




1-1-1955

"Ecclesia" According to Saint Paul

Ralph G. Bealer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses>

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [History of Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bealer, Ralph G., "'Ecclesia' According to Saint Paul" (1955). *Graduate Thesis Collection*. 466.
<https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses/466>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

(This certification-sheet is to be bound with the thesis. The major professor should have it filled out at the oral examination.)

Name of candidate:

Ralph G. Bealer

Oral examination:

Date March 15, 1955

Committee:

S. Marion Smith, Chairman

Marie P. Bell

W. W. Newland

Thesis title:

"Ecclesia" according to
Saint Paul

Thesis approved in final form:

Date March 15, 1955

Major Professor S. Marion Smith

(Please return this certification-sheet, along with two copies of the thesis and the candidate's record, to the Graduate Office, Room 105, Jordan Hall. The third copy of the thesis should be returned to the candidate immediately after the oral examination.)

B
1

"ECCLESIA" ACCORDING TO SAINT PAUL

by

Ralph G. Bealer

2

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Arts Degree
New Testament Department

Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis
1955

PREFACE

Several years ago the writer became interested in a study of the New Testament concept of the church. Since the major part of the New Testament collection dealing with this concept is made up of the writings of the apostle Paul he felt that the study should begin with these writings. In making a preliminary study it was found that the apostle's concept would be too extensive and too inclusive to incorporate in its entirety within the scope of a thesis written as partial requirement for the Master of Arts Degree. Consequently this work is limited, being primarily foundational.

In order to maintain this foundational character the writer decided to make a study of a representative passage of each variant shade of Paul's concept, and, that only where some form of the term $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ (ecclesia) appears in the text.

So that Paul's usage of the term might be more fully understood the first and second chapters are designed to serve as a background. These chapters will show that Paul, when he had become a Christian, had inherited a word that was potent with vital significance for him and for others like him in the new religion.

The remainder of the thesis is divided according to the major emphases which Paul makes upon the term 'ecclesia'. This has caused a shift of the Galatian letter from its traditional date of composition which places it shortly after the writing of the Corinthian letters into a closer proximity with the Thessalonian letters. The concept of 'ecclesia' in Galatians is more in accord with that found in the Thessalonian letters than with that in Corinthians and Romans.

It will be noted that the letter to the Ephesians is included in Chapter IV, "Ecclesia" in the Prison Epistles. For reasons which would involve more discussion than should be inserted in a preface the writer wishes only to say that he accepts the Pauline authorship of this epistle. He holds that the letter was not originally addressed and directed to the Ephesian church but to some other Christian community or communities in the vicinity of Ephesus. A copy of this letter could have gone to the Ephesian Christian community.

It will also be noted that the pastoral epistles are omitted. Because 'ecclesia' appears three times in I Timothy only and because it is used in its most common shade of meaning, these passages are non-essential to our purpose.

The Thesis therefore is not exhaustive. It

does not include every passage where 'ecclesia' is used nor does it include Paul's concept of the church as expressed in passages where the term itself does not appear. Since the emphasis rests upon the term, it appears in the title without the article. This would indicate that the study is focussed upon the essence with which the great apostle clothes 'ecclesia'.

A statement should be made concerning the use of Hebrew and Greek terms. In their first appearances the terms are written in the original language with a transliteration following. In general the word in subsequent appearances is given in the transliteration form enclosed in single quotation marks. When the transliterated word is used otherwise than that of indicating the form in the original language quotation marks are omitted. There are places in the thesis where 'ecclesia' is translated into "church". Words, when they appear in italics in the sources from which they are quoted, are underscored. Biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

In concluding the Preface I wish to express my appreciation to my advisor, Professor S. Marion Smith for his valuable counseling, to one of my colleagues on the faculty of Huntington College, Huntington, Indiana, for helping me to formulate my interpretation of 'ecclesia' in the prison epistles, and to my advanced

students with whom I had opportunity to discuss some phases of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	ii
Chapter	
I. "ECCLESIA" BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN ERA . .	1
II. "ECCLESIA" RATHER THAN "SYNAGOGUE" . .	11
III. "ECCLESIA" IN PAUL'S EARLIER EPISTLES .	32
IV. "ECCLESIA" IN THE CORINTHIAN AND ROMAN LETTERS	53
V. "ECCLESIA" IN THE PRISON EPISTLES . . .	83
VI. CONCLUSION	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	105

CHAPTER I

"ECCLESIA" BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN ERA

The early Christians called their society by the Greek term ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) either about the time Paul embraced Christianity or a short time later. It seems very probable that they appropriated it a short time after his conversion. For instance, at the time of the apostle's conversion the Christians are referred to as "any belonging to the Way."¹ This must be a reference to a point in history because 'ecclesia' was in popular usage among the Christians at the time the book of Acts was written. Scott conceives the possibility of the term being employed "almost from the outset. When Paul goes back in memory to his earliest Christian days he uses the term 'ecclesia' or 'ecclesia of God' as a matter of course (Gal. 1:13, 22; I Cor. 15:9), and we may infer that it was already established before the date of his conversion."² We may be fairly certain it was not introduced as late as the apostle's earlier writings. As we read these epistles we can sense that

¹Acts 9:2.

²Ernest F. Scott, The Beginnings of the Church, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914, pp. 30f.

the term was already in common use since the writer employs it freely and without definition or explanation.³

In the Hellenistic era Jewish and Gentile people were acquainted with this word. Association with Greek culture and literature conveyed to them the term and its basic meaning. In the classical Greek its definition was distinctive: it was the sovereign assembly of the free Greek city-state formally summoned by the herald. In literature Thucydides⁴ applied it to the Spartan assemblies; Herodotus⁵ to the Samian; and Aristotle⁶ to the Homeric. Later in the period of the Christians it was applied to any popular assembly whether formally summoned or coming together by chance. In Acts the author uses it for a disorderly gathering.⁷ It should be noted that non-biblical Greek gives little aid for appreciating its biblical meaning, for in the former 'ecclesia' is never used as a title of a religious group.

In the period of the New Testament the Greek language was spoken in all the nations of the Mediterranean world which included Palestine. Lieberman asserts

³I Thess. 1:1; 2:14; II Thess. 1:1, 4; Gal. 1:2, 13, 22.

⁴Thucydides 1.87.

⁵Herodotus 3.142.

⁶Aristotle, Politica 1285^a II.

⁷19:41.

that the Rabbis in the ancient land frequently inserted Greek into their addresses to the congregation of the synagogue assuming that everybody understood it.⁸ It is established that the language the apostle Paul used when he reasoned out of the Scripture with prospective Christians was Greek. And the Scripture he had at hand was the Septuagint. This Alexandrian version was the Bible of the Hellenistic Jew and it accompanied him wherever he went. In Palestine as well as elsewhere both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians knew this translation. The abundant quotations from it in the literature of the Church intimate that there was a general familiarity with it. Swete indicates that the Palestinian Jew, Flavius Josephus, used the Septuagint in writing his Antiquities.⁹ It is in this translation that 'ecclesia' is employed in the majority of cases in translating the Hebrew word קָהָל (qahal) whose fundamental meaning is that of "assembly." In this version קָהָל יְהוָה (qahal yehowah), "the assembly of Yahweh" is translated ἐκκλησία κυρίου (ecclesia kuriou).¹⁰ This is a reference to Israel,

⁸Saul Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine, (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942), pp. 29ff.

⁹Henry Barclay Swete, An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1900), p. 377.

¹⁰Deuteronomy 23:3, "No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord. . . ."

the people of Jehovah.

In the following passages from the Old Testament 'qahal', translated into the Greek by 'ecclesia', points to general assemblies.

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners that were among them.¹¹

And the king turned his face, and blessed all the assembly of Israel¹²

Used in this meaning "ecclesia" appears frequently in the Greek Old Testament.

In addition to the above usage "ecclesia" translates 'qahal' when it indicates an assembly for a specific purpose. For example: an assembly convoked for evil counsel, "I hate the company (assembly) of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked;"¹³ for war, "And the chiefs of all the people, of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God ;"¹⁴ for religious purposes, "And the Lord gave me the two tables of stone and on them were all the words which the Lord had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the

¹¹Joshua 8:35. A. R. V.

¹²II Chronicles 6:3. A. R. V.

¹³Psalms 26:5.

¹⁴Judges 20:2.

assembly;¹⁵ for feasts and worship,

And Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, "O Lord, God of our fathers, art thou not God in heaven?" Meanwhile all the men of Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly Then Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the Lord, worshiping the Lord.¹⁶

And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly And they killed the passover lamb And the priests and the Levites brought burnt offerings into the house of the Lord.¹⁷

and for civil affairs, "I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly" (A. V.).¹⁸ On this verse Toy reflects,

If the evil be moral, the congregation, (or, assembly) is the crowd of bad companions who lead the man astray, or the community which witnesses his downfall; but this interpretation does not agree with the connection--he declares (vv. 12, 13) not that he came near descending, but that he did descend into the depths of moral evil, and he reflects that he has barely escaped something else, namely, crushing suffering. This sense of the term evil occurs in 13:17, Psalm 10:6, 27:5; here it appears to mean official punishment. Congregation and assembly (synonymous terms) signify first any mass of persons gathered together, and then particularly a community (sometimes the whole body of Israelites) in organized political or judicial form, here the official gathering of the man's community to take

¹⁵Deuteronomy 9:10.

¹⁶II Chronicles 20:5, 6a, 13, 14, 18.

¹⁷II Chronicles 30:13, 15.

¹⁸Proverbs 5:14.

cognizance of offences against law. In the early time every Israelitish community appears to have exercised judicial and executive powers (Dt. 17:7; 21; Lev. 24:16). In the Roman times also the Jewish communities all over the empire seem to have had the right of jurisdiction over their members, and this was probably the case in the Greek period in Palestine and Egypt The stress here laid on the verdict of the community is to be noted.¹⁹

If Toy is correct (there is historical evidence in his favor) then 'ecclesia' translating 'qahal' means not only a general assembly or one called for a specific purpose, but also an assembly as an organized body. Deuteronomy and Nehemiah have each a section which confirms such a conclusion. In Deuteronomy 23:3 we have a verse in which the assembly ('qahal'-'ecclesia') of Yahweh is mentioned and this same verse is repeated in essence in Nehemiah 13:1 in the period of the Restoration.²⁰ Both references are in contexts which set forth laws, commandments, and regulations for an organized group.²¹ In the Nehemiah passage there is noticeable a strenuous effort to effect a strong organization of "all the assembly of them that were come again out of the captivity."²²

¹⁹Crawford H. Toy, Proverbs, International Critical Commentary, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 110.

²⁰"No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord"

²¹Deuteronomy, chapters 12 through 26; Nehemiah 10:32-13:3.

²²Nehemiah 8:17.

The Apocryphal Book of Sirach,²³ the Greek translation, contains in four instances the term 'ecclesia'. In each one an assembly of the people is involved. Let us examine two of them.

And she (wisdom) will exalt him above
his neighbour,
And will open his mouth in the midst
of the assembly.²⁴

Charles thinks that in the foregoing passage the reference is probably to those gathered together for instruction in the temple since the synagogue did not exist in Palestine until the latter half of the second century B. C.²⁵

In the following passage the general assembly of the people is prominently brought out.

But they (craftsmen) shall not be inquired
of for public counsel,
And in the assembly they enjoy no
precedence.
On the seat of the judge they do not sit,
And law and justice they understand not.
They do not expound the instruction of
wisdom,
Nor understand the proverbs of the wise.²⁶

²³Written ca. 180 B. C.; translated into Greek about fifty years later by the grandson of the author.

²⁴The Book of Sirach 15:5.

²⁵R. H. Charles, Apocrypha, Vol. 1, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the O. T., (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 370.

²⁶Sirach, op. cit., 38:33. The following quotations from Sirach also indicate an assembly of people: "The utterance of the prudent is sought for in the assembly" 21:17. "She (an adulteress) shall be led into the assembly" 23:24. This assembly is most likely a judicial one, made up of the people, for the purpose of administering punishment.

At this point a negative approach will contribute additional confirmation of what so far has been found relative to the shades of meaning in 'ecclesia'. When a select group out of Israel is in assembly the term is not used although 'qahal' appears in the original Hebrew in some instances. For example, in Jeremiah 31:8 'qahal' is translated ὄχλον (ochlon). Here Jeremiah gives expression to his vision of the company of the Dispersion which will return to their homeland. Evidently this company is not considered by the translators as an assembly in the same sense as that expressed by 'ecclesia'.²⁷

Neither is 'ecclesia' used when 'qahal' seems to have the general idea of company, i. e., an assembled multitude. For instance, when the people of Israel were camping in the plains of Moab the Moabites are recorded as saying to the elders of Midian, "Now will this multitude ('qahal'-'synagoge') lick up all that is round about us"²⁸ Another good illustration of this usage is found

in Leviticus 4:13, 14.

And if the whole congregation $\eta \tau \eta \nu - \sigma \upsilon \nu \alpha \gamma \omega \gamma \acute{\eta}$ ('edhah-synagoge) of Israel err, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, ('qahal'-'synagoge'). . . . when the sin wherein they have sinned is known, then the assembly ('qahal'-'synagoge') shall offer a young bullock for a sin-offering, and bring it before the tent of meeting. (A. R. V.)

²⁷See also Ezekiel 16:40, 23:24 where 'qahal' is also translated into the Greek by 'ochlos'.

²⁸Numbers 22:4 (A. R. V.).

Again 'ecclesia' is not engaged to translate 'qahal' when this word is used to designate the association of those who have common interests. In such instances 'synagoge' is used.

For the assembly ('qahal'-'synagoge') there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the sojourner be before the Lord. One law and one ordinance shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.²⁹

In the Book of Exodus when the Elders of Israel are to be assembled two different Hebrew verbs are used, viz., אָסַף ('asaph) 'to gather'³⁰ and קָרָא (qara) 'to call',³¹ i. e., 'to summon'. The verb קָהַל (qahal) whose sense is 'to assemble' is not used. The first of these verbs is translated into the Greek συναγω (synago) whose signification is 'to bring together', 'to congregate'. The second verb is translated ἐκκαλέω (ekkaleo) 'to call out' or 'to summon forth'. Although in this second instance a word which is closely related grammatically to 'ecclesia' is used, yet that does not mean that 'ecclesia' is to be applied to a special,

²⁹Numbers 15:15, 16. See also Exodus 16:2, 3; Numbers 16:47; I Maccabees 7:12 where (synagoge grammateon) is found, meaning "an assembly of scribes", i. e., an assembly of those who have a common interest.

³⁰Exodus 3:16, "Go and gather the elders of Israel together" Exodus 4:29, "Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel."

³¹Exodus 19:7, "So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him."

called out group. It is quite possible that the LXX translators did deliberately conceive a similarity of thought between 'ekkaleo' and 'ecclesia', yet this idea of 'a calling out' or 'a summoning forth' is hardly admissible in the latter. On this point Hort's discussion is pertinent. He says,

ἐκκλησία is derived from an obsolete root meaning 'to call' or 'summon', and the resemblance to the Greek καλέω naturally suggested to the LXX translators the word ἐκκλησία, derived from καλέω (or rather ἐκκαλέω) in precisely the same sense.

. . . . In the actual usage of both ἐκκλησία and ἐκκλησία this primary idea of summoning is hardly to be felt. They mean simply an assembly of the people³²

Let us turn once more to the Book of Sirach. The Greek term used to denote the assembling of the Elders in 6:34 and 7:14 is πλῆθος (plethos).³³ Here 'ecclesia' is not considered as appropriate by this Greek translator.

It is therefore apparent from both the positive and the negative approach that in the classical and Hellenistic Greek the prominent idea is that of an assembly of the people rather than of any representative group or council.

³²Fenton John Anthony Hort, The Christian Ecclesia, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), pp. 5f.

³³6:34, "Stand thou in the assembly of the elders"

7:14, "Prate not in the assembly of elders, And repeat not (thy) words in (thy) prayer." Tr. by R. H. Charles

CHAPTER II

"ECCLESIA" RATHER THAN "SYNAGOGUE"

In the New Testament literature the body of Christians is consistently called ἡ ἐκκλησία (he ecclesia). In only one instance is there the possibility that the Christians assembled are called ἡ συναγωγή (he synagoge).¹ Ropes in commenting on James 2:2 indicates that a Christian assembly may have been called 'synagoge'. He does not go so far as to say that the Christian community was so called at any time.

