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An Evangelical Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

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PREAMBLE

Faith and Order Paper No. 111, the Lima document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), has been widely acclaimed as a most significant statement in the recent history of the church. It represents a momentous endeavour to reach doctrinal agreement on key issues that for centuries have troubled the churches. The World Evangelical Fellowship welcomes the opportunity to join those many churches and organizations that are responding to the document and sharing the common search for the bearing of the apostolic faith on baptism, eucharist and ministry.

This statement has been written by the Theological Commission of WEF with the purpose of speaking both to the ecumenical community and to those of our own constituency who may belong to churches involved in the ecumenical process, or who more generally seek guidance on how evangelicals should respond to the document.

The WEF is not an organized church nor an organization of churches. It is a fellowship of national and regional evangelical bodies formed with the purpose of encouraging, motivating and enabling the local church to fulfil its scriptural mandate. It represents approximately 100 million Christians around the world. Structurally WEF is polymorphous: it represents about sixty national or regional fellowships, and a variety of denominations, parachurch organizations and individual Christians. The WEF constituency ranges from those who do not observe the sacraments (e.g. Friends) to those for whom sacraments are centrally important to their faith and thought (e.g. some Anglicans and Lutherans). Membership in WEF requires adherence to the Statement of Faith (see Appendix I). Many of the persons who belong to one or other regional national fellowships are members (and leaders) of churches that are also intimately involved in the ecumenical movement. There is, therefore, some overlap of membership.

The WEF is a fellowship of evangelicals. Three characteristics of evangelicals are historically linked to developments in the churches during the last century and a half. The first is a response in the English-speaking world to what was seen as an overemphasis on the sacraments, and to a concomitant devaluation of the need for personal faith in the recipients of the sacraments. This means that evangelicals [p. 292](#) tend to be 'low church' rather than 'high church' (to use terms current in the Anglican world).

A second characteristic of evangelicals is their stress upon the authority of Scripture and its essential doctrines, such as those enunciated in the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. We give priority to such matters as the deity of Jesus Christ (in the strict sense of the Councils), the historicity of his virginal conception and bodily resurrection, the substitutionary nature of his atonement, the primacy of justification as the entry-point into a right relationship with God, the necessity of a personal response of faith to the gospel, the exclusive sufficiency of grace as the ground of our salvation and of faith as the means for appropriating it, the prospect of Christ's personal return, and the truthfulness of the divine revelation embodied in Scripture.

Out of this engagement with sacramentalism and theological liberalism, with their resulting de-emphasis on personal faith and on the need for conversion, a third distinctiveness has arisen: evangelicals sense the urgent need to share the good news in worldwide evangelism with those who have not believed in Jesus Christ. Hence our objection to any reduction of the Christian message to a merely social or political gospel and to the idea that there is saving truth in all religions.

In short, emphasis on personal faith rather than the efficacy of the sacraments, acknowledgement of the supreme authority of Scripture above autonomous reason or the traditions of the churches, and the continuing mandate to evangelize the lost, characterize evangelicals today.

From these characteristics it follows that conversion, seen as the turning from sin to God, is for evangelicals the *sine qua non* for fellowship in the body of Christ.

This does not mean that evangelicals have no interest in the sacraments, nor that they hold that Scripture gives ready-made answers to all of life's complex problems, nor that the traditions of the church may be ignored, nor that we may be insensitive to social injustice. It does mean that in responding to BEM we will analyze the issues raised primarily in the light of our perception of God's normative self-disclosure in Scripture.

Amongst evangelicals there is a growing concern about ecclesiological issues and the need to manifest as clearly as possible the visible unity of the body of Christ. We agree, for instance, that:

- The one holy catholic and apostolic church comprises all who call upon the name of the Lord in truth ([1 Cor. 1:2](#)) and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord ([1 Cor. 12:3](#)). p. 293
- Membership in this church, the body of Christ, not membership in any denominational affiliation, constitutes our fundamental identity as people of God.
- The prayerful yearning of our Lord, namely that we experience and display, in truth, that oneness that exists between him and the Father, should be a driving force in our lives ([Jn. 17](#)). Visibly to maintain the unity of the Spirit ([Eph. 4:3](#)) and to grow into a unity-in-maturity as we strive to attain to the fulness of the stature of Jesus Christ ([Eph. 4:16](#)) are constituents in our continuing assignment.
- The visible unity of the church should build upon the truth of the whole gospel.
- In anticipation of the consummation, the Holy Spirit is present in the church, empowering it to live a life worthy of the gospel and to proclaim by word and action the mighty deeds of God who called us out of darkness and into his marvellous light ([1 Pet. 2:10](#)).

The WEF Statement of Faith does not contain an article on the church. One reason for this omission is that evangelicals have not generally considered church government, the nature of sacraments and the nature and form of authority in the church to be the most important issues to be faced. Moreover, opinions differ rather widely across the constituency of WEF on the sacraments (or 'ordinances': cf. Appendix II) and church polity. Questions relating to baptism, eucharist and ministry are nevertheless of great interest to evangelicals, though in accordance with our own ecclesiological diversity our evaluations of the BEM proposals vary somewhat.

In this response we will bear in mind the four questions raised by the WCC Commission on Faith and Order (BEM, p. x):

- the extent to which [WEF] can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the ages;
- the consequences [WEF] can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith;
- the guidance [WEF] can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness;
- the suggestions [WEF] can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to its long-range research project 'Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today'. p. 294

We will summarize our response to these questions in the Conclusion.

It is important to note the particular context and origin of the BEM document, made clear in the background and introductory material (see BEM, pp. vii–x; *Churches Respond to BEM 1* [1986], pp. 1–27; *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* [1986], *passim*). The most important point to be considered is that the document is designed to facilitate the process of the union of churches, and therefore it deals with matters which have traditionally hindered this process. Accordingly, it does not set out a fully comprehensive theology of church, ministry and sacraments but deals with areas of difficulty. In many cases these are of a practical and institutional nature, as well as theological and pastoral. Similarly, it seeks to resolve these areas of difficulty by searching for consensus and agreement with a View to establishing grounds for unity where perhaps it had not been anticipated beforehand.

Because of the nature of the WEF and of the origin and history of the BEM document, we cannot respond to the document and the four questions asked of respondents in the same way as denominations and Christian World Communions can, especially those involved directly in the ecumenical process. Nevertheless as members of the body of Christ we express our concern for unity on these issues and therefore submit our observations.

Before dealing with specific points in BEM, there is one major area in which we would offer comment on the document. It concerns the first question about the extent to which we can recognize in this text the faith of the church through the ages. It is one that comes close to the heart of the reason for the existence of the evangelical movement. To facilitate our response, the issue may be formulated as follows: Does the wording of BEM's first question not focus the attention on what is secondary, namely the faith of the church through the ages, rather than on what is primary, that is, the normative witness given in Scripture?

By God's grace, we will approach the BEM document in a spirit of openness and biblical discernment. In dealing with these matters we shall indicate what distinguishes evangelicals from other Christians regarding the issues covered by BEM, and the extent to which our central concerns are reflected in and adopted by BEM.

BAPTISM

A. Introduction

The framers of the Lima document are to be thanked for their valiant p. 295 efforts to achieve some measure of unanimity on so disputed a subject as baptism. On this subject our evaluation is so integrally connected with our unity and diversity as evangelicals that a brief explanation seems prudent.

Because the convictions and values that unite WEF constituents (cf. Preamble) do not include a uniform understanding of baptism, the degree of divergence amongst us on this subject is large. Some of us use the term ‘regeneration’ in connection with baptism (evangelical Lutherans, some Anglicans), Others advocate baptism months or years removed from conversion (some Baptists and others), and still others practice no baptism at all (Salvationists, evangelical Friends).

These differences of opinion turn on such issues as the following: the mode of baptism; how baptism is related to faith—whether or not conscious, personal faith must precede baptism (indeed, the precise function of baptism in Christian experience); how those who are baptized are related to the people of God in the Old Testament; and the degree to which baptism should be interpreted as an individual act and the degree to which it should be interpreted corporately. Because of the place of Scripture in evangelical theology, disputes in these areas resolve into disagreements over the meaning of Scripture. We frankly admit that we have not done all we could to bring these disputes to fair debate around the Scriptures, in an effort both to isolate the precise points of our interpretative disagreements and to resolve them.

Nevertheless, most evangelicals would happily subscribe to such points as these: that Christians should be baptized in obedience to God; that baptism is related to the incorporation of people into the church; that baptism implies unity with Christ, and therefore also with Christ’s death and resurrection; that it is a symbol or a sign (some would add a ‘seal’) of that identification; that it is a means of grace, in the sense that by means of baptism God blesses us and gives us assurance; above all, that sacramentalism (cf. Appendix II) must be rejected as unbiblical.

B. Aspects of the baptism section most evangelicals will appreciate

Among the many features of the Lima document for which most evangelicals will be grateful are the following:

1. The text recognizes the need for conversion and faith (cf. especially B4).
2. The Lima document rightly calls for genuine unity (B2), and p. 296 insists that the evil divisions based on race, sex and status be transcended. At the same time, it guards against language that might be taken to call for the abolition of all distinctive *roles* through baptism.
3. The Lima document rightly relegates the mode of baptism to a position of secondary importance. It properly challenges credobaptists, who insist that conscious faith precede baptism, not to be too stringent about the mode; and paedobaptists to recognize that immersion expresses in the best way the Christian’s participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.
4. On several fronts, the Baptism section of BEM openly admits the differences of opinion found amongst WCC constituents, even while trying to find points of continuity and agreement. We applaud such frankness, convinced that genuine unity can never be achieved by masking differences.
5. We acknowledge the effort of BEM to grapple with the complex historical and liturgical problems associated with the practice of baptism in relation to the gift of the Spirit, personal faith and the corporate life of the church (B14-23). Its proposals challenge evangelicals to develop their own thinking and practice in this area.

C. Aspects of the baptism section with which evangelicals have difficulty

1. *Sacramental language*: we find we cannot approve the sacramentalist language of the entire section (baptism unites, initiates, gives participation, effects). To be sure, many in the WEF constituency would not feel that the problem lies in the language itself since

Reformed theologians have often used similar language. The early Reformers followed the linguistic rule that the sign may stand for the thing signified (i.e. metonymy). Many in the WEF would argue that baptism is not a mere symbol of the grace preceding it, but also an instrument of the grace that it symbolizes (as 'visible word'). The problem, they would argue, is that the sacramental language is not accompanied by an equally firm emphasis on the need for faith, repentance, and conversion, as presuppositions of baptism.

Many WEF constituents would go farther and insist that the clearly sacramentalist language of the Lima document depends far too heavily on church tradition that cannot be traced back to the New Testament itself. Even when conversion and faith properly receive some stress (B4), the clause in question is weakened by being subsumed under an introductory sentence which claims that baptism makes us partakers of [p.297](#) the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. The same paragraph (B4) goes so far as to say, 'Thus those baptized are pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ, and are given as part of their baptismal experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.' Again, 'signifies and effects' (B14), implies a sacramentalist causation that few evangelicals could support (though evangelical confessional Lutherans amongst us greatly stress the efficacy of the Word in baptism).

