

The Crucified Christ as Lord of the Church

Theological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 11-14

In Memory of Athol Gill

by

Thorwald Lorenzen

Introduction

Athol Gill was a man of the church. He was an ordained minister, and he was a theological teacher. And yet, he often wondered whether the church as he found it was an adequate reflection of Jesus Christ, whom the church confessed as *Κυριος* ("Lord"). His exegetical studies and insights convinced him that there was more to faith in Christ than the established church manifested. He had begun to understand that at its deepest level the biblical message invited people to become disciples of Jesus and to join his passion for the world. Obedience to that invitation, rather than theoretical orthodoxy or liturgical celebration, became for him the determining reality of Christian faith. Athol Gill was concerned with the implementation of human rights, and in the last years of his life he was engaged in research to locate and understand the theological place of the poor in the biblical story.

Relevance. We shall keep these concerns in mind as we focus our attention on a New Testament text that has played a major role in shaping the self-understanding of many Christian communities and churches. Sacramental churches use 1 Corinthians 11 to insist on the centrality of the Eucharist, and to contend for the real presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine. Charismatic communities cherish 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 because there *glossalalia* is listed among the gifts of the Spirit. The apostle affirms and practices that gift himself, and indeed, he encourages Christians to seek after the gift of tongues. Baptists and other churches who are suspicious of church structures and church offices find in these chapters an affirmation of their "low key" structures, their democratic organisation and their self understanding as the "gathered community" (1 Cor 11:20). And even those who are disillusioned with the religious establishment altogether, find in the "love-feast" of chapter 11 and in the "ode to love" (1 Cor 13) a worthwhile vision for life.

Context. It is unusual to select 1 Corinthians 11-14 – more exactly: *1 Corinthians 11:17-14:40* – for discussion. It seems to be more natural, and it is certainly more common, to take chapters 12-14 as a unit. With 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul clearly sets out to respond to an inquiry concerning matters related to the *πνευματικα* ("spiritual gifts") and the *πνευματικων* ("spiritual people").¹ The danger is, however, that by centring our attention on chapters 12-14, the dominating interest becomes the gift of tongues in their relationship to the other gifts of the Spirit. Then the context, how and where believers actually live their lives in the church and in the world, recedes into the background. But, for Paul, this context has *theological* significance. Spiritual gifts are the gifts of the Spirit of God, and God is the creator and reconciler of heaven and earth. The gifts of the Spirit of God can therefore only be discussed in relationship to the nature of the church and its responsibility in the world. When Paul questions the very identity of the church (11:20), he is not questioning the fact of their spiritual practices and manifestations, and he is not doubting their religious efficacy. His concern is whether the gifts that are being exercised, are a manifestation of that Spirit who glorifies the crucified Christ as Lord. Chapter 11 therefore provides the social and ecclesiastical context for a discussion of chapters 12-14.

¹ The Genitive construction "concerning tw=n pneumatikw=n" can grammatically be neuter ("spiritual gifts") or masculine ("spiritual people"). Here the reference is to "spiritual gifts" because Paul interprets pneumatika/ with xari/smata (neuter), in 12:7 he speaks of "manifestation of the Spirit", and in 14:1 he encourages his readers to seek ta\ pneumatika/ ("spiritual gifts"). At the same time it is true, of course, that spiritual "gifts" cannot be separated from the people to whom they are given and who exercise them.

The task of theology. In his correspondence with the church in Corinth, Paul is fulfilling the task of theology in the church: he is asking whether the life and practice of the church is an adequate reflection of its confession to Jesus Christ as Lord. And since in Corinth it was also controversial what “Jesus Christ” actually stands for, Paul places his exhortations to the church within a christological framework that portrays Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen One (1 Cor 1, 2 and 15).

The church in Corinth. That brings us to the church in Corinth. Here we have a prime example of a church that was in danger of losing its Christian identity, and consequently its relevance. The salt was in danger of losing its flavour; the light of the gospel was being placed under a bushel. A passion for God and his Christ had issued into a religiosity that was primarily concerned with self-edification; no longer could the “world” see the good works of the Christians, and in response give glory to God (Matt 5:13-16).

We shall read Paul's passionate plea to the church in Corinth with the hope that in understanding that ancient text, our own situation may also be interpreted and modified.

The Church in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-22, 33f.)

We do not have any texts written by the Christians in Corinth. But we have letters of Paul to that church, and from these letters we can deduce a fairly clear picture of the situation of the church in Corinth.

The church as a multi-cultural community. It must have been a mixed group of people who made up the church in Corinth! Paul notes that, according to worldly standards, not many of them were “wise” or “powerful” or “of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26). The church was made up of rich people in whose houses the Christians met; there were also shop-keepers and tradesmen; then there were men and women who occupied leadership functions in the church; and there were poor people, and people from the lower social classes: slaves, servants, nannies and labourers.

While in the social and religious clubs of that time people were usually classified according to social status, and they separated themselves accordingly, in the Christian community an alternative vision began to take shape. Faith in Jesus Christ relativised social differences. The God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit was understood as affirming the equal dignity of all human beings. Where his Spirit becomes concrete in faith and baptism, the barriers of self-interest are removed and a community of equals is being shaped (12:13; compare Gal 3:28, Col 3:11).²

The church meeting. Paul implies that the Christians in Corinth gathered regularly for meetings (11:17-21, 33-34; 14:23, 26). In the late afternoons, after work, the church members – rich and poor, home owners and slaves, widows and wharf labourers, nannies and children – would come together for a common meal, and in its context to thank and worship God, and to be spiritually nourished. They would bring their own food, and, remembering that “the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof” (Ps 24:1), they consecrated the food to the Lord. With this act of consecration they showed their desire to share. The food now belonged to the whole community. Their primary intention was not to eat their *own* meal, but they wanted to *share* and then eat *together*. By doing that, they manifested the church *of God* (11:22), and they demonstrated their *unity* in Christ (10:16). Then they ate and drank. At least here at the community meal – later called “A)ga/ph” (“Love”: Jude 12; Ign. Smyrn. 8:2; [2 Pet 2:13]) – all the members of the community would get enough to eat! The grace of God became an event in a community that confessed Christ as Lord and therefore shared what it had. They would eat and sing and pray and

² It is obvious that we cannot provide a full portrayal of the church in Corinth; but see: Alfred Schneider, *Die Gemeinde in Korinth. Versuch einer gruppensdynamischen Betrachtung der Gemeinde von Korinth auf der Basis des ersten Korintherbriefes* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1977).

listen to a sermon – and in that context, probably towards the end of the gathering, they would also celebrate the “Lord's Supper” (so called in the New Testament only in 11:20).³

These regular gatherings for food, fellowship and worship are of great theological importance for Paul. In them the church as the “body of Christ” becomes, ever again, an event in human history. They are the presupposition for the discovery and exercise of the “spiritual gifts”. It is interesting that Paul avoids religious cult language. He simply speaks of “coming together” (11:17f., 20; 14:23, 26). He does not want to separate fellowship and worship from every day life. He does not want to raise a barrier between the sacred and the secular realms of life. “The only really important thing in its services is simply the fact that the whole church gathers there.”⁴

Our text is of great interest because it is one of the few biblical texts that allow us a view into an early Christian worship service. Its holistic character – with a meal and the “Lord's Supper” – has already been mentioned. The πνευματικά (“spiritual gifts”) or the χάρισματά (“gifts of grace”) of the Christians are recognised, although in Corinth there seems to have been the tendency to give greater honour to the more demonstrative gifts, especially the gift of speaking in tongues. Paul therefore emphasises that in the worship service it must become evident who their Lord is, and that salvation is a communal reality. Neither individualism nor an inflexible liturgy, but the order of *shalom* (“salvation”, “peace”) must determine their coming together (14:33, 40). Each member accepts responsibility to make worship a community experience. There are no spectators. Different people would offer their gifts. Hymns would be sung (14:26).⁵ The Scriptures would be read, they would be interpreted (teaching and prophesying; also by women, 11:5), people would listen, and prayers would be offered. If these prayers were in a tongue then an interpretation would be required so that all could join in. Others would bring a “revelation” from the Lord (14:26, 30). The participants would respond with “Amen” (14:16). Perhaps credal confessions like “Jesus is Lord!” (12:3) and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 were also recited. And the invocation “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22) probably played a role. It is important to note the inherent leaning of the Christian faith not to withdraw from responsibility for the world, but to live in open communication with the world. Clear and understandable communication is therefore more important than individual edification, and the preaching of the gospel was a great concern to the apostle (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1, 4; 3:1).

Nevertheless, a discord must have begun to spoil the atmosphere at the community meal. Paul speaks of “divisions” and “factions” among them (11:18f.); and he distinguishes between their “own meals” (11:21) and the “Lord's Supper” (11:20). What had happened? Most likely, those who were rich and had more leisure time came earlier than the rest (implied in 11:21, 33). The food which they brought for themselves and for others they consecrated to the Lord and thereby manifested that it was for all people. However, for themselves they must have brought some extras like fish and meat and good wine; and they began to eat before the slaves and labourers and nannies had arrived (11:21, 33). Indeed, it must have happened at times, that while there was not enough food left for the late-comers (11:21), some of those who had come early were already drunk.

³ The same togetherness of meal and sacrament is suggested in the Synoptic accounts: Mark 14:17-25, par. Matt 26:20-29, Luke 22:14-20. The phrase “after supper” in 11:25 suggests that at first the elements of bread and wine were separated by the full meal. However, for reasons that we shall mention below, the church probably soon placed the “sacrament” towards the end of the meal.

⁴ Eduard Schweizer, “The Service of Worship. An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 14,” in: *Neotestamentica. German and English Essays 1951-1963* (Zürich/Stuttgart: Zwingli Verlag, 1963, pp. 333-343), p. 333. Further: “The prime sign of a service of worship is, according to the New Testament, the togetherness of all the members of the church. This alone distinguishes it from the daily service - that the believers are really and concretely assembled together.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 333f.).

⁵ Modern New Testament scholarship has retrieved many early christian hymns (or fragments thereof) from the New Testament writings, e.g. Luke 1:46-55,68-79; 2:14; 29-32; John 1:1-5,9-14,16-18; Rom 11:33-36; Phil 2:6-11; Eph 1:3-14; 1 Tim 3:16; 6:15f.; Col 1:15-20; Eph 5:14; 1 Pet 1:3-5; 2:21-24; Heb 1:3; Rev 4:8,11; 5:9f.,12,13; 7:10,12; 11:15,17f.; 12:10-12; 15:3f.; 19:1-3,5,6-8. Besides these hymns there was of course the Psalter which provided further resources for worship.

The problem was twofold. The fact that some people brought and ate their own food revealed their *individualistic* tendencies. This went hand in hand with an increasing *lack of concern for the late-comers*.

