

People of God, Body of Christ, Koinonia of Spirit: The Role of Ethical Ecclesiology in Paul's "Trinitarian" Language

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The relationship between trinitarian doctrine and human society is intensely debated today. Can Paul's ethical ecclesiology help? Paul's missionary theology requires a careful working out of the interrelations of the term "people of God" taken from Israel's Scriptures, and another term, the "body of Christ," deriving from the sacraments and popular social theory. Are these opposing ecclesial descriptions? Has one superseded the other? At issue is nothing less than the integrity of God. This paper argues that a close study of a third Pauline ecclesial term, "koinonia of Spirit," can clarify the problems of sameness and difference and of the one and the many in Pauline theology. A complex integrity holds together: Israel and the Gentiles; Christ and his church; and the Oneness of God with the divine Lordship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Paul's practical problems led to his "trinitarian" reflections, suggesting that the relationship between dogmatics and practical theology works both ways.

Introduction

Recent articles by Karen Kilby and Miroslav Volf have reviewed and critiqued what they describe as a growing interest in "social doctrines of the Trinity."¹ According to Kilby, social theories of the Trinity often project our ideals onto God. For "social theorists" God is more appropriately modeled on three human beings than one, yet the three are somehow one, bound together by the divine perichoresis,

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¹ Karen Kilby, "Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity," *Blackfriars* 81.956 (October 2000): 432-445; Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity is our Social Program: The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14.3 (July 1998): 403-423.

which is then glossed in human communal terms as “interrelatedness, love, empathy, mutual accord, mutual giving and so on.”² Given the difficulties that result from such projection, she calls on theologians to renounce the idea that the point of the doctrine of the Trinity is to give insight into God and to see it instead as a grammatical rule for reading the biblical stories, describing the experience of prayer, and otherwise structuring Christian discourse.³ Miroslav Volf, on the other hand, although critical of the naively optimistic claims that Nicholas Fedorov and others made for humanly realized historical programs based upon the Trinity, does want to argue that the doctrine of perichoresis teaches us not only about the unity of God but also about God’s identity. Theological constructions of God’s identity as “non-reducible” and “not self-enclosed” when situated in the biblical “narrative of divine self-donation” can indeed provide a social “vision” for the church, if not a social program.⁴

From the perspective of the church’s rethinking of its relation to the Jewish people and vice versa, Kendall Soulen is also interested in the doctrine of the Trinity and the identity of God.⁵ While the church has revived its interest in the ancient doctrine of the Trinity with new-found pride, it has been much more self-critical of its past teachings about the Jewish people. Soulen insists that these two questions (the triune identity of God and the church’s relationship to Israel) must be rethought together. Trinitarian theology must affirm that “the triune God is the Holy One of Israel” in such a way that God’s identity as YHWH is “genuinely *constitutive* for understanding God’s eternal identity and ultimate purposes for creation.”⁶

These theological discussions and others like them suggest that ecclesiological and ethical dimensions of trinitarian thinking are very much alive in the church today. While contemporary theologians usually begin with the doctrine of the Trinity as given, in order to explore its social and ethical implications for the church, the church’s first theologians addressed social and ethical issues arising in the church and found themselves writing in ways that would eventually be called “trinitarian.” One of the clearest examples is the apostle Paul. Writ-

² Kilby, “Perichoresis,” 441.

³ Kilby, “Perichoresis,” 443.

⁴ Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program,” 406-412.

⁵ R. Kendall Soulen, “YHWH the Triune God,” *Modern Theology* 15.1 (January 1999): 25-54.

⁶ Soulen, “YHWH,” 27.

ing from within the world of what we now call the New Testament, Paul only knew that he was sending advice-filled letters to early Christian communities whose presenting problems were myriad and complex. As Paul attempted to address their ethical and ecclesiological issues, he found it necessary to speak of God's complex identity. Specifically, he spoke of Israel's God, who had raised from the dead the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, and before long he was speaking about one triune God who could best be described in triadic formulas, who was (in some sense) trinitarian. Paul will end by granting the title "Lord" not only to Jesus Christ but also to the Spirit, so clearly does he find them to be identified with the Holy God of Israel.

Rowan Williams has put the matter well:

To say that Paul, or any writer in the corpus of Christian scripture, simply enunciates a "trinitarian ethic" is, of course, anachronistic and over-simple. But it is always worth asking what it is that the language of Christian scripture *prompts*, makes thinkable, gestures towards. At this level, it is not nonsense to suggest, I believe, that a trinitarian structure for discourse about the eternal life of God offers the fullest explication of Paul's moral rhetoric.⁷

This paper attempts to trace some of the logic of Paul's "trinitarian" thinking by showing the importance of three key ecclesiological terms in the structure of his theological discourse. Wrestling with the ethical question of God's unity and identity (how the one God of Israel can be God of both the Jews and Gentiles), Paul has to expand the traditional term "the people of God" to include Gentiles as a result of what God has done in Jesus Christ and in the Spirit. Explaining how the ethical actions of individual members of the community affect the whole church, Paul draws on sacramental understandings to coin what is apparently a new ecclesiological term, "the body of Christ," to link God's Christ and believers through the power of the Spirit. Finally, he employs a third ecclesiological term, "the koinonia of the Spirit," to point to the power of God by which members of the

⁷ Rowan Williams, "Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 257. See also David S. Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3.2 (Spring 1994): 152-164, reprinted in *Sewanee Theological Review* 45.4 (Michaelmas 2002): 371-384.

church see themselves as “the people of God” and “the body of Christ”—that is, recognize that they have become one with Christ and with one another. The nonnegotiable oneness of God seems to have become for Paul an aspect of God’s identity that must be described in “trinitarian” terms.

Inevitably, then, my strategy for this paper will be exegetical demonstration coupled with brief commentary. It will be necessary to show the concrete social and ethical situations that provoked Paul’s theological response and led him to describe God’s identity in “trinitarian” terms and the church in these three terms (“people of God,” “body of Christ,” “koinonia of Spirit”) that reflect the triune identity of God. I shall undertake this exegetical demonstration in several steps. First, I shall show briefly that there are triadic or “trinitarian” formulations about God in the undisputed letters of Paul. Second, I shall discuss the three ecclesiological terms that mirror this threefoldness individually. Third, I shall demonstrate that while “people of God” and “body of Christ” work in parallel, according to Paul’s logic, “koinonia of Spirit” functions to relate the other two ecclesial terms. This again mirrors the logic of the triadic formulations about God: just as “Father” and “Son” are mutually reciprocal relation-identifying terms, the Spirit functions to relate them to each other and to relate their mutual relation to the community. Finally, I shall comment briefly on the role of the title “Lord,” which Paul applies to Father, Son, and Spirit, although he uses it primarily for Jesus Christ. My conclusion will then return to some of the current theological issues raised at the beginning of the paper.