συναγωγή means "meeting" and it is not necessary here to distinguish between the "meeting" as an occasion and as an assembled body of persons. It is the proper word for a Jewish religious meeting, but is occasionally used, chiefly by writers having some Jewish or Syrian connection, for a Christian meeting.²

A. T. Robertson says that it may seem a bit odd for a Christian church (ecclesia) to be termed 'synagoge', but James is writing to Jewish Christians.³

¹James 2:2 "For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, συναγωγὴν ὁμῶν (synagoge humon) and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,"

²James H. Ropes, Epistle of St. James, International Critical Commentary, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 188.

³A. T. Robertson, The General Epistles and the Apocalypse, Word Pictures in the New Testament, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1933), p. 28.

Johnston thinks 'synagoge' in this verse should be understood as the place of assembly rather than the assembly itself.⁴ Zahn in his Introduction to the New Testament offers this interpretation as a possibility.

. . . . συναγωγῆ, without any modifying word, denotes Jewish meeting-places, the ἑκκλησίᾳ where would seem to indicate that the Christians addressed had their own particular places of worship by themselves. An inscription of 318 A. D. . . . designates a building as συναγωγῆ Μαρκίων.⁵

Burrows has observed that,

The early Palestinian church was at first hardly distinguished from the Jewish people. Separate synagogues may have been organized by the disciples, since any ten men could organize a synagogue, but there is no positive evidence for this. The disciples evidently worshiped in the temple with other Jews.⁶

Occasionally the Church Fathers designate a Christian assembly by the term 'synagoge'. The illustrations in the footnote show that 'synagoge' may be translated "assembly" with ease.⁷

That the early Christians were recognized as a

⁴George Johnston, The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament, (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1943), p. 41.

⁵Theodor Zahn, Introduction to the New Testament, translated from the third German edition, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1953), Vol. 1, p. 94.

⁶Millar Burrows, An Outline of Biblical Theology, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 149.

⁷Ignatius, The Epistle to Polycarp, 4:2, "Let your assembling together be of frequent occurrence." Hermas, Mandates, 11:9, "When, then, a man who has the divine spirit comes into an assembly of righteous men .

synagogue is held probable by Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake.⁸ These men base their probability on Acts 24:5 where the Christians are referred to by the Jews as "the sect of the Nazarenes." At a date earlier than Jackson and Lake, Weizsäcker concluded that the Christians could have been designated as a synagogue. He rests his conclusion on a different premise from that of the other two men. He uses Acts 6:9 where reference is made to a synagogue or synagogues in Jerusalem for Jews from other nations. In like manner, according to Weizsäcker, the Christians could have been called a synagogue "on the basis of their nationality as natives of Galilee."⁹ However, there is no documentary evidence or means of proof for such deductions. The passage upon which Weizsäcker rests his conclusion seems rather to point to a practice of early Christians meeting with Jews in the synagogues of the latter.

Epiphanius in writing about the Ebionites says, "but they call their church ἐκκλησίαν (ecclesian) a synagogue συναγωγήν (synagogen), and not at all a church ἐκκλησίαν (ecclesian)."¹⁰

⁸F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity, The Acts of the Apostles, (London: Macmillan and Company, 1920), vol. 1, prolegomena 1, p. 304.

⁹Carl von Weizsäcker, The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), vol. 1, p. 47.

¹⁰Haer. XXX. 18.

It is important to note that the Ebionites were an ultra-Jewish party in the early church. The "Nazarenes" of Acts 24:5 has in it a suggestion of being Jewish. It is because of references such as these that some New Testament scholars feel that the early church made up of Jewish converts was designated a synagogue. Concerning this matter, Lightfoot says,

The Christian Church in its earliest stage was regarded by the body of the Jewish people as nothing more than a new sect springing up by the side of the old. This was not unnatural: for the first disciples conformed to the religion of their fathers in all essential points As soon as the expansion of the Church rendered some organization necessary, it would form a 'synagogue' of its own. The Christian congregations in Palestine long continued to be designated by this name, though the term 'ecclesia' took its place from the very first in heathen countries.¹¹

From the Biblical references these scholars use it would not be too difficult to conclude that the Jewish Christians in their assemblies were in all probability called "synagogues." But this does not necessarily mean that they called the place of their meeting, independently from the Jews, a synagogue. The passage in James (2:2) is perhaps better taken as an assembly of the Christians rather than the place of such an assembly.

However, there must be some significance to the fact that the New Testament writings including Acts

¹¹J. B. Lightfoot, The Epistles of St. Paul, Philippians, (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1886, edition 1896), p. 192.

never, with the exception of James 2:2, employ the term 'synagogue' when speaking of or addressing the Christian believers. Luke does not use 'synagogue', not even as a historical reference. Not at any time does he mention a period when or a place where the Christian believers as a group are called a synagogue. The strange phenomenon is, that while some may have called the early Christian assemblies 'synagogues', Luke refers to these same Jewish Christian communions as 'the ecclesia'¹² There must be a reason for Luke doing this. A probable answer may be found in one or more of the following considerations.

First, there is the possibility that when the book of Acts, as well as the major portion of the New Testament, was composed the Christians had assumed for their new society the name 'ecclesia'. By this time they had found in the word "an enduring term for their movement and one which served satisfactorily many needs of nomenclature."¹³ If this was the situation then it would have been natural for Luke to use this name in his history and for the others to use it in their writings.

In the second place, 'synagoge' was evidently

¹²See Acts 5:11; 8:2; 9:31 and others.

¹³F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity, The Acts of the Apostles, (London: Macmillan and Company, 1933), vol. 5, p. 387.

not used as a synonym for 'ecclesia' by the New Testament writers since these terms in the New Testament are never used interchangeably in reference to the Christian Church. This was not the case in reference to the congregation of Israel.

The Greek noun (synagoge) came later to be used as the regular designation of the Jewish organization and place of worship, while (ecclesia) became the standard designation of the Christian church, but the Hellenistic Jews and early Greek-speaking Christians found both words used interchangeably in their Greek Bible for the congregation of Israel. Hence Stephen speaks of Moses as being in the ekklesia in the wilderness.¹⁴

In the New Testament the distinction is sharply drawn. The synagogue is either a Jewish assembly or the place of such an assembly. The 'ecclesia' is the Christian community either in assembly or not in assembly. It will be noted that Luke in his work carefully maintains this distinction current in his day.¹⁵

Furthermore, it should be observed that the term "synagogue" was associated with an institution that was distinctly Jewish. The origin of the synagogue is not known,

but it may be reasonably surmised that it had its antecedents in spontaneous gatherings of Jews in Babylonia and other lands of their exile on the sabbaths and at the times of the old seasonal feasts or on fast days, to confirm one another in fidelity to their religion in the midst of heathenism, and

¹⁴Burrows, op. cit., p. 148.

¹⁵Acts 11:22, 26; 18:1-10.

encourage themselves in the hope of restoration.¹⁶

Moore also indicates that the very preservation of the existence of Judaism through all the vicissitudes of its fortunes, it owes more than anything to the synagogue.¹⁷ The synagogue "was both prayerhouse and school, the religious and therefore the civic centre of the (Jewish) community in any place."¹⁸ It shall be shown later that the association of this word with the institution attributed to it a very limited meaning.¹⁹

The third consideration undoubtedly has a very important element within it. The early church consisted of two main branches of converts: the Jewish (including Hellenistic Jews) and the Gentile. The characteristics of these two branches are well defined by Schaff in his History of the Christian Church.

The Jewish Christians, at least in Palestine, conformed as closely as possible to the venerable forms of the cultus of their fathers, which in truth were divinely ordained, and were an expressive type of the Christian worship. So far as we know, they scrupulously observed the Sabbath, the annual Jewish feasts, the hours of daily prayer, and the whole Mosaic ritual, and celebrated, in addition to these, the Christian Sunday, the death and resurrection of the Lord, and the holy Supper. But this union was gradually weakened by the stub-

¹⁶George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, The Age of the Tannaim, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), vol. 1, p. 283.

¹⁷Ibid. p. 285.

¹⁸Johnston, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁹See pages 19 and 20.

born opposition of the Jews, and was at last entirely broken by the destruction of the temple, except among the Ebionites and Nazarenes.

In the Gentile-Christian congregations founded by Paul, the worship took from the beginning a more independent form. The essential elements of the Old Testament service were transferred, indeed but divested of the national legal character, and transformed by the spirit of the gospel. Thus the Jewish Sabbath passed into the Christian Sunday; the typical Passover and Pentecost became feasts of the death and resurrection of Christ, and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; the bloody sacrifices gave place to the thankful remembrance and appropriation of the one, all-sufficient, and eternal sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and to the personal offering of prayer, intercession, and entire self-consecration to the service of the Redeemer; on the ruins of the temple made without hands arose the never-ceasing worship of the omnipresent God in spirit and in truth.²⁰

The historical record shows that there were some very sharp controversies between these two branches concerning the relationship of the Gentile Christians to Judaism. Out of these controversies came the vision that these two branches had to be unified into one. As a result of this vision strenuous efforts toward unity began. As evidences of such efforts we cite two passages. The first is the conclusion at which the Jerusalem church (made up of Jewish Christians) arrived concerning Gentile Christians and their relationship to Judaism.

And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James

²⁰Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Apostolic Christianity, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), vol. 1, pp. 460f.

replied, "Brethren, listen to me. Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood."²¹

The second is a significant passage found in Ephesians. Here the writer is addressing a Christian community composed of Jewish and Gentile believers.

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.²²

It is immediately apparent that this unity is not to be effected on the basis of Judaism, but on the basis of Christ's sacrificial work and upon the universal appeal of the gospel. To use a term which had become 'provincialized' through Jewish adoption for their institution of worship which represented, preserved,

²¹Acts 15:12-20.

²²Ephesians 2:11-18

and fostered the old regime of the Law would, to say the least, be inappropriate. It would certainly be inadequate for the new, all inclusive society.

Oesterley maintains that the Pharisees created the Synagogue.²³ In reference to the provincialism the Pharisees developed Johnston has made the following observation:

The Pharisees lacked humility of spirit. Their aim of service to God was sincere enough and they had a genuine missionary spirit, but they tended to be harshly legalistic, exclusive, and self satisfied. The saints, for whom the world had been created, had become a band of the perfect who deserved to be called the righteous, and the Remnant idea had not yet entered on its inheritance.

In the end this involved the failure of a world community of Judaism to arise. Israel had heard the missionary call in a theology which said: "God's name shall be in every place in Israel and among the Gentiles." Such universalism is meagrely represented in our sources for Judaism. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, reflecting prophetic influence, declare that every man has been created in the image of God. None therefore was beyond the reach of His mercy. "By thee and Juda shall the Lord appear among men, saving every race of men." Elsewhere this becomes the familiar expectation that the heathen would submit to the ancient house of Jacob. Tobit pictures the nations as abandoning their idols, while I Enoch boldly says: "All the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration and shall praise Me, and all shall worship Me." The Son of Man was to be the light of the Gentiles.

This higher note was supplanted by the particularist spirit. No trace of it occurs, for example, in the books of the Maccabees, Jubilees, or the Psalms of Solomon. As a religion of legalism Ju-

²³W. O. E. Oesterley, Judaism and Christianity, The Age of Transition, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1937), vol. 1, p. 141.

alism forfeited the right to be that world-wide religion for which men and women waited.²⁴

It seems that under such circumstances it would be impossible for the early Christians to conceive the word 'synagoge', so much a part of the Pharisaic movement, as being capable of conveying the ideal of the incorporation of all peoples within their body. This word could do nothing but leave the impression of being partisan or tend to over-emphasize the Jewish-Christian element in the new community. "Synagogue" in the final analysis would become a contributing factor to any hindrances in the way of merging into one body Jewish and Gentile Christians. Luke whose great theme in both his gospel and the Acts is the universality of the Christian faith would most likely also have found "synagogue" inadequate. This seems to be the case with other New Testament leaders who had the vision that the Church was not just another national society flavored with a destructive provincialism and particularism. There was need, therefore, for a term which did not have a distinctly Jewish accent. The term was at hand. Henceforth the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ would be known as "the ecclesia."

The era in which Christianity came into being is outstanding for its cosmopolitanism and universalism brought about by the fusion of the different existing

²⁴Johnston, op. cit., pp. 27f.

cultures with that of the Greek. Commenting on this and its effect upon the religious concepts of the day Johnston says,

It is important to observe that in the Graeco-Roman world religion was usually a department of state. Birth determined both a man's race and the gods he worshipped. Inevitably the new idea of a universal community affected religion. Universalism and syncretism appeared. The denationalized cults were tolerated alongside the established rites. They offered their benefits to the individual as such, not to the citizen. Their voluntary associations met a social need not provided for by the polytheism traditionally accepted. A professional clerical class and the individual's power to choose introduced entirely new elements. The result of the fact, that the world was a cosmopolitan whole in the Empire, was that a common religion was sought: and the thought of the age, especially the Stoic philosophy, reinforced the tendency produced toward henotheism. Not content with a cosmopolitan pantheon ruled by a supreme god as the oecumené was governed by the Emperor, men were led on farther to monotheism: one world, one creator.²⁵

It is possible that the Gentile Christians who outnumbered Jewish believers and who had a more universal and cosmopolitan outlook on life and affairs than the strict Jews exerted a greater influence upon the selection of 'ecclesia' than perhaps we realize. Burrows strongly implies this fact in his statements which follow:

Gradually, however, the sense of (the Christians) being a distinct group increased. The admission of Gentiles contributed to this development. The gospel was still regarded as the true Judaism and believers as the true Israel, yet the nation as a whole rejected it. The frequent use of the word "church" in Acts, Chs. 1 to 14, doubtless reflects

²⁵Johnston, Ibid., p. 14.

the growing importance of the group of disciples.²⁶

The situation in selecting 'ecclesia' may have been as extreme as Jackson and Lake assert, "The term was perhaps first selected in Greek and by Greek Christianity."²⁷

This brings us to another important consideration but one which has some problems that may never be solved because of the lack of sufficient and specific historical material. Two essential factors are involved in this consideration of which we have no historical information as yet. First, we have no definite knowledge as to where and when the institution of the Jewish synagogue began. Some think it began in the exilic period, others in the Persian. Second, it is impossible to know that the Septuagint translators had or did not have the correct conception of the Hebrew and Greek terms under discussion. Thus Trench:

The rule which they seem to have prescribed to themselves is as follows--to render עֲדָה ('edah) for the most part by συναγωγή (synagōgē) in no single case to render it by ἐκκλησία (ecclesia). It were to be wished that they had shown the same consistency in respect of קָהָל (qahal); but they have not; for while ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) is their more frequent rendering they too often render this also by συναγωγή (synagōgē) thus breaking down for the Greek reader the distinction which undoubtedly exists be-

²⁶Burrows, op. cit., p. 149.

²⁷Jackson and Lake, vol. 5, Additional Notes, op. cit., p. 387.

tween the words.²⁸

In addition, there is the problem of interpreting what little data we do have. Therefore any conclusion at which we arrive will of necessity be tentative.

In the first chapter it was noted that 'qahal' and its Greek equivalent 'ecclesia' in basic meaning signifies the assembly of the people. In the literature to which a later dating is given 'synagoge' also has this sense of assembly. In the following passage this may be seen. It should also be observed that 'synagoge' as an equivalent for 'edhah' is also used but in this instance in accord with the meaning it has in the majority of cases which is that of "congregation."

And if the whole congregation (קָהָל - סוּבַאָרְוֹרָה 'edhah-synagoge) of Israel err, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly (קָהָל - סוּבַאָרְוֹרָה qahal-synagoge) . . . when the sin wherein they have sinned is known, then the assembly (קָהָל - סוּבַאָרְוֹרָה qahal-synagoge) shall offer a young bullock for a sin-offering, and bring it to the tent of meeting. And the elders of the congregation (קָהָל - סוּבַאָרְוֹרָה 'edhah-synagoge) shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before Jehovah . . .
 . . .²⁹

In extra-biblical literature of the same period and later 'synagoge' seems consistently to have the mean-

²⁸R. C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Company, 1886), pp. 3f.

