

NEW TESTAMENT BACKGROUND FOR THE CONCEPT OF LOCAL CHURCH

When I accepted the gracious invitation to give the opening address at this Cincinnati Convention of CTSA dedicated to the theme of "The Local Church," my first inclination was to speak simply of "The Local Church in the New Testament." Then, recognizing the diversity of New Testament views and the sparseness of information about the earliest Christian situation, I resolved to be more precise, "Local Churches of the Late New Testament Period," the title I submitted for printing in the program. But when I began a detailed study, I realized that "local church," besides being a somewhat vague term today, is not a category easily applied to the New Testament. And so my final decision has been to present a paper on New Testament background that might be useful for your theological discussion.

I. REGIONAL CHURCHES AND "THE CHURCH"

In the past it has been almost an axiom of biblical scholarship that the term *ekklēsia* was used first for the Christian community of a given region or city before it was applied more abstractly to the whole body of Christians ("the Church"). This opinion is based chiefly on Pauline usage, for in the Proto-Pauline Epistles¹ we find "the church of the Thessalonians" (I Thess 1:1), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal 1:1), "the church of God which is in Corinth" (I Cor 1:1; II Cor 1:1), "the churches of God which are in Judea" (I Thess 2:14). In some of the Deutero-Pauline Epistles we find a more generalized concept: "the church" is the body of Christ in Col 1:18, while Eph 5:25 states that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Nevertheless, a wider range of evidence indicates a more complex situation than that suggested by the axiom "first particular, then general or universal."

(1) The Pauline usage itself is far from clear. A serious debate is still centered on whether Colossians might not be Proto-Pauline; and even if one sides with the majority of scholars in favor of the Deutero-Pauline judgment, the line of demarcation between the earlier Epistles and Colossians is not clear. The usage of "the church" in Colossians can be related to the usage in I Cor 12:28: "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets,

¹I Thessalonians, Galatians, I-II Corinthians, Romans, Philippians and Philemon are the undisputed Pauline Epistles.

then teachers. . . ." It is almost impossible to think that in the Corinthian statement "the church" is the regional community of Corinth, for such figures as apostles, prophets, and teachers are attested in many churches of the New Testament period.² As Bultmann correctly observes in comment on I Cor 12:28, "By the person and the work of the apostles, prophets and teachers the Ecclesia is represented as the *one* Church."³ Indeed, the study of individual Pauline Epistles shows little precision in Paul's use of *ekklēsia* in terms of the one and the many. In Gal 1:13 he can speak of having persecuted "the church of God"⁴ and in Gal 1:22 of not being known by sight "to the churches of Judea which are in Christ." If in I Cor 14:34 Paul says, "The women should keep silence in the churches," in the very next verse he says, "It is shameful for a woman to speak in church." And while he addresses "the church of God which is in Corinth" (I Cor 1:1), he speaks of "the churches of Galatia" (16:1) and "the churches of Asia" (16:19).

(2) If in the Pauline usage of *ekklēsia* there is no clear progression from the many to the one, neither is there precision in other works of the New Testament. The word appears in only one of the four Gospels, so that it is scarcely a common term in the Jesus tradition. In Matthew, a work of the 80's, we find the same singular/plural ambiguity as in the Pauline Epistles of the 50's. The *ekklēsia* of Matt 16:18, "You are Peter and upon this rock I shall build my church," surely covers more than a regional community; yet the only other Matthean passage (18:17) just as surely refers to a local community, for the complaint against the recalcitrant brother (who will listen neither privately nor before several witnesses) is to be referred "to the church." Roughly contemporaneous with Matthew is Luke/Acts. While most of the uses of *ekklēsia* in Acts are for regional communities,⁵ a more generalized usage is in Acts 9:31: "The church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria." The Johannine usage is uncertain. In the corpus of Gospel and Epistles *ekklēsia* occurs only in III John and there seemingly for a local community.⁶ We do not know whether the

² See Acts 13:1; Eph 2:20; 4:11.

³ R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1951, 1955), 2.104.

