ECCLESIOLOGY AND ETHICS

IN 1 CORINTHIANS

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I. PAUL AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

Paul was a planter of churches (1 Cor 3:6-9), an organizer of far-flung little communities around the Mediterranean that united clusters of disparate people in the startling confession that God had raised a crucified man, Jesus, from the dead and thus initiated a new age in which the whole world was to be transformed. The letters of Paul that survive in the NT are his pastoral communications with these mission outposts. Though separated from them, he continued to offer them exhortation and counsel about how to conduct their common life "worthily of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1:27).

These general observations about the Pauline mission merely restate common knowledge, but their implications for Pauline ethics have not been sufficiently appreciated. I would like to draw particular attention to their significance for interpreting the moral vision of the Pauline letters. It will be my contention that Pauline ethics is fundamentally ecclesial in character and that we begin to grasp his moral vision only when we understand that he sees the church as inheriting the corporate vocation of God's covenant people, Israel. Apart from this foundational assumption, Paul's ethic can only appear to be what many critics have thought it to be: a haphazard conglomeration of moral notions drawn eclectically from the commonplaces of his time.

To be sure, Paul nowhere sets forth a systematic presentation of "Christian ethics." Nor does he offer his communities a "Manual of Discipline," a comprehensive summary of community organization and duties.[1] Instead, he responds ad hoc to the contingent pastoral problems that arise in his churches.[2] Should Gentile believers be circum-cised? Should converts to Paul's movement divorce their unbelieving spouses? Or, on the other hand, should married couples who convert stop having sexual relations? Are Christians obligated to obey the Roman authorities? What is to be done when some members of the church hog all the food at the potluck supper? In every case, Paul offers answers.

The advice that he offers is not merely generic and conventional, as though he were a first-century Ann Landers, answering everybody's cards and letters in terms of a lowest common denominator of common sense. Rather, he is seeking to shape the life of a particular community in accordance with his vision; his exhortations are aimed at defining and maintaining a corporate identity for his young churches, which are emphatically countercultural communities. Thus, his letters should be read primarily as instruments of community formation. Their rhetoric consistently aims at reinforcing group cohesion and loyalty within the community of faith. Social-scientific approaches to Paul's correspondence have helpfully highlighted this aspect of his apostolic project.[3]

Paul's strong thematic emphasis on community is not, however, merely a matter of practical expediency, nor is it to be understood solely in terms

of sociological models. Rather, Paul develops his account of the new community in Christ as a fundamental theological theme in his proclamation of the gospel.4 Indeed, the focus on community is a part of the gospel itself. How so? If we ask, "What is God doing in the world in the interval between resurrection and parousia?" the answer must be given, for Paul, primarily in ecclesial terms: God is at work through the Spirit to create communities that prefigure and embody the reconciliation and healing of the world. The fruit of God's love is the formation of communities that confess, worship, and pray together in a way that glorifies God (see, e.g., Rom 15:7-13). Such communities are palpable signs of God's reconciliation of the world.

This message finds its most remarkable expression in 2 Cor 5:14-21, in which Paul declares that the death of Christ has brought into being a "new creation," made manifest in the church which is entrusted with "the ministry of reconciliation."5 The conclusion of the passage articulates a mystery that stands at the heart of Paul's gospel: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Notice that he does not say "so that we might know about the righteousness of God" or even "so that we might receive the righteousness of God," or "so that we might have the righteousness of God imputed to us vicariously." Instead, the vocation of the community is to become the righteousness of God, to embody God's righteousness (i.e., his covenant faithfulness) in the world.6 That was the purpose for which Christ died. The theological claim here about the identity of the church is extraordinary, but it is foundational in Paul's thought. Such a claim is possible only because Paul understands the church to be God's new covenant people, those who bear God's name and disclose his true will and character.7

How does this emphasis on community formation as the telos of God's redemptive activity cash out in Pauline ethics? What are the ethical implications of Paul's ecclesiology?