²⁹Leviticus 4:13a, 14, 15a. A. R. V.

ing of an assembly.³⁰

There are a few instances in the Old Testament where the entire people is called an assembly. In some of these instances 'synagoge' becomes the Greek equivalent for 'qahal'³¹ and in others 'ecclesia' is the equivalent.³² Thus the distinction between these two words as noted in their earlier usage breaks down.

One more factor should be added to this consideration and examined. In the exilic and post-exilic Biblical literature 'edhah' and its Greek equivalent 'synagoge' almost totally disappear while 'qahal' and its Greek equivalent 'ecclesia' come into prominence.³³ This leads Hort to say that after the exile the word 'qahal' came to combine the meaning of 'edhah' and

³⁰In the Will of Epiktela, a writing of the third or second century B. C. 'synagoge' is used of a corporation in assembly. In Sirach and in the Psalms of Solomon it is used to designate an assembly.

It appears, from what evidence we have, that in the post-exilic period 'synagoge' was used to indicate an assembly of some kind. But it is in the Biblical literature of the post-exilic period that 'qahal' and its Greek equivalent 'ecclesia' are used in the majority of cases to indicate an assembly.

³¹Numbers 1:1-7; 20:1-6, the whole congregation of Israel is meant. Ezekiel 38:7, 13, 15, the whole company returning from exile.

³²Deuteronomy 23:1, 2, 3, (cf. Nehemiah 13:1), 8 - has every appearance of being the people of Israel. I Chronicles 28:8 - all Israel. Ezra 2:64 - all Israel returned from captivity.

³³I Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Psalms.

'qahal'.³⁴ This conclusion may be correct but evidence in its favor is scant. It seems there is something more significant about its disappearance. We noted above that 'synagoge' was used consistently to designate an assembly, particularly during the post-exilic period. It is supposed by many scholars that sometime either in the exile or in the post-exilic period the Jewish synagogue came into existence. Whenever it did the Hebrew people used the term 'synagoge' by which to name it. One of two things is possible: either the Hebrews appropriated the word because it had come to mean an assembly or their appropriation of it for their particular meetings in the synagogue thrust this shade of meaning into it. There is no way of determining which is the possibility. The significance deepens by the fact that in the New Testament era 'synagoge' is used to designate either an assembly of Jews or the place of their assembly, mostly the latter. It is probable that soon after the synagogue came into existence it was considered either a national institution or an institution peculiar to the nation of Israel. In either event the "nationalizing" of the term because of its association with the institution was in contradiction to the developing concept of universalism during this Hellenistic era and may be one of the reasons for its disappearance

³⁴Hort, op. cit., p. 7.

in the exilic and post-exilic literature of the Bible. The concept of universalism becomes increasingly prominent in the late Biblical literature.

On the other hand, those who penned the literature of these periods may have wanted to retain the distinctive feature of Israel as an assembly of Jehovah even though the nation was scattered. By doing this the writers may have hoped to retain the prophetic or religious meaning for the existence of Israel. This prophetic meaning was invested in 'qahal' - 'ecclesia'. If this should have been the case then 'edhah' - 'synagoge' no longer could be appropriate. It was now wedded to an institution which represented a people and their particular form of religion and which also afforded those away from the homeland a place of worship. It no longer spoke of a people as it at one time had done. Could it be possible that the early Christians saw their relationship to the prophetic or religious line? It is possible they were aware of the religious connotation of 'ecclesia'. If they were, it would be natural that they would have been attracted to it, and if they were aware of the specific Jewish usage of 'synagoge' these same Christians would refrain from using it.

Yet its (ecclesia) origins are in Judaism, and it is this Jewish Greek term, with its LXX associations of dignity and of intimate relation with God rather than the usages of secular Greek that gave the term its appropriateness. But the

Christians used it not in contrast with the Gentile ἑκκλησία but like other terms, e. g. ἄγιοι to express in the first instance their claim to be the true ἑκκλησία of revealed religion. So it happened that Christianity usurped the term, leaving, however, to Judaism the other LXX word for religious assembly, συναγωγή as an almost undisputed possession.³⁵

In the last place, the attitudes of the Christians toward Jesus as the Messiah were essentially different from those held by the Jews. These differing attitudes were some of the greatest contributing factors to the hostilities between the Jews and Christians and to the Christians' ultimate and complete break with Judaism and the synagogue.

The Jews did not and would not accept Jesus as the Messiah because he did not fit into their pattern of what a Messiah should be and do. In fact, they crucified him because of the Messianic claims which were made. Ropes in commenting on the purpose of the Gospel of Mark has this to say concerning the cause of his crucifixion,

and Mark's introduction of it (the Scribe's question as to the first commandment) here furnishes the reader, and I believe is intended to furnish him, with adequate and convincing proof that Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees and at the end the Sadducees' hostile devices against him were in no sense due to any declaration that the sacred Law of Moses was now in whole or in part superseded Jesus met his death, such is Mark's contention, not because his thought or his life ran counter to the Law, but because he claimed to be the Messiah

³⁵Jackson and Lake, vol. 5, Additional Notes, op. cit., pp. 387f.

of the Jews.³⁶

The point of the greatest dilemma for the Jew was the element of suffering and death in the life and mission of the Messiah. These they had never conceived to be part of the Messianic mission. However, the closest disciples of Jesus and those who later became Christians saw in him the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures in their portrayal of the Messiah. The disciples, under the instruction of Jesus, at length perceived that suffering and death were part of the Messiah's life and mission. "For the church there was no question from the very beginning that Jesus was the promised Messiah. This was the one point on which his followers definitely and sharply differed from other Jews."³⁷ Oesterley engages in an interesting discussion on the suffering of the Messiah. He writes,

. . . . they (Servant-Songs) bear witness to the rise of a new moral conception in Jewish religious thought, that of vicarious suffering. Few scholars would not maintain that to the author of these poems the Servant was a Messianic figure, but by the time that the tradition of the Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew scriptures known as the Targums had established itself it is clear that the Servant of Jahweh had come to be identified with the Messiah. But in the Targum of Jonathan on Isaiah 53, the passage in which the Servant is unequivocally depicted as a suffering, dying, and triumphant figure, we find a curious phenomenon. Throughout that passage all references to the sufferings of the Servant are

³⁶James Hardy Ropes, The Synoptic Gospels, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 27.

³⁷Burrows, op. cit., pp. 92f.

skilfully transferred to sinful Israel or to her persecutors, while those parts which refer to the glory and triumph of the Servant are referred to the Messiah.

The date of the fixing of the Targum tradition is too early to allow of an explanation of this phenomenon as the result of Christian influence, that is, as an attempt to refute the early Christian use of the passage as a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Messiah. It is rather to be explained as part of that general tendency to react against everything that might suggest the possibility of suffering or death in anything related to the divine or possessing the divine nature, and in the later Jewish conception the Messiah might at least be said to be regarded as a semi-divine person. This is borne out by the fact that in the Synoptic gospels the confession of Jesus that he was the Messiah, was immediately received by the Sanhedrin as blasphemy.

Here, then, we have the point of divergence between the earliest Christian community and their fellow-Jews. While both were Jews in every essential respect, observing the Mosaic law, strict in attendance at the Temple, and awaiting the consolation of Israel, the sect of the Nazarenes believed that, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah appointed by God for Israel had appeared, suffered for the sins of his people, died, and risen again, and was about to return in order to inaugurate the 'age to come' foretold by the prophets. The main body of Judaism remained steadfast in their rejection of the conception of a suffering Messiah.³⁸

From the outset the first group of disciples found themselves separated from their countrymen by their acceptance of a suffering and dying Messiah. Good Jews though they were and desired to remain, they found themselves reluctantly being forced farther and farther away from Jewish ground by the internal logic of the Cross.³⁹

Because of the devotion of the early Christ-

³⁸Oesterley, *op. cit.*, pp. 240f.

³⁹*Ibid.* p. 279.

ians to the person of Christ it was not long until the church and the synagogue came to the parting of the ways. In their total withdrawal from the synagogue the Christians gave up 'synagoge' as a nomenclature for themselves. This word now represented the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the appointed Messiah. Not so 'ecclesia'.

. . . . with regard to the whole question, we must not overlook the failure to find in our authorities any mention of the term synagogue being applied to Christians. They themselves seem always to have denoted the congregation in Greek by the word *ἐκκλησία*.

The Churches which existed in Judaea in the period following the conversion of Paul are named by him, Gal. 1:22, the *ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἰουδαίας*. The name synagogue was avoided, and the fact that it was avoided, in spite of the ease with which by a qualifying word or phrase it could have been distinguished from that of the Jews, warrants the conclusion that their meeting even in form had nothing in common with that institution. The name *ἐκκλησία* applied to them the idea which belonged to the whole body of God's people, and indeed the earliest expression is *ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ*, the Church of God. Believers who recognised the distinctive character of their faith could not be satisfied with forming a separate synagogue. As on the one hand they lost the right to do so in union with their fellow-citizens, so on the other it had ceased to correspond with their own nature. It was far from embracing all they desired. The assembly, in which a community regularly listened to the exposition of the law, provided no fit expression for their consciousness. For their union was grounded, not merely on their expectation of the kingdom of God, but on the conviction that they were already its members. With this belief the name *ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ* corresponded.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Carl von Weizsäcker, Translated by James Millar, The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), vol. I, pp. 47f.

CHAPTER III

"ECCLESIA" IN PAUL'S EARLIER EPISTLES

Archbishop Trench, in his New Testament Synonyms, wrote as an introduction to ἐκκλησία (ecclesia),

There are words whose history it is peculiarly interesting to watch, as they obtain a deeper meaning, and receive a new consecration in the Christian Church; words which the Church did not invent, but has assumed into its service, and employed in a far loftier sense than any to which the world has ever put them before. The very word by which the Church is named is itself an example-- a more illustrious one could scarcely be found--of this progressive ennobling of a word. For we have ἐκκλησία in three distinct stages of meaning--the heathen, the Jewish, and the Christian This did not, like some other words, pass immediately and at a single step from the heathen world to the Christian Church; but here, as so often, the Septuagint supplies the link of connexion, the point of transition, the word being there prepared for its highest meaning of all.¹

When Paul, by the call of God, left the venerated sect of the Pharisees (concerning his relation to this sect he wrote, "as to the law a Pharisee"),² and became a member of the Christian society he inherited this unique and great prophetic-religious term. Fortunately he was not like some men who when they have had great bequests made to them failed to judge their true value

¹New Testament Synonyms, 9th ed., pp. 1-7, quoted in Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, vol. IV, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), p. 38.

²Philippians 3:5b.

and consequently neglected them. As a result these be-quests are lost forever. Paul did not regard lightly or mishandle his inheritance so as to cause it to be lost to future generations. By the time he had completed his life's mission he had enriched this word by introducing shades of meaning into it which were beyond any of its connotations when he became heir to it.

William Robinson in his book, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church speaks of Paul's place in the church in this respect and says,

Paul is the one in the New Testament to whom we owe the most profound doctrine of the church, we might say of "the one holy catholic apostolic church" -- of the church as the corporate society of the saved and saving remnant of Israel.³

The apostle was the most powerful directive force in charting the course of the early church and in developing the concepts of 'ecclesia' which the church gradually accepted for its own. When we speak of Paul developing the concepts of 'ecclesia' we do not mean that Paul created the church or the church idea. It was in existence when he became a part of the church.

The present chapter will discuss Paul's usage of ἑκκλησία (ecclesia) in his letters to the Thessalonian and Galatian Christians.⁴ This word appears only seven times in these epistles, but it is possible

³William Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church, (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1948), p. 55.

⁴I Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14; II Thessalonians 1:1, 4; Galatians 1:2, 13, 22.

to glean some significant concepts which he and most likely the Christians held in these early years of the church. All except one of these seven passages refer to the body of Christians in a local sense. For example, "the churches of God which are in Judea,"⁵ and "the churches of Galatia."⁶ The exception is Galatians 1:13 where 'ecclesia' is used to denote the body of Christians in the universal aspect, ". . . how I persecuted the church of God violently."

These letters are the earliest New Testament writings we have from the apostle. They were written around the middle of the first century A. D. From this source it is possible for us to conclude that the concept of a local ecclesia and a universal ecclesia was a component of the thinking of these Christians during the apostolic era.

In Gal. 1:13 we find ἡ ἐκκλησία used not of a local church but of the whole body of Christians That he does not mean the local church in Jerusalem, but the body of Christian believers as such, is indicated by the fact that the persecution extended beyond Jerusalem, by the addition of τοῦ Θεοῦ, by the absence of any local designation and especially by the use of precisely the same phrase ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ in I Cor. 10:32, where a reference to the church at Jerusalem is impossible, and to any local church improbable. The facts as a whole show that when he wrote Galatians Paul had not only learned to think of each local Christian body as ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ in that particular place, but had also already formed the notion of the entire body of be-

⁵I Thessalonians 2:14.

⁶Galatians 1:2.

lievers in Christ as constituting the $\Sigma\Omega\text{P}$ of God, $\eta \epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha \tau\omicron\upsilon\theta \Theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, and that though he used the expression but rarely, it was that which came most naturally to his lips when he was speaking of the Christians

Both uses of $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ are thus in evidence from an early period, but the local sense, for which there was a basis in the Jewish use of this term in translation of $\Sigma\Omega\text{P}$ and especially in the current Greek usage, is undoubtedly primary. On the other hand, the fact that Paul's earlier letters preceding Romans are all addressed to a church or group of churches, while from Romans on the word $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ does not appear in the salutation, does not warrant the inference that in framing the idea of the oecumenical he had abandoned that of the local church, for though the Christian community in Rome is nowhere in the epistle spoken of as constituting a church, this may very well be due to the fact that it was not organized as a single community, and in Philip-
pians, Philemon, and Colossians the apostle still uses $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ of the local body.⁷

The word ecclesia is found no less than 115 times in the New Testament, and in all but three of these it refers to the church, either local or universal. In 79 of these it is used of the local church, either in the singular or plural; in 27 it is used of the church universal; in six cases it is doubtful whether the local church or the church universal is intended.⁸

The first verses of I and II Thessalonians are the only cases, except Galatians 1:13, where 'ecclesia' is used in the singular. "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" The primary reference of the word in these Thessalonian verses is to

⁷Ernest DeWitt Burton, The International Critical Commentary, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), vol. X, pp. 419f.

⁸Robinson, op. cit., p. 107.

the body of Christians in a specific locality. "Of the Thessalonians" makes this primary meaning obvious. It is descriptive, showing that the church is constituted of converts to Christianity who are inhabitants of a certain locality, namely, Thessalonica. In addition, however, the singular form seems to express content which goes beyond reference to a local church. It suggests the idea of community and conveys a conception of the inherent character of that community.

Here in the first pieces of New Testament literature the individual Christians are addressed as 'ecclesia'. When these men, for Silas and Timothy are in accord with Paul, addressed the Christians as 'ecclesia' they are not thinking foremost of the Christians as individuals but as individuals in community. While it is true that what Paul writes he desires individual Christians to know and practice yet they are not to do so as individuals separated from each other and independent from the sacred community: an impossibility as far as Paul is concerned. These epistles, therefore, are not addressed to "the Christians in Thessalonica" with an individualistic flavor but to the 'ecclesia' in which is inherent the corporate idea. It is safe, then, to assume that Paul considered from the beginning of his apostolic commission that the Christians are constituted a community.

Our more extensive knowledge of the Hellenistic world in which Paul lived and of the Jewish background from which he came helps us to more fully realize that the apostle must have held the concept of the individual in community and that when he became a Christian he transferred this concept over to the church.

Paul, like every Jewish prophet was an individualist in a very real sense, but an individualist in community.

