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THE CHURCH IN YOUR HOUSE:
A STUDY INTO THE FORM AND FUNCTION
OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ours is the century of the church. Perhaps uniquely so in all the history of the church, Christians of the twentieth century have the task of forging a viable doctrine of the church within the ecumenical movement while facing a world in the convulsions of rapid change, revolution and upheaval.

Ours is the century of the church because it is, perhaps, the first century in which Christians are seriously studying its mission and nature. Other centuries, other epochs had their tasks. But the doctrine of the church has, quite strangely, never been as thoroughly explored or articulated as other Christian doctrines. St. Augustine had to study "The City of God," the divine society, while the Roman Empire went through its dying convulsions. After Augustine set the church in majestic perspective, the doctrine of the church fell into what Walter Marshall Horton has called "a total eclipse in medieval scholasticism." As long as the pope wielded both swords as supreme pontiff and temporal prince, there was little need to discuss the church. This vast silence extends even to the Summa of St. Thomas; except for short discussions on Christ or the pope as the head of the church, the angelic doctor never wrote a formal exposition of the church.¹ Possibly because the fabric of western Christendom was still relatively intact, the Lutheran confessors likewise assume and insist that

¹Walter Marshall Horton, Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 208.

they stand in the best and fullest tradition of the church catholic by believing, teaching and confessing what has been taught at all times, in all places by all. We modern Lutherans might wish that we were Luther's seven-year old, who at the minimum age of discretion "knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd."²

The situation has only recently begun to change from the time of the Lutheran Confessors. As recently as the beginning of this century Adolph von Harnack could write a volume answering What is Christianity? solely from the perspective of the individual. To work out a doctrine of the church may be precisely the God-given task for Christians heading into the twenty-first century. Such a task will find Christians facing two ways simultaneously: They must face their fellow Christians within the multi-logue of the ecumenical movement ready for the Spirit's leading and stimulation. They must also face a world writhing under ideological conflict and racial tensions, and threatened by global hunger on a standing-room-only planet. Hence, a viable doctrine of the church can never be the product of the church's casual intramural sport, but the earnest struggle that the world may believe (John 17:23).

A search for new forms of church and new patterns of ministry and mission has occupied parts of the church in the western world for the past ten years or so. Both the concern for the doctrine of the church and for the cutting edge of mission dominate the search for new forms. That search has yielded varied patterns, many of which utilize face-to-face contact in

²Smalcald Articles, XII "The Church," The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer and Arthur C. Piepkorn (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 315.

smaller groups to meet the challenges of mass-man in a depersonalized society. Some of these new forms of church and church ministry and mission have claimed a relationship to "the church in your house":

1. Ministries of engagement and interpersonal dialog, in structured settings such as counselling ministries and industrial chaplaincies, or in a free, unstructured ministry of group therapy and healing in the context of total pastoral care.³

2. Communal living, with life together organized around Word and sacrament and with members of the community pledging themselves to joint disciplines of study, prayer and penetration into the community (the lay academies of Europe and American parishes such as the Church of Our Savior of Burlington, Vermont, and the Community of the Atonement of Washington, D.C., are good examples).

3. Parish koinonia groups, ecclesiolae in ecclesia, with the features of small group Bible study, open sharing of insight, intercessory prayer and problem-solving and reporting in from the daily task of lay witness usually characterizing koinonia groups.

4. House-churches where Word and Eucharist serve as the focus, but where the kitchen table does double duty as the pulpit and altar, and as the table for the agape-meal consisting of breakfast or evening coffee. (See Canon E. W. Southcott's The Parish Comes Alive which describes the strategy of an English parish where daily masses in homes visually teach

³Here the outstanding example is "The House-Church of J. C. Blumhardt" described in Rudolph Bohren, Preaching and Community, translated from the German by David E. Green (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965), pp. 140-58.

the family nature of the church and bridge the chasm between dechurched factory workers and the local parish church.)⁴

Another practical consideration forcing the search for new forms of church is the increasingly high cost of securing property and erecting basic units for new "mission" congregations. Economic pressures may force the American churches to reexamine their procedures of mission expansion, because they may well prove to be too costly in the future.

However, we should make very clear that this investigation is a piece of historical inquiry. The task of systematic theology in forging a doctrine of the church within the context of ecumenical conversation must meet the radical demands of the twentieth century with the definitive insights of the first century. Likewise, the task of practical theology, that of structuring the Christian community to meet the challenges of our day, the search for new forms of church, must be informed by the form of the church in New Testament times. Exegetical work does not go on in a vacuum. It must respond to the issues of our day, as in the ecumenical movement and in the search for new forms. This paper attempts to suggest answers to present-day questions into the form and function of the church on the basis of the first century situation insofar as that is discernable from the first century documents.

These basic questions and underlying concerns carry the thrusts in this paper:

1. What does Paul mean by "church" and "house"? Is the church in the house really the church of God, or is it a family gathering, an enclave?

⁴E. W. Southcott, The Parish Comes Alive (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., Limited, 1961).

Is the house-church really the one church of God in Christ in its dimensions of wholeness and catholicity? Is the entire body of Christ present and actualized in even the smallest localized form of church?

2. What are the basic essentials for the church to be the church? Are there an infinite variety of forms that the church could take and still be the church? Or are there irreducible, minimal requirements for church?

3. In searching the Scriptures we will ask, What are the processes of change, development and growth in Paul's conception of the church. Is it axiomatic that the church must change in response to the changing conditions of society? Does the cosmic Christ the church worships and serves as Lord give it space to adjust and change in response to the needs and changing conditions of society? In short, what are the christological assumptions underlying a theology of change?

In coming back to the Scriptures to investigate the form and function of the primitive church we are not interested in re-creating patterns, lifting them whole from their living context and artificially planting them into the life of the church that faces the twenty-first century. However, the living voice of Scripture and the living Lord of the church and Scripture are normative for the church's life in any day. We who stand within the church may let its true nature be obscured; familiarity may not breed contempt, but it may fossilize patterns, forms and structures and atrophy the church's response to its Lord's call to service in the world.

We make the following methodological assumptions in approaching the New Testament documents:

1. Of the thirteen books in the Pauline corpus, the letters to the Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus can rightly be termed deutero-Pauline.

The remaining nine letters to the churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Colossae and Thessalonica and the Philemon letter define the broader scope of this investigation.

2. The greatest weight should be given the four letters in which house-churches are explicitly mentioned among Paul's greetings: 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon and Romans. We do not argue from silence that similar patterns are to be found in the primitive Pauline communities in Galatia, Philippi and Thessalonica. While the letter to the Romans does not mention the word ekklesia until chapter 16, and although that chapter's authenticity has been the subject of serious debate, we assume that the contents of chapter 16 fit the situation in Rome better than Ephesus.⁵

3. The Acts of the Apostles, though later than the letters of Paul, displays the author's kerygmatic view of salvation history and the role of the primitive church within Gottesheilsplan; it will be used as a secondary source.

The New English Bible--New Testament has been used for direct quotations, with one or two exceptions where the author thought a literal translation of the Greek text might be helpful.

⁵Paul Feine, Johannes Behm and Werner Georg Kuemmel, Introduction to the New Testament, translated by A. J. Mattill, Jr. (14th revised edition; Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 222-26.

CHAPTER II

THE CHURCH IN YOUR HOUSE

The house-church was a pattern of church life that was used quite frequently in the primitive church, according to the book of Acts, and one which the Pauline communities used as well.

"The assembly of Christians in hospitable homes goes back to the very first days of the church." That is Floyd Filson's verdict on the early house churches of the book of Acts.¹ The earliest church in Jerusalem appears to have been closely tied to the Jewish synagogues and temple. Bultmann observes: "The Church as eschatological Congregation had not yet found appropriate expression in a cult of its own, since it had not cut itself loose from the temple cult."² The primitive church met in the temple area for some aspects of its life and piety which were Jewish, while it also met in private homes for distinctively Christian aspects. The temple was used as the site for prayer and teaching; it was not used for sacrifice,³ since Jesus the Christ was the community's sacrifice. Lohmeyer concludes that even Acts 5:42 gives us a glimpse of this strict division: the

¹Floyd V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," Journal of Biblical Literature, LVIII (1939), 106.

²Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 57.

³Ernst Lohmeyer, "Das Abendmahl in der Urgemeinde," Journal of Biblical Literature, LVI (1937), 229.

apostles' activities center both in the temple for prayer and "in various private homes"⁴ for preaching and teaching.

The Pentecost account indicates that forgiveness of sins comes by repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus the crucified but risen Messiah, not by the sacrificial ritual of the temple (Acts 2:38). The tradition that came down to Paul from the earliest church (1 Cor. 15:1-3) conceived of Jesus' death "as an expiatory sacrifice" for sins in accordance with the Scriptures.⁵ All accounts of the Lord's Supper indicate that Jesus died as a sacrificial victim. The Synoptics stress Jesus' blood poured out "for you" (hyper humōn in Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20) or "for many" (Matt. 26:28). The Matthean account makes explicit the sacrificial content of the phrase with the extension of thought that "the blood of the covenant" is shed "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Paul's version of the bread-word also makes plain that the agma is "for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). The primitive and general-Christian character of Christ's death as expiatory sacrifice is signalled in the wide distribution of the formulas "for you" (hyper humōn, "for many" or "for sins" throughout the New Testament documents (lacking only in James, Jude and 2 Peter).⁶

In Acts, the temple precincts are used both for distinctly Jewish rites such as the observance of evening prayer (Acts 3:1) and Paul's secret vows (Acts 21:26) and for the distinctly apostolic deeds of teaching, preaching

⁴Walter Bauer, Wm. F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 563.

⁵Bultmann, I, 46.

⁶Ibid., I, 84-85.

and healing. Peter and John heal a man crippled forty years in the powerful name of the risen one (Acts 3:7). Peter and John use the occasion of this mighty deed to proclaim the message of the crucified and risen Lord publicly in Solomon's Cloister (Acts 3:11-26). Their message is interrupted by their arrest. What exasperated the Sadducean party was the apostles' proclamation of "the resurrection from the dead—the resurrection of Jesus" (Acts 4:2). Such fanatic messianism endangered the delicate political balance and undermined their authority. Since the apostles were laymen unschooled in the Law (Acts 4:13), they were released with the warning "to refrain from all public speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:17-18).

Before this the primitive church was unmolested. To the outsider, the Jerusalem church "appeared to be one of the numerous Jewish movements or sects" (Acts 24:5 and 28:22-24).⁷ The Christian sect might be unique in its fanatical messianism and claims about its Founder, but it stayed within the confines of Judaism with its zealotry for the customs (Acts 10:14; 21:20). Before the blow-up over the public proclamation of the risen Christ, the Jerusalem church met in Solomon's Cloister, but others were hesitant to join them (Acts 5:12-13) because of the growing pressure and disapproval of the authorities.

Judaism took varied positions toward the primitive church in Jerusalem:⁸ The common people generally spoke highly of the Jerusalem church for its piety (Acts 4:14). The "Sadducean priestly nobles" saw in the messianic

⁷Leonhard Goppelt, Jesus, Paul and Judaism: An Introduction to New Testament Theology, translated and edited by Edward Schroeder (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964), p. 100.

⁸Ibid., pp. 104-6.

movement a threat to their political position. The Pharisees rejected the claims of the Jerusalem church "with unmerging nonchalance," but urged caution and tolerance because of their own fear of God. The Pharisees "refused to acknowledge political expediency as grounds for doing away with pious and law-abiding heretics."

Temple (hieron) drops from Luke's vocabulary after Acts 4 and 5, re-appearing only in Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and subsequent hearings. Thus a shift away from the temple to less troubled surroundings in private homes can be deduced. Acts indicates a gradual withdrawal from the temple cultus for a variety of reasons. During the crisis of Peter's imprisonment the house of Mary, mother of John Mark, served as locus for a prayer meeting of "a large company" who had gathered in response to this emergency of the community (Acts 12:12). Further, Acts 12:17 indicates that this was only one group, not the entire Jerusalem church, for Peter requests: "Report this to James and the members of the church" (tois adelphois). With the increase in size as the primitive church accepted Hellenistic members, dispersed group meetings were held; the Lord had added too many to the Jerusalem church for all the believers in the city to meet in one house. In addition, Christians were not thoroughly at home joining other Jews in temple and synagogue worship. What united them in cultic worship and daily service of the risen Lord was to be found not in temple or synagogue but in separate gatherings (kat' oikon) in various private homes.

Guilds as Models of Form

When Paul began his work in the Hellenistic world as apostle and missionary, there were already many models of form for the intimate fellowship in Christ centered in the hospitable homes of Christians.

Johnston, in his monograph The Doctrine of Church in the New Testament, has sketched the magnificent world of imperial Rome.⁹ All was not well internally: large numbers were unemployed or living on the public dole, while society was plagued by the evils attendant on slavery and great vice. For three centuries the old civic loyalties had been disintegrating. Ties to the old city-states were strained and often broken in the movement toward empire. First came Alexander with his amazing conquests and his enlightened policy of fusing East and West by permitting great diversity within loose controls; then "his muddling, quarrelsome successors," and a movement toward regionalism; and finally a new brand of universal rule imposed by Rome's armed might. The rule imposed by Rome brought with it the pax romana and the pax Augusta after centuries of political squabbling and bloody warfare. Out of a sense of relieved gratitude the caesars and even the city of Rome itself were revered in Hellenistic Asia Minor as the personifications of authority. The cult of Rome and the caesars was focused through temples and statues and meant primarily loyalty to the new universe centered in Rome: "I am a Roman citizen."

But all was not well; daily life still had its frustrations.

The central government was quite far away from the provinces and its bureaucracy tended to destroy all personal relationships between the ruler and the solitary individual and the single family. Men longed for guidance and closer social contacts to take the place of lost freedom and civic rights.

The mood of uncertainty verged on despair as states and governments toppled and collapsed one after the other. In a search for structure and meaning for private life some turned to astrology, others to philosophy; but the dominant Stoic philosophy left many without satisfying answers.¹⁰

⁹George Johnston, The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1943), pp. 3-14.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 4.

Amid the skepticism and turmoil of changing times, there was a "noteworthy increase of small societies where people might come together" for a variety of personal reasons. These guilds or collegia had been known in Rome since the later days of the Republic, and were eventually legalized. In Rome the collegia had to show a iusta causa, such as state service or burial purpose, for associating. In the Hellenistic world such private guilds and associations had long flourished. Membership in these guilds was open to all who paid the entry fees and abided by the rules; class and race barriers were set aside as men and women, rich and poor, free and slave could meet on equal terms. The structures of these koina and collegia provided the model for ways in which cults such as the mystery religions could organize.¹¹

In the first century before Christ there was a definite growth of interest in the mystery religions, in asceticism and mysticism, and in the use of magic and incantations addressed to gods of all sorts. The

semi-oriental mysticism met a spiritual need of the times, a demand for something clear and dogmatic which explained the universe, and for an assured hope of immortality. The East conquered the West because it had something to give.¹²

The Synagogue as a Model of Form

The synagogue was one form and pattern that Judaism had long used amid the confused social and religious situation of the Hellenistic-Roman world.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹²Arthur Darby Nock, Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 13-17, quote from p. 16.

In Acts 15:21 James repeats the current understanding that synagogues are an ancient institution, with the implication that they may go back to Moses himself. Though mentioned specifically in the Old Testament for the first time in Ps. 74:8 (when meeting houses burned down), the rabbis could not imagine a time when Israel was without the synagogue.¹³ During the Babylonian captivity, God's people in exile needed some place for worship; "since cultic worship was impossible in a land which was wholly unclean."¹⁴ Ezekiel's house was such a ready-made center, for Ezekiel's vision comes to him while the elders of Judah are sitting before the prophet en tō oikō (Ezek. 8:1, LXX).¹⁵

Temple and synagogue stood side by side for centuries. But the synagogue's influence spread much further geographically and with astonishing rapidity. Wherever the Jews settled they established synagogues. Strabo (born 63 B.C.; died after 21 A.D.) notes that there is no place in the oikoumenē (presumably the Roman Empire) where the Jewish race has not established a foothold. This observation likely refers to the ubiquitous synagogues which would be highly visible to the observer.¹⁶ Evidence of the geographic spread and the vitality of the synagogue is given by James in his summarizing speech at the Jerusalem council on problems raised by

¹³Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928), IV, 1, 115-16.

¹⁴Goppelt, p. 23.

¹⁵Ismar Elbogen, Der juedische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), p. 446.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 447.

the mission to the Hellenistic world: "Moses, after all, has never lacked spokesmen in every town for generations past; he is read in the synagogues Sabbath by Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). The book of Acts mentions the synagogues sprinkled throughout the world of the Mediterranean as Paul encounters them in his missionary tours (Damascus, Acts 9:2 and 20; Salamis, 13:5; Antioch in Pisidia, 13:14; Iconium, 14:1; Thessalonica, 17:1; Berea, 17:10; Athens, 17:17; Corinth, 18:4 and Ephesus, 18:19 and 26, 19:8).

Scattered over Palestine and the Hellenistic world, the synagogues were "little Israels, each local gathering a microcosm of the Jewish community." The synagogue became the practical substitute for the temple; it replaced rather than imitated the temple. The synagogue was both religious and civic center, both prayer-house (oikos tēs proseuchēs) and school, for the Hellenistic Jewish community in any place. The stress was on the individual members, each possessing the revelation of Torah, each with the duty to maintain the public worship of Yahweh and to serve him in humble obedience in daily life. Laymen were its officers, with each synagogue having its own president, reader and attendants. The simple service included Psalm-reading, regular and serialized readings from the Pentateuch and the Prophets, prayers, a homily in the vernacular, and at the end a blessing, pronounced by a priest if one were present.¹⁷

Membership in the synagogue provided citizenship in Israel, the people of God, and also ecumenical ties for the local group. Membership was not in one central synagogue in a large city, for instance, but was determined by a wide variety of interest, language and nationality groupings. In a

¹⁷Johnston, pp. 19-20, and Floyd V. Filson, "Temple, Synagogue, and Church," The Biblical Archaeologist (December 1944), V, 84-85.

large city, the synagogues became little enclaves (cf. "the Synagogue of Freedmen, comprising Cyrenians and Alexandrians and people from Cilicia and Asia," Acts 6:9). Many synagogues, especially on the Hellenistic frontier away from centers of Jewish population, were small structures. A private individual might erect a synagogue or put an entire building at the disposal of the synagogue (the Roman centurion in Luke 7:5); or a portion of a private dwelling might be dedicated as an oikos tēs proseuchēs.¹⁸

The synagogues of the diaspora used Greek almost exclusively. Lietzmann makes the judgment:¹⁹

The frequent opinion that the designation "Hebraic" points to communities speaking Hebrew or Aramaic, is mistaken. The door post of a synagogue has been found at Corinth, on which stands the name of the congregation: "Synagogue of the Hebrews." But these Hebrews did not speak Hebrew for the inscription is in Greek. Outside Palestine, only the Rabbis had any Hebrew--but no one knows how many they were or how much they knew. Only from the remote region of the Crimea do we possess Hebrew inscriptions of the first to the fourth century.

