

Prof. James Dunn

MAIN THEMES IN PAULINE THEOLOGY

4. The Church – Paul’s Trinitarian Ecclesiology

When we turn to Paul’s understanding of the church, much of what we have already been looking at becomes still more relevant. Not least of importance, what we have already seen prepares us for what might be called the trinitarian character of Paul’s understanding of the church. So we look first at the very concept of ‘church’ as ‘the church of *God*’. This will include a parenthesis on what we can say of the historical actuality of the Pauline churches in the first century. Then we turn to Paul’s other principal way of speaking of the church as ‘the body of *Christ*’. This will include an attempt to clarify Paul’s concept of apostles as church founders. Finally we turn to church as ‘the fellowship of the *Spirit*’, or shared experience of the Spirit. This will inevitably include further clarification of Paul’s concept of the body of Christ as a charismatic community.

4.1 The church of God

If there is a single term in the NT writings which denotes the existence and character of the embryonic Christian movement in various centres where it became established, that term is *ekklēsia*, ‘church’. The word occurs 114 times in the NT; 23 in Acts; 62 in the Pauline corpus; and 20 in Revelation.¹ The choice of the term *ekklēsia* is interesting in itself. In common usage it denoted simply an ‘assembly or gathering’ of people for some shared purpose. It occurs in this sense twice in Luke’s account of the city assembly in Ephesus (Acts 19.32, 40). It has also been found occasionally in reference to some associations or the business meetings of some clubs (*collegia*).² But its predominant usage was to the regularly summoned citizen body in legislative assembly.³ So the earliest Christian usage could have been simply to denote the ‘meeting’ which their coming together constituted. The alternative term, *synagōgē*, was equally capable of signifying a ‘gathering or coming together’, but it probably had already become too much identified as the ‘assembly of Jews, the synagogue’.⁴ It is not very likely, however, that Paul’s used the term to imply that the Christians in a Mediterranean city saw themselves as an alternative to or in competition with the assembly of citizens. The fact that Paul can speak both of *ekklēsiai* (plural) in a region,⁵ and of individual *ekklēsiai* (house churches, probably more than one) which met in the

¹ E.g. Matt. 18.17; Acts 5.11; 8.1, 3; etc.; Rom. 16.1, 4-5, 16, 23; 1 Cor. 1.2; 4.17; etc. Jas. 5.14; Rev. 2-3; *1 Clem.* inscr.; Ign. *Eph.* inscr.; *Did.* 4.14; Herm. *Vis.* 2.4.3.

² Examples of *ekklēsia* used for voluntary associations and their meetings are provided by J. S. Kloppenborg, ‘Edwin Hatch, Churches and Collegia’, in B. H. McLean, ed., *Origins and Method*, J. C. Hurd FS (JSNTS 86; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 212-38 (here 215-6 n.13, 231 n.65).

³ LSJ 509; K. L. Schmidt, *TDNT* 3.513-4.

⁴ Cf. LSJ 1692 with BDAG 963; see further E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised and edited by G. Vermes and F. Millar (4 vols. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973-87) 3.90-1, 95-8.

⁵ 1 Cor. 16.1 (the churches of Galatia); 16.19 (the churches of Asia); 2 Cor. 8.1 (the churches of Macedonia); Gal. 1.22 (the churches of Judea).

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

same city⁶ suggests that the common sense of ‘gathering, meeting’ was in mind, and was so understood by others who heard it being used.

The determining factor for Paul’s usage, however, was almost certainly the LXX use of the term *ekklēsia* to translate the ‘assembly of YHWH/Israel’ (*qahal YHWH/Israel*). This is indicated by Paul’s frequent reference to ‘the church of God’ or ‘the churches of God’.⁷ To be noted is the fact that this usage also indicates a background in the Aramaic-speaking congregations, and that *ekklēsia* probably emerged as the translation of *qahal*, again in preference to *synagōgē*.⁸ The point, of course, is that the inspiration for the use of the term *ekklēsia* was almost certainly more theological than political.⁹ Paul’s usage was not original to him or to his mission, as his reference to ‘the churches of Judea’ (Gal. 1.22) also implies. It embodied not so much a claim to be a new political entity as a claim to be in direct continuity with Israel, the Israel that God called out (*ekkalein*) to be his people in the world. To be ‘the church of God’ meant to be in line with God’s purpose for his people from the time he first called them out to be his people. Here again the regularity of Paul’s use of the plural (‘churches’) is worth noting: Paul evidently thought of separate gatherings, in houses or cities, several in a city or region, as individually ‘churches’. The thought of ‘the church’ as a national or universal entity had not yet come to expression.¹⁰ Wherever a group of believers in Jesus as Lord came together (*syn-agomai*), there was ‘the church of God’.