Of that kind of Christianity which is able to conceive of a man's being a Christian out of relationship to the people of God, he knew nothing and could know nothing.⁹

The idea of community is prominent among Jewish Christians from the very beginning of the New Testament ecclesia. In the following passage quoted from the earliest history of the Christian church we are made aware of this fact.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.¹⁰

In answer to his own question, "Why is it that

⁹Robinson, Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁰Acts 2:42-47.

the Christian religion from the outset has involved this idea of community" Scott writes,

Apart from the fact that men are by nature social, and must always stand in need of one another, it has to be remembered that in ancient times hardly any place was allowed to the individual The idea of a Christian fellowship was no doubt affected to some extent by this ancient sense of solidarity Christianity by its inherent nature has always drawn men into association.¹¹

This same scholar in commenting on Paul's concept of community says,

When he became a Christian his first action was to have himself baptized as a member of the church. Wherever he went, in the course of his missionary labours, his object was to form a community, representing in its own locality the one indissoluble church of Christ A Christian who stood all by himself was unthinkable to Paul. Christianity, to his mind, implied membership in the church What is called an individual is only a separate member of a group or species. To be sure, the individual qualities are all-important, and constitute the identity of the given plant or animal or man. But they are variations of the type, and before we can make anything of the separate creature we must place it within the type to which it belongs. In accordance with this law the people of Christ become a community. They realized from the first that they did not stand separate but all embodied that new type of humanity which had appeared in the world through Christ. If each of them was to develop his own Christian life they must all be bound together in a brotherhood. With Paul this sense of community was peculiarly strong.¹²

As suggested earlier, the singular form ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) conveys a conception of inherent character

¹¹Ernest F. Scott, The Nature of the Early Church, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 65.

¹²Scott, Ibid., pp. 148f.

of this community. The nature of this character is intrinsic not only in the one specific local ecclesia but also in the ecclesia universal. When Paul wrote "to the church of the Thessalonians" he could not divorce the character of this local church from that of the universal one. As Scott has put it, "This term may denote the church in its intrinsic character of the holy community, the fellowship of those who have identified themselves with the Kingdom of God."¹³ When Paul employed this term and Christians either read or heard it used there was bound to come to their minds a concept of a community that was distinctive and unique from anything they had previously known.

What is the import of the prepositional phrase, "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? This construction in full or in part appears only in these three epistles.¹⁴ There must be some reason for it. That reason probably is found in the fact that the ecclesia is a new religious movement still in its infancy. Thus the phrase is definitive for this early ecclesia. It indicates relationship first of all and intensifies the concept of the character of the Christian community as suggested by 'ecclesia'.

This prepositional phrase denotes that the new

¹³Scott, *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁴I Thess. 1:1; 21:14; II Thess. 1:1; Gal. 1:22.

religious community is in relation both to God who is revealed in the Scriptures (at that time only the Old Testament was in existence) and heralded by his people Israel and to the historical figure, Jesus. By this time much of the ancient world had learned about God from the dispersed Jews and about Jesus from the Christian missionaries. The new communities springing up in the cities of that world, it must be understood by the Christians especially, were in relation to this God and to this Jesus.

The really important part of the phrase is, "the Lord Jesus Christ." These titles of the Savior are in the dative case as is also "God the Father" being controlled by the preposition "in" ἐν (en). This makes "the Lord Jesus Christ" equal with "God the Father." This latter part of the phrase thus points out that the ecclesia is as definitely in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ as it is to God. In his discussion of Galatians 1:22 Blackwelder offers an analysis of the phrase "in Christ" which is somewhat equivalent to the one we are discussing.

"In Christ" is used 164 times in Paul's letters. This phrase for him meant four profound truths. (a) It is the source of Christian morality (b) It represents Paul's concept of what it means to be a Christian (c) It illustrates the central teaching of Christ himself (d) It presupposes the Cross¹⁵

¹⁵Oscar Fisher Blackwelder, The Epistle to the Galatians, The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), vol. 10, p. 464.

Evidently Paul wanted these early Christians in Thessalonica to recognize that their new religious community was in an intimate relation with Jesus Christ and bound up inseparably with his work.

It is the ecclesia in the sense of community that is "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." In continuing his discussion on Galatians 1:22 Blackwelder comments on this idea of community relationship with deity.

Biographically for Paul, "in Christ" represented the new relationship into which his roadside experience had ushered him "In Christ" is the key to all he thought and did. He uses the phrase over and over. And not alone of a personal relationship, but of a relationship in the Christian church as well: "the churches of Judea which were in Christ." The geographical location was Judea, but the permanent locale was "in Christ." To be in Christ is a relationship available not only for individuals but also for those same individuals as a part of the total fellowship of the church

The fact that a church, as well as an individual, may be "in Christ" may indicate that there is a relation in Christ only possible in group fellowship. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). There are insights, attachments, alliances with Christ which are possible only for a man who is alone in quiet, personal devotion. There are other insights into life and experience with Christ which are possible only in association with others, who, like himself, are in Christ.¹⁶

"In God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" intensifies the concept of the character of the community as conveyed by the singular term ἐκκλησία (ecclesia) in verse one.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 464f.

It is the common relation of its members to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ which constitutes them a church in the sense of the Apostle: in contradistinction from all other associations or societies, they form a Christian community Paul in this Epistle greets a community distinct from either of these.¹⁷

The ecclesia cannot be in relation to God and to Jesus Christ without having a character peculiar to this relationship. The last part of this prepositional phrase tells us that the New Testament ecclesia is distinctly one of Christian character as well as of a divine one. These words

distinguish the Christian Church from pagan and secular assemblies, on the one hand, and from the Jewish synagogue, on the other. An entirely new phrase is used because there is an entirely new kind of assembly to designate.

The symbolism is that of transference into a new atmosphere or environment Christians literally seemed to be living in a new world. They found themselves possessed by a power not their own that lifted them up to new levels of life.¹⁸

Relationship with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ determines the essential character of the ecclesia. The ecclesia is not only a community but a holy community having inherent in it the character of God and of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this relationship there is implied the ecclesia's oneness with deity. Duncan in his The Epistle of Paul to the Gala-

¹⁷James Denney, The Epistles to the Thessalonians, Expositor's Bible, (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), pp. 8f.

¹⁸E. J. Bicknell, The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians, (London: Methuen and Company LTD, 1932), p. 2.

tians says that "in Christ" implies that Christ and his people form a corporate fellowship and that to be "in Christ" means to be a member of that religious fellowship which draws its very life from Christ.¹⁹

The Christian religion, in whatever form, finds its center and, it might almost be said, its circumference also in Christ. It is Christ who both distinguishes and unites the church. In so far as the church is one and in so far as it has a distinctive message to impart and a distinctive gift to bestow, Christ is the principle of both the distinctiveness of its service and the unity of its life the life of the Spirit gives the community its character.²⁰

It is essential that we consider such expressions as "the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus" and "the church of God."²¹

The first expression has a meaning in it which shall be discussed under the second one. Because of the addition "in Christ Jesus" the first has a strong implication that the Christian assemblies in Jerusalem were distinguished from the Jewish, some of which may have used the term 'ecclesia' by which to designate themselves in their relation to God. There is some evidence that at the time these epistles were written the Jewish Christians were continuing their custom of visiting the synagogue and the temple services. If

¹⁹George S. Duncan, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.), p. 104.

²⁰John Knox, On the Meaning of Christ, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), pp. 1f.

²¹I Thessalonians 2:14; Galatians 1:13.

the interpretation of the evidence is correct then the significance of the phrase "the churches of God in Judea in Christ Jesus" has tremendous weight added to it. It would mean, that in spite of the fact that the Jewish Christians were attending Jewish assemblies, their union with Christ distinguished them as an assembly different from those of the Jews. The Jewish Christians had acknowledged the historical Jesus as their Messiah and had placed themselves under his authority while the Jews had not done so. Christians endeavored to acclaim him the master of their lives in a very literal sense. For the Jews Moses was the authority, Jesus was an impostor. This basic difference between the Jew and the Christian Jew is clearly brought to the reader's attention by Luke in his history. The following passages taken from his writing disclose that early in the Christian movement men were aware of the principal premise which would eventually cause a complete cleavage between the Christian and the Jew. In both instances quoted it is Peter who speaks.

Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.²²

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his

right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.²³

This cleavage certainly had come to an advanced position when Paul wrote his early letters. Stephen had been martyred, Hellenistic Jewish Christians were scattered abroad on account of persecution, Paul had suffered expulsion from synagogues and had received physical injuries at the hands of unbelieving Jews. The distinction between the Christian and the Jewish assemblies in Jerusalem is heightened by Paul's reference to the waves of persecution against the Christian ecclesia in Judea.²⁴

The epoch which began with Stephen is introduced by the fact, that as the Church in Jerusalem increased there sprang up considerable Hellenistic element These Hellenists were in every respect good Jews. The impulse also that had brought them to Jerusalem proved of itself their strong attachment to the faith of their fathers. But still they had had within their reach a culture different from that of the native Jerusalemites, and this . . . influenced them to some extent in those very matters that pertained to their religion. Even the Alexandrian Jews were Jews, yet a philosophy had taken root among them which was almost more Greek than Jewish, and which deduced novel ideas from the contents of Holy Scripture itself. Now it is not said whether Stephen himself was a Hellenist it is related that Stephen came first into conflict with people from Hellenistic synagogues.²⁵

A general Jewish persecution followed; this certainly took place under the leadership of the Sanhedrin, and was therefore public

²³Acts 5:27-31.

²⁴I Thessalonians 2:14.

²⁵Weizsäcker, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

Thus after a brief period came to an end the privacy of the Christians, and their peaceful relations with the rest of the Jews. Now . . . they were recognised to be renegades, and the whole zeal of the guardians of the law was turned against them. And none was more furious than that party whose chosen lifework it was to cherish and preserve the law as the only source of their race's salvation, the centre of all its trust and hopes. The persecution was Pharisaic But this very conflict which burst upon the church led to its greatest advance.²⁶

. . . . the external effect of the persecution remains. It compelled the Christians to take up a position of their own. Although the members of the early Church might still cherish the feeling that they formed a Jewish brotherhood, yet the established and ruling Judaism had rejected their faith. And this rejection was for them the first step on their way to a separate religious constitution.²⁷

Paul discloses in the brief statement constituting I Thessalonians 2:14 that the Palestinian church was not

concerned almost wholly with the rights of the Law but that the Jewish Christians took their stand on faith in Christ, and probably they suffered more for their religion than their Gentile brethren, who lived in the more tolerant surroundings of Paganism.²⁸

This distinction between the Christian community and Judaism is shown more clearly in Galatians than in any other of the writings of Paul. In this letter the statement, "But I was unknown by my face to the churches

²⁶Ibid., pp. 72f.

²⁷Ibid., p. 75.

²⁸Scott, op. cit., p. 33.

of Judea which are in Christ" appears.²⁹ The addition "in Christ" designates these assemblies, though they were in the area of Jewish population, as being the new Christian communities and not the Jewish.

In Galatians 1:13 Paul shows that he considered the new ecclesia different from that of the Jewish faith, "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it." From this statement it is easy to determine that

by now using the nomenclature ekklesia of God in distinction from Judaism, these two are already being denominated two entirely different communions. The ekklesia of God, although coming up out of, and constituting a unity with, the true, Old Testament people of God, is now an independent magnitude, standing next to and over against Jewry in the external sense of that word.³⁰

The apostle Paul was the greatest factor in the early church that entered into the separation of Christianity from Judaism. Not only did he conduct himself in accord with his conviction that the ecclesia "in Christ" was different from Judaism but he boldly heralded this fact.

Paul devoted his life largely to the endeavor to cut the church entirely free from Judaism. He realized, with his deeper insight into the Christian position, that it was different in its essential

²⁹Galatians 1:22.

³⁰Herman N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), footnote, p. 61.

principle from that of the older religion
 It was Paul, more than any other man, who effected
 the separation of the two religions, but there were
 outward forces working along with him. Jewish
 opinion had become more and more alienated from the
 new teaching. The Gentile mission was mak-
 ing wonderful progress, and the Gentiles were im-
 patient of the restrictions of the Law. In spite
 of all efforts on the part of the older Apostles to
 preserve the link with Judaism the church was com-
 pelled to draw apart, and took its stand definitely
 as a new community, entrusted with a new message.³¹

Christianity was itself the active force in its
 own development. It indeed took advantage of cir-
 cumstances, but if these had been entirely different
 it would still have turned them to much the same ac-
 count. It worked by its own intrinsic power, and
 the given conditions served only to bring out of it
 what was in it from the first.

In this struggle towards self-consciousness the
 leading spirit was admittedly the Apostle Paul. It
 was through him that the church broke away from Ju-
 daism, that its institutions took permanent form,
 that it made its appeal to the larger world. Above
 all, it was he who moulded the Christian beliefs in
 the light of conceptions which were borrowed in
 great part from Gentile thought His effort
 was simply to understand the beliefs which were ac-
 cepted by all Christian men.³²

The final study to be pursued in this chapter is
 on the words, "the church of God."³³ Besides the con-
 tent of character that the words "of God" place into
 'ecclesia' there are two other things it suggests.
 First, the ecclesia had its origin in God; secondly, the
 New Testament *ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ* (ecclesia tou Theou)
 ecclesia of God is in continuity with the Old Testament
 ecclesia.

³¹Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 12f.

³³Galatians 1:13.

The first factor must be recognized by the Christian communities if they were to remain distinctly Christian. If they would fail to perceive this first factor they would become easy prey to the Judaizers who insisted that Gentiles put themselves under the yoke of Judaism as the gateway into Christianity. Coupled with this propaganda was the Judaizers' belief that Israel was the true ecclesia of God, their belief resting in the Old Testament revelation. On account of this their insistence for Gentile proselytes would become intensified, for they believed that only by submission to the Mosaic ordinances could Gentiles become members of the ecclesia of God.

However, in Galatians, Paul's great declaration of independence for the church, it is shown that the new ecclesia is constructed not upon Mosaic religion but upon Jesus Christ as the Messiah about whom the Old Testament Scriptures prophesy. According to Paul, therefore, this new ecclesia is the true ecclesia of God because under God's revealed will it is founded exclusively upon Christ and faith in him apart from any element of Judaism. Paul thus discloses the true nature of the church and at the same time implies its universal aspect.

This rejection of the authority of the Old Testament as such, coupled with the apostle's kindred contention that the gospel was for all nations as they were, i. e., without entrance into the Jewish community or subjection to Jewish law, raised squarely the issue whether Christianity was to be a potentially universal religion or was to continue, as it was at

first, a sect of Judaism, differing mainly by one doctrine from current Pharisaism. On this question Paul took clear issue with the conservative party among the believers in the Messiahship of Jesus. The inspiration of his mission was a vision of a church universal worshipping the one God and Father, and accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour--a church into which men should come from every nation and religion, not through the vestibule of Judaism and the acceptance of the law of Moses and the rites of the Old Testament, but straight from where they were and through the single and open door of faith in Jesus Christ. His opponents also believed in one God and in Jesus as his Messiah, but they could not consent or conceive that men should enter the Christian community except through an acceptance of Judaism, or that the Christian church should be anything else than a specific expression of the Jewish religious community.³⁴

On the other hand

It is very striking that at this time, when his antagonism to the Judaizers was at its hottest, he never for a **moment** set a new Ecclesia against the old, an Ecclesia of Jesus or even an Ecclesia of the Christ against the Ecclesia of God, but implicitly taught his heathen converts to believe that the body into which they had been baptized was itself the Ecclesia of God.³⁵

While the ecclesia originated in God and is separated from the legal teachings and the ceremonial practices of Judaism yet paradoxically this phrase, "the church of God" hints at the thought that the New Testament church is the continuation of the Old Testament ecclesia. This paradox is expressed most ably by S. H. Hooke in his Essay, The Emergence of Christianity from Judaism,

In the sinister shadow of the Cross the Church

³⁴Burton, op. cit., p. lxii.

³⁵Hort, op. cit., p. 108.

has forgotten the vast extent of her indebtedness to the Jew. It is necessary to remember that the Church emerged from the womb of Judaism, and that the metaphor has the profound truth in it that the bones of the Christian Church were shaped in that womb.³⁶

This is apparent from passages such as Galatians 3:7-9 where descent from Abraham is ascribed to all believers, and Colossians 2:11 where one of the attributes of the nation of Israel is applied directly to the church. In commenting on Galatians 1:13 Burton has written,

Two facts are notable about the expression employed here
 (1) the use of the singular to denote not a local body but the Christian community at large
 (2) the characterisation of this community as the church of God. The first of these facts shows that Paul had not only formed the conception of churches as local assemblies and communities of Christians, but had already united these local communities in his thought into one entity--the church. The second fact shows that this body already stood in his mind as the chosen people of God, and indicates how fully, in his thought, the Christian church had succeeded to the position once occupied by Israel.³⁷

It is perceptible that Paul conceived the church to be linked to the past, a part of the continuity of the history of God with men. What is said here concerning the church universal may also be said concerning those instances in which Paul uses the plural, "churches of God."