The Apostle Paul and “Trinitarian” Formulations

It was only gradually, over the course of the first several centuries, that the church learned to confess belief in one eternal God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The church’s trinitarian formulations were proclaimed as dogma at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) and were the subject of theological reflection both in the East (the Cappadocians) and in the West (Augustine).⁸ As Arthur W. Wain-

⁸ G. L. Prestige argued that while the second-century writers Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* 2.15) and Tertullian (*Adv. Prax.* 3) used, respectively, the Greek *trias* and the Latin *trinitas* to describe Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, these words did not originally express the unity of God and therefore did not have the depth of meaning which they acquired later in the third- and fourth-century debates. Compare Prestige, *God in*

wright argued many years ago,⁹ there is no clear historical boundary between the third- and fourth-century systematic doctrinal statements about the Trinity and the less philosophical reflections of the New Testament writings which preceded them.

Since the first Christians were Jews, they would have recited the ancient words of the *Shema* in their daily prayers: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4-5). That the *Shema* remained authoritative for Christians is shown, among other things, by the first article of the creed, "we believe in one God."¹⁰ Nevertheless, apparently from the beginning, Christianity distinguished itself from the rest of Judaism by the veneration it gave to Jesus the Christ. One finds already in the New Testament: hymns in honor of Christ, baptismal language linking Christ and God, eucharistic language describing his presence to the community, and exalted language describing his role in creation and his session at the right hand of God.

Pliny, the second-century Roman governor of Bithynia, described the Christians who met on a fixed day before it was light to "recite a hymn to Christ as to a god."¹¹ The apparent clarity that an outsider perceived, however, probably did not reflect subtle tensions in the doctrine of God that must have been present throughout the early church. Already among the New Testament writings there are notable differences in theology and christology. There is no one clear understanding of the identity of God in Jesus Christ that is charac-

Patristic Thought (London: Heinemann, 1936), 88, 93. But more recent historical theologians of the patristic period have stressed the evolution of the baptismal creed from its roots in the Easter liturgies of the early churches and the metaphysical nuances of terms like *trias* and *trinitas* already in use in the second century. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 173 and following.; Basil Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation: The Faith of the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993); Basil Studer, "Trinity," *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 2:851-853; David F. Wright, "Trinity," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2d ed., (New York: Garland, 1997), 2:1142-1147.

⁹ Arthur W. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 4-5. See also chapter 3, "The Mystery and Wonder of the Trinity," in Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 52-81.

¹⁰ Robert L. Wilken, "Not a Solitary God: The Triune God of the Bible," *Pro Ecclesia* 3.1 (Winter 1994): 36-55 at 38.

¹¹ Epistle 96.

teristic of all the early Christian writers. It is still debated whether any of the early Christian writers whose works now comprise the New Testament referred directly to Jesus of Nazareth as God. The studied caution and reluctance of New Testament theologians to make this move explicitly, even as they described Jesus doing things only the God of Israel could do, and even as they commended the worship of Jesus or the confession of Jesus as "Lord," shows that they were, from first to last, Jewish in their understanding of the one God and informed by biblical Scriptures that insisted there was and is no other god besides YHWH.¹²

Paul, the first and perhaps the most brilliant of the New Testament theologians, must have puzzled over how to reconcile the Jewish insistence that God is One with the Lordship of Jesus Christ and of the Spirit which is linked in his letters¹³ with both God and Christ. The oneness of God plays a central role in Paul's theology: it mandates "one Gospel" (Gal. 1:6-8, 2:7-8); privileges the covenant with Abraham over the law ordained by angels and the mediator Moses (Gal. 3:20); and explains why the same God must be God of both Jews and Gentiles and must justify them both in the same way (Rom. 3:29-30). On the other hand, Paul's radical monotheism must not have been inconsistent in his mind with the confession that "Jesus is Lord."¹⁴ Paul reminds the Thessalonians how they turned from idols "to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:9-10), and while he agrees wholeheartedly with the Corinthians that "there is no God but one," for Paul that oneness implies the lordship of Jesus Christ:

¹² See Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, Appendix 3, "Did New Testament Christians call Jesus God?" (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 171-195; see also Murray J. Harris, *The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992).

¹³ The seven uncontested letters of Paul are: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of Paul and other New Testament writers on this issue, see Lawrence W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Minneapolis, Minn. Fortress, 1988). Hurtado has continued his research in two subsequent books, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999) and the magisterial *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003).

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven and on earth—as indeed there are many gods and lords [many entities addressed as gods or lords],—
 yet for us there is one God, the Father from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor. 8:5-6)

It would be inaccurate to think in terms of a strict “binitarianism” in Paul. He may or may not ever actually identify Jesus Christ with God.¹⁵ Similarly, as noted above, it would be imprecise to speak of unambiguous “trinitarian” thought in Paul, for while the Spirit and the Lord are identified (2 Cor. 3:17-18) and the Spirit is described as “giving life” (2 Cor. 3:6), which only God can do, there is never an equation of the Spirit with God, other than in an exegetical genitive as in Romans 15:19 (“by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit”) where the power of God who does signs and wonders is identified with the power of the Spirit. Usually Paul talks about the “Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11, 1 Cor. 3:16, 1 Cor. 7:40), the “Spirit which is from God” (1 Cor. 2:12), or the “Spirit of his Son” (Gal. 4:6). At 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul speaks of those who were washed, sanctified, and justified “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” as if these two realities were at least complementary and perhaps even interchangeable.

Much has been written about the threefold formula in 2 Corinthians 13:13:¹⁶ “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, And the love of God, And the communion (*koinōnia*) of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” Some scholars think this was a fixed piece of traditional

¹⁵ Caution is called for because of Romans 9:5. It is said that this verse has been subjected to more discussion than any other verse in the New Testament (Brown, *Introduction to New Testament Christology*, 182). Brown does think that the title “God” is given to Jesus in this verse, but notes the complexity of the discussion and the presence of thoughtful biblical scholars on both sides of the debate. For a full discussion of the verse, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975, 1979), 1:464-470.

¹⁶ See Ralph P. Martin’s discussion of the subjective versus objective genitive of the third clause, and his reasons for preferring the subjective genitive, *Second Corinthians* (Dallas, Tx.: Word, 1986), 495-497, 503-506. I agree with Martin that Paul is probably speaking of the communion created by the Holy Spirit; but that, whichever way the genitive is taken, the function of the Spirit is to conjoin the work of Christ and the love of God as in Romans 5:8 and 8:9.

material quoted by Paul and others think it was an expansion by Paul on the formula which he uses more frequently, “the grace of the Lord Jesus (Christ) be with you” (1 Thess. 5:28, 1 Cor. 16:23, Rom. 16:20, 24; see also 2 Thess. 3:18). Further evidence that Paul is either working with a known “trinitarian” formula or developing one himself is found in the parallelism of 1 Corinthians 12:4-6:

Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit;
And there are diversities of ministries but the same Lord;
And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who works
all things in all.