1. Those who are baptized, Paul insists, have become "one in Christ Jesus," no longer divided by former distinctions of ethnicity, social status, or gender (Gal 3:28). Because in Christ they are all "sons8 of God," they all belong together in a single family in which all are joint heirs.9 His passionate opposition to Cephas at Antioch (Gal 2:11-21) sprang from his urgent conviction that Jews and Gentiles must be one in Christ, not separated by social barriers. The basic problem with the desire of Jewish Christians to maintain Torah observance was, according to Paul, not that it engendered "works righteousness," but rather that it fractured the unity of the community in Christ.10 John Barclay, following J. D. G. Dunn and others, has well summarized the ethical issue at stake: "The problem here is not legalism (in the sense of earning merit before God) but cultural imperialism-regarding Jewish identity and Jewish customs as the essential tokens of membership in the people of God."11

2. It is important to realize, however, that Paul could equally be accused of pro-mulgating a reverse "cultural imperialism." He has relativized and disqualified the distinctively Jewish signs of membership in God's covenant community ("works of law"= circumcision, food laws, sabbath observance), but he has at the same time inevitably set up new marks of participation in that community (confession of faith, baptism, experience of the Holy Spirit).

Daniel Boyarin, in an important and provocative study of Paul, describes Paul's vision of community as "particularist universalism."l2 It should not be forgotten that the community whose unity Paul passionately seeks is not the human community as a whole, nor is it a pluralistic community within the polis. Rather, it is always the particular community of the church. To be sure, Paul hopes for the ultimate triumph of God's grace over all human unbelief and disobedience (Rom 11:32; Phil 2:9-11). Consequently, he hopes for the final reconciliation of all humanity to God. Until that eschatological consummation, however, Paul speaks only to the community of faith. He articulates no basis for a general ethic applicable to those outside the church.

3. The key questions for Pauline ethics, then, must always be formulated in ecclesial terms. The community is the primary addressee of God's imperatives. If the biblical story focuses on God's design for forming a covenant people-as Paul believes it doesl3-then the primary sphere of moral concern is not the character of the individual, but the corporate obedience of the church. Paul's formulation in Rom 12:1-2 encapsulates the vision: "Present your bodies [somata, plural] as a living sacrifice [thysian, singular], holy and well-pleasing to God. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind…." The community, in its corporate life, is called to embody an alternative order that stands as a sign of God's redemptive purposes in the world. This is the concrete social manifestation of the righteousness of God. The coherence of Paul's ethical teaching comes into focus only when we understand that he is consistently formulating the ethical mandate in ecclesial terms, seeking God's will not by asking first, "What should I do?" but" What should we, as God's people, do?"

4. If indeed the church is interpreted as the proleptic fulfillment of the scriptural narrative of election and promise, one more crucial theological affirmation-alluded to already above-must be underscored: the church is the community of the new covenant. In 2 Cor 3:16, Paul explicitly describes himself as a minister of "a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit." The word of God-mediated through Paul (v.3)-is now written upon the hearts of the community, as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer 31:33). No longer is God's will written on stone or in ink; it is embodied in the life of the community. Indeed, it was a salient aspect of Jeremiah's prophecy that no merely written law would be necessary in God's new covenant, nor would there be a need for specially authorized interpreters: "No longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother...for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." This notion that the people of the new covenant should already know the law written on their hearts is, of course, the source of a great deal of trouble for Paul, but it also explains a great deal about his ethical modus operandi. He refuses to deal with ethical problems solely through exposition of the law, for he prefers to appeal to a spiritual discernment that is operative through the transformation of the community. With transformed minds, the church should be able to discern the will of God (Rom 12:2).

5. Another consequence of construing the church as the community of the new covenant is that the Pauline Gentile churches are seen in metaphorical continuity with Israel. Paul refers to Abraham as their father (Rom 4) and, writing to the predominantly Gentile church at Corinth, calls Israel of the

exodus generation "our fathers in the wilderness" (1 Cor 10:1).14 Because
the continuity is metaphorical rather than "in the flesh," Paul can reject
the mandate for observance of specific Torah practices such as circumcision
and food laws, while retaining the claim that the community (the ekklesia)
is the sphere of God's special activity and blessing, the manifestation of
God's righteousness.

II. THE ROLE OF ECCLESIOLOGY IN STUDIES OF PAULINE ETHICS

In light of the above summary of the ecclesial basis and orientation of
Pauline ethics, it is reasonable to ask whether this aspect of Paul's
thought has been appropriately recognized in NT scholarship. A full report
of the research on this issue would expand this essay beyond reasonable
limits, but a few general observations about the state of the question may
be ventured.

1. The standard surveys of NT ethics almost completely ignore the ecclesial
context and shaping of Paul's moral vision. Here I refer to the works on NT
ethics by J. L. Houlden, J. T. Sanders, Allen Verhey, Siegfried Schulz,
Wolfgang Schrage, L. William Countryman, Eduard Lohse, and Willi Marxsen.15
To be sure, most of these works discuss "love" as a central theme of Paul's
ethic, but they tend to treat it as though it were an individual character
attribute or responsibility.