There is no better way of closing this chapter than by the words of John Knox,

³⁶S. H. Hooke, The Emergence of Christianity from Judaism, Edited by W. O. E. Cesterley, op. cit., p. 254.

³⁷Burton, op. cit., p. 45.

The event which bears the name of Jesus Christ is more clearly and more closely related to some parts of history than to other parts. As any event must, it belongs not only to history as a whole, but also in a special sense its own particular stream. This stream began (in the restricted sense in which any segment of history may be said to "begin") when the Hebrew people first became a self-conscious community with Yahweh as its God; and for nearly twenty centuries it has been identified as the Christian community and, in the broader sense, as the culture of Christendom Christian history is not something merely added to Hebrew-Jewish history; it represents an appropriation and transfiguration of that history.³⁸

³⁸Knox, op. cit., pp. 31f.

CHAPTER IV

"ECCLESIA" IN THE CORINTHIAN AND ROMAN LETTERS

In the previous chapter the theme which kept recurring was that of the distinction between the new ecclesia and Judaism. In our discussion of the Thessalonian and Galatian passages in which 'ecclesia' appears we discovered implications that the early Christians, particularly under the leadership of Paul, were becoming aware of that distinction and as a consequence were beginning to move out from the fold of Judaism into a body of their own.

In this chapter examination of the term as employed in the Corinthian and Roman letters will reveal that the concept of unity is very prominent in the mind of Paul. This does not mean that this concept is absent from the earlier letters. In reference to this fact we have already observed that the singular form of the term 'ecclesia' suggests the idea of a corporate body, of the individual in community.¹ There cannot be the idea of corporateness without including in it the concept of unity or oneness. This idea is more prominent in the Corinthian letters than in the former ones because there were situations in the church at Corinth which demanded

¹Chapter III, pp. 36ff.

that this concept come to the fore and be made prominent. This is Robinson's viewpoint as will be seen in the following quotation from him.

But while this, [serious threats to the church from within and without] no doubt, caused him to dwell more explicitly on the doctrine of the church, its unity and indissoluble corporeity, it would be hazardous to conclude that this same doctrine was not implicitly held by Paul and his readers in the Thessalonian letters Even in the Thessalonian letters it is quite definitely stated that Christians are "the elect of God" (I Thess. 1:4; II Thess. 2:13, A. V.); they are exhorted to "hold to the traditions" which were current in the church (II Thess. 2:15); and both letters give us a picture of an organized community with its forms of discipline (II Thess. 3:6). The case is even more clear in Galatians, where the threat to unity is already severe, and where one can see Paul anxious to maintain the liberty which is in Christ Jesus against an older restricting tradition, and yet careful to do nothing to create a breach between the mother church and the younger churches of the Gentile mission. Here Paul develops that interpretation of history in which Christians become "sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7) and heirs of "the blessings of Abraham" (Gal. 3:14), and culminates in the conception of the church as "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), the "true Israel" of promise over against the "false Israel" of flesh, the one Israel which includes both Jew and Gentile.²

There are variations upon the theme of unity in the three letters that are discussed in this chapter. As far as Paul is concerned there is a threefold unity: (1) of the universal ecclesia; (2) of the ecclesia as a local body; (3) of the local ecclesia with the universal one.

According to Paul there is no room for schism or division in the ecclesia regardless of how inclusive it

²Robinson, op. cit., pp. 67f.

is as to race, nationality, and creed or how extensive as to territory occupied. Craig says that Paul "goes back and forth from the singular to the plural with surprising freedom. The one church was located in many places and he could refer to these congregations either as churches or 'the church'"³ Robinson also implies the same essential unity in the following statement, "As men and women are in Christ by virtue of their being in the church, so the local church is a church because it is in the one church and is the outcrop of the one church in that particular place."⁴

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians he consistently kept before them his perception that the ecclesia was one.

Here Paul has to do with a church of his own planting, beset by local risks which partly determine not only the choice of subjects but their very treatment. . . . This serves to make the letter specially valuable for the light which it throws upon continuity and unity as essential to a church surging with supernatural energy on unaccustomed lines. . . . Only by freshly adhering to the traditions, could these enthusiastic Christians keep within the safe channel for reaching the haven of their cherished hope. Hence the emphasis upon the Church as the fellowship which was at once heir to the earlier promises of God, fulfilled in Christ, and also a distinctive, corporate community in the religious world.⁵

³Clarence Craig, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), vol. X, p. 16.

⁴Robinson, op. cit., p. 73.

⁵James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.), pp. xxviii f.

There is a secondary refrain which receives emphasis and which is closely related to the theme of unity. In fact, it is a contributing factor in realizing the unity of the ecclesia. This refrain is the unique essential character of the ecclesia. It will appear at times while the primary theme of unity is being discussed.

In the salutations of the Corinthian Epistles the writer introduces these two complementary themes.⁶ In them we can perceive Paul's concept of the threefold unity and the essential character of the ecclesia.

Perhaps the phrase that has the greatest significance toward establishing unity in the Corinthian Christian community is "the ecclesia of God." We have noted in part the meaning of this phrase as used in the Galatian letter where it appears in its universal meaning.⁷ In that context the phrase signifies that the universal ecclesia was separate from Judaism, that it had its origin in God, and that it was in continuity with the Old Testament ecclesia. None of this is lost in the Corinthian passages even though it is used (with

⁶I Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

II Corinthians 1:1b, ". . . . To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia."

⁷Galatians 1:13, pp. 47ff.

the exception of one instance)⁸ to designate the local assembly of Christians. However, this threefold significance is not the prominent aspect for Paul when he designates the ecclesia at Corinth as the ecclesia of God. From all that follows he shows that he has the element of unity in mind when he speaks of the ecclesia as "the ecclesia of God." This element could, without much difficulty, also come to the minds of the apostle's readers. This is particularly true with the Jewish constituency of the Christian community. "The ecclesia of God" would lead them to think of the oneness of Israel as a religious body either assembled or scattered and of Israel's God. They were not without similar knowledge as expressed in the Apocalypse of Baruch wherein the claims of Judaism against Christianity are affirmed,

We are all one celebrated people,
Who have received one law from One.⁹

Neither would the Gentile constituency be ignorant of the concept of unity inherent in their usage of the same phrase. Therefore this phrase signifies the universal unity of the people of God. ". . . sanctified in Christ Jesus" indicates that Paul now conceives the Christians to be the people of God. The addition of the

⁸I Corinthians 15:9. Here the same phrase, "church of God" means the universal church. Paul thus uses this phrase to designate both the local and the universal church.

⁹R. H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913), vol. II, p. 506.

words, "in Corinth" tends to transfer the concept of the unity of the universal Christian ecclesia to the local one. Thus as truly as the universal Christian ecclesia is one, so the Christian ecclesia in Corinth is one. Back in the fourth or fifth century Chrysostom said that the expression "church of God" is at once a protest against the party-spirit, that it is the church of God and not of any one individual. All that the universal church is, that the local one is. The local ecclesia is not so much identical with the universal one as it is that the universal ecclesia manifests itself in these specific localities.

This fact, evidently, is the very thing the Corinthians had failed to see or had deliberately disregarded. Not only were they divided within their own ranks but they had a tendency to function independently from the ecclesia universal. In the salutation of both letters the apostle begins with his effort to correct this situation. When Paul wrote in the salutation of the first letter, "with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," "he is commending to the Corinthians the fact that their call is not for themselves alone, but into the unity of the Christian brotherhood."¹⁰ Paul declares that as a local

¹⁰Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, The International Critical Commentary, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 3.

ecclesia they are one with the universal. Such is manifest from these words, "called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours," and, "with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia." By these simple statements in the salutations Paul informs them that he does not consider them as a church isolated or independent, but as a part of the great, extensive fellowship. This is the third part of his threefold concept of unity and it is with this part that we begin the major discussion of this chapter.

There are a number of passages besides the two quoted above in which Paul indicates that the Corinthian Christian ecclesia is one with the other ecclesiae and thus with the ecclesia as a whole. It should be observed that not any of the following points and passages or all of them put together were considered by the apostle as means by which he might impose unity upon the church. They are the results of his perception of the oneness of the Christians as members of the ecclesia of God. The essential thing is that the Corinthian Christians come to the same perception and conduct themselves in accord with it.

1. In every ecclesia Paul teaches consistently his "ways". To him they are the "ways" of Christ of

which he was a recipient.¹¹ Moffatt describes them as "authoritative instructions in Christ Jesus, belonging to the Christian Torah of the gospel, which are his because he was the first to lay them on the conscience of the Corinthians."¹²

These "ways" probably included Christian precepts and principles and the application of them to every day living. Paul may have had the latter in mind more than the former because he insisted upon an ethical Christianity and because he commends them for maintaining the traditions they had received from him.¹³ They may also include, as Thayer maintains, the methods which the apostle used in the discharge of his office.¹⁴ Luke, in recording the activities of the great apostle in the churches of the Galatian province says,

And the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region.¹⁵

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when

¹¹I Corinthians 4:17, "Therefore I sent to you Timothy . . . to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church."

¹²James Moffatt, I Corinthians, op. cit., p. 51.

¹³I Corinthians 11:1.

¹⁴Joseph H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Chicago: American Book Company, 1889), p. 438.

¹⁵Acts 13:49.

they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.¹⁶

In these references we see the substance of Paul's teaching and note some of the methods he used in establishing the churches.

Paul is assuring the Corinthian Christians that the "ways" of which Timothy will remind them are taught by him in every Christian community.

There is a general consistency in the Apostle's teaching, and Timothy will not impose any special demands upon the Corinthians, but will only bring them into line with what St. Paul teaches everywhere. This is one of several passages which remind the Corinthians that they are only members of a much greater whole. They are not the whole church On the other hand, no more is required of them than is required of other Christians.¹⁷

We should note that in all the passages which are being considered in this chapter Paul does not address individuals as such, majority or minority groups within the ecclesia, but the entire local body of Christians. The ecclesia is addressed as though it were one individual.

2. In the Corinthian ecclesia as in all others Christians are to live the Christian life in any set of circumstances.¹⁸ The importance of living the Christian

¹⁶Acts 14:21-23. Read also Acts 20:17-37.

¹⁷Robertson and Plummer, I Corinthians, *op. cit.*,

¹⁸I Corinthians 7:17, "Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all churches."

life is impressed upon each individual believer as a member of the community but the order for such living is given to the ecclesia. Here again the Corinthian church is one with the rest. The apostle is not giving this rule to the Corinthian ecclesia only; it is the regular principle for all. In such a statement the founder of the Corinthian ecclesia makes a destructive thrust against their divisive spirit and their practice of independence. According to this they do not stand isolated from the universal ecclesia nor do they have any special rules independent from the other churches ('ecclesii'). This universal rule is now applied to their local situation in the verses which follow.¹⁹ In living to the full the Christian life, regardless of what state or occupation they find themselves in, whether circumcised, uncircumcised, slave or free, they are doing what Christians everywhere are being taught to do.

3. The churches believe they have no liberty to alter current social regulations and customs.²⁰ On the basis of this universal practice Paul makes his appeal to the Corinthian Christians.

It appears as though some of the women of the

¹⁹verses 18 to 24.

²⁰I Corinthians 11:2-16, especially verse 16, "If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God."

Corinthian ecclesia were attending and participating in its meetings with their heads uncovered. No reasons are given as to why they were doing this. Their action, however, betrays their belief that the liberty they have in the Christian faith gives them the right to free themselves from at least some social regulations and customs. It also must have caused some disturbance because the apostle deals with it as a problem. In this problem his attitude is different from that which he took toward the introduction of Judaistic rites into the Christian faith such as was occurring in the Galatian churches.

We have evidence in his epistles of the fierce fight he waged against the judaizing elements in the Christian church who tried to impose Jewish rites and practices, such as circumcision and the keeping of Jewish feast days, upon pagans who had become converts to Christianity. Yet while setting aside these strictly Jewish traditions as by no means binding on his converts, there were obviously others, among them the Judaistic and rabbinical interpretation of the status of women in the religious community, by which he insists they must regulate their church order and belief.²¹

Paul's major appeal is to what all the other Christian communities are doing and upon this he rests his authority for his answer to the Corinthian problem. Again one is led to see that Paul is anxious no cleavage occur within the universal Christian community. There must be no breach of principle which would cause the essential

²¹John Short, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), vol. x, p. 125.

character of one ecclesia to be different from that of the universal ecclesia. Thus Paul would not encourage any church to break with social customs when such breaks would imperil the entire church. The Corinthian ecclesia must again be impressed of its oneness with all the other churches.

There is another passage which comes under the same principle and which should be considered at this point.

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.²²

In this passage two new factors are introduced. First, there is a reference to "the law" and this reference is not as easily understood as the term "practice" in 11:16, "If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God." The "law" may be the original command recorded in Genesis.²³ On the other hand the word might refer to the Jewish regulation concerning women speaking in the synagogue. If this should be the case then Paul was not advocating an absolute isolation of the ecclesia from

²²I Corinthians 14:33b-35.

²³Genesis 3:16b, ". . . yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Judaistic practices.

However, the pertinent fact to observe is that the women in the Corinthian Christian assemblies are to do what the women are doing in "all the churches of the saints." The second new factor is the phrase, "all the churches of the saints," a phrase which is used no other time in the New Testament. Its connotation rests in the word "saints." This term appears one time in First and Second Thessalonians respectively.²⁴ In these passages Paul designates all those who are associated with Christ "saints". In his salutation to the Corinthians they are told that they have been called to be saints. In the salutation to his second letter he calls all the Christians in Achaia "saints". The word becomes very prominent in these epistles and in all which follow. In fact, the Christians in some of the letters are addressed not as "ecclesia" but as "saints".²⁵

The essence of the term is becoming apparent. Basically it denotes separation, the idea of consecration of one to another, consequently possessed by that other. Therefore people who are "saints" are those who are separated or consecrated unto God and are his possession. In the new era men become saints through faith in the

²⁴I Thessalonians 3:13 and II Thessalonians 1:10.

²⁵Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2.
Cf. Romans 1:1-7.

Lord Jesus Christ. Since all are thus consecrated to God the term in the plural becomes collective. The genitive, "of the saints," does not mean that the churches find their source in or are owned by the saints. The saints collectively are the churches (ecclesiai) and in turn the church (ecclesia). "Of the saints" therefore denotes the unified character of the churches. Again the concept of the unity of the church becomes manifest.

the clause: as in all the churches cannot be taken with the preceding Taken with what follows the words are an appropriate reminder that this commandment is not given to the Corinthians alone but to all the churches (cf. 7:17). The sense is then: let that which happens everywhere, also happen with you.²⁶

4. The Corinthian church, like all other churches, must be characterized by sympathy and liberality.²⁷ In the passages noted below the Corinthian Christians are admonished to follow the example of the churches in Galatia and in Macedonia. As Paul had directed the primarily Gentile churches in Galatia to give to the famine stricken and destitute Jewish Christians at Jerusalem so also the Corinthians are to do. In the second letter Paul encourages them to be as liberal in their giving as

²⁶F. W. Grosheide, Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 341.

²⁷I Corinthians 16:1, "Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do."
See II Corinthians 8:1-7, 23, 24.

the poverty stricken Macedonians had been. In these two strokes Paul's concept of the local church's oneness with the other churches crops out again. Sympathy and liberality are essential characteristics of the ecclesia and are to be manifest in every local ecclesia.

There is an interesting suggestion on unity here. The Gentile churches would first of all become united in their attitude toward the Jewish church and also the breach between the Jewish and Gentile branches would possibly be narrowed and more unity become apparent among them. That there were these two distinct branches of the ecclesia these verses from Romans testify:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks. . . . All the churches of Christ greet you.²⁸

Hort considers "the churches of Christ" in the latter part of the quotation above the churches of Judea. It will be recalled that the title Christ or Messiah appeared in connection with the references to the churches of Judea in the Thessalonian and Galatian letters.²⁹

Hort says,

It seems . . . that by 'the Ecclesiae of the Christ' the Messiah, St. Paul means the Ecclesiae of those 'of whom as concerning the flesh the Messiah

²⁸Romans 16:3, 4, 16b.