How could the Christians in Corinth justify such a situation – consciously or subconsciously? The increasing *individualism* was probably related to a growing *spiritual elitism*. There were those who thought that they had already arrived (1 Cor 4:8). They tended to be preoccupied with their own spiritual needs and desires, and in consequence, they structured their life and the life of the church accordingly. Not the welfare of the whole community, not the mission of the church in the world, but the benefit of the individual or of a certain group of individuals (1 Cor 1:12) became the determining interest.

They knew, of course, of the late-comers. But they probably thought that it was most important that “after supper” (11:25) *all* people would participate in the “cup”. Is the sacrament not more important than the meal? Does not the sacrament feed the soul, while food only provides pleasure for the perishing body?⁶ This is what those thought who had enough to eat!

At this point the protest of the late-comers must have arisen. But how did the apostle come to know about their discontent? It is unlikely that those who had plenty to eat, who did not wait for the late-comers, and who had theological reasons for going ahead with their meal, would have informed the apostle. The information must have come from those late-comers themselves.

Now the apostle was challenged. Should he take this matter seriously? Did this complaint affect the identity and relevance of the church? Does this criticism deserve or even demand theological attention? Is this only a question of morality, or is this a question of faith? And: whom should he believe, and with whom should he side? How should truth and expediency be weighed against each other? In those days they did not have church buildings; he therefore needed the homes of the richer people for church gatherings. But then, the late-comers also belonged to the community of faith. How will the apostle rank the importance of those who had houses and food, on the one hand, and the slaves and servants and labourers, on the other? In which way does his theology – spelled out in 1 Corinthians 1, 2 and 15 – become relevant in a concrete church situation?

It is important to note that Paul takes the information “from below” very seriously. Indeed, so seriously, that he hurls at the church in Corinth the unbelievable verdict: “it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat” (11:20). Given the importance of the Lord's Supper, Paul seems to question the church's *Christian* identity. Had the church become another religious club, of which there were many in Corinth? How shall we understand such a harsh criticism?

Problems in the church. The church in Corinth was plagued by many problems. We hear of “divisions” and “factions” (11:18f., 1:10f.). There were those who claimed to “belong to Paul”, others to Peter, or to Apollos, and even to Christ (1:12).

Indeed, the whole of 1 Corinthians deals with problems. There were theological problems as to how one should understand the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and what consequences this would have for one's life and for the church (chapters 1, 2 and 15). Also the meaning of Baptism and the Lord's Supper was controversial (chapters 10-11). Religious problems included the question of how Christians should behave when food was served them which had previously been dedicated to idols (chapter 8). Moral problems strained the fellowship of the church. Sexual immorality (chapter 5), and questions of sexual behaviour (chapter 7) were discussed. Christians brought lawsuits against each other before the worldly courts (chapter 6). Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν (“all things are lawful for me!”) had become a libertinistic slogan amongst some members in the Corinthian church (6:12; 10:23). This was related to spiritual problems. An overwhelming

⁶ In 10:1-5 Paul warned the church against a theology of sacramental security. Participating in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist does not automatically assure God's pleasure and divert his judgement.

experience of the Spirit of God had, for some of the Christians, led to a feeling of spiritual elitism, arrogance and triumphalism (4:8-13, 18f.; 5:2; 13:4f.). Indeed, they seemed to be so sure of their present reign with Christ (4:8), that they saw no need for the future resurrection of the dead (15:12). This then raised the question how one could distinguish between the Spirit of God and their own spirit or the spirit of the world (chapters 12-14).

Our text points to a social problem that gained theological significance for Paul because it was directly related to a certain understanding of Jesus. Paul does not criticise the spiritual experiences of the Christians in Corinth, nor does he reject spiritual manifestations in the church there. He does not question the worthwhileness of their singing, preaching, healing and praying. His scathing criticism is directed against a church that claims to celebrate the Lord's Supper, but at the same time (literally!) fails to display a social conscience. For him it was an intolerable contradiction that they met for the Lord's Supper, but failed to fully integrate the slaves, the servants and the labourers in the community meal: "... do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (11:22). With this question he suggests an essential inter-relationship between the nature of the church, as the church of God, and the mission of the church in the world. And since God has revealed himself in the crucified Christ as the God who is love, therefore the mission of the church must manifest a partiality for the late-comers.⁷

Was it not the central passion of Jesus to share his life with the outsiders and the late-comers? Did Jesus not eat with publicans and sinners, and in direct consequence of his life-style was criticised, opposed, arrested and finally killed? Indeed, did his opponents not call him "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt 11:19 = Luke 7:34; Mark 2:16)? How then can the church celebrate the Lord's Supper and not give equal status to the lower social classes? That, for Paul, was a denial of the Lordship of Christ and therefore a negation of their identity: "it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat" (11:20)! Indeed, with their individualism and the subsequent disinterest in the late-comers, they, the church (ἐκκλησία: v. 18), despised the "church of God" (ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ: v. 22) and thereby negated their own identity.

The ideal would have been that the church meets for a community meal where the presence of Christ is celebrated. In that context of eating, worshipping and praying, they would also have a special liturgical part of eating the bread and drinking the wine, with a sermon to interpret what was taking place (10:16f.; 11:17-34; 14:26). Christian fellowship must be lived by people who know that God shared his life with them, and who, on that basis, now gladly share their life with others. In this integrated fellowship and gathering of believers they would manifest who their Lord is. For Paul it was impossible to believe in *Jesus Christ* and not wait for the *late-comers*. That would change the community meal into a cultic liturgy which he could no longer call "the *Lord's Supper*". Faith in Christ and worship of him cannot by-pass those with whom he spent his life and for whom he died.

And yet, on the other hand, Paul could also not imagine that a church can cease to be, or that a church could exist without celebrating the Lord's Supper. Was the church in Corinth not part of the "church of God" (1:2)? Could God's creation be annulled by human disobedience? Paul finds this difficult to imagine. Therefore, as a *compromise*, he suggests that in future they should eat their real meal at home (1 Cor 11:22), and then meet together for a separate "Lords Supper".

Who, then, is Jesus Christ, and where is he present? The significance of the conflict becomes clearer when we try to understand the difference in Christology between Paul and the Christian leaders in Corinth. Their attitudes and practices implied that they had forgotten that *faith in Jesus Christ* is an *ultimate concern* and therefore encompasses all dimensions of life. They had begun, first to distinguish, and then to separate their faith from social and moral responsibility in the church and in the world. In the church they considered it to be their main responsibility to provide for

⁷ Compare: Athol Gill, "Human Rights: A Down-Under Perspective," in: William H. Brackney, ed., *Life, Faith and Witness. The Papers of the Study and Research Division of the Baptist World Alliance 1986-1990* (Birmingham, AL: Samford University Press, 1990), pp. 243-257.

spiritual nourishment and therefore to make sure that all people participated in the sacrament. Participation in the full meal was secondary. In other words, they began to place greater emphasis on the presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine, than in the community of men and women, where the social barriers of society had been relativised, and where a new humanity had begun to dawn, a humanity in which those who “have” would wait and share with those who “have not”.

What does Paul do? Paul interprets the situation in Corinth by comparing it with the story of Jesus. He explains that the authenticity of faith in Christ, the efficacy of participation in the sacraments, and the truth of worship is at stake in their relationship to the late-comers. The efficacy of the sacrament is not assured with the taking of the elements, nor does liturgical correctness of citing the Lord's Supper tradition guarantee the efficacy of the Eucharist. A proper celebration of the sacrament inter-relates faith in Christ and commitment to the late-comers. Is this not a terrifying reminder to the church of all ages that we can go through the motions of liturgy, sacrament and worship, and yet miss the point of it all!⁸

It is of great significance, however, that Paul does not merely give moral instructions to the church in Corinth. He reminds them of the gospel, the liberating story of Jesus. Perhaps, so his implied hope, if they would realise that the Eucharist is the *Lord's Supper* and not the church's meal, that it is the feast where the presence of Christ is celebrated, and that Christ is the one who shared his life with the late-comers and thereby revealed that “God is love”, then they might find a way back to a worthy celebration of the Lord's Supper and thereby recover the identity and relevance of the church.

The Crucified Christ as Host at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23-33)

In and with the Lord's Supper tradition Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that the *crucified* Christ is host at the Lord's Supper. It is not the church's table, and it is not for the church to decide who can come, and who must stay away. The church's privilege and responsibility is to recognise who the host at the table is, and then to provide space for him to minister to the community through the Holy Spirit. In doing that the church celebrates the *Lord's Supper* as a worthy remembrance of the crucified Christ.

The Lord's Supper, then, is intimately inter-woven with the *passion story* of Jesus: “the Lord *Jesus* on the night when he was *betrayed* took bread ... as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's *death* until he comes” (11:23, 26). The “Lord *Jesus*” is host at the Lord's Supper. And this Lord Jesus, whom they have experienced in their life and whom they confessed to be present in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, is no other than the *crucified* Jesus! The risen and exalted Christ has not left the offence of his life and the resulting death behind; it is not the *Pneuma*-Christ who is experienced through sacramental communion and spiritual exercises. Rather, the *Lord* is “*Jesus*”. In this way the present experience of Christ is interrelated with the life and death of Jesus. The story of the church is inter-woven with the story of Jesus. And Jesus is understood with reference to his passion: “... on the night when he was betrayed.” And Jesus' passion resulted from his life giving solidarity with the “late-comers” in his society. The Lord's Supper is therefore not a religious liturgy that separates the church from the world. Rather, it is the intensive re-calling and re-assuring that the church is the “body of Christ” and as such must

⁸ If one takes into consideration what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, then the above observation needs to be stressed even more! Reflecting about the proper celebration of the “Lord's Supper”, Paul speaks about people who “sat down to eat and drink and rise up to dance” (v. 7); he speaks about immorality (v. 8) and putting the “Lord to the test” (v. 9). All of this climaxes in the warning: “I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (v. 21). The alternative to a *proper* celebration of the Lord's Supper seems to be a demonic one. “Demonic” here would mean that the Lordship of the crucified Christ is denied and self-edification becomes the reference point for the church's thinking and practice. According to Paul, “demons” and “idols” do not exist as such. They become what they are if and when humans focus their ultimate concern on pen-ultimate objects.

minister to the world. The church's privilege and responsibility is to let its life and its worship be shaped by the crucified Christ and thereby create analogies to him. If and when that happens, then they "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The host, then, at the supper is Jesus Christ, and the identity symbol of Christ is the *cross*. This emphasis is in harmony with the early Christian conviction that the identity of the risen Christ is to be understood with reference to the marks of the crucifixion (John 20:20; Luke 24:39). Indeed the apostle himself interpreted the presence of Christ in his existence as "always carrying in the body the *death of Jesus*" (2 Cor 4:10). By understanding the death of Jesus as being for us – "This is my body which is *for you*" (v. 24) – the story of Jesus becomes intimately inter-woven with our own story.⁹ It is this story, the passion-story of Jesus, that the church must re-live and re-present in each new situation. The church *can* do it in the power of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. The reality of the resurrection and the subsequent faith in Jesus Christ therefore do not cause a break between Jesus and Christ; the historical Jesus is not dissolved into the Christ of faith. But through Easter and Pentecost the Crucified One has been revealed as the head of the church and as the host of the meal where the church celebrates its Christian identity. It is for these christological reasons that the Lord's Supper tradition cannot be separated from the context as it is described in vv. 17-22 and vv. 33f.