The richer vision of the universal church which we find in the later Paulines we should certainly not ignore. Particularly striking is the way the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians envisage the Church as the place of reconciliation, where reconciliation between different nations and warring parties takes place (Eph. 2.13-22; Col. 1.18-20). But here I wish to focus more on the house churches so typical of Paul’s mission, since we need to be aware of the historical realities Paul had in mind when he spoke about church and about its functioning and organisation.

4.2 House churches

It is probably unnecessary to point out that when Paul speaks of the Corinthian believers ‘coming together in church’ (1 Cor. 11.18), the thought was not of ‘church’ as place (‘in a building’). Rather it was of the individuals themselves coming together to *be* church, *as* church. ‘Church’ denoted people not place. In view of the later connotations which have become attached to ‘church’ (= ‘building’) it might be less confusing to use terms like ‘congregation’, ‘gathering’, ‘meeting’, ‘assembly’. That said, of course, an important question is, Where did the first believers come together in the cities of the Aegean mission? What accommodation did they use for their comings together? This involves something of a parenthesis, but one which I hope will be worthwhile.

a) *The archaeological evidence.* Since the Pauline mission almost certainly began as a rule in one or other of the synagogues in the city entered,¹¹ it is useful to begin by noting what we know of

⁶ Rom. 16.5; 1 Cor. 16.19; Col. 4.15; Phm 2. There is wide agreement that the greetings of Rom. 16.14-15 have in view other house churches in addition to the meeting in the house of Prisca and Aquila (16.5).

⁷ ‘The church of God’ – 1 Cor. 1.1; 10.32; 11.22; 15.9; 2 Cor. 1.1; Gal. 1.13. ‘The churches of God’ – 1 Cor. 11.16; 1 Thes. 2.14; 2 Thes. 1.4.

⁸ In LXX *qahal* is translated by *ekklēsia* 68 times and by *synagōgē* 36 times; see H.-J. Fabry, *TDOT* 12.546-61 (here 561); details in Hatch & Redpath 433 and 1309-10. Note again Acts 7.38.

⁹ See also J. Roloff, *ekklēsia*, *EDNT* 1.412.

¹⁰ See further my *Theology of Paul* 537-40.

¹¹ Acts 13.14; 14.1; 16.13; 17.1, 10, 17; 18.4, 19; 19.8; 28.17, 23. See further my *Beginning from Jerusalem* #29.5b.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

first century synagogues in the western diaspora. Archaeology has uncovered several synagogue buildings which were almost certainly already established in the first century in Italy, Greece and Asia Minor – for example, at Ostia, Rome’s port, at Stobi, in Macedonia, on the Aegean island of Delos, and at Priene, between Ephesus and Miletus.¹² In many, probably most cases, however, the Jewish community had to make private houses serve as synagogues, wherever there was a significant Jewish community.¹³

What then of the meeting places of the first believers, when the latter moved out of the immediate synagogue context? Archaeology has uncovered no structure which can be both identified as a ‘church’ and confidently dated earlier than a century or more later than Paul. So we have to assume that these meetings took place either in private homes or in larger premises rented for the occasion. Nothing in our sources indicates that the latter was realistic in the great majority of cases. The cost of regular bookings would probably have been beyond the means of the first small groups, and in any case local associations would hardly welcome competing societies to their premises. And temple property would hardly be conducive to a Christian gathering. The only obvious conclusion is that the first believers met as ‘church’ in each other’s houses, with the wealthiest member and the largest house providing a regular venue for ‘the whole church’ in different centres. This deduction is strengthened by the various references to house churches in Paul’s letters, and by Paul’s reference to Gaius as ‘host to the whole church’ at the end of his letter to Rome (Rom. 16.23), which was written from Corinth. Paul likewise speaks of ‘the whole church’ in Corinth coming together for worship (1 Cor. 14.23), so presumably in both cases he was thinking of those occasions when all the local believers could meet together, as distinct from the several and more frequent(?) smaller gatherings in smaller homes.