Inscriptions in the Latin vernacular also show the existence of a synagogue of Hebrews at Rome.²⁰ The services were conducted in the Greek or Latin vernacular. As in Palestine, where an Aramaic targum was current alongside the Hebrew text, so in the diaspora the Greek Septuagint was used in the public worship of the synagogue.

Not only were the Scriptures read in Greek, but also the same language was used for the prayers and the confession of faith, the "Shema", in public worship in the synagogue. The sources

¹⁸Elbogen, pp. 451-77.

¹⁹Hans Lietzmann, Beginnings of the Christian Church, translated by Burtram Lee Woolf (Cleveland and Chicago: Meridian Books of The World Publishing Co., 1961) I, 113.

²⁰Elbogen, p. 480.

testify to this fact in regard to Caesarea, the quasi-gentile capital of Palestine, and naturally the same holds good for the diaspora in general.²¹

The summary judgment of Johnston is: "It was the Synagogue, rather than the Temple or the . . . collegia, which provided the first model for Christianity."²²

Separation from the Synagogue into House-churches

However, there were factors within the primitive church which ultimately forced a separation from Judaism, and separation from the synagogue. These factors, present within the primitive church from the beginning, were determined by its conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the living, ruling Christ. These factors were not imports from the outside, from Hellenistic sources, for example. From the first the Christian community in Jerusalem was founded on the certainty that the crucified Jesus was the risen and exalted Christ (Acts 2:22-36). The Jerusalem community, as its life was superficially observable, appeared to be merely another of the numerous sects with a unique insight or different stress on the orthopraxy of Torah-observance. Leonhard Goppelt has clearly indicated that the separation between the Jerusalem community and Judaism took place on the basis of its messianism, its Christology, its insistence on witness to the risen Lord.

Separating early Christianity and Judaism [italics are in the text] was the two-fold confession that in the final analysis all were guilty of the Crucifixion, and that in cross and resurrection salvation had dawned. The kerygma of the church, arising from the apostolic witness to Easter, call the Jewish people to this confession. They were called to confess the redemptive meaning of cross and resurrection

²¹Lietzmann, I, 114-15.

²²Johnston, p. 20.

as illuminated by the scriptures, not to acknowledge some particular theories about Jesus.²³

The source of the Jerusalem community's life and the clue to its very existence was the risen Christ's self-revelation to his followers, and the apostles' stirring eyewitness testimony to the Easter-event.

On the basis of this witness to the cross and resurrection, the primitive church called and invited people whose life was based on Torah-observance over into a life marked by the cross and resurrection. In making this witness and extending this invitation, the primitive church was the redeemed and redeeming community of the end-time. As such, it had a singular consciousness of being the Spirit-filled community (Acts 2:14-21 and 38-39). The implication was clearly drawn that those who declined to accept the fresh understanding of the crucified Jesus as God's Christ were part of "this crooked age" (Acts 2:40). Its rite of initiation effected more than Jewish proselyte baptism;²⁴ in offering both forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38), Christian baptism united the baptized in a common life. The Jerusalem community shared common meals in private houses. The meals were marked by high joy, provided a tie of social fellowship and sharing of resources to meet needs, and probably were celebrations of the risen Messiah's presence in their midst (Acts 2:42 and 46-47).²⁵ The Jerusalem community "met constantly to hear the apostles teach" and so showed its preference for its own leaders over Judaism's traditional leaders, the priests, scribes and elders (Acts 2:42).

²³Goppelt, p. 102.

²⁴Oscar Cullman, Baptism in the New Testament, translated by J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1952), pp. 9-12.

²⁵Oscar Cullman, Early Christian Worship, translated by A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), pp. 14-20.

To the extent that this group valued and cherished its leaders, fellowship and practices, just so much was it inwardly estranged from those Jews who would not believe. It might cling to its Jewish contacts and heritage, exalt its Jewish basis and character, and seek to win its Jewish neighbors, but the Jews who followed Jesus as the Christ and lived in the Christian fellowship were living life from another center, and the things which set them apart . . . were the things which to an earnest Christian counted most.²⁶

Christians at first remained Jews in race and religion, praying in the temple and frequenting synagogues in Jerusalem and Damascus (Acts 9:2). While the believers met in private houses for instruction, fellowship and the breaking of bread in eucharistic exaltation (agalliasis), there is no indication in Acts that they formed their own synagogues. The apostolic proclamation goes to fellow Jews first. The kerygmatic approach of the primitive church points up the fresh revelation God has given in cross and resurrection. But the appeal is made by Jews to Jews: Peter addresses the crowds on Pentecost as "Men of Israel" (Acts 2:22; see also Acts 3:12); Paul uses the same phrase at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16). What is striking is that this identical term of address is on the Pharisee Gamaliel's lips before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:35). While insisting that they "must obey God rather than men," Peter also points out that the hanged Jesus was exalted precisely "to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:29-31). God's people is still the nation Israel, ho laos (Acts 10:41), even though the risen Christ did appear only "to witnesses God had chosen in advance."

The main missionary thrust to the Hellenistic world, according to Luke's kerygmatic selection of materials, took place from Antioch through Greek-speaking Christians scattered from Jerusalem. To be sure, Gentile

²⁶Floyd V. Filson, "The Separation of Christianity from Judaism," Anglican Theological Review, XXI (1939), 180.

Christianity arose through the spontaneous, sustained witness of scattered Christians who went through the country preaching the word after Stephen's murder (Acts 8:4). It arose without a program of mission expansion affirmed by convention resolutions. Alexandria and Rome already by 55 A.D. had flourishing churches that had been established by non-Antioch missionaries as a continuing result of the Pentecost fallout of the Spirit on the Hellenistic visitors who heard the apostolic preaching of the cross and resurrection (Acts 2:10). Luke refers to Antioch alone because it was the mother church of Gentile Christianity (Acts 11:26), because it was at Antioch that the special problems of law-free Gentile Christianity arose and were settled, and because Antioch was the first base of support for Paul, Christ's apostle to the non-Jewish Hellenistic world.²⁷

On one level, even before the affair involving Stephen, the bilingual problem of Palestinian Jews and Hellenistic Jews must have caused a deepening division within the Jerusalem church itself. Filson describes the problem:²⁸

This does not mean that the church was split into two parts, but since not all Christians spoke both languages, a barrier to full fellowship was established.

Social life, gathering for worship in homes, and choice of synagogues for participation in Jewish worship would be determined by this factor. Moreover, the use of Greek involved a different version of the Scriptures and a different relationship to the life of the Gentile world. Unconsciously the two groups would slowly drift apart

On a more profound level, though, the law-free teaching and preaching of the Greek-speaking Christians in Jerusalem aroused the concerted opposition of the Sadducean nobility and the Pharisees. Stephen, the outstanding

²⁷Goppelt, pp. 110-11 and 115.

²⁸Filson, "The Separation of Christianity from Judaism," XXI, 182-84.

spokesman of the Greek-speaking wing, was subpoenaed before the Sanhedrin. This charge was brought against him: "This man is for ever saying that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and alter the customs handed down to us by Moses" (Acts 6:13-14). Thus, for Stephen the future coming of the risen Jesus will make irrelevant and unnecessary the whole system of temple and Torah, of sacrificial rite and legal observance. Stephen's defense (Acts 7) made plain

that neither the Temple nor membership in the cultic community [all italics in text] would save them from the wrath due to break upon them when Jesus appeared. It was not liberal tendencies of Hellenistic Judaism which stood behind his declaration, but rather Jesus' own preaching of repentance. Nor was it the spirit of Hellenistic enlightenment, but the Spirit of Jesus which took the lead in breaking through the boundaries of Judaism, while Judaism retreated within itself. Judaism rejected Stephen's preaching as an attack on the foundations of its existence.²⁹

If the church's Gospel could lead Stephen to such blasphemy, and if such preaching of Jesus' cross, resurrection and return could so radically call into question the very foundations of Judaism's legal and cultic existence, then it had to be eliminated from Judaism just as Jesus was. A storm of persecution broke on the Jerusalem church for a while (Acts 8:1), but gradually subsided so that "the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was left in peace to build up its strength" (Acts 9:31).

Within the Jerusalem church, the law-free preaching and teaching of the Greek-speaking wing produced resentment and an accommodation to Torah-observation by the Law-observing wing in order to keep working and living within the Jewish community as a minority party. Filson holds that some of the friction and resentment is reflected in Acts 6, where the complaint about administration of relief is only a surface symptom of something much

²⁹Goppelt, pp. 106-7.

deeper.³⁰ When the "two-hundred per cent" Jews of Greek-speaking origin precipitated the arrest and murder of Stephen (Acts 6:9-12), there were two effects. First, the Aramaic-speaking Christians over-reacted in their scrupulous observance of the Law and customs to "prove their 'one-hundred per cent.' Jewishness." What had originally been an unconscious carry-over of Jewish piety and practice now became a matter of principle (Acts 21:20).³¹ Second, the Greek-speaking Christians fled from Jerusalem (Acts 8:4) for more cosmopolitan and tolerant surroundings (Acts 11:19). The Greek-speaking wing that fled the purge had no great stake in Judaism or its distinctly separatistic practices. Rather, they issued the call to repentance and the urgent announcement of "the good news of the Lord Jesus" to Hellenistic pagans as well with outstanding success (Acts 11:20-21). The law-free attitude of the Greek-speaking Christians and their consorting with pagan converts would not endear them to the Torah-observing synagogues at Antioch. Thus the Antioch Christians swung in their own orbit. With no great emphasis on distinctive Jewish practice, with their emphasis on the crucified and risen Lord, with separate meetings and leaders, they naturally developed their own style and appeared to others as a separate group. "It was in Antioch that the disciples first got the name of Christians" (Acts 11:26).

Ekklēsia in the Septuagint

Basic to an understanding of "the church in your house," its form and function and shape and strategy, is the meaning of the words ekklēsia and oikos in the light of their Septuagint background.

³⁰Filson, "The Separation of Christianity from Judaism," XXI, 182-83.

³¹Goppelt, p. 108.

K. L. Schmidt in his article on ekklēsia in Kittel indicates that it is doubtful that ekklēsia ever meant a religious society to the ordinary Greek on the street; possibly the word might indicate the business meetings of a guild or club.³² But none of the common words, (for example, thiasos, eranos, koinon, synodos, syllogos), which were used with remarkable frequency to signal the guilds or brotherhoods of the ancient world are applied to the church in the New Testament. Even the name "Christian" appears rarely in the New Testament (only Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16), and then only on the lips of quizzical, inquiring pagans). The apostolic writers avoid the term as narrowly sectarian; for Christians are, by definition, "partisans of Christ . . . supporters of one particular movement among many."³³ Schmidt contends that the use of ekklēsia arose among Greek-speaking Jewish Christians and their pagan converts who formed congregations resembling the Hellenistic synagogues before Paul's time. Using the resources of the Septuagint, Hellenistic Christians avoided the localized content of synagogē in common usage and chose the distinctive ekklēsia instead.³⁴

The Septuagint uses the word ekklēsia about one hundred times; eighty-one in the canonical Scriptures and twenty-three in the Apocrypha, and occasionally in the attempts made by Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion to bring the Greek Old Testament in line with the Hebrew. The Hebrew equivalent is always qahal or qahal root-words. It almost always means "a

³²K. L. Schmidt, "The Church," Bible Key Words from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, translated and edited by J. R. Coates (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), pp. 24-25.

³³Ibid., pp. 28-29.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 30-31.

specific assembly of the people where they gathered for a definite purpose and dispersed again when the business at hand was completed."³⁵ The nature of those who come and stay together depends entirely upon those who compose the ekklēsia. We hear of an ekklēsia of the prophets (1 Sam. 19:20), an ekklēsia of the holy (Ps. 88:5) and pious (Ps. 149:1). Judas Maccabeus gathered an ekklēsia of the loyal (1 Macc. 3:13). In Psalm 25 we hear of both an ekklēsia of the wicked (Ps. 25:5), which the Psalmist abhors, and of ekklēsias gathered in praise and worship (Ps. 25:12). We are even told that the godly avoided "the slander of the state and the ekklēsia of the mob" (Sirach 26:5). So the ekklēsia is something that is brought together or comes together; it is called to convene and assembles for a wide variety of purposes.

Thus in the Septuagint ekklēsia has "no ecclesiastical significance."³⁶
 "The word in Greek is not stamped with a religious impression."³⁷

In opposition to this view, O. Linton saw in the usage of the Septuagint a "theocratic element," which comes through when gahal or edah are used of Israel as the people of God assembled for worship or summoned for holy war. In Linton's analysis the slaves freed from Egypt and assembled as the people of God at Mount Horeb are then and there constituted as ekklēsia; that is the day of the ekklēsia (Deut. 9:10 and 18:16).

Diese Volksversammlung ist sozusagen die konstituierende Versammlung des Gottesvolkes. Da das Volk damals die fuer alle Zeiten gueltige

³⁵Edward Schweizer, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament Teaching Regarding the Church," Theology Today, XIII (1957), 471.

³⁶Schmidt, p. 51.

³⁷Schweizer, XIII, 471.

Kundgebung Gottes empfaengt, sind auch alle Israeliten mit einbegriffen, auch die Frauen u. die Kinder, ja, auch die kommenden Generationen.³⁸

To be sure, during the frontier days, during the conquest and taming of the land of promise, the confederated tribes gathered as the ekklēsia only on exceptional, festive occasions. For Linton the controlling thought, the basic motif behind the use of ekklēsia in Joshua and Judges and in the collection of the Chronicler, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, is this: the ekklēsia at Mount Sinai is constituted by the summons and purposes of God.

This construct of Linton's is disputed by J. Y. Campbell.³⁹ He notes that the full phrase qahal Yahweh is used only seven times. The two clearest citations are in Numbers and are translated synagogē by the Septuagint. In Num. 16:3 Moses and Aaron are faced down by Korah and his co-conspirators, two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation (edhah), with the charge of exalting themselves "above the assembly of the Lord" (qahal Yahweh). In Num. 20:4 the complaints against Moses and Aaron are not raised by a relatively small group of dissidents, but the entire qahal Yahweh is dissatisfied with lack of water and short rations: "Why have you brought the qahal Yahweh into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle?" Another significant use of qahal Yahweh occurs in the Chronicler's history (1 Chron. 28:8). Though the Chronicler uses the word qahal by itself more

³⁸O. Linton, "Ekklesia I (bedeutungsgeschichtlich)," Real-lexikon fuer Antike und Christentum begrundet von Franz Joseph Dolger, Theodor Klauser, Helmut Kruse, Hans Lietzmann, Jan Hendrik Waszink, herausgegeben von Theodor Klauser (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1959), IV, 908, see also 907-9.

³⁹J. Y. Campbell, "The Origin and Meaning of the Christian Use of the Word ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ," Journal of Theological Studies, XII (1948), 134-37.

frequently than any other Old Testament writer, only in this place does he use the phrase gahal Yahweh. David summons all of the political authorities, military brass and other dignitaries to a meeting to lay before them his plans for the temple's construction. Toward the conclusion of his address, David calls on the assembly to rededicate itself totally to Yahweh, and to do so kata prosōpon pasēs ekklḗsias kyriou. The Massoretic text at this point would seem to demand an understanding that the totality of the people of Israel and not only the chief political representatives at the meeting are the gahal Yahweh. The Septuagint's translation refers to the whole assembly of the Lord, but not every assembly; thus the gahal Yahweh is restricted to the meeting of the political leaders and not the totality of Israel. The remaining four passages all refer to people who are taboo in the religious assembly, and are excluded from the worshiping community (Deut. 23:1-8; 2 Esdras 23:1 [Neh. 13:1], Lam. 1:10, and the obscure Micah 2:5). Campbell expresses surprise that "the gathering of the people at Horeb is never called the assembly of Jhv̄h, though it had a better claim than any other to that title." Campbell concludes that the passages in question provide "no adequate basis" for asserting that gahal Yahweh is the "usual term for Israel as the people of God," nor for supposing that "a Christian reader of the LXX would be led to think that Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ . . . had that meaning."

By way of summary, in the Septuagint gahal, the assembled or dispersed congregation of Israel, is ekklḗsia. To be sure, the Septuagint still uses gahal in a general, non-religious sense. In itself the designation ekklḗsia is applicable to any assembled group such as a call-up for war or invasion (Num. 22:4; Judg. 20:2; Ezek. 16:40), or the plotting of wicked (Ps. 25:5). Apparently ekklḗsia in this sense has little or no religious content. What

distinguishes the ekklēsia from other gatherings is the fact that it is the assembly of God, gahal Yahweh, ekklēsia theou. The gahal is summoned and gathered for God's purposes.

Though ekklēsia is always a translation of gahal, the reverse is not so; gahal is translated by other words. Two Hebrew words, edhah and gahal, in the Old Testament are applied rather indiscriminately to gatherings of Israel. Though far from synonymous by derivation, they are used fairly interchangeably. Hoskyns, summarizing Hort's researches, notes in connection with the gatherings of Israel that

edhah referred to "the society itself, formed by the children of Israel or their representative heads, whether assembled or not assembled", while gahal denoted "their actual meeting together". But, after the Exile gahal came to be used almost to the exclusion of edhah, and combined in itself the two shades of meaning which had formerly kept the words distinct. Meanwhile, Israel was becoming more and more conscious of being a peculiar people, a chosen race, the elect people of God. And so the gahal of Jehovah was used to signify, not an assembly of Israel upon some particular occasion, but the people of Israel of God's people distinct from everybody else, whether assembled or unassembled, the chosen of Jehovah for his service.⁴⁰

Hoskyn's contention that gahal Yahweh carries the unique load of "God's chosen people distinct from everybody else" runs aground on the statistical distribution of edhah and gahal in the Septuagint. More than eighty per cent of the total occurrences of edhah in the Old Testament are in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Joshua; over fifty per cent are in Numbers alone. Edhah is used of the people of Israel during their wilderness wanderings, whether actually assembled around the tent of meeting or not. "If therefore, any Hebrew word had acquired a quasi-technical significance and

⁴⁰Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and F. Noel Davey, The Riddle of the New Testament (3rd edition; London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 23.

come to mean by itself 'the people of God', it is much more likely that it would have been 'edah, not qahal.'"⁴¹

The statistical distribution of ekklēsia as a translation for edah and qahal in the Septuagint would not seem to support Hoskyn's conclusion either. Johnston notes that ekklēsia as a translation for qahal in its technical sense of an "assembly called for religious purposes," "the Assembly of Yahweh or Israel," is distributed as follows: In Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers ekklēsia is totally absent, while synagogē occurs sixteen times as the translation for qahal; in Deuteronomy ekklēsia occurs eight times, synagogē one; in the rest of the Old Testament fifty-eight, with but two isolated instances in Jeremiah of synagogē. Edhah by contrast, is used more frequently of Israel, the congregation of God "as an organic unity, God's people In this sense it becomes practically technical in P of the community which left Egypt and received the Torah at Sinai." Septuagint usage in this technical sense is most heavy in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, where it is translated by synagogē ninety-two times. In Deuteronomy and Genesis it does not occur, and in the remainder of the Old Testament edah is translated by synagogē twenty-three times.⁴² The Septuagint never translated edah with ekklēsia.