²⁹I Thessalonians 2:14; Galatians 1:22.

came' (Rom. 9:5), and to whom His Messiahship could not but mean more than it did to Jews of the Dispersion, much less to men of Gentile birth: in a word that he means the Ecclesiae of Judaea. . . . It might easily be that all these had been represented at some recent gathering at Jerusalem, and had there united in a message which some Jerusalem colleague or friend had since conveyed to him.³⁰

Erdman goes so far as to say that Paul's chief motive was his "desire to knit together the two elements of the church, the Gentile and Jewish, by such an act of charity as would express to the latter both the sympathy of the Gentile Christians and the genuineness of their faith."³¹ Whether or not Erdman is correct Filson indicates the possible unity that could come from the Corinthian participation in the collection:

To resume and complete it will cement their new loyalty to Paul, deepen their Christian life, widen their horizons in the church, and help to bind Jewish and Gentile Christians together in a bond of brotherhood.³²

In reference to the giving of the Macedonian Christians, Strachan writes,

The concordat at Jerusalem did not remove from many minds the unwillingness to share ancestral privileges with Gentiles, thus freely admitted to a Church which was regarded as the continuance of the Church of Israel. The fact that this voluntary assistance came to the Jerusalem Church from Gentile sources must have been a powerful weapon to break down Jewish ancestral prejudice among Jerusalem Christians. No

³⁰Hort, op. cit., p. 111.

³¹Charles R. Erdman, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1928), p. 152.

³²Floyd V. Filson, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), vol X, p. 363.

finer example than this contribution could be found of the power and initiative of the Christian faith in thus transcending racial barriers. Quite naturally, Paul asks and expects converts, many of them of a different race and nationality, to come to the aid of the Jerusalem Church.

Paul begins by bringing forward their example as pioneers in the great work of breaking down racial barriers.³³

If in Romans 16:16 "the churches of Christ" are the Jewish churches of Judea then a closer affiliation is coming into existence. Such greetings would both tend to bring about a closer union and express a more congenial feeling of one branch of the church for the other. The writer of Romans decidedly encourages such unity when he adds his great appeal in the verses which follow this one.

Furthermore, according to II Corinthians 8:23, 24, they, when contributing to the collection being made up by the various churches, would give evidence of their oneness of spirit with that of these churches.

So, Paul concludes, by receiving these men whom I am sending, and by completing the collection under their leadership, give outward demonstration or proof of your love for us and of our boasting about you to these men. Paul spurs the readers to prompt and generous giving (a) by appealing to their love for him, (b) by recalling the confidence he has expressed to the messengers when asking them to go to Corinth, and (c) by reminding the Corinthians that the other churches are present in these men and will hear from them what the Corinthians have done about

³³Robert H. Strachan, The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.), pp. 132f.

the collection.³⁴

On Paul's charge to the church at Rome, "contribute to the needs of the saints"³⁵ Thornton makes this comment,

This means 'sharing one's goods with fellow-Christians in need,' a bodily work of mercy, and a typical corollary of that koinonia which involves living sacrifices embodied in the outward life. But this outward sharing of goods is also symbolic of the whole meaning of the common life³⁶

To this discussion of the oneness of the churches in relation to each other may be added Romans 16:1, 2³⁷ and First Corinthians 16:19.³⁸ The verses from Romans deal with the spirit of hospitality which, according to Paul, should be a characteristic of all the churches. To the Christians at Rome Paul specifically says, "practice hospitality".³⁹ To practice it meant to strengthen the sense of oneness among the churches. Hospitality, says Cragg,

³⁴Filson, op. cit., p. 373.

³⁵Romans 12:13.

³⁶L. S. Thornton, The Common Life in the Body of Christ, (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1942), p. 21.

³⁷"Let me introduce our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae; receive her in the Lord as saints should receive one another, and give her any help she may require. She has been a help herself to many people, including myself." Moffatt's translation.

³⁸"The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Prisca, with the church that meets in their house, salute you warmly in the Lord." Moffatt's translation.

³⁹Romans 12:13.

increases fellowship; it promotes wider understanding; it cements the ties which bind one group to another. The consciousness of belonging to one church scattered throughout the empire but united in a common faith must have been greatly strengthened by every personal tie with members from other congregations. If "the saints" in one center felt anxious to "salute" their brethren in another . . . we can imagine how much more firmly the ties were cemented by actual intercourse.⁴⁰

The verse from the Corinthian letter⁴¹ is unique in that it is the first time in Paul's extant correspondence that salutations from other Christian communities appear. Moffatt says that such salutations are partly to make the Corinthians realize they belong to a larger community.⁴²

The dominant factor up to this point is Paul's desire for unity among all the ecclesiai. There are evidences, however, that his purpose is not to create such unity by insisting upon similar practices, conduct, and character in all the churches but that these similarities are to be present in each ecclesia because the ecclesiai together are already one. We have been bordering upon the concept of the unity of a universal ecclesia which expresses itself in a pattern of conduct in each local one.

There are a few instances in which Paul discloses

⁴⁰Gerald R. Cragg, The Epistle to the Romans, Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954), vol. IX, pp. 654f.

⁴¹I Corinthians 16:19.

⁴²Moffatt, op. cit., p. 279.

his concept of the oneness of the ecclesia. These shall now receive our attention. In the First Corinthian salutation he appends these words, "both their Lord and ours." To the Corinthian Christians Jesus is presented as the Lord over them and over all Christians everywhere. The only deduction possible from this is that Jesus is the center of unification for all Christians. Thus, because of their common relationship with him, they are brought into relationship with each other and together they constitute one body.

In First Corinthians 14:23 Paul uses the term, "the whole church" (ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη he ecclesia hole). This term seems to include more than just the Christians in Corinth. The entire Corinthian church is already involved in speaking in tongues. Then, too, Paul, by using this inclusive term strengthens his argument against coveting the gift of speaking in tongues as the greatest of all gifts. He declares how futile and ineffective this gift is, for even if the whole body from every place should assemble at one place and all this host speak in tongues, the impression upon the outsider would still be very negative.

In Romans 16:23 Gaius is spoken of as being the host of "the whole church", (ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας holes tes ecclesias). It is hardly possible that all the Christians in Corinth could assemble at one time in his house. It means that "his house was open to any travel-

ing Christian from abroad.⁴³ Moreover, in the references to the ecclesia meeting in a house neither is the occupant of the house called a host nor does the adjective "whole" appear.⁴⁴

"The whole church" is significant in that it suggests the unity of the entire Christian body. Christians from everywhere represent this body and constitute it. Therefore Paul can speak, not only of individual churches and Christians, but of these as the whole church.

Again, in this period after Paul, and largely through his own work as a missionary and thinker, the church established itself as a great institution. It consisted as yet of many separate communities, each of them jealous of its independence, but they had constant intercourse with one another, and the project of a federation was already in the air. They never doubted that ideally they formed a single brotherhood, standing over against the world as the society of Christ's people. . . .⁴⁵

In First Corinthians 15:9 Paul informs the Corinthians that he considers himself the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the ecclesia of God. Here he could very readily have had in mind the unity of the ecclesia. He did not persecute a Christian ecclesia in one community, nor ecclesiae in many communities, but the ecclesia of God wherever it was found.

⁴³R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 925.

⁴⁴Cf. Romans 16:5, I Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 2.

⁴⁵Ernest F. Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 16.

In Romans 16:5 we have one more expression that conveys this same concept. "Greet also the church in their house." Although it is a local assembly, the singular form indicates that its character is similar to that of the universal one. It is interesting to note that the word 'ecclesia' was first used in the singular before it was used in the plural. The ONE church is before the many churches. A study of 'ecclesia' in the book of Acts shows that the plural form does not appear until 15:41. Up to that point it is used in every case in the singular. This means that "the one church is not the collection of separate churches, but the separate churches are the expression of the one church in different localities."⁴⁶ Therefore a universal term denoting universal unity became applicable to the local body, and in this way Paul uses it. What Hort suggests about the Ephesian church in his comments on Acts 20:28 may be applied here.

He [Paul] begins with the actual circumstances of the moment, the local Ephesian community, which was the flock committed to the Ephesian Elders, and then goes on to say that that little flock had a right to believe itself to be the Ecclesia of God which He had purchased to be His own possession at so unspeakable a price. Of course in strictness the words belong only to the one universal Christian Ecclesia; but here they are transferred to the individual Ecclesia of Ephesus. . . . In the Epistles we shall find similar investment of parts of the universal Ecclesia with the high attributes of the whole. This transference is no mere figure of speech. Each partial society is set forth as having a unity of its own, and being itself a body made up of many members has

⁴⁶Robinson, op. cit., p. 61.

therefore a corporate life of its own: and yet these attributes could not be ascribed to it as an absolutely independent and as it were insular society: they belong to it only as a representative member of the great whole.⁴⁷

The character of unity of the universal ecclesia becomes the essential character of the local one; and the character of unity of the local one expresses the character of unity of the universal ecclesia.

Paul was very emphatic in his insistence that the local ecclesia maintain unity within itself. Portions of chapters eleven and twelve of First Corinthians are devoted to this problem.⁴⁸

The divisions against which Paul raises his voice in chapter eleven are different from those in the earlier part of the Corinthian letter.⁴⁹ The latter were caused by loyalties to different religious leaders. The former were due to social contrasts in the ecclesia. Paul could not commend the ecclesia in Corinth because that which was taking place within it was destroying its essential character of unity. It was not only the selfishness of the wealthy that concerned Paul but what that selfishness was doing to the unity of the ecclesia of God. The church was to be characterized by unity in its social relation-

⁴⁷Hort, *op. cit.*, pp. 102f.

⁴⁸I Corinthians 11:17-22; 12:12-31.

⁴⁹I Corinthians 1:12, 13.

ships but this was not the case at Corinth.

ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ (en ecclesia) is the construction Paul uses here. This usage is "at once classical and a return to the original force of 'qahal'"⁵⁰ and thus indicates the gathering or assembly of the Christians. "'As a church' would distinguish this meal from a private dinner party. At the latter a man might invite the guests he desired; but this is a table where the Lord has issued the invitations."⁵¹ This fact made the social distinctions all the more serious and a dangerous threat to any hope for unity. On this Moffatt has written,

. . . . they were carrying party-spirit into the very festival where all should be at one. . . . Worship ought to raise people above any consciousness of social differences; at its best, it lifts them into such an intense experience of all that they have in common, that everything else is forgotten.⁵²

What these selfish people were doing disclosed their failure to respect and revere that assembly which had its origin in and life from God. They denied the purpose for which they met, violated the unity of the ecclesia, and ministered to class feeling. All this was "but a profane outrage upon the holy communion which symbolized unity and fellowship of the Lord."⁵³

⁵⁰Hort, op. cit., p. 118.

⁵¹Craig, op. cit., p. 133.

⁵²Moffatt, op. cit., p. 158.

⁵³Ibid., p. 162.

The addition "of God" in verse 22 is significant. They are undoubtedly added to make possible a proper perspective for the Corinthians so that they might see how far they had penetrated into this "profane outrage". These words, stressing the unity of the ecclesia, become a warning against divisions. What God has established as one they must not divide.

The apostle's concept of unity comes to its climax in chapter 12.⁵⁴ The term 'ecclesia' does not appear in this passage until verse 28, but its connection with what precedes makes it evident that Paul had the ecclesia in mind when he was writing about the unity of the body: the unity of the human body illustrates the unity of the ecclesia.

In this passage Paul assumes the unity of the ecclesia and deals with the problem of the diversity of its members and of the gifts. Constituting this one body are Jews and Greeks, slaves and free men, small and great. In it are found a variety of gifts distributed among apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, and speakers in tongues. Yet the body is one. An excellent discussion of this passage and Paul's problem is offered in a recent publication by John A. T. Robinson which I shall quote at length here.

Is it really conceivable that Jesus Christ can

⁵⁴verses 12 to 31.

be many persons? That was the problem with which Paul wrestled, and, later, the conviction which we see him trying to impress upon his readers. For us, starting as we do with our conception of the Body of Christ as a society, the most pressing problem is how the many can be one. The multiplicity is obvious, the unity problematic. For Paul, the difficulty lies the other way around. The singularity of Christ's resurrection body is taken for granted, just as it was by those who saw it on Easter morning. It is the fact that it can consist of a number of persons that really calls for explanation. . . . The unity of Christ, as of the human body, is his starting point. He then proceeds to show that the body cannot in fact consist only of 'one member', but must be 'many' (v. 14). The point of the verses that follow (15-21) is not that the different members must be united among themselves . . . but precisely that there must be more than one member if there is to be a body at all.

Paul's argument is that the resurrection body of Christ can be articulated in diversity without ceasing to be a unity. All the members of a human body form one body despite their number. So it is with the person of Christ. . . . There must indeed be multiplicity if there is to be a body. . . . But the diversity is one that derives from the pre-existing nature of the unity as organic: it is not a diversity which has to discover or be made into a unity.⁵⁵

Paul proceeds to show that in this single organism "the many parts contribute to the unity of the whole by fulfilling a variety of functions."⁵⁶ Scott says that the church is like the human body, which consists of many members, each one with its special function, while all are dependent on one another and operate in harmony.⁵⁷

⁵⁵John A. T. Robinson, The Body, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), pp. 58ff.

⁵⁶Thornton, op. cit., p. 288.

⁵⁷Ernest F. Scott, The Nature of the Early Church, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 278.

Therefore each member in the Corinthian ecclesia was essential because there could be no body without these different members. "Just as God in the original constitution of the body placed differently endowed members in it, so in the original constitution of the Church He placed differently endowed members in it. . . .⁵⁸

For a Corinthian Christian to consider himself and his gift superior over any other, or contrarily to envy the gift or position of another, or for all to desire the exact gift is not only to divide the ecclesia but to start the process of its disintegration and final destruction as a unit. Paul would have this ecclesia in

Corinth

remember that there is in the Christian body, just as there is in the frame of the living man, a divinely ordained diversity of members, combined with a oneness in mutual help and in devotion to the whole: so that no member can be despised as useless, either by himself or by other members; for each has his proper function, and all are alike necessary. This unity involves mutual dependence, and therefore it excludes discontent and jealousy on the one hand, arrogance and contempt on the other.⁵⁹

So closely are the different members united as one body that to cause one member to suffer is to cause the whole body to suffer, or to honor one member is to make the whole body glad.⁶⁰ Concerning this Craig writes, Schism (KJV) is not a very happy rendering in vs. 25;

⁵⁸Robertson and Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁶⁰I Corinthians 12:26.

for the apostle was not thinking of the divisions discussed earlier in the letter, but of the jealousies resulting from the overevaluation of certain gifts. Instead of jealousy and mistrust, there should be mutual respect and helpfulness within the church. This leads to the final conclusion from the analogy. An injury to one organ of the body affects the entire organism. If the church really is a body, the body of Christ, the same will be true among its members. The sorrows of one member will be the sorrows of all; the joys of one will be the joys of all.⁶¹

That Paul declares the concept of unity is apparent at the beginning of this passage, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and all were made to drink of one Spirit."⁶² In this verse Paul declares that the Spirit is the source of unity. Short in the Interpreter's Bible makes the following comment on the Spirit's part in the unity of the ec-
clesia,

. . . every organ of the body has its own function, and no organ is meant or devised to undertake the functions of another. For the well-being of the entire church there were bound to be diversities of gifts and therefore of functions. . . . The key-notes must always be unity and fellowship, and a deep, abiding realization of the significant and overriding truth that "all these are inspired by the one and same spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" (12:11).⁶³

Scott also declares that

the body is one because it is pervaded in all its parts by one life-giving principle; what is it that animates the church and holds it together? It can

⁶¹Craig, op. cit., p. 162.

⁶²I Corinthians 12:13.

⁶³Short, op. cit., pp. 163f.

be nothing else than Christ himself, who dwells in the church and uses it in his service. . . . The church, in a sense, is Christ himself, still visibly present in the world.⁶⁴

This last statement rests upon Paul's clinching point in his argument for unity, "Now you are body of Christ,"⁶⁵ (Greek reading). Robertson and Plummer in their exposition of this verse have written,

'Body of Christ' is the quality of the whole which each of them individually helps to constitute. . . . It does not mean, 'Ye are the Body of Christ,' although that translation is admissible, and indicates the truth that each Christian community is the Universal Church in miniature; nor, 'Ye are Christ's Body,' which makes 'Christ's' emphatic, whereas the emphasis is on σωμα (soma) as the antithesis of μέλη (mele). Least of all does it mean, 'Ye are a Body of Christ,' as if St. Paul were insisting that the Corinthians were only a Church and not the Church, a meaning which is quite remote from the passage. . . . He means here that the nature of the whole of which the Corinthians are parts is that it is Body of Christ, not any other kind of whole.⁶⁶

The ecclesia in Corinth therefore is the local body in which the universal ecclesia manifests itself. As such it is one, for obviously, the body of Christ is not many but one.