There are several other “triadic” formulations in Paul’s letters: Phil. 3:3, Gal. 3:11-14, Gal. 4:6, 1 Cor. 12:3, 2 Cor. 1:21-22, 2 Cor. 3:3, Rom. 14:17-18, Rom. 15:16, Rom. 15:30 (see also 2 Thess. 2:13-14, Col. 1:6-8) and many additional places where Paul links Father, Son, and Spirit in such a way as to suggest a triad. A notable example occurs at Romans 8:11, where Paul doubles the threefold description of God in a conditional statement: “If (since) the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the One who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” At least once, Paul identifies Christ with wisdom, “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24), suggesting the whole range of associations with the Spirit that has life-giving power, which is made explicit in the fourth gospel.

Three Pauline Ecclesiological Descriptions: “People of God,” “Body of Christ,” and “Koinonia of Spirit”

Just as Paul describes the identity of God in terms of a radical monotheism that is not inconsistent with the threefold naming of God as Father, Son, and Spirit, so Paul uses three ecclesiological terms to characterize the life in God of the one church community he addresses as he writes to individual house churches around the Mediterranean.

People of God

When Paul refers allusively to God’s “people” (as in Rom. 9:25-26, 10:20-21, 11:1-2, 15:10-11, 1 Cor. 10:7, 14:21, 2 Cor. 6:16) he does so in the context of God’s covenant relationship with Israel. It is strik-

ing that every single time Paul uses the word *laos* it is clearly associated with God and that each of these texts is or contains a quotation from or an allusion to Scripture.¹⁷ While classical Greek used *laos* to mean people, population, or crowd, Paul works primarily with some version of the LXX which follows the traditional biblical distinction between the holy people *‘am* and the rest of the nations or Gentiles *goyim*¹⁸ by rendering *laos*, usually in the singular, for the people of God and *ethnê* for the plural “peoples.”¹⁹

Paul has taken over not just the linguistic background of the phrase “people of God,” but also most of its theological content. This theological content can be summarized as follows: Israel is God’s own possession since their election results from the action of God (Ex. 19:4-5); God’s election of Israel is rooted in a particular historical event, their deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Deut. 7:6-8); and God’s election of Israel as his people calls them into covenant relationship with God (Deut. 7:9-11). On the other hand, Paul has made some major theological modifications: although membership in the people of God is still to be understood as the merciful act of God, and not the result of birth and descent (Rom. 9:11), it now includes Gentiles; it is through God’s gracious initiative that the Gentiles are now also called “my people” (Rom. 9:15, 24-26); Paul continues to root God’s election and call in a specific historical event, namely the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 9:29, 32-33); and the whole people of God, Jews and Gentiles together, are called to God’s purposes of mutual upbuilding and mission (Rom. 14-15).²⁰

Body of Christ

The case is somewhat different with the idea of the “body of Christ,” for which there is no apparent precedent in Israel’s self-

¹⁷ W. F. Moulton, A. G. Geden, and H. K. Moulton, eds., *Concordance to the Greek Testament*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 583; Rom. 9:25/Hos. 2:25; 9:26/Hos. 1:10; Rom. 10:20-21/Isa. 65:1-2; Rom. 11:1-2/Ps. 94:14; Rom. 15:10/Deut. 32:43; Rom. 15:11/Ps. 117:1; 1 Cor. 10:7/Ex 32:6; 1 Cor. 14:21/Isa. 28:11-12; 2 Cor. 6:16/Lev. 26:11-12.

¹⁸ John D. W. Watts, “The People of God: A Study of the Doctrine in the Pentateuch,” *Expository Times* 67 (May 1956): 232-237 at 232.

¹⁹ George S. Worgul, “People of God, Body of Christ: Pauline Ecclesiological Contrasts,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (January 1982): 24-28 at 24.

²⁰ This paragraph substantially modified from Worgul, “People of God,” 24-25.

description as a people. L. Cerfaux argued that Paul's sources for this ecclesiological term were twofold: eucharistic traditions related to the "words of institution" on the one hand, and the well-known fable of the body and its members which Menenius Agrippa took from Aesop and applied to the social order.²¹ The argument for eucharistic traditions as the source of Paul's metaphor for the Christian community rests on the combination of 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 (the traditional "words of institution") with the application to the community made in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed over to you, namely, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was handed over took bread and having given thanks, broke it and said, "this is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me" (1 Cor. 11:23-24).

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (*koinōnia*) in the blood of Christ?

The bread which we break, is it not a participation (*koinōnia*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf of bread, we although we are many, are one body, since we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

The argument for the fable of Aesop as used by Menenius Agrippa as a source for Paul's thought about the "body of Christ" derives from 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and Romans 12:4-8, where Paul uses it in a conventional way to express the theme of unity and diversity within the community and to warn against schisms (1 Cor. 12:25, see also 1:10 and 11:18) likely to result whenever one part of the body exalts itself against another or defects from the whole.

In addition to these two widely recognized sources for Paul's ecclesiological term "body of Christ," I would argue that baptismal traditions, or Paul's interpretation of baptismal practices which were well known to the community, must also have been a source for Paul's understanding of the "body of Christ." An important text is Romans 7:4: "Likewise, my brothers, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God." Romans 7:4 is suggestive, coming as it does after 6:3-11 (which describes Christian burial with Christ in baptism into his death and res-

²¹ L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul* (New York: Herder, 1963), 266.

urrection into newness of life, no longer enslaved to sin) and before 8:15-16 (receiving the Spirit of adoption (sonship) and the testimony of the Spirit with our spirits) when—perhaps in the context of baptism itself—we cry “Abba, Father,” that we are children of God and co-inheritors with Christ—both of his suffering and of his glorification. At 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, the baptismal connection is made even more explicit:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Related to baptism and the newness of life which it entails for the Christian, discussions of sanctification and of eschatological fulfillment are also linked to the body of Christ in Paul. This is inevitable, given his conception of ethics as christologically grounded, especially the way in which he understands baptismal “conformity to Christ” in terms both of present suffering and of future glory (Rom. 8:18-25, Rom. 8:29-30, Rom. 12:1-2, 1 Cor. 5:5, 1 Cor. 6:20, 1 Cor. 15:12-28, 2 Cor. 1:5-7, 2 Cor. 4:10-11, Gal. 6:17, Phil. 1:20, Phil. 3:10, Phil. 3:21).²²

Koinonia of Spirit

Admittedly, the term “koinonia of Spirit” is used only twice in the extant letters of Paul (in the “trinitarian” formulation of 2 Cor. 13:13 and at Phil. 2:1-2):

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the koinonia of the Holy Spirit (*hê koinônia tou hagiou pneumatou*) be with you all (2 Cor. 13:13).