For example, J. T. Sanders writes:

In his bondage to the flesh, the Christian cannot love; but, in the new
existence granted to him in faith, and which is shortly to be actualized by
God's coming, he can love or, at least, be commanded to love-that is, to
attest the existence which he knows, in faith, to be his.16

In the succeeding paragraph, Sanders describes Rom 12:1ff. as a passage that
"intends to be instructive regarding what a Christian is to do."17
Remarkably, his entire discussion of Romans 12 offers no hint that Paul is
addressing the community or that the passage's moral admonitions are to be
lived out in the context of the church.18 Indeed, Sanders can summarize
Paul's basic moral intent, without reference to the community of faith, by
saying that "The Christian is one who `does the good' to his fellow man."19
Similarly, Lohse can write of Paul's ethic in terms of "new creation in the
the life of the believer," without any acknowledgement that for Paul the new
creation is manifest precisely in the life of the community.20

In one sense, it is not inappropriate to apply Paul's admonitions to the
life of the individual believer. Certainly Paul does think that individual
Christians are called to love and that individuals participate in the new
creation. My point, however, is that these general discussions of Pauline
ethics employ a highly individualistic hermeneutical filter that strains out
crucially important matters. Paul's concern for the life of the community is
hermeneutically converted into moral exhortation for individual religious
subjects. It is tempting to blame this individualistic reading on Rudolf
Bultmann's influential treatment of Paul in his Theology of the New
Testament,21 but the truth is that Bultmann's work is also a symptom rather
than a cause of the misreading that I am describing, which is rooted deep in
the traditions of Western Protestantism.22

2. Some of the monographs that deal specifically with Pauline ethics are more helpful in calling attention to the ecclesial dimensions of Paul's moral vision. Victor Furnish's landmark study Theology and Ethics in Paul offers a number of clear articulations of the point that I am emphasizing:

The conception of salvation as an individual matter between man and God is utterly foreign to Paul's preaching. . . . To be in Christ, in the Lord, in the Spirit means to be in the community of Christ, the Lord, and the Spirit.23

Hence, the will of God is always to be discerned by and for the community, not by individuals in isolation:

This communal context of the believer's life is of the greatest importance for Paul's understanding of how the Christian is able to know what he ought to and ought not to do. . . . The believer's life and action are always in, with, and for "the brethren" in Christ. For him, moral action is never a matter of an isolated actor choosing from among a variety of abstract ideas on the basis of how inherently "good" or "evil" each may be. Instead it is always a matter of choosing and doing what is good for the brother and what will upbuild the whole community of brethren.24

Despite these forceful statments, however, Furnish does not treat ecclesiology as one of the"root-motifs" of Pauline ethics; instead, he gives programmatic emphasis to Paul's "theological, eschatological, and christological convictions."25 In fact, apart from the passages just cited, ecclesiology plays a relatively minor role in Furnish's account of Pauline ethics.

Three studies that do place fundamental emphasis on the centrality of the church in Paul's thought are Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, T. J. Deidun, New Covenant Morality in Paul, and J. Paul Sampley, Walking between the Times.26 Banks' work is an exemplary elucidation of Pauline thought that has not received the attention it deserves in Pauline scholarship.27 Deidun places entirely too much weight on a questionable exegesis of 1 Thess 4:1-12 as an articulation of "new covenant morality," but his stress on the theme of the new covenant as "the Mitte of pauline theology"28-even if slightly overdrawn-is a helpful corrective calling attention to a major neglected theme of Pauline thought.29 Finally, Sampley offers a treatment of Pauline ethics that accords significant emphasis to the role of the community in Paul's thought. The first chapter in his section on Paul's "moral reasoning" is entitled"The Community as Primary Context,"30 and Sampley consistently stresses the ecclesial dimensions of Paul's processes of moral deliberation.3l

3. Studies of the social history and organization of the Pauline churches, though not dealing either with "ecclesiology" or with "ethics" as theological loci, nonetheless have contributed enormously valuable insights on our topic. Here the seminal works are those of Gerd Theissen and Wayne Meeks.32 Meeks devotes a substantial chapter to "The Formation of the Ekklesia,"33 and his subsequent chapters on "Governance," "Ritual," and "Pattems of Belief and Pattems of Life" all contribute to an account of the church communities that Paul formed. By concentrating particularly on the

setting of the Pauline communities within Greco-Roman culture, however, Meeks underplays the importance of Paul's conviction that the church is to be understood in continuity with Israel as God's elect people.