The Corinthian church as such is a corpus Christi, an organism made by Christ and maintained by Him, having the complete character of a body as that was described.⁶⁷

Up to this point Paul has not made the specific

⁶⁴Scott, The Nature of the Early Church, op. cit., p. 155

⁶⁵I Corinthians 12:27a.

⁶⁶Robertson and Plummer, op. cit., pp. 277f.

⁶⁷Grosheide, op. cit., p. 297.

statement, as he does in the prison epistles, that the ecclesia is the body of Christ. It is only implied, but the implication is strong. Paul also does one thing in the First Corinthian letter which he does no where else, namely, he identifies the ecclesia with Christ.⁶⁸

In commenting on this passage Thornton says,

In the illustration the Church is not actually mentioned at all. The word ecclesia does not appear until verse 28, when the illustration is succeeded by a direct application. So the Body is described in two ways. As a 'whole' it is the Christ; as an aggregate of 'parts' it is the members. But the Body is not thought of as a mere collection of individuals. For as soon as metaphor is dropped the Church appears in place of the aggregation of members. . . . The Church is interpreted in terms of the Christ, the One Man who includes us all in himself. The fundamental thought of this passage is that there is one Christian organism; and that one organism is the Messiah. However, whereas the illustration is about 'the Messiah' (v. 12), the application is about 'ecclesia' (v. 28). The two terms are important. For St. Paul they represent the two aspects of the New Israel. The Messiah and his community are inseparable. But the former is 'the whole' in which the latter is included. We are the Church because we are in the Christ. He gives unity to his members. The members are the Church because in him they are one; but not otherwise.⁶⁹

Thus Paul rises to new heights in the expression of his concept of ecclesia. It is one body identical with the Christ.

⁶⁸I Corinthians 12:12. The title "Christ" is better understood when it is taken to mean "church" in this instance.

⁶⁹Thornton, op. cit., pp. 255f.

CHAPTER V

"ECCLESIA" IN THE PRISON EPISTLES

For the first time in Paul's writings the ecclesia is called the body of Christ. It is so called in two of these prison epistles, namely, Colossians and Ephesians.¹ "Most commonly, and with justice, the idea of the Body of Christ is regarded as Paul's characteristic and most profound contribution."²

In Philippians,³ Philemon,⁴ and in one passage in Colossians⁵ the term is employed as in the earlier epistles. It is either the universal church which Paul says he had at one time persecuted, or it is the church in a community, or the church in a house.

'Ecclesia' appears sixteen times, in each instance in the singular form and without any descriptive or definitive term in the genitive such as "of God," "of Christ," "of the saints," or "of the Gentiles."

¹Colossians 1:18, 24. Ephesians 1:22, 23;
5:23.

²Johnston, op. cit., p. 75.

³3:6; 4:15.

⁴verse 2.

⁵4:15, 16.

Neither is it modified by such phrases as "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," or simply, "in Christ." Occasionally the apostle uses the term in the same way in his other epistles but in these he does so consistently. This apparently means that when Paul wrote these prison epistles the identity of the new ecclesia was established throughout the world of that day. The earlier definitive forms could be dropped because the Christian ecclesia would no longer be in danger of being confused with any other ecclesia.

In the Corinthian and Roman epistles we observed that Paul is continually couching 'ecclesia' in terms of unity. The universal ecclesia is one. The local ecclesia is a manifestation of the universal one, therefore each is in unity with the universal. In addition, each local ecclesia itself is to be characterized by this same unity. In appealing to the Corinthians to establish unity in their ecclesia he informs them that they are body of Christ. It is at this point he advances the concept that the ecclesia is identical with the Christ.

In the passages under consideration in this chapter the ecclesia receives a relative identity.⁶ It is the body of Christ and Christ is its head. In this new trend of thought Paul is no longer referring to the local ecclesia but to the universal one: the ecclesia in

⁶Colossians 1:18, 24. Ephesians 1:22, 23; 5:23.

all the world is the body of Christ.

In First Corinthians 12 the idea of the ecclesia as body is

little more than metaphorical. It was shewn that while the Church is made up of a great number of people, with all their diverse interests, it is yet an organism; it resembles a body, in which all the parts are animated by one life-principle and work harmoniously together.

In the later epistles this idea of the Body of Christ ceases to be figurative, and is made to correspond to a mystical reality. The Church is regarded as the larger incarnation of Christ. As once he appeared in a body of flesh so he now dwells in the Church, and uses it for his self-manifestation, continuing through it the work for which he came.⁷

The ecclesia is different from all other creation; it is a new creation, spiritual, Christ's spiritual, or as some call it "mystical", body. Lenski says that the ecclesia has the special, unique relation to Christ of being alone his body.⁸

There is a discussion on the church as the body of Christ by Thornton which I wish to introduce here.

This biological metaphor differentiates the Church from Christ. . . . The ecclesia is now given a relative identity of its own, which is to be more fully developed in Ephesians. . . . There is, moreover, a further distinction in the new use of terms. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is now distinguished, not only from him as the Head, but also from the mortal body of flesh and blood which was nailed to the

⁷E. F. Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.), p. 24.

⁸R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians, (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1937), p. 404.

Cross

Moreover there is an unmistakable contrast between the mortal or fleshly body of Christ and another body which is also his but which is identified with the Church. It is customary to refer to the Church as 'the mystical body' of Christ with this distinction in view. It is 'mystical' in contrast to his natural body of flesh and blood.⁹

The next factor to consider is the function or mission of the ecclesia as the body of Christ. There is no reference to its function in Colossians but there is in Ephesians. A direct statement of mission is made in 3:10 and there seems to be an implication of mission in 1:22, 23. In these latter verses the church is designated as "the fulness of him who fills all in all."

There are two major interpretations of these important words. First, that the ecclesia as the body of Christ is filled with all the fulness of Christ. E. F. Scott feels that this interpretation is somewhat in keeping with Paul's general thought. "The Church is . . . filled by him--pervaded in all its parts with his life, and so wrought into an organic whole."¹⁰

Second, that the church is the complement of the Lord Jesus. The meaning of the verse would then be, ". . . his body, that which makes complete him who fills all in all." So Chrysostom, Oecumenius, Thomas Aquinas and a number of moderns some of whom are here

⁹Thornton, op. cit., p. 300.

¹⁰E. F. Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, op. cit., p. 159.

quoted. Abbott quotes Chrysostom's remarks on πλῆρωμα (pleroma),

"He says πλῆρωμα," [pleroma] observes Chrysostom, "just as the head is completed by the body, for the body is composed of all the parts and has need of each one By all then is his body completed. Then the head is completed, then the body becomes perfect when we are all joined and united together."¹¹

The most recent declaration of this view is made by Beare in the Interpreter's Bible,

'Fulness'--The best sense of the word in this context seems to be 'complement:' that which makes complete. Christ and the church together form an organic unity: the body is the complement of the head. . . . The Messiah, regardless of his nature, cannot function as Messiah in the void; he must have as his counterpart the people which he is to deliver and rule. . . . The church is the sphere in which he exercises his messianic functions; it is the organ by which he manifests his presence and power, and brings to fulfillment the divine purpose 'to unite all things in him.'¹²

Thornton combines these two viewpoints,

It must therefore be recognised that in this epistle there are two senses in which the Church is the fulness of Christ. In the primary sense the Church is the fulness because the mystical body is like a vessel into which the fulness of Christ is poured. He fills it with himself. In the secondary sense, however, the Church may be called the fulness of Christ because that fulness cannot be manifested amongst men without or apart from the human vessel which contains it. As Christ is the indispensable mediator of God's fulness, so the Church is the indispensable container of Christ's fulness. On the first view the Church is empty apart from Christ; on

¹¹T. K. Abbott, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 37.

¹²Francis W. Beare, The Epistle to the Ephesians, The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 637.

the second view Christ is inaccessible without the Church. The Church apart from Christ would be like an empty wine-cup. Christ without the Church would be like wine which, for lack of a wine-cup, no one could drink. To conceive of the Church apart from Christ is like thinking of an empty jewel-case. So Christ without the Church would be like precious treasure hidden, buried, or inaccessible.¹³

I think the second interpretation of these verses is in close accord with the context and with the writer's concept as expressed in Ephesians. I shall return later to this passage. In the meantime we shall investigate Ephesians 3:10, "that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places." The mission of the ecclesia is specifically stated in this verse. It is through the ecclesia that "the innumerable aspects"¹⁴ of God's wisdom are made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This, Paul continues, is one phase of the eternal purpose which God has realized in Christ Jesus. The other phase is that of bringing Gentiles into the same body with Jews.¹⁵ What, then, is this eternal purpose, According to this passage and 1:10 it is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth. Therefore,

The mission of the church, like the work of its ex-

¹³Thornton, op. cit., p. 310.

¹⁴Weymouth Translation.

¹⁵See Ephesians 3:1-9.

alted head, is not confined to earth; its field is the whole cosmos. It has already been emphasized by the writer that the reunion of a divided humanity in the church is in itself the token and the initiation of the ultimate union of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. We have now the further thought that the revelation of God's ultimate purpose in creation is made 'through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.'¹⁶

Paul has spoken of his own commission to proclaim the gospel to the world and so to bring into existence that Church designed by God in which Jews and Gentiles would alike share in Christ's salvation. But this work of his had been subordinate to an infinitely greater work. From the Church which he was helping to build up a movement was to proceed which would finally affect the whole universe. Thus he thinks of a revelation made through the Church 'to the angelic Rulers' or powers. This may simply be another way of saying that even the highest angels had hitherto been ignorant of God's purpose, and were now learning it for the first time as they watched the progress of the Church. But there is probably a more definite idea, which is to be understood in the light of I Cor. 2:6-8. Paul there tells of a hidden wisdom which he reserved for his maturer converts. It seems to have consisted in some kind of apocalyptic scheme which served as a background for his explanation of the gospel message. According to this speculative construction, so far as we can guess its nature, the hostile powers had sought to frustrate the work of God, and believed they had succeeded when they conspired against Christ and brought about his Crucifixion. But unwittingly they had been mere instruments in God's hands. The death of Christ had been the very means He had devised for the accomplishment of His plan.

So it is here declared that the hostile powers, after their brief apparent triumph, had now become aware of a 'divine wisdom' they had never dreamed of. They saw the Church arising as the result of Christ's death, and giving effect to what they could now perceive to have been the hidden purpose of God. Paul has already defined that purpose: to reunite all things in Christ. All the warring elements in the universe were to find their centre in Christ, and thus to be brought again into harmony. It was the

¹⁶Beare, The Interpreter's Bible, op. cit., pp. 189f.

powers 'in the heavenly sphere' that had maintained strife and division, and now they realized that they were overcome. They knew that God had willed to restore a universal peace by Christ, and that through the Church His plan was already on the way to fulfillment. This, then, was 'the wisdom' of God which was being 'disclosed' to them.¹⁷

When we return to 1:22, 23 we note that God has given Christ as head or sovereign over all things. Surely "all things" is as inclusive here as in 1:10, both including the present sphere and those spheres beyond the present. If we accept the interpretation of "fulness" in 1:23 as meaning "complement" then the ecclesia becomes the instrument through which Christ will unite all things in himself. This becomes obvious at once when we remember that the ecclesia is both the Messiah and the body of the Messiah. Therefore it seems that the dative form of 'ecclesia' in verse 22 could be considered as instrumental rather than the indirect object of benefit. Thus these verses might read, "and has put all things under his feet and has made him head over all things by the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all."

There are several quotations I wish to make in connection with this approach.

Paul does not think of Christ as supreme over all for the benefit of the Church, but rather conversely. He is the head of the Church in order that finally he may be head of all existence. The Church is to be his instrument whereby he is to exercise a universal

¹⁷Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians,
op. cit., pp. 189f.

power.

Christ fills the whole universe, but in a more special sense the Church is his 'fulness'--the sphere in which he reigns and directly exercises his power.¹⁸

For this reason, namely, that our Lord possesses the fulness of deity, he also became the mediator through whom the whole universe is reconciled to God. This was effected through his death upon the Cross. Moreover not only was reconciliation effected between God and creation, but also peace was made between the warring elements of creation itself. Such peace-making was the appropriate work of him in whom all things cohere. Without him the universe would fall to pieces. There would no longer be anything common between the parts. So his redeeming work restores the common life of all creation.

The redeemer's work has cosmic significance because in him the fulness of deity becomes available for the restoration of creation to its true relations with the Creator. We can see here a great doctrine of the Common Life unfolding itself. The life which the Beloved Son shares with the Father is the sphere in which creation exists. . . . All that is common to us flows from all that is common to the Persons of the Godhead. In so far as God's image is not effaced in us we share a common life which is drawn from God. But the Fall of man has introduced estrangement and enmity. For St. Paul and his contemporaries this human discord was certainly bound up with a wider cosmic discord whose source lay in a rebellion of angels. It was useless therefore to turn to angelic mediators; for they were involved in the catastrophe. The restoration of the common life of the universe could take place only through the one who possessed all the resources of Godhead. . . . The centre of this great work of reconciliation lies in the Body of Christ.¹⁹

So then, this uniting of all things in Christ has already begun in the ecclesia.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁹Thornton, op. cit., pp. 294f.

²⁰See Ephesians 2:11-22.

Paul falls back on the idea of ver. 10, that the whole creation is to be reunited in Christ. . . . This work of reconciliation has begun in the Church, which is like the microcosm of what all existence will finally be. Not only so, but the Church is destined to be the instrument for accomplishing this greater end. It is the sphere in which the power of Christ is immediately exercised and from which it will radiate out to the very confines of the universe.²¹

We are now approaching the basis upon which this universal unification rests and from which it proceeds to its final attainment. This basis constitutes not only the unity of the ecclesia but its oneness with Christ its head. Three types of association of the ecclesia with Christ are made in the Colossian and Ephesian letters, namely, head and body, husband and wife, and the equality of the ecclesia with Christ, all of which portray the oneness that exists between the ecclesia and the Christ.

The head and the body, although they are separate and specific identities, constitute one person. Each are mutually dependent upon the other. The head cannot exist apart from the body, neither can the latter without the former. Thus in the Messianic function, even though Christ be the head and the ecclesia be his body by way of specific identities, the head and the body are one.

He is the head of the church, not merely in the sense that the head is the most important member of the

²¹Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, op. cit., p. 160.

body and controls all the others. The thought rather is that all the forces of the body are gathered up in the head. It is that seat of that life and will which are distributed through the different members and unite them into an organic whole.²²

Abbott says that there is an organic connection, that the life of the church springs from its union with Christ as its head.²³ While the head is the source of the body's life yet the head could not execute his Messianic functions without a body comparable to the ecclesia.

The Church has such significance as being no merely human organisation, but the household of God and the redeemed family of mankind. Apart from the Church God would be the heavenly Father without an earthly family. His Beloved Son would still be the firstborn of the Father, but not 'amongst many brethren'. In God's plan for creation man alone is said to have been made in the divine image. So only through this created image can God's likeness be printed upon his creation. Throughout the Bible man is nothing apart from God; yet man is apparently indispensable to the carrying out of God's plan. From the call of Abraham onwards the people of God is the instrument through which the divine purpose is fulfilled. So there is no Messiah without Israel, no incarnation of the Word without the co-operation of a Virgin Mother, no Christ without the Church, no fulness of Christ apart from his mystical body. There can be no knowledge of God amongst men except through a holy community in which they can see God's love in some measure reflected, and no dwelling of God amongst men unless there be a human temple in which he can take up his abode.

God's plan requires a human torch with which to display the light of his glory in creation, a human shrine in which his sacrifice of love may be offered, human material with which to kindle the sacrificial flame. The wisdom of God in Christ is made known to

²²Ibid., p. 24.