In Hellenistic Judaism's use of ekklēsia and synagogē, the indiscriminate use of the word without special freight parallels that of the Septuagint. "Philo's evidence corroborates that of the LXX." While Judaism knew the word ekklēsia and often preferred it to synagogē, "there is no hint of a

⁴¹Campbell, XII, 133.

⁴²Johnston, pp. 36-38. See also Campbell, XII, 133.

special use by which it was accustomed, dogmatically, to speak of the Ekklesia of Israel."⁴³

When and why did the early church choose the term ekklēsia? When this became a normative description we do not know. That it was only a couple of decades after Easter, and that it was first popularized in a Hellenistic Christian group we have already seen from Acts 11:26. Its use was already well established in the Hellenistic churches by the early fifties, as Paul's letters indicate.

Why was ekklēsia chosen? Among reasons given for the choice of the term are the following:

1. Ekklēsia was the only term in current usage that could carry the load of the Christian claim to be the one summoned and sent people of God gathered around the Messiah, the risen Christ. The congregation of God, the qahal Yahweh, the ekklēsia theou designates a redeemed community living in the end-time. The ekklēsia stands at the eschatological crossroads of God's opportunity and judgment (kairos and krisis). The title, in Bultmann's words,

had already become an eschatological term; for Judaism expected of the end of days that it would bring the gathering together of now scattered Israel and the revealing of the new hidden Congregation. By designating itself Congregation--more exactly, Congregation of God--the earliest Church declared that it itself was the fulfilment of the hopes of the apocalyptists.⁴⁴

Septuagint usage indicates that ekklēsia could be used for the local, particular gathering, and still refer to the entire people of God, the qahal Yahweh. Thus, ekklēsia could be universal while still including

⁴³Johnston, p. 39, contra Bultmann, I, 38.

⁴⁴Bultmann, I, 38. See also Johnston, p. 43.

the local gathering; in Cremer's concise phrase, the ekklēsia is the redeemed community as both the church catholic ("die Gesamtheit aller von u. zu Christo Berufenen") or the church localized ("Heilsgemeinde in lokaler Begrenzung").⁴⁵

2. For Gentile converts ekklēsia would not be subject to misunderstanding as synagogē would. Synagogē, with its distinctive and widespread content of Jewish exclusiveness in the Hellenistic world, would raise definite problems for the primitive communities which so readily and effectively proclaimed "the good news of the Lord Jesus" to the pagan world (Acts 11:20-21 and 24). Ekklēsia's inclusiveness would recommend it to Christians, whose community welcomed women and children as full members of Christ in preference to synagogē, where important positions and first rank membership was confined to men.⁴⁶ Stauffer comments:

The Church that calls itself ecclesia means to be neither Synagogue nor anti-Synagogue nor yet para-Synagogue, but the covenant community of the Messiah, seeing its roots back beyond the age of the formation of the Synagogue in the very beginnings of Israel.⁴⁷

Just as twentieth-century Christians would not call their gatherings "lodges," so the primitive church avoided the use of synagogē. With a choice between two Septuagint words, the primitive church selected ekklēsia in preference to synagogē, pars pro toto, leaving synagogē to the Jews (with two exceptions: synagogē in James 2:1-2 and episynagoge in Heb. 10:25).

⁴⁵Hermann Cremer, Biblisch-Theologisches Woerterbuch der neutestamentlichen Graecitaet (Fuenfte Auflage; Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1888), p. 469.

⁴⁶Schmidt, p. 56.

⁴⁷Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology, translated by John Marsh (New York: Macmillan Co., 1956), p. 153.

3. Nor would ekklēsia be confused with other terms popularly designating social clubs, religious brotherhoods, mystery cults. Ekklēsia was not a verbal coin rubbed smooth by wide and indiscriminate use in the Greek-speaking world.⁴⁸ Its every-day meaning of a gathering for a specific purpose was neutral enough to be filled with specifically Christian content.

4. Ekklēsia had been used in the Septuagint, had scriptural common usage and was thus familiar to the vast number of Hellenistic Jews who had no Hebrew. For those Jews who were bilingual, the Septuagint equivalent might signal the etymological content of God's call and summons.⁴⁹

The Church in Your House

As the Christian mission to the Hellenistic world spread, Paul's strategy, according to Acts, was to work first among the Jews and God-fearing proselytes. Acts emphasizes that the missionary preaching of the apostle and his assistants invariably began in the synagogue services (Acts 13:14 and 44; 14:1; 17:1-4,10,17; 18:4 and 19; 19:8). Outside of Jerusalem no Jewish temple served as center of unity and life in the areas of Paul's activity; the synagogue gave Jewish worship a new focus by making Torah rather than sacrifice the center of devotion and daily study and practice. Thus the synagogue featured regular instruction and discussion of God's will for daily life.⁵⁰ The Apostle Paul seems to have adopted this pattern of Scripture study, instruction and discussion in the synagogues.

⁴⁸Schmidt, pp. 28-29; and Wolfgang Schrage, "Ekklesia und Synagoge: zum Ursprung des urchristlichen Kirchenbegriffs," Zeitschrift fuer Theologie und Kirche, LX (1963), 179, n. 5.

⁴⁹Schmidt, pp. 25, 30-31 and Hoskyns and Davey, p. 23.

⁵⁰Filson, "Temple, Synagogue and Church," V, 84.

Paul could summarize his mission to the Hellenistic world: "I delivered the message to you; I taught you, in public and in your homes" (kat' oikous, Acts 20:20).

This was not the procedure everywhere. The heathen temple precincts were avoided because of "the vast difference between them and the one God and the one Lord."⁵¹ In Athens both synagogue and marketplace are arenas for proclamation and discussion (Acts 17:17). At Ephesus Paul hired a lecture-hall, but did so only when, after three months, a break with the synagogue forced him to withdraw his converts and move elsewhere (Acts 19:8-9). Another possibility is seen at Corinth: after Paul was expelled from the synagogue for affirming that "the Messiah was Jesus," a God-fearer or half-proselyte⁵² named Titius Justus put his home (oikia) at Paul's disposal (Acts 18:7).

It is with this passage that we are introduced to the house-churches. The Greeks had no separate word for family; they used both oikia and oikos to designate the house or dwelling-place, the household or family, the wider family relationship, or clan to cite but part of the range of meaning.⁵³

⁵¹Gerhard Dalling, Worship in the New Testament, translated by Percy Scott (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 164.

⁵²Hereafter the author will use the term "half-proselyte" for the Greek sebomenoi ton theon. While the phrase is usually translated "God-fearers, worshippers of God," half-proselyte lays stress on these Hellenistic converts accepting Judaism's ethical monotheism and synagogue worship without accepting the obligation of keeping the law and the customs. (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 753). Since all who attended synagogue were presumably "God-fearers," this translation seems to be more apt to the writer.

⁵³Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, pp. 560-63, and Otto Michel, "οἶκος" in Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954), V, 122-23. Hereafter Kittel's Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament is referred to as TWNT.

Were the Pauline house-churches just family gatherings? Or were they the ekklēsia, the one people of God, gathered in the house of a family who had put their dwelling at the disposal of the fellowship?

This problem and the attendant one of the baptism of whole households is crystallized in Acts 18:7-8. In this passage Titius Justus, "who lived next door to the synagogue," welcomes Paul into his house (eis oikian). So Paul apparently used the oikia of Titius Justus as his center for preaching, since the sense of the passage dictates no abatement of the apostolic witness that "the Messiah was Jesus" (verse 5). The next development is that "Crispus, who held office in the synagogue, now became a believer in the Lord, with all his household" (syn holō tō oikō autou); "and a number of Corinthians listened and believed, and were baptized" (verse 8). Other passages also speak of the baptism-conversion or the conversion-baptism of households: the earliest witness is 1 Cor. 1:16: "Yes, I did baptize the household of Stephanas (ton Stephanā oikon)"; Peter's proclamation to Cornelius and "his relatives and close friends" (Acts 10:24) results in baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for "these persons" (Acts 10:47-48); Peter was invited by Cornelius so that he might "speak words that will bring salvation to you and all your household" (su kai pās ho oikos sou, Acts 11:14). In Acts 16:15 the half-proselyte Lydia, apparently with no husband in the background,⁵⁴ "was baptized, and her household with her" (ho oikos autēs). The jailkeeper at Philippi was urged: "Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (su kai ho oikos sou). Late

⁵⁴Kurt Aland, Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?, translated from the German by G. R. Beasley-Murray (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1963), p. 89 and Joachim Jeremias, The Origins of Infant Baptism, translated from the German by Dorothea M. Berton (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1962), p. 15.

in the night Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him and to everyone (en tē oikiā autou), and "afterwards he and his whole family were baptized" (Acts 16:31-33). All of these were half-proselytes or Gentiles, with the exception of Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and possibly Stephanus.⁵⁵ These passages demonstrate that the oikos was an important staging ground and center for the Pauline missionary preaching.

Were the house-churches just gatherings of a family? Or were they "locals" of the one ekklesiā gathering in particularity much as a large labor union would have many member units or locals? Was the house-church a narrowly limited group, an enclave, or was it a catholic group gathered in diversity in the home of a family or individual? The letters of Paul give some clues. Prisca and Aquila made their home a center for Christian communities at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19) and again at Rome (Rom. 16:3-5). Aquila and Prisca were not poor people apparently, for they found work for Paul at Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). In Romans 16 Paul sends greetings to Christians by name; one cluster is obviously a list of individuals (Rom. 16:5-10a and c). But several others are groups and knots of Christians sprinkled around Rome: "the household of Aristobulus" and "those of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord's fellowship" (Rom. 16:11); two separate clusters of five individuals and "all friends (adelphois) in their company" and "all God's people (hagiois) associated with them" (Rom. 16:14-15). The context would also indicate that "all Christ's congregations" send greetings to the local units in Rome. The clear implication from Romans 16 is that

⁵⁵Joachim Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, translated by David Cairns, with new material by the author (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1960), pp. 19-20.

"each group had its own meeting place."⁵⁶ The partisanship among the church at Corinth, with at least four groups extolling the unique charisma of their favorite leaders, might give further supportive evidence that in larger centers the one church might have several "locals," each with its own meeting place. In smaller centers there might be but one "local" and one meeting place. At Laodicea, Nympha (or was it Nymphas?) was hostess to "the ekklesia at her house" (Col. 4:15). Philemon and his family also opened their home to the ekklesia (Philemon 1-2), but it is uncertain where this house-church was located.⁵⁷

Other evidence that argues against the enclave view and for the catholic view of the local house-church is indicated by the way the Lord's Supper was observed at Corinth. A hunger-satisfying meal was served at which some gorged themselves while others went hungry. People came from dispersed homes of their own, and from several social levels for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-21).

As a result of this evidence, we conclude that the house of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16) or the house of Philemon (Philemon 2) would not be restricted to the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children, nor even to the household which might include relatives or slaves who lived in the home. But the oikos in the dual sense of family and dwelling would serve as hospitable hosts and as meeting place for the Pauline community. Otto Michel's observation concurs with this conclusion: "Primitive Christianity built its

⁵⁶Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," p. 106.

⁵⁷John Knox, Philemon Among the Letters of Paul: A New View of Its Place and Importance (Revised edition; New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959), pp. 45-55. John Knox has argued that Philemon came from Laodicea.

communities within the structures that existed, such as family units, wider relationships and "houses." The house served simultaneously as a warm, hospitable fellowship (Gemeinschaft) and as a place of meeting.⁵⁸

The catholic view gets further support when we consider some of the members of the church at Corinth. Referring to 1 Cor. 1:26-28, Lietzmann makes the point that while the majority of the members of the Corinthian church belonged to the lower class, we ought not generalize, but remember that "members of a higher class also belonged to the same churches."⁵⁹ In Corinth, Crispus the leader of the synagogue came over (Acts 18:8), leaving a position that accorded high honor and responsibility. Elbogen notes that the leader of the synagogue directed the worship service by selecting individuals to lead the prayers, read from the Torah and explain or preach. Also, his was the task of preserving discipline and external order during worship (Luke 13:14). Not in all places, but often, he would supervise care of synagogue property and serve as public relations man to the community and state.⁶⁰ Both Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14 and Rom. 16:23) and Titius Justus (Acts 18:7) seem to be eminent, substantial men and there can be no doubt about the prominence of Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23). The implication to be drawn is that within the community at Corinth there were at least four individuals of means and status who could sponsor house-churches in their homes.

⁵⁸TWNT, V, 132-33.

⁵⁹Lietzmann, I, 175.

⁶⁰Elbogen, p. 483.

Baptism of Houses

Additional support for catholicity in diversity among the primitive house-churches is the evidence that comes as a by-product and secondary result of the Jeremias-Aland controversy over infant baptism. What has been gained is a clearer understanding of the house-church.

In 1929 Hans Windisch, in his religionsgeschichtliche approach "Zum Problem der Kindertaufe," found no biblical support for the practice of infant baptism before the second century of our era.⁶¹ However, Ethelbert Stauffer in Deutsches Pfarrerblatt, XII (1949), investigated the Old Testament citations of oikos in order to shed light on New Testament passages that speak of baptizing "a whole household." Stauffer came to the conclusion that from early times there was a constant Oikosformel which "not only referred to the children in addition to the adults but had quite special reference to the children, and not least to any small children who might be present."⁶² Existence of such an oikos-formula or oikos-phrase has been the key to Jeremias' conclusion that in the missionary situation of the primitive church "the children . . . hidden in the bosom of the family" were baptized along with their parents.⁶³ This thesis, based on the concept of oikos, was strongly challenged by Kurt Aland's Did The Early Church Baptize Infants?⁶⁴ and just as strongly defended in Jeremias'

⁶¹Hans Windisch, "Zum Problem der Kindertaufe," Zeitschrift fuer neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, XXVIII (1929), 119-42.

⁶²Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, p. 20.

⁶³Ibid., p. 19, supported on pp. 19-29, 43-55.

⁶⁴Aland, pp. 87-94.

rebuttal, The Origins of Infant Baptism.⁶⁵ It is outside of the scope of this paper to sift and weigh the biblical,⁶⁶ patristic, historical and archeological evidence presented and disputed in this Gespraech.

However, these general comments can be made:

1. The impasse has come about because of a difference in methodology. Stauffer thought he had isolated twenty-five Septuagint passages which had a stylized meaning that included especially small children even though not specifically named. Stauffer's Oikos-formel was reduced to twelve passages by Jeremias' form-critical scrutiny. Aland discounts the Oikos-formel on the basis of concordance study and a statistical weighing of lexical occurrences; he then attacks the nine (or twelve by Jeremias' reckoning) remaining passages as having nothing to say about infants of converts being baptized with their parents.

2. There is a positive yield for the purposes of this study. Stauffer, Jeremias and Aland all agree that oikos in the New Testament customarily has a wider denotation than a man's immediate family (in other words, husband, wife and children, which forms our normative family unit today), even if they disagree on what this means for the origins of infant baptism. Peter Weigandt analyzes the Septuagint rootage of oikos in his review of Stauffer and Jeremias' claim to have isolated an oikos-phrase in the Old Testament.⁶⁷ Weigandt also notes the preponderant material, oikos/oikia as the Septuagint

⁶⁵Jeremias, Origins of Infant Baptism, pp. 12-32.

⁶⁶The biblical material alone is massive: bayit in Lisowsky encompasses seven definitions spread over sixteen pages and forty-four columns; in Hatch and Redpath oikos is the Septuagint equivalent for twenty-one Hebrew vocables with listings on ten pages and nineteen columns.

⁶⁷Peter Weigandt, "Zur sogenannten Oikosformel," Novum Testamentum, VI (1963), 49-74.

equivalent of bayth used 1,862 times not including the Apocrypha. He discovers a wide range of at least six different meanings for oikos in the twenty-five passages Stauffer isolated as Oikosformeln: the totality of Israel, clan, population of a city, the wider family relationship, the normative, nuclear family, and the male members of a family.⁶⁸ Weigandt concludes that in the Septuagint oikos is a very fluid term which is understood only in the light of the immediate context, and that family in the narrow sense was generally the head of the house, wives, aged, grown children and occasionally household slaves.⁶⁹

Jeremias' rebuttal of Aland's arguments is in the main a buttressing of the biblical use of oikos. Bayth/family is used in the Old Testament "almost always as part of a stereotyped formula": he and his (whole) house, (with 36 occurrences) which "denotes the complete family and in many cases the inclusiveness is emphasized by the addition of kol." Or he and the (whole) house of his father (with 25 occurrences), which signals the larger family; "the large family of Jacob numbered seventy persons" (Gen. 46:27). The Septuagint also "had a lively sense of the meaning of the 'complete family'" is what the biblical evidence means for Jeremias: "The phrase 'he and his (whole) house' denotes the complete family; normally husband, wife and children."⁷⁰

At the very least, our understanding of "the church in your house" is aided by the knowledge that in the Septuagint oikos was used very widely for larger groupings, that the tightly-knit nuclear family of the twentieth

⁶⁸Ibid., VI, 50-61.

⁶⁹Ibid., VI, 62-63.

⁷⁰Jeremias, The Origins of Infant Baptism, pp. 19-24.

century was not the pattern in Bible times, and that the oikos had a good probability of including the aged, grown children and, on occasion, also household slaves. We ought not jump to the conclusion that "at the conversion of the 'households' the whole domestic staff was regularly included in the conversion and the baptism." Onesimus, the runaway slave of Philemon who hosted a house-church, was brought to Christ only after his flight (Philemon 10 and 16).⁷¹

The Pauline communities, we have seen, often took the form of the house-church, a form which was decidedly different from the social clubs and somewhat different from the synagogue.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 13. This stands against Michel's over-simplification in TWNT, V, 133.

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE AND FORM OF THE PAULINE COMMUNITIES

Fundamental to an insight into the form and function, the structure, shape and mission of the primitive church is that church's own view of itself. Toward that end we will examine the letters of Paul to see the shape his view of the church took as he held it in front of the communities he founded. There is, of course, no direct access by way of the original documents to what the average "Jew in the pew" thought of the house-church in whose worship and fellowship he participated. One may make inferences, but these are at best educated guesses. Beyond the written documents we cannot go. "Ignoramus" is our confession.

The Church is God's by Virtue of His Action in Christ

The church is not a human organization, but the organism of God and of his Christ.

That something exceptional is intended by "the church" is seen in the consistent use of the definite article in the New Testament. Hoskyns has noted that "the phrase, the ekklesia, used absolutely, though consistent in the New Testament, is never once found in secular writings."¹ Meetings of

¹Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and F. Noel Davey, The Riddle of the New Testament (3rd edition; London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 21. See also K. L. Schmidt, "The Church," Bible Key Words from Gerhard Kittel's Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, translated and edited by J. R. Coates (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), pp. 9-10 where he argues that "The omission of the definite article is frequent, but makes no difference . . ." Contra Hoskyns and Schmidt, see J. Y. Campbell, "The Origin and Meaning of the Christian Use of the Word ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ," Journal of Theological Studies, XII (1948), 137-38. Campbell appears to have been misled by mere statistical weight and fails to see that the advance in Ecclesiasticus actually serves as a foil to the New Testament, since every reference in Ecclesiasticus appears without the definite article.

the koina or collegia could be termed ekklesiai; these club meetings often served to propagate emperor worship or the mystery cults. But the church was not the flag-waving, super-patriotic American Legion of the first century; it did not wrap itself in the flag and shout meaningless slogans about God and country; it is the church of God. The oriental cults and mysteries may have also used the structures of small groups, "exclusive . . . strictly local in character," that met on occasion in houses.² But the church at Corinth or Colossae is not a civic or social club, a Greek Kiwanis or Elks lodge but God's people in that place linked through Christ to all of God's people in every other place (1 Cor. 1:2).