It appears to us that the tensions within the Baptism section of the Lima document are largely confined to sacramentalist controversies (remembering especially the debate on the seal of the Spirit: cf. B14). It is highly significant that the conclusion should be: 'All agree that Christian baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit'. In its context, this statement apparently writes off all non-sacramentalist Christians, who do not tie together water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism as efficacious cause and effect, to say nothing of those who do not practice any baptism (e.g. Salvationists, Friends). In short, most evangelicals will regret the persistently sacramentalist thrust of the entire document.

2. *Use of Scripture*: Many of WEF's constituents would question the baptismal exegesis of BEM (e.g. B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, B8, B9, B10, B19). Amongst the passages quoted are many that do not refer to water-baptism ([1 Cor. 12:13](#) of paramount importance). Most would find considerable difficulty with the appeal BEM makes to [In. 3:5](#); [1 Cor. 6:11](#); [Tit. 3:5](#); [Heb. 10:22](#), to cite but a few examples.

3. *Mere appearance of agreement*: It appears to us that the framers of BEM too frequently use language that is patient of mutually exclusive interpretations. If we are not mistaken in this impression, we must ask whether genuine unity is achieved when each party reads BEM in such a way that the presence of mutually unacceptable opinions is actually hidden.

To take but two examples, all will happily accept the words 'the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people' (B1), but some will worry that the context implies that these words mean God bestows his grace 'at baptism', 'in baptism', or 'in consequence of baptism'. The theological problem at issue is not mere automaticity, for sacramentalist theology strongly maintains the need of faith for *fruitful* reception of the sacraments; it is the problem of a grace-conveying role distinct from that of signification ('visible word'). Again, 'means' in the statement 'Baptism *means* participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ' (B3) is ambiguous, for it may refer to the thing signified or to the operation of the rite itself. [p.298](#)

Further, silence on some issues may (doubtless unwittingly) convey a greater impression of agreement than is in fact the case. For instance, although the Lima document makes it clear that faith is the required condition for fruitful reception of baptism (B8), and although the Commentary gently takes to task those churches that practice infant baptism 'in an apparently indiscriminate way' (BCom 21), neither makes clear what faith is required. BEM does not rule out the Roman Catholic view that the

absence of conscious objection (*obex*) is a sufficient condition for infant regeneration. Most evangelicals, regardless of their views of paedobaptism, would judge such an uncertainty to be a serious liability.

4. *Grounding unity in baptism*: To base unity on the rite of baptism is entirely foreign to Scripture, since [1 Cor. 12:13](#) does not refer to water-baptism. Biblical unity is based on union with Christ through the Spirit's indwelling ([Rom. 8](#)). The full measure of such unity requires agreement in faith; nevertheless our human limitations require that present church unity be based on agreement on the *essentials* of the faith. The rite of baptism is an important issue to the question of union and unity, to the extent that it is related to fellowship with Christ.

BEM's appeal for 'mutual recognition of baptism' (B15, B16) is probably both easier and more difficult within an evangelical framework than within some other traditions. Evangelical distinctives, such as concern for doctrinal truth and the unmasking of merely nominal Christian profession, make the mutual recognition of baptism a difficult matter indeed. Add to this that evangelicals do not agree on the issue of paedobaptism versus credobaptism, any more than do Christians who would not align themselves with the evangelical movement. On the other hand, evangelicals often achieve quite remarkable degrees of unity with other evangelicals at the local level, despite considerable differences in churchmanship. Moreover, a number of evangelical denominations allow individual clergy to follow their own conscience in the matter of baptism, while encouraging them to accept the baptism of quite different traditions. This is possible precisely because for most evangelicals baptism does not loom as large an issue in inter-church cooperation as it does for many others.

5. *The statement on 're-baptism'*: This occurs as the culmination of an historical and theological vignette of the rise and significance of the diverse baptismal practices found within the church today (B11–B13). Although most credobaptists amongst WEF constituents would question the likelihood 'that infant baptism was also practiced in the apostolic age' (B11), the rest of the historical vignette in this section is [p. 299](#) unobjectionable. However, many statements in B12 seem to becloud the issue (e.g. the faithfulness of Christ as the ground of baptism is not relevant in this particular debate). The distinction 'between those who baptize people at any age and those who baptize only those able to make a confession of faith for themselves' (BCom 12) holds interest, but the real distinction, as we see it, is between those who baptize only those who do make a confession of faith for themselves, whatever their age, and those who do not. Both positions require similar attitudes to Christian nurture; this point is well taken. Nevertheless, historic credobaptist conviction cannot accept the two positions as 'equivalent alternatives', for the simple reason that credobaptists, to be consistent, normally consider paedobaptism to be no baptism at all.

In BEM (B15, BCom 12), essential disagreements between paedobaptists and credobaptists are treated as if they were differences in emphasis only. In reality, the differences are historic and profound. What is quite clear is that, in the nature of the case, no credobaptist (including the Baptist, Brethren, many free churches, almost all Pentecostals) can accept the proposition that 'any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided' (B13). Credobaptist conviction, by and large, is that re-baptism is a misnomer. The plea in BEM amounts to asking credobaptists to renounce their conviction. By thus writing off more than half of Protestants around the world, BEM becomes needlessly divisive.

EUCCHARIST

A. Introduction

Especially since the sixteenth century, the bread of fellowship has become a major source of discord in Christendom. The framers of the Lima document entered a sensitive area indeed: they deserve our appreciation and their work requires rigorous scrutiny.

Evangelicals differ widely on the importance and the nature of the Lord's Supper. The views range from a minority who do not observe the ordinance at all to those for whom it is an integral part of Christian worship, and from those who consider the Lord's Supper only as a symbolic remembering of Christ's death to those who maintain that Christ is bodily present under the elements of bread and wine. Nevertheless, we would generally agree on the following:

1. that the Lord's Supper commemorates the death of Christ for our sin and points to our communion with Christ in an eternal kingdom; [p. 300](#)
2. that it is a means by which God blesses and strengthens us, though without spiritual grace being imparted through the physical elements;
3. that participating with faith and a clear conscience is essential;
4. that a sacramentalist understanding of the Lord's Supper should be rejected (cf. Appendix II); and
5. that the understanding of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice we offer with Christ is unacceptable.

Our concern in this evaluation of the Eucharist section of BEM has been to assess the depth of the agreement reached, to see whether it can accommodate evangelical orientations on faith and church order pertaining to the Lord's Supper, and to evaluate the document in the light of the apostolic teaching of the New Testament.

B. Areas where evangelicals appreciate the eucharist section

Among the emphases for which evangelicals are grateful are the following:

1. The text stresses that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is unique and unrepeatable (E10).
2. BEM affirms that only through the Holy Spirit is Christ present in the Lord's Supper.
3. The text recognizes communion as 'the meal of the New Covenant—as the anticipation of the Supper of the Lamb' (E1).
4. The section of thanksgiving acknowledges that 'this sacrifice of praise is possible only through Christ' (E4).
5. The Lima document acknowledges that the celebration of holy communion includes the proclamation of the Word—indeed, it is itself an effective proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises (E3, 7, 27).
6. The text affirms that sharing in the Lord's Supper demonstrates the oneness of God's people, and makes plain that personal and social ethical demands are entailed by participation in the eucharist (E19-21).

C. Aspects of the eucharist section with which evangelicals have difficulty

This section reflects rather fully, although in moderate tones, a sacramentalist view, as distinguished from an evangelical one. The word 'eucharist', historically little used in Protestant churches, may [p. 301](#) already indicate this slant. (We recognize, however, that the term is less important than the substance.)

Sacramentalist emphases are obvious in the following traits:

1. The eucharist is hailed as ‘the central act of the Church’s worship’ (E1) and alluded to in mysteric terms: Christ, as he presides at the meal, is ‘the priest who celebrates the mystery of God’ (E29).

2. The eucharist is considered the means by which, or the locus in which, the grace of God is actually communicated to the faithful. Although some formulations might be understood in a weaker sense, the repetition of the theme strongly suggests a sacramentalist meaning. This impression is reinforced by the description of the rite as an ‘effective sign’ (E5—the traditional Roman Catholic definition of a sacrament).

3. The rite is interpreted in terms of ‘real presence’, a real presence so unique and so closely related to the elements (E13) that it remains a property of the elements after the celebration itself is over (E15). Presumably this view underlies the appeal to respect the practice of the reservation of the elements (E32). BEM refrains from using the term ‘transubstantiation’ (E13 and ECom 15) but allows the concept within the range of acceptable options, a point implicitly acknowledged by the Commentary (‘the deepest reality is the total being of Christ’ [ECom 15] states this dogma in non-technical language).

4. The eucharist is emphatically understood as a sacrifice of praise offered to the Father (E3, 4, 23), and as intercession that the church offers not only through Christ but also in communion with Christ (E8). Indeed, after initially and rightly emphasizing that the eucharist is the ‘sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit’ (E2), BEM’s discussion predominantly construes the Lord’s Supper in terms of what we offer to God. The *anamnesis* (‘memorial’) theme is used to justify the idea of a ‘representation’ beyond ‘a calling to mind of what is past and of its significance’ (E7): the idea of memorial, we are told, ‘refers to this present efficacy of God’s work’ (E5). At least in the Commentary, the unique and unrepeatable sacrifice of the cross is understood to be ‘made actual’ (Comm. 8). It is in this context, we are told, that the traditional Roman Catholic designation of the eucharist as ‘propitiatory sacrifice’ may be understood. This construction is satisfactory neither to traditional Roman Catholics nor to evangelicals.

5. The BEM claim that the world is ‘present in the whole eucharist celebration’ seems to us to be not only unduly speculative but without Scriptural sanction. The eucharist, we are told, ‘is the great sacrifice of p.302 praise by which the Church speaks on behalf of the whole creation’ (E4, 22, 23).

6. We question whether the need for faith for reception of the rite has received adequate attention in the document. Though one may presume that for BEM, as for the whole Christian tradition, the sacraments are sacraments of faith, it is remarkable that the only reference to faith in the eucharist section of BEM is related to ‘discerning the body and blood of Christ’ (E13). Most evangelicals believe that God effectively grants his gift of grace through the Lord p. Supper only when the promise of the gospel in the sacrament as the ‘visible word’ is apprehended by faith. Stressing the necessity of personal faith is a way of honouring the freedom of the Spirit and the purity of justification without works.

In short, BEM’s strong sacramentalist emphasis and its relative silence on other views appear to marginalize non-sacramentalist understandings of the Lord’s Supper.