This brief survey is by no means comprehensive, but it suggests some major areas that merit further attention in our effort to understand Paul's theology and ethics. While several studies of Pauline ethics have noted the importance of the church as the context for Paul's moral vision, this insight does not seem to have impressed itself on the field of NT studies at large. The majority of studies on Paul's thought still tend to treat him as concerned with the moral choices and responsibilities of the individual believer. A classic expression of this perspective is provided by Hans Dieter Betz, whose major critical commentary on Galatians characterizes the ethical message of the letter's parenetic section (Gal 5:1-6:10) in the following way:

...Paul does not provide the Galatians with a specifically Christian ethic. The Christian is addressed as an educated and responsible person. He is expected to do no more that what would be expected of any other educated person in the Hellenistic culture of the time.34

Betz's claim that Paul provides no "specifically Christian ethic" is closely linked to his misleading assumption that Paul's moral advice is addressed to the individual Christian rather than to the church as a corporate entity which is called to "bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).35

Since Paul continues to be read-against the grain-as preoccupied with the individual's relationship to God and with the moral responsibilty of individuals, there is a need for fresh theological studies that highlight the importance of ecclesiology (i.e., community formation) for Paul's ethics. In the remainder of this essay, therefore, I propose to reexamine a single Pauline letter (1 Corinthians) with this heuristic question in mind: how is Paul's ethic shaped by his vision of the church?

III. ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE ETHICAL ARGUMENTS OF 1 CORINTHIANS: A SURVEY

The result of reviewing 1 Corinthians through this ecclesial heuristic question is striking: the letter can be read from start to finish as the outworking of an ecclesiologically-centered ethic.36 The Corinthians have understood the gospel in terms of individual spiritual fulfillment, and this misunderstanding has led to rivalry and fragmentation of the community. At every point in his response, Paul recalls them to unity by stressing the ecclesial context of God's grace, the corporate character of God's redemptive work in Christ, and the shared vocation of the community. Concern for unity of the community is the fundamental theme of 1 Corinthians, the common thread that binds the letter's diverse pastoral admonitions together.37 Let us consider some representative passages.

A. 1 Corinthians 1-4: An Appeal for Unity.

The letter's introductory thanksgiving concludes with the affirmation: "God is faithful; by him you were called into the koinonia of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). This call to the fellowship of Jesus then in

turn becomes the immediate ground of a plea for unity:

Now I appeal to you brothers and sisters, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you might be in agreement and that there be no divisions (schismata) among you, but that you be ordered in the same mind and in the same opinion (1:10) .

This exhortation is necessary because Paul has received word that there are indeed quarrels within the Corinthian community. Some of the particular causes of these divisions are discussed during the course of the letter. Paul, however, regards such disunity in the church as contrary to the word of the cross (1:18-2:5) and as a sign of the Corinthians' immaturity in the faith.

And so, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as fleshly people, as infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to handle it. Even now you are not able to handle it, for you are still fleshly. For where there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not fleshly and are you not walking according to human inclinations? (3: 1-4)

Dissension in the church is deeply worrisome to Paul, for the aim of his apostolic labors has been to build community, not just to save souls. He has "laid the foundation" (3:11), and he is concerned that other contractors are botching the subsequent construction job. The quality of construction matters urgently because the community is "God's building"(3:10). Indeed, Paul dares to assert more: the community is the place where God dwells. "Do you not know," he asks, "that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [plural]?"(3:16). To read this last sentence as though it spoke of the Spirit dwelling in the body of the individual Christian would be to miss the force of Paul's audacious metaphor: the apostolically founded community takes the place of the Jerusalem temple as the place where the glory of God resides.38 When the community suffers division, the temple of God is dishonored. But the presence of the Spirit in the community should produce unity rather than conflict. Thus, the first four chapters of the letter focus on Paul's appeal for unity, not, e.g, on Paul's apostolic self-defense.