What then does archaeology tell us about such homes in the larger cities fringing the Aegean? Some sites are no help whatever. For example, Thessalonica in Macedonia and Smyrna in Asia Minor, as indeed also Rome, have been so built over that little remains open to view. Fortunately, however, the changing geography and economic fortunes of places like Ostia, Corinth and Ephesus, have left substantial remains which are still being worked on and from which we can gain a good grasp of the range of housing stock in such cities during or around our period. Attention has usually been caught by the more substantial properties, occupying most of a small block within a network of streets. But in places the ruins extend above the first floor level (Ostia in particular) and give us a better idea of what must have been one-room or small apartments in tenement blocks.

In his article in the *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Nicholas Purcell sums up the situation well:

By the imperial period, multi-storey tenement blocks, which were usually known as *insulae*, housed all but a tiny fraction of the population of Rome and other big cities. Not all this accommodation was of low quality; some was sited in attractive areas, some *cenacula* (apartments) were sufficiently large, those on the lower floors were not inconvenient . . . and many people of quite high status could afford no better.¹⁴

¹² Details in C. Claussen, *Versammlung, Gemeinde, Synagoge: das hellenistisch-jüdisch Umfeld der frühchristlichen Gemeinden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 191-206.

¹³ L. M. White, ‘Synagogue and Society in Imperial Ostia: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence’, in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* 30-68: ‘The evidence indicates that most, if not all, of the earliest synagogues were renovated from existing buildings, usually houses’ (34); see further his *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture* (2 vols.; Harvard Theological Studies 42; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1996-97) 1.60-101. The synagogue buildings at Priene, Stobi and Dura Europos were originally private houses (Schürer, *History* 3.24, 67; Claussen, *Versammlung* 208).

¹⁴ *OCD*³ 731-2.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

Juvenal in his *Satires* 3.193-202 gives a vivid picture of the shoddy buildings which during the second half of the first century period must often have been built too hastily and too high by landlords anxious to maximize their rental income:

We live in a city shored up for the most part with gimcrack stays and props: that's how our landlords arrest the collapse of their property, papering over great cracks in the ramshackle fabric, reassuring the tenants they can sleep secure, when all the time the building is poised like a house of cards. I prefer to live where fires and midnight panics are not quite such common events. By the time the smoke's got up to your third-floor apartment (and you still asleep), your heroic downstairs neighbour is roaring for water and shifting his bits and pieces to safety. If the alarm goes at ground level, the last to fry will be the attic tenant, way up among the nesting pigeons with nothing but the tiles between himself and the weather.¹⁵

b) *The size of first century churches.* What deductions can we make concerning the churches which met within the range of property which literature and archaeology has revealed to us? Given that the majority of any group of converts in any city was likely to be illiterate, lacking in influence and low-born (1 Cor. 1.26), we certainly have to assume that their accommodation would have been at the lower end of the scale. That is to say, if Purcell is correct, most would have lived in multi-storey tenement blocks, perhaps several stories above the ground. Presumably some gatherings at least took place in such apartments, or at least the larger ones nearer street level. A church in such a 'house' would consist of only a small group, of, say, up to twelve. Though since the word 'house' inevitably carries connotations of a larger property, such cell groups would probably be better referred to as 'tenement churches'.¹⁶ Again, if Purcell is correct, even the relatively prosperous Aquila and Priscilla could almost certainly have been able to afford no more than a larger ground-floor apartment of a more substantial tenement property, so that the churches which met in their houses (Rom. 16.5; 1 Cor. 16.19) might only have been fifteen or twenty-five strong.