D. The Eucharist and the New Testament

It appears to us that extra-biblical (though traditional) developments have been used, consciously or unconsciously, as the hermeneutical key in BEM’s study of the New Testament, and this we consider an unfortunate choice. Scripture can play its normative role with respect to the human process of reception and application in the church, only when it interprets itself. By this we do not mean that human interpreters can cut themselves off from their cultural understanding and heritage, but that the unique

revelatory status of Scripture must be preserved: in our understanding, Scripture judges all cultures, and not the reverse.

The following points might be mentioned:

1. Though we want to stress that the Lord's Supper is an integral part of what Christians do when they gather together ([1 Cor. 11:2](#)), the primary focus on such occasions is the declaration of the Word of God so that God's people may worship him in word and deed: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God' ([Col. 3:16](#); cf. [Rom. 12:1-2](#)).

2. Biblical passages on the Lord's Supper offer little warrant for the idea of causal efficacy attributed to the sacrament. Most evangelicals would not apply the words of Jesus in [Jn. 6](#) directly to the eucharistic elements. As to the communication of saving grace, the constant [p. 303](#) emphasis in the New Testament falls on the mediation of the preached Word of God.

3. Similarly, most evangelicals (but not all) will accept that careful exegesis of the words of institution—'This is my body ...'—finds no intimation of a change affecting the bread and the wine, apart from the adding of their new function and meaning as signs. To us, the truth of the ascension ([Jn. 20:17](#); [Acts 3:21](#)) raises insuperable difficulties with the logic of 'real presence', in the sense of bodily presence.

4. As to sacrificial language, it is strikingly absent from New Testament references to the Lord's Supper. 'Eucharist' (Greek *eucharistia*), to be sure, is a New Testament word for the Christian sacrifice of praise: but it refers to the accompanying prayer, not to the meal itself ([1 Cor. 11:24](#); [14:16](#)). The fact that thanks is offered does not transform the meal into a thank-offering. No clear proof from Scripture may be adduced to support the BEM conception of 'memorial' as 'making present' or 'actual' a past event. Although BEM affirms the unrepeatable nature of Christ's sacrifice (E8), its construction of 'memorial' undermines this affirmation and conflicts with the New Testament emphasis on the once-for-all character of the atonement, set forth, for example, in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Proclamation, yes ([1 Cor. 11:26](#)); actualized sacrifice, no.

These biblical considerations on the Lord's Supper must be seen in the context of the evangelical understanding of the gospel. It is centred in Christ's redeeming work on the cross where he died for our sin as our righteous Substitute. On the basis of this work of Christ the Christian church lives, not as an institution that dispenses salvation, but as a community of those who have been justified by grace and who proclaim salvation. Our assessment of BEM's understanding of the Lord's Supper stems therefore from our deep conviction about the essentials of Christian faith.

MINISTRY

A. An evangelical approach to ministry

In accordance with biblical usage, 'ministry' refers first of all to the varied service by the whole people of God. It consists in the communal or personal communication of the blessings of the gospel. These relate to initial salvation, edification and the meeting of other human needs. As a result of this service or ministry, its recipients become aware of God's presence and power and more attuned to his will and purpose. [p. 304](#)

The term 'the ministry' (or 'minister') may be used to refer to the officially appointed ministers working within a reasonably structured situation. The purpose of the 'appointed ministers' is to equip others for the work of ministry ([Eph. 4:11-13](#)). One should not infer, however, that effective ministry is in any way restricted to this group of

people as they function in formal situations. Nor is it to be supposed that by virtue of such membership or appointment members of this group possess any permanent character or qualities. The key dynamic is God working in the ‘ministers’ (official or unofficial) to enable them to become channels of his gracious presence.

The ways in which the officially appointed ministry is exercised are many. These are not restricted to any set list, but range from personal testimony to all kinds of serving relationships. The titles that may be given to formally appointed, official ministers vary, often according to the type of activity in which they are involved. Such names include bishop, pastor, elder, deacon, evangelist, missionary, preacher, counsellor. These are primarily functional terms rather than being indicative of status. Official appointment (which may be known as ‘ordination’ or ‘induction’ or ‘commissioning’ or ‘setting apart’) implies recognition of a God-given ministry. While such appointment may confer certain authority within the group making the appointment (and those in fellowship with it), this authority is conditional upon continued exercise of faithful ministry. Such formal appointment or ordination is not *necessary* for ministry.

The qualities required in a person for fruitful ministry include prior gifting by God, spiritual sensitivity and maturity, trust in and obedience to God. Normally such ministry cannot be exercised without a sense of divine calling and an obedient response. Faithfulness and fruitfulness in ministry depend on obedience to the guidance of God and on the continual blessing of God. Such ministry calls for acknowledgement and intercession on the part of those whom it serves.

These are, in brief, some of the distinguishing features of the concept of ministry held by most evangelicals. Many evangelical churches exhibit these features in whole or in part and consider them to be biblical, rather than simply denominational or historical.

It is to be noted that some issues treated as basic in the BEM report (such as ‘validity’ and ‘apostolic succession’) are also important in an evangelical approach to church and ministry. Nevertheless, we deal with them in ways so different from BEM, and so commonly express them in other terminology, that they are hardly recognized as the same issues. It is therefore difficult for us to comment directly on those parts [p. 305](#) of BEM that touch on these particular technical terms; the underlying issues themselves need to be identified and discussed. It is at this fundamental level that WEF wishes to interact with the BEM section on ministry.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

1. The calling of the whole people of God (M1–6)

In general, the first six paragraphs of the Ministry section of BEM set out a valid framework for considering the question of Christian ministry, with their focus on the sinful state of humankind, the redemptive work of Christ, and the calling of the people of God through the Spirit. We applaud the fact that reflection on ministry is set within the context of the question, ‘How, according to the will of God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the life of the Church to be understood and ordered, so that the Gospel may be spread and the community built up in love?’ (M6).

Given the significant differences amongst Christians ‘in their understanding of how the life of the Church is to be ordered’ and especially of ‘the place and forms of the ordained ministry’ (M6), it is understandable that the theme of ordained ministry should have been singled out for special consideration. Nevertheless, it is a pity that, in seeking to answer the fundamental question about the way the church is to be ordered, the Lima document largely fails to capitalize on the excellent foundation laid in M1-6. Instead, it largely restricts its discussion to the traditional patterns of ordained professional clergy.

By focusing its attention on this topic, BEM has perpetuated the problem by defining church unity in the narrow terms of the nature and role of the ordained clergy, rather than placing it in the broader context of the ministry of ‘the whole people of God’.

2. The church and the ordained ministry (M7–18) and ordination (M39–55)

While the observation that ‘the church has never been without persons holding specific authority and responsibility’ (M9) is unobjectionable, BEM’s understanding of the nature and role of such ministry presents serious problems. We will deal with the following: the constitutive role ascribed to the ministry of official clergy; the designation of a particular form of ministry as priestly; the sacramental understanding of ordination; the notion of the ordained ministry as the focus of unity; the ordination of women.

First, we find it incompatible with the New Testament to claim that the ordained ministry, or the service of persons who are ‘publicly and [p. 306](#) continually responsible’ for the church, is ‘constitutive for the life and witness of the church’ (M8). Rather, the church is constituted by the presence of the resurrected Christ through the Holy Spirit in the believing community ([Mt. 18:20; 28:16–20](#)), the members of which minister as the priestly people of God to one another and to the world. The ordained ministers can be validly described as ‘representatives of Jesus Christ to the community’ (M11), as long as it is clear that they represent Christ in a way that is not *essentially* different from the way in which any believer is called and gifted to represent Christ.

Second, evangelicals query the suggestion that presidency of the eucharistic celebration might legitimate calling ministers ‘priests’ (M17); they would not find in the metaphorical language of [Rom. 15:16](#) a warrant for a ministerial priesthood distinct from the priesthood of all believers (cf. [1 Pet. 2:10](#)).

Third, undoubtedly the ordained minister can be—and often has been—a ‘focus of unity’. Normally ministers are qualified to guide the Christian community according to God’s Word, and it is the duty of the members to follow this guidance. The moral authority of the minister and his loyalty in expounding the Scripture are an important force to keep the church united in the bond of peace. But the ordained ministry in itself is not a guarantee against strife and division; indeed, the ordained ministry can be the source of such strife. And it must also be said that unity has often been reached or maintained at the cost of serious doctrinal deviations.

Fourth, reservations must be expressed when BEM claims that in the rite of ordination the authority of Jesus Christ is conferred on the minister (M15). From the biblical point of view the problematic nature of such conferral is compounded by the sacramental understanding of ordination elaborated in M39–50. Though BEM stresses the importance of the involvement of the congregation, the invocation of the power of the Spirit and the commitment of the ordinand (M41–44), ordination is still said to be ‘a sign performed in faith that the spiritual relationship signified is present in, with and through the words spoken, the gestures made and the forms employed’ (M43).

Fifth, considering ordination as conferring this special status also compounds the difficulties for some churches in regard to the role of women in ministry. It is therefore not surprising that BEM offers no solution to the controversy over this matter, but simply expresses the need for further study of the issue. But the theological problems are considerably simplified if ordination is seen as public recognition by the church of a call to exercise a spiritual gift for ministry and the commitment of the church to the support of the gifted person in the [p. 307](#) exercise of his or her ministry. In this case, ‘male-ness’ or ‘female-ness’ is not the primary issue, but gift and calling. Amongst evangelicals the question is whether or how the constraints on certain types of ministries in the New Testament (e.g. [1 Tim 2:12](#)) apply today.

3. The forms of the ordained ministry (M19–33) and succession in the apostolic tradition (M34–38)

BEM suggests that ‘the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it’ (M22). Yet BEM makes this proposal despite its acknowledgement that no such precedence can be established from the New Testament (M19, 22), that the form of the threefold pattern itself has changed remarkably over the centuries, and that currently it ‘stands evidently in need of reform’ (M24). The only reason given for recommending the threefold ministry as an expression of unity or as a means for achieving it is that of historical development. For an evangelical this is clearly insufficient warrant. Why should the contemporary church be narrower in its understanding of ministry than the New Testament, where we find a variety of forms of ministry (cf. M19)? To press for a specific, hierarchical form of ‘threefold ministry’ is to turn a legitimate diversity into a divisive issue. Thus BEM’s commendation of the threefold ministry achieves the opposite of what is intended.

Historical development is also taken as the basis for a particular understanding of the apostolic succession. It is argued that the ‘succession of bishops became one of the ways ... in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed’ (M36). Accordingly, it is claimed that non-episcopal churches should see the virtue of the episcopacy, especially when it is recognized that ‘the reality and function of the episcopal ministry have been preserved in many of these churches’ without the use of the word ‘bishop’ (M37). ‘Apostolic tradition’ is understood as ‘continuity with the apostles and their proclamation’ and ‘continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles’ (M34), such as witness and proclamation of the gospel, fellowship, service and worship. If apostolic tradition were to be understood in this sense only, then the primacy ascribed to ‘apostolic tradition’ would mean the acknowledgement of Scripture as critical norm over all subsequent tradition, a position to which evangelicals subscribe. But in BEM ‘apostolic tradition’ also refers to the extended tradition handed down and preserved by the churches in unbroken episcopal succession. In that case, the normative Scriptures become subservient to the church tradition.

