

PARTIES IN THE CHURCH OF JERUSALEM
AS SEEN IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

by

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Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860) first impressed students of NT history with the importance of identifying and tracing the influence of groups or parties within the early Church. Baur and his "Tübingen School" sought to interpret the NT against the background of cleavage between Jewish Christianity, led and represented by Peter, and the Gentile Christianity of Paul. Reconciliation between these groups, he believed, was achieved only in the "catholic" church of the second and following centuries.¹ Subsequent scholarship has abandoned the particulars of Baur's reconstruction. But with varying degrees of emphases, it has followed his example in attempting to understand early Christianity and its literature within a structure characterized by internal division.²

Among recent investigators, S.G.F. Brandon³ remained closest to Baur by retaining the major features of the "Tübingen hypothesis" but substituted James the Just (the relative of Jesus) for Peter as the representative leader and spirit of Jewish Christianity. On the other hand, a number of scholars have argued that Paul's opponents came from outside the Jerusalem Church.⁴ Yet, the notion that James was the leader of the most rigorously legalistic group of early Christianity and a staunch opponent of Paul remains a frequently accepted assumption by many students.

¹*The Church History of the First Three Centuries*. trans. by Allan Menzies (London: 1878), Vol. I, pp. 44-183; cf. *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*. 2 vols. trans. by Eduard Zeller (London: 1876).

²For surveys of the work of Baur and the criticisms of it see Stephen Neil, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1961* (Oxford: 1964), pp. 19 ff. and W. G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. by McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: 1970), pp. 125 ff., 162 ff.

³*The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (2d ed.; London: 1957); cf. *Jesus and the Zealots* (Manchester: 1967).

⁴E.G., Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. by Frank Clarke (London: 1959) and Walter Schmithals, *Paul and James*, trans. by Dorothea M. Barton (SBT; London: 1965); *Paul and the Gnostics*, trans. by John E. Steely (Nashville: 1972).

At least two different lines of investigation are required to clarify the situation. One, of course, is a continuation of the attempts to identify the sources of opposition to Paul—I suspect that hostility against him came from a number of diverse interests in the first century world. Secondly, there is need to clarify the complex internal make-up of Jerusalem Christianity. An important first step in this effort should be the identification of dissenting factions within the Church of Jerusalem.

Numerous important studies of Jewish Christianity are already available.⁵ Among others, Oscar Cullman has focused upon the problem of divisions within the Jerusalem Church and recognized the existence of more factions than the obvious division between Hebrews and Hellenists.⁶ E. E. Ellis⁷ has made an important contribution by observing that soon after the Jerusalem Christian Hellenists were forced to leave the city

the Christian Hebrews divided into factions. Some, like James, accepted Hellenist and Gentile Christians without requiring them to adhere to the Law. Others insisted that all followers of the Messiah must obey the Law, or at least practice circumcision.⁸

⁵General literature on this topic includes sections in most surveys of the history of the Apostolic Age, studies of Paul, and commentaries on Acts and Galatians. Specialized studies include W. R. Sorley, *Jewish Christians and Judaism* (Cambridge: 1881); F. J. A. Hort, *Judaistic Christianity* (Cambridge: 1894); Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: 1949); *Urgemeinde Judenchristentum Gnosis* (Tübingen: 1965); and *Jewish Christianity*, trans. by Douglas R. A. Hare (Philadelphia: 1969); Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel* (Paris: 1948); Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. by John A. Baker (Chicago: 1964); Jakób Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (London: 1954); and Richard N. Longnecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (SBT, 2d. Series; London: 1970).

The 1967-1968 topic of study for "The Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins" was "Jewish Christianity in the Early Centuries (apart from Paul)". Bibliographies and papers contributed by that body have made an important contribution to research in this area.

My doctoral study, "The Church of Jerusalem, A.D. 30-100: An Investigation of the Growth of Internal Factions and the Extension of its Influence in the Larger Church" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation; Manchester, England: The University of Manchester, 1969) contains an extensive bibliography on this subject.

⁶"Dissensions Within the Early Church," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXII (1967), pp. 83 ff.; cf., "Samaria and the Origin of the Christian Mission," *The Early Church*, trans. and edited by A. J. B. Higgins (Philadelphia: 1956), pp. 185 ff. and "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity," *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, edited by K. Stendahl (London: 1958), pp. 18 ff. Note also the comments on "currents" within Jerusalem Christianity by Hans Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity*, trans. by John E. Steely (Nashville: 1973), pp. 56 ff.