B. A Test Case: Idol-Meat (1 Cor 8:1-11:1).

A careful examination of 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1 will demonstrate how Paul's appeal for unity within the ekklesia works in response to a particular issue. The Corinthians have written to Paul about several matters (1 Cor 7:1), including the problem of food sacrificed to idols (8:1, 4). In Greco-Roman culture, a person who offered a sacrifice to the god in a pagan temple would often invite family members and friends to share in a feast at which the meat of the sacrificial animal was consumed; the feast was held in the temple of the god (cf. 8:10). In some respects, such social occasions were more like dinner parties than religious ceremonies, but their association with the pagan gods would surely have made many Jews and Christians uneasy about participating. The temptation to participate would have been strong, however, because of social pressure to conform to normal cultural practice. Furthermore, public distribution of meat was sometimes made in conjunction with civic religious festivals; such occasions were among the relatively few

opportunities many people would have had to eat meat.39 Some of the Corinthians, confident in their knowledge (gnosis) that "there is no idol in the world" and that "there is no God but one" (8:4) have decided that there is no harm in participating in such meals celebrated in connection with pagan religious observances. Others, however, whom Paul calls "the weak" (8:7) are scandalized by this behavior or-what Paul considers worse- drawn by the example of the "strong"40 to join in such temple meals despite their own scruples (8:7, 10; cf. Rom 14:23: "Those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin").

Remarkably, Paul does not seek to settle the disagreement among the Corinthians by issuing a simple ruling on the disputed point. Instead, he appeals to those who do possess "knowledge" to act in loving acknowledgment of their familial interdependence with their brothers and sisters in the community who do not share their convictions. His counsel is already implied in the pithy comment with which he leads off the discussion of the problem: "Knowledge puffs up; love builds up (oikodomei) (8:1b; cf.10:23-24). Those who insist on their own spiritual prerogatives and refuse to place concern for the community first are pursuing a disastrous course: "So by your knowledge the weak one is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died"(8:11). The alternative is a way of life that surrenders freedom and prerogatives for the spiritual welfare of others. Paul declares his own intention to choose this way: "Therefore, if food causes my brother to fall, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause my brother to fall" (8:13).

This formulation provides the transition into an extended discussion of Paul's own apostolic conduct as an example of the self-surrendering behavior that he is recommending (9:1-27). As an apostle, Paul asserts, he has the right to receive financial support for his ministry; indeed, "the Lord (Jesus) commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel"(9:14; cf. Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7). Nonetheless-contrary to the direct authority of the tradition of Jesus' teaching!-he refuses to accept support, in order to "make the gospel free of charge" (9:18). The operative norm here is relinquishment of self-interest for the benefit of others.

Paul restates and generalizes this norm in 9:19-23, a passage that bears a striking structural similarity to the Philippians hymn. "For though I am free from all," he declares, "I enslaved myself to all,41 in order that I might gain more of them"(9:19). The passage is often read as a statement of Paul's cultural flexibility for the sake of his mission; rightly so, but its deeper point is Paul's willingness to relinquish his own freedom for the sake of the gospel. With a telling self-description he signals that he has not forgotten the idol-meat issue: "To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak"(9:22). That is, of course, precisely what he wants the "strong" Corinthians to do: to become weak. He is offering himself as a model for imitation. Because he presents himself as one "not seeking my own advantage, but that of many"(10:33), he can at last articulate the exhortation that undergirds the entire idol-meat discussion: "Become imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Thus, we see that Paul addresses this pastoral problem at Corinth not by seeking to determine the appropriate halakah in Torah,42 not by pointing to the authoritative teaching of Jesus or the pronouncement of an Apostolic

Council (Acts 15), but by urging the strong members of the Corinthian church to follow the example of Christ and the example of the apostle by surrendering their place of privilege. The telos of such action is not just to enhance personal virtue and humility, but also to secure the unity of the ekklesia in Christ. At the same time, the community is called to discern the right action in light of the story of Israel in the wilderness. The ekklesia stands in a typological relation to Israel and must therefore beware the dangers of idolatry and spiritual complacency. For the church to see itself prefigured in the story of Israel is to recognize the communal imperative to "flee from the worship of idols"(10:14). The strong Corinthians see the idol-meat issue in terms of individual capacities and prerogatives. Paul reframes the questions as part of a narratively ordered ecclesiology, so that the issue becomes the whole church's freedom from spiritual compromise.

The ethical norm, then, is not given in the form of a predetermined rule or set of rules for conduct; rather, the right action must be discerned on the basis of a christological paradigm, with a view to the need of the community and the community's identity as God's covenant people.

C. Community Discipline (1 Cor 5:1-6:11).

Paul's reluctance to specify narrow behavioral norms was perhaps one of the factors that led to trouble in the Corinthian community. Acting in light of their own spiritual discernment, some of the Corinthians were acting in ways that Paul found deeply objectionable. In 1 Cor 5:1-5, for example, he condemns an incestuous relationship between a man and his mother-in-law as "sexual immorality of a kind that is not found even among Gentiles." Here he gives no reason for his rejection of this behavior; he merely pronounces condemnation. He formulates his moral indignation in a manner ("not found even among the Gentiles") suggesting that this particular normative judgment is rooted in Jewish cultural sensibilities, based ultimately on Lev 18:8: "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife." This background, however, remains implicit.