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any koinonia of the Spirit (*tis koinônia pneumatou*),²³ any

²² For discussion of how these eschatological assumptions are related to the doctrine of the body of Christ and of embodied Christians in patristic theology and ethics, see Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²³ The genitive in Philippians 2:1, like that in 2 Corinthians 13:13, should be taken first as a subjective genitive, although in each case it may also have a secondary meaning which is more expressive of the community’s attitude towards the Spirit (objective genitive).

compassions and mercies, complete my joy so that you think the same thing, having the same love, together in soul, thinking the one thing (Phil. 2:1-2).

Yet the idea of *koinonia* of Spirit plays a major role in Paul's theology and ethics, as I shall argue below. Paul can speak of the agency of the Spirit as if of a "person"²⁴ (Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:14, 16, Rom. 8:26). Paul also speaks of being "in the Spirit" as being "under a power"²⁵ in 1 Cor. 6:11, 12:3, 9, 13, 14:16, Rom. 9:1, 12:11, 14:17, 15:16, and so on. So that in the passage on the eucharistic communion (*koinônia*) with Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17) considered above, Paul goes on to spell out what he means by *koinônia* (participation, partnership, communion) in terms of participation in the powers or spirits to which the altars of sacrifice are dedicated:

Consider the practice of Israel according to the flesh (historical Israel); are not the ones eating the sacrifices partners (*koinônoi*)

²⁴ Theologians and ethicists used to know much more confidently what this term meant than at present, when its notorious complexity drives many to avoid it entirely, substituting terms like *hypostasis* (subsisting entity) or *idiotes* (distinctive entity). At least one notion of person (in the sense of identifiable agency) involves consistency over time, place, and circumstance. Related to this idea is a notion of personhood and identity often identified with Gilbert Ryle (*The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson, 1949) that a person's character is defined by "characteristic action." We are helped by literary notions of "character" and "character development," for example, by the literary axiom attributed to Henry James, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, New Haven: Yale, 1974.)

²⁵ In the New Testament, this idea is associated particularly with Luke, but that is because Luke in particular has borrowed prophetic models (Samuel, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, and so on) in order to frame his christology. J. Louis Martyn (*Galatians*, New York: Doubleday, 1997; *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1997) reminds us that in Paul's apocalyptic worldview, there is a war going on between the flesh and the Spirit (powers hostile to each other) which corresponds to the two ages in which people live. For example, Paul exhorts the Galatian Christians to "line up with the Spirit" (as in military rank and file, *stoichômen*, Gal. 5:25) rather than to be subject to the elements of the universe to which their fleshly thinking might attract them. So, while Paul's (biblical) understanding of the Spirit as a power which comes over people so that they prophesy is certainly in evidence (Compare 1 Cor. 14), it has also been shaped by so-called "intertestamental" apocalyptic ideas of the war between the enemies of God and the Spirit of God.

of the altar of sacrifice? . . . I do not want you to become partners (*koinônoi*) of the demons (1 Cor. 10:18, 20).²⁶

This way of thinking helps to explain the variety of *koinônia* expressions in Paul's letters, both those that deal specifically with partnership/participation in Jesus Christ, the sufferings of Jesus Christ, or the gospel of Jesus Christ,²⁷ and those which deal more generally with life together in Christ.²⁸ In close parallelism to the way Paul uses *koinônia* to express the relationship between Jesus Christ and the community, he also uses it to speak of his own relationship with a particular community. This use is evident in 2 Corinthians 1:7, "For we know that just as you are sharers (participants, *koinônoi*) in our sufferings, so you will also be [sharers] in our comfort," in Philemon 17 ("So if therefore you consider me your *koinônion*, receive him as you would receive me"), and in Philippians 4:15, where Paul reminds the church of his special relationship to them: "And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me (*ekoinônêsen*) in giving and in receiving except you only." Other references to economic partnership include Galatians 6:6, and several references to the collection which Paul was taking up for the poor church at Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:4, 2 Cor. 9:13, Rom. 12:13, and especially Rom. 15:26-27):

For Macedonia and Achaia thought it good to make some contribution (*koinônian*) for the poor of the saints in Jerusalem. They thought well of it and, indeed, they are their debtors; for if the Gentiles had a share in (*ekoinônêsan*) their spiritual things, they ought also to minister to them in the fleshly (practical) things.

For Paul, a whole range of ideas, from particular relationship to economic support, inhere in the concept of *koinônia*, yet among all these varied uses there is a recognizable "family resemblance" that helps

²⁶ See also 2 Cor. 6:14c, "Or what *koinônia* has light with darkness?"

²⁷ Compare 1 Cor. 1:9, "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the *koinônia* of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"; Phil. 3:10, "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and *koinônia* of/in his sufferings"; Phil. 1:5, "thankful for your *koinônia* in the gospel."

²⁸ Compare Philemon 6, "the *koinônia* of your faith"; Gal. 2:9, "they gave the right hand of *koinônia* to me and to Barnabas"; 2 Cor. 8:23, "Titus, my *koinônos*."

to define what he means by “koinonia of the Spirit.” It implies a relationship of such closeness that substantial obligations and commitments result or are expected from it; it has to do with a shared vision, person, goal, or project in which the members are substantially invested.

The Pauline Logic of “Koinonia of Spirit”

At this point it is important to note the logic of Paul’s triadic formulations about God and its parallel in the ecclesiological terms he uses to express the communion of the church with God in Christ through the power of the Spirit. Just as the terms “Father” and “Son” in Paul (and throughout the New Testament) are mutually reciprocal and define identity in terms of that reciprocal relationship, so the Spirit functions in Paul to relate the two distinct-but-one-in-relationship entities and to relate their mutual mode of relatedness to the Christian community that has been called into being through the work of God in Christ. The logic of persons (or *hypostases*) within the one God of Israel is mirrored in the logic of the terms used for the community identified with the persons. While the terms “people of God” and “body of Christ” reflect the complex reality of the way the community is both Jewish and Gentile on the one hand and both one and many on the other hand (both ways of holding together distinction or difference within union), the logic behind the term “koinonia of Spirit” holds together the terms “people of God” and “body of Christ.” That is to say, the logic behind the phrase “koinonia of Spirit” is key to understanding the theologically rich tensions of “sameness and difference” and “the one and the many” within the Pauline churches. This will be clearer if we examine two case studies: the unity of Jews and Gentiles through the power of the Spirit in Romans 15:1-13 and the unity of Christ and his church in the power of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

Israel and the Gentiles: The Role of the Spirit in Romans 15:1-13

Throughout Romans, the character of God (the righteousness of God understood as God’s integrity or oneness in action) is at issue.²⁹

²⁹ I have argued for this interpretation of Romans briefly in *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God’s Righteousness* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002) and at greater length in my dissertation, cited below. I therefore assume it here in order to save space for the present discussion.