However, it is sufficiently clear that most city groups of early disciples would have included at least some higher status members. And the probability is that these latter would have invited the local believers to meet as church in their larger property. Gaius has already been mentioned as hosting 'the whole church' in Corinth (Rom. 16.23), making it possible for 'the whole congregation' to come together (*synerchesthai*) 'at the same place (*epi to auto*)' (1 Cor. 11.20; 14.23). And Philemon's house in Colossae could accommodate both several guests¹⁷ and some slaves.¹⁸ If, then, we should envisage Christians coming together as churches in more substantial houses, houses with an atrium and a dining room (*triclinium*), we can certainly assume that larger gatherings were accommodated. How much larger is a matter of some dispute. The best estimates run up to fifty,¹⁹ though quite how such a large group could meet as a single, coherent meeting is less than clear. Were they divided among two or more rooms? When the church met for the common meal, not all, presumably, could have been accommodated in the triclinium, a fact which probably helps to make sense of the unsatisfactory arrangements for the only church about whose gatherings Paul speaks (Corinth).²⁰ Certainly numbers able to be accommodated should not be

¹⁵ As quoted by S. Goodenough, *Citizens of Rome* (London: Hamlyn, 1979) 62.

¹⁶ R. Jewett has for some years insisted on the more realistic term 'tenement churches' rather than the potentially misleading 'house churches' (with reference to villas uncovered in places like Pompeii and Corinth); see his 'Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church', *BR* 38 (1993) 23-43; now also R. Jewett, *Romans* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 53-5, 64-6.

¹⁷ Phm 22: 'Prepare a guest room for me'; not 'the guest room'.

¹⁸ There is no suggestion that Onesimus, the subject of the letter to Philemon, was the latter's only slave.

¹⁹ R. J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980) 40-2; J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983) 153-8.

²⁰ 1 Cor. 11.17-22.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

calculated on the bare data of square feet or square metres, since space would presumably be taken up with furnishings and possibly also statuary or ornaments.

The basic point which emerges is that the earliest house churches, in most cases, must have been fairly small, a dozen or twenty people in all. And even when ‘the whole church’ in a city or section of a city could meet as church in one place, we may very well be talking of only forty or fifty people, and not necessarily gathered in a single room. The dynamics of church life, of the shared life of believers in most cities, must have been dependent on and to some extent determined by the physical space in which they were able to function as church. We, of course, are accustomed to visualizing huge church buildings and congregations which can be numbered in the hundreds or even thousands. So it is important for us to remember that the typical church of the first century or more of Christian history was the gathering of a small cell comprising twenty or so, and less regularly up to about fifty. This is important, since we are now well aware that the social dynamics of small groups is very different from that of large groups. And the accompanying theology needs to take such factors more into account than is usually the case. In many cases our concern should be not that our churches are too small but that they are too large!

The same applies when we turn to the second aspect of Paul’s trinitarian ecclesiology – the body of Christ.

4.3 The body of Christ

In the first two lectures I emphasized the strong continuity between Paul and his Jewish heritage. In Rom. 9-11 in particular Paul insisted that God remained faithful to his covenant with and promises to Israel. This strong sense of continuity is underlined by his use of *ekklēsia* to denote the gatherings of believers in Messiah Jesus – Christians gathering as the *qahal YHWH*. It is notable, however, that when Paul turned from the subject of Israel and its future, in Romans 12, he reached for a different image or metaphor for the assembly of Christians – the body of Christ. In the first lecture I also emphasized that for Paul himself the principal identity factor for him was not so much his own status as an Israelite, but his being ‘in Christ’. Here the point which needs to be emphasized is that the communal equivalent to the individual believer ‘in Christ’, the corporate equivalent to being ‘in Christ’, is ‘the body of Christ’. ‘We are all one body in Christ’ (Rom. 12.5). ‘Just as the body is one and has many members . . . so also is Christ’ (1 Cor. 12.12). ‘You (Corinthians) are Christ’s body and individually members’ (12.27). To be ‘in Christ’ is to be a member of ‘the body of Christ’. Why this image?

a) *One body, many members*. Much the most plausible source of the imagery is the use of the metaphor of the body as a vital expression of the unity of a community despite the diversity of its members. The image of the city or state as a body (we still use it in speaking of ‘the body politic’) was already familiar in political philosophy. The famous fable of Menenius Agrippa, narrated by Livy and Epictetus, is the best-known example.²¹ The point being made by Menenius Agrippa was that plebs and patricians could not cease to cooperate with each other. It would be like the limbs of the body refusing to cooperate with the bodily organs, with disastrous results for the body. Paul’s exposition in 1 Cor. 12.14-26 closely echoes the concerns of the fable: that the unity and well-being of the state depended on the mutual interdependence of its diverse members, the trade guilds and national groupings, being fully recognized and lived out in mutually beneficial interaction. Paul seems to have adapted this familiar metaphor of community and drew from it the same implications

²¹ Livy, *Historia* 2.32; Epictetus 2.10.4-5.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

for mutual recognition and cooperation. The Christian assembly is a body, like the body politic. It functions as a unity only by the different members acting in harmonious interdependence. However it is different from the body politic precisely because its distinctive and identifying feature is that it is the *body of Christ*.