Most evangelicals feel that the plea BEM makes for episcopacy a [p. 310](#) communions is an incentive to us to bring our understanding of Scripture to bear in the dialogue with other communions.

3. Because our perspective on the authority of Scripture, the nature of salvation, the role of the church, and the means of grace differs from the prevailing views of BEM, evangelicals are less likely than some others to use the Lima document for guidance in matters of worship and witness. Those amongst us, however, who have tended to underestimate the importance and value of the Lord’s Supper should be encouraged to review their theology and practice.

4. We wish to encourage Faith and Order in its endeavour to focus on the substance of the faith as the basis for true unity. We pray therefore that the long-range project ‘Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today’ will serve to that end. We make two suggestions:

a. that in the quest for unity in faith, the Scriptures function as supreme norm, and that traditions, including our own, be regarded as *interpretative* traditions—themselves subject to Scripture;

b. that in this project Faith and Order take into account more carefully the convictions of the millions of active believers who live and serve Christ in the context of a non-sacramentalist understanding of Christianity.

At the same time, we frankly acknowledge that the failure of Faith and Order to do so in the past has in part stemmed from our failure to make our views known clearly,

charitably and persistently. We would like to think that this response will contribute something to that end.

APPENDIX I

WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP STATEMENT OF FAITH

We believe in the *Holy Scriptures* as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct;
One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
Our *Lord Jesus Christ*, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and His personal return in power and glory;
The *Salvation* of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit; [p. 311](#)
The *Holy Spirit*, by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ;
The *Unity of the Spirit* of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ;
The *Resurrection* of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

APPENDIX II

MYSTERY, SACRAMENT, ORDINANCE

Part of the contemporary debate on baptism, eucharist and ministry lies hidden behind the terminology. Indeed, the stance of many evangelicals cannot easily be understood apart from an appreciation of some terminological developments during the earliest centuries of the Christian era.

Although the term ‘sacrament’ does not appear in BEM until B23, in the eyes of most readers of all persuasions, evangelicals included, the approach toward baptism, eucharist and ministry in this document is evidently ‘sacramentalist’. Unfortunately, ‘sacrament’ and ‘sacramentalist’ have diverse meanings for different speakers and writers. Some review of the rise and the use of the terms therefore seems advisable.

In contemporary evangelicalism, some define ‘sacrament’ as a religious rite instituted by Jesus Christ. With so simple a definition, few would find theological difficulty. Even credobaptists (i.e. those who believe that only those who articulate their own faith should be baptized) would not find fault with the first known application of the term to baptism, found in Pliny’s letters. Writing to Trajan, Pliny describes what he has learned from apostate Christians of early Christian faith and practice:

... they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, *and also to bind themselves by oath* [Lat. *dicere secure invicem seque sacramento*], not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft...
(Letters X. xcvi. 7)

Scholars usually recognize that ‘oath’ (*sacramentum*) refers to baptismal vows.

The history of the church shows that from this earliest usage three linguistic developments contributed to the contemporary situation.

First, the Greek term *mystērion* (‘mystery’ in older English versions of the New Testament, often ‘secret’ in more recent versions) was [p. 312](#) applied to the Lord’s Supper and to baptism, even though no such use is found in the New Testament. The word designated in common parlance the secret ceremonies which lay at the heart of various

'mystery-religions', as they are called for that very reason; the central rites were thought to mediate divine benefits. The mystery-religions were forms of devotion warmer and more personal than the official exercises of city and imperial religion. Because they had a considerable appeal throughout the Roman Empire in the first centuries of our era, contacts with Christianity were inevitable. Superficial similarities between the mystery-rites and the church's baptism and holy supper made it an easy step to transfer the term *mystērion* to the Christian observances.

Second, an effort was then made to relate this new usage to the teaching of the New Testament. The argument was one of analogy: just as miracles and signs are the visible manifestation of the powerful presence of the *mystery* of the kingdom ([Mk. 4:11](#) par.), just as Jesus' physical body is the visible demonstration of the *mystery* of the Word made flesh ([1 Tim. 3:16](#)), and just as the church is the bodily manifestation of Christ, expressing the *mystery* of the relationship between Christ and the church ([Eph. 5:32](#)), so also the bread and wine are the visible manifestations of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper—and therefore another 'mystery'. That link is not made in the New Testament, where *mystērion* almost exclusively refers to divine revelation in some measure hidden in previous ages but now revealed in the coming and teaching of Jesus Christ and his Spirit-anointed disciples.

Third, the Greek word *mystērion* was translated into Latin by the term *sacramentum*, from which our word 'sacrament' derives. The Latin *sacramentum* meant 'a thing set apart as sacred' and, more specifically, referred to 'a military oath of obedience as administered by the commander'. In the latter sense, it had been used very early for Christian baptism, as we have seen in Pliny's quotation, in harmony with the popular simile of the church as the 'militia of Christ'. As the rendering for *mystērion*, however, 'sacrament' took over the connotations of the Greek word, and the idea of ritual efficacy, for salvation and blessings, attached to it. That was reinforced by the association with sacredness. Later generations within the Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches of the church not only elevated the sacraments to a place of prominence in the church's worship, but increasingly stressed that sacraments are efficacious signs, conveying the grace that they contain, and that grace is communicated by virtue of the rite. [p. 313](#)

Since this view, which may be called sacramentalism, lacks biblical support, it is rejected by most evangelicals. Because of its connotations some of them studiously avoid the use of the word 'sacrament' itself; they rather speak of 'ordinances', i.e. things which the Lord has ordained. [p. 314](#)

Attesting the Evangel Evangelically: Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism

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I. WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Any account of Christian regard for other religions must depend decisively upon what being Christian is understood to involve. Therefore I begin this theological essay on religious pluralism by asking, What is a Christian?

Responses to this question vary according to whether priority is given to belief, experience or moral commitment. Some, following Schleiermacher, have argued that Christian beliefs are merely secondary and particular expressions of general religious experience. Others, in the tradition of Kant, have held that being a Christian is essentially a matter of being good and doing one's duty. I, however, align myself with those who hold that being a Christian is necessarily and decisively a matter of *belief*, though not sufficiently so. To be a Christian one must believe certain things, albeit in a manner that involves religious experience and entails moral commitment. Moreover, I follow those who deny that Christian belief is simply an historically conditioned expression of some universal religious experience. Certainly, it involves claims about the whole of reality; it makes universal claims. But these universal metaphysical beliefs are governed by particular, historical ones: beliefs about the birth, life, death and resurrection of the man, Jesus.

To be a Christian, I suggest, is to believe that God, who stands at the beginning and at the end of all things, has been from eternity one who would become human, suffer death and rise again from the dead bodily; and this, in order to save creation from the consequences of human sin. To believe this is to believe far more than that Jesus has given us an authoritative representation of God, revealing Him in essentially the same kind of way as any other genuine prophet. Rather it is to believe that in the active person of Jesus God is who he is, and therefore that apart from Jesus God would be essentially different. In [p. 315](#) other words, it is to deny that we can separate the being or nature of God from the history of this particular person; and it is to affirm the basic meaning of the doctrines of the divine Incarnation and of the Second Person of the Trinity.

I hold that this belief is very important. It is very important because of what it affirms about the reality in which we humans live, move and have our being. It affirms that in spite of recurrent human experiences of gross injustice and dreadful tragedy what is fundamentally and finally real is congenial to personal being such as we know it—that is, personal being in time and space. It declares that historical persons—persons who live in particular places at particular times for a limited duration—are fundamentally and finally at home in the cosmos. To believe that God became flesh and blood is to have reason to believe that at the very beginning and at the very end of all things persons like us are loved. Such a belief, it seems to me, is necessary for the hope that makes it possible for us to suffer injustice and tragedy with a patience that is not apathetic, but even joyful. It constitutes genuinely good news for us humans who, with everything we love, are currently headed for the grave.

To be a Christian, then, is to believe something about the nature of reality that is important for the basic quality of human lives. It is to believe that God so loved the world that He suffered the human condition to the point of death. Moreover, it is to believe this with integrity; that is, in a way that inspires in the believer profound gratitude, hope, humility and repentance, together with the moral commitment to attest what she believes in word and deed. We should note here that from time to time such attestation will assume critical form; either that of the contradiction of whatever statement, attitude or act negates Christian belief, or that of the completion of whatever statement, attitude or act says less than it. The culmination of my argument in this section, then, is that being a

Christian inevitably involves being critical of beliefs and practices which appear to be *un-Christian*.

II. BEARING WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL EVANGELICALLY

The Christian, as I have defined her, is one who holds and bears witness in word and deed, affirmatively and critically, to the belief that God is such that he would and has become man even to the point of death. But how is she to bear this witness? In what manner is she to testify to her belief before those who believe otherwise? I intend now to respond to these questions by drawing out some of the moral [P. 316](#) implications of the Gospel and its presuppositions. My basic assumption will be that we must bear witness to the Gospel in a manner that is consistent with its content; that is to say, that we must testify to the Evangel *evangelically*.

The first element of the Gospel whose moral content I wish to consider is the dogma of justification by grace, according to which we are saved decisively by the sheer love of God and not on account of our own merit. This dogma holds that the *belief* in salvation by divine grace is itself a necessary part of being saved; and therefore that such a belief is also basically a gift from God. This becomes significant for our discussion through the implication that if I find myself able to bear witness to the incarnate and crucified God, it is not because I am worthy to do so but because God has chosen me in spite of my unworthiness. The dogma of justification by grace forbids me, then, to treat the Gospel as my own property, as something that I have acquired by my own efforts or something that I possess on account of my own qualities. Indeed, it implies that if I do treat it in that way, I betray it. Accordingly, I am forbidden to suppose that those who do not believe in the Gospel fail to do so because they are more perverse, more resistant than I. For if I believe in the Gospel of grace, then I must accept that the only thing that distinguishes me from those who believe otherwise is grace itself. Why I should have been chosen to bear witness to the Gospel rather than you, I have no idea. God's election is a mystery. What I do know, however, is that I was not chosen on account of my superior qualities, religious or moral. The dogma of justification by grace, then, makes the moral claim that I should regard myself in relation to the non-Christian as fellow-sinner, equal in sin. (We may best understand the Epistle to the Romans, 2.1–3.20, by substituting 'Christian' for 'Jew', and 'non-Christian' for 'Greek' and 'Gentile' as we read it).