Some Christians in Corinth – possibly the leading persons of the church – had obviously forgotten that at their community meals, at the "Lord's Supper", they were the *guests of the crucified Christ*. Instead of living their life, as Jesus did during his life, in solidarity with the late-comers and thereby "proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes", they wanted to protect and enjoy their own religious sentiments. They defined the content of their faith primarily with reference to their own religious needs and interests, rather than focusing their faith on the passion story of Jesus. Since Jesus' passion marked the intensification of his life for the poor, the oppressed, the leper, the widow and the children, it should have been impossible to celebrate the Lord's Supper and at the same time by-pass the needs and interests of the late-comers.

Ideally, therefore, the a)ga/ph-meal should not be separated from the sacrament of breaking the bread and drinking the wine. The whole meal, including the breaking of bread and, "after supper" (11:25), the drinking of wine, should be the Lord's Supper. The often repeated "*this*" in the Lord's Supper tradition – "*This* is my body which is for you. Do *this* in remembrance of me *This* cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do *this* in remembrance of me" (11:24f.) – does not refer primarily to the elements of bread and wine,¹⁰ but it applies to the whole meal, the whole "Lord's Supper", which, if it is to be the *Lord's* Supper, must include the servants and nannies and slaves. In Corinth, however, modifications in the celebration of the Lord's Supper must have taken place. At first the sacramental action was placed at the end of the meal, so that those who came too late for the meal, could at least partake in the sacrament; and then, finally, the sacrament was separated from the meal altogether. For Paul this was a *compromise*. The church has institutionalised that compromise and kept it to the present day.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the church is defined as the *community of the "new covenant"* (v. 25). The *newness* of the eschatological community consists in the fact that in and with its life and celebration it *anticipates* the ultimate victory of the crucified Christ – "until he comes", v. 26; compare the invocation in 16:22: "Our Lord, come!". It anticipates the future of the crucified Christ by creating *analogies* in which the content of their faith comes to expression.

⁹ Günther Bornkamm comments that the death of Christ for all people includes, as an immediate and inherent consequence, the life of those who believe in Christ; and this inclusion must not be understood merely in terms of a moral duty or a grateful response, but it is a theological reality and as such it is an inherent part of the event of salvation. ("Herrenmahl und Kirche bei Paulus," in: *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum*. Gesammelte Aufsätze Band II. BEvTh 28 [München: Kaiser, 1963, pp. 138-176], p. 163).

¹⁰ "Bread" (a)/rtoj) is masculine, while "this" (tou=to) is neuter; the "cup" is not the element itself, but it contains the element of wine.

Social, racial and sexual barriers are relativised. The church understands itself as the community of the friends of Jesus who are liberated by the power of the gospel to provide an alternative to the encroaching selfishness and individualism. Faith in Christ and the love implied therein create community, while selfishness and individualism destroy it. And since human beings are relational beings who need fellowship and friendship as much as they need air to breathe, water to drink and food to eat, the destruction of community has consequences that affect the health of the participating members (v. 30).

When the church “*remembers*” Christ in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (vv. 23, 25), in this act of remembering, the passion story of Jesus merges with the life of the community of believers, so that the church can no longer *be* the church apart from remembering at the same time the people with whom Christ lived and for whom he died. The church cannot “remember” Christ, worship him and pray to him and, at the same time, block out those with whom he shared his life. The Lord's Supper tradition therefore reaches its aim when it kindles within each successive generation the question as to who the late-comers in our community and in our world are. The Eucharist as the *Lord's Supper* is therefore not only concerned with the identity of the church, but also with its relevance.

Recognising that the crucified Christ is host at the table, and knowing that Jesus had no other passion than sharing his life with sinners and with outsiders, would it not be presumptuous for the church to decide who can participate in the *Lord's Supper* and who cannot? When, in addition, one hears that some churches use the Lord's Supper for disciplinary measures, then its original meaning of being the celebration of Christ's *unconditional love* is distorted altogether. The Lord's Supper has then become a means to narrowly define the church's identity without being concerned for its relevance. The α.)νολ./πιη-meal, where believers celebrate their freedom in Christ and where people seek spiritual resources to exercise responsible freedom in the world, has become the secure haven for Christians who anxiously try to keep for themselves what God has freely shared with them. The Lord's Supper would then no longer be the *Lord's Supper*, because it would no longer manifest the deepest mystery of the Christian vision of reality, that in giving oneself in service one will receive the enriching grace of God (2 Cor 4:7-12; Mark 8:35).

By eating the bread and drinking the cup worthily the church is proclaiming “the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). *Unworthy* participation in the Lord's Supper manifests disobedience to Christ: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an *unworthy manner* (α.)νολ./ωφ) will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord” (v. 27). What does “*unworthy*” mean in this context? It can only refer to the individualism and the selfishness that destroys community. Paul is reminding the Christians in Corinth that it is possible to participate in the Lord's Supper in a manner that is *inappropriate* to the occasion. The reference point for “unworthy” is not one's private morality, or the liturgical way in which the sacrament is administered. The reference point is given with vv. 17-22 and vv. 33f. In Corinth it was simply unfitting to the occasion, to celebrate the *Lord's Supper*, and then by-pass the concerns of the late-comers. Had not Jesus, the host at the Lord's Supper, shared his life with those who were morally and religiously suspect? Not private morality but concrete social concern is at the heart of the matter.¹¹ When Paul writes those strong exhortations in 11:27-30 and even intimates that weakness, illness and death are the result of an unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper, then this signifies that one cannot and one must not separate spiritual welfare from the bodily, social or historical dimension of human life. “Discerning the body” (v.29) refers therefore to the failure to recognise the nature of the community meal as the *Lord's Supper*.

Paul's plea becomes very personal: “*examine yourself*” (v. 28, compare v. 31)! Self examination is an implicit aspect of faith in Christ. By examining, evaluating and judging oneself in light of the

¹¹Ernst Käsemann comments: “Es gibt nur ein einziges todeswürdiges Verbrechen beim Herrenmahl, nämlich verleugnete Bruderschaft.” (Translation: “Relating to the Lord's Supper there can only be one crime worthy of death and that is denied brotherhood [fellowship].”) (“Gäste des Gekreuzigten,” in: *Kirchliche Konflikte*. Band 1 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982, pp. 128-140], p. 135).

passion story of Jesus, the believer and the believing community recognise their humanness and their selfishness and they realise that the way of the cross is a process of continual repentance and renewal. It belongs to the theological function of the church to constantly evaluate its faith and practice in light of the story of Jesus. This text has a cutting edge that challenges the church today. While most churches carefully define a theology of the Lord's Supper and use the Lord's Supper as the most intense celebration of their identity, indeed, while there are still major churches who restrict participation in the Lord's Supper to its own members or to baptised believers, we must insist that the Lord's Supper anticipates the final victory of the crucified Christ. It is at this table where it must come to expression that Christ died for all people, that his life manifested a marked partiality for the poor and oppressed, and that his salvation has ecological and cosmic consequences. Here the celebration of unconditional love is the major content. Is it possible to celebrate the *Lord's Supper* without remembering that 35,000 children under the age of five die each day because they don't have enough to eat and to drink, while the budgets in our countries use billions for unnecessary military equipment? Can we celebrate the *Lord's Supper* without remembering those who are tortured by government agencies because they have followed the voice of their conscience and engaged themselves for the furtherance of justice? Is it possible to celebrate the *Lord's Supper*, eat nature's bread and drink nature's wine, and not problematise our exploitative attitude to nature? Identity is important; but its purpose is to retrieve those resources that help the church to be relevant in a broken world.

“You are the body of Christ” (12:27)

What Paul has intimated with the Lord's Supper tradition, he makes explicit when he interprets the church's identity as: “You are the body of Christ”! What does that mean? Can this concept help us to understand the identity of the church, and its mission and responsibility in the world?

The idea of using the concept “body” (σωμα) for a group of people, for the state, or even for humanity and for the world, was well known in the ancient world.¹² In addition, the Jewish tradition embraced the idea of a “corporate personality” whereby a whole people could be designated by one name, as it was the case with Adam = humanity or Jacob = Israel.¹³

With the concept “body of Christ” Paul inter-weaves several realities: the church, the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ, and even the world. In Romans 7:4 “body of Christ” refers to the *crucified body* of Christ through whom Christians have died to the law. In our text “body” refers to the *Lord's Supper*: “This is my body” (1 Cor 11:24; 10:16); and from there it flows over to designate the *church*: “we who are many are one body” (1 Cor 10:16f., compare 1 Cor 12:12-30; Rom 12:3-8). An early Christian hymn even celebrates Christ as the head of the “body”, the *world* or the *cosmos* (Col 1:18; “the church” is a later interpretation).

This means that the church as the “*body of Christ*” is the community of faith in and through which the crucified and risen Christ encounters the world as saviour, reconciler and liberator. In the church as his “body”, Christ's salvation and liberation is believed, experienced and lived. And through the life and ministry of the church Christ shares his life with the world. Just as human beings with their bodies are woven into the world, into society, into history and into nature, so Christ through his body, the church, wants to communicate the riches of his salvation to society, to history and to nature.

It is important to see that the community of believers is indissolubly inter-related with Christ. After having said that “the body is one and has many members”, and that “all the members of the body, though many, are one body,” one would expect the continuation: “so it is with the church.” Instead, Paul continues: “so it is with Christ” (12:12). The church is part of the reality of Christ, although

¹²The religio-historical parallels are gathered by Eduard Schweizer, “sw=ma ktl.,” *TDNT* VII (1971 [1964]), pp. 1036-1039, 1054f.

¹³ Compare *ibid.*, pp. 1069f.

Christ must not be reduced to the church, and the lordship of Christ over the church must be safeguarded. In the post-Pauline literature it is therefore explicitly stated that Christ is “the head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18). Christ cannot be understood apart from the church, just as the church is nothing without Christ. The church is the concrete historical manifestation through which Christ ministers to his world. The church is grounded in the resurrection of the crucified Christ and this foundational event must determine the nature of the church.

As the “body of Christ” the Christian community endeavours to make room for him to minister to the world. The church is not autonomous. The church cannot decide what it wants to do or does not want to do. As the “body of Christ” the church can only make itself available to him, listen to him, follow him. The identity of the church is in him and in him alone. And since he is the saviour of the world, therefore the church’s identity consists in its being relevant to the world.