The church is the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9). When Paul writes to the fragmented, schismatic church at Corinth, he reminds them that they are the church of God on the local scene in Corinth, "dedicated to him in Christ Jesus, claimed by him as his own, along with all men everywhere who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2). The two participial phrases not only bring out the uniqueness of the church over against Greek cults and fellowships, but they redefine the genitive "of God." The Corinthians are the church because they have been brought into a special relationship with God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ calls and claims the church "as his own," for the church is uniquely the locus where the uniqueness of God and his Christ is acknowledged in worship and service. Hence, the church at Corinth differs from the Jews and pagan Greeks: "give no offence to Jews, or Greeks, or to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32; cf. 1 Cor. 11:16 and 22). The church of God is not a human institution, as

²George Johnston, The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 9.

Saul found out when he tried to exterminate the church out of zeal for Torah-observance. God's gracious action in Christ was stronger than Paul's party piety: "In the end he appeared even to me . . . for I had persecuted the church (ekklesia tou theou) and am therefore inferior to all the apostles--indeed not fit to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:8-9; see also Gal. 1:13 and Phil. 3:6).

Even more startling is Paul's use of the plural, the churches of God. Under pressure, the ekklesiai of Thessalonians, those "who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:1), "has fared like the ekklesiai in Judaea, God's people in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 2:14). In fact, their response of faith and love under persecutions prompts Paul to boast about the Thessalonians among all the churches of God (2 Thess. 1:4). What is meant is far more than the sum total of isolated units of God's people. The new center of God's people is in God's Christ. In this respect Paul's conception goes beyond the Septuagint idea of the qahal Yahweh, all of the people of God either assembled or dispersed. For the Old Testament people of God was a single nation whose relationship to God was one. In the early days of the tribal confederacy the nation was a unity in diversity, composed of many tribal and racial elements. Many individuals and groups within the nation Israel went separate ways; but they were pulled together, given cohesion, united, in the covenant, the land and the temple. It was to this diverse nation as a corporate unit that the prophets made their appeals for Yahweh (see Is. 1:3, Jer. 50:17 and Hos. 4:15).

Similarly, national origin and common history, racial and cultural homogeneity are not the ties that bind the Pauline communities to the whole church of God. God has called them into existence. Jesus Christ

is the center of gravity; the church is the direct result of God's activity and choice:

My brothers, think what sort of people you are, whom God has called. Few of you are men of wisdom, by any human standard; few are powerful or highly born. Yet, to shame the wise, God has chosen what the world counts weakness. He has chosen things low and contemptible, mere nothings, to overthrow the existing order. And so there is no place for human pride in the presence of God. You are in Christ Jesus by God's act, for God has made him our wisdom; he is our righteousness; in him we are consecrated and set free. And so (in the words of Scripture), "If a man is proud, let him be proud of the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

This classic statement Paul sends to a church riddled with splits and sectarian partisanship. Paul reaffirms God's covenant--action in Christ also for a church at peace in the midst of outer conflict and persecution:

"We are certain, brothers beloved by God, that he has chosen you . . ."
(1 Thess. 1:4).

Paul often refers to "the churches" (Rom. 16:4; 1 Cor. 7:17; 11:17; 14:33-34; 16:1,19; 2 Cor. 8:1,18-19,23; 11:8,28; 12:13; Gal. 1:2,22). "The use of the plural might be taken as showing that congregations stand side by side on an equal footing. . . ." notes Schmidt.³ Paul can refer to "other churches" (2 Cor. 11:8) and to "the rest of the churches" (2 Cor. 12:13), or "no church" (Phil. 4:15) in thanking "God's people incorporate in Christ Jesus, who live at Philippi" (Phil. 1:1) for their support. It is not simply a case of "juxtaposition," but "incorporation" and "corporate unity" which is expressed by "the whole church" (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 14:23), "all the churches" (Rom. 16:4,16; 1 Cor. 7:17; 14:33; 2 Cor. 8:18; 11:28), or "everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17).⁴

³Schmidt, p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 9.

Nor does size of the church make any difference. Size may have been important to Israel as a nation, but what is determinative for the new gahal Yahweh is that God has gathered his own via the missionary proclamation of the crucified, risen and exalted Lord. The churches may be small groups meeting in separate houses (Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2), or all the Christians of a great metropolis, or clusters of Christians scattered throughout a province (Rom. 16:19). The important matter is the call of God's action in Christ. Hoskyns has summed it up well:

Thus the name "ekklesia" can be given indiscriminately to the whole body of Christians, to local bodies of Christians, and even to smaller bodies of Christians within the local bodies. The corporate sense of ekklesia has not been lost in the emphasizing of the idea of calling. The word has been transformed to denote a body of men and women in which the unity of every part corresponds to, repeats, represents, and in fact is the unity of the whole. . . . The part is equal to the whole, because each part possesses not a fragment of the Christ, but the whole Christ. . . .⁵

Hence, the church, like the Old Testament gahal Yahweh, belongs solely to God; the church is God's only through the action of God's choice and grace in Christ. Most clearly is this hammered home in the first three chapters of First Corinthians, as Paul counters the schismatic competitiveness in the Corinthian house-churches. Division into cliques denigrates God's choice and makes human dynamics and not God's sovereign grace the generating source of the community; for "there was at the time a tendency to exalt religious teachers or prophets, as men with occult gifts, as having deity in them . . ."⁶

⁵Hoskyns and Davey, p. 25.

⁶Arthur Darby Nock, Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 88.

God initiates things; he calls and summons (1 Cor. 1:9). God saves men by the foolishness of a proclamation whose content is the cross (1 Cor. 1:25-30 and 2:10). Only God's Spirit unlocks God's secret purpose; only the Spirit brings to faith in the crucified Christ. Where the Spirit works, God's power is at work (1 Cor. 2:9-16). The church is God's field. Therefore, apostles plant, other missionaries water, but God makes all this human activity yield a harvest (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Or the church is God's dwelling, God's temple (oikodome)? Well, God's Christ is the only foundation (1 Cor. 3:9 and 11).

The Church is Christ's

With what event did the church begin? Paul's Hellenistic communities had never had personal contact with the earthly Jesus. Paul's letters to these communities contain few echoes of the historical Jesus' words and works.⁷ R. Newton Flew in Jesus and His Church holds that Jesus intended the church, that the church began with the call of the disciples and was crystalized with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi.⁸ Flew's argument may hold true for the Gospels, but for Paul the earthly ministry of Jesus recedes into the background, at least so far as the internal evidence of Paul's letters indicates. Jesus is born under the Law as a Jew (Gal. 4:4) of Davidic descent (Rom. 1:3); he was betrayed on the night before his death (1 Cor. 11:23; Paul shows interest in very little more than this.

⁷Rudolph Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 188, and Hans Joachim Schoeps, Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History, translated by Harold Knight (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 55-58.

⁸R. Newton Flew, Jesus and His Church: A Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament (2nd edition; London: Epworth Press, 1943).

The sparsity of Paul's interest in the historical Jesus comes about because he proclaims the crucified, risen and exalted Lord. The Galatians had Christ graphically portrayed as crucified before their very eyes in Paul's missionary proclamation (Gal. 3:1). In Corinth Paul abandoned the fine words of oratory or the wisdom of philosophy for the "attested truth of God" (1 Cor. 2:1). Neither deception nor self-adulation mark Paul's kerygma (2 Cor. 4:1-2): "It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord . . ." (2 Cor. 4:5). The crucified but risen Christ apprehended Paul and in a personal theophany called Paul as apostle. Because of Christ's sovereign grace and gracious call to apostleship, Paul is not at liberty to free-lance. In his mission to Corinth Paul concentrates on "nothing but Jesus Christ—Christ nailed to the cross" (1 Cor. 2:2). The Christ whose history the church remembers in trust, adoration, service and proclamation is the Christ that died for our sins, was buried and was raised to life on the third day kata tas graphas—as the Old Testament Scriptures indicate of the Messiah (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Thus "Christian faith did not exist until there was a Christian kerygma" specifically designating Jesus Christ the crucified and risen one "to be God's eschatological act of salvation."⁹

The church is the community of the crucifixion, resurrection and active rule of the Christ by his Spirit. Christ's death and resurrection are the community's sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7), and serve as continuing source and reference point in the community's life (1 Cor. 5:6-8). Christ's covenant-sacrifice as the community's new Exodus is the basis of the Lord's Supper test (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The cross of Christ is the community's

⁹Bultmann, I, 3.

cultic center, the means of expiating sin (Rom. 3:25); the cross as hilasterion is the continuing generating source in contrast with the sin-offering that was effective on the Day of Atonement (Ex. 25:17-22). The blood of Christ (Rom. 3:25 and 5:9; Col. 1:20) gives full payment and forgiveness (Rom. 3:25-26), release and deliverance (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30 and Col. 1:14 where apolytrōsis is employed).¹⁰ Paul's preaching of the cross and resurrection results in the ekklēsia. The cross and resurrection are God's explosive summons, and the Spirit's fallout at Pentecost continues. Paul reminds the Corinthians of the effect of the cross and resurrection in calling them into community: "Such were some of you": thieves, grabbers, drunkards, swindlers, those who abused themselves and others in adulterous relations or homosexual perversions. "But you have been through the purifying waters; you have been dedicated to God and justified through the name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Most scholars agree that the church is the community of the crucified, risen and exalted Christ. George Johnston in The Doctrine of The Church in the New Testament stresses that the church is the community of the resurrection, and that no Christian society such as the circle of disciples was fully constituted as ekklēsia before Easter and Pentecost.¹¹ A similar view is held by Schnackenburg,¹² who sees the church as a

¹⁰Ibid., I, 85.

¹¹Johnston, pp. 51-57 (as extended comment on Flew's five arguments; see also George Johnston, "The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament," Peake's Commentary on the Bible (London and New York: Thomas Nelson, 1962), pp. 719, 721.

¹²Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Church in the New Testament, translated by W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), pp. 9-15 and 22-34.

"post-paschal community" connected to the one original cell in Jerusalem through the apostles. Hugh Anderson cites Theo Priess' Life in Christ approvingly to demonstrate the futility of trying to establish any exact calendar date or specific event as the birthday of the church. The church only appears clearly out of the "culmination of Jesus' ministry in the resurrection," but the resurrection is to be viewed "not as a calendar date but as the regulative factor governing the Church's emergence in history."¹³ Thus, the church comes about as the result of man's response of faith to God's self-disclosure in the one kerygma of Jesus' message and mission as the Christ: ministry, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and exaltation.

Life "in Christ" by the Spirit

Just as theology ultimately is soteriology for Paul, so Paul's soteriology is the matrix of his ecclesiology. Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation make redemption possible, and similarly Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation make his redeemed-redeeming church possible. On the other hand, those who are members of Christ also identify fully with Christ. As the first of many brethren, Christ in his life and death is to be followed, imitated, shared (1 Cor. 11:1).

Just as the Christ who "is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) is God's agent at one with all humanity in full identification with rebellious sinners, so not only Paul but also the Pauline communities live a common life "in Christ." To the Philippians Paul explains why he

¹³Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins, A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 106.

"wrote off" his pedigree, his external assets; he gladly renounces them all to gain Christ and find himself "incorporate in him." "All I care for," Paul summarizes, "is to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, and to share his sufferings, in growing conformity with his death, if only I may finally arrive at the resurrection from the death" (Phil. 3:5-11). The formula that Paul uses frequently to describe the Christian man or the Christian community is that of being "in Christ."

Deissmann saw "the Christ-intimacy of the Apostle Paul" on the most personal and intimate level: "Christ in him, he in Christ." This relationship, he insisted, "must be conceived as the peculiarly Pauline expression of the most intimate possible fellowship of the Christian with the living spiritual Christ."¹⁴ Johannes Weiss very rightly criticized Deissmann for discovering a new key and then forcing that key to fit all doors. To be sure, Weiss insisted, "in Christ" does "denote a profound personal identification with Christ which is the basis of salvation and new life" The formula often expresses vivid personal emotion.

But in addition

Behind the formula lies the idea of corporate personality that occupies a large place in the thinking of the Bible. Christ is the inclusive representative of mankind, and by faith we are incorporated into him and so become members of his Body the Church.¹⁵

Far from being a mystically local idea of dwelling in the exalted Christ,

¹⁴Adolph Deissmann, Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History, translated by William E. Wilson (Harper Torchbook based on 2nd edition, 1927, revised and enlarged; New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 140.

¹⁵Johannes Weiss, The History of Primitive Christianity, II, completed after the author's death by Rudolph Knopf, translated by four friends and edited by Fredrick C. Grant (New York: Wilson-Erickson, Inc., 1937), p. 57.

the "in Christ" passages view the crucified, risen and exalted Lord as "a universal personality." The "in Christ" passages take on a universal, eschatological content; they have a view to the church rather than to any private mystical fellowship, which was characteristic of the current Hellenistic speculations that circulated in Paul's time. Similar formulas have no precedent in the Septuagint, nor are they found prior to Paul; perhaps he is their author. But they find their root in the eschatological sacrament of Baptism, for "by baptism believers are removed from the sphere of the first Adam, that of sin and death, into the sphere of the second Adam, that of righteousness of life."¹⁶

"In Christ" passages stress personal identification with Christ as the basis for salvation and new life; they are christological confessions that affirm tremendous things about Christ and so not just focus on oneself. "In Christ" is not a commonplace, not something one says about any other human being. James Stewart has underscored the formula's startling, striking significance:

It is worth reminding ourselves that no such words have ever been used, or indeed could ever be used, of any of the sons of men: we do not speak of being in St. Francis, or in John Wesley. The fact is that when we speak of being "in Christ" we are consciously or unconsciously making a confession of faith; we are framing a Christology; if we are saying something about ourselves, we are saying something far more tremendous about Jesus.¹⁷

¹⁶Albrecht Oepke, "Év," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, herausgegeben von Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1935), II, 537-38. Hereafter Kittel's Woerterbuch is referred to as TWNT.

¹⁷James S. Stewart, A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n.d.), p. 154.

The "in Christ" formula underscores that "the Church is something that happens"¹⁸ by the Spirit, as the result of the Father's action in Christ. "In Christ" is the church's experience. The label "Christian," denoting a sectarian or partisan interest in Christ, is found only in the mouths of those outside the fellowship in Christ. Paul never speaks of Christians, but of those in Christ (Rom. 16:7-13, where it occurs eight times of Paul's comrades who toil in the Lord's service, whether gifted specialists or simple lay folk; see also Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:1 and 4:7). The church happens when Christ becomes the sun at the center of the redeemed man's new life, his new point of orientation, the new atmosphere in which he lives, worships and serves. The new life orbiting within Christ is emphasized by the New English Bible translation: "when anyone is united to Christ (en Christō), there is a new world" (2 Cor. 5:17). Personal identification with Christ comes about as the result of God's reconciling action. Rom. 5:6-11 summarizes the reconciliation which pulls people into the orbit of Christ:

For at the very time when we were still powerless, then Christ died for the wicked. Even for a just man one of us would hardly die, though perhaps for a good man one might actually brave death; but Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and this is God's own proof of his love towards us. And so, since we have now been justified by Christ's sacrificial death, we shall all the more certainly be saved through him from final retribution. For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. But that is not all: we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus, through whom we have now been granted reconciliation.

To be sure, "in Christ" designates a very close personal relation,¹⁹ but Paul is not interested in the individualist brand of mysticism that

¹⁸Edward Schweizer, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament Teaching Regarding the Church," Theology Today, XIII (1957), 742.

¹⁹Walter Bauer, Wm. F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English

marked the Hellenistic cults. For Paul the phrase "in Christ" is primarily used to define the community.²⁰ For example, Paul remained unknown by sight to the churches of Judea "in Christ" (Gal. 1:22). Though Paul never visited the Lycus Valley, he could address a letter "to God's people at Colossae, brothers in the faith, incorporate in Christ" (Col. 1:2). He reminds the Corinthians, "You are in Christ Jesus by God's act" (1 Cor. 1:30); which act unfolds through the apostolic proclamation with communal significance: "For in Christ Jesus you are my offspring, and mine alone, through the preaching of the Gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). Paul's urgent and persistent bolstering and teaching is aimed not just at individuals, but at a communal goal of presenting "each one of you as a mature member of Christ's body" in Christ (Col. 1:28). Most pointed is Rom. 12:4-5:

For just as in a single human body there are many limbs and organs, all with different functions, so all of us, united with Christ [en Christo], form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another.

It is not that Paul is not interested in a vivid faith relationship to Christ. Christ's reconciliation and eschatological salvation is to become real and actual, but real and actual within the church's fellowship, as members of house-churches belong to Christ by the Spirit's creative act.²¹ To be in Christ for Paul is not a mystical, introspective experience which isolates personal experiences. Paul himself had such mystic experiences. As a man in Christ, he "was caught up as far as the third heaven," saw the beatific vision, heard divine secrets; yet even though it was a real, precisely dateable experience (fourteen years before writing

Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 259.

²⁰Flew, pp. 152-54.

²¹Otto Michel, "οἶκος," TWNT (1942), IV, 567-68.

his fourth letter to the Corinthians), Paul does not consider it normative either for himself or for the community "in Christ" (2 Cor. 12:1-6). What is normative is the community's experience of Christ's reconciliation: That the community in Christ is "graced" (1 Cor. 1:4), dedicated to God (1 Cor. 1:2), and has an exhilarating awareness of freedom (Gal. 2:4); that "all are justified by God's free grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24); that even Jewish members of the community are justified in Christ (Gal. 2:17), since life en nomo (Rom. 2:12 and 3:19), just as life under the law (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 4:4-7, 21-22 and 5:18) leads nowhere. By contrast life in Christ leads to the blessing of Abraham being extended to Jews and pagans alike (Gal. 3:14), for all God's promises receive their Yes in Christ (2 Cor. 1:19-21). Through faith, all can be sons of God in union with Christ (Gal. 3:26). To be in Christ, then is not a private experience or individual possession. To be in Christ characterizes and constitutes the fellowship of the church.

It is equally important to note what does not validate the church's existence for Paul. Law, regulation and rule do not constitute the church, for "Christ ends the law and brings righteousness for everyone who has faith" (Rom. 10:4). The church is constituted by the experience that "there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ Jesus, because in Christ Jesus the lifegiving law of the Spirit has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2). Roland Allen has noted that the crisis of authority in the church at Corinth decisively demonstrated that law, rule and casuistry were not Paul's methods:

If at conversion they had been admitted to a church and initiated into a religion, of which the most marked requirement was observance of law as laid down by authority, they would have understood that they could not be Christians unless they submitted to authority. Submission and obedience would have been the chief duty inculcated.