⁴ It is not certain whether this expression (also I Cor 15:9) involves a generalized use of "church" or refers to "the church of God which is in Judea" (I Thess 2:14). L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 106-14, favors the latter position, arguing that "the church of God" was originally a title used exclusively for the church of Jerusalem.

⁵ E.g., 8:1 for the church in Jerusalem, 13:1 in Antioch, 14:23 in Asia Minor, and 15:41 in Syria and Antioch.

⁶ Clearly it refers to a regional church in III John 9, and probably also in III John 6. In II John 1 and 13 "Elect" (Lady) refers to a regional church.

Johannine writers would have used *ekklēsia* for the collectivity of Christians. Doubt is raised not only by Johannine silence but also by the hostility of the Johannine writers toward some who profess belief in Christ (John 6:60-65; 8:31ff.; 12:42-43; I John 2:19), and by the reference to "other sheep not of this fold" (John 10:16), so that unity is not yet attained but needs to be prayed for (17:21). In such an outlook could any one term describe an existing Christian universality? The cousin to the Johannine writings, the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse), knows of seven local churches in Asia Minor (1:11; 2:1, 8 etc.) but uses collective symbols for the Christian whole, such as the pregnant woman (12:4-5) and the Bride of the Lamb (19:7; 21:9).

(3) Clearer information about the relation between the churches and the church can be amassed if we move beyond the term *ekklēsia* to the self-understanding of the Christian community and to terms other than *ekklēsia*. The absence of *ekklēsia* from most of the Gospels and from the early chapters of Acts which describe the first Christian community before the beginning of the mission outside Jerusalem⁷ suggests that only gradually did this term become the self-designation par excellence of the Christian community. The Semitic background is plausibly the usage of *qahal* ("assembly," LXX: *ekklēsia*) in the phrase "the church of the Lord" in Deut 23:1, to describe Israel in the desert. This would fit the self-conception of the earliest Christian community as the renewed Israel, symbolized by the Twelve who were to sit on (twelve) thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). Let me suggest two other terms as candidates for earlier designations of the renewed Israel. In Acts 24:14⁸ we find the term "the Way" (*hodos*, reflecting Hebrew *derek*) as Paul expresses his self-understanding in contrast to that of his Jewish opponents, "According to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our Fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law or written in the Prophets." The use of the term "the Way" in the Qumran self-description of the Dead Sea Scroll sectarians⁹ makes plausible the thesis that Acts has preserved an early

⁷Before 8:1 (which marks the beginning of the mission outside Jerusalem) *ekklēsia* occurs only in 5:11 ("Great fear came upon the whole church [of Jerusalem]") and in 7:36 (a reference to the church of Israel in the desert—an important reference in support of the thesis to be mentioned above about the background of the Christian term).

⁸Other special uses of "the Way" as a title for Christianity may be found in Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22 (see also 16:17; 18:25-26).

⁹In the Community Rule (1QS 8:12-14) we read: "When these people join the Community [*yahad*] in Israel, according to these rules they shall separate from the habitation of wicked men to go into the wilderness to prepare the way of God, as it is written [Isa 40:3]. . . ."

Jewish Christian self-designation of the community, which saw itself fulfilling the directive of God pertinent to Israel in Isa 40:3: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord"—again a description of Israel in the desert on the way to the promised land (although this time in the exodus from Babylon rather than from Egypt). Notable too is the frequency of *koinōnia* in the New Testament to describe the participation, communion, or fellowship that holds Christians together,¹⁰ for example, already in Acts 2:42 as a characteristic of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. It may be asked whether *koinōnia* does not have a Semitic antecedent in *yahad*, "community, oneness," which is once more a Dead Sea Scroll self-designation, for the basic rule book of the sectarians was entitled "The Book of the Ordinance of the *Yahad*." Since the Dead Sea Scroll sectarians regarded themselves as the renewed Israel, these parallels confirm the thesis that the initial Christian self-understanding was in terms of Israel, and thus there was a sense of oneness or unity from the beginning. Acts 6-8 indicates that increase in numbers, disagreements, and a mission outside Jerusalem produced by persecution led to the development of diverse Christian communities and regional communities. Paul's use of "the church of God" for such regional communities indicates that they were to see themselves as patterned upon and imitative of the church in Judea. The universal sense of "the Church" would preserve (or regain) the original unity. Thus, in tracing how Christians understood themselves as a church, one could argue for a logical progression from original unity to regional or ideological diversity and finally to universality. Any thesis that would give priority to the local or regional church runs up against the indication in Acts that at one time the local community of Jerusalem was the whole Church.¹¹