This interpretation of the church's identity assigns a *critical* function to the church. Just as Jesus in his earthly life took his stand with the underprivileged and engaged his life for their dignity, liberation and salvation, so as the risen Lord, through his “body”, the church, he wants to continue the process of salvation and liberation.

“*You are the body of Christ!*” With this the concrete existence of the church is being interpreted. We are reminded of a similar saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “*You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world*” (Matt 5:13-16). These are not moral exhortations that the church *should be* the body of Christ, the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The church is also not pointed towards a future when they *will be* the body of Christ. No, the sayings are addressed to concrete people interpreting their situation: “*You are the body of Christ!*” Their identity is in him. All the church needs to do – but that is what they can and must do – is to listen to him, and then put into practice what they have heard. No more, and no less.

What *consequences* does it have when the church is understood as the “body of Christ”? It means, *firstly*, that the church as “his body” must have an *ecumenical longing*. In him all Christians and all Christian churches are one: “*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread*” (1 Cor 10:17).

It means, *secondly*, that with its life and ministry the church and its members witness to Christ as saviour and liberator in the world. In and through the church the risen and exalted Christ wants to exercise his lordship over the world. Paul takes up that theme and provides a theological interpretation for Christian existence: “*we are fellow workers for God*” (1 Cor 3:9). The same is meant when at the end of the gospel of Matthew the risen Christ exercises his lordship through the ministry of the church. All authority in heaven and on earth is his, but in the exercise of that authority he does not by-pass the church; rather, he invites the church to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Matt 28:18-20). In and through the service of the church the lordship of Christ becomes real and concrete in the world.

Thirdly, since we are his body, and since he is the Lord of life, therefore Christian life can be a festival without end. Faith cannot be separated from morality, but it needs to be carefully distinguished from it, and in this distinction the priority of faith needs to be guarded. The church's identity is not found in performance or achievement. Ultimately, it can only be found in being “his body”. Celebrating the presence of Christ and anticipating his ultimate victory over the forces of selfishness, estrangement and death – that is the privilege of the church. Nevertheless, because it is his presence that the church celebrates, therefore all people and all of creation must be included in that celebration. What this means for the concrete life of the church is spelled out in 1 Corinthians 12.

The Spirit empowers the Church for its Mission

(1 Cor 12:1-31)

How can the church actually be what it is, the “body of Christ”? Answer: by echoing in its “order” and in its “ministry” the being of Christ as the self-revelation of God. To do that, God himself will provide the spiritual resources! Paul therefore grounds the gifts of the Spirit in the trinitarian nature of God (vv. 4-6), and he specifies this with reference to Jesus as Lord (vv. 1-3). The spiritual gifts enable the church to create and shape analogies to the God who has revealed himself in the Crucified Christ.

"Jesus is Lord" (12:1-3). Addressing the controversial issue of “spiritual gifts” (πνευματικά)¹⁴ Paul reminds the church that religious experiences and demonstrations as such are not unusual. In all religious traditions people can experience conversion, illumination and ecstasy. An unknown and undefined power (good or evil) can take hold of people and heal or destroy them. Such spiritual experiences can include activities of healing, glossolalia, singing, dancing, jumping and ecstatic movement.¹⁵ The apostle therefore reminds the Christians in Corinth that already before their conversion to Christ they “were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak” (v. 2).

Paul then correlates “*Jesus*” and “*holy*”. When we recall how the church in Corinth had treated those who came late to the Lord's Supper, we may begin to understand why “*Jesus*” had become a problem to them. Jesus and traditional holiness do not mix. The poverty of Jesus, his communion with publicans and sinners, and his commitment to the marginal people does not square with an understanding of holiness that has no room for poverty, suffering and ambiguity. The Christians in Corinth probably preferred to speak of the risen “*Christ*” who, in their opinion, had left the poverty of his life and death behind. Paul intimates that they considered themselves to have already arrived. In a moving and somewhat ironic contrast Paul spells out what it means when “*Jesus*” becomes real in the power of the Spirit:

... I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals.
We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ.
We are weak, but you are strong.
You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.
To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands.
When reviled, we bless;
when persecuted, we endure;
when slandered, we speak kindly.
We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.
(1 Cor 4:9-13)

It is this vision that Paul wants to introduce when talking about the gifts of the Spirit. The *Holy Spirit* is at work when the Lordship of *Jesus* is made manifest. This means concretely that God and neighbour, and especially the neighbour in need, must be thought of together. One cannot worship God and by-pass those whom God loves. Not religiosity, but the concrete manifestations of love are the marks of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁴ Compare footn. 1.

¹⁵ Compare: Carl A. Keller, “Enthusiastisches Transzendenzerleben in den nichtchristlichen Religionen,” in: Claus Heitmann / Heribert Mühlen, eds., *Erfahrung und Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, München: Kösel, 1974), pp. 49-63; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit. A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), pp. 302-307; Johannes Behm, “glw=ssa ktl.,” *TDNT I* (1964 [1933], pp. 719-726), pp. 722-724.

The church must accept a perpetual challenge. On the one hand, it must earnestly seek the gifts of the Spirit (14:1). On the other hand, the church must distinguish between the human spirit, which constantly tends to use God and religion to compensate human needs and validate human interests, and the Holy Spirit who creates analogies to the crucified Christ. Thus Paul makes clear at the outset: not spiritual experiences and demonstrations as such, but the commitment to Jesus as Lord forms the basis and content of Christian faith.

The trinitarian God empowers his church (12:4-11). Having specified the theological criterion for locating and measuring the work of the Holy Spirit (v. 3), Paul now lays the *theological foundation* for communicating his conviction that Christian faith calls for a *variety* of spiritual gifts, that in such a variety the *colourful* grace comes to expression, and that the content and manifestation of the gifts must cohere with God's *self-revelation* in the crucified Christ.

The controversy about which he was informed and to which he needed to respond had to do with the nature of “spiritual gifts” (v. 1: πνευματικά; v. 4: ξαρι/σμοτα), and their function within the community of faith. From the implicit criticism that Paul utters in 1 Corinthians 12-14 (compare especially 13:1-3; 14:1f., 13-16, 37), it is fairly clear that the massive and demonstrative gifts (especially *glossolalia*, speaking in tongues) were greatly valued by some in the church. At the same time these gifts became cause for controversy. Most likely, those who had and practised the gift of tongues claimed and enjoyed a special honour in the church. It is even possible that some Christian leaders claimed that *glossolalia* constitutes the empirical verification for being a Christian, and that therefore it should be sought and practised by *all* Christians.¹⁶ This implied, of course, that those who did not have that gift experienced soteriological uncertainty, which in turn caused confusion and division in the church. How does Paul interpret the situation in Corinth?

First of all, he recognises a *variety* of spiritual gifts and locates their theological foundation in the *trinitarian* nature of the one God: “there are *varieties* of gifts, but the *same Spirit* ... *varieties* of service, but the *same Lord* ... *varieties* of activities, but it is the *same God* who activates all of them in *every one*” (vv. 4-6). The oneness of God, his Godhood, does not exclude, but it includes variety. The “varieties” of gifts are an expression of the “same” God. The nature and being of God does not validate uniformity and elitism, but it seeks analogies that represent God as the one who has revealed himself in the crucified Christ through the power of the Spirit. In post New Testament days this conviction led to the *doctrine* of the trinity which to the present day has attempted to formulate the specifically Christian understanding of God.

Paul emphasises, *secondly*, that the trinitarian nature of God can only be reflected in “*varieties* of gifts (ξαρι/σμοτα)”, “*varieties* of service (διακονια)” and “*varieties* of activities (ενεργη/μοτα)”. God has given many gifts to his church in order to communicate his colourful grace to a pluralistic world.¹⁷ As a rainbow with its many colours reflects the beauty and depth of the sun, so the community of faith with its many gifts reflects the colourful grace of God. Not the individual Christian but the Christian community reflects the trinitarian being of God. The questions of vv. 29f. – “Are *all* apostles, are *all* prophets, are *all* teachers, are *all* ...” – all imply the answer “No!”. It is not important that every Christian has all the gifts, what is important is that the gifts are grounded in God and that they reflect his nature.

¹⁶ Paul uses the word “ba/rbaroj” (“foreigner”) to describe those who hear but do not understand, or those who speak but are not understood (14:11). Generally Paul uses this word to describe non-Greek people to whom the gospel must also be preached (Rom 1:14). But the word had a long history, and it was well known. It can also have the connotation of “wild,” “crude,” “fierce,” “uncivilised,” (Hans Windisch, “ba/rbaroj,” in: *TDNT* I [1964 [1933], pp. 546-553], p. 548). It could, therefore, have been used in a derogatory way by those who had the gifts of tongues and were looking down upon those who did not.

¹⁷ One must therefore not absolutise the list given here, and then think that exactly these gifts must be found in every local church throughout the ages. Paul's lists vary according to the situation: compare 1 Cor 12:7-11, 28-30; 14:26; 7:7; Rom 12:6-8.

One wonders why Paul changes the terminology from πνευματικῶν (“spiritual gifts” - v. 1) to χάρισμα¹⁸ (“gifts of grace - v. 4), and then places alongside of the χάρισμα, and on the same level, the δεικνύουσι (“services”) and the (ἐνεργήματα (“activities”). This modification results from his christological interpretation of the ministry of the Spirit. If the spiritual gifts are a manifestation of God's revelation in *Jesus* (v. 3), then they must manifest a certain pull “toward the below”. With the use of χάρισμα, rather than πνευματικῶν Paul emphasises that the gifts of the Spirit are grounded in the χάρις (“grace”) of God. And the grace of God aims at concreteness in service (δεικνύουσι) and in the activities of the Spirit (ἐνεργήματα).¹⁹ The emphasis is no longer on the individual and his or her spirituality. What Paul emphasises is that Christ through his “body” ministers to the world, and for that ministry God equips the community of faith.

Thirdly, this emphasis on “service” and the implied partiality for the late-comers surfaces also in Paul's passionate desire to *communicate* the gospel, and to communicate it *holistically*. Words of wisdom and knowledge as well as prophesying, together with a holistic view of salvation (faith *and* healing!) feature therefore before the more individualistic and demonstrative manifestations of the Spirit.

Fourthly, if the church realises that spiritual gifts are *gifts*, then there can be no reason for any conceit or elitism. They are more than talents and they are not acquired through personal discipline. They are the gift of God to enable the church to reflect his being in the world.