Observance of the rules would have been the first duty of every convert. If St. Paul had from the beginning insisted upon this aspect of the church that it is a society governed by rules which every one who enters it must keep, the Corinthians and all his converts would never have thought of it any other way. But that would have been precisely what St. Paul did not believe, and therefore, could not teach.²²

If Christ is life for the believer (Phil. 3:21 and Gal. 2:20), then Christ is life at its source, at its end and along the entire continuum for the community of the faithful in Christ. If the church does not live by law and regulation, but by Christ, then it lives with ease and joy in this world. Christians could be at home in a threatening, hostile universe, with their bodies and minds neither subject to nor tortured by evil spirits, astral forces and cosmic powers. This is the position of Paul as he establishes and perfects the community at Colossae in God's wisdom and insight (Col. 1:9-12). Paul counteracts the heretical teaching of false teachers in the Lycus Valley. The heresy was an eclectic smorgasbord, a combination of incipient Gnosticism, catch-words and secret rites of the current mystery cults, smattered with secret wisdom of a syncretistic variety, mixed with ascetic rigorism and speculation about angels from Jewish sources and a placation of divine spirits that promoted anxious self-absorption rather than joy in Christ and eager service.²³ Over against the heretics who teach fasting and ascetic abstinence from sexual intercourse as the way to get ready for initiations and as a means of subduing the power of the flesh over

²²Roland Allen, Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 115.

²³Paul Feine, Johannes Behm and Werner Georg Kueffel, Introduction to the New Testament, translated by A. J. Mattill, Jr. (14th revised edition; Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 239-40.

the spirit²⁴ (Col. 2:18), Paul holds out the life lived fully in Christ. "Therefore, since Jesus was delivered to you as Christ and Lord, live your lives in union with him. Be rooted in him; be built in him, be consolidated in the faith you were taught . . ." (Col. 2:6-7). The spread of astral religion through the Hellenistic world was one of the results of the "failure of nerve" that followed the collapse of the traditional anthropomorphic religions. If personal gods were not responsible for structure, order and justice, then the Hellenistic world was forced to look out into a vacant universe controlled by chance or by astral forces and cosmic mechanisms with which the fate of men is "inextricably entangled."²⁵ Paul frees the Colossians from the residue of such superstition. By baptism God "rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom our release is secured and our sins forgiven" (Col. 1:13-14). The false teachers hang on delusive speculations centering "on the elemental spirits (stoicheia) of the world and not on Christ" (Col. 2:28). In Christ the hidden, threatening side of creation is under full control: "his is the primacy over all created things." No matter what the Gnostics want to call these hostile, invisible forces, they are under control of the Christ in whom the church lives. Christ is both the agent of creation and the goal of its existence (Col. 1:15-16). The universe is not going to fly apart, for "all things are held together in him" (Col. 1:17).

As we have seen, Paul's thesis is: "What ever gnosis claims to do, Christ can actually do." Gnostic exaggerated claims and exalted titles

²⁴Wilfred L. Knox, St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (London: Cambridge University Press, 1939), p. 153.

²⁵G. H. C. Macgregor, "Principalities and Powers," New Testament Studies, I (1954-1955), 20-21.

all come true in Christ. Hugh Anderson has well stated Paul's translation of the Gospel into the thought patterns and terminology of Gnostic speculation current at Corinth and Colossae:

It seems reasonable to suggest that the language and thought-forms of the contemporary Weltanschauung served Paul as an aid to the translation of the gospel in terms relevant to the situation of Hellenistic man in the Gentile world, while at the same time he resisted any kind of modification of his absolutely Christocentric soteriology and never let the "for us" of the historic life and death of Jesus Christ become lost in the "with us" of the spiritual and exalted Christ.²⁶

Paul in Colossians writes against those who would separate God from the created order, which they see only as a plaything of the cosmic forces of evil. Such a Gnostic Weltangst is not for those who are rooted and built in Christ; the Lord who redeemed mankind from the forces of sin and death is also Lord over the unseen structures and spirits.²⁷ Within the span of one verse (Col. 1:17), Paul shows that any discontinuity that might exist between the created universe and the new universe of Christ's risen body, the church, has been bridged by baptism and the baptismal message of forgiveness.²⁸ The identical God meets man in Christ in both spheres of creation and redemption, both in the universe and in the church.

The Body of Christ

The rich full view of the church as the body of Christ again rises out of the high christology of Paul.

²⁶Anderson, p. 43.

²⁷Walter Eltester, "Schoepfungsoffenbarung u. natuerliche Theologie in Fruehen Christentum," New Testament Studies, III (1956-1957), 112-13.

²⁸Ernst Kaesemann, Essays on New Testament Themes, translated by W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 167-68.

The God who is not a tribal deity, but the universal God and creator of the cosmos has a likeness and image, Jesus Christ, his dear Son (Col. 1:14-15). Jesus is God's agent in the cosmos, opening up God's hidden wisdom (1 Cor. 1:30 and Col. 2:3). God's secret plan is Christ himself, for Christ fully entered the stream of human life to redeem all men. By Christ's death God has come all the way to span the gap, whether caused by guilt or the aeons (Col. 1:21-22). Now alive forever, the risen Christ will raise the redeemed with him (Col. 3:1-4) and shapes the community's life by union with him (Col. 2:6-7). Linked to Christ the head, the whole body develops and grows according to God's design (Col. 2:19).

This concept of the church as the sōma Christou, the body of Christ, also flows directly from Paul's christology.²⁹ It is the risen Christ who came from beyond the human confines of time and space and arrested Paul on the Damascus highway and incorporated him into the church. Paul, as far as the records indicate, did not participate in the historical events in Palestine around the year 29; Christ became present to him outside of Palestine, and beyond the historical events of the cross, resurrection and sending of the Spirit. Paul is the special messenger of the risen Christ, "an apostle, not by human appointment or commission, but by commission from Jesus Christ and from God the Father who raised him from the dead" (Gal. 1:1). It is that revelation of the risen Christ which incorporated Paul into the body of Christ and served as the basis of his apostolic proclamation (Gal. 1:11-16).

²⁹John A. T. Robinson, The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), pp. 48-49.

Eduard Schweizer has emphasized how this decisive shaping of the church by the crucified and risen Christ can take place at the intersection of the temporal concepts of Jewish thought and the spatial concepts of Hellenistic thought: the church lives "in Christ."

Paul can therefore join to the traditional Lord's Supper formula about the "communion of the body of Christ", which, as the parallel "blood of Christ" shows, includes the thought of the crucified body present in blessing, his own interpretation that the Church is the one body. . . .

But this saying about the "body of Christ" which is primarily a local conception, makes it possible for Paul to regard the Church in the first place as the one that is at present united with its now living Lord. Even so, that in no way excludes the presence of what then took place in the cross and resurrection. But to Paul it is most important that this presence is no longer to be regarded as a historical after-effect—such a view would be bound to lead to misunderstanding, as if Jesus Christ were to be understood essentially as the originator of a historical movement the effects of which are still going on.³⁰

Thus the church as the body of Christ can be understood only by virtue of its being "in Christ." As Christ's body, the church is the embodiment and corporeality of the "in-Christ" relationship to the incarnated, crucified and risen Christ. Christ is life for the believer (Phil. 3:21 and Gal. 2:20). The community of believers is closely identified with Christ. The center of the community is not the ethics of Jesus or the way of salvation that Jesus came to elucidate, as though one could adopt either without personal attachment to the bringer of this doctrine, the founder of this way of salvation. The center of the community is Christ; or better yet, Christ alive in his members is the community.

Christ alive in his members is not the freight modern man would load onto the designation of the Christian community as the body of Christ. Body

³⁰Eduard Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament, translated by Frank Clarke (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1961), pp. 91-94, quote from pp. 93-94.

is usually a term loaded with individualistic concern; it deals with deodorants or beauty aids. The word "body" can carry the connotation of a group or collection in our linguistic usage, but usually in an impersonal way: a body of water, a body of factual material. The adjective "corporate" or the verb "incorporate" bring to mind many depersonalized, institutionalized images from the world of big business. Similar use of sōma in the sense of "a body of people" or "a society" had been employed before Paul by many, primarily Stoic writers but also by Philo and Josephus, in referring to the universe or the state.³¹ T. W. Manson discovered what he felt was a partial parallel to the New Testament use of sōma in the inscription of Cyrene. Manson compared the phrase Hellenōn sōmati ("the community of the Hellenes") in the decree with the Pauline phrase sōma tou Christou, which Manson took to be the equivalent of sōma ton christianōn. Manson fuzzes the point Paul is making. To be sure, "The uniqueness of the New Testament phrase resides in the qualifying genitive";³² it is precisely the body of Christ that Paul refers to, not merely a gathered collection, group or body of Christians. The point is worth noting: there are no parallel uses of the term body as Paul employs it; for Paul somatic existence for the Christian is always related to the sōma Christou, the body of the crucified but risen Christ.³³

³¹Eduard Schweizer, "σωμα," TWNT (1965), VI, 1041-42 and 1048-54; also Wilfred L. Knox, "Parallels to the New Testament Use of σωμα," The Journal of Theological Studies, XXXIX (1938), 243-46.

³²T. W. Manson, "A Parallel to the New Testament Use of σωμα," The Journal of Theological Studies, XXXVII (1936), 385.

³³Robinson, pp. 49-50.

Sōma Christou, the body of Christ, occurs only in letters from Paul or his circle. The term appears in four letters to four different churches: 1 Corinthians, Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. Sōma-language receives its greatest impetus from Paul's controversy with his opponents in Corinth, being employed fifty-six times in the two letters to Corinth and eighteen times in the letter written from Corinth to the Roman community. Paul uses sōma only in the sense of the individual in the five citations that do occur in the letters to Thessalonica, Galatia, and Phillipi.³⁴ Paul goes to no lengths to explain the unusual content he loads into sōma Christou. Possibly sōma teaching about the church as the body of Christ became standard in Paul's later missionary preaching to the Hellenistic world, or it arose out of the needs of the church at Corinth. The communities founded by Paul at Corinth and Ephesus are apparently familiar with Paul's startling sōma teaching, and Pauline thought patterns could have reached to Colossae and Rome by way of Paul's missionary assistants or "transfers" from Pauline communities.

It is more likely that Paul's conception of the church as Christ alive in his members arose out of the needs of the Corinthian community. In 1 Corinthians Paul confronts a Gnostic piety which placed great stress on the spirit viewed as man's transformed, liberated inwardness.³⁵ Paul's Gnostic opponents discount the body and the need for self-control (1 Cor. 6:12-20) and they neglect the community and the needs of other members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 11 and 14). The Corinthian church was divided and split; schismatic groupings in Corinth may well have followed the lines of the house-churches. The house-churches were not

³⁴Schweizer, TWNT (1965), VI, 1060-61.

³⁵Ibid., VI, 1061.

only geographically scattered, but they were even further apart as "in-groups" fomented controversy, division and party spirit (1 Cor. 3:1-4).

The first time we encounter sōma language in relation to the church is in 1 Cor. 6:12-20. In opposing the lustful license of the Gnostic enthusiasts Paul argues that the body is the very sphere in which God is honored (verse 20); redemption takes on its meaning not in liberation from the body's desires through alliances with prostitutes (verses 15-17). The sōma is not for lust (verse 13). The sōma belongs to God; the Corinthians were bought at a price, and Christ's death and resurrection have converted their sōma into the Spirit's shrine (verse 19). The body belongs to the Lord by virtue of the cross and resurrection. So interconnected are Christ and the Corinthian community that the body is not only for the Lord, but this can be completely inverted: the Lord is for the body (verse 13).³⁶ Hence, Paul can ask: "Do you not know that your bodies are limbs and organs of Christ?" (verse 15). In the startling realism of this phrase Paul clearly refers to the person, Christ, not to a society or body of people.

Paul is not speaking metaphorically when he uses sōma Christou of the church. Rather, the church is Christ's body in a very real sense. In 1 Corinthians 12 and Rom. 12:5 Paul does not use socio-political analogies, but the model of the living, organismic body. Sōma conveyed to Paul and his communities something that was "not corporate but corporal."³⁷ As the continuing presence of the crucified but now risen and exalted Lord, the church acknowledges Christ's lordship in the everyday life that the members

³⁶Ibid., VI, 1062.

³⁷Robinson, p. 50.

live out in the body (Rom. 12:1-2), and in the life of Christ's body as believers live it out together in community.

The Corinthians have forgotten the dimension of Christ's body, the church. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul reminds them of the interconnection between "private" life in Christ's body, life together in the community of Christ, and Christ's crucified and risen body whose life and power still flows through both. How forcefully Paul does this can be seen in the startling turn of language in 1 Cor. 12:12: "For Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body." Just how violent the language is can be seen by the roughness of the original: "For just as the body is one though it has many members, and all of the members of the body many as they are are still one body, so also is"—not the body of Christ, the gathered congregation in the house-church, as we would expect—"so also is Christ." Baptism, Paul argues, effects incorporation into the body of Christ:³⁸ "We were all brought into one body by baptism . . ." (1 Cor. 12:13). The body is something the Corinthians were brought into; it was there before their faith or their baptism, for the risen Christ was present in the faithful in other places before the apostle came to Corinth. Nor does the Corinthian's "in-group" clubiness give the body of Christ its unity. Many diverse backgrounds are brought into the unity of Christ's body (verse 13); hence, unity does not grow out of the many members of Christ, but out of Christ whose single body with its many limbs and organs still makes up but one body (verse 12). Christ has identified himself with all his members, in all of their rich diversity. Paul's opponents want to mutilate and

³⁸Schweizer, TWNT (1965), VI, 1068.

monsterize the body of Christ by excising organs and limbs that seem non-essential (verses 14-21), or by letting lowly parts of Christ's body atrophy through neglect (verses 22-23). The body of Christ excludes inferiority complexes and notions of superiority.³⁹ Since Christ identifies with all his members, the goal Paul holds out is "that there might be no sense of division in the body" at Corinth, "but that all its organs might feel the same concern for one another" (verse 25). Paul puts down divisiveness by reminding the feuding house-churches: "Now you are Christ's body"—you gathered in this house. Whether gathered together for worship⁴⁰ or scattered through this metropolis in daily life, you are the body of Christ, and that means each and every one of you are individual members of Christ's risen body—"and each of you a limb or organ of it" (verse 27).

The body draws its life from a single source; it is the body of Christ. Here is no externally conceived relationship of Christ as governor with the church following him in ethical obedience. The church's relationship toward Christ is far more profound than that. Robinson says pointedly that Paul "is not saying anything so weak as that the Church is a society with a common life and governor, but that its unity is that of a single physical entity: disunion is dismemberment."⁴¹ Robinson overstates Paul's realism. Disunion can lead to dismemberment, but Paul is not ready to read the Gnostic enthusiasts out of the church, or lop off wayward members and organs of Christ's body. Paul does not exclude them from the eucharist; he does point out that sacraments do not work magically, ex opere operato, as the

³⁹Ibid., VI, 1067.

⁴⁰Oscar Cullmann, Early Christian Worship, translated by A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), pp. 33-34.

⁴¹Robinson, p. 51.

Old Testament people of God found out to their regret (1 Cor. 10:1-10). Rather, these events caution the cocksure: "Beware, you too can fall," (1 Cor. 10:11-13). Paul does not tell the schismatic house-churches to suspend celebration of the Lord's Supper; their sharply divided groups contemptuously ignore the one body of Christ, shame the poorer members, do more harm than good (1 Cor. 11:18-22). It is impossible to meet the risen Lord in a private eucharistic party; the Lord metes out judgment on any who eat and drink without discerning the body (1 Cor. 11:29). The remembrance of Jesus is a remembrance of his sacrifice in which God delivered him to a victim's death, a slaying that separated flesh and blood (1 Cor. 11:24 and 27).⁴² Such a remembrance is to jog the Corinthians into wholesome probing and examining of themselves (1 Cor. 11:28-30). Even in view of flagrant offenses in the area of practice, Paul does not suspend altar fellowship, nor does he lop off those members who have cut others out of the body of Christ; he proclaims the sacrifice of the cross and calls for repentant self-examination as the corrective. Rather, such thoughtful participation in the body and blood of Christ of the Lord's Supper moves the Corinthians from mere participants in Christ's body to actually being Christ's body.⁴³ "Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake" (1 Cor. 10:17). In eucharistic meal the many become one body because they participate in Christ's body. For Paul there can be no direct individualistic fellowship with Christ, but only a fellowship with Christ's

⁴²Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, translated by Arnold Ehrhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 107-8 and 144.

⁴³Kaeschmann, Essays on New Testament Themes, translated by W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 109-12.

body as a member of the community, albeit a single member of the community.⁴⁴ The eucharistic experience of the broken but living body of Christ made present within the body of believers in the breaking of the one loaf is the crucial nexus.⁴⁵ All share in one loaf at the Eucharist. The one loaf makes for one unbroken body of Christ, actualizes in the church's worship its rich diversity and deep unity in Christ (1 Cor. 10:17).

For Paul sōma Christou is a variegated concept, often with two or three levels of meaning operative at one and the same time. It can mean the body of Christ that was sacrificed on the cross (Rom. 7:4), or the body present in the bread of the eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16), or the many members of the one body (1 Cor. 10:17) gathered in worship around the word and sacrament of the crucified and risen Lord (1 Cor. 11:24,26,27). On the other hand the body of Christ sacrificed on the cross, the bread of the eucharist, and the congregational assembly are all the same body of Christ expressed in different ways and levels of time and space (1 Cor. 10:17 and 11:27-29). None of them are "like" or "similar to" the body of Christ. Each is the body of Christ, each a concrete expression of the one person, death, resurrection and living presence of Christ.

Lord and Head of the Church

The body of Christ is not just a figure or comparative analogy. United to Christ, the church is a body of believers whose common life is tied completely to Christ. Never is the church, as Christ's body, fully identified

⁴⁴Schweizer, TWNT (1965), VI, 1068.

⁴⁵Robinson, pp. 56-58.

with Christ. The Hellenistic mysteries may have many "gods" and many "lords," but the church has only one God and one Lord to whom it owes its existence (1 Cor. 8:6). He is the Kyrios. Christ is the head of the ekklōsia. In modern terms Christ by his Spirit is central control, the brain and functional nerve center.

When Paul speaks of the body of Christ this does in fact mean that there is a sphere in which the blessing of what happened on the cross continues to act, and in which he who through his resurrection was exalted to be the Lord exercises this in his lordly dominion; namely the Church. To be taken up into the body of Christ is in fact a very real event. It means: to come within the "power-field" which is determined by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. . . .⁴⁶

Those who have been purchased and won by Christ now live under the controlling power of his cross and resurrection, and their sōmata are Christ's limbs and organs responsive to Christ as his body.

To the Corinthian community comes the apostolic reminder of a supreme authority in the church. The Corinthians are clearly anticipating the resurrection from the dead, and living here and now clear out of this world as a church of divinely perfected superior people. The pneumatics or inspired religionists at Corinth felt the Spirit's inrush of heavenly power, and they kick over all restraints of authority. Paul reminds them that "every man has Christ for his Head," just as "Christ's Head is God" (1 Cor. 11:3).