⁷"'Those of the Circumcision' and the Early Christian Mission," *Studia Evangelica*, Vol. IV. Papers presented to the Third International Congress on New Testament Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1965. Part I: The New Testament Scriptures. Edited by F. C. Cross (Texte und Untersuchungen; Berlin: 1968), pp. 390 ff.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 394. Similar views of the identity of internal factions of the Church of Jerusalem were proposed by Carl Wieszaecker, *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*. 2 vols. trans. by James Miller (3rd ed.; London: 1910-1912).

This statement, I believe, deserves clarification and elaboration

The purpose of this study is to attempt a more precise identification of the groups within the first Church of Jerusalem. Although I am convinced that the Pauline epistles, especially Galatians, confirm the existence of the groups described below, I shall limit my discussion to the data of Acts. Furthermore, although Acts provides information about the events and stages through which these groups emerged, I can here give only briefest notice to this part of its evidence.⁹

The Background and Setting of the Jerusalem Church

Any consideration of the internal development of Jewish Christianity must take into account the potential effects of its environment, including religious, nationalistic, and cultural influences. Differences of opinion springing from divergences of the backgrounds of Jerusalem Christians created the potentiality for factionalism. These were a significant part of those strong forces which played upon the original Christians and helped shape the life of their community.

In particular we must remember the distinctive and pluralistic nature of the Judaism of this period. For our purposes three features of Late-Judaism (586 B.C.-A.D. 70/90) must be kept in mind. First, it was essentially a way of life. Concern for orthopraxy (right conduct) took precedence over orthodoxy (adherence to a clearly defined body of doctrine). Secondly, by the first century certain legal prescriptions and ceremonial observances, such as circumcision, Sabbath keeping, traditions regarding ritual defilement, and dietary regulations, had virtually become tests, not only of religious devotion, but also of loyalty to the Jewish state, and instruments of protection for a racial exclusivism.

A final feature of Late-Judaism of special significance for an understanding of the Jerusalem Church is its eschatology. Its view of the future and especially of the final phase of God's work on earth gave the Hebrew nation a sense of destiny, the expectation that Yahweh would act to redeem and glorify Israel as he acknowledged her as his people. But, there were differences of opinion about such matters as the nature and events of the Eschaton (the Final Age), the person and work of the Messiah and/or other eschatological figures, the effect of the dawn of the

⁹I have dealt with these matters in my "The Church of Jerusalem, A.D. 30-100," pp. 85 ff. Although there are numerous differences in details and over-all conclusions, I now find that my general methodological approach in reconstructing NT history has close affinities with that of Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, trans. by Robert A. Guelich (New York: 1970).

Final Age upon Torah,¹⁰ and the fate of the Gentiles during that period.¹¹

At the same time, the first "Followers of the Way" in Jerusalem were united and distinguished from their countrymen by their belief that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. They were convinced that with his coming God had uniquely and decisively intervened into the affairs of men, that a new phase in Salvation History had begun. All of their pre-Christian eschatological views had to be reinterpreted in view of the understanding, that what they had previously regarded as a future hope was now a present reality.

The accounts of Acts characterize the earliest days of the corporate life of the believers as a time marked by zeal, unity, apostolic instruction, and rapid growth (cf. Acts 2:42-47). This is not surprising. In the first flush of enthusiasm for the new faith and in their initial expressions of Christian love, the potentials for dispute and factionalism were easily overlooked. But with the passage of time the complexities of the hard realities of corporate life began to surface. Differences in background, orientation, and personality were bound eventually to cause problems. Acts records the emergence of these and associates their initial manifestation with the dispute between the Hellenists and Hebrews in 6:1 ff.

The Jewish Christian Hellenists

Luke seems to intend his account of the activities and speech of Stephen as a vehicle for presenting and distinguishing the Jewish Christian Hellenists from the rest of the Jerusalem community.¹² Evidently the Jewish Christian Hellenists' concept of Jesus did not differ

¹⁰Some felt Torah would be abolished during the Eschaton. Others thought it would be replaced, better interpreted, strengthened, or remain unchanged. See W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (JBL Monograph; Philadelphia: 1952) and *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: 1964), pp. 109 ff.; cf. Howard M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (JBL Monograph; Philadelphia: 1957), chap. 2.

¹¹Cf. Scott, "The Church of Jerusalem," pp. 95 ff. For a summary of Rabbinic attitudes toward Gentiles see C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* (Philadelphia: 1960), pp. 556 ff.; cf. George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1927-1930), Vol. I, p. 346.