The fact that the spiritual gifts are grounded in the colourful grace as it is revealed in the resurrection of the crucified Christ leads to *a transfiguration in their order of importance*. While in Corinth the massive demonstrations of the Spirit received great honour and featured on the top of the list, Paul relativises their importance by reversing the order of importance (vv. 8-10, 28-30). *Glossolalia* is now mentioned last. Paul does this for christological reasons. Just as God raised the *crucified* Jesus from the dead and thereby demonstrated his power in weakness, so the church recognises Jesus as Lord by distinguishing between the power of weakness and the weakness of power. The church and its functions are focused on Christ – and he came to serve!²⁰

Paul insists, *fifthly*, that the Spirit of God is given to *every Christian*: “... the same God ... activates all of them in *every one*. To *each* is given the manifestation of the Spirit ...” (v. 6f.); “... the same Spirit ... allots to *each one individually* just as the Spirit chooses” (v. 11). While some Corinthian Christians may have distinguished between the πνευματικῶν (“spiritual people”) and the ordinary Christians, Paul insists that through faith and baptism every Christian has been endowed with the Holy Spirit (v. 12f.). The Spirit is given with the event and the process of faith. This does not mean, however, that Christian faith can be measured, or that every Christian must have all the gifts. Faith is like a grain of mustard seed (the smallest seed one could think of in those days!), but it stands under the promise of growth and greatness (Mark 4:30-32; compare 1 Cor 3:5-9). Important is not to compare gifts or to seek the gifts that one may not have; important is to

¹⁸ Again we note Paul's tendency not to use religious concepts. *Xa/risma* is taken from every day use and given here theological status (Ulrich Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt. Die paulinische Charismenlehre auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen Gemeindefunktionen* [Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1972], pp. 128-142, 189f., 238).

¹⁹ Again, it is important to remember that Paul intentionally avoids language that could suggest that the Christian church simply adopts traditional religious offices. Paul's language here and at other places makes clear that *all* Christians have received the Spirit and the Spirit leads and enables them to *service*; compare: Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament*. SBT 32 (London: SCM, 1961 [1959]), chapter 21; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958 [1955]), pp. 692-695. “Service is not just *one* of the determinations of the being of the community. It is its being in *all* its functions.” (*Ibid.*, p. 692 [the emphases are in the original German text]).

²⁰ Compare Mark 10:45 (par. Matt 20:28) and the even older version in Luke 22:27. This christological indicative calls for a corresponding practice in the church: “He who is greatest among you shall be your servant.” (Matt 23:11; compare Mark 10:43f. par. Matt 20:26f., Luke 22:26; Mark 9:35).

recognise one's own gifts and then submit them to the Lordship of Christ and contribute them to the up-building of the community. There is therefore no reason, for instance, to think that all Christians must have or should seek the gift of tongues. If there is any hierarchy at all, it must reflect God's self correspondence to the poverty of Jesus.²¹

We note *finally* that God's nature of love is reflected in the fact that the gifts are primarily there “*for the common good*” (v. 7). Paul never speaks of *self*-edification as such. Only if the spiritual gifts are used “for the common good” will they then also bring authentic self-edification. Self-discovery is a by-product of living in openness toward God and neighbour. The Spirit is bound to Jesus and therefore calls to service as the secret key to life (v. 5). Paul does not question the importance of personal edification and renewal. But in light of his christology he doubts that it can be an end in itself. The individual is part of the community, and the community is the “body of Christ”. Only by actively participating in the community and by helping the community to be the “body of Christ” will Christians be nurtured in their own spiritual life.

Paul holds several things together. Since it is God who gives the gifts, therefore they must reflect his nature. While the *gift* character excludes *elitism*, the *trinitarian* nature of God excludes *individualism*. Any order of importance among the gifts of the Spirit must reflect the fact that God has revealed himself in the *crucified* Christ.

The church as the “body of Christ” (12:12-31). Paul argues that Christ is present in the world and ministers to the world through his “body”, the church. And since it is *his* body, therefore “*all*” members are important (v. 13). This *christological orientation* leads to the assertion that in the church the consequences of sin and selfishness are relativised; in the church the social barriers that are operative in the world give way to a new humanity in which the equal dignity of Jews, Greeks, Slaves and Free are affirmed (v. 13). In the church there is variety within a unity of vision and purpose. This is now being illustrated with a picture: the human body.

The human body consists of many parts (v. 14). *Each one* of these parts (eye, ear, hand, foot) is *necessary* to make up the body (v. 18). Just as the body consist of the togetherness of all its parts, with the same emphasis it must be said that the parts are nothing, they cannot exist, apart from the body.

This leads the apostle to a *first* conclusion. There must have been people in the church in Corinth who thought that they didn't have much to offer. It may have included those who did not have the gift of tongues. This led to *inferiority feelings* and the subsequent desire to be someone else and to crave other gifts. But why should the hand try to be a foot? Both are needed! Why should the ear try to become an eye? The body can only be what it is when both are there (vv. 15-20). Christians should not lament what they don't have; they should recognise what they do have, and then place it under the Lordship of Christ. Indeed the failure to do so would imply a concrete denial of the fact that “*God* arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as *he* chose” (v. 18).

Paul intensifies his application of the picture with a *second* observation. It is not only foolish to think that one member of the body, for instance the eye, could exist and make up the body without the other members (hand, foot, ear), but the church leaders may have to learn that there is a certain leaning, a certain *partiality* implied in faith: “*God* has so arranged the body, giving the *greater* honour to the *inferior* member” (v. 24; compare 1:26f.). Again we notice how the christological criterion calls for concrete consequences in the interpretation of the life of the church. The transfiguration of reality through the crucified Christ shapes the reality in the church. Not the survival of the fittest, but authentic witness is the criterion.

²¹ It seems strange that Paul lists “faith” among the gifts. In light of Paul's other writings this cannot mean that faith is a gift that only some Christians have. Paul here is not thinking of justifying faith which makes a Christian a Christian, but he is thinking of a miracle working faith as in 1 Corinthians 13:2.

Then, *thirdly*, Paul must have thought of those whose spiritual competency is acknowledged and who have *leadership* functions in the church. All institutional structures have a tendency to absolutise themselves and thereby radiate the message: “I have no need of you” (v. 21). Institutional leadership has an inherent leaning to be conservative, to defend tradition and to be sceptical against all new ideas. In such a situation Paul reminds the church that where Christ is Lord there the so-called weaker members are not only “indispensable” (v. 22), but they are given the “greater honour” (v. 24). Under the leadership of the crucified Christ hierarchical thinking is not only relativised, it is transfigured. Not a social Darwinism that lets the strong determine the life of the church, but a vision of the cross has captured the hearts of the community of believers: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (v. 26).

Fourthly, Paul must have realised that a fundamental problem in Corinth was a mounting *individualism*. It is true, of course, that faith comes to every individual, but faith in Christ does not individualise people. It integrates the believer into a *community* of the friends of Jesus. Paul therefore mentions the community before he refers to the individual: “... you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it” (v. 27), and right at the outset he insists that baptism is primarily not a sacrament for individual edification, but the believer is baptised into the body of Christ (v. 13). Christians need each other. Only in their togetherness are they the body of Christ. It is inherent to Christian faith to long for a communal manifestation. Apart from the community believers are lacking a necessary dimension of their faith. All individualistic tendencies within the church must therefore be resisted. In analogy to the human body, the body and its members cannot be separated, but the body has a procedural priority, although every pain and every joy of any part of the body is felt by all its members.

This, *finally*, implies that the community of faith that acknowledges Jesus as Lord must seek a way *beyond selfish individualism and communal chaos*. Every reality seeks its corresponding structures. Such structures are legitimate if they correspond to their respective foundation. The structures that correspond to the communal dimension of the Christian faith must reveal that the crucified Christ is Lord of the church. The Lordship of Christ implies the priesthood of all believers. Every one is needed. And yet under the Lordship of Christ there are different functions: apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators and speakers in various kinds of tongues (v. 28). Although Paul suggests a certain order (“first ... second ... third ... then ...then ...” v. 28), this order must not be understood in hierarchical terms.²² It is an order which in each respective situation (in this case in Corinth) must give expression to the trinitarian nature of that God who has revealed himself in the crucified Christ. It is interesting that neither deacons (*δυνακονοι*) nor bishops (*επισκοποι*), nor elders (*πρεσβυτεροι*) are mentioned in this list. Their functions may not have existed in Corinth, or at that stage they were included under “helpers” and “administrators”. Apostles, prophets and teachers are given special status because their function is to *communicate* the riches of Christ into the church. They are servants of the word.²³ Nevertheless, Paul also insists that “helping” and “administration” are *ξαρυσματα* . The speaking in tongues is mentioned last.

Before Paul continues to interpret the concrete situation of the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul points to “a more excellent way” which provides the foundation for all *ξαρυσματα* and by which therefore all *ξαρυσματα* must be measured.

²² The enumeration “first ... second .. third ...” has led many to argue for rank and hierarchy within ecclesiastical structures. However the context in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 as well as a comparison with other listings of “services” (12:8-11; Rom 12:6-8) make quite clear that for Paul all *xari/smata* gain their importance in their relation to manifesting the crucified Christ. The christological orientation leads to a transfiguration of all hierarchical thinking as 1 Cor 12:14-26 shows. For Paul the differences between the *xari/smata* are functional, not ontological. Indeed, in each situation the local church needs to recognise different *xari/smata* depending on the challenge of the situation. Eduard Schweizer summarises: “speaking generally, the Church emphasized its different nature with surprising freedom by creating new ministries and transforming old ones.” (*Church Order in the New Testament*. SBT 32 [1961 [1959]], p. 203 [§ 24i]).

²³ For details see H. Greeven, “Propheten, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus. Zur Frage der 'Ämter' im Urchristentum,” *ZNW* 44 (1952/53), pp. 1-43; the respective articles in *TDNT* are also helpful.

The Content and Measure of Faith: Love (1 Cor 13:1-13)

Why does Paul, before in 1 Corinthians 14 he continues his theological dispute with the Christians in Corinth, introduce this magnificent “ode to love”?²⁴ What is the purpose of the “hymn to love” in its present context? “God *is* love”! That is explicitly stated in 1 John 4, but it is the general conviction of early Christianity, and indeed, it is also the underlying message of the Old Testament. God makes a covenant with his people and with his creation, and in doing so, he binds his very being to the future of his covenant partners. Paul tunes into that tradition and speaks of the “new covenant” which God has established in Jesus Christ (“this cup is the new covenant in my blood,” 11:25). God has revealed his being as love in the crucified Christ (1 Cor 1-2), whom God raised from the dead (1 Cor 15). Love therefore is that divine reality which marks “life in Christ”, and it must therefore be the underlying reality for determining the life of the “body of Christ”, the church.²⁵ The incarnational principle, however, the fact that God has revealed his love in the story of that particular person, Jesus, demonstrates that love aims at concreteness. The church is the church in that it creates analogies to the God who in Christ has revealed himself as the God who is love.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul therefore names “love” (ἀγαπή) as the divine reality in which the ξαρινόμενα are grounded and on which they remain dependent. “Love” is the soil on which the ξαρινόμενα continue to grow and from which they derive their content. “Love” is the very essence of the being of God. A church without love is a church without God. And a church that does not derive the content of love from God's revelation in the crucified Christ refuses to think God on God's terms and has thereby domesticated God into an idol. Without love faith degenerates into sterile morality or dogmatic legalism. Love therefore is the measure for every manifestation of the Spirit of God.