Paul reminds the Corinthian fanatics, in danger of losing their steadiness in the quest for extraordinary blessing received again and again in the "spirit," that everything depends on the events of the cross and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-5). Paul reminds them that the church

⁴⁶Eduard Schweizer, Lordship and Discipleship, translated from the German Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und Seinen Nachfolgern with revision by the author (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 111.

confesses Christ whose work was finished at a specific time and place. His work at the cross had to be finished before the church began; the church as the body of Christ's death and resurrection is the result of Christ's penultimate work which will be completed in God's end (1 Cor. 15:24-28). More than that, the Corinthians already are feeling the Lord's judgment (1 Cor. 11:27-32) because of their arrogance toward members of the body (1 Cor. 11:20-22,29). So Christ is the head of every man as head of the church.

By contrast the Colossians are living under the dread of seemingly powerful, unseen and capricious astral forces and angelic structures. Paul reminds them that through Christ, the body's or church's head, God has already made peace by the shedding of Christ's blood at the cross (Col. 1:18-20). At the cross Christ smashed all hostile powers in the universe and humiliated them in his triumphal procession (Col. 2:15). As a result "every power and authority in the universe is subject to him as head" (Col. 2:10). Christ is the kephalē of both the first creation and the second creation.⁴⁷ The first creation took place through Christ's instrumentality; "the whole universe has been created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16). The universe that seems so hostile to the Colossians in reality is under Christ's control, since he is the catalytic agent by which the universe took shape and now holds together (Col. 1:17). The hostility and rebellion of the universe was also reconciled in Christ. His body nailed to the cross is the site of the reconciliation of the total

⁴⁷Ernst Lohmeyer, Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon, Vol. IX of Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar ueber das Neue Testament (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1961), pp. 61-64, and L. S. Thornton, The Common Life in the Body of Christ (3rd edition; London: Dacre Press, 1950), pp. 295-99.

universe; Christ's mortal body is the sphere in which the whole created order has God's peace pronounced over the universe (Col. 1:20). Thus, the first creation and the second creation are held together by Christ who is the kephalē of both the universe (Col. 2:10) and the church (Col. 1:17). The word head can mean the beginning, the ground or source, which is Christ's position over against created universe. The word head can also mean the most important and representative member of the body as an organism. Thus in the second creation, in the sphere of Christ's body, what happens to Christ happens to all. Adam's transgression brings death upon the entire human race inasmuch as all men have sinned (Rom. 5:12). God's grace reverses Adam's sin. "For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the gift that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:15). In short, "As in Adam all men die, so in Christ all will be brought to life . . ." (1 Cor. 15:22). As the head of the body Christ is the source of new life; he is the resurrection and peace for all his body, the church.

The union between Christ and his body the church is never exaggerated in Paul. Christ's body is never identified with Christ; Christ identified himself with mankind (Phil. 2:5-8). Christians are not absorbed into Christ. Christ is Savior and Judge; the church is not the supreme arbiter of its own shape, purpose and destiny. Despite the emphasis on corporate personality and the stress on Christ's oneness with the church, there is no ecclesiastical primacy in Paul's teaching. Rather, for Paul thought about the church stems from thinking about the work of Christ; ecclesiology is rooted in christology.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUNCTION AND LIFE OF THE PAULINE COMMUNITIES

Service in the Daily Life of the World

The body of Christ as the sphere in which the cross and resurrection continue to act is the territory of Christ's lordship and dominion. It is in the body of Christ that the exalted Lord claims the daily service of his limbs, organs and members.

Paul does not exalt the church. He calls the whole body of Christ to express the Lord's claim in its bodily functions and in the course of normal daily life. The body of Christ is "for the Apostle in its very corporeality the reality of the community inasmuch as the community itself, as the place of the Risen Lord's dominion, represents the new world."¹ The eschatological gift of the Spirit makes the church a "possessed" community. They have received the gift of grace, but receive it to display the unity, mission and holiness of God's special people. God's gracious summons is heard in the church's obedience to the Lord's call to unity, oneness in aim and action.

The New Testament has no technical term for church office and service, even though the Greek language has a wealth of terms for "office." Arche denotes office in the sense of ruling or being at the head; time signals the sense of high position with great dignity. The most suitable term for cultic and ritual services would seem to be leitourgia,

¹Ernst Kaesemann, Essays on New Testament Themes, translated by W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 68.

which means in Greek life the more or less voluntary services undertaken by the citizen for the community, and by the worshipper for the gods, and in the Septuagint (about 100 times) the ceremonial service performed by the priest.²

But leitourgia in the Pauline corpus refers primarily to service rendered by government in wielding life and death authority, life and collecting revenue (Rom. 13:6 and 1-6), or the service of the entire church in gathering the collection for Jerusalem (to display the unity of the Hellenistic missions with the original cell) (Rom. 15:27; 2 Cor. 9:12; see also Phil. 2:25).

The one New Testament word that is most descriptive of churchly service is diakonia, a word that does not occur in the Septuagint. The diakonia of a diakonos is primarily in the area of "serving at table," and describes the role of one who renders timely service, waits on others, tends to the needs of others at a banquet. To the Greek world "ruling and not serving is proper to a man." To the Greek any service rendered to others, should it entail sacrifice and renunciation, would be balanced by the personal gain accrued and would "not entail any true self-emptying for the sake of others."³ So prior to the New Testament, the diakonos was a lowly table waiter.

The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus applying to himself the title diakonos. Jesus rebaptizes the word, widening it beyond mere food service to serving the whole of mankind in its aching needs. Just before his death,

²Eduard Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament, translated by Frank Clarke (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1961), pp. 171-72.

³Herman Wolfgang Beyer, "Διακονία," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, herausgegeben von Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1935), II, 81-82. Hereafter Kittel's Woerterbuch is referred to as TWNT.

Jesus tells his disciples: "I am among you like a servant" (Luke 22:24-30). Jesus' entire career is studded with service to others: eating and con-
 sorting with any who would have him, encouraging by his presence any and
 all sinners to fling themselves entirely on God's grace, counselling the
 puzzled, healing the broken in body and mind, straightening twisted lives.
 But supremely, in his obedience to God unto death on the cross did Christ
 Jesus take the role of the doulos, slaving selflessly in his diakonia
 (Phil. 2:5-8). Jesus served all mankind in going the downward way of the
 cross: The Son of Man "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to
 surrender his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

The early church was called by its slaving, table-waiting Lord to
 take up the signature of diakonia. "Among you, whoever wants to be great
 must be your servant, and whoever would be first must be the willing slave
 of all" (Matt. 20:26-27).

The primitive church had a slave caste—all of the baptized are to
 serve. Christ at the eve of his death reverses positions, abandons the
 head of the table as uncontested leader and pater familias and stoops to
 slave work (John 13:1-17). Jesus not only reverses the usual estimates of
 human action; "He is instituting in fact a new pattern of human relation-
 ship."⁴ Diakonia is primarily everyday, everywhere and anywhere action,
 not just churchly, cultic service. In Jesus' story of the Last Judgment
 (Matt. 25:31-46) many different activities, such as giving food and drink,
 offering clothes, shelter or refuge, visiting the socially outcast, show
 the signature of diakonia (Matt. 25:42-44). Since Jesus' diakonia there
 has been only one office in the church, namely the one Jesus Christ filled

⁴Ibid., p. 84.

as diakonos, as doulos and then as exalted Lord. The diakonia is shared by the whole church. The idea of humble service is still in the foreground in Paul's letters; diakonia still denotes one who humbly serves God and his fellowmen without arrogation of rights and powers of office.⁵ The runaway slave Onesimus has the verb diakoneō applied to the personal care and service he gave Paul in jail (Philemon 13). Paul's righthand assistants, highly capable Timothy and Erastus, assist Paul in the mission to Macedonia (Acts 19:22).

Jesus called his disciples to follow him in lowly service. As much as Paul emphasized the crucified, risen and exalted Christ, he also witnessed to him who took the form of a slave and humbled himself to death. The church as the body of Christ knows exaltation only by way of service, suffering and persecution. The life-pattern of the Christ is to take form within the apostle and the Pauline communities as they live a common life marked by uncommon, humble service.⁶ The notes of humiliation and exaltation are made clear by the apostle in the paradoxical condition of his career;

We are the imposters who speak the truth, the unknown men whom all men know; dying we still live on; disciplined by suffering, we are not done to death; in our sorrows we have always cause for joy; poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many; penniless, we own the world (2 Cor. 6:8-10).

Paul's closeness with his Lord is seen in the persecution that that apostle suffers.⁷ "Wherever we go we carry death with us in our body,

⁵Schweizer, pp. 174-77.

⁶Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins. A Commentary on Modern Viewpoints (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 279.

⁷Eduard Schweizer, Lordship and Discipleship translated from the German Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und Seinen Nachfolgern, with revisions by the author (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 91.

the death that Jesus dies, that in this body also life may reveal itself, the life that Jesus lives" (2 Cor. 4:10). The persecutions and hardships the apostle bears (2 Cor. 11:23-28) leave their scars, "the marks of Jesus branded on my body" (Gal. 6:17). Paul dies daily (1 Cor. 15:31); though "done to death" for Christ's sake, no hardship or persecution separates the apostle or the body of Christ from its Lord: "in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35-39). Not only the apostle, but precisely the Pauline communities are to enter in to the sufferings of Christ. The Philippian community under pressure of persecution is steadied: "for you have been granted the privilege not only of believing in Christ but also of suffering for him" (Phil. 1:29, see also 1 Thess. 2:14 and 2 Thess. 1:4-5). The shape of Paul's life is determined by the cross: "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not my life, but the life of which Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Similarly, the body of Christ is buried with Christ in baptism's death in order that the cruciform pattern may burst into new life (Rom. 6:3-4). Believers have already been taken up into the body of Christ in that "one man died for all and therefore all mankind has died." The one for the many is the dynamic and magnetic field whereby the church as Christ's body is drawn into the purpose of the slain body of Christ on the cross: "men while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should live for him who for their sake died and was raised to life" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Ernst Kaesemann, in his penetrating essay on "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," finds in charisma the Pauline concept "which describes in a theologically exact, and comprehensive way the essence and scope of every ecclesiastical ministry and function. . . ."

"The charisma of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord", says Rom. 6:23. Other charismata only exist because of the existence of this one charisma to which they are all related . . . eternal life is not one gift among many but the sole and unique gift of the End. . . . the life which has appeared with the coming of Christ and has laid hold on men. . . . The Spirit is our present participation in eternal life, but we can possess him and participate in his gift only as he possesses us. Eternal life does not encourage sleeping partners or uninvested capital. We can only have charis . . . to the extent to which it seizes hold of us and to which the lordship of Christ acting through it brings us into the captivity of his service.⁸

The real character of the "Christ party" at Corinth remains obscure. Anderson's survey reveals two alternatives,⁹ both of which evaded the call of the cross to service in recognition of Christ's lordship. Perhaps, as Bo Reicke suggests, Paul is attacking a docetizing Gnosticism of Judaizing background. If so, this faction was concentrating on the exalted heavenly Christ with whom communion was possible only through a true gnosis. Neglecting the cross and the historical, earthly existence of Jesus, these people concentrated on a lop-sided eucharistic celebration of the Lord of heavenly life. Or, if Schmithals is correct with his view that Paul's opponents were Gnostics, then the party cry "I am Christ's" is the slogan of those who imagine they are components and parts of the heavenly Christ. At any rate, their party spirit and pneumatic enthusiasm has to be brought back to earth; they must understand that they are not already resurrected angels, and that their theologia gloria must be relinquished for a theologia viatorum et crucis.

Kaesemann shows that Paul picks up one of the Christ party's favorite watch-words, pneumatikos, and in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 adopts the term denoting individualistic pride for the purposes of charismatic service of

⁸Kaesemann, pp. 64-65.

⁹Anderson, p. 217.

Christ and his body. The Christ party's favorite terminology signals all the heightened "powers of miracle and ecstasy" which they seek so passionately that they evade the community in the process. Paul redefines pneumatikos as the charisma of grace, in order to end confusion in the community and bring "the Enthusiasts back down to earth out of their fantasy-heaven." Demonic idols cannot evoke "the response 'Jesus is Lord' which is uttered by the slave of the Christ when the Spirit lays hold of him." Nor does the state of ecstatic possession issue in service and personal responsibility. "No spiritual endowment has value, rights or privileges on its own account. It is validated only by the service it renders." Useful service to others has validity, for it builds the community.¹⁰

Truly spiritual service (logikē lātreia) consists in the response to God's grace and the wide diversity of talent, ability, insight and opportunity that the body has. Members of Christ offer their very selves to God in response to His mercy; the living sacrifice takes place, not in cloistered precincts, but in the everyday life of the world where mind, imagination and life-patterns flow together in daily choices (Rom. 12:1-2).

The Holy Church Pursues God's Call to Special Duty

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul's discussion of Christ and his body revolves about the analogy of the human body. Despite wide diversity of function and form among many organs and members, that very diversity forms one body. The one body of Christ, though all of its members have great diversity, is essentially one in Christ. Out of their unity in Christ, the members employ

¹⁰Kaesemann, pp. 66-67.

their varied charismata in interdependence and mutual interaction. All are interdependent because all confess Christ as Lord and because Christ is like a single body with many gifts and functions of great versatility and specialization (1 Cor. 12:1-24). This interdependence is demonstrated in mutual care (1 Cor. 12:25-26). But the individual members are interacting limbs and organs in the body only because "now you are Christ's body" (1 Cor. 12:27). Rom. 12:5-8 argues the same way: "All of us, united with Christ, form one body"; in the sōma all are dependent on Christ, yet all need each other. Members of Christ's body gifted with specialized charismata exercise communal functions: inspired utterance, administration, teaching, stirring speech, giving, leading, helping. Nor is there room for snootiness or superiority (Rom. 12:3). While specifically sōma-language is absent, the same pattern occurs in Gal. 3:28 and Col. 3:11, where sexual or cultural divergences, or differences of religious background, work and social status make for diversity not division: "you are all one person in Christ Jesus."

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul kills any attempt to raise a hierarchy of superior powers and gifts. The enthusiasts notwithstanding, within the one body miraculous workings of the Spirit in miraculous healings, ecstatic glōssōlalia and unusual powers cannot be construed as raising one member above another. Not that there is a democracy of the proletariat; rather there is a Christocracy of the one Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). Gifts of social support which help, guide and administer belong to the gifts of the Spirit as well as the more spectacular prophecy or ecstatic speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12:28-30). Everyone has the Spirit (Rom. 8:9 and 1 Cor. 12:3); therefore everyone without exception is given his specialized function (1 Cor. 12:4-11). Since all gifts and varieties of service and work are

given by the same Spirit, all are of value without any hint of superiority. The acid test of validity and relative importance is whether the church is built up (1 Cor. 12:7 and 14:1-25). From this point of view the ministries of the word--prophetic speech, plain teaching or interpretation of insight shared with the other members of the house-church--are of greater importance since they truly build up the church. Glossolalia, with its verbal and emotional fireworks, ranks least among services one can render for the others. The great danger for the charismatic lies in the mistaken notion that his gift demonstrates a higher rank of piety and spiritual ability; he may forget that all gifts come from God's grace and all are to be deployed as a means to proclaim Jesus as Lord. The more usual, less flashy gifts, such as insight into God's plan or caring for the needy, may serve the church best.

God's common call in Christ clearly implies his call to duty within the primitive communities. Kaesemann sees three watchwords, three concepts that erect a framework of polarity, within which the question of order in the Christian community is kept in proper tension and relation. The first is "To each his own." God gives to every man (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:5; 11:18; 12:7), so that each has his charisma from God.

Ecclesiastical equalitarianism is thus ruled out of court. God does not repeat himself when he acts, and there can be no mass production of grace. There is differentiation in the divine generosity, whether in the order of creation or redemption.

The second watchword is "For one another" (1 Cor. 12:23). Whereas the pagan uses his talent to jockey for position in the struggle for existence, the Christian's

particular gift frees him from men, from the things they worry about and the tyranny they exercise, and binds him solely to the Lord. But it also frees him from his own self, the tyranny it exercises and the worries it engenders, so that he can become in love the servant of all.

The third watchword "designed to stifle self-will" runs "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21; see also Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3). The fear of Christ means recognition of one's brother Christian, his endowment, freedom and station in life because his person and charisma are "representative of the ascended Lord."¹¹

Within God's gracious gift, the Corinthians in both gathered and scattered lives are to display the fact that God gives unique gifts to every man for the good of that community wherein the Lordship of the risen and ascended Christ is recognized in faith, worship and service. In fine, the community of God's people in Corinth are God's holy people on special duty in the everyday, anywhere world: They have been "dedicated to God in Christ Jesus, claimed by him as his own" (1 Cor. 1:2).

The One Church Pursues Unity

Paul was no schismatic. The theory present in Acts, that there was one universal church from the beginning, and that the whole body of Christians and the localized church in Jerusalem are one and the same, is given recognition by Paul.¹² In Acts there is only one church. Its first cell is centered in Jerusalem, but spreads elsewhere among converted Jews and proselytes from all over the Mediterranean world (Acts 2:8-11); its outward growth continues into surrounding areas of Judea and Galilee, and then not long afterward into Samaria, Syria and Cilicia (Acts 6-11). God's people is one, and the gospel is one as the good news moves across geographic, religious and cultural frontiers from Jerusalem to Rome.

¹¹Kaesemann, pp. 76-78.

¹²George Johnston, The Doctrine of The Church in The New Testament (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 62.

The unity of the church is based on Paul's conception of the universal Christ: "as the human body is one . . . so also is Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). The Corinthians are reminded that God's claim has not only given them special duty as saints, but that they are tied and united "with all men everywhere who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord as well as ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). The universal Christ who is worshiped and adored in every place of worship (topos as in 1 Cor. 1:2 is used in the synagogue inscriptions as a technical term for "place of worship")¹³ is the same Lord who is worshiped in other Christian communities founded by other missionaries or apostles. Other Christian communities springing from the original Jerusalem cell have been founded by others than Paul, but they own the same Lord Jesus Christ. So their Lord is the same as "ours," that is, the churches of Paul's missionary labors. T. W. Manson notes: "The force of the whole prescript is thus to stress the unity of the Church as a whole, and at the same time to insist on the equality of the different communities comprised in the unity."¹⁴ The Corinthians also are saints, with God's special call. Their special duty as God's holy people puts them on the same footing as the church in Jerusalem; saints is not special designation of the Jerusalem church as the chosen of God, as Karl Holl held.¹⁵ The Jerusalem Christians and any other localized unit of the body of Christ are dedicated and claimed as God's "holy ones" through the

¹³T. W. Manson, "St. Paul in Ephesus," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXVI (1941-1942), 119-20.

¹⁴Ibid., XXVI, 103.

¹⁵Karl Holl, "Der Kirchenbegriff des Paulus in seinem Verhaeltnis zu dem der Urgemeinde," Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1928), II, 58-60.

reconciliation of Christ, and not through any special status as the elect.¹⁶ As saints the Corinthians are members of the one people of God, called "to share in the life of his Son" (1 Cor. 1:2,9).