II. HOUSE CHURCHES OF THE PAULINE MISSION

The opening greeting to this convention by the Archbishop of Cincinnati already introduced us to the contemporary ambiguity of

¹⁰While in itself the word *koinōnia* can describe the concrete results of communion, namely "community," the New Testament usage favors the spirit of communion that produces community. See Schuyler Brown, "Koinonia as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology?" *One in Christ* 12 (1976), 157-67.

¹¹Caution is necessary, however, for Acts 18:24-19:7 describes Christians at Ephesus (some of them coming from Alexandria) as late as A.D. 55 who knew nothing of Christian baptism or of the Holy Spirit. Such a group could scarcely have had their origins in the Jerusalem community described at Pentecost which made the Holy Spirit and baptism part of the fundamental instruction (2:38). Plausibly such a group could have derived from early followers of Jesus during the public ministry who had no further contact with the mainline group of followers symbolized by the Twelve.

the term "local church." For instance, does the term refer to the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.A., as distinct from other countries, or to the diocesan church under the bishop, or to the parish church as the smallest unit? A similar question must be raised when we begin considering regional churches in the New Testament era. If Paul speaks of "the churches of Galatia" or "the churches of Asia" (I Cor 16:1, 19), his plural may cover the church in each city or town in Galatia and Asia, so that the smallest unit would be comparable to "the church of God which is in Corinth" (I Cor 1:2). However, as Christianity grew, we know of a smaller unit, exemplified by plural house churches in the same city. If we wish to consider local churches in the New Testament period, we must deal with house churches; and I shall begin with the simplest form of this phenomenon, the house churches of the Pauline mission. I speak of "simplest form" for several reasons. The pattern of Paul's mission meant that most often he was the first Christian missionary to come into an area (I Cor 3:10-15; Rom 15:20: he did not build on another man's foundation); and so at least for a while all the churches in a Pauline city would have stemmed from the same mission. Moreover, it is Paul who gives us the most information about the existence of house churches.¹² Let me sample a few of the questions that a study of the Pauline house church might raise for theology.

(1) *Church structure.* In his earliest preserved letter (I Thess 5:12) Paul speaks of "those who are over you in the Lord and admonish you." In the list of charisms in I Cor 12:28 Paul mentions the charism of administration (*kybernēsis*). In Philip 1:1 he sends greetings "to the bishops and the deacons."¹³ And the Pastoral Epistles pay great attention to presbyters and deacons who must be appointed in every city (Titus 1:5) to govern the church in the aftermath of Paul's death. Thus, from one end of the Pauline corpus to the other, there are various figures of local authority.

¹² Among the passages to be considered are Rom 16:5, 14, 15; I Cor 16:19; Philem 2; Col 4:15. Important treatments include F. V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *JBL* 58 (1939), 105-12; W. Rordorf, "Was wissen wir über die christlichen Gottesdienststräume der vorkonstantinischen Zeit?" *ZNW* 55 (1964), 110-28; P. Stuhlmacher, "Urchristliche Hausgemeinden," in *Der Brief an Philemon*, *EKK* (Zurich: Benziger, 1975), 70-75; A. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1975), esp. 60-91; H.-J. Klauck, "Die Hausgemeinde als Lebensform im Urchristentum," *MTZ* 32 (1981), 1-15.

¹³ While most scholars agree that Philippians is authentically Pauline, many think that it is a composite letter, put together by joining smaller pieces of Pauline correspondence. Thus it is uncertain whether the Opening Formula of the letter is from Paul or from the compositor. If the latter, our sole clear Pauline evidence for the existence of bishops in the Pauline churches during Paul's lifetime would be lost.