The significance of this should be pondered. For Paul in effect shifts the corporate image of the Christian community from that of the nation state (historical Israel) to that of the citizen assembly. That is, he shifts the image from a community identified by ethnic and traditional boundary markers to one whose members are drawn from different nationalities and social strata, and whose prosperity depends on their mutual cooperation and their working harmoniously together. The identity of the *Christian* assembly as 'body', however, is not given by geographical location or political allegiance, or by race, social status, or gender. It is given but by their common allegiance to Christ, visibly expressed not least in baptism in his name and in the sacramental sharing of his body. The implication is clear. Only when that common allegiance is given primacy in mutual relations can the potential factional differences be transformed into the necessary mutual cooperation for the common good. It is the common commitment to Christ, being 'in Christ', which determines our communal character as the body of Christ. Anything which diminishes or obscures that central fact diminishes and obscures the reality of the body of Christ. And if Christ is present on earth in his body, through his body, as his body, then our failure to embody that central fact actually hinders and prevents Christ's presence and ministry for the world. That is a sobering corollary to have to draw. For Paul, the term 'Jew' had to be redefined not by circumcision but as one praised by God (Rom. 2.28-29). And the term 'Israel' had to be redefined not in ethnic or national terms but as those 'called by God' (Rom. 9.6-12). So we too should try to ensure that the definition of the body of Christ is not confused by political status or traditional ritual but remains determined first and always by the attachment of each of its members to Christ.

b) *The apostolic church*. When we look at the ministries in Paul's understanding of the church as the body of Christ, the most prominent is that of apostle: 'God has appointed in the church first apostles' (1 Cor. 12.28). This enables us to tie in Paul's concept of his role as apostle with his understanding of the apostolic church. For one of the fundamental aspects of Paul's apostolic mission was to found (or plant) churches. For Paul, an apostle was commissioned, sent forth, to found churches. This is clearest in 1 Cor. 9.1-2: 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord? . . . If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord'. Here the authority of the 'apostle' is very much tied in to the apostle's role in establishing a church: Paul was not apostle to others, because he had not converted them, had not founded their churches; but he was to the Corinthians, because it was through his evangelism that the church of Corinth had come into existence. In other passages in the Corinthian letters Paul's conviction that he had been commissioned as a church-planting missionary comes to repeated expression:

- 1 Cor. 3.5-15 – 'like a skilled master builder' he laid the foundation;
- 15.10-11 – he worked harder than the other apostles to bring his audiences to faith;
- 2 Cor. 5.20 – he saw his role as an 'ambassador for Christ'.

This ties in to the agreement to which Paul was party in Jerusalem: that he (and Barnabas) would be responsible for the Gentiles (Gentile believers) and for mission to the Gentiles (Gal. 2.9). It is important to note that Paul did not regard his apostolic commission as something very general, apostle to all believers. Rather, it was specific – to the Gentiles. So it was to that extent limited, limited to the churches for which he was responsible, and Paul seems to have accepted that it was so limited. This is why he became so angry when others encroached on his territory and was so hesitant about overstepping the limitations of his own commission (2 Cor. 10.13-16). Here we should note the

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

symbiotic relation between apostle and church which Paul thus worked with. So when he says that ‘God appointed in the church first apostles’ (1 Cor. 12.28) he was most likely *not* thinking of the universal church and of apostles with universal authority.²² Rather he was most likely thinking of ‘the church’ in the sense that the Corinthian believers came together to be the church in Corinth (11.18; 12.27). The ‘apostles’ of 12.28 were the apostles who had established them as believers, brought them together to be the body of Christ in Corinth. The apostles appointed to the church in Corinth were, in the first place, Paul himself, and possibly also Apollos (1 Cor. 4.9). We can probably draw similar conclusions from Paul’s description of Andronicus and (his wife?) Junia as ‘outstanding among the apostles’. Here we should note that Andronicus and Junia are the only apostles Paul mentions in regard to the Roman Christians. So the most likely explanation is that Andronicus and Junia were the apostles who founded (one or more of) the house church(es) in Rome.²³ Should we be embarrassed at the thought that one of the founding apostles of the church in Rome was a woman? If so, why, since Paul himself seems to relish Junia’s apostolic role?