The second feature of the Gospel to which I turn is the concept of salvation as always both present and future. Insofar as I believe in God in Christ and so trust in love of God, I may rest assured that my salvation is secure. I may rest assured that God has already done all that is necessary for me to be saved, that I am being saved and that my salvation shall be made complete. Nevertheless, until that moment of completion I remain a sinner. I may be *iustus*, but I am still *peccator*. This means that even as one who believes in the incarnate and crucified God, I am still quite capable of neglecting inconvenient truths about God, about myself and about human life. It means that I am still quite capable of abusing and exploiting my religion; of using it to bolster my own sense of moral self-sufficiency by indulging in moral [p.317](#) indignation and contempt (no doubt the most pious of fashions) at the expense of others. In other words, I am still quite capable of exploiting my status as a Christian, as one of the (apparently) elect, to advance my own programme of self-justification. As a Christian sinner I am not immune from using the Evangel for quite unevangelical purposes.

It is surely one of the most constant refrains of the prophetic tradition of Judaism—a tradition whose mantle Jesus himself assumed—that those chosen to bear witness to the gracious God are well able and frequently inclined to betray Him, sometimes at the very

point where they imagine that they are being most faithful. (We may think here of some of the Pharisees). Even a religion whose credal formulae are perfectly true p. susceptible to becoming a vehicle of opposition to God. And given the universal persistence of sinfulness among human beings, this susceptibility is likely to become a reality. It is in this sense, I suggest, that we may agree with Karl Barth's mischievously shocking statement that all religion, Christianity included, is *unbelief*.¹

My main argument so far has been that the Christian cannot regard herself as morally superior to the non-Christian precisely because salvation is by grace. Now I want to propose that the Christian must regard herself not only as fellow sinner, equal with the non-Christian in moral inadequacy, but also as fellow creature, equal in mutual responsibility and need. From the conduct of Christ, the doctrine of God as a trinitarian community, the notion of humanity as made in the image of God, and the Pauline concept of the Church, the Christian has good reason to believe that the human creature has been created to be in a relationship of reciprocity with her fellows. Therefore, she who believes in a God who is acting to restore fallen humankind to true humanity is bound to commit herself to a relationship of giving and receiving with her fellow creatures, regardless of whether or not they believe as she does.

In the course of my main argument I asserted that even those who assent to the Gospel are capable of using their religion to further their own self-justification, thereby betraying what they believe. Here I propose that if we combine this with the Christian claim that God is Lord of the whole world, then it becomes conceivable that this God might use the adherents of 'other religions' to criticize and correct believers in the 'true religion' who abuse it.

It is along such lines that I am inclined to interpret Malachi 1.11: 'For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the p. 318 nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.' (RSV. Cp. NIV). This declaration both follows and precedes passages where the prophet rails against the faithlessness of God's Chosen People, and it clearly serves to provide a contrast to corrupt Jewish religion. Joyce Baldwin holds that this verse should be understood eschatologically, noting that to interpret it otherwise would make Malachi the only biblical writer to sanction pagan sacrifice.² But would it not be equally possible to read it as hyperbole in the same vein as Amos' deflation of Israel's privileged status before God to that of any other nation, and his demotion of the Exodus to rank of an ordinary ethnic migration: "'Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?' says the Lord. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kit? ...'" (Amos 9.7)?

It is also reasonable to interpret the story of Jesus' encounter with the centurion (Mt. 8.5-13; Lk. 7.1-10) along similar lines. Although Luke's version implies a considerable measure of sympathy for the Jews on the part of him whom Jesus' remarked, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith,' it is not at all certain that he belonged to those Gentiles who participated in synagogue services without actually becoming proselytes. In other words, the centurion here was not necessarily one who, *phoboumenos ton theon*, was

¹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), S.17.2.

² Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale Press, 1972), p. 228.

an informal member of the Chosen People—as Cornelius probably was (Acts 10.2).³ In which case, Jesus was speaking of a pagan.

However, even if these passages were to be interpreted in a fashion less complimentary to ‘other religions’, we would still have to acknowledge the extent to which both Judaism and Christianity have developed by borrowing ideas and practices from beyond their own circles. The borrowing, of course, has not been uncritical; and what has been borrowed has been significantly changed in the process. Nevertheless, our predecessors in the faith have persistently found valuable things in religiously foreign places. And it seems self-evident to me that there are ideas, insights and practices that Christians today would do well to learn from other religious sources, in order to p. 319 become better *Christians*. Might we not, for example, have something to learn from the thoroughness with which orthodox Jews and Muslims manage to sanctify ordinary, secular life by interrupting it regularly with sacred moments of prayer and worship?

I have been arguing here that the combination of two Christian beliefs—that God in Christ is Lord of the whole world and that Christians are still sinners and therefore capable of abusing their religion—makes it conceivable that God might choose non-Christians to teach Christians a thing or two. I shall now proceed to argue further that it is probable that there are some non-Christians who know the true God—that is, God in Christ—albeit in an opaque fashion.

I take it for granted that God intends the salvation of all, and that he is fair. From this we may infer that all persons must be given the opportunity to receive salvation in Christ, even when they have not been confronted with the Gospel evangelically—the implication being, of course, that many are confronted with the Gospel in a manner that lacks integrity and which thus robs it of credibility. Further, unless we are prepared to suppose that such people have not been met by the Gospel in an evangelical manner because they did not deserve to be—a supposition that the dogma of justification by grace precludes—then we must believe that saving grace has reached them by some other route.⁴ In this connexion it is pertinent to remember that Abraham answered the call of God *as a pagan* (Gen. 11.31–12.4a), and that he received the blessing of Melchizedek, who was a Canaanite priest (Gen. 14.17–24). We should also remember that Jesus was not a Christian.

Much light can be thrown on this perplexing business by taking a moment to think about what we mean when we talk about ‘a religion’. I suspect that we usually assume a religion to be a kind of fixed and quite discrete system of beliefs and practices to which some people subscribe and others do not. In fact, however, a religion is neither fixed nor discrete. Rather it is constantly developing in relation to other religions (*inter alia*), sometimes defining itself over and against them, sometimes adopting and modifying some of their features. Further, a religion is seldom a single system, but rather a collection of species that share a common historical origin and some common beliefs and practices, but which differ from each other in their interpretations of the common heritage—in the ways that they arrange the common p. 320 elements and in the relative weight that they ascribe to each of them. Further still, the adherents of a species of a particular religious tradition cannot be presumed to believe and practice exactly the same things in exactly the same way. There is often a considerable discrepancy between the public stance of a religion and the stances taken by its members. Even if it were true that all Roman

³ R. T. France, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, New Series (Leicester: IVP, 1985), pp. 153–54; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP, 1974), pp. 135–37.

⁴ Karl Rahner, ‘Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,’ *Theological Investigations, V: Later Writings* (London: Darton, Longman & Tdd, 1966), pp. 122–3.

Catholics did subscribe to official doctrine about the Virgin Mary at least passively, it would still be true that in the lives of many Roman Catholics that doctrine plays no effective role whatsoever. Therefore it is simply not enough to ask whether someone is a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu. We need to know what kind of Muslim he is, what particular convictions and practices he holds dear and what he stands to lose, and why. Otherwise we risk committing an act of religious racism, treating the other person simply as a member of a religious class and denying him the respect due to a unique individual.⁵

So, for example, if you would estimate where I stand in matters of belief and practice, you would need to know far more about me than the fact that I am a Christian. You would need to ask, What kind of Christian? To which I would answer, Protestant. Well, what kind of Protestant? Anglican. But what kind of Anglican? Evangelical. Now you think that you know me. But in the end generic labels are simply not enough, for there are none that fit me (or you) perfectly. In the end you must deal with me as a particular person. And when you do, you will discover that with regard to my understanding of salvation I am quite Protestant, but with regard to spiritual discipline I have Catholic tendencies. You might also discover that my understanding of the authority of Scripture is too liberal for your tastes (though others, of course, would find it too conservative). And you will certainly discover that I do not hold all that I believe with equal enthusiasm, and that at certain points I simply live more or less comfortably with internal contradictions. In other words my religion is a unique constellation of beliefs and practices; and in order to have some idea of where I stand, you would have to take the trouble to get to know me quite closely. Therefore, to discover that A is a Christian and B is a Jew is not actually to have discovered very much. For if I were to make the effort to get to know A and B more closely, I might be surprised (as, indeed, I have been) to find myself much more at home with a Jew [p. 321](#) who believes that God is able and inclined to involve himself in the concrete and personal details of history, than with a Christian who believes that God only operates in the world by means of general, impersonal laws.

To estimate, therefore, where a person stands before God, we cannot simply classify him. We have to respect him as an individual with a unique history, and so with a unique set of interpretations of a particular religion. To fail to give this kind of respect, I have suggested, is to ignore the complicated nature of religious commitment. It is also to offend love.

My main contention in this section has been that the Christian has ample reason to regard the non-Christian as her fellow, treating him as her moral equal, listening to him carefully and persistently, and ready to hear God's voice even through his lips. And I have sought to argue this on the basis of Christian belief in salvation by grace, in the persistent sinfulness of the Chosen People, in the morally normative interdependence of human creatures and in the universal sovereignty and salvific will of God in Christ, as well as of the complex nature of religious commitment and the requirements of love.

I do not believe that my argument in any way obscures the fact that there are important differences between the Christian and her non-Christian fellow or that these differences should be acknowledged. The Christian, as I have defined her, believes in the incarnate and crucified God and is called to bear witness to that belief. Accordingly, she is bound to contradict whatever gainsays it and add to whatever says less than it. Love may enjoin dialogue; but precisely to the extent that it enjoins genuine dialogue, it also enjoins candour. John Taylor makes this point well: 'dialogue ... means a sustained conversation

⁵ Raymond Pannikar makes a similar point about the subtlety of religious commitment. See 'The Unknown Christ of Hinduism,' in John Hick & Brian Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions* (Glasgow: Collins, 1980), pp. 127-28.

between parties who are not saying the same thing and who recognize and respect the differences, the contradictions, and the mutual exclusions, between their various ways of thinking'.⁶ Nevertheless, although we have not sought to deny that important differences lie between the Christian and the non-Christian, we have certainly implied that the immediately apparent differences are not always the decisive ones, and that apparent differences may sometimes mask profound agreements.

III. RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN THE PUBLIC PLACE

Close to the heart of the programme of political liberalism is the **P. 322** determination to keep public institutions free from control by any single religion. The origin of this determination lies in the revulsion felt by many at the blood that was shed in the name of the Protestant or Catholic God during the century or so of intermittent 'religious' warfare which plagued Europe from the mid-16th to the mid-17th century. But even today liberal eyes still tend to see the features of a fanatic lurking just beneath the surface of every pious face. Therefore the liberal political programme is designed to provide a political constitution which is capable of commanding the assent of everyone, *regardless of religious commitment*. Under such a constitution a religion enjoys freedom of self-expression provided that it does not infringe the rights of those who do not adhere to it—by attempting, for example, to govern public institutions without their consent.