¹²For discussions of the distinctives of Stephen's position see B. W. Bacon, "St. Stephen's Speech: Its Argument and Doctrinal Relationship," *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Yale Bicentennial Publications; New York: 1902), pp. 215 ff.; Marcel Simon, *Saint Stephen and the Hellenists* (London: 1958) and "Saint Stephen and the Jerusalem Temple," *JEH*, Vol. II (1957), pp. 127 ff.; Johannes Bihler, *Die Stephanusgeschichte* (Müchener Theologische Studien; München: 1963); and Martin H. Scharlemann, *Stephen: A Singular Saint* (Analecta Biblica; Rome: 1968).

I have dealt extensively with Stephen and the Jewish Hellenist Christians in "The Church of Jerusalem," pp. 98 ff. and summarized the major points of Stephen's speech in "Stephen's Speech: A Possible Model for Luke's Historical Method?" *JETS*, Vol. 18 (1974), p. 93.

materially from that of the rest of the Church. Further, they acknowledged the OT foundation of Christianity and the Church as the legitimate continuing expression of God's purpose to take out for himself a people from among the nations. However, they dissociated themselves from contemporary static, particularistic interpretations of Jewish history, Torah, and cultus. At best they regarded these as having been superseded by the coming of the Jesus-Messiah; at worst they regarded them as having been over-emphasized and misused by Hebraic Jews who had superimposed human concepts and practices upon the divinely appointed worship.

The NT evidence, especially Stephen's speech, seems to indicate that the Christian Hellenists in Jerusalem rejected external conditions as legitimate requirements for membership in "The People of God." For them the dawn of the Eschaton had brought the end of ceremonial prescriptions and racial privilege. The task of the Church was spiritual and its scope unlimited. Thus for the Jewish Christian Hellenists, prime concern was for the universal character and mandate of the call of God which they felt had been ignored by their Jewish contemporaries, including their fellow Jewish Christians. The Church must move forward into the world and proclaim to all the good news that the Son of Man-Messiah is even now at the place of power and glory with Lordship and dominion over all (Acts 7:56; comp. Dan. 7:13-14; Mk. 14:61-62).

These Jewish Christian Hellenists were scattered by the persecution which followed Stephen's martyrdom. Soon afterward they were probably swallowed up by the Larger Church and their distinctive emphases became almost indistinguishable. Before that happened this branch of Jewish Christianity apparently provided patterns for interpreting Christianity in relation to OT history and institutions which are reflected in the canonical Epistle to the Hebrews and the letter of Pseudo-Barnabas.¹³ More pointedly, its contribution is seen in the implementation it gave its universalistic notions by engaging in missionary endeavors among both Jews and Gentiles.

The Christian Hebrews of Jerusalem

The elimination of the Hellenists did not remove tensions from the Jerusalem Christian community. The influence of pre-Christian differences of opinion about the effect of the coming of Messiah and the dawn of the Eschaton upon Jewish institutions and privileges continued in the Jerusalem Church, now dominated by Jewish Christians with a Hebraic (Semitic) cultural orientation. According to Acts, the precise

¹³Cf. Scott, "The Church of Jerusalem," pp. 351 ff.; also see literature on Stephen listed in preceding note and William Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: 1951), pp. 36 f.; and L. W. Barnard, "St. Stephen and Alexandrian Christianity," *NTS*, Vol. VII (1960-61). Contrast R. A. Kraft (*Didache and Barnabas* [Vol. III of *The Apostolic Fathers*, R. M. Grant, ed.; New York: 1965], pp. 1 ff.) who thinks Barnabas stands in several exegetical lines.

identification of these issues and recognition of their gravity came gradually, primarily as a result of developments on the mission field.

Hellenist Philip's preaching to the Samaritans (circumcised individuals, but only partly Jewish in race and religion) raised concerns in Jerusalem which were alleviated only when the unmistakable presence of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans was attested during a visit by Peter and John (Acts 8:6-17). The account of the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 and 11 demonstrates the serious reservations with which the original community viewed the admission of an uncircumcised Gentile, even an exceptionally good and pious one (n.b. 10:2, 22). It took a thrice-repeated vision, a heavenly voice, and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his associates with the accompanying phenomenon of glossolalia to overcome Jewish prejudice and convince some Jerusalem Christians that "to the Gentiles also has God granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

Further concerns arose as scattered disciples (almost certainly Jewish Christian Hellenists) who traveled as far as Antioch on the Orontes, proclaimed the Christian message "to the Greeks" (Acts 11:20). The mission preaching of Barnabas and Paul in Cyprus and south central Asia Minor (Acts 13-14) heightened anxieties as even larger numbers of Gentiles were brought into the Christian community.