Discipleship (13:1-3). Vv. 1-3 list outstanding spiritual gifts that would command attention in any church:

- Speaking in tongues as the experiential manifestation of the presence of the Spirit. Here speaking in tongues is mentioned first because it is obviously the focus of attention and controversy in Corinth.
- Preaching as the ability to interpret and speak the word of God into the respective situation.
- Theology as the serious attempt to understand the mystery and content of faith in Christ.
- The power of faith which manifests itself in healing, exorcisms and the performance of other miracles.
- Yes, the very willingness to make a vow of poverty and become a martyr for Christ.

Paul mentions the very best of the ξαρινόμενα. And then he makes the sobering observation that even the best gifts can fail to reach their divine τέλος (“purpose”). Even the most outstanding gifts can be misused if it is forgotten that they are *gifts*, and that they cannot be and must not be separated from their *divine giver*.

Although Jesus Christ is not explicitly mentioned in this chapter it is clear that for Paul (ἀγαπή) and Christ are interrelated (Rom 5:5, 8, 8:35-39, 15:30; Gal 5:6). Indeed, chapter 13 must be read as an explication and intensification of the great christological statements in chapters 1, 2 and 15. “Love” therefore is not an ethical virtue or a moral quality. It is the new reality that concretely and effectively relates the resurrection of the crucified Christ to the believer and to the believing community. Where Jesus is confessed as Lord (12:3) there love determines the faith and practice

²⁴ This does not mean that 1 Corinthians 13 was in fact a hymn. It is clearly a poetic piece of teaching.

²⁵ “Love” describes the content for “God” and “Christ”, and as such it is the foundation for Paul's ethical exhortation: Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; Phil 2:1-11; Col 3:14.

of the community. The *ξαρυσματα* must therefore demonstrate who the author and the content of faith is.

A person who speaks in tongues is not yet a disciple of Jesus. An orator is not yet a preacher. An intellectual Christian is not yet a theologian. A hypnotist is not yet a faith healer. A hermit is not yet a saint. A revolutionary is not necessarily a martyr. The question is whether the saving and liberating passion of the crucified and risen Christ is disclosed – and the measure for that is *(α)γαπη*. Paul thinks christologically. The *ξαρυσματα* must bring to visible expression that God has revealed himself in the crucified Christ, and that as such he remains present in the power of the Spirit. Not knowledge or spiritual demonstrations or moral achievements are at the basis of Christian existence, but love.

The way of love (13:4-7). The vv. 4-7 read like a commentary to the word of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark: “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” (8:35). Paul intimates what will happen when Christ becomes real in his church, when faith is authentically anchored in Jesus, when the church makes room for God, and when the crucified Christ is recognised as the host at the Lord’s Supper and as the Lord of the Christian community.

The church would learn, *firstly*, to walk the way of love with *patience* (v. 4). The way of love is difficult to discern, and it is even more difficult to walk. Often, there is no recognition, no success and no praise. The church remembered, however, that he, the crucified and risen Christ, incarnated the way of love. His story added a new dimension to the portrayal of the suffering servant in the Old Testament: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (Isa 53:7); “...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.” (Isa 53:2b-3). Against all the apparent evidence in the world, the promise of faith includes the conviction that the way of Jesus is more worthwhile than the way of Caiaphas and Pilate. God raised the crucified Jesus from the dead and thereby he effectively demonstrated that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20). Not the triumphant Christianity of the Corinthian enthusiasts, but the patient way of love creates an analogy to the God whose own patience has suspended his wrath and judgement.²⁶

Secondly, the way of love creates *community*. Referring to “love”, Paul protests in the name of Christ against the selfishness and individualism in Corinth. “Love is *not* jealous or boastful; it is *not* arrogant or rude. Love does *not* insist on its own way; it is *not* irritable or resentful; it does *not* rejoice at wrong” (vv. 5f.). These many “*not*” point to the one important fact that love breaks the isolation and self-interest of the individual and creates community. The individual who is determined by love seeks his or her identity in the “other”. In relationship to the “other”, persons become who they are.

Thirdly, the way of love includes the commitment to *truth and justice*: “Love does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices in the truth” (v.6). This distinguishes the community of faith from a organisation with religious interests. Faith is not less, but it is much more than religious feeling and private piety. Love gives to faith a concrete and revolutionary dimension. Love calls for action. It is dynamic. It is movement (15 verbs are used in these 4 verses!). There are two definitions of the nature of God in the New Testament. One is “God is Spirit” (John 4), expressing the dynamic nature of God (*ruach/pneuma* originally mean “wind” or “storm”). The other is “God is Love” (1 John 4), meaning that God's dynamic nature has a *telos* (“purpose”), and this *telos* is the salvation and liberation of his creation. Love therefore unmask injustice, and it rejoices in the truth by providing the vision and the resources for establishing justice. In a world where the forces of death

²⁶ Compare: J. Horst, *makroqumi/a ktl.*, *TDNT IV* (1967 [1942], pp. 374-387), pp. 376-379, 382f.

and of hatred create structures of injustice, the reality of life and of love must unmask the structures of death and create structures of life.

Fourthly, such a way is long and steep! But Christ has gone it before us. The church is invited to follow him in obedient discipleship. Since he, the crucified and risen Christ, is the author and content of faith, therefore the believer can bear the consequences of discipleship (v. 7: four times “*all*”).

Love therefore creates analogies to the being of God in our life, in our church and in our world. Love does not seek its own, but in bringing life to the “other” it finds itself. Love gives itself away and thereby becomes what it is. Love is not romantic. It is realistic. It rejoices in truth and justice; it resists injustice and death. In the knowledge that God has raised the crucified Jesus from the dead love will never cease! It carries within itself the promise of ultimate triumph.

The triumph of love (13:8-13). The ξαριν/σμοατα, even the best of them, and the church “offices”, even the most prominent ones, belong to the pen-ultimate.²⁷ Indeed, according to Paul, even the risen Christ, when he has completed his work of salvation and liberation, will submit himself to the father, so that “God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The eschatological visionary in the Book of Revelation saw no temple (church) in the city of God, “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev 21:22). Although there are slight variations in content, the central message of these texts is clear. When all that is pen-ultimate will be dissolved into the ultimate, when God’s reign will be fully established (compare Zech 14:9), when the “economic” trinity finds its fulfilment in the “immanent” trinity, when God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven, then love will determine all of reality - because God is love! Vv. 8-13 echo therefore that love relativises everything else. Faith in Christ anticipates the ultimate victory of love. What is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (1:23), what the Christians in Corinth with all their piety and religiosity have not yet understood, is, that love is the centre and content of ultimate reality. In the present this is an inherent part of the promise of *faith* in the resurrection of the crucified Christ. This faith becomes active in *love* (Gal 5:6), and as such it makes visible the *hope* that anticipates the triumph of the crucified Christ and with it the triumph of love. Faith, hope and love are the down-payment of the Spirit, that what is promised now, will be fulfilled then. Neither intellectual perception, nor moral perfection, nor religious zeal can replace the reality of love. Indeed without love the Christian life would be emptied into sterile morality, religious legalism and intellectual fundamentalism. We must fear nothing so much as a church without love!

In this section, then, Paul counters the individualism and selfishness of the Christians in Corinth with three emphases: he *firstly* reminds them that the Christian life is a process (compare 12:31 [“way”], and the many verbs used in 1 Cor 13) towards the future triumph of the crucified Christ. Against all the evidence in the present (individualism, lovelessness, consumerism, lack of concern for the late-comers) ultimate reality is marked by the resurrection of the crucified Christ. *Secondly*, since it is the crucified Christ who determines the content of faith in God, therefore love must determine the life of the Christian and the life of the Christian community. Against the individualism and the selfishness of the Christians in Corinth Paul interprets God’s revelation in Christ to mean that a)ga/ph does not seek fulfilment in self-centredness but in a creative participation in the community and an active concern for the late-comers. *Thirdly*, Christians accept the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” and try not to relativise that tension by withdrawal from responsibility or by an escape into an individualistic religiosity.

Love as it is manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the centre of all reality. What this means in the concrete life of the church is further spelled out in 1 Corinthians 14.

²⁷ The distinction between the ultimate and the pen-ultimate I have adopted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM, 1955 [1949]), pp. 79-100.

The Identity and Relevance of the Church (1 Cor 14:1-40)

Love has an inherent longing for concrete manifestations. The incarnation concretely manifests that “God is love”. This leaning of God toward the particular and the concrete is the reason why Paul now leads us back to discuss the consequences of what he has said about love for the church in Corinth. He thereby continues the discussion of chapters 11 and 12, which he had interrupted to remind the church of (α)γαπη as the christological reality that determines their being. We recognise a discernible logic in Paul's reasoning. In *chapter 11* he portrayed the crucified Christ as host of the Lord's Supper and as the Lord of the church. On that christological basis he asserted that the church cannot worship Christ apart from showing concrete solidarity with the late-comers. In *chapter 12* he inter-relates christology with ecclesiology by naming the church as the “body of Christ”. In the church, concretely in the way the members relate to each other, how they evaluate the πνευματικα, and how they appreciate each other's spiritual gifts, it must become visibly evident who the Lord of the church is. What was implied in chapters 11 and 12, became explicit in *chapter 13*. The crucified Christ is the revelation of the being of God as love. Love therefore must determine the community of faith. In its life, in its worship, in its structure and in its mission, it must become evident that the reality of the church is determined by the unconditional love of God as it has come to expression in the crucified and risen Christ. What this means in a concrete church situation is now further discussed in *chapter 14*.

The overture (v. 1). V. 1 summarises the main emphases of the chapter. Christological reflections have led Paul to the conclusion that *love* must be the determining reality for everything that the Christian and the Christian community does: “Make love your aim ...”! However, love aims at concreteness; it wants to arrive in human existence and shape historical reality.

The reality of love therefore entails the imperative: “... earnestly desire the *spiritual gifts* (πνευματικα).” Paul uses here the word for “spiritual gifts” that was preferred in Corinth, πνευματικα, rather than ξαρισματα. His concern is not to eliminate the “spiritual gifts” or even to reject the concept “πνευματικα”. Paul wants to emphasise that the “spiritual gifts” are understood as *gifts* of the “Spirit” of the God who has revealed his nature in the *crucified* Christ. When that is clear, then Paul has no objection to calling spiritual gifts “πνευματικα”. They are then grounded in the grace of God (ξαριφ - ξαρισματα), and the content of grace is (α)γαπη (“love”).