While the ecclesial description “people of God” is taken over from God’s covenant relationship with Israel, which is understood as the *one* people of God among the *many* other nations (Gentiles), Paul’s churches are composed largely of Gentiles or a mixture of Jewish and Gentile Christians and Paul describes himself as “an apostle to the Gentiles” in Romans 11:13. Paul’s missionary theology requires a careful working out of the interrelations of the “people of God” and the “body of Christ.” Otherwise they may appear to be contrasting ecclesial descriptions,³⁰ or the second may appear to have superseded the first.³¹ Paul must somehow hold in suspension both (1) the covenant priority of Israel and the dependence of his Gentile churches upon the covenant promises given to Abraham and to his seed (the people of God) and also (2) divine impartiality between Jewish and Gentile Christians within the church (body of Christ). At issue is nothing less than the integrity of God.³²

Although Paul has already made it clear that the Gentile Christians are dependent upon God’s special relationship with Israel in Romans 11:13-27 and has suggested a complex dialectic whereby God has played Israel and the Gentiles off against each other in order to have mercy upon them all in 11:28-32, Romans 15:1-13 is the climax of the long argument for the righteousness of God understood as God’s integrity towards both Israel and the Gentiles. That Romans 15:1-13 is a unit is clear from the close parallelism in the structure of 15:1-6 and 15:7-13. In each half, Paul first appeals to the community to act in a particular way; then identifies Christ as exemplar; next gives exegetical warrants from Scripture; and finally prays that God will empower the community to enact the christological pattern. The first half addresses the community’s life together as a mixed church of Jewish and Gentile Christians, while the second half refers to the

³⁰ So concludes Worgul, “People of God,” 27-28, although his argument rests on some unnecessary assumptions that now seem more problematic than when he wrote.

³¹ At the end of his article, Worgul asserts that from the late second century on, the term “people of God” is modified in the literature to become “the new people of God” and that the word *laos* (with its Israel-specific meaning) gradually disappears from ecclesial literature entirely (“People of God”, p. 28). If he is correct, then as Kendall Soulen shows, the church not only misread its Scriptures but also its own earliest theologians.

³² The argument of the next four paragraphs is a brief summary of the much fuller discussion of Romans 15:1-13 which appears in my dissertation, “Affiliation with Jesus Christ in His Sacrifice: Some Uses of Scripture to Define the Identity of Jesus Christ in Romans” (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997, 229-261).

larger mission to the Gentiles and leads naturally to Paul's request for support.

More specifically, the first half (Rom. 15:1-6, summarizing the previous chapter) urges the powerful to accept the weaknesses of the less powerful as their burden and the responsibility of everyone in the community to become so radically identified with the neighbor that the other's liability becomes one's own. Romans 15:3 strongly suggests that while "pleasing the neighbor" may refer to Jesus' teaching (specifically Lev. 19:18 as a partial summary of the law, as in Mark 12:31), more probably it summarizes the career of Jesus, the *telos* of which was seen most clearly in his death (the occasion for his speaking of Ps. 68:10 LXX). So *kata Christon Iêsoun* ("according to Christ Jesus") in 15:5 becomes the christological narrative equivalent of *kata tas graphas* of 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, and the career of "the Christ" (15:3) becomes Scripture for the Christian both alongside of and inside of the texts which were Scripture for Jesus.

Paul asserts that the figure of the Christ was "pre-written for our instruction" in Psalm 68:10 LXX and elsewhere. The nature of our "instruction" is the kindling of hope, which is initially surprising, since the context gives no reference to hope and the word "hope" is not found in Psalm 68 LXX. Hope is closely associated with the promise to Abraham and the gift of the Spirit, as Paul has already shown (Rom. 4:18, 5:3-5, 8:20, 24-25). The reference to hope makes sense by pointing forward to verses 7-13, namely, the eschatological uniting of Jews and Gentiles. The "steadfastness and encouragement" of the Scriptures is that of the trustworthy God who speaks through the Scriptures and through the pattern of the Christ. Paul's concluding prayer in 15:5-6 envisions the community at Rome, powerful and powerless together, conformed to the pattern of Jesus described in Psalm 68:10 LXX as a sign of the coming eschatological community in which all with one voice glorify God.

In the second half of the passage (Rom. 15:7-13), Paul shows how the hope of this eschatological community of Jewish and Gentile Christians which fulfills the promise to Abraham is the gift of "the God of hope," mandated by the career of "the root of Jesse . . . who rises to rule the Gentiles in whom the Gentiles hope," given "so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may have hope" (15:12-13). Paul tells the story of Jesus that not only justifies the Gentile mission and mandates Paul's own apostleship to the Gentiles, but also compels the support for this mission from the united Jewish-Gentile community

at Rome. If the focus of Romans 15:1-6 was the life together of that community, the thrust of Paul's argument here is outward: the united community at Rome, glorifying God and bearing witness (by their pleasing of one another) that they are "of Christ," is called to envision an even more comprehensive unity based once more on the story of Jesus.

Again, the eschatological union of Jews and Gentiles is shown to be God's intention, both because it is warranted by a series of scriptural quotations which describe Gentiles joining in the worship of Israel's God and because of the example of Jesus Christ, "who rises to rule the Gentiles." As in 15:4, the Scriptures witness to the steadfastness of God, which is both the source of the community's hope and the ground of its ethics. Paul can exhort the Roman Christians to support the Gentile mission because the God of exhortation already addresses them through Scripture and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They can expect to be filled with all joy and peace in their trusting of this God, so that they may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the God of hope, and the sign of the root of Jesse, in whom the Gentiles hope.

To summarize: with respect to the problem of Israel and the Gentiles (nations), Paul places an uncompromising monotheism³³ and reminders of God's promises to the patriarchs in Scripture together with the central narrative of what God has done in Jesus Christ,³⁴ the defining narrative for the community that participates in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit. The community has "hope" in the Spirit because it is convicted of the integrity or righteous consistency or trustworthiness (though not predictability) of God. Because of God's faithfulness both to Israel and to the Gentiles, the Jewish and Gentile Christians at Rome can welcome one another as God and Christ have welcomed them, suspending judgment upon each other in matters of religious practice and cooperating with each other to support further missionary activity to the Gentiles in Spain. It should be noted again that the argu-

³³ Romans 3:29-30: "Or is God [the God] of Jews only? Is [God the God] not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles as well. Since God is One, [God] will make those of the circumcision righteous by faith and those of the uncircumcision righteous through faith."