Even in this disturbing passage, however, the specific directive that Paul gives to the Corinthian church ("Drive out the evil person from among you" [5:13]) is motivated by a concern for the unitary holiness of the community: "Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you [plural] may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened" (5:6b-7a). Thus, concern for the health and purity of the community remains the constant factor in which more specific norms must be grounded.

Indeed, as I argued in Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul, Paul's use of the phrase "you shall drive out the evil person from among you" in 1 Cor 5:13 directly appropriates the language of Deut 17:7 and—even more appositely—Deut 22:22, which prescribes the death penalty for illicit sexual relations among Israelites.43 Paul thus tacitly "adopts" the Gentile Corinthians as members of the covenant people of God. His treatment of the issue makes sense only in these terms: just as Israel was to purge itself of the abominations of the inhabitants of the land, so also the church must purge itself of ways of conduct inappropriate to the kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11).

Similarly, the underlying logic of Paul's rejection of recourse to the courts (6:1-8) is that disputes should be handled within the community of faith. To go to court before unbelievers is to breach the unity of the church. Paul's question, "Can it be that there is no sophos among you?" (6:5), is bitingly ironic in view of the Corinthians' claim to possess a special wisdom. True wisdom is to be found only in conduct that sustains and builds up the community.

D. Building Up the Community through Worship.

The ecclesial character of Paul's ethic is brought into close focus by Paul's long discussion of speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts in the community's worship in chapters 12-14. This passage forcefully holds up the norm of communal edification as the standard by which spirituality is to be measured and guided.

Apparently some of the Corinthians were priding themselves on their rich endowments of spiritually-inspired "speech and knowledge" (cf. 1:5). In the opening of the letter Paul gives thanks, perhaps with a trace of irony, that the Corinthians "are not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1:7). He does not give a direct description of the problems surrounding spiritual manifestations in the Corinthian assembly, but his counsel suggests that some members of the community must have been claiming spiritual superiority and dominating the community's worship with virtuoso displays of glossolalia.

In responding to this situation, Paul develops an account of the church's interdependent common life:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activites, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (12:4-7).

The diversity of God's gifts is necessary "for the common good" of the community. Paul underscores his point by employing the analogy of the human body in which all the parts are necessary to healthy functioning of the organism: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it"(12:26). Then Paul introduces his foundational metaphor for the church's corporate life: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (12:27).

Common participation in the body of Christ becomes the basis for Paul's particular directions concerning the regulation of the community's worship. Speaking in tongues is a spiritual experience, a fine thing in itself, says Paul (14:2, 5a), but it does not edify the community. All actions, however ostensibly spritual, must meet the criterion of constructive impact on the church community. Consequently, intelligible prophecy, which offers "upbuilding, exhortation, and consolation" for the community (14:3), is to be more highly valued and sought: "Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church"(14:4). The noun oikodome (building up, edification) and the cognate verb oikodomein occur repeatedly in this chapter. The task of community building, which was originally Paul's apostolic work, is transferred to the community itself.

Thus, the purpose of corporate worship becomes community formation. It is crucial, however, that the work of community-building be a shared, participatory enterprise. The worship assembly is not to be monopolized by any one member. Instead,

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up (oikodome) (14:26).

Thus, the gathered community's worship reflects and symbolizes the interdependence of the body of Christ.

Sandwiched between chapters 12 and 14 is Paul's great panegyric on love. Whether this is an independent piece of tradition inserted here by Paul or whether it is composed for the occasion at hand, the placement of this discourse shows that Paul interprets love in terms of the ecclesial context elaborated in the surrounding chapters. Love, rightly understood, should constrain those super-spiritual Corinthians whose behavior threatens the good of the community. Love binds the body of Christ together in mutual suffering and rejoicing; love seeks the upbuilding of the whole community rather than private advantage. It is striking that Paul places this discourse on love in the midst of his response to the tongue-speaking controversy rather than, say, in his discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Why so? For Paul, love has its primary locus in the common life of the church.