What relation to such authority was maintained by the owner of the house in which the respective church met? Were the householders eventually among those who were over the Thessalonians in the Lord? Were they among the bishops of Philippians and the presbyter-bishops of the Pastorals? (If not, there must have been some very sharp conflicts from time to time between householders and those charged with pastoral authority over the church meeting in the house.) It would seem that the householder had to have at least one form of authority since he had the power of the keys and could refuse admittance to his house. (The importance of this power is apparent in II John 10 where it is urged that false teachers not be received into the house [church], a power of refusal that III John 9 describes as being exercised by one who puts himself first in the church.) A connection between the householder and the presbyter is suggested by some of the family descriptions in the job description of the presbyters in the Pastorals: the presbyter must be married only once, one whose children are believers, able to manage his own house well and to keep his children in order (Titus 1:6; I Tim 3:4). The relations of householders to the prophets and teachers of the churches are more obscure. Did the householder teach those who came to his house? Or were prophets and teachers shared by various house churches?

We must remember that the owners of some of the house churches seem to have been women. "Those of Chloe" who send a report to Paul (I Cor 1:11) may be Christians who meet at the house of Ms. Chloe; and Acts 12:12 suggests that Christians meet at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark.¹⁴ I Corinthians 16:19 refers to a church meeting in the house of a couple, Aquila and Prisca. We do not know if there were women presbyters in churches in the New Testament period;¹⁵ but if there were women householders and if householders had pastoral roles in the churches meeting in their houses, some of the Pauline remarks forbidding roles to women may be more intelligible. Does I Cor 14:34 specify that "women should keep silence in the churches" because men householders normally spoke and, without a specific prohibition, women householders would have had the same right? Does I Tim 2:12 specify, "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men," because men householders were among the presbyters who had authority and taught (I Tim 5:17) and, without

¹⁴ Acts gives prominence to women patrons of Paul, e.g., at Philippi Lydia who was baptized with her whole household (16:14-15; see also 17:4, 12 and 17:34 [Damaris]). It is not implausible that the Christian communities met at the home of such women.

¹⁵ See R. E. Brown, "Episkopē and Episkopos: The New Testament Evidence," *TS* 41 (1980), 334-35.

a specific prohibition, women householders would have had the same right? If we know that Aquila and Prisca together maintained a house where the church met, Acts 18:26 describes Priscilla and Aquila expounding the way of God more accurately to Apollos, the distinguished preacher from Alexandria.

(2) *Cultic issues*. Who baptized people in the house churches of the Pauline mission?¹⁶ Did the householder baptize? This is not an improbable suggestion (especially as regards slaves in the household) and would help to explain the popularity of family terminology within the Christian community. We know virtually nothing about who presided at the Eucharist in regional churches, although *Didache* 10:7 suggests that at the end of the century prophets were still able to hold a Eucharist in the manner they wished; and by the early second century, in churches addressed by Ignatius, a bishop or his designate could preside. In the late New Testament period, when there was no prophet present, did the householder preside at the Eucharist? Acts 2:46 remembers that bread was broken in the houses of Christians; and if the Passover model of Judaism continued to influence the Eucharist, conceivably the host of the house might have celebrated the Eucharist.

(3) *Ethical issues*. Some of the moral teaching of the New Testament becomes more intelligible when we concentrate on the house church as the functional Christian unit. The prominence of *Haustafeln* or Lists of Rules for the Household¹⁷ cannot be explained simply because the family was the basic Christian unit. Most of the house directives envisage slaves and thus the very kind of house that served as the focal point for the Christian community. Careful consideration of sociology and archaeology suggests that Christians met at the houses of wealthy believers.¹⁸ Only a fairly wealthy person would have had a "living room" large enough for the ten to forty people that constituted a house church; and the New Testament itself bears witness that the owners of house churches had slaves, e.g., Philemon, and Mary of Jerusalem (Acts 12:1-2).¹⁹ The Christian eucharistic assembly in the house of a wealthy person brought into that person's living quarters people of lower status and poverty who under normal circumstances would

¹⁶This question is made more acute by Paul's statement pertinent to his year and a half at Corinth, "I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius. . . . Also I baptized the house of Stephanus" (1 Cor 1:14-15).