The United States is, perhaps, the most liberal of all modern states, insofar as its religious and political institutions have been formally separated from the very beginning. The British state is much less liberal (in this sense) on account of its constitutional connexion with Protestant Christianity. It is quite possible, of course, for there to be a considerable measure of freedom for religious expression in a state whose institutions bear public witness to a particular religion. But if such public testimony is not made with extreme sensitivity and charity, the adherents of other religions are bound to be alarmed, fearing that the power of the state is being marshalled against their religious beliefs and practices. When, on the other hand, institutional witness to a particular religion is made carefully and with due respect, then in a secularist age it is quite conceivable that members of other religions might actually prefer the public affirmation of one particular religion to the expulsion of all religion onto the private margins of society.

It seems obvious to me that the conversion of the heart and mind to what is true and good cannot be effected by the application of external pressure; it cannot be coerced. Moreover, it seems to me that it is intrinsic to its nature that love should respect the freedom of the beloved to go his own way, even when that way appears to be a highway to hell. If these things are so, then it follows that the Christian is obliged to repudiate the use of all forms of external force, including the use of public institutions, to coerce conversion. In a religiously pluralist society, the Christian religion can only justify *to itself* its retention of a position of public privilege if it operates such an arrangement respectfully, fairly and generously with regard to other religious communities.

Accordingly, the Christian teacher in a public (i.e. state) school is bound by her vision of God as loving and by the corresponding moral claim made upon her own behaviour not to use her public office to **p. 323** apply 'undue pressure' to the children placed in her charge with regard to their religious orientation. What does this self-denying ordinance entail? It entails seeking to be at least scrupulously fair, and preferably generous, in her treatment of non-Christian religions. It entails freely admiring what is good in them and freely conceding what Christianity as a cultural institution might learn from them. It

⁶ John V. Taylor, 'The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue,' in *ibid.*, p. 212.

entails recognising a distinction between Christian faith and Western Christian culture, and making it abundantly clear that she is not in the business of defending her own cultural turf for its own sake. It entails demonstrating that she is committed to affirm whatever seems by the light of the Word of God in Scripture to be good and true, regardless of its provenance and even if it requires the jettisoning or the revision of cherished 'Christian' beliefs. It does *not* entail that she must abandon or suspend her convictions, though she will have to distinguish between those convictions that are basic to Christian identity and those that are not. Nor does it entail that she must suppress criticism of other religions; only that she must first earn the right to criticize by proving herself to be fair and generous, and as capable of receiving criticism as of delivering it.

I have just argued that the Christian teacher as a public servant is restricted in the ways she may bear witness to the Gospel by the moral claims *of that Gospel itself*. Finally and very briefly I shall consider whether her duty to attest the Gospel could ever permit the Christian teacher to encourage a child to mature in a non-Christian religion. From what has been said above it should be quite clear that I do not believe that the Christian teacher can encourage a child to endorse *everything* that the religion of his parents might require of him. She cannot suspend her own convictions and their critical implications. Nevertheless, as we have proposed, adherents to a particular religion are often highly selective in their appropriation of it, and in the end everyone travels a unique religious path. Therefore it seems to me that the route which leads to God in Christ need not always, especially in its initial stages, involve the public abandonment of the religion of one's birth for Christianity. Rather, it might well involve growing within a non-Christian religion but in a peculiar direction, like Abraham in his paganism and Jesus in his Judaism.⁷ In which case, p. 324 Christian witness in a multi-faith classroom could faithfully take the form of helping a pupil to find ways of moving toward God in Christ *through* the beliefs and practices of a non-Christian religion.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this essay I have sought to find a way of moving between two poles. On the one hand lie the facts that the Christian is called to confess some quite definite beliefs about the nature of God, of human being and existence, and of salvation; and that the making of such a confession is bound to involve the criticism of contrary beliefs. On the other hand there are the facts that the manner and means by which a Christian confession may be made are subject to restriction by the moral implications of the content of that confession; and that these moral restrictions become tighter in the case of public service.

As I close, let me bring out into the open a tacit assumption of great significance that lies behind my choice of route through the territory bounded by these two poles: namely, that silence itself may be a most cogent form of Christian confession. Of course, there is a silence that is born of fear—the fear of ridicule or criticism or ostracism. But if silence can be faithless, it can also be faithful. For there is the silence that is born both of a love which knows that it cannot speak without betraying trust and abusing power, and of a faith that the Holy Spirit may speak directly where human creatures should not. Therefore to choose this kind of silence is not at all to reject the call to bear witness to the Gospel, and

⁷ Pannikar may be arguing in a similar vein when he recommends that the Christian incarnate himself in the non-Christian religion in order to redeem its core; that is, in order to find a way to Christ *through* it, transforming it from within ('The Unknown Christ,' *ibid.*, pp. 132f., 138–40). Kenneth Cragg seems to suggest the same kind of approach when, appealing to the Incarnation, he speaks of 'referencing' the Gospel in terms of the mental universe of other faiths (*The Christ and the Faiths* [London: SPCK, 1986], p. 343).

so to betray one's Christian identity. Quite to the contrary, (it is to answer the call to bear that witness with integrity,) in manner as well as word: it is to attest the Evangel evangelically.

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One Baptism or Two? Reflections on the History of Christian Baptism

David F. Wright

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I have no doubt that some of my audience have undergone two baptisms—two water baptisms, that is. They may not now regard their first one as a baptism, but such a nicety need not detain us at this stage. (After all, it was certainly baptism in the mind of all those involved at the time who were capable of judging, and would be so reckoned by the great consensus of Christian people down the centuries.)

I am also confident that many of my listeners can immediately think of churches which they instinctively regard as outstanding when measured by recognized yardsticks, but most of whose baptisms are not in their view Christian baptisms. These congregations' main form of baptism is not that of my presumed hearers, and so much the worse for that, since the latter's is alone true Christian baptism.

One baptism or two? Is the state of affairs I have conjured up a matter of great concern to evangelical Christians today? It is my conviction that it should be, and if this lecture achieves anything, I hope it will at least provoke some to reflect afresh on 'the waters that divide', as Donald Bridge and David Phypers entitle their helpful introduction to 'the baptism debate'.¹ For this split among us is a blatant affront to a cherished axiom of the Reformation—the perspicuity of the scriptures. How can they be so clear to the reading of faith if they speak to us in such contradictory terms on baptism? I doubt if any other disagreement poses so sharp a challenge to this pristine protestant conviction. It is high irony that this principle should have been so powerfully articulated in the very context in which this gulf first opened up. Medieval anticipations of the sixteenth-century breach between magisterial and Anabaptist Reformers were of negligible significance.

It is also surprising that the ecumenical movement, which has occupied so many of the energies of the churches in the twentieth century, should have been so slow to grasp this particular nettle. It is only in the last ten years or so that it has featured high on the agenda of the Faith and Order arm of the World Council of Churches. Its earlier, p. 326 long-lasting preoccupation with the interrelated issues of ministry and eucharist has contributed, I suggest, to an ecumenical undervaluing of baptism, which finds a parallel in evangelical Christianity. Both main traditions have for too long given inadequate recognition to the

¹ Leicester, 1977.

constitutive and practical significance of baptism in New Testament Christianity. When ecumenical theologians tell us that the church is a eucharist community, I respond that they would be far truer to the New Testament to call it a baptismal community. When they set before us the goal of intercommunication, I want to place a higher premium on interbaptism. It is my judgement—or perhaps I should say my impression (the subject would make a good research topic)—that in the New Testament baptism is more often made the ground of exhortation, admonition and instruction than the Lord's Supper. This is what I mean by the constitutive and practical significance of baptism for the apostolic churches. It is seen most obviously in [Romans 6:1-4](#), where Paul exposes the absurdity of continuing to sin so that grace might increase by reminding his Roman readers of what happened to them in baptism. A similar style of reasoning on the basis of baptism is found elsewhere, most remarkably at [1 Corinthians 15:29](#), where Paul grounds belief in the resurrection of the dead in the obscure practice of baptism 'for the dead'.

We have still to recover the importance of baptism as a point of reference and departure in our applied theology. How many of us, faced with Paul's problem in [Romans 6](#), would have dealt with it in terms of the baptismal character of the Christian, as he did? How many of us have learned to repel the assaults of Satan as Luther did, by declaring '*Baptizatus sum*' ('I have been baptized', or perhaps 'I am a baptized person'—to bring out the force of the perfect tense)? (Did not Jesus act in very much the same way according to the Gospels, when, in the face of Satanic testing, he determined to be true to his baptismal calling?). The emphasis in some modern theology on baptism as the ordination of all God's people picks up another strand in Luther, namely his insistence that all Christians are priests by virtue of their baptism, but this is an applied theological use of baptism which may not have obvious New Testament warrant.

BAPTISM AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

What is crystal-clear in the Pauline letters is the correlation between baptism and Christian unity. Here are four illustrations of this theme: (1) [1 Corinthians 12:13](#)—although we are many separate individuals, 'we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or [P. 327](#) Greeks, slaves or free'; (2) [Galatians 3:27](#), where the argument is quite similar—'all of you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'; (3) [1 Corinthians 1:13](#)—'Were you baptized into the name of Paul?' Their baptism into the single name of Christ renders their party divisions outrageously incongruous; (4) (and here we rejoin the title of this lecture) [Ephesians 4:5](#), where, in a notably triadic or trinitarian passage, Paul lists among the realities that constitute our oneness in the Spirit 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism'.

This last text requires more extended consideration. There are two things it does not mean. First, it is not a knock-down argument (or an argument of any kind) against second baptism. The oneness it affirms is not that of temporal oneness (though one could compile a long list of distinguished theologians who have used it as a conclusive proof-text to this end). Second, the baptism of which Paul speaks is very simply the ordinance or rite or sacrament that was administered to new believers and initiated them into the church of Christ. That is to say, this 'one baptism' is not Christ's one baptism on our behalf in his atoning life, death and resurrection. This interpretation was advocated by J A T

Robinson² and has enjoyed the support in recent years of some theologians, particularly in the neo-orthodox tradition. (A letter that T F Torrance once wrote to *The Scotsman*³ on the occasion of some baptismal controversy in the Church of Scotland distinguished between ‘a rite of initiation (in water) and the actual baptism (in blood) with which Christ was baptized on our behalf’. Although he proceeded to ground ‘the mere rite’ in Christ’s baptism, this exegesis has damaging consequences for the way we think about and practise baptism, as well as losing contact with the context in [Ephesians 4](#).)

