powerful hermeneutical tools that advance our analysis of this situation. The theory has been developed by Henry Tajfel and John Turner since the 1970's within the related disciplines of social and organizational psychology. They

discovered how one's identification with a group created a sense of 'us' (social identity) that affects people's feelings, attitudes, and behavior in ways that an individual sense of 'me' (personal identity) could never accomplish. Moreover, social identities come in different kinds (work, family, hobby, religion, nationality) and sizes (from married couples and small work teams to nations or ethnic groups). Each group has its own relevant characteristics in comparison with other groups ('intergroup'), and some of the larger social identities encompass many small ones (e.g., nations encompass cities, collegial groups, and churches).

Research in the last 10 years has also addressed relationships within groups ('intragroup'). Group members think of themselves in terms of group values and norms (self-categorization theory), and not in personal terms (depersonalization). Leadership is essentially a group-based phenomenon. At first, group members who are most representative of the group (prototypical), become influential, especially as they are socially liked for the commitment to the group and their prototypicality. Over time, group members attribute the influence of these prototypical members to their personality or even to their 'innate' leadership abilities, constructing a charismatic leadership personality, which allows positions of leadership to develop. Those in leadership can maneuver strategically to ensure that they remain prototypical, or that the group prototype shifts in their own direction.

When we now look back at 1 Timothy and Titus, we recognize the process of depersonalization. Paul thinks of himself, Timothy, and Titus as group prototypes for their congregations, while those who do not fit in their groups are stereotyped. Paul's long-term working relationship with his coworkers strongly suggests that references to 'sound doctrine' and stereotypical opponents are shorthand terms that depends on their intimate bond for an accurate understanding. By contrast, the lively dialogue in 1 Corinthians or Galatians demonstrates emotional distance and broken loyalty. Moreover, the ecclesial structures in the Pastorals are evidence of robust leadership which initiates structure to connect theological ideals with the realities of everyday life.

Thus, the observed differences in the Pastorals do not require a late date for their interpretation, if variables of group life are taken into account. Moreover, leadership studies should not only study the explicit structures of e.g., the Pastorals but also the developmental process by which leadership emerges within the context of social identities. Thus, social identity theory can be a powerful hermeneutical tool that significantly enhances our historical critical study with respect for the integrity of the Biblical text and its tradition.

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**Border Lines: the partition of
Judaeo-Christianity**

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Scholars in the field of Jewish-Christian relations are now hard-pressed to ignore Daniel Boyarin's recent revision of early Christian literature from social identity analysis. Boyarin claims that the binitarian view of God was common to Jews and Jesus-followers until the time of Justin. Given this situation, Justin aimed to construct, by writing the *Dialogue*, a self-definition of Christianity over against Judaism so that the latter would have a portrayal that denies belief in the Logos: '... an important motivation for Justin's expenditure of discursive energy is not so much to convince the Jews to accept the Logos, but rather to deny the Logos to the Jews, to take it away from them, in order for it to be the major theological center of Christianity, with the goal of establishing a religious identity for the believers in Christ that would, precisely, mark them off as religiously different from Jews' (p. 146). Orthodoxy and heresy, therefore, are mere notions for constructing religious identity by both rabbis and Christians. Accordingly, Judaism and Christianity were created out of Logos theology. The rabbis, thereafter, we are told, began to respond to this ground-breaking Christian religious identity by naming the archetypal idea of 'two powers in heaven' a heresy within Judaism.

Nonetheless, Boyarin's charge that Justin's *Dialogue* was an attempt to construct Judaism contrary to what it was is not convincing to this reviewer. First, a gross misrepresentation as such would only undermine Justin's own credibility to his contemporary readers.

Second, Boyarin adduces the writings of Philo as one of the key evidence that most Jews were binitarians; certainly, Philo pointed to the plurality in 'let us create ...' (Gen. 1:26) or 'as one of us ...' (Gen. 3:22) as

a reference not to the Logos, but rather to 'unspeakable number of powers' (*Opif.* 24; *Conf.* 33-34). And while Philo calls logos τὸν δεῦτερον θεόν (QG 2.62), he does so only once; moreover this Logos has not been sufficiently and specifically identified with a particular person in the Jewish scriptures (e.g., as one who appeared to the patriarchs as in the *Dialogue* (56-62). What Justin calls 'the mystery of Christ in the scriptures,' referring to the notion of connecting the Logos precisely with the coming Messiah, therefore, would be even more incredulous to the Jews. Wherever specificity is absent, any belief would remain little more than tentative speculation at best.

Third, Boyarin argues as if Justin's Christology stems merely from an opposition to Judaism. However, this neglects Justin's assertions of continuity of divine revelation between the OT scriptures and the teachings of Christ as recorded in the memoirs of the Apostles (see esp. *Dial.* 105.1; 106.3).

Lastly, Boyarin is right to identify the area of Christology as the matrix of the *Dialogue* for Justin's definition and defense of Christianity; Boyarin, however, merely selects a few passages from the text to support a socio-political theory about Justin's possible motive behind the text. In order to see what Justin really emphasized as the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy in the *Dialogue* one would need to evaluate its central message in light of the overall structural analysis with reference to Justin's major assertions and claims about Jesus Christ. For instance, is the existence of the Logos as another God the central thrust and thesis of this treatise? This preexistence of the Logos is significant, but, Justin finds this belief in another God the easiest to convince Trypho, and continues to demonstrate something of greater magnitude and more troubling for Trypho. According to the *Dialogue*, not just the 'second God' but the 'incarnate God,' and

even more emphatically, the crucifixion of this incarnate Messiah is the epicenter of Christianity, the main stumbling block for the Jews.

Aside from Boyarin's creative analysis, there seems to be an overdependence on the theory of hybridity (a catchy term for describing the fluid nature of one's mixed 'situated-ness,' [Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994]), a method of socio-political analysis perhaps helpful for understanding cultural and ethnic identities, but clearly reductionistic for grasping the religious phenomenon of conversion. If Boyarin were to discuss this matter with Justin, one can imagine that Boyarin would agree that the incarnation (although he tries to find some compatibility even here), and certainly, the particular identity of Jesus as the incarnate crucified Messiah, is a *novum* for Judaism. Quite obviously Boyarin would disagree with Justin's estimation that most of the Jews were non-binitarians during Justin's time. Now it is certainly easy to focus the discussion on the matters upon a new disagreement (i.e., whether most Jews were binitarians), rather than on the matters upon which one already agreed to disagree (i.e., belief in the incarnation, and especially the particularity of the crucified one). It appears, however, that this natural tendency to gravitate toward the point of new disagreement has misled Boyarin to think that precisely this new disagreement must also define orthodox Christianity for Justin. Nevertheless, if Justin were given a chance to reply, he would again disagree. For Justin, the belief in 'another God' would simply continue to be Judaism if this Logos was never enfolded and crucified.

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