So the second trinitarian feature of Paul’s ecclesiology is his understanding of the church as the body of Christ. What of the third feature?

4.4 The fellowship of the Spirit

Paul brought two words into play in his references to the church. One was *koinōnia*; the other was *charisma*. Each calls for attention.

a) *The shared experience of the Spirit*. The key phrase comes in the parting benediction of 2 Corinthians: ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the *koinōnia* of the Holy Spirit be with you all’ (2 Cor. 13.13). The phrase is usually translated ‘the fellowship of the Spirit’. This is misleading, because it is usually taken as referring to the community of the Spirit – as in ‘The Women’s Fellowship’, an organisation within a church. But repeated studies have made it clear that the basic meaning of the phrase is better given in a translation like ‘participation in the Spirit’.²⁴ That is to say, what is in view is not a physical entity, like a congregation, but the subjective experience of the Spirit as something shared, mutually participated in. The point is, then, that what draws and keeps believers together for Paul was not simply a common membership of a congregation, but the common experience of the Spirit. It was believers’ awareness that their experience of the Spirit was one which others had also shared which provided the bond of mutual understanding and sympathy.

As we saw earlier, it was precisely this recognition, that uncircumcized Gentiles were experiencing the Spirit of God just as those at Pentecost had experienced the Spirit, the same Spirit, the same experience of being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 10.47; 11.15-17; 15.8), which ensured that the Gentile believers would be accepted as full members of the church without their being circumcized. The unity was the direct outcome of the *koinōnia* of the Spirit, the shared experience of the Spirit. Paul drove home the same point in 1 Cor. 12.13: it was their common experience of being

²² See also particularly J. Hainz, *Ekklesia: Strukturen paulinischer Gemeinde-Theologie und Gemeinde-Ordnung* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1972) 252-5.

²³ On Junia as a female name – so Andronicus and Junia possibly the only husband and wife among ‘all the apostles’ of 1 Cor. 15.7 – see now particularly E. J. Epp, *Junia, The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), with extensive bibliography. For the meaning of the phrase *episēmoi en tois apostolois* as meaning ‘outstanding among the apostles’, rather than ‘well known to the apostles’, see Epp 72-8 and Jewett, *Romans* 963.

²⁴ J. Y. Campbell, ‘KOINŌNIA and its Cognates in the New Testament’, *JBL* 51 (1932), reprinted in *Three New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 1-28 (especially 25-27); F. Hauck, *TDNT* 3.804-8; J. Hainz, *EDNT* 2.203-5, drawing on his larger study, *KOINŌNIA: ‘Kirche’ als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus* (BU 16; Regensburg: Pustet, 1982).

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

baptized in *one* Spirit which constituted them as *one* body; it was their common experienced of being drenched with *one* Spirit which rendered irrelevant their differences of nationality and social status. And in Eph. 4.3-4 the same point is reinforced. The unity of the church is understood as the direct outworking of the unity of the Spirit. The choice of verb is instructive: ‘make every effort to preserve (*tērein*) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’. The unity of the Spirit was something given, the basis of unity, not something they could create or contrive. All that believers, bound together by their shared experience of the Spirit, was either to preserve that unity, or destroy it.

b) *The charismatic community*. Perhaps the most striking features of Paul’s understanding of the body of Christ is that in each of the passages in which Paul expounds the concept at some length he envisages the body of Christ as a charismatic community.

Just as in one body we have many member, and all the members do not have the same function, so we all are one body in Christ . . . having charisms which differ according to the grace given to us (Rom. 12.4-6).

There are diversities of charisms, but the same Spirit. There are diversities of service, and the same Lord. There are diversities of activities, but the same God, who effects all things in everyone. [Note again the trinitarian ecclesiology] To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . One and the same Spirit distributes to each as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and all watered with the one Spirit. For the body does not have one member but many . . . (1 Cor. 12.4-7, 11-14).