¹⁷Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:22-6:9; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; 1 Pet 2:13-3:7.

¹⁸See Stuhlmacher, *op. cit.* (n. 12 above), 71; and Malherbe, *op. cit.*, 71ff. Also G. Theissen, "Soziale Schichtung in der korinthischen Gemeinde," *ZNW* 65 (1974), 232-72; and J. G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1975).

¹⁹The householders Aquila and Prisca seem to have had the money to make their way to Corinth after being expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2).

never have been admitted. Perhaps this explains the social restiveness of Christians (I Cor 7:20-24 tells slaves to remain content as slaves), and such strange situations as that described in I Cor 11:18-21 where at the Lord's Supper only some were invited to eat a full meal (the friends of the householder and his social equals?).

I have made only superficial suggestions on a few issues pertinent to house churches; those interested in the theology of the local church will see many more possibilities (and repercussions).

III. VARIOUS NEW TESTAMENT COMMUNITIES

I said above that the house churches of the Pauline mission were the simplest form of the topic, since, for a while at least, the house churches in a Pauline city would have been homogeneous. However, the situation would have been quite different later in major Christian centers. In the year 90 in a place like Antioch or Ephesus, for instance, conceivably there would have been a variety of house churches resulting from different Christian missions. Let me suggest a possible range.²⁰

(a) A house church of Christian Jews still insisting that acceptance of the Law was necessary for salvation, holding a low Christology in which Jesus was the Messiah but not divine in origin, and celebrating the Eucharist as a memorial of Jesus.

(b) A house church of mixed Jewish and Gentile Christians, stemming from a mission associated with the Jerusalem Apostles and holding the Twelve in high honor as founders of the church. While Gentiles did not need to be circumcised, the Law still had meaning for Christian life. This group would have believed in Jesus as the Son of God through virginal conception, and have stressed that the Eucharist was truly the body and blood of Christ.

(c) A house church from the Pauline mission, consisting mostly of Gentiles who felt completely liberated from the Law, thinking of Paul as "the Apostle," believing in Jesus as the first-born of all creation.

(d) A Johannine house church, consisting of those who thought of themselves as God's children through birth from above and for whom birth as Jew or Gentile was an irrelevancy of the flesh. This group would not use the title apostle but would regard all as disciples; they would not speak of the church in foundational language since Jesus was an ongoing presence to each generation through the Paraclete. Jesus would be seen as the incarnation of

²⁰The house churches I list can be reconstructed from the New Testament and Ignatius of Antioch; they constitute a minimal range. For a wider range, see R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1978), pp. 168-69.

the divine Word spoken before creation, and the Eucharist would constitute his flesh and blood which all must eat and drink if they are to share the divine life of God's unique Son.

It is not clear to what extent Christians from one of these house churches would be welcome at another house church. Certainly those of (a) would not be welcome at (c) or (d), and vice versa.

I am using this imagined picture to introduce another form of the local church in the New Testament. After the death of the great apostles in the 60's,²¹ our knowledge of Christian church life is drawn from reading between the lines of Christian writings of the last third of the first century and reconstructing the communities for whom such works would make sense. These communities, even if they were made up of many house churches in many areas, may be said to constitute theologically different "local churches."

Let me offer a very brief sketch of the diverse churches or Christian communities of the postapostolic period of the New Testament—a very active field of biblical research today.²² I proposed to the meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association in August 1979 at Boston that specialists in various areas of the New Testament should pool their efforts in working out the history of these communities (as reflected in the respective New Testament works) and in placing all the histories side-by-side, almost on a graph. Such a process, if completed in this millennium, might result in one of the greatest contributions of twentieth-century scholarship toward filling in the history of the early Church and toward understanding the lines of the theological development connecting the apostles to the Great Church of the late second century.