In difference to the ethos in Corinth, Paul places special emphasis on *prophesying*: “... especially that you may prophesy.” Why does Paul rank “prophesying” above the “speaking in tongues” (v. 5)? Three reasons may be mentioned. *Firstly*, “prophesying” is grounded in revelation (v. 30). It interprets a biblical text or a kerygmatic tradition or a direct revelation into the respective situation. Such objective reference points must be maintained lest revelation is dissolved into human and religious experience. The *second* reason why Paul emphasises “prophesying” is that for him the church's “outward journey” has precedence over the “inward journey”. Both are needed and both are related, of course. Words and deeds become sterile and empty apart from a related spirituality. But it must be clear that Christian spirituality cannot be divorced from seeking to share in word and in deed what has been received. In the church as the “body of Christ” the primary concern must be “speaking” to men and women (v. 2). The *third* reason has to do with transparent communication. Since sharing the riches of the gospel is the aim of the church, therefore “I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (v. 19). Paul therefore explains that it would be of little use to the church if he came to them “speaking in tongues”, because then they could not understand his message (vv. 6-9). His emphasis is rather on “revelation”, “knowledge”, “prophecy”, and “teaching”, because they are less

subjective and make better communication possible.²⁸ What this concretely means in the local church situation can now be summarised.

Preaching and the speaking in tongues. The dominant topic of 1 Corinthians 14 is the spiritual gift of “speaking in tongues” in its relationship to the nature and mission of the church. Glossolalia was valued and practised in Corinth, both in private and in the worship services.²⁹ Paul recognises glossolalia as a “spiritual gift”. He possesses and practices that gift himself (v. 18; compare v. 6; 2 Cor 12:1-3), and he clearly says: “... do not forbid speaking in tongues” (v. 39), indeed “... I want you all to speak in tongues” (v. 5).

But then he establishes a *hierarchy*: “... I want you all to speak in tongues, but *even more* to prophesy. He who prophesies is *greater* than he who speaks in tongues ...” (v. 5, compare vv. 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 18f., 39). Why this hierarchy? Can this hierarchy be grounded in the foundational reality of faith? Did not Paul himself argue that all gifts are grounded equally in the trinitarian nature of God (12:4-6), and that they are all relativised by the reality of love (1 Cor 13)? We saw in our discussion of chapter 12 that there is no hierarchy of spiritual gifts or church offices as such. But since the church's passion must be to create analogies to the resurrection of the crucified Christ, therefore with this *christological criterion* a certain functional order of importance is given. Paul obviously wants to argue, that in contrast to the Corinthian Christians, his christology forces him toward a different evaluation of the πνευματικαί. If the crucified Christ is Lord of the church, and if the church is his “body”, then the major emphasis must not be individual edification, but mission. In the mission of the church the identity of faith must be preserved. Therefore, not demonstrations of supernatural miracles but the communication of the gospel is decisive. It is not enough to hear or to see (13:1-3, 14:7f.); the crucified Christ must be portrayed in what is seen and heard.

This hierarchy that is implied in Paul's Christology, does not only have consequences for the life of the church. It also has consequences for the life and pilgrimage of the *individual Christian*. Already in chapter 3 Paul had lamented their lack of spiritual growth: “... I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1). He recognises the need for a growth process in each Christian. For that reason it is also understandable, indeed unavoidable, that immediately following the life changing experience of conversion special attention is given to the newness of the Christian life. But just as a baby must grow toward maturity, so also the Christian must grow beyond this fascination with the new found integration of life and begin to realise that the redeemer God is also the creator God who has elected the church to make his salvation and liberation real in the world. “Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking ...” (v. 20), but grow towards maturity where not your self-edification but your call to ministry will be the determining reality!

It is clear that “*prophesying*” here does not primarily refer to the prediction of the future. It is more related to what we mean by *preaching*. It speaks to “people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (v. 3, compare v. 31); it “edifies the church” (v. 4), and it therefore contains the element of teaching (v. 31); it preaches the riches of the gospel in such a way that the outsider and the unbeliever experience their need and “that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, ‘God is really among us’” (vv. 24f.). Prophesying therefore means communicating the word of God into the respective situation.³⁰ The result of prophesying is conversion (v. 25) and edification (v. 3; comfort, consolation, instruction). Glossolalia could fulfil

²⁸ Note the many linguistic variations with which Paul emphasises the importance of transparent communication: “understand” (v. 2), “edify” (v. 4), “benefit” (v. 6), “know” (v. 7), “intelligible speech” (v. 9), “meaningful” (v. 10), emphasis on reason (vv. 13-19) and interpretation (v. 27).

²⁹ Compare: Johannes Behm, glw=ssa ktl., *TDNT* I (1964 [1933], pp. 719-726), pp. 722, 724.

³⁰ For a more comprehensive description of “prophets” in the Pauline churches see: H. Greeven, “Propheten, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus. Zur Frage der ‘Ämter’ im Urchristentum,” *ZNW* 44 (1952/53, pp. 1-43), pp. 3-15; Gerhard Friedrich and others, profh/thj ktl., *TDNT* VI (1968 [1959], pp. 781-863), pp. 829, 848-860.

that function only if it is grounded in the Spirit of Christ and if it is interpreted (vv. 5, 9-11, 13; compare 12:10, 29f. where the “interpretation of tongues” is considered to be a *ξολ/ρισμοι*).

Spirit and reason. A fundamental theological problem is: what is the place of reason in theological reflection? Can and does reason *produce* theological truth? Or does it *receive* theological truth and then reflect about it (*fides quaerens intellectum*)?

In vv. 13-19 Paul distinguishes between *πνευ=μοι* (“spirit”) and *νου=φ* (“mind”, “reason”) or *φρε/ναι* (pl. of *φρη/ν*, “thinking”, “understanding”, v. 20). These are not opposites or contrasts. Indeed, for a proper attitude and participation in worship one needs both, praying with the spirit and praying with the mind, singing with the spirit and singing with the mind (v. 15). The important thing is that the Lordship of the crucified Christ comes to expression in the church. The spirit must therefore be measured (12:3!). And this measuring takes place with the mind. This is not only true for the “speaking in tongues”, it is also true for “prophesying” (v. 29). This is the service that theological reflection must provide for the church.

The theological challenge, therefore, is not to eliminate reason, but to recognise its temptation and assign to it its proper place. The temptation of reason is that it receives its information from the “wisdom of this world” and thereby becomes a servant of the “flesh” (1 Cor 1:10–3:9). In the realm of faith, then, reason is the servant of faith and as such it explicates that God raised Jesus from the dead and thereby appointed the crucified Christ as Lord of the church and as the secret centre of reality (1 Cor 1:18, 2:2).

Individualism and community. Paul's main critique concerning *glossolalia* is that it furthers *individualism*, and that therefore it is not conducive to the building of *community*. “Those who speak in a tongue build up *themselves* ...” (v. 4); they “... do not speak to other people, but to God” (v. 2). Individualism overlooks the basic reality and content of faith. Although faith comes to each individual, it does not individualise people, but it creates a community of equals (12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Human beings are by nature not individualists. They are relational beings. Their identity is shaped in and through relationships. The biblical creation story therefore emphasises that God created the human being as male *and* female (Gen 1:27). It was sin, selfishness and greed that individualised people. In the realm of salvation, where Christ is believed and obeyed, there this individualism is relativised and a community of equals is being shaped.

Love as “up-building”. Love (1 Cor 13!) is here understood in terms of *Οι)κοδομη/* (the process of up-building and edification: used 7 times as noun and verb in vv. 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26). Love becomes concrete. And since it is the love that God has revealed in Jesus Christ, therefore it cannot be individualised, but it must serve the “edification” or “up-building” of the community. *Οι)κοδομη/* is an active and dynamic concept. The church is, in that it joins the passion of God for his creation, and thereby the church is in a constant process of change and building.

All the *πνευματικα/* or *ξολ/ρισματα* must be related to and must fuel this process of change. Spiritual gifts must contribute to the growth process of the church. Only via that detour do they also serve personal edification. The believer exists within the reality of love. It is within this relational network that personal enrichment takes place.

The order of peace. Community is not an end in itself. It reflects the communitarian being of God (12:4-6) and as such it is the “body of Christ” through whom Christ wants to encounter the world as saviour and liberator. The community must therefore be structured to fulfil its mission. The worship service must be conducted in such a way that an outsider can understand and participate (vv. 26-33, 40).

It is important to note that Paul does not contrast “confusion” and “order”, but “confusion” and “peace”. “Peace” is a description of God's being; it means salvation (Hebrew: *shalom*). The church must create analogies to God's being, and the word “God” must not be used to justify a

hierarchical status quo. Analogies to God must be an expression of peace and love (compare 2 Cor 13:11). The emphasis is not on a hierarchical order. The emphasis is that the church's structure and liturgy must make manifest that the crucified Christ is Lord.

In this context we also need to mention the strange assertion that “*women should keep silence in the churches*” (v. 34f.). This neither fits into the present context (11:5 implies that women pray and preach in the church!),³¹ nor does it fit into Paul's theology in general (Gal 3:28). Commentators therefore propose that vv. 33b-36 are a later addition to the text.³² Theologically important is *why* this exhortation was made.

If a *later editor* or *later editors*, possibly with reference to 1 Timothy 2:11f., added it, then it could have been for one of two reasons. It could have been a sign of “conservative” tendencies. The revolutionary powers of the gospel with their emphasis on the justification of the sinner and the dawning of a new humanity of equals had receded into the background. Christianity had settled down to become a religion. The church adapted to societal modes, and in a patriarchal culture the tendency was to cement faith into a male dominated church system. This has basically remained intact to the present day. Or it could have been a warning against the individualism of women who, under gnostic influence, had endangered the health and the credibility of the Christian community (compare 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 3:1-9).

If, on the other hand, vv. 33b-36 were written by Paul, then they must be read as a hermeneutical adaptation to the context in Corinth. For Paul, the individualistic tendencies were a result of sin. Individualism cuts people off from the sources of life: relationship to God, to neighbour, to history and to nature. In Christ, God has dealt with the sin of individualism. Therefore faith creates a community of equals. In this community of equals, men and women are equal, and women are active participants in the worship life of the church (11:5!). Nevertheless, the church must be the “body of Christ” in a given context. In each context its aim is to provide room for Christ to encounter his world as liberator and saviour. This entails, in the “outward journey”, respect for the surrounding culture, and for the “inward journey” it means an orderly church life and worship service. The text could then be understood as an adaptation to the context in which procedural priority is given to the “outside”; and the “inside”, the believer, is asked to make certain compromises in their expression of the God given liberty in order that the communication of the gospel may not be hindered.³³

This would mean, however, that it would be in direct contradiction of the message and intention of the text if *today* the churches would use this text to deny equality to women. Today the message of the text is more likely directed against the individualism of star-preachers and church leaders who deny full equality to women and thereby seriously impoverish the quality of the Christian community. Denying equality to women today – as many churches still do! – seriously impedes the credibility of the church and therefore the communication of the gospel.

³¹ Acts 2:17-21 and 21:9 also know of female prophets in the early church.