IV. CONCLUSION: ETHICS AS ECCLESIOLOGY

What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of all the ways that Paul appeals to community as ethical warrant and norm in this letter. I have not yet said anything about the issue of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), which for Paul comes down in the end to the matter of "rightly discerning the body"-i.e., recognizing that the Lord's Supper is a sign of the unity of the Body of Christ, and behaving accordingly. Nor have I yet said anything about "the collection for the saints" (16:1-4), which functions for Paul as the great symbolic enactment of the unity of Gentile and Jew, thus figuring forth the eschatological character of this new messianic community that Paul is laboring to create.

By not saying anything about these matters, I have omitted two of the most powerful expressions of the theological claim that every line of 1 Corinthians breathes forth: to discern the will of God rightly, the Corinthians must perceive their identity as the new covenant people of God, living in koinonia, embodying the presence of the eschatological Spirit of God in a world whose previous order is passing away. The theological constant underlying Paul's counsel throughout the letter is that he imagines God's eschatological salvation in corporate terms: God transforms and saves a people, not atomized individuals. Consequently, the faithful find their identity and vocation in the world as the body of Christ.

Thus, to do "ethics" apart from ecclesiology is utterly unthinkable for Paul. Ethics is ecclesiology. Ethics is simply the church's imaginative outworking of its identity as the Israel of God.

NOTES

1. Such summaries were not uncommon in the ancient world: in various ways,
the genre is represented by the Community Rule (lQS) found among the Dead
Sea Scrolls, the presentation of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Matthew,
the Didache, and the codification of Jewish halakah in the Mishnah.

2. Even the letter to Philemon, which confronts an issue that might have
been considered a private pastoral matter, is addressed not just to Philemon
but also to Apphia and Archippus and to "the church in your house" (Philem
2). Paul insists on laying the decision-making process open to the
community's scrutiny. On the rhetorical effects of Paul's addressing the
letter to the whole church, see Norman Petersen, Rediscovering Paul:
Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World (Philadelphia:
Fortress, 1985). The Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are
addressed to individuals, but their authorship is debatable.

3. See especially Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social
World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); The
Moral World of the First Christians (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); and
Bengt Holmberg, Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive
Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

4 See Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in
Their Historical Setting (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

5. The first person plural pronouns in 2 Cor 5:18-20 may refer either to the
apostle himself or to the church more generally. Although the discussion
grows out of Paul's defense of his own apostolic ministry, the paragraph
develops towards a climax in which the vocation of the whole church is in
view, most unmistakably in v. 21. The ambiguity of reference in vv. 18-20 is
a natural result of Paul's conception of the relation between his own
vocation and that the community: the church is to imitate the apostle and
share his vocation; conversely, the apostle models in microcosm the larger
vocation of the elect people to be a light to the nations. N. T. Wright's
otherwise illuminating article on this passage ("On Becoming the
Righteousness of God: 2 Corinthians 5:21," in David M. Hay, ed., Pauline
Theology: Volume II: 1 & 2 Corinthians, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) misses
the crucial point by confining the reference of v. 21 to the apostle
himself.

6.This passage should be compared to Rom 1:17, which announces that the
righteousness of God "is being revealed" in the world through the gospel. In
light of 2 Cor 5:21, we might well pause to ask exactly how Paul thinks that
the righteousness of God is being disclosed. Is it possible that he thinks
there also of the church-the body of reconciled Jews and Gentiles-as the
locus of revelation? If so, Eph 2:11-22 (cf. 3:10) would be a faithful
rendering of a central Pauline theme.

7. 0n dikaiosune theou as covenant terminology, see Richard Hays,
"Justification," Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:
1129-33.

8. Paul uses the term huioi ("huioi ") to include both men and women, as the

continuing explanation in 3:28 makes clear. The decision of the NRSVtranslators to render the term as "children" in 3:26 and 4:5-7 is hermeneutically justifiable, though it diminishes the rhetorical effect of some of Paul's turns of phrase, e.g. 4:6: "…and because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying `Abba! Father!' "

9. Nowhere does Paul speak of all humanity as "children of God." All are God's creatures, but the language of family relationship is reserved for the elect community.

10. Richard B. Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," CBQ 49 (1987): 289-90. On the problem of why Cephas and others shunned table fellowship with Gentile converts, see E. P. Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11-14," in R. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa, eds., The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon), 170-188.

11. John Barclay, Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 239. Barclay is building here on the insights of E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," BJRL 65 (1983), 95-122; "The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-18)," JSNT 18 (1983), 3-57; and Francis B. Watson, Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach, SNTSMS 56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

12. Daniel Boyarin, A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Cultural Identity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

13. I have argued elsewhere (Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) that Paul's hermeneutical reading strategy construes scripture as a grand narrative of election and promise.