About this time some Christians from Judaea precipitated one or a series of crises which resulted in the clarification of the genuine nature of the disagreement which, simmering beneath the surface, had caused the frequent instances of friction, minor questionings, and disputes. This fundamental issue was nothing less than the question of the nature of Christian salvation—are circumcision and adherence to Jewish laws and customs requirements for Gentiles who desire to convert to Christianity (Acts 15:1, 5)? It was with this that the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:6 ff.) had to deal.

Luke gives only the briefest outline of the deliberations and decisions of that assembly.¹⁴ Yet, it seems clear to me that he intends the reader to understand that "the apostles and elders" (vs. 6) gathered in Jerusalem repudiated the claim that Jewish rites and ordinances are necessary prerequisites for Gentiles to become Christians. Positively, they affirmed that, for Jews and Gentiles alike, Christian salvation is offered on the basis of "the grace of the Lord Jesus" (15:11) through which God cleanses "hearts by faith" (15:9). The so-called decrees (15:20, 29), I believe, were put forward only as guidelines to enable Gentile Christians to "do well" (cf. 15:29) as they encountered the moral and ceremonial problems of racially mixed Christian communities.

This clarification of the nature of Christian salvation drew a clear distinction between Judaism and Christianity. It also exposed the existence of at least two factions within the Hebrew Christian branch of the Jerusalem Church. On the basis of Acts 15:5 we may call one "The

¹⁴Note Acts 15:7, "After there had been much debate"

Pharisaic Hebrew Christians.” For want of a better term, we will designate the other group “The Moderate Hebrew Christians.”

a. The Pharisaic Hebrew Christians

The Pharisaic Hebrew Christians appear to have emerged from those who had pressed the issues which made the Council of Jerusalem necessary. For them Christianity was merely a party within Judaism, distinguished only by its conviction that the Messiah, in the person of Jesus, had actually come. They must also have believed that the Messiah’s appearance had introduced changes into the eschatological situation, but obviously they did not believe that those attitudes and practices which constituted the real essence of Late-Judaism had been annulled or radically altered. In particular, the Pharisaic Hebrew Christians held that Jewish believers were obligated to continue observing the traditional Mosaic Torah and customs. They demanded that Gentiles enter the Messianic community on the same basis as they would join any other Jewish group—that the Gentiles must first become proselytes to Judaism which included submitting to circumcision and Torah, before they could be admitted to the Christian fellowship.

The Pharisaic Hebrew Christians must have looked upon the Jerusalem Council as a serious set-back if not an actual defeat.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Council did not cause their immediate extinction. It is possible that the Pharisaic Hebrew Christians may have relented in their demands for circumcision as a condition for salvation. Instead they may have urged Gentile believers to accept the yoke of Torah as a mark of completion, maturity, and privilege within the Christian community. It is more likely that they began to ignore the Gentile Christians and concentrated instead upon insistence that Jewish-born believers remain true to ancestral practices.

The concern of the leaders in Jerusalem over the potential reaction of the numerous believing “zealots for Torah” on the occasion of Paul’s final visit to that city (Acts 21:20 ff.) testifies to the continuing influence of the Pharisaic Hebrew Christian spirit within the Mother Church. Evidences of opinions and activities in keeping with their views are reflected in several early Christian writings. At least some of the Judaizing influences in Pauline Churches and the attacks upon Paul with which he had to deal in his epistles probably came from the Pharisaic Hebrew Christians of the Jerusalem Church. The extreme forms of Jewish Christianity found in such documents as the Pseudo Clementines is a likely extension of their influence. Justin Martyr’s references to second century Jews who accepted Jesus as Messiah, observed circumcision, Sabbath keeping, laws of purification, “and other such ceremonies,” and tried to persuade others, including Gentile Christians to do so also (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chaps. 46-47), is proof of the

¹⁵The letter from the Council evidently contained a repudiation of at least some of their group, cf. Acts 15:22.

persistence of the Pharisaic Hebrew Christians and their spiritual descendants within early Christianity.¹⁶

b. The Moderate Hebrew Christians

Most investigators seem to equate Jerusalem (or Jewish) Christianity as a whole with the Pharisaic Hebrew group. But Acts indicates that when issues were clear-cut, the main-line Jerusalem Church distinguished its views from those of the more extreme Jewish groups. Not only is this evident in the account of the Acts 15 Council but also when "The Circumcision Party" (*hoi ek peritomes*) questioned Peter following his dealings with Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18). In Acts 21:18 ff. James and the elders appear to separate themselves from "the zealots for the Law."