³² Further arguments for the post-pauline character of vv. 33b-36 are that the reasoning flows easier from v. 33a to v. 37; the language is partly non-pauline (e)pitre/pw and there is a close parallel in the Pastoral Epistles 1 Tim 2:11f. We must also note that the reference to the practice of “all the churches” (v. 33b) is in contradiction to the practice in Corinth (11:5) and Galatia (Gal 3:28), as well as to the many early house churches that were led by women (Rom 16:1 [Phoebe], Col 4:15 [Nympha], Acts 16:14f., 40 [Lydia], Acts 12:12 [Mary the mother of John Mark], and the fact that Priscilla is often mentioned before Aquila may also indicate that she was the leader of the church in their house [Rom 16:3, 5a; Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tim 4:19]).

³³ That is also the thrust of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's argument that Paul encourages the exercise of spiritual gifts by both women and men, but that he makes certain cultural adaptations in order to safeguard the identity of the Christian community over against orgiastic and ecstatic religious movements (*In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* [London: SCM, 1983], pp. 226-233).

The “outsider” and “unbeliever” as criteria. The Christian community distinguishes itself from a religious sect by living in critical openness to the world. It must be open to the world because of the intense longing to communicate the riches of Christ to the world. This openness must be *critical* because the conscience of the believer is bound or has bound itself to Jesus Christ.

Paul therefore assigns a theological place to the ἑτερογενεῖς (“non-members”, “outsiders”, “non-Christians”) and to the ἀπίστοι (“unbelievers”: vv. 16, 22-25). They are not merely guests or strangers or potential converts. They become the measure for the church's identity. Just as in Mark's and in Matthew's Gospel Christ is not only located in the preaching of the word and in the administration of the sacrament, but also in the poor, the stranger, the widow and the child (Mark 9:37; Matt 25:31-48), so Paul emphasises here that faith in Christ longs to share the love that it has received in concrete hope for others.

Summary and Outlook

A concrete situation. 1 Corinthians 11-14 is a fascinating text. It is one of the few texts that allows us to view the concrete situation of one of the earliest Christian churches. We meet a local church with its many needs, problems and temptations, and we witness how the apostle Paul tries to lead the church to live in harmony with its confession that “Jesus is Lord”.

The trinitarian foundation. Paul's advice to the church is theologically grounded. He insists on the inter-relationship between the trinitarian God and the church and its mission. The church echoes the being of God. Ultimately, the question for the Christian and for the Christian church is: who is God, how can God be known, what is the proper way to respond to God, and how does he become real in our life, in our church and in the world? Paul's answer is clear: God has revealed his nature and being in the crucified Christ, and through the resurrection and in the power of the Spirit the crucified Christ is Lord of the believer, of the church and of the world. The difference between the church and the world is that in the church his lordship is recognised. The church is his “body”, and the identity of the church consists therefore in being the “body of Christ”. This, however, marks at the same time the church's relevance. The church as the “body of Christ” makes room for the crucified Christ to communicate the riches of salvation and liberation to the world.

Love as the concrete presence of the crucified Christ. The presence of Christ in the church becomes real and concrete through the reality of love. Jesus was crucified because he incarnated the God who “is love”. Jesus' fellowship with publicans and sinners, his solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, his transgression against religious traditions in order to heal and restore broken people, this living correspondence to the nature of God as love, was the direct reason for his arrest, trial and crucifixion. When God raised the crucified Jesus from the dead he thereby established the promise of the triumph of love. 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 (cross), 1 Corinthians 15 (resurrection) and 1 Corinthians 13 (love) are therefore intimately inter-related.

The “Lord's Supper”. With this theological foundation Paul is deeply shocked when the late-comers in Corinth inform him about the church's tendency, that when they meet for supper and worship (the ἀγούρη-meal!) they fail to wait for the servants, the nannies, the labourers and the slaves. This for Paul was not merely a moral or a social-ethical problem; it was a christological problem. The lordship of Christ was at stake in the behaviour of the Christians in Corinth. Their change in behaviour marked a shift in their understanding of Jesus Christ. They were beginning to believe in a different Christ. With their focus on personal spiritual experiences, they began to replace a christology of the cross with a christology of glory. They sought the riches of Christ in sacramental communion and personal edification, rather than including the late-comers into their relationship with God. Paul therefore reminds them that the crucified Christ is the host at the Lord's Supper, and that therefore it would be a denial of his lordship if the late-comers are neglected.

The gifts of the Spirit. On the theological basis that God is a community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (12:4-6), Paul explains that the church must be a community of equals. In that community the “Spirit” will always witness to the “Son” (12:1-3), and therefore the gifts of the Spirit must make evident who the Lord of the Christian and of the church is. The Spirit is therefore not primarily a supernatural power for the performance of miraculous demonstrations (that is well known in every religion!), nor is the Spirit the abstract power of reason or the motivation for moral action and reflection. Primarily, the Spirit is the personal power of God that makes the crucified Christ as God's revelation effective in our life, in the church and in the world. The church knows this and, therefore, with its life and service it anticipates the triumph of the crucified Christ. For this concrete life of anticipation the Spirit grants spiritual gifts that help the Christian community to create analogies to the triumph of the crucified Christ.

At the same time the Spirit supplements the work of the Son in that the Spirit effectively applies and universalises the work of the Son. The rich variety of $\xi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ (“spiritual gifts”) and $\delta\iota\alpha\kappa\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (“services”) therefore reflects the colourful grace of God, and at the same time these gifts and services enable the church to minister to a multifaceted world.

The gifts and the gifted people must be shaped into an order. But this order is not the order of the status quo, and it must never be absolutised. In each situation the “order” must reflect the shalom of God as it has been revealed in the crucified Christ. “Functions” and “gifts” may vary from situation to situation as the power of the gospel seeks to become relevant to the world. The church through its structures must manifest God's love for the late-comers. The “outsider” and the “non-believer” are therefore given theological status. The Spirit empowers the church to fulfil its mission, and at the same time it points the church to the crucified Christ as the measure and content of Christian faith and Christian life.

The gathered community. Christian faith is a relational reality. Christians will therefore regularly meet together for fellowship, worship and renewal. By regularly and intentionally meeting together, Christians confess that salvation is a community reality. Faith comes to each person, but it does not individualise people; it creates a community. And with every meeting this community becomes ever anew the event of the ecclesia. But as such it remains an “open community”, ever aware that the Christ whom they worship and on whom they feed in faith had no other passion than to bring the riches of salvation and liberation to the “outsider”, the “non-believer” and the “late-comer”.

By their fruits you shall know them! Individualism, elitism and a privatised faith that shows no real concern for the late-comers has created Christ in its own image. Christianity has then become a religion that validates the self interest of its adherents. Christ has become the cult-hero of the church. If, on the other hand, Christ is understood as the crucified One, then love will determine Christian reality. Christians will seek self-fulfilment in relation to the “other” and thereby build community. This community will be a community of equals in which social, spiritual and sexual barriers have been unmasked as the results of sin and have therefore been abolished. As friends of Jesus the community will live in openness to the world. The “outsider” and “unbeliever” are given theological status. The church is structured for the demonstration of justice (showing solidarity with the late-comers) and for the communication of the gospel (prophecy is more important than glossolalia) – as such it is the “body of Christ”. Christians in Corinth and in the churches to the present day have understood their spiritual gifts mainly in terms of $\pi\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\alpha$ that serve for personal edification and increase personal reputation. Paul, on the other hand, chooses the concepts of $\xi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\mu\alpha$ and $\delta\iota\alpha\kappa\omicron\nu\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in order to emphasise that spiritual gifts are gifts and that these gifts enable the believer and the believing community to represent the life of the crucified and risen Christ in the world.

The importance of theological reflection. The inter-relationship between the praxis of the church and theological reflection is interesting and exemplary in this text. Paul evaluates the nature and mission of the church. But his criteria for evaluation is not personal advantage or ecclesiastical expediency, but an intentional commitment to Jesus Christ as the crucified One. His major criticism is therefore that the church in Corinth does not recognise that the crucified Christ is

host at the Lord's Supper and head of the body, the church. Controversial was not christology as such, but the *content* of christology. This has remained the case to the present day. If the church would really believe in the resurrection of the crucified Christ – not merely with its reason, but with its life! – then it would seek God's power in human weakness, it would give theological status to the late-comers (we may call it the “preferential option for the poor”), it would see its identity in service, and it would have no other passion than making human life human and thereby form analogies to the crucified Christ.

This would have direct consequences for social ethics. By their fruits you shall know them! An inadequate theology leads to a distorted identity and a reduced relevance. Concretely: a church which continues with the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments, but at the same time refuses to give theological status to the poor and oppressed, lives in disobedience to Christ; a church that today still refuses to give equal status to women denies thereby the lordship of Christ; a church which builds hierarchical structures and thereby introduces individualism and elitism into the church no longer reflects the communitarian being of God.

A hermeneutic of suspicion. Our text invites us to entertain a healthy suspicion with regard to practices and structures in the church. By having an open ear and an open heart for the information from those who were disadvantaged in Corinth Paul tuned into the divine leaning towards the “below”. Paul recognises that God's revelation in the crucified Christ implies a partiality for those who are pressed toward the margin of life. He is therefore suspicious and openly critical of those who are leading the church in Corinth. Leadership structures have an inherent will to survive; therefore they most often fail to be self-critical. Their power must be constantly balanced by listening to those who have no voice, no power and no friends. In a world where the poor, the tortured, the children and the oppressed have no lobby, can the church think of a nobler privilege than becoming a lobby for those who are pressed to the margin of life?

A hermeneutic of compromise. Paul recognises the need to make compromises. The concrete manifestation of the church must be measured on the ideal of the church as the community of love. Yet in a broken and ambiguous world, the ideal can only be approximated. For the Christian and for the Christian community life is a process in which the triumph of the crucified Christ and the ultimate reign of love is anticipated (“until he comes”). Life between the “already” of the salvation that has been established by Christ and the “not yet” of its fulfilment is marked by compromises. These compromises must be recognised as such and they must be constantly challenged. For Paul it was a compromise when he said to the Christians in Corinth that, if they cannot wait for the late-comers, then they should eat their main meal at home and come together for the sacrament. The tragedy is that the church to the present day has not challenged that compromise and has therefore failed to heed Paul's plea to seek an integration of life under the lordship of Christ.

Nevertheless, the apostle Paul reminds us through the ages that moral exhortation has little power to accomplish change. Real change can only come from the power of the gospel. Like Paul, we would have to learn ever again to tell the story of Jesus as the crucified One in the hope that then love will capture our hearts, we will discern Jesus in the late-comers, and we will recognise each others' gifts – and then be the “body of Christ”.

Do not quench the Spirit,
do not despise prophesying,
but test everything;
hold fast what is good,
abstain from every form of evil.
(1 Thess 5:19-21)

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