(1) *Three forms of post-Pauline communities.* Despite the enormous impact of Paul's personality and thought upon the churches founded in his mission, after his death those loyal to him developed distinct lines of development and interest. I shall stress below characteristic features in the ecclesiology of each of three communities; but let me caution that many other aspects of their respective theologies are distinctive.²³ Also, I do not mean that the

²¹The only three apostles about whom we have detailed knowledge from the New Testament are Peter (first among the Twelve), Paul (apostle of the Gentiles), and James (brother of the Lord, not a member of the Twelve)—all three died in the mid-60's, in Rome and in Jerusalem respectively.

²²For a popular introduction to the preliminary results, see the last chapters of D. J. Harrington, *God's People in Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), esp. pp. 67-106.

²³In January 1980 I gave the Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary (Richmond, VA) on "The Post-Apostolic Churches of the New Testament," and I am currently engaged in preparing those lectures for publication, 1982 or 1983. Among the possible topics to be treated in each church are Christology, ecclesiol-

emphasis of one community would necessarily lead that community to deny altogether the emphasis of another community; rather it is a question of the truly operative factor in the respective conception of the church.

(a) The post-Pauline communities reflected in the Pastoral Epistles.²⁴ Here the traumatic questions of teaching, guidance, and survival raised by the death of the apostles are answered in terms of church structure. Getting presbyter-bishops (and deacons)²⁵ appointed in every church is the solution, for such officers will hold on to the tradition and protect against dangerous new teaching; they will constitute a regular, ongoing institution for pastoral care.

(b) The post-Pauline communities reflected in Ephesians and Colossians. Such figures as presbyter-bishops are never mentioned in these Epistles, which pay little attention to structure. Instead, there is offered an ideal of the church as the body of Christ, the spotless bride for whom he gave himself—a body that spans heaven and earth and in which the members are being constantly nourished by Christ, the head, and are growing together unto God. This is an organic, not an institutional model of the Church; it offers a vision that will continue to attract people who will give themselves for the Church.

(c) The post-Pauline situation reflected in Luke/Acts. (It is not clear whether Luke is writing for one church or a group of churches; it is possible that the addressees are more tangentially related to the Pauline mission than are the direct descendants addressed in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles.)²⁶ Here neither structure nor idealism is the operative ecclesiological factor. Church development is seen as a historical process moving from Jerusalem and the Jews to Rome and the Gentiles; at each crucial step the Holy Spirit intervenes and guides the church leaders in their decision. Presumably the death of those leaders would cause no

ogy, relation to Judaism, relation to the Law (ethics), pneumatology, and anthropology.

²⁴I use the vague term "reflected in" because sometimes we encounter a situation existing in the churches addressed and other times a situation familiar to the author (and the church where he has lived) that he wished to introduce into the churches addressed. Very helpful in detecting three different types of post-Pauline communities is C. K. Barrett, "Acts and the Pauline Corpus," *Expository Times* 88 (1976-77), 2-5. See also M. C. de Boer, "Images of Paul in the Post-Apostolic Period," *CBQ* 42 (1980), 359-80.

²⁵We know nothing of what deacons did in the New Testament period or (since the requirements for presbyters and deacons are the same) why some people were appointed deacons and some presbyters. If the householders of New Testament house churches served as presbyters, could there have been a socio-economic distinction: those who did not own houses became deacons?

²⁶Luke/Acts does not identify its author, and today many careful scholars doubt the accuracy of the late second-century guess that the author was Luke, a companion of Paul.

trauma; for the Holy Spirit would continue to guide, and the Church would continue to grow and spread.

(2) *Two forms of Johannine communities.* According to the author of I John 2:19, a group from the community with which he identified himself had seceded; and it is most probable that these secessionists considered themselves the true heirs of the Johannine tradition, even as did the epistolary author and his adherents.²⁷ While these two communities differed among themselves as to the importance of Jesus' human career and the salvific importance of Christian life, they both probably differed from other Christians in terms of an extraordinarily high Christology and of an ecclesiology that put no emphasis on structure, on apostolic foundation, and on continuity with the apostles. The Johannine ideal seems to have been a community of equal disciples receiving God's life from Christ—children of God living in *koinōnia* with the Son and the Father, who need no human teacher, for they are taught by the Paraclete. (I shall not go into detail here, but there are significant Johannine differences from any of the three post-Pauline concepts listed above.)