Apparently the Moderate Hebrew Christian views and spirit were present in veiled and undefined form in the Jerusalem Church from its beginning. The group became distinguishable only as Jewish-born Christians with views on both extremes emerged as identifiable entities. Available information is insufficient to permit compiling a complete picture of the thought and attitudes of the Moderates. Nevertheless, much may be learned about them by piecing together evidence which portrays them in contrast to the other parties.

The Moderate Hebrew Christians accepted the reality of changes introduced by the dawn of the Eschaton. As a part of the new situation they seem to have acknowledged, at least theoretically, that the position of the Jewish nation as the sole channel through which God calls people to himself had come to an end. Consistent with this acceptance of the universal nature of Christianity, they rejected circumcision and Torah as

¹⁶I suggest that it is within the context of a description of the character and effects of Pharisaic Hebrew Christianity that two frequently raised issues should be discussed. These concern the consequences of the fall of Jerusalem upon early Christianity and the relationship between the second century Ebionite sect and Jewish-Jerusalem Christianity.

S.G.F. Brandon (*The Fall of Jerusalem; Jesus and the Zealots; and The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth* [New York: 1968]) has championed the view that the Jerusalem Church and its influence ceased to exist after the overthrow of the city in A.D. 70. He says that for the most part the Jerusalem Christians made common cause with their countrymen in the war with Rome and consequently were virtually annihilated. He blames strong attachment to Jewish institutions and loyalty to the state for this debacle. These opinions rest precariously upon Brandon's questionable method of handling the NT documents and his tenuous reconstruction of the nature and history of pre-A.D. 70 Christianity. To the limited extent that the evidence may support his hypothesis, it would seem that such religiously motivated Zealot-like spirit could have been present only within some individuals of the Pharisaic Hebrew Christian faction of the Jerusalem Church.

Secondly, the sect usually called "Ebionites" was apparently a group with its own complex internal differing emphases, interests, and currents. At the risk of oversimplification, I suggest that the precursors of Ebionism, especially those parts of the movement described by H. J. Schoeps (*Theologie und Geschichte; Jewish Christianity*; cf. "Ebionite Christianity," *JTS* N.S. Vol. IV [1953], pp. 219 ff.), are more likely to be found among the Pharisaic Hebrew Christians than the Jerusalem Church as a whole.

necessary conditions for salvation.¹⁷ To some extent they participated in the world mission of Christianity. Yet they maintained and practiced their Christian faith within a distinctively Jewish framework.

Acts records that, to some extent, the Moderate Hebrew Christians continued to worship in the Temple, to participate in Jewish rituals, and to observe at least some requirements of Torah. Their reasons for doing so were probably varied, and it is likely that there were differences between individual Moderates as to which customs they observed and in the degree of their involvement in Jewish rituals. Precise information about these matters is lacking. But more important is the difference between Moderate and Pharisaic Hebrew Christians at the point of motives for continued loyalty to Jewish institutions. The Pharisaic Hebrew Christians kept Torah because of compulsion and obligation. For the Moderates these things were not to be imposed upon Gentile believers and were observed by Jewish Christians only by choice and in freedom.¹⁸

Once the nature of Christianity and the doctrine of salvation apart from Torah had been clarified the primary points of concern for the Moderate Hebrew Christians appear to have centered on practical, moral, and ceremonial problems. Their Late-Jewish emphasis upon orthopraxy together with their ingrained distrust for Gentile propensity to idolatry and moral laxity apparently caused the Moderates to emphasize the implications of faith in Jesus for life and conduct. More evident is their search for a formula to allow Gentile and Jewish Christians to share membership in the Church without endangering or offending the ceremonial standing or scruples of the latter.

Acts tells of at least two attempts to effect a compromise which would safeguard Jewish consciences and hopefully further peaceful relations between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Such efforts appear to me to be characteristic of the Moderate Hebrew Christian spirit.