Paul’s undoubted meaning here is simply that the baptism we undergo is common to us all, as is the ‘one Lord’. Baptism is a unifying factor because each of us severally passes through it into the one body of Christ. This (in my view indubitable) reading of the text may have implications for the repetition of baptism, and is quite compatible with more than one explanation of the relation between Christ’s baptism and ours, but it does not say anything as such about either subject. [p. 328](#)

Having clarified the meaning of [Ephesians 4:5](#), we must not pass without allowing God’s word in Paul’s words to address its challenge to us. Are you able as a college community to make this confession your own and, to declare that you are all united by a common baptism? One Lord—yes; ‘one faith’—yes; but ‘one baptism’? We come back to the questions with which we began. Are ‘the waters that divide’ so deep and broad that we cannot link hands in fellowship from one side to the other?

In his commentary on Ephesians, Bishop B F Westcott comments that we might have expected to find in this list in chapter 4 the phrase ‘one bread’ or some similar mention of the eucharist.⁴ We know from [1 Corinthians 10:17](#) that Paul was capable of arguing from the ‘one loaf’ of the supper to our oneness in Christ’s body, but he did not do so here. The various quasi-credal or confessional formulae discernible in the New Testament, chiefly in the Epistles, never, unless I am mistaken, refer to the Lord’s Supper. Baptismal allusions, on the other hand, are identifiable in several of them.⁵ This should not surprise us, for the occasion of baptism was perhaps the most significant context for the confession of the faith in the early church. This was not a matter of testifying to one’s own experience, as happens at too many Baptist baptisms today, but of making one’s own the common confession of the believing community of which one was becoming, in baptism, a member.

THE NICENE CREED

Of the early formal and fixed creeds of the church the one which enjoys the widest acceptance among the different Christian traditions is the Nicene Creed, or, more accurately, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, for it derives not from the Council of Nicaea of 325 but from the second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381. Its date of origin is important for the interpretation of its clause about baptism, ‘We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.’ Not only in the New Testament but also in the most authoritative creed of the Christian church we encounter an affirmation of ‘one baptism’. What does the phrase denote in the Nicene Creed?

² ‘The One Baptism as a Category of New Testament Soteriology’, *SJT* 6 (1953) 257–74, reprinted in his *Twelve New Testament Studies* (Studies in Biblical Theology 34 (London, 1962) 158–175. For conclusive refutation see W E Moore, ‘One Baptism’, *NTS* 10 (1963–64) 504–516.

³ 15 June 1977.

⁴ *St Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, 1906) 58–59.

⁵ Cf for example, [Rom 10:9](#), [1 Tim 6:13f](#). Cf J N D Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London, 1972) 15ff.

This is not a question that allows of a prompt and confident answer, p. 329 for it has yet to receive the extended scholarly discussion it deserves. My response, based upon research in the relevant patristic sources, is not yet as assured as I would like it to be. It is certainly paradoxical, for I conclude that the Nicene acknowledgement of ‘one baptism for the remission of sins’ already implies some parting of the waters. Its baptism is the baptism of believers, or at least of those who have sins to be remitted, and does not embrace infant baptism, or, as we should call it for clarity’s sake, ‘baby baptism’. This is not because baby baptism had not entered the practice of the Eastern Church by the later fourth century. It certainly had, although how commonly it was observed is difficult to say. But in so far as the fourth-century Greek Fathers touch explicitly on the question, they seem to have believed that babies were not sinners or sinful and hence, if baptized, were not baptized ‘for the remission of sins’.

A lecture does not lend itself to a detailed presentation of the evidence that justifies such an interpretation.⁶ A few indications must suffice on this occasion. John Chrysostom’s enormous corpus of homilies and other works contains less than a handful of references to paedobaptism, but one of his baptismal catches speaks directly to this question.⁷ He enumerates ten gifts of baptism, for it is a mistake to think that it confers only the remission of sins. ‘It is on this account that we baptize even infants, although they have no sins, that they may be given the further gifts of sanctification, righteousness, adoption as sons,’ etc. The only other source whose evidence is directly to the point is a poem by Gregory Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian trio whose reconstructive theological work lies behind the creed of 381. He refers to baptism as a seal of God—for infants only a seal, but for adults a remedy as well as a seal.⁸ The same writer’s oration on baptism appears to bear out the implication of this poetic allusion, that infants have no need of baptismal healing or medicine. Babies in danger of death must be baptized without delay, he advises, ‘for it is better that they should be unconsciously sanctified than depart this life unsealed and uninitiated’. Others should wait until they are at least about three years old, ‘when they may be able to listen and to answer p. 330 something about the sacrament ...’ Even then they come to the font only to be fortified ‘because of the sudden assaults of danger that befall us’, ‘for of sins of ignorance owing to their tender years they have no account to give’.⁹

The Eastern Fathers of the fourth century seem generally to have viewed the benefits of baptism for babies as twofold—the bestowal of gifts such as eternal life, and strengthening against the hazards of earthly existence. I have found no evidence to suggest that any of them could have applied the baptismal clause of the Nicene Creed to baby baptism. However unfamiliar we may be with the baptismal theology of these Greek Fathers, their reasons for baptising babies were broadly those advanced by the Pelagians in their controversy with Augustine in the fifth century in the West. Although infant baptism is attested in the church from the late second century onwards, if not earlier, it was very much a rite in search of a theology until Augustine supplied it in his doctrine of original sin.

⁶ Cf my essay ‘How Controversial Was the Development of Infant Baptism in the Early Church?’, forthcoming in J E Bradley and R A Muller (eds), *Church, Word and Spirit: Historical and Theological Essays in Honor of Geoffrey W Bromiley* (Grand Rapids, 1987).

⁷ *Baptismal Catecheses* 3:6 (tr P W Harkins, *St John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions* (Westminster, MD, and London, 1963) 57.

⁸ *Carmina Dogmatica* 9:91–92 (PG 37, 463–464).

⁹ *Oration* 40:28, cf 40:17.

What, then, is the reference of ‘one baptism for the remission of sins’? The context of this statement is the early church’s bewildering hang-up over the problem of post-baptismal sin. The clause may be paraphrased as follows: in so far as baptism is given for the remissions of sins, a person may receive it only once. There may be, indeed there are, other means for the remission of sins after baptism, but baptism itself cannot be repeated for this purpose. Texts in support of this interpretation are to be found in Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Lectures* and in Chrysostom’s *Baptismal Catecheses*.¹⁰ Cyril’s explanation is particularly interesting. If it were possible to receive baptism a second or third time, ‘it might be said, “Though I fail once, I shall go right next time”.’ If you fail once, ‘there is no setting things right, for there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (!). None but heretics are rebaptized, since their former baptism was not baptism.’ Chrysostom’s explanation agrees with Cyril’s: ‘Since the old contract of debt is destroyed, let us be alert to prevent any second contract. For there is no second cross, nor a second remission by the bath of regeneration. There is remission, but not a second remission by baptism.’

So the baptismal clause in this fundamental creed turns out to have a very restricted reference. Its ‘one baptism’ is not the ‘one baptism’ of [Ephesians 4](#). It affirms not the common, single baptism that unites all the baptized, but the unrepeatability of the baptismal remission of sins. In these terms, it cannot easily encompass baby baptism, which a [p. 331](#) consensus in the East in the fourth century refused to link with the forgiveness of sins. (One can visualize an indirect relevance of the Nicene statement to paedobaptism. Even if it is accepted that babies are not baptized for the remission of sins, the creed presumably excludes the possibility of those baptized as babies being subsequently baptized again for the remission of [post-baptismal] sin).

REBAPTISM

Another important issue in the early church to which the Nicene Creed says nothing is the rebaptism within the Catholic Church of those already baptized in heresy or schism. Cyril of Jerusalem, as we have just seen, explicitly debar such an assertion of ‘one baptism’ from excluding the rebaptism of heretics. Given the prominence of rebaptism controversies in the Western Church, particularly from the mid-third century for almost another two hundred years, it is remarkable that hardly any of the local creeds in use in the West include an affirmation of ‘one baptism’.¹¹ More specifically, it never featured in any creed in the North African Church of Cyprian and Augustine, which was a hotbed of disputes over rebaptism. Although one can easily enough conceive how the Nicene clause could be cited to the disadvantage of the rebaptizing Donatist, it originally had nothing to do with this Western quarrel. Moreover, it is important to insist upon the irrelevance of the Nicene Creed to the questions of schismatic baptism faced by the North African Fathers. The history of baptismal practice and discussion is littered with the inappropriate application of texts and formulae (such as the assertions of ‘one baptism’ in [Ephesians 4](#) and the Nicene Creed), without regard to their original meaning. Cyprian rebaptized schismatics, and the Donatists rebaptized Catholics, not because these schismatics and Catholics had committed serious post-baptismal sin but because the schismatic or Catholic baptism they had received was, in the judgement of the rebaptizers (Cyprian and the Donatists) no baptism at all. The latter regarded themselves, of course,

¹⁰ Cyril, *Procatachesis* 7; Chrysostom, *Baptismal Catecheses* 3:23, 63:4.

¹¹ The evidence can be seen in A Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Alten Kirche* (Breslau, 1897).

as dispensing not rebaptism but (first) baptism *de novo*. We must further remember that such rebaptismal policy had nothing whatever to do with the form or manner of administration of the false baptisms. Their rejection by the baptizers was a straightforward corollary of their refusal to recognize anything from God—grace, Spirit, salvation, forgiveness—outside their own **P. 332** true church which was the Catholic Church for Cyprian, and the Donatist Church for the Donatists.

Cyprian's practice, which the Donatists later followed, was controversial in his own day and was abandoned by the Catholic Church within half a century. Augustine spelt out an influential theology of baptism that justified this abandonment and the church's recognition of the validity, within strict limits, of baptism administered outside the church. The Augustinian position became the norm in Western Christianity, so that rebaptism *on the grounds argued by Cyprian and his successors* has not been common since the patristic era. Even during the centuries when the Roman Church accorded no churchly status whatever to Protestant bodies, it did not normally rebaptize converts from Protestantism, although it often hedged its bets by the use of conditional baptism ('If you have not been baptized, I baptize you ...').

But from time to time church history throws up instances of the administration of rebaptism based on a rejection of the church character of the communion in which baptism was first received. How frequently this has happened, I cannot say: the subject requires further research. Some Waldensians practised rebaptism on these 'Cyprianic' grounds. According to the Fourth Lateran Council the Greek Church had rebaptized Catholics (canon 4). Some nineteenth-century Anglicans refused to accept baptisms that had not been dispensed by an episcopally ordained minister. The more conservative sectors of American Presbyterianism on several occasions in the nineteenth century debated whether Roman Catholic baptism was valid, if the Roman Church could not be recognized as a true church of Christ. Other practices of rebaptism on similar, Cyprianic, grounds could almost certainly be catalogued.