(3) *A community related to I Peter.* A community where Peter is venerated and where the basic preaching is shaped by Jewish symbolism, especially that of the Exodus. The church is seen as a renewed Israel fulfilling God's promises to Israel in the desert: a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people (I Pet 2:9). The officers of the community are the presbyters (elders) and the younger (= deacons; 5:5).

(4) *The Matthean community.* A mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, observing the Law as interpreted by Jesus, honoring Peter as the rock on which the church has been built, possessing authoritative teachers and lines of authority but anxious to make authority conform to the spirit of Jesus who protected the little ones and was willing to forgive seventy times seven.

(5) *A community related to the Epistle of James.* A very Jewish community for whom the name of James the brother of the Lord had authority. A practical insistence on works of piety (caring for the widows and orphans) marks this group which seems to assemble in a Christianized synagogue.

(b) *Other communities.* A longer discussion would need to consider Mark, Hebrews, and Revelation in order to determine how one might speak about the communities addressed by these

²⁷ See my *Community* (footnote 20 above), pp. 97-109. The dispute was over two different interpretations of the same tradition; the interpretation given by the epistolary author was later accepted by the Great Church as orthodox; but it may not have been the majority interpretation among Johannine Christians. The larger group, opposed to the epistolary author, eventually may have become gnostics.

works or represented by the author of these works. And since *Didache*, *I Clement* and perhaps even Ignatius of Antioch would be contemporary with some New Testament works, one might wish to introduce the ecclesiology of these subapostolic writers into a discussion of theological communities as "local churches" of the New Testament period.

IV. THE CHURCHES OF GREAT CHRISTIAN CENTERS

Another aspect of the study of local churches would be the history of Christianity in a single city over a period of time, from the New Testament period into the second century. Among attempts in this direction have been a study of Rome and Ephesus²⁸ as representing two different styles of Christian ecclesiology and Christology, and a study of Rome and Jerusalem²⁹ as representing two different ideals. Recently a specific aspect of the church of Antioch has been studied.³⁰ Let me take the example of the church of Rome and show how modern biblical studies might contribute to the study of this local church, complementing what has been known from history and archaeology.

Christ had been preached in Rome (almost surely by disciples from Jerusalem) before the mid-40's, and there was a thriving Roman Christian community when Paul wrote Romans about 58. *I Clement* was written from the church of Rome to the church of Corinth about forty years later, presumably by a presbyter of Rome. In the forty-year interval between Romans and *I Clement*, *I Peter* was probably written from Rome (5:13: "She who is at Babylon") to Gentile Christians of northern Asia Minor, and Hebrews was probably written to Rome (13:24: "Those from Italy greet you").³¹ From these four works what might one reconstruct of the Roman church?

The Jewish element seems to remain strong throughout the period even as the Gentiles increase in number. In Romans, Paul takes extraordinary care to make clear that his gospel is not different from the early Jewish Christian formulations known to Rome,³² that he has never denied the special privileges of the Jews

²⁸K. Lake, *Landmarks in the History of Early Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 75-103.

²⁹H. von Campenhausen and H. Chadwick, *Jerusalem and Rome*, Facet Books Historical Series #4 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

³⁰W. A. Meeks and R. L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, *SBL Sources for Biblical Study* 13 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978).

³¹One should also include in this literature the Gospel of Mark, and I plan to write a monograph on the church of Rome in which I shall do so. Does Mark reflect a dispute among the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians at Rome over how to understand the Jerusalem apostles (and Peter in particular)?