The first compromise was the so-called decree of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20 ff.). This request that Gentile believers adhere to the ceremonial and moral guidelines implicit in these prohibitions had the virtual effect of asking them to become "God-fearers" (although the term is not used). Acquiescence by the Gentile Christians would have enabled Jewish Christians to associate with their Gentile brethren on a basis acceptable to a broad spectrum of non-Christian Judaism. The request that Paul enter the Temple and join certain who had taken a vow (Acts 21:23 ff.) is another example of the moderate and mediating policy

¹⁷In Gal. 2:6, 9, Paul affirms that the understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus was such as to enable the leaders of the Jerusalem Church to extend to him the right hand of fellowship without adding to his gospel.

¹⁸Compare the attitudes of those second century Jewish believers, accepted as true Christians by Justin Martyr but rejected by some Gentile Christians, who kept the law "through weak-mindedness," by choice, but did not seek to impose it upon others; *Dialogue with Trypho*, chaps. 43-47, esp. 46-47.

of this group.¹⁹ Nevertheless, when matters of principle were involved, such as the universal implications of Christianity (the Cornelius incident) or the nature of salvation (at the Jerusalem Council), the Moderates could be depended upon to affirm steadfastly Christianity to be a religion offering God's favor to all men equally on the basis of grace through faith in Jesus alone.

Acts strongly implies that the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, including the Twelve Apostles, James the Just, and the elders, shared and were representatives of the spirit of Moderate Hebrew Christianity. If this is true, it is significant for two reasons. In any multifactional organization the opinions of the leaders have a strong claim for being the official views of the body. Furthermore, the "average" members who comprise the majority of any popular movement tend to accept the opinions of the leaders. If this were the case in the Jerusalem Church then the Moderates were the largest group and thus had a second reason, numerical superiority, for claiming to represent the normative position.

Conclusion

If even in general we have accurately summarized the data of Acts regarding the dissenting groups within the Jerusalem Church, our conclusions could affect the study of Christian origins and of the NT in particular at several points. For an example, there are implications here for questions relating to the nature, tendencies, and accuracy of Acts. If I have read this document correctly then some reassessment may be in order of the oft-repeated assumption that harmonistic interests have caused the writer to gloss over the fact of dissension within the early Church. Further, let us assume for the moment that the distinction between the Moderate and Pharisaic Hebrew Christians did emerge only gradually and over a period of time. In this case the account of Acts may reflect the author's awareness of and sensitivity to what actually happened rather than his redactional tendencies.

Clarification of the nature and identity of factions within the Jerusalem Church opens the door to further consideration of the relation of Paul to that body. If there were both Moderate and Pharisaic Hebrew Christians within the Church of Jerusalem, it is quite understandable how Paul might have been accepted by and maintained good relations with one group and at the same time been bitterly opposed by another segment of the same Church. Again, the literary and historical critical issues raised by comparing Paul's letters with portions of Acts may be more easily understood or solved if the internal divisions of the Jerusalem community are kept in mind.

Thirdly, if the Church of Jerusalem did contain at least three clearly

¹⁹The suggestion of the Jerusalem leaders, reported by Paul in Gal. 2:7 ff., that the Jewish and Gentile missions be segregated from each other, is probably yet another example of an attempt at compromise in the face of practical difficulties by the Moderate Hebrew Christians.

definable factions, then students must take care to identify clearly and precisely which group they have in mind when investigating the history, relationships, and influence of the Mother Church. If I am correct that Moderate Hebrew Christianity was the “normative faction” of the Jerusalem community, then alteration will be required in some attempted reconstructions of the dominant ethnos and concerns of that body. Within this context, reconsideration of the background and orientation of some early Christian writings may be in order. This could include restudy of some of the Synoptic sources, the Petrine literature, the epistle of James, some of the sources and allusions of Revelation, and parts of the Didache.

Finally, conclusions about the person and theology of James the Just should be drawn more cautiously. This is especially true when the investigator is forced to choose between an assessment of his character as implied in earlier documents, such as the NT, where he appears as a Moderate, and later writings in which he is ascribed a more rigidly Jewish legalistic and/or ascetic stance.²⁰

²⁰It is strongly possible that the later Pharisaic Hebrew Christians and their descendants may have read their expectations and theology into their remembrances of the most influential figure of the Church of Jerusalem of the middle of the first century. Cf. the comment of H. J. Schoeps, a change from his earlier opinions, that the historical James was never “the head of the ‘Christian Pharisee’ party in the first Church.... Only after his death was his figure embroiled in a Judaizing way, was he made into the ‘Pope of Ebionite fantasy’ (Th. Zahn),” *Paul, the Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History*, trans. by Harold Knight (London: 1961), p. 67.