²³Abbott, op. cit., p. 34.

all created spirits; but the Church is the indispensable bearer of the message (Eph. 3:10). The truth, 'even as truth is in Jesus' (4:21), is communicated to mankind only through redeemed men, as it was originally communicated to redeemed men through the Man who is our redeemer.²⁴

The closeness of this relationship is still more clearly portrayed in the figure of the husband and his wife. That which is pertinent to our present study is Ephesians 5:28-32. Husband and wife in their union are one flesh. In this passage Paul shows that "Christ and the Ecclesia are as closely joined as are husband and wife;"²⁵ they are one. Robinson says that the marriage relationship "enables Paul to put the relationship between Christ and the church in its most intimate form."²⁶

This intimate relationship also expresses the concept of unity or oneness and therefore can hardly be separated from the eternal purpose of God. For example, all men, regardless of race, nationality, position, or occupation, who are in the ecclesia are incorporated in a body in which the uniting of all things with Christ has begun and which is as much one with Christ as are husband and wife. This idea is expressed by both Scott and Len-ski. Scott writes,

²⁴Thornton, op. cit., pp. 31of.

²⁵Johnston, op. cit., p. 93.

²⁶Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church, op. cit., p. 72.

Few things in Paul's writings have caused more perplexity than his interpretation of the meaning of marriage. At first sight his idea that it was meant to point forward to the union of Christ and the Church appears farfetched and absurd--an extreme example of the arbitrary mode of thought which he had learned in the Rabbinical schools. Yet it is possible to discern a great truth at the heart of his conception. The union of man and woman, however we look at it, is indeed a great mystery. It is the highest expression of the principle which we find everywhere at work in nature, and if we could understand fully what it means, we should possess the master-key to God's purpose in creation. Lucretius begins his great poem on 'The Nature of the World' with a splendid invocation to the power that draws male and female into union. Paul was equally conscious of the significance of this mystery, and tries to relate it to the other great mystery of the uniting of all things in Christ.²⁷

Adam was not revealing a mystery when he said, "the two shall be one flesh." What is so mysterious about the natural sex relation of husband and wife? But when the order of nature is compared with the order of grace as regards Christ and the Una Sancta, a mystery great and wonderful stands revealed. Except for proper enlightenment such as Paul furnishes this correspondence of the marriage relation (the husband being the head, the wife the body) with the saving relation (Christ the Head, the church the Body) would not be noticed. Even now Christians alone see it when they are enlightened by revelation. The mystery is so wonderful in that what lies on the earthly plane of sex should correspond with what lies on the exalted plane of soteriology.²⁸

Ephesians 3:21 is an interesting verse which also expresses the oneness of the ecclesia with Christ, "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to

²⁷Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, op. cit., pp. 243f.

²⁸Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, op. cit., p. 643.

all generations, for ever and ever." It is part of a doxology ascribing glory to God. This glory is, according to Paul, equally manifest in the ecclesia and in Christ. Since Paul conceives the ecclesia and Christ as one he could hardly separate them in this doxology. Therefore as the glory of God is exhibited in the ecclesia so also it is exhibited in Christ. One might be justified in translating $\kappa\alpha\iota$ (kai) as "even" though the latter phrase, "in Christ Jesus" may have a broader connotation than the former one, "in the ecclesia". The verse would then read, "to him be glory in the church even in Christ Jesus" Scott makes the following comment on this verse,

Certainly there is no parallel elsewhere to the strange phrase by which the Church seems here to be equated with Christ His theme has been the work of reconciliation which God has purposed in Christ. The work has begun in the Church, but is to extend from this immediate sphere until it covers the universe So these words of doxology may be paraphrased 'to him be glory not only in the church but in that infinite realm of being of which Christ is the centre.'²⁹

Beare in his exegesis of this verse has written the following,

The double phrase is to be understood only in the light of the thought that Christ and his church are complementary parts of one organism, as head and body; together they form the sphere in which the glory of God is manifested, and the medium through which the praises of the creation are rendered to the Creator. There seems to be, however, a certain

²⁹Scott, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, op. cit., p. 200.

widening of the thought as it moves from 'in the church' to 'in Christ Jesus'--a suggestion, as it were, that the glorifying of God 'in Christ Jesus' is wider than the glory which is given him 'in the church'. It is of the nature of Christ that he should glorify the Father, and that the Father should glorify him, with a glory which is not limited to this creation.³⁰

From all these important passages it can be plainly seen that Paul perceives the oneness of the ecclesia with the Christ, this oneness being the beginning of the ultimate and complete harmonious relationship of all creation within itself and with its redeemer.

³⁰Beare, op. cit., p. 681.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the conclusion is to record within a small space the advancing expressions of the apostle's concept of 'ecclesia' and thus of the ecclesia or church, as this word is translated. It seems probable that the Christians were referring to themselves as a body or community by the term 'ecclesia' at the time of Paul's conversion or shortly thereafter. Paul did not give this word to the church but with the rest of the Christians adopted it.

Upon a cursory reading of his writings it appears that Paul is constantly developing his concept of 'ecclesia'. However, study discloses evidences which indicate that the highest concept he expresses in his later writings was held by him from the beginning of his mission to the Gentile world. It is only the expression of this concept that advances and expands and then only as needs and opportunities arise. It is more the matter of applying the term rather than developing it.

In his earlier letters, Thessalonians and Galatians, written approximately twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul conceives the 'ecclesia' to be a distinct religious community. Christians do not

exist merely as individuals individually related to Christ but are, each one of them, incorporated in community. In these early epistles Paul saw that Christians in every place were incorporated into a body which he considered one universal community. To him there were also such local communities which together did not constitute the universal ecclesia but which were outcroppings of it. The one universal community and any local community he alike called 'ecclesia'.

His second significant disclosure in these epistles is that the ecclesia is a distinctly new religious community. It was one not only related to God as Israel had been but also related to the Messiah who was Jesus. It was this latter relation that made it distinctly Christian and new. However, it is the former expression of relationship that shows he believed the new ecclesia had had its beginning in God and was the continuation of the true Israel. In fact, he saw that the new ecclesia had succeeded to the position once occupied by the old ecclesia, Israel. On this particular situation Scott has written at length,

Since the church thus arose unconsciously, of its own accord, there is no need to seek its origin in suggestions from the outside. It has been assumed often that Christianity simply took over the Old Testament conception of Israel, the chosen people of God, with the one difference that faith instead of race was made the bond of union. A view of this kind might seem to be adopted in the New Testament itself, and this is not surprising. The disciples were Jews, and knew of no other type of religious association than the Jewish community. They believed that God

had made his promises to Abraham and would fulfil his purpose with the world through Abraham's seed. They took for granted, therefore, that the church was Israel, or at least the faithful remnant which in the sight of God, as the prophets had declared, was the true Israel. It is pointed out that the name which the church adopted, apparently from the outset, was "the Ecclesia", a name applied in scripture to the congregation of Israel. Paul in one place (Gal. 6:16) speaks explicitly of "the Israel of God", and in the speech of Stephen, perhaps the earliest Christian document which has come down to us, the whole argument turns on the idea that Israel as a nation has been rejected and has surrendered its privileges to the true Israel, the church.

In all respects it was the Israel of the past, brought at length to its consummation Yet it is wrong to conceive of the church as breaking away from the old Israel in order to form a new one, similar in character but renovated and purified. So far from regarding itself as a substitute for Israel, its chief anxiety at the outset was to be recognized as a legitimate Jewish sect. So far from trying to repeat the ancient customs it laid all the stress on what was distinctive in its own worship and beliefs and mode of life. It was the "new Israel" in the sense that while it remained part of Israel it was altogether new. Something different had emerged from the old conception of a chosen people.

The truth is that even if the Jewish community had never existed, the church, in all its essential features, was bound to result from the mission of Jesus.

It was not the Jewish community over again, with a few minor differences, but was a new creation.¹

In the later writings, Corinthians and Romans, Paul's concept of the unity or oneness of the ecclesia becomes very prominent. First, the universal ecclesia is one. This is seen in his terminology, "the ecclesia of God" which signified for him the universal unity of

¹Scott, The Nature of the Early Church, op. cit., pp. 29ff.

the people of God. He also views each local ecclesia as one with the universal ecclesia in regards to character, conduct, and practice. Therefore there must be a basic unity of the one local ecclesia with all others in these aspects. This did not mean for Paul a stereotyped assembly in each instance. What it did mean was that the ecclesia was characterized by oneness in its essence and character. The apostle allowed for periphery variations due to the local circumstances in which the ecclesia found itself. Campbell incorporates this idea in his discussion of "The Body of Christ." He says,

III. This institution, called the congregation of God, is a great community of communities--not a community representative of communities, but a community composed of many particular communities, each of which is built upon the same foundation, walks according to the same rules, enjoys the same charter, and is under the jurisdiction of no other community of Christians, but is to all other communities as an individual disciple is to every other individual disciple in any one particular community meeting in any given place.

IV. Still, all these particular congregations of the Lord, whether at Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus, though equally independent of one another as to the management of their own peculiar affairs, are, by virtue of one common Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one common salvation, but one kingdom or church of God, and, as such, are under obligations to cooperate with one another in all measures promotive of the great ends of Christ's death and resurrection.

VI. These districts are a part of the circumstances of Christ's kingdom, as well as the manner of maintaining correspondence and co-operation among them, and the occasions and incidents requiring concert and conjoint action. For these, as well as for the circumstances of any particular community, the Apostles gave no specific directions. It was, indeed, impossible they could; for, as the circumstances of particular communities, and of the whole church, vary at different times and places, no one

set of particular, sectional, or intersectional regulations could suit all these peculiarities and emergencies. These, then, are necessarily left to the wisdom and discretion of the whole community, as the peculiar exigencies and mutations of society may require.²

Furthermore, the apostle conceives not only the unity of the universal church and the unity of the local church with the universal one but also the unity of that local church within itself.

In the first epistle to the Corinthians Paul for the first time refers to the church as body. This local ecclesia, he says, is body of Christ. He also identifies it with Christ. Thus the ecclesia for him is at one time the Messianic community and the Messiah.

In the Prison Epistles, written at a still later date, and especially in Colossians and Ephesians, Paul discloses his concept in the highest terms. While the ecclesia never loses its identity with Christ he does give it an identity of its own by calling it "the body of Christ." The major concept in these writings is that of the church's oneness with Christ. This oneness Paul expresses in three different ways: (1) the ecclesia is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of the body, (2) as husband and wife are one, the husband being the head, the wife, the body, so intimately one are the

²Alexander Campbell, The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Plead by the Current Reformation, (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1835), pp. 77f.

church, the body of Christ, and Christ, the head of the body, (3) the glory of God is alike expressed and manifested in the church and in the Christ.

This oneness is conceived of in relation to the eternal purpose of God which is the uniting of all things in heaven and in earth in Christ. In the oneness of the Christians among themselves and the oneness of their body with Christ this process of harmonizing all things with Christ and the consequent harmony of all things with each other has begun. For Paul the ecclesia is the instrument through which the Messiah is able to consummate his redemptive task in the uniting of the whole creation in himself.

The church differs, therefore, from every other society in the world. All other institutions, as compared with her, are of human contriving and are mortal. They have their beginnings, though those beginnings may be lost in obscurity; and they come to a definite end. This is true even of such institutions as empires, nations, and civilizations. But the church is not of human contriving--it is divine Neither is it mortal--it is immortal The church represents that point in the creative and redemptive activity of God where he is revealed; and as such it is a continuation of that process of his showing forth of himself which was begun when the Word "was in the world yet the world knew him not." The church is a supernatural society within a natural environment--"a colony of heaven," as Paul called it.

If the church is the perpetuation of the Incarnation, it will have about it those paradoxical qualities in duality which he, our Lord, had. Like him, it is both human and divine In the church, there are "two natures in one body," and it is essential that we do not forget this. Where there is concretion, there is always this paradoxical duality. The fact that the church is human is clear enough But the church is also divine Like Christ, the church is temporal and eternal

It is never just the church at any single time point in history. It includes the apostles, prophets, martyrs, saints of all ages, and presumably our Lord himself as the Head. Like him, it is local and yet universal. It is never just the community in a single locality. When a body of people, say twenty, are gathered together as a church to offer to God the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, they are joined to the whole church in time and space. Like him, it is in the world, but not of it.³

³Robinson, The Biblical Doctrine of the Church,
op. cit., pp. 102ff.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Abbott, T. K. The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916.
- Beare, Francis W. The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. X, The Epistle to the Ephesians. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953.
- Bicknell, E. J. Westminster Commentaries: The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians. London: Methuen and Company LTD, 1932.
- Blackwelder, Oscar Fisher. The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. X, The Epistle to the Galatians. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953.
- Burrows, Millar. An Outline of Biblical Theology. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946.
- Burton, Ernest DeWitt. The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920.
- Campbell, Alexander. The Christian System in Reference to the Union of Christians and Restoration of Primitive Christianity as Plead by the Current Reformation. St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1835.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. Systematic Theology. Vol. IV, Ecclesiology-Eschatology. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948.
- Charles, R. H. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament. 2 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1913.
- Cragg, Gerald R. The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. IX, The Epistle to the Romans. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1954.

- Craig, Clarence Tucker. The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. X, The First Epistle to the Corinthians. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953.
- Denney, James. Expositor's Bible: The Epistles to the Thessalonians. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908.
- Duncan, George S. The Moffatt New Testament Commentary: The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.
- Ellicott, Charles J. A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians with A Revised Translation. Boston: W. H. Halliday and Company, 1885.
- Erdman, Charles R. The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1928.
- Filson, Floyd V. The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. X, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953.
- Findlay, G. G. The Expositor's Greek Testament. Vol. II, St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1908.
- Flew, R. Newton. Jesus and His Church. New York: The Abingdon Press, 1938.
- Frame, James Everett. The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912.
- Grosheide, F. W. Commentary of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953.
- Hort, Fenton John Anthony. The Christian Ecclesia. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897.
- Jackson, Foakes, and Lake, Kirsopp. The Beginnings of Christianity. Part 1. Vol. 1, The Acts of the Apostles, Prolegomena I. London: Macmillan and Company, 1920.
- . The Beginnings of Christianity. Part 1. Vol. 5, The Acts of the Apostles, Additional Notes. London: Macmillan and Company, 1933.

- Johnston, George. The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament. Cambridge: University Press, 1943.
- Judaism and Christianity. Vol. I, The Age of Transition. Edited by W. O. E. Oesterley. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937.
- Knox, John. On the Meaning of Christ. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947.
- Lenski, R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1945.
- _____. The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians. Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1946.
- _____. The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon. Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946.
- Lieberman, Saul. Greek in Jewish Palestine. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942.
- Lightfoot, J. B. The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n. d.
- _____. The Epistles of St. Paul, Philippians. New York: Macmillan and Company, 1896.
- Moffatt, James. The Moffatt New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, n. d.
- Moore, George Foot. Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. Vol. 1, The Age of the Tannaim. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927.
- Moulton, James Hope, and Milligan, George. The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament. London: Hodder and Stoughton, Limited, 1930.
- Plummer, Alfred. The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915.
- Ridderbos, Herman N. The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953.

- Robertson, A. T. Word Pictures in the New Testament.
Vol. IV, The Epistles of Paul. New York: Rich-
R. Smith, Inc., 1931.
- Robertson, Archibald, and Plummer, Alfred. The Interna-
tional Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exe-
getical Commentary on the First Epistle of St.
Paul to the Corinthians. New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1916.
- Robinson, John A. T. The Body, A Study in Pauline Theo-
logy. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952.
- Robinson, William. The Biblical Doctrine of the Church.
St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1948.
- Ropes, James Hardy. The International Critical Commen-
tary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on
the Epistle of St. James. New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1916.
- _____. The Synoptic Gospels. Cambridge: Harvard
University Press, 1934.
- Sanday, William, and Headlam, Arthur. The International
Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical
Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896.
- Schaff, Philip. History of the Christian Church. Vol.
I, Apostolic Christianity. Grand Rapids: Wm. B.
Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950.
- Scott, Ernest F. The Beginnings of the Church. New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914.
- _____. The Moffatt New Testament Commentary: The
Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon
and to the Ephesians. New York: Harper and
Brothers, n. d.
- _____. The Nature of the Early Church. New York:
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941.
- _____. The Purpose of the Gospels. New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1949.
- Short, John. The Interpreter's Bible. Vol. X, The First
Epistle to Corinthians. New York: Abingdon-
Cokesbury Press, 1953.