Unity in Christ is affirmed in the face of controversy, bickering by schismatic groups championing their human teachers and baptizers. From one viewpoint, was the Cephas party the center of the denominational storm, the low pressure area sending out squalls of division and disunity through the rest of the church at Corinth? Could this be the reason why Peter's name is absent in 1 Cor. 3:5-6? Was there an anti-Paul campaign waged by some of Peter's Palestinian party? Manson contends that Peter and James join forces against Paul to force him to pattern his Corinthian mission on the Palestinian model; the conflict between Paul and Jerusalem, which Manson sees throughout the Corinthian and Galatian letters, was caused by the powerplay of the Jerusalem authorities, "in defiance of the agreement made with Paul" (Gal. 2:9) in the effort "to extend their power and influence into the churches" Paul founded.¹⁷ Manson's conjecture that Peter and James themselves are behind the effort to undermine Paul's authority and substitute Palestinian patterns is far from persuasive. Paul throughout 1 Corinthians 1-4 speaks to the entire congregation and does not polemicize against any specific group with Judaizing tendencies. The entire letter is a polemic against a Gnosticized gospel offering full salvation and moral freedom to the pneumatikoi.¹⁸

¹⁶Otto Proksch, "ἐπίκοι," TWNT (1933), I, 107-8.

¹⁷Manson, XXVI, 106-7, 333.

¹⁸Paul Feine, Johannes Behm and Werner Georg Kueimmel, Introduction to the New Testament, translated by A. J. Mattill, Jr. (14th revised edition; Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 201-2.

Karl Holl in his pioneering discussion of Paul's concept of the church also sees a wide divergence between Peter and Paul. However, it rests not on character assassination, but on divergent theories as to the unity of the Church. Agreement between Paul and the Jerusalem mother-church centers on these basics: (1) the church expresses its life through structure, is an organized body with institutional patterns, with members of Christ filling different functions. The church's order comes from God for the peace of the church (1 Cor. 14:33). (2) The apostles are God's gift for the orderly structure of the church (1 Cor. 12:28 "in the first place apostles' . . ."). (3) The Jerusalem church is the first cell, the primary center, the home base for the church's missionary expansion; as Paul's testimony indicates: "I have completed the preaching of the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum" (Rom. 15:19).¹⁹

To be sure, Paul knows only one church (Gal. 1:18 and 2:1ff.). There is only one ekklesia whether it is composed locally only of Jewish Christians (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13 and Phil. 3:6), or whether it is an ekklesia composed of both Palestinian and Hellenistic elements, both Jewish and Gentile Christians (Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Col. 4:16 and 1 Thess. 1:1). Wickert summarizes Paul's plea in 1 Cor. 1:1-2: Christ set us free in order that we might be one in him. Stand firm in his unity.²⁰ The divergences between Paul and Peter that Holl postulated are based on the false premises that Peter took a "Catholic" view of authority while Paul assumed a "Protestant"

¹⁹Holl, II, 62-63.

²⁰Ulrich Wickert, "Einheit und Eintracht der Kirche im Praescript des ersten Korintherbriefes," Zeitschrift fuer die neu-testamentliche Wissenschaft, L (1959), 78-79.

stance, and that Paul polemicized against Peter at Corinth.²¹ For both Paul and Peter the church is built on Christ; the living Christ is the center of all authority and unity. Paul is not attacking any privileged position of Peter as the rock on which the church is built but schismatic party spirit. Paul will have nothing to do with rivalry that detracts from Christ by bragging: "Our champ is better than yours. Let's you (Paul) and he (Peter) fight." In the controversy over table-fellowship recorded in Galatians (Gal. 2:11-14), the question is not the primacy of Peter, but the life-or-death issue: Will law or gospel, Christ or custom, determine fellowship in the church's life? Will the church be open to all men or will it be a Pharisaic enclave? Peter, as leader in the Jerusalem church, is pictured in Acts as making the decisive speech in the controversy over admitting Gentiles; he favors a church open to the Hellenistic world, not a closed Jewish church (Acts 15:6-11). The church with a universal Lord has turned from operating within the framework of Judaism to be one universal church.

Paul's appeal at Corinth is to the universal Christ whose action frees for the purpose of unity. "Surely Christ has not been divided among you! Was it Paul who was crucified for you? Was it in the name of Paul that you were baptized?" (1 Cor. 1:13). Christ acted. He went to the cross for all men. You belong to Christ and you belong to each other because you were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ is your basis for unity. The implication is that beyond the schismatic, cliquish fences the Corinthians have erected they are to see the cross

²¹Holl, II, 63-66. See Flew's evaluation in R. Newton Flew, Jesus and His Church: A Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament (2nd edition; London: Epworth Press, 1943), pp. 155-7.

and baptism, which will clear their vision for a view of another as brothers for whom Christ died, brothers forged into one body of Christ.

Paul was no schismatic, no empire-builder. He was scrupulously loyal to the Jerusalem church. He went his way as an apostle to the Hellenistic world, all the while laboring constantly and successfully for unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians. He did not oppose Peter at Antioch out of spite, but on basic principle and without compromise. His opposition to Peter produced no schism or cleavage; the one body of Christ remained one. Further, Paul worked very hard to cement this unity. The churches of his founding in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Corinth are urged to participate with energetic enthusiasm and dispatch in the apostolic collection for the "poor" in Jerusalem.²² The motive for the collection is that of koinonia: "For if the Jewish Christians shared their spiritual treasures with the Gentiles, the Gentiles have clear duty to contribute to their material needs" (Rom. 15:27). The agreement struck at the Jerusalem missionary conference that the Hellenistic missions should keep the "poor" in mind was the very thing Paul made it his business to do (Gal. 2:10; see Acts 11:27-30 where the collection originates by the Spirit's inspired instruction at Antioch). Especially the Corinthian community needs the shaming example of other's astounding gifts in response to Christ's generous riches to get on with the project they resolved to support (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). The Corinthian house-churches are not urged to pay temple tax or Peter's pence, but to participate with high interest in what other communities have done in Asia Minor, or because

²²Holl, II, 60-61.

of the need and lot of the "poor" in Jerusalem. The oneness of the church comes to the fore in the apostolic collection.

Further, Paul's letters are studded with personal references, and tend to tie the scattered house-churches into one family. They would create the same sort of interest as a letter from home. The letters were circulated through the house-churches (Col. 4:16), in much the same way that a round-robin letter would make the rounds of some scattered family. Even in churches never visited by the apostle such as Rome or Colossae, Paul used all the personal contacts that he could (Romans 16 and Col. 4:10-17).

The same care for one another is to take place within the internal life of the ekklesia as Christ's life is actualized where Christians rub shoulders and make daily decisions. To have the crucified Christ as common Lord means in the church a community of service and a communality of status. The love of Christ naturally involves the love of brothers in Christ; as a result, "everyone is equal in the humility of discipleship and now can escape from the call to unselfish activity."²³

The call to unity stems from the risen, exalted lord. Stauffer notes, that the living, reigning Lord is not anchored in a past event "which gradually loses its significance" as it recedes into the distance. Nor is life in Christ an "illustration of an eternal law of life which has a supratemporal meaning."²⁴ Christ is the living Lord who comes to exercise his reign and dominion at the crossroads of daily life within the intersecting lives of his community in the common life of the world.

²³Johnston, p. 86.

²⁴Ethelbert Stauffer, "εἰς," TWNT (1935), II, 437.

Nowhere is this more clearly brought out than in the brief letter to Philemon.²⁵ Philemon, a wealthy Christian, is known to Paul only by hearsay, at second hand (verse 5). Philemon's slave, Onesimus, has run away (verses 15-16) and stolen get-away funds (verse 18).²⁶ The runaway slave Onesimus came across the imprisoned Paul (accidentally? or because he knew of Paul from Philemon's house-church?). Paul converted Onesimus, becoming his father in Christ (verse 10). Paul sends the runaway back though he would have preferred to keep Onesimus with him "here in prison for the Gospel" (verse 13). Recognizing the legal claim Philemon has upon his slave, Paul sends Onesimus back to his owner. Paul pleads with Philemon as an apostle, on the basis of the Gospel and not on the basis of private humanitarian convictions:²⁷ "For perhaps this is why you lost him for a time, that you might have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but as more than a slave--as a dear brother, very dear indeed to me and how much dearer to you, both as a man and as Christian (en Christo)" (verses 15-16). But for a few notable exceptions of highminded patricians of Stoic persuasion, the slave in Paul's day was depersonalized, an object

²⁵For a critique of John Knox' ingenious detective work evident in Philemon Among the Letters of Paul, and his article "Philemon and the Authenticity of Colossians," Journal of Religion, XVIII (1938), 114-60, see Heinrich Greeven in "Pruefung der Thesen von J. Knox zum Philemonbrief," Theologische Literaturzeitung, LXXIX (1954), sp. 373-78. Greeven concludes that Knox has given clearer insight into Colossians and Philemon at many places but that the main lines of his argumentation are a "Fuelle der Phantasie," sp. 378. See also Feine, Behm, and Kueimmel, pp. 245-46.

²⁶John Knox, Philemon Among the Letters of Paul (revised edition; New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959), pp. 37-39; and "Philemon and the Authenticity of Colossians," Journal of Religion XVII (1938), 157-59.

²⁷Ulrich Wickert, "Der Philemonbrief--Privatbrief oder apostolische Schreiben?," Zeitschrift fuer die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, LIII (1961), 232-36.

of more value but no more status than an animal.²⁸ The slave in Judaism of Jesus' time was also seen on a lower level of humanity, classed with immobile property, with no rights at law. A slave's customary treatment followed this degrading and humiliating pattern: Since a slave was a chattel, his master could do with him as he desired . . . even to throwing things and administering beatings. In the Rabbinic writings "slave" constituted one of the worst epithets and insults; a man could be excommunicated from the synagogue for calling his neighbor a slave.²⁹ How remarkable that amid such a climate of enslaved bondage and limitation, Onesimus, the runaway now converted, is to be treated as a human being, as one of the family in a Christian house-church, as a dear brother in Christ. Philemon is not expected to brush lightly aside his slave's stealing. Onesimus will have to pay, or Paul will pay in his stead. But the new brother in Christ, though a household slave, is a full member of the house-church, and so is to be welcomed as any Christian, even the apostle himself (Philemon 17-20).

Harmony in the community's social life is shaped by Christ's servanthood and willing humiliation. Life in Christ is to counter the dangerous gap between private faith and public relationships. Paul reminds the Philippian community that their own experience "in Christ" must be the controlling and directing force in their common life (Phil. 2:1-5). Later in the same letter Paul urges two warring women to agree together "in the Lord."

²⁸Gerhard Friedrich, Der Brief an Philemon, uebersetzt und erkluert, Teilband VIII, Die Kleineren Briefe des Apostels Paulus in Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1965), pp. 189-90.

²⁹Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "δοῦλος," TWNT (1935), II, 273.

It is as though he said to those two Christians who had unhappily become estranged, "Remember your common union with Christ. Remember that it is not in two different spheres that your spirits are living; the two spheres coincide, there is but one, and it is Christ. Realize this and act on it, and your present differences will vanish. In the Lord you will agree."³⁰

Similarly the large community at Rome is to express their oneness, to form in actuality one body in Christ, mutually interdependent (Rom. 12:3-16; see also 1 Cor. 1:2,9,12-13; 11:17,27).

The Church is Catholic, Hence Missionary

Precisely because the church is holy and given God's special orders, and precisely because the church is the one body of Christ, is the church called to be God's one, holy invasion in the world. The church is called to be one without nationality or culture as limiting, screening factors (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:29; 10:9 and Col. 3:11). Because Christ's work was for the whole cosmos and all humanity, the church has a universal sweep as wide as all mankind. The goal of the church's mission is a new humanity in Christ (Col. 1:23; 3:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:14-20).

The missionary function of the church is not just one among several important functions. Paul places the mission of the church into the broad scheme of God's redemptive plan for the cosmos in Colossians. The church's Lord has already claimed the total universe as his by reason of creation (Col. 1:16) and his victory at Skull Hill (2:15). In taking over hostile territory, the church conducts a mopup operation after Christ's decisive victory over the powers. On the basis of Christ's cosmic reconciliation

³⁰James Stewart, A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, n.d.), p. 159.

(1:20) the Gospel is proclaimed "in the whole creation" (1:23). When the church invades the world, it meets its Lord. It is not as though Christ were present and ruling only in the house-church, in the worshiping assembly, but absent or powerless in the structures of daily life where Christ's body carries on its missionary task.

In the letter to the Colossian community Paul points up the missionary task of the body of Christ. The apostle looks beyond the body of Christ localized to a world wide unity that assumes cosmic range.³¹ The task of mission is based on the historical fact of Christ and him crucified, with the union of creation and redemption in the crucified Christ (Col. 1:13-20); it moves out from the experiential reality, Christ in you, with personal involvement and faith in God's action (Col. 1:13-14, 21-23, 26-27). Paul draws the inescapable conclusion: his assigned task is to make known all nations to all men everywhere God's secret in Christ, and saving power of God for everyone who has faith (Col. 1:27 and Rom. 1:16). The Colossian community as the missionary body of Christ lives under eschatological pressure. Their life is hidden right now with God (Col. 3:3). Not that the church is perfect, for risen with Christ in baptism, it must keep eyes peeled on its risen, exalted Lord (Col. 3:1). The community's full potential and total life is in Christ, with its full realization yet to come "in glory" (Col. 3:4).

Since the Colossians are eschatologically oriented, they can now live unshackled lives in free service and joyful anticipation, sure of the wonderful status they have hidden with Christ. But the eschatological then is to

³¹Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament, p. 109, and Johnston, p. 91.

be apparent here and now: they are not to be tyrannized by ascetic demands and legalistic pressures of law, custom and community as others around them (Col. 2:20-23); rather the risen Christ is to be their gyroscope, keeping them on course (Col. 3:1). Their whole style of life is to reflect Christ's ownership (Col. 3:5-11), and Christ's sturdy peace and pardon sends joy and thanksgiving surging into every corner of life (Col. 3:12-17). While the Haustafel shows traces of conventional ethics of Hellenistic Judaism and popular Greek mortal style, the new emphasis is on the common life of the community in the public arenas of family life and daily work (Col. 3:18-4:1) and in the hidden disciplines of intercession and conversational witness (Col. 4:2-6). The apostle does not propose a timeless Christian ethic, nor does he propose a revolutionary overturning of contemporary structures (such as slavery) but an inter-penetration of them by the total life of the Christian community.³² What is striking in Pauline Haustafeln is the concentration on the growth of the community, with no individualistic moralizing that undermines the community.³³ Why the heavy emphasis upon the weaker members of the community: wives, children, and slaves? Because in contradiction to the synagogue, the Christian communities include the weaker members as full members in the body of Christ.³⁴

³²Hans Conzelmann, Der Brief an die Kolosser, Das Neue Testament Deutsch: Die kleineren Briefe des Apostels Paulus, herausgegeben von Paul Althaus und Gerhard Friedrich (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1965), VIII, 153-54.

³³Otto Michel, "οἰκος," TWNT, V, 133, n. 42.

³⁴Ernst Lohmeyer, Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar ueber das Neue Testament (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1961), IX, 154-55.

Colossians and Philemon emphasize the common life in Christ that all Christians in one place live out in its many dimensions. When read from that standpoint, the letters underscore the visibility of the house-churches. Especially the hosts of the house-church would live a fishbowl existence, open to public scrutiny at all times. The reconciliation God effected is experienced in life together as the clutch of sin is broken and life dedicated to God is braced and directed. Colossians reminds us that salvation is experienced "family-style" in the house-church. Also, Colossians emphasizes that God's holy and dedicated people are given unity not to live for themselves and turn their back on the world, but to face the world with a witness to Christ that is wise, winsome and never dull (Col. 4:5-6).

Worship is done family-style also, without domination of the assembly by any one individual. In Paul's letters there is no evidence of a worship service in the church in which one man preached while all other members merely listened. The Pauline communities know of no ordained order of "preachers." The togetherness of the body of Christ means that each member takes part with his special gift. That is how the body of Christ worshiped at Corinth: "when you meet for worship, each of you contributes a hymn, some instruction, a revelation, and ecstatic utterance, or the interpretation of such an utterance" (1 Cor. 14:26). Of course, not every member of the body speaks in every service (1 Cor. 14:26). Some may have never spoken a word in church. But Paul expects the whole community to take active part in the intercessions (Col. 4:2-4), and the liturgical interplay in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16).³⁵ All members are

³⁵Gerhard Delling, Worship in the New Testament, translated by Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 82-90.

to let the message of Christ dwell in them in all its richness. And the very richness and many-sidedness of the message becomes evident as the members of the community "instruct and admonish each other," each bringing home his special insight or contribution "with the utmost wisdom" (Col. 3:16). Allusions in Paul's letters indicate that other communities structured worship in free patterns of Spirit-guided liturgy and message. The entire Thessalonian community has responsibility to be open to utterances of the Spirit and to test the insights that come via people gifted with prophetic utterance (1 Thess. 5:19-22). The church at Rome which had not been founded by Paul's apostolic mission and had no special relation to him lists much the same gifts of God's grace for the church's life and worship as the Spirit had given to the church at Corinth (compare Rom. 12:6-8 with 1 Cor. 12:8-11, 28-30).

The worship service is another arena for the power of the word. Paul in 1 Cor. 14:23-25 gives the illustration of some uninstructed member on the fringe or a rank unbeliever who goes into the assembly and hears from everyone something that searches his conscience and brings conviction He is reached so effectively by the machine-gun fire of short messages and testimonies that he falls before God crying, "God is certainly among you!" The prophetic utterance that Paul speaks of in this passage is the type of rapid-fire preaching that connects the hearers' situation to the message. The voices from the ancient past that speak out of the Old Testament books read in worship gets translated from the milieu of Israel to the situation in the Hellenistic world by this fresh prophetic utterance. The message of the cross and resurrection is proclaimed in a living way, not as a doctrinal topic of dry orthodoxy. Such prophetic preaching plants the Gospel into the situation of the hearers and is to be encouraged. The gobbledygook of

glossolalia, however, is as irrelevant as technical terms used by medical men or theologians as shorthand for discussion between specialists; hence, Paul restricts its use to the narrow limits of private prayer (1 Cor. 14:2, 18-19). The church does not speak in a private language or secret code known only to initiates, but speaks with the outsider in view.³⁶

St. Paul left a living church in a strategic center after a few months or a couple of years and then moved on. Cities were strategic centers not merely because of economic importance or because they lay along great highways of the Empire. Paul made them strategic centers, Roland Allen emphasized, from which the Spirit compelled him to begin. Paul seized strategic points with a mission strategy in mind: Churches founded in strategic centers "became the sources of rivers, mints from which the new coin of the Gospel was spread in every direction." They became centers and springboards for new work with new power.³⁷ It was this missionary zeal, stemming from newly formed communities, which gave the church the thrust, the inner cohesion and power for expansion. Sects such as the Essenes and Zadokites also originated from within non-homogenized Judaism, but, unlike the church, stayed within the national fold and found that national exclusiveness led to extinction.³⁸ Judaism was granted the status of religio licita, even with all its sects, because despite its exclusiveness it drew from only one national grouping. The Pauline communities

³⁶Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament, pp. 222 and 226.