³²It is generally agreed that Rom 1:3-4 is pre-Pauline and the phrase "spirit of

(9:4-5), and that the preaching to the Gentiles did not displace the Jews in God's plan of salvation. (What an extraordinary statement for Paul: that he converted Gentiles to make the Jews envious, and that the Gentiles were only a wild olive branch grafted on the tree of Israel [11:13-14, 24]!) Clearly Romans contains a *captatio benevolentiae* designed to make Paul acceptable among a community dominated by a Jewish Christian heritage, possibly suspicious of him. It is interesting that in Romans 3:24-25 Paul phrases redemption in the language of Jewish cultic sacrifice: "God presented Jesus as an atoning sacrifice [*hilastērion*] through faith in his blood."

In I Peter 1:13-2:10 the Roman theology of conversion and baptismal entrance into the renewed Israel is presented as an encouragement to the Gentiles addressed in Asia Minor. The analogy of the departure from Egypt and the experience of becoming a covenanted people at Sinai dominates the picture, and once more there appears the language of Jewish sacrifice: "You know that you were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1:18-19).

The Epistle to the Hebrews may have been written shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 in order to persuade the Jewish Christians of Rome that they should not now expect the eschatological restoration of Jewish cult in a purified Christian form. Paul's Epistle to the Romans may have persuaded them that ultimately the Jews would be converted, and they may have imagined that this would mean a purified cult, priesthood, and sacrifice. Hebrews proclaims that the cult, sacrifices, and priesthood of Israel are finished, and that the only Holy Place is in heaven, where Christ "has entered once for all, taking . . . his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (9:12).

The Christian community at Rome apparently received Hebrews, for *I Clement* betrays knowledge of it.³³ However, its message was domesticated and interpreted in a way that would have surprised its author. *I Clement* represents not the abolition of Israelite cult by Christ (the message of Hebrews), but the reintroduction of the symbolism of Israelite cult and an application to Christian realities. "God commanded us to celebrate sacrifices and services . . . at fixed times and hours. . . . For to the High Priest his proper ministrations are allotted, and to the priests the proper place has been appointed, and on Levites their proper services

holiness" reflects Hebrew grammar. See *Mary in the New Testament*, ed. by R. E. Brown et al. (New York: Paulist, 1978), pp. 34-40.

³³See 9:3-4; 10:7; 12:1; 17:5; 19:2; 27:1; 36:2-5; 43:1. This knowledge of Hebrews in *I Clement* is another argument for Rome as the community addressed by Hebrews.

have been imposed" (50:2, 5). A few verses later *I Clement* describes how Christ appointed apostles who in turn appointed bishops and deacons (42:1-4); and while *I Clement* does not connect these ideas, it is rightly considered the forerunner of the identification of the Christian bishop, presbyter, and deacons as high priest, priests, and levites, when later a triform ministry developed. Ultimately the Jewish Christian aspiration will triumph in its own way; for the Eucharist will be considered the Christian sacrifice fulfilling Mal 1:11, the episcopate and then the presbyterate will be the Christian cultic priesthood, and the Christian place of worship will be the Christian Temple containing the living presence of the Son of God.³⁴

The Jewish Christian conservatism of Rome can be traced into the second century in the opposition of the Roman church to innovative theologians from the East (Valentinus, Marcion, Tatian) and in the reluctance to accept the Gospel of John (the Alogoi, Gaius?) with its adventuresome Christology. But pursuit of that theme would take me beyond the purposes of this lecture. My immediate purpose in this section has been to offer theologians food for thought about "local church" as the church of a locality such as Rome, and how modern biblical scholars might contribute to the theme.

* * * * *

I realize that by showing how many different ways one may approach local church in the New Testament, I have complicated your task. I suspect that as good theologians you will discover that the study of local church in later periods and even in the present is also complicated. All of which reinforces the cynicism of Oscar Wilde about "the truth pure and simple"—the truth is rarely pure and never simple.

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³⁴The author of Hebrews probably never thought of such developments, and so in the technical sense they are not contradictions of his thought, even though it is quite dubious that he would have approved of them. In my judgment, Hebrews cannot be used today to demand an undoing of church developments about priesthood (in the manner of Küng), but it remains as a conscience about the primacy of Christ's priesthood and the danger of obscuring that primacy when too much honor is paid to human cultic priests.