³⁴ Throughout Romans, but especially at 1:3-6, 3:21-26, 4:24-25, 5:1-21, 6:3-11, 7:4, 8:3, 8:15-17, 8:28-39, 10:9-13, 11:26-27, 14:9, and finally at 15:1-13.

ment in 15:13 rests at least in part on the earlier discussion about hope and the Spirit at Romans 5:1-5 and the pneumatology of Romans 8:9-27. In Romans 5-8 Paul has worked out a theology and an anthropology which are interrelated through the power of the Spirit. We turn now to his similar move with respect to the unity of Christ and his church in 1 Corinthians.

*Christ and His Church: The Role of the Spirit in
1 Corinthians 6:12-20*

Paul has no difficulty accepting the charismatic experiences which the Corinthian church valued so highly as authentic manifestations of the Spirit of God in 1 Corinthians 12-14. At one point he gives thanks to God that he speaks in tongues more than all of them (1 Cor. 14:18)! Paul's pneumatology, however, is constrained by his radical monotheism, by the Scriptures through which God has spoken to Israel, and especially by the defining central narrative of what God has done in Jesus Christ, in such a way that his discernment of the spirits at work in the community will rule out some of the behaviors which the Corinthians justify as manifestations of spiritual gifts. Paul has already proposed the public confession "Jesus is Lord" as a minimal test that guarantees the *Christian* character of spiritual experiences, since no one can make that confession except by the Holy Spirit, just as no one who curses Jesus could be speaking by that Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). But something more is needed to test the spirits at Corinth, since believers who confess Jesus as Lord are also engaging in behaviors which Paul cannot recognize as authentically Christian. They may or may not be claiming to do these actions in the power of the Holy Spirit; they may only be asserting that the spirit of the age is compatible with the Holy Spirit. Either way, the problem Paul has to solve, both for himself and for the Corinthian church which he had founded, is: What distinguishes genuinely *Christian* manifestations of the Spirit, from other spiritual activities (charismatic experiences or behaviors of those baptized into the one Spirit), that ought not to be recognized as Christian?³⁵

³⁵ This way of framing the problem of recognizing the Holy Spirit among others follows Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 148-151. I have broadened his discussion to include ethical actions done in the name of the Spirit in addition to charismatic experiences supposed to have been gifts of the Spirit, but the problem is the same.

James D. G. Dunn proposed an answer to this question as it has to do with the testing of charismatic experiences:

The character of the Christ event is the hallmark of the Spirit. Whatever religious experience fails to reproduce this character in the individual or community, it is thereby self-condemned as delusory or demonic; it is not the work of the eschatological Spirit. For the eschatological Spirit is no more and no less than the Spirit of Christ.³⁶

While Dunn's last sentence as it stands becomes incomplete when it is transferred into a paper dealing with "trinitarian" aspects of Paul's ecclesiology, he is certainly correct that Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are intimately connected in many passages in both 1 and 2 Corinthians.³⁷ In this correspondence where, more than anywhere, Paul has to deal with the issue of Christ and community, we also find considerable attention to the Spirit.

Paul will deal specifically with "the body of Christ" in 1 Corinthians 10:16-22 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 in terms of the eucharistic sharing of the *one* loaf and the *one* cup by the *many*. He will use the fable of the body and its parts in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 to talk about spiritual gifts. For Paul, ecclesiology and ethics are inseparable, as is shown in the discussion of the "body of Christ" above. The present discussion, however, concerns the relationship of the "people of God," the "body of Christ," and "koinonia of the Spirit" in Paul's ecclesiology. To get at this we have to go back to the theological elements by which Paul's pneumatology is constrained: Jewish radical monotheism, the Scriptures through which God has spoken to Israel, and the central defining narrative of what God has done in Jesus Christ, which, we have shown above, is the way Paul believes God has kept faith (covenant righteousness) with Israel.

If "people of God" and "body of Christ" are truly related in Paul, then it ought to be possible to use something like what Dunn proposed (as Paul's way of testing charismatic experiences) in order to test ethical actions. Are members of the community who confess Christ as Lord engaging in behavior which is not authentically Chris-

³⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 321-322.

³⁷ Among others: 1 Cor. 1:24, 30, 2:2-5, 2:14-16, 5:3-5, 6:11, 6:17, 12:3, 12:12-13, 15:45; 2 Cor. 1:21-22, 3:3-8, 3:17-18, 4:13-14, 11:4, 13:4-5, 13:13.

tian (in Paul's view), and are they either claiming to do so in the power of the Holy Spirit or claiming that what they do is not incompatible with the Holy Spirit? Does Paul use anything like "the character of the Christ event" as a criterion for the discernment of spirits? Does he argue that "whatever *ethical action* fails to reproduce this character in the individual or community is delusory or demonic," or at any rate, "not the work of the eschatological Spirit?" An attractive test case is 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

Apparently some members of the Christian community are going to prostitutes and are arguing for the right to do so. It is possible that "being people of the Spirit, they imply, has moved them to a higher plane, the realm of spirit, where they are unaffected by behavior that has merely to do with the body."³⁸ It is also possible that since prostitution was both legal and a widely accepted social convention, the Corinthians who frequented prostitutes "were merely insisting on their right to continue participating in a pleasurable activity that was entirely normal within their own culture."³⁹ Either way, they may not have made any connection between what was done in the body and the God who raised the Lord and will also raise us through God's power. Paul sets up an imaginary argument (*diatribe*) with his opponents by quoting their slogans back to them, along with his own refutation. The first two verses (1 Cor. 6:12-14) follow this pattern:⁴⁰

CORINTHIANS

PAUL

"All things are lawful for me"

"but not all things are beneficial."

"All things are lawful for me"

"but I will not be under anything's power."

"Foods are for the belly and the belly for foods; but God will destroy both it and them."

"The body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body; And God both raised the Lord and will also raise us up by God's power."

³⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 250.

³⁹ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1997), 102.

⁴⁰ Amended from Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 249.

The resurrection of the body is an essential part of the defining central narrative for Christians because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The one whom Christians confess as Lord because of the resurrection of his body is also precisely Lord over the bodies of Christians. They belong to him and he to them because the same God who raised the one body will raise the other. Paul has suggested a connection between the *one* body of Christ already raised and the *many* bodies of Christians (the body of Christ) which will be raised by the power of God.