To each of us has been given grace in accordance with the measure of the gift of Christ . . . ‘He gave gifts to humans’ . . . And he gave some as apostle, some as prophets . . . (Eph. 4.7, 8, 11).

The key word in the Romans and 1 Corinthians passages is *charisma*, ‘charism’. It is a word whose status in Christian theology we owe almost entirely to Paul. It had little significance before he took it up. And in the NT there is only one occurrence of the word outside the Pauline corpus.²⁵ Obviously *charisma* is formed from *charis*, ‘grace’, and can be described in shorthand terms as the result or effect or expression of grace. *Charisma* for Paul is that which brings grace to expression, to concrete reality. Here again we should recall that it was such clear evidence of grace in the lives of Paul’s converts which convinced the Jerusalem leadership, not just that God was working through Paul on behalf of Gentiles, but also that such Gentile converts had to be fully accepted as part of the church of God, without requiring any further work of the law. So for Paul, a charism is divine grace coming to effect and expression in word or deed – as clearly in the lists of charisms in Rom. 12.6-8 and 1 Cor. 12.8-10. Conscious of the imagery of the body, Paul defines a charism as the ‘function’ (*praxis*) of an organ or limb of the body. And conscious of the point of the body metaphor, Paul is quick to insist that the charism is not for personal use or benefit, but as a function of the body, and so ‘for the common good’ (1 Cor. 12.7), for the benefit of others, for the benefit of the whole.

To gain a proper grasp of Paul’s concept of the body of Christ as charismatic community, we need to observe a number of other point.

First, Paul conceives of a rich diversity of charisms. The lists he offers in the three passages just referred to were certainly not intended as a comprehensive or complete list. The fact that several of the charisms he includes in these lists are rather vague or overlap makes the point – for example prophecy and exhortation, sharing, caring and acts of mercy in the list in Romans. The list in 1 Cor. 12 obviously had in view the particular experiences and fascinations of the Corinthian assembly,

²⁵ Rom. 1.11; 5.15, 16; 6.23; 11.29; 12.6; 1 Cor. 1.7; 7.7; 12.4, 9, 28, 30, 31; 2 Cor. 1.11; 1 Tim. 4.14; 2 Tim. 1.6; 1 Pet. 4.10.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

particularly speaking in tongues, and experiences of inspiration, healings and miracles. The point is that for Paul, a word or action was a charism whenever it brought grace to expression. One corollary which follows is worth noting immediately: that we should beware of limiting the concept of 'means of grace' to the sacraments or the preaching of the Word. For Paul, any word or action through which grace comes to expression for the benefit of others is a charism, a means of grace.

Second, Paul did not think of charisms as limited to few, to a special order within the body of Christ. In his fuller exposition of the body of Christ in 1 Cor. 12 he makes a special point of denying that the functioning of the body could be limited to the gifts or ministry of one individual. In fact he draws a cartoon to show how ridiculous that thought could be. He draws, as it were, a large eye, with a little head, arms and legs, or a large ear, with a little head, arms and legs. Is that a body? Could that single individual, that single ministry function as a whole body? 'If all were a single member, where would the body be?' (1 Cor. 12.19). Where indeed? A church so dependent historically on its order of priests, individual congregations historically so dependent on its priest, need to take Paul's question with more seriousness than they have hitherto. We have hardly begun to appreciate what 'the ministry of the whole people of God involves or requires. When ministry is limited to the few the result is a grotesque parody of the body, a body eighty or ninety percent paralyzed, with only a few organs functioning, and functioning to little effect, since the effectiveness of the body depends on its diversity functioning in unity.

Third, the lists of charisms Paul provides include not just the eye-catching prophecy, speaking in tongues, or miracles. Also charisms are 'helpful deeds', 'giving guidance' (1 Cor. 12.28), sharing and doing acts of mercy (Rom. 12.8). In his fuller exposition in 1 Cor. 12.14-26 Paul makes a point of insisting that no charism, however modest or humble it may seem to be, is to be looked down upon or regarded as unnecessary. Once again, the ministry of the whole people of God needs to be paid more than the lip-service which it has so often been given. Paul did not split his concept of the body of Christ into those who ministered and those who were ministered to. To each was given the manifestation of the Spirit. The variety of ministries, of charismatic function, extended to all members.