³⁷Roland Allen, Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 12-17, quote from p. 17.

³⁸Johnston, p. 24.

were not only exclusive, but drew from all nations, races and cultures and made an absolute claim as the ekklēsia of God.

In the letter to the Romans Paul has both a view to the ends of the earth and the end of the world. Thus Paul expresses his eagerness to reach Spain via Rome, for he wishes to reach the farthest limit of the known world as soon as possible (Rom. 15:19-24). Paul wishes to use the large Roman church as the next strategic center in his missionary leap-frogging around the Mediterranean. The preface to Romans gives Paul's plan: "Through [Christ] I received the privilege of a commission in his name to lead to faith and obedience men in all nations . . ." (Rom. 1:5). "But I should like you to know, my brothers, that I have often planned to come . . . in the hope of achieving something among you, as I have in other parts of the world. . . . For I am not ashamed of the Gospel. It is the saving power of God for everyone who has faith—the Jew first, but the Greek also . . ." (Rom. 1:13 and 15). In Romans Paul is highly interested in the salvation of the individual: Romans 5-8 particularly deals with personal faith, personal life in God's plan, personal salvation. But from the conclusion of Romans 8 on the letter deals with the theme of the redemption of the cosmos and of all creatures beginning with the Jews, with the carrying through of God's plan of salvation.³⁹

What is astounding is that Paul's house-churches become missionary centers. It seems strange to modern man that "there should be no exhortations to missionary zeal" in Paul's letters.⁴⁰ Paul does commend the Thessalonians for being a model for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia,

³⁹Anderson, pp. 144-45.

⁴⁰Allen, p. 93.

for "from Thessalonica the word of the Lord rang out" so that "everywhere your faith in God has reached men's ears" (1 Thess. 1:7-8). Paul comments in Col. 1:6 that "everywhere [the true gospel] is growing and bearing fruit as it does among you . . ." which likely means both internal and external growth.⁴¹ The comment is made in such an offhand parenthetical way, that the complete normality of growth in life and in numbers is underscored. Conzelmann's comment is to the point: "Von jeder lebendigen, ob auch kleinen Gemeinde geht missionarische Kraft aus."⁴²

The Apostle

Paul constantly refers to himself as an "Apostle of Jesus Christ by God's will" (2 Cor. 1:1), "commissioned by the will of God" (Col. 1:1). He is "a servant of Christ Jesus, apostle by God's call, set apart for the service of the Gospel" (Rom. 1:1). When his authority is called into question, he puts matters straight by insisting that his special office came "not by human appointment or human commission, but by commission from Jesus Christ and from God the Father who raised him from the dead" (Gal. 1:1).

The word apostle in the New Testament clearly denotes function, the bearing the New Testament message of the crucified and risen Christ, and is not simply a title. The bearers of the word in Luke-Acts virtually equal the Twelve (Acts 15:2,4,6,22-26 and 16:4), almost in the sense of a "closed college" alongside the presbyteroi.⁴³ But apostolos is also applied to others beside the Twelve on special assignments. Paul and Barnabas, are

⁴¹Lohmeyer, IX, 27-28.

⁴²Conzelmann, VIII, 161.

⁴³Rengstorff, "ἀπόστολος," TWNT (1935), II, 422.

apostoloi (Acts 14:4,14). Paul uses the term in the wider sense of special assignment: in Rom. 16:7 Junias and Andronicus, Paul's "fellow countrymen and comrades in captivity," though otherwise unknown, are called apostles; 2 Cor. 8:23 calls Titus' travel companions commissioned delegates or apostoloi of "our congregations"; see also Phil. 2:25 where Epaphroditus is apostolos or commissioned representative to Paul for the Philippian community.

Paul generally uses the term apostle "for a definite group of Christ's witnesses who have seen the risen Lord (1 Cor. 1:1) and have been definitely commissioned. Both uses apply to himself as to the first apostles."⁴⁴ Paul does not dispute the first apostles' authority (Gal. 2:1-10), and even the dispute with Peter illustrates their common unity in the faith--though Peter is inconsistent in applying it (Gal. 2:11-14). Paul's authorization and hence his authority as an apostle is not any less than the authority of the first apostles. His authorization, however, took place outside of the time and space in which the other apostles were commissioned representatives of the risen Christ.⁴⁵ But Paul has seen the risen Christ and been authorized by Him (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8-10; Gal. 1:1-2,13-17). Paul considers himself an apostle to the churches of his founding in the Hellenistic world: "If others do not accept me as an apostle, you at least are bound to do so, for you are yourselves the very seal of my apostolate, in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:2). But Paul does not plow where others have planted. His mission is to the unevangelized of all nations (Rom. 1:5-6; Rom. 15:17-20; see also Gal. 2:8; 1:16).

⁴⁴Schweizer, Church Order in the New Testament, pp. 194-95.

⁴⁵Rengstorf, II, 424-30.

Critics could and did downgrade Paul as a second-rate apostle who did not know Christ kata sarka (2 Cor. 5:16). Paul admits that, unlike the Twelve, he has had no contact with the historical Jesus. God's fantastic grace called the persecutor of the church to full apostleship, grace being what it is (1 Cor. 15:8-9). Paul "establishes his apostleship" functionally, by hard work and suffering, and not by a conception and claim of the apostolate based on office.⁴⁶ Paul insists he is in no way inferior to the Twelve; he works harder than all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:10), for he "received the privilege of a commission (charin kai apostolōn) in [Christ's] name to lead to faith and obedience men in all nations" (Rom. 1:5-6). Paul is at one with the other apostles also because he faithfully reproduces the core of the early Christian tradition (1 Cor. 15:1-7) with such fidelity that he could say: "This is what we all proclaim, and this is what you believed" (1 Cor. 15:11). The Lord's Supper that Paul established in his communities faithfully reflects the tradition of the primitive church which came "from the Lord himself" (1 Cor. 11:23-25). This highlights the basic "unity between Paul and the original apostles for all the differences between them."⁴⁷

In the face of opposition to Paul's apostleship within the Corinthian community, Paul asserts his status and authority as a full apostle (2 Corinthians 10-13). Paul insists he is in no way inferior to any of "those superlative apostles," as he sarcastically trims them to size (2 Cor. 11:5 and 12:11). If they want to match pedigrees and credentials under categories of racial purity or legalistic Pharisaism, Paul's will

⁴⁶Ibid., II, 438.

⁴⁷Ibid., II, 438.

equal any they can put up (2 Cor. 11:21-22). He has visions with the best of them; he even gets up to the third heaven with his (2 Cor. 12:1-5). But his apostolic qualifications include outdoing them in total commitment to the cause of Christ, so that Paul is "more overworked than they, scourged more severely, more often imprisoned, many a time face to face with death" (2 Cor. 11:23-31). They are sham-apostles, fakes whose lack of authorization by the risen Christ shows in that they "seek their own ends instead of offering unselfish service." One commissioned by Jesus should be lowly and suffer, but as "superlative apostles" they are too good for that (2 Cor. 11:13; 11:5,11).⁴⁸ Paul by contrast has "the marks of a true apostle," unrelenting work "which called for such constant fortitude, and was attended by sign, marvels, and miracles" (2 Cor. 12:12). The Corinthians owe Paul everything, for he preached the Gospel to them free of charge, never sponging on them (2 Cor. 11:7-11). In that way Paul cuts the ground from under the sham-apostles who masquerade as apostles of Christ but are agents of Satan (2 Cor. 11:12-15). Their version of the Gospel is imported and distorted and calls for less than "single-hearted devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2-4). In reality the sham-apostles only want to tyrannize and exploit the church at Corinth (2 Cor. 11:20).

Evidently the case in 2 Corinthians is a crisis-situation. But in handling the crisis Paul shows that the apostolate is not merely a function, but unquestionably an office specifically committed to him by the risen Christ with the possibility of the "sharp use of authority—authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down" (2 Cor. 13:10; see also 2 Cor. 10:8). The issue in 2 Corinthians is this: Can a church

⁴⁸Ibid., II, 446-47.

hire and fire apostles? Paul answers, No! Only the risen Lord appoints apostles. No segment of the church can appoint its own apostle and trim the Gospel to its own liking.

The Apostle and His Helpers

Paul described his own function as apostle primarily by putting stress on proclaiming the Gospel (1 Cor. 1:17 and Col. 1:23). His was the task assigned by God "to deliver his message in full" (Col. 1:25), and in the process to get global coverage for the Gospel among the Gentiles in the Hellenistic world (Rom. 15:16-19), by proclaiming Christ's name where it has never been heard in ever wider scope (Rom. 15:20-24).

Proclaiming the Gospel means establishing the converts in steady pastoral care and oversight. As Christ's envoy Paul was as gentle with the Thessalonians in ceaseless toil and drudgery night and day "as a nurse caring fondly for her children" (1 Thess. 2:6-9). He uses the picture of a father dealing lovingly with his children "appealing to you by encouragement, as well as solemn injunctions, to live lives worthy of the God who calls you . . ." (1 Thess. 2:11-12). Paul compares himself to a mother going through birth-pangs all over again with the stupid Galatians until they take the shape of Christ (Gal. 4:19). Paul admonishes and instructs any who will listen, "toiling strenuously" in order "to present each one of you as a mature member of Christ's body" (Col. 1:28-29).

While the anxious concern for all the churches is a daily, weighty responsibility (2 Cor. 11:28), Paul does not meddle and tinker with every facet of organizational life. Beare notes Paul's basic procedure:

Once his churches are established, he commits to them the management of their own affairs, seeking to develop in them the willingness to accept responsibility, and intervening with the weight of

his own authority only when they are threatened with the rise of doctrines which would nullify the gospel (as incompatible with the moral demands of the Gospel (as at Corinth). Negatively, he never suggests that he is vested with any authority to choose or to ordain their leaders, or to ratify any choice that they may make.⁴⁹

Allen has noted that Paul would preach in a place for five or six months, sometimes more as in the case of Corinth or Ephesus, and then leave behind him "a church, not indeed free from the need of guidance, but capable of growth and expansion." Paul's missionary tours in Asia Minor and Macedonia tell the story of a missionary re-visiting organized and established congregations which could stand and grow without the apostle's constant presence or attention. Allen notes that

Paul did not stay in Thessalonica more than five months, and he did not visit the place again for over five years, yet he writes to "the church of the Thessalonians" and speaks of it as being on the same footing as "the churches of God in Judea."⁵⁰

The apostolic functions and tasks, if not the office, were shared by Paul with his missionary helpers. Paul left Timothy and Silas in Berea, while he headed toward Athens, and then instructed them to rejoin him as quickly as possible (Acts 17:14-15). Timothy and Silas return from Macedonia, and with their return Paul can devote himself entirely to preaching and dialogic argumentation (Acts 18:5). Paul stays in Asia while "two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus," take care of matters in Macedonia (Acts 19:22). Paul sends Timothy to Thessalonica "to encourage you to stand firm for the faith, and under all these hardships, not to be shaken . . ." (1 Thess. 3:2-3). He sent Timothy to Corinth at

⁴⁹Frank W. Beare, "The Ministry in the New Testament Church, Practice and Theory," Anglican Theological Review, XXXVII (1955), 11-12.

⁵⁰Allen, p. 84.

least once and he sent Titus at least twice. The purpose of these contacts was to strengthen, not prop up congregations incapable of supporting their own life.

St. Paul was careful not to lose touch with his new converts. They sorely needed visits and instruction, and they received them . . . he was in constant communication with them by one means or another.⁵¹

In addition to personal visits at long intervals, occasional letters and two-way communication by deputies and assistants, a large number of Christians assist the apostle in caring for the communities. Chloe's people inform Paul that the one church at Corinth has splintered under the impact of the Gnosticized interpretation of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:11). It is likely that "Chloe's people" were trusted household slaves given this assignment. As diakonos, trusted worker for Christ, Epaphras brings news and exchange of information about the Colossians (Col. 1:7-8), and may have wound up in jail for his troubles (sunachmalōtos in Philemon 24). Archippus is told, "Attend to the duty entrusted to you in the Lord's service" (diakonia in Col. 4:17). Paul's guarded instruction may indicate that already at Colossae someone served as church treasurer and was concerned with poor relief and other matters of confidentiality that required tact, trustworthiness and a closed mouth; but it is unlikely this is a reference to any structured office.⁵² Archippus is Paul's "comrade-in-arms" (Philemon 2); Paul considers Archippus and Philemon his valued associates in the Lord's work, though the apostle never made a missionary tour in the Lycus valley. Tychicus, Paul's "dear brother and trustworthy helper" (diakonos) and fellow-servant in the Lord's

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁵²Beyer, "διδάκονες," TWNT (1935), II, 88-90.

work," is sent to inform the Colossians of Paul's condition (Col. 4:7).

The recently converted slave Onesimus also performs a helping service in the furtherance of the Gospel, and is described in the same glowing language of endearment as Tychicus (Philemon 13 and 16).

Thus within the Pauline communities, many members of the house-churches exercise their special gifts (charismata), not because they have been consecrated, ordained or elected, but because the charisma and the opportunity to perform the task have been given by God. God's gift comes first, recognition of faithful service by the apostle or the church are secondary.⁵³ Not every member can expect to have every gift, so each must lean on the other in interdependence. Specifically kerygmatic gifts, serving the intelligible proclamation of the Word that exalts Christ as Lord, come first in rank. Out of love the balance of gifts is stabilized and structured. In Schlinck's words:

The spiritual gifts are considered to be valid as long as they are freely and totally subordinated to the body of Christ, and they are understood to be functions of "Agape." According to the very essence of the church, the service rendered to the brethren and therefore to the congregation, must also be rendered with all the brethren to the whole world. Every charism is service in the church and this is at the same time, service on the frontier between the church and the world.⁵⁴

⁵³Eduard Schweizer, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament Teaching Regarding the Church," Theology Today, XIII (1957), 480.

⁵⁴Edmund Schlinck, "Apostolic Succession: A Fellowship of Mutual Service," Encounter, XXV (1964), 52-54, quote from p. 54.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

What did Paul mean by "the church in your house"? There is a tension built into the phrase.

1. The juxtaposition of "the church" and "in your house" indicates that the church exists in two different dimensions at the same time. The eschatological and incarnational dimensions of the church are always in tension. The church lives two lives at one and the same time. It is the church of God in Christ. That is to say, it is the visible community of God with the eschatological sensitivity that it is the one summoned and sent people of God gathered around the risen Christ. Though it is the ekklēsia of God, the body of Christ, yet it is also at one and the same time a community gathered in an oikos. In short the eschatological community is set in the incarnational framework of a specific "house." For Paul the church in your house has catholic and universal dimensions compressed into the small local gatherings of house-churches. The house-church is a catholic community in faith-continuity with the People of Abraham, Isaac and Israel.

2. The church is a living body, an organism not an organization. As a living body it is not a society, club or collection.

The church is the body of Christ, not simply a body of men or corporation. It is the corporeality of Christ, the physical arena within which the power-field of the cross and resurrection causes members to yield their bodies in service to Christ, his members and his world. Within the body of Christ, Christ is worshiped and served as Lord.

The church is in Christ, as well as the Christ being in his church. Thus, the church is the community of the faithful; the community of those who live and remain in Christ and in whom Christ lives and expresses his presence in the world. The church is not an ethical society, living in response to the Founder, even trusting him and walking in his commandments. The church is "in Christ," whether frail or faithful. Thus Paul's vision of his primitive communities in house-churches is basically and essentially christological.

3. Paul likely chose hospitable homes, or had them offered to him for very practical reasons, not for profoundly theological ones: he and his band of converts had been expelled from the synagogue; the ample home of a well-to-do convert like the archesynagogus Crispus (1 Cor. 1:14 and Acts 18:8) or the city treasurer Erastus (Rom. 16:23) or the Stephanus family (1 Cor. 1:16 and 16:15) was available, and the price was right.

On the other hand, the house-church gave pointed witness to the fact that life together was the center of the Gospel. Not only is salvation personal, but in the body of Christ it is expressed in corporeality. Life together is the gift of God's reconciliation in Christ given in exchange for life fragmented and shattered. Salvation is experienced "family style," and the life in Christ is spread family style via worship and missionary outreach to a broken world. The inviting and intimate setting of the hospitable house-church did little to obscure this insight.

4. The house-church encapsulates the problem of the church's unity held in the face of great diversity. It is not human unity and solidarity that makes for church unity. Unity and the on-going pursuit of unity is the direct result of God's action in Christ. The primitive Pauline communities illustrate the tension. They were tempted to come together

along the lines of human qualities that attract or repel. Apart from the Gospel the separation of the house-churches at Corinth could be excused and even justified because of natural human differences that prompted the enclave mentality of mystery cult and synagogue. The temptation was the all-too human notion that the body of Christ is composed of like-minded people who share similar cultural outlooks or venerate the same leaders.

On the other hand the early church was able to bring and hold together in little house-church fellowships the slave and wealthy master, the educated and the unschooled, the cultured and the deprived. Huge chasms of class, culture, race and religious background were bridged by the unity that Christ forged. Yet the very fact that there are so many affirmations of the church's basic unity in Christ is a reverse witness to the fact that the church is one by God's summons, but must constantly pursue the "unity of the Spirit" who unites the rich diversity of the many into one body.

5. Christology invariably informs and decisively shapes Paul's ecclesiology. The apostle's heavily christocentric emphasis in such areas as the form and function of the Pauline communities, which could be so vulnerable to triumphalism or institutional introversion, acts as corrective to the dangers of ecclesio-centricity. Churchly patterns and offices, institutional rites and forms could balloon in exaggerated over-emphasis so that Christ's body dwarfed the Head. Or the Lord of the universe and head of the church could be caged and reduced to a tamed, institutionalized figure held captive by ecclesiastical engineering and tinkering. In his letters Paul always resists the distinct peril that so much pre-eminence be given to the Christ of the church that christology is diluted into ecclesiology.

6. The method Paul uses to solve problems in the primitive communities is to point to the Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord. The church under the call of God's grace is bolstered to pursue God's call to special duty, to pursue unity and to express the catholic and missionary dimensions of the church. The church's response to any given problem or crisis ought to be determined by God's call and its nature as the body of Christ.

Paul's method is most relevant for the church today. The church lives by what is behind it in the cross, resurrection and sending of the Spirit, and not by frantic response to one crisis after the next emergency. Hence, the church's tack into a problem or challenge is set, not by the direction in which public opinion is blowing, nor by the explosive nature of a problem, nor by the call of the government, but by the call of its Lord and the shape of the Lord's diakonia to the world. Sociological data, analyses of social issues are only secondarily determinative, only negatively descriptive. They are law, not promise. The Lord's call and the Lord's pattern of ministry are normative.

The search for new forms of church and new patterns of ministry can be merely ecclesiastical tinkering of a non-theological, engineering, do-it-yourself approach to the "relevance of the church." On the other hand the search for new forms is very necessary. Radical times may require radical forms of ministry. But not to the point of absolute radicality. Whatever new forms of church, mission and ministry may develop, they will develop out of the forms we already have. Whatever new forms of church do develop, they must be scrutinized in the light of the primitive house-churches and their form and function.

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