Then Paul's argument shifts in structure to a series of rhetorical questions addressed to the community: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? (Never!) Do you not know that the one who is joined with (or joins with) a prostitute is one body [with the prostitute]?" Here Paul quotes Scripture with an introductory formula that stresses its character as the word of God: "For he says, 'the two into one flesh'" (an exact quotation of the key words of Gen. 2:24 LXX). On the other hand, says Paul, "the one who is joined with the Lord is one spirit [with the Lord]." Again, Paul's argument is suggestive for our thinking about the one and the many, in that he sets up the two arrangements as mutually exclusive: either union with sexual immorality or union with the Lord.⁴¹ The language from Genesis 2:24 used in this context strongly suggests that the sexual exclusivity of the marriage covenant is the metaphor for the communion not only of the believer with Christ but of the whole body of believers with Christ.⁴² Their united holiness means that the one committing sexual immorality sins against his own body both individually and communally. This reading is strengthened by the fact that

⁴¹ Compare 1 Corinthians 10:20b-22, "I do not want you to be partners (*koinōnous*) with demons. You cannot share the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Or do we make the Lord jealous?"

⁴² In this patriarchal worldview, the lordship of Christ (already confessed by believers) is simply strengthened by marriage imagery that assumes lordship of the man over the woman. Paul himself is careful to problematize that in the very next chapter (1 Cor. 7:4) where both the husband and the wife have power over each other's bodies. The later interpreter of Paul who wrote Ephesians 5:21-33 is not so careful and identifies the church as the bride of Christ precisely in order to ensure the subjection of Christian wives to their husbands.

Paul has already referred to the church as a whole as a “temple” (1 Cor. 3:16-17, see also 2 Cor. 6:16) when he asks the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your (plural) body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you (plural), which you have from God?” What the Corinthians have in common is their role in the defining central narrative about what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, spoken by God ahead of time in the words of Genesis 2:24 “the two into one flesh”: they do not belong to themselves, they were “bought with a price,”⁴³ so they are to glorify God in their (plural) body.

To summarize: Paul has taken the (probably not hypothetical) case of an individual in the community who is joined with a prostitute to show the community its corporate stake in holiness: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” Their bodies make up the body of Christ, the same body that God has already raised in one sense and will raise in another. That God is One is shown, as it was in Romans 15, by consistency, if not identity, of action: that is, God does not raise the body of Christ (the bodies of the Corinthians) in precisely the same way that God has already raised the body of Jesus Christ, but the integrity of God stands behind Paul’s argument that the Corinthians should take actions done in their bodies seriously. The character of God, the word of God spoken ahead of time through the Scriptures of Israel, and the defining narrative of what God has done in Christ give a particular shape to Paul’s pneumatology, which unites the community to Christ.⁴⁴

*The Oneness of God and the Divine Lordship of the Creator,
the Christ, and the Holy Spirit*

We have already remarked upon the importance of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4: “The Lord, our God, the Lord is One”) for Pauline theology and ethics. At the same time, it must be said that for Paul, the

⁴³ Again, while the obvious reference is to the redemption (from slavery) model of soteriology as in Romans 3:24, there may also be an allusion to the bride price of marriage.

⁴⁴ Notice the parallel questions in 1 Corinthians 6:15 “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” and 6:19 “Do you not know that your (plural) body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you?” and also the way in which the image of the temple of the Spirit is linked both to God and to Christ: the Spirit is from God, and therefore they are not their own. They are not their own, because they were redeemed by Christ. So they are to glorify God in their body, just as Christ did.

words “God” and “Lord” are not interchangeable, for Paul most often associates the word “Lord” with Jesus Christ, who is also regularly called the “Son of God.” However, Paul also uses the term “Lord” for both God the Creator and the Father of Jesus Christ and for the Holy Spirit, also sometimes identified with either the Father or the Son. It is not only the large number of references to “the Lord” in Paul which makes it difficult to catalogue these in any satisfactory way, but other complicating factors as well, for example the large number of these references which appear in scriptural quotations. At first, one might be tempted to assign all of these to God the Creator and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, but at times Paul is clearly reading the text christologically, and there may be places where he intends both meanings. A careful literary study which takes into account both the scriptural context of each reference and its present location in Paul’s argument is not yet available to us.⁴⁵

It is possible to study this subject from a historical and form-critical perspective and this has been done brilliantly in Werner Kramer’s exhaustive study of Pauline titles for Jesus. He identifies expressions of “calling upon the Lord” and “the name of the Lord” together with “the Lord Jesus” or “the Lord Jesus Christ” as pre-Pauline confession, linked both to the exaltation of Jesus (Phil. 2) and to his power and authority, to which the church lays claim in baptism. But God is neither displaced nor absorbed by the Lord, as is seen from the fact that thanksgiving is always directed to God, not to the Lord. Kramer points out Paul’s tendency to use *dia* phrases to preserve both the bond and the distinction between God and the Lord.⁴⁶ In Kramer’s view, these confessions did not mention historical events, but conceived the relationship of lordship in spatial terms, a sphere of dominion which holds sway here and now, and implies the appropriateness of worship.⁴⁷ It is notoriously difficult to separate pre-Pauline material, which appears presently in the Pauline letters from Paul’s own adaptation of it. Kramer argues that one of Paul’s distinc-

⁴⁵ But see C. Kavin Rowe’s article, “Romans 10:13: What is the Name of the Lord?” in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 22.2 (December 2000): 135-173. Rowe’s forthcoming dissertation will treat Luke’s complex narrative use of the title *kyrios*, in relation to its Septuagintal background.

⁴⁶ Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (Naperville, Ill.: Allenson, 1966), 80-83.

⁴⁷ Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, 127.

tive uses of this traditional material is in ethical instruction or when dealing with actual practical pastoral problems, and that it is there that we find his characteristic formula “in the Lord.” When these are examined closely, says Kramer, we see that for Paul the church is confronted in every aspect of its life by the Lord and held accountable. The church belongs wholly to the Lord and will belong to the Lord until the last day.⁴⁸

Thus the lordship of the Creator, the Christ, and the Spirit are in part, at least, a witness to the consistency of God through time. Ethically speaking, the term refers to the integrity of God; literarily speaking, it refers to the character of God. If God’s being is known through God’s actions, as Karl Barth insisted,⁴⁹ and if the definitive central narrative of the Christian faith is the story of Jesus Christ, past, present, and future, then in the most important sense, there is no real tension (for Pauline theology at least) between the threeness and the oneness of the Lord. The more difficult questions for Paul (and perhaps therefore also for Pauline theologians) are soteriological and ecclesiological: How is the Lord’s community to be caught up in this definitive story? What is the relationship of the people of God and the body of Christ? How is the integrity of God to be communicated to the many believers who call upon the name of the Lord? It is precisely at this point that the “koinonia of the Spirit” holds such promise.