14. See my discussion of these passages in Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul, 54-57, 95-102.

15. J. L. Houlden, Ethics and the New Testament (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Jack T. Sanders, Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); Allen Verhey, The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Siegfried Schulz, Neutestamentliche Ethik (Zürich: TVZ 1987); Wolfgang Schrage, The Ethics of the New Testament, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); L. William Countryman, Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Eduard Lohse, Theological Ethics of the New Testament, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); and Willi Marxsen, New Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

16. J. T. Sanders, 57. 17. Ibid., emphasis mine.

18. For a more ecclesiologically sensitive reading of Romans 12, see Marva J. Dawn, The Hilarity of Community: Romans 12 and How to Be the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

19. J. T. Sanders, 65. (Cf. Gal. 6:10!) It should also be noted that Sanders then chastises Paul for being inconsistent in his specific moral teachings by appealing to "revelation from the Lord" rather than to the general moral principle of doing the good (66)!

20. Lohse, 105-13.

21. Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol 1., trans. K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 185-352.

22. One working title for this essay was "The Apostle Paul and the Individualistic Hermeneutic of the West," but in the end I opted for a more constructively descriptive-and less derivative-title.

23. Victor P. Furnish, Theology and Ethics in Paul (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 203, emphasis his.

24. Ibid., 233, emphasis his.

25. Ibid., 212-24, quotation from p. 213.

26. Banks, Paul's Idea of Community, see n. 4 above; T. J. Deidun, New Covenant Morality in Paul, AnBib 89 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1981); and J. Paul Sampley, Walking between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

27. It is tempting to speculate about the reasons for the relative neglect of this book. Atleast three factors come to mind: 1) The book is written for a popular audience rather than as a scholarly monograph; 2) At the time of the book's publication, Banks was teaching in Australia rather than in Europe or America; 3) Perhaps most importantly, Banks' work came out just at the time when NT scholarship was newly engrossed in rhetorical criticism and in social-scientific study of the Pauline communities; thus, Banks' fundamentally theological study of Paul's idea of community fell among thorns, as it were.

28. Deidun, 45-50.

29. See now also N. T. Wright, The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

30. Sampley, 37-43. See also pp. 60-62, 66-69.

31. In addition to the works mentioned here, see also the unpublished 1987 Yale dissertation by Sally Purvis, "Problems and Possibilities in Paul's Ethics of Community" (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms), some of whose content is summarized in Sally B. Purvis, The Power of the Cross: Foundations for a Christian Feminist Ethic of Community (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993). Walter Klaiber, Rechtfertigung und Gemeinde: Eine Untersuchung zum paulinischen Kirchenverständnis, FRLANT 127 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), explores the relation of Paul's ecclesiology to his doctrine of justification, but deals only tangentially with ethics (e.g., pp 249-55).

32. Gerd Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); Meeks, The First Urban Christians, see n. 3 above.

33. Meeks, The First Urban Christians, 74– 110.

34. Hans Dieter Betz, Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches of Galatia, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 292.

35. On this passage see Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ."

36. Ernst Käsemann-the inveterate champion of the thesis that "Christology is the permanent measure of all ecclesiology"-would no doubt be scandalized by such an affirmation and fulminate against it. See Ernst Käsemann, "Paul and Early Catholicism," trans. Wilfred F. Bunge, in New Testament Questions of Today (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 258.

37. Margaret M. Mitchell, Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 17, has demonstrated conclusively by means of rhetorical analysis that "1 Corinthians is a unified letter which throughout urges the course of unity on the divided Corinthian church."

38. A similar hermeneutical shift occurred in the Qumran writings: the community of the Covenanters was seen as replacing the corrupt temple in Jerusalem. See Bertil Gärtner, The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament, SNTSMS 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965) .

39. Theissen, 125–29.

40. Paul does not actually use the term "strong" in 1 Cor 8; however, the term does appear in his discussion of a very similar problem in Rom 14: 1-15:6. See also the rhetorically freighted remark of 1 Cor 1:27: "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and the weak things of the world to shame the strong."

41. See Dale Martin, Slavery as Salvation: A Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 86–116, on the topos of the "enslaved leader."

42. Pace Peter J. Tomson, Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, Section III, Vol. 1 (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum and Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

43. P. 97. At the time of writing Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul, I noted only the parallel in Deut 17:7, but the topic of Deut 22:13-30 is much more clearly related to the issue that Paul is addressing in Corinth. Note especially the ending of the section in Deut 22:30: "A man shall not marry his father's wife, thereby violating his father's rights."

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