Fourth, Paul also makes a point of noting that the charisms include a system of checks and balances. The charism of speaking in tongues should always be checked and in a sense controlled by the charism of interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 14.13-19, 27-28). The charism of prophecy should always be evaluated (1 Cor. 14.29; 1 Thess. 5.20-22), checked by the charism of 'discernment of spirits' (1 Cor. 12.10). All charisms are to be regarded as of less importance than the manifestation of love (1 Cor. 13).

A final aspect of Paul's concept of assembled believers as the body of Christ, a charismatic community should not be overlooked. This is Paul's understanding of what we might call the balance of authority in the congregation. Of course there were the authoritative ministries of apostle, prophet and teacher. And Paul did not hesitate to exercise his own authority when he deemed it necessary, as in 1 Cor. 11.16 and 14.37-38. But he also recognized the responsibility and authority of the congregation itself. On several occasions he exhorted *all* members of different churches to teach, admonish, judge and comfort.²⁶ In exhorting the Corinthians he never seems to envisage a recognized leadership group, overseers or elders, to whom he could appeal to maintain better order in the shared meals and worship gatherings. His hope was rather that when they came together as church someone would be given a word of wisdom to lead them (1 Cor. 6.5). As Stephanas and his household had 'appointed themselves' to a ministry for the saints which they saw was lacking (1 Cor. 16.15), so he presumably hoped that others would respond to the prompting of

²⁶ Rom. 15.14; 1 Cor. 5.4-5; 2 Cor. 2.7; Col. 3.16; 1 Thess. 5.14.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

the Spirit to speak or act. So too the congregation was responsible to recognize such charisms when they were displayed (16.18; 1 Thess. 5.12). And not just the prophets were responsible to evaluate particular prophecies (1 Cor. 14.29), but the whole congregation, all the members of the body, were responsible to 'test everything' (1 Thess. 5.21).

For those who think of the church functioning primarily or even solely by orders of ministry, by ecclesial hierarchy, it is a sobering thought to reckon with that Paul thought of the body of Christ functioning charismatically, that is, by the function of the different charisms in harmonious interaction. But this seems to be what Paul had in mind – an interplay of authority, of apostle, prophet and teacher on the one hand, and of the charismatic community on the other. Hans von Campenhausen's summary description of Paul's 'vision of the structure of the community as one of free fellowship, developing through the living interplay of spiritual gifts and ministries, without the benefit of official authority or responsible "elders"' still seems to be closer to the reality envisaged in Paul's letters than most other formulations.²⁷

What is important here is the full recognition of the third dimension of Paul's trinitarian ecclesiology. 'We believe in the Holy Spirit' does not mean, cannot surely mean, belief only in the Spirit given only through the sacraments, shut up in the Bible, in effect subordinated to the hierarchy. The Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit who broke through the boundaries round Israel to open the grace of God to Gentile as well as Jew, is not, cannot be so bound. As Hans Küng warned forty years ago, 'In a Church or community where only ecclesiastical official rather than all the members if the community are active, there is grave reason to wonder whether the Spirit has not been sacrificed along with the spiritual gifts'.²⁸

4.5 Conclusion

In sum, then, if we could recapture the full sweep of Paul's trinitarian ecclesiology it would save us from many of our traditional failings. As the church of God, the church stands in full continuity with the *qahal YHWH*; recognition of that fact might well have saved Christianity from its hateful tradition of anti-Judaism. So too the church as the place where reconciliation happens between God and humankind, between Jew and Gentile, between races and cultures might have been much more of a reality than it has been. As the body of Christ, the church is Christ's bodily presence still in the world today. But our failure to recognize that all 'in Christ' are the body of Christ has surely disabled and crippled Christ's bodily presence in the world for far too long. As the fellowship of the Spirit, the church should function as charismatic community, the body functioning by the grace bestowed by the Spirit. But we have fled from God's Spirit for too long; we have hidden ourselves from the Spirit. And when the life of the Spirit bubbles up in charismatic excess without learning the lessons which history teaches, without drawing on the wisdom of tradition, we don't really know what to do. But one thing which would help is if we were fully to recover Paul's trinitarian teaching on the church.

²⁷ H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (1953; London: A & C Black, 1969) 70-1.

²⁸ H. Küng, *The Church* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967) 187.