It is not an accident that Paul’s most direct ecclesiological use of the expression “koinonia of Spirit” occurs just before the Christ hymn in Philippians 2. If there is any “koinonia of Spirit” the community will be conformed to the pattern of what God has done in Christ, foretold already in the Scriptures (“the right hand of God,” Ps. 110:1, “every knee shall bow,” Isa. 45:23, and so on) entrusted to Israel by the One God who is Lord of all the cosmos. The other two ecclesiological expressions “people of God” and “body of Christ” are shown to be intimately related, whether the question is that of Israel and the Gentiles (Rom. 15:1-13) or that of Christ and his church (1 Cor. 6:12-20), through the koinonia of the Spirit. Through the power of the Spirit, the people of God can recognize the same God who gave Israel such powerful promises through the Scriptures to have kept

⁴⁸ Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, 181-182.

⁴⁹ *Church Dogmatics* II/1, Trans. T. H. L. Parker et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 257-272.

them in the surprising but not uncharacteristic action of showing mercy to the Gentiles. Through the power of the Spirit, the community which has been redeemed by Christ becomes one with him, so that all other potential powers over them are refuted and excluded. They cannot drink the cup of demons; they cannot unite with prostitutes. Only in that koinonia of Spirit can they confess that Jesus is Lord. However, in their confession of the lordship of Jesus, they also confess their union with one another, their mission to those who have not yet heard the gospel, and their solidarity with the whole of creation.

So, to summarize once more, when we examine one⁵⁰ of Paul's ecclesiological descriptions, "koinonia of Spirit," more closely, it becomes apparent that this idea (although the term "koinonia of Spirit" itself is used infrequently in the extant letters of Paul) is the glue which holds together Pauline ethics. This is so because, given Paul's understanding of the central place of the story of what God has done in Jesus Christ, "koinonia of Spirit" links the integrity of God to the notion of the "people of God" understood now, again through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as including both Israel and the Gentiles representatively in Paul's mixed and/or mostly Gentile churches. In a similar way, the story of what God has done in Jesus Christ is also the defining narrative for the "body of Christ." Participation in that defining narrative through the koinonia of the Spirit in baptism and the eucharist conforms the members of the body to Christ's own crucified and resurrected body in their life together. To the extent that one can distinguish theology and ethics at all, "koinonia of Spirit" also holds together the Oneness of God as affirmed in the *Shema* with the divine Lordship of the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁰ It is hard to say for certain whether or not this ecclesiastical description was "third" in the order of Paul's experience and/or of his reflections on the nest of problems described in this paper, as we who come from churches that routinely confess the Apostles' Creed and the "Nicene" Creed might assume. Paul certainly must have had some understanding of God and the Spirit of God and perhaps of a relationship between them before his call/conversion/apostolic commissioning. Whether he had any cause to work out in his mind the idea of the "people of God" as those who had "koinonia of Spirit" with God before he began to confess "Jesus Christ as Lord," and to associate the Spirit with the ability to make that confession, and to live according to "the mind of Christ," is difficult to say.

*Conclusion: Can Paul's Practical Problems Assist
Our Trinitarian Discourse?*⁹

Paul had to work out the problem of the *people of God* (Israel and the Gentiles) for his missionary theology and he had to solve the problem of the *body of Christ* (Christ and his church) because of his concern for church unity. Both are instances of the problem of the one and the many, and in both cases Paul combines a radical monotheism with a sophisticated notion of participation (*koinônia*) of the community in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As he works this out, he develops an *ad hoc* pneumatology to resolve the problem of the one and the many. Because Paul insists that the Spirit he describes is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of his Son, and because Paul holds together the Father and the Son so tightly (Rom. 5:8), he also insists that the great narrative of what God has done in Jesus Christ is the defining narrative for the community called by God, baptized into Christ, standing firm in one Spirit. It is in the letters where Paul struggles mightily to get clear about what that Christ-conformed community must look like (1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans) that we get his clearest articulations of “trinitarian” theology.

This brings us full circle to recent theological reflection on social aspects of the Trinity and on the benefits and liabilities of understanding the Trinity as the model for social reforms within the church. It is worth noting once more that usually social understandings of the Trinity are said to work the other way: the church’s understanding of the union in relation of the Trinity is held to mandate certain human social relationships. Then it becomes useful to ask whether the social relationships apparently mandated by the life of the Trinity are in fact a reflection of the divine community or a distortion of it. At the same time, the issue of human projections of “divine values” onto the Trinity so that they may then shape human social relations becomes relevant.⁵¹

Two factors in addition to the tendency of human sinfulness to “read” the divine life of the Trinity in a self-interested way might encourage us to rethink the relationship between ecclesiological models and trinitarian metaphors. The first is the observation that Paul seems to have ended up with “trinitarian” formulations as a result of his insistence on the radical monotheism of God witnessed to in the bibli-

⁵¹ As noted in Kilby, “Perichoresis.”

cal Scriptures, whatever liturgical experiences of worshipping Jesus Christ as “Lord” he knew (surely at least baptism and eucharist and probably also the hymns and creedal formulations that he seems to be quoting) and his ecclesiological reflections on the sacred narrative at the heart of the Christian faith. Paul had to decide what the community conformed to the story of what God had done in Jesus Christ must be like in its confession and praxis. The second is the observation that the historical relationship between texts like 2 Corinthians 13:13 with its triadic structure and later patristic formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity suggests that the relationship between practical and systematic theology runs both ways. Paul’s early hunches about the integrity of God, formed in the crucible of practical theological problems in his churches, might help us better to formulate a doctrine of the Trinity for our time that is attentive to its social implications for our own churches. It seems impossible theologically (and Paul would surely have found it a strange idea) that there should be no power of influence from the life of God to that of the one who worships God, since as the church fathers knew, “we imitate whom we adore.”

As we consider how to protect the church’s trinitarian theology from the tendency of willful humans to replace the mysteries of God with our own more predictable values, we would do well to be guided by Miroslav Volf’s comments about the narrative of the life of the Trinity, God’s self-donation in human history which is “the divine labor of love’s suffering and risk.”⁵² Perhaps the reason that Paul applies the title “Lord” to Father, Son, and Spirit alike, but uses it primarily for the Lord Jesus Christ, is that he would agree with Volf’s formulation “the love of God on the cross reiterates the eternal love in God.” In that case,

to propose a social knowledge based on the doctrine of the Trinity is above all to re-narrate the history of the cross, the cross understood not as a simple repetition of heavenly love in the world, but as the Triune God’s engagement with the world in order to transform the unjust, deceitful, and violent kingdoms of this world into the just, truthful, and peaceful “Kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah” (Rev. 11:16).⁵³

⁵² Miroslav Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program,” 413.

⁵³ Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program,” 415

Our own “trinitarian” language, like Paul’s before us, ought to be in the service of an ethical ecclesiology rooted in the biblical Scriptures, given voice by our worship of God’s Christ in the power of the Spirit, and, above all, shaped by the narrative of God’s costly redemption of the world that stands at the heart of Christian theology.