ANABAPTISM

It has been suggested¹² that some cases of rebaptism by sixteenth-century Anabaptists fall into this category. Some Anabaptists, it is argued, rejected Catholic or mainstream Protestant baptism not because it was infant baptism and therefore not Christian baptism at all, but because they rejected root and branch the Constantinian captivity of the state church, whether Roman Catholic or magisterial **P. 333** Protestant. It has even been claimed that some of them practised Anabaptist paedobaptism—that is, the second and only true baptism they administered was infant baptism. The subject has not yet been sufficiently researched for this account of Anabaptist practice to be accorded great significance.¹³ But is a salutary reminder that between the Anabaptists and the magisterial Reformers yawned a far deeper gulf than separates many today who cannot join hands across 'the waters that divide'. It is a sound instinct when discussing this

¹² L Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, 1964) 195–197.

¹³ Verduin's evidence from Luther does not stand closer scrutiny, as correspondence with Dr Euan Cameron of Newcastle University has helped me realize. But the records of very early Anabaptism in the Wassenberg district are clear enough.

sixteenth-century split not to speak about baptism first of all, and perhaps not to speak about it too much at all.¹⁴

Nevertheless, baptism is our legitimate talking-point on this occasion. Mainstream Anabaptism, taking its stand on its repristination of New Testament Christianity, could not countenance infant baptism and hence practised ana- or rebaptism. For this Anabaptists suffered, being branded frequently as 'Donatists' and subjected to the sanctions of the anti-Donatist legislation of the early Christian Roman emperors, especially Justinian.¹⁵ The injustice of this treatment has not been adequately acknowledged and repented of by the churches that have inherited the legacy of the magisterial Reformers. Something comparable to the mutual rescinding in 1965 by Pope John VI and Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople of the ancient sentences of excommunication of their respective sees would be a splendid gesture. For the iniquity of the punitive measures inflicted on the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century lay not so much in the use of the sword (which was merely par for the course in that age) but in trapping the Anabaptists under legislation directed against Donatists. Both groups rebaptized, but for quite different reasons. The Donatists had no scruples over baby baptism, but rejected Catholic baptism, whether of babies or of adult converts. The mass of the Anabaptists failed to find paedobaptism in the New Testament, and hence administered only believers' baptism. The theologians among the establishment Protestants should not have tolerated the labelling of the Anabaptists as 'Donatists'. We find here another example of the tendency in the [p. 334](#) history of baptism for significant distinctions to be collapsed into simple catch-all constants, such as 'one baptism' or 'rebaptism'.

MODERN DEBATE: LIMA

The modern baptismal divide corresponds in broad terms to that of the sixteenth century, but there is at least one major difference. We appear to have so downgraded the importance of baptism that it has become possible for some of us, at any rate, to disallow a denomination's baptismal practice without calling into question its character as 'church'. For example, the congregations of the Baptist Union of Scotland seem able to regard 95% of the baptisms administered in the Church of Scotland as not Christian baptism without casting aspersions on the Kirk's right to be called a Church of Christ (unless I am being overgenerous to Scottish Baptists). But it is *prima facie* an anomalous standpoint to adopt, especially if one holds, with the Reformers of every stripe, that the ministry of the gospel sacraments is an indispensable mark of the church. Such an attitude could not conceivably have gained currency until after the sixteenth century. It suggests an awkward dilemma for the stricter sort of Baptists to this day, for a church that is not a baptismal community is, by New Testament standards, a very odd entity indeed.

The second half of the twentieth century is witnessing some unprecedented developments on the baptismal scene. In 1982 was published the so-called Lima report, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM for short)*.¹⁶ This is a product of the Faith and Order Commission within the World Council of Churches, and reached its final form at a

¹⁴ This was brought home to me when a Mennonite scholar submitted for a theological dictionary an article on 'Anabaptist Theology' which made no mention of baptism at all.

¹⁵ Cf Verduin, *op cit*, ch 1; G H Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (London, 1962) xxiii, 239f.

¹⁶ *Faith and Order Paper* (Geneva, 1982) 111. Cf my *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (the 'Lima Report'): An Evangelical Assessment* (Rutherford Forum Papers, 3; Edinburgh, 1984).

conference in Lima in which Catholics and Eastern Orthodox were full participants along with Lutherans, Reformed, Baptists, Anglicans and others. It comprises text and commentary. Although the main text does not represent in every respect a consensus of belief, it is an agreed statement, in that it embodies agreement on how each of the three topics is to be understood, including points of continuing difference.

This is a report of enormous importance. It has already become within most of the churches the standard starting-point for ecumenical reflection on baptism, eucharist and ministry. In a nutshell, its approach to the divergence in baptismal practice suggests that there may not be much difference between infant baptism followed by [p. 335](#) Christian nurture within the believing community issuing in personal confession of faith, and the nurture of a child within the congregation, perhaps after thanksgiving for its birth and the parents' commitment to their Christian responsibility, leading to baptism on personal confession of faith.¹⁷ Two key sentences which appear in the commentary are these: 'The differences between infant and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community ... A discovery of the continuing character of Christian nurture may facilitate the mutual acceptance of different initiation practices.'¹⁸

There is nothing breathtakingly new in *BEM's* consideration of baptism, except that, on the basis of agreement among official representatives of Baptists as well as the majority of paedobaptist churches, it claims to offer a path to interbaptism—the mutual recognition of the two dominant forms of baptism. Much might be said about *BEM*,¹⁹ which is a text we dare not ignore. I commend it for study, for one reason in particular. If, with our evangelical commitment to the supreme authority and the clarity of scripture, we have been unable to find a route through the baptismal impasse (a bridge across the baptismal gulf), ought we not to start thinking about a biblical frame of reference in which we can agree to accept and live with both baptismal traditions? It is at least worth considering.

'EQUIVALENT ALTERNATIVES'

What the Lima report proposes in theological terms is already a reality in some churches, namely, the observance of both infant and believers' baptism as 'equivalent alternatives' (this being almost a technical phrase by now) in the normal course of congregational life. The United Reformed Church in England and Scotland and the Church of North India are the two bodies following this procedure best known to me, but some independent congregations mostly south of the border are also 'double-practice' churches. Others have moved some way to this position by openly and formally authorising the non-observance of their norm of paedobaptism—and hence allowing with approval the non-baptism as babies of the offspring of Christian parents. The French Reformed Church and one of the main American Presbyterian [P. 336](#) Churches have adopted this policy, which has even to a limited extent been at least condoned by one or two bishops in the Church of England.

Each of these two groups of churches is in its way highly significant. The United Reformed Church and the Church of North India are the result of church unions in which both Baptists and paedobaptists were involved. It will be very interesting to observe how

¹⁷ cf 'Baptism', para 12.

¹⁸ 'Baptism', commentary (12).

¹⁹ For my brief evaluation, see n 16 above.

baptismal practice develops in such churches. Will believers' baptism slowly make baby baptism less and less common? I have so far been unable to find out anything about trends in the Church of North India, nor has any clear change yet been identified in the United Reformed Church. One would expect that, in so far as each individual congregation will have to come into these united churches out of either a Baptist or a paedobaptist tradition, with no prior experience of an 'equivalent alternatives' baptismal ministry, cross-fertilization will proceed slowly, except perhaps where congregations originally of different traditions become a single congregation within the united church.

The other category of churches that have officially countenanced a departure from invariable paedobaptism as the norm, is even more interesting. The reasons behind their revised policy are no doubt of different kinds: recognition of the greater reluctance of even some Christian parents today to decide for their children; accommodation to the unceasing and perhaps increasing questioning of infant baptism on both historical and theological grounds (after all, the two most influential Reformed theologians of this century have forcefully rejected infant baptism—Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann); respect for a new atmosphere of ecumenical baptismal debate; even perhaps an attempt to come to terms with the difficulties of administering a consistent paedobaptist discipline as the age of Christendom and the Christian society no longer provides viable models for remnant or gathered churches.

The *BEM* approach, exemplified in the fully-fledged 'double-practice' churches, appears to accept that there is no realistic hope of reaching agreement on one form of baptism. One could, however, put a different complexion on their expectations—namely, that agreement, if it is to come at all, will emerge only from allowing the two baptisms to cohabit within one family. I find it intriguing that one of the chief architects of the *BEM* construction, Geoffrey Wainwright, who is a Methodist, is on record back in 1969 as conceiving of a modified Baptist pattern as the most hopeful for the ecumenical future.²⁰
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POLARIZATION

One short-term or medium-term result of ecumenical encounter on baptism has in fact been increased polarization.²¹ (This experience has many parallels in ecumenical engagement.) Baptists have rightly challenged paedobaptists whether they really regard infant baptism as full, complete baptism. If they do, why do they place so much stress on confirmation or admission to communicant membership? Are we not members of Christ's body by virtue of baptism, and ought not baptism to admit to the Lord's Table? *BEM* itself points up the incongruity of interposing some other ecclesiastical rite between baby baptism and entry to the Lord's Supper.²² It is an index of the unbiblical imbalance some of our evangelical churches have fallen into on baptism that this later ceremony is accorded greater significance than baptism itself. It is not unknown, even in our blue-riband evangelical congregations, to have a teenage convert baptised prior to a service, in the presence of the elders alone, before he or she proceeds into the congregation to be admitted to communicant status on a par with others who had the good fortune to have

²⁰ *Christian Initiation* (London, 1969) 80–83.

²¹ Cf G Warner, 'Baptism from Accra to Lima', in M Thurian (ed), *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (*Faith and Order Paper*, 116; Geneva, 1983) 27.

²² 'Baptism', commentary (14) (b).

been baptized in infancy. If we administer baptism to babies, we have no warrant to treat it as less than the full dominical ordinance or sacrament.

This polarization may retard progress. Baptists may be more likely to adjust to a 'double-practice' policy when paedobaptists accept that baby baptism is incomplete until something like confirmation (ie, a formal, public personal profession of faith) has taken place. Baptists might be readier to 'buy' paedobaptism on these terms—baptism by instalments, as it were. I very much hope that this will not be the case. It is surely far healthier to acknowledge that we have inherited two different patterns of baptism, and to accept the other's practice without being able to endorse it, than to fudge the issue in this way.

ORIGINS

I also refuse to abandon the historical enquiry into the beginnings of Christian baptism. I cannot resign myself to the view that everything has been said that can be said and that, short of the discovery of new evidence (such as Paul's lost third letter to Timothy on how to baptise p. 338 babies), no headway will be made on baptismal origins. There is no time now to open up this aspect of our subject. I have recently argued elsewhere that a surprising amount of the evidence in the earliest centuries is patient of the interpretation that quite young children were baptized on their own profession.²³ It is intriguing that the very first attestation of infant baptism as the normal practice (in Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*, c.215) is in the form of an instruction how to baptize—first those who can answer for themselves and then those who cannot. At what age would children in a newly converted family be able to answer for themselves? We have already cited the recommendation of Gregory of Nazianzus that infants should preferably not be baptized until they were about three years of age when they could listen and 'answer something about the sacrament'. It is evidence like this that makes me protest vehemently at talk of 'adult baptism'. If we all took our bearings from the earliest differentiation between those too young to answer for themselves and those, perhaps of quite young, *infant* years, who could. (This distinction also, by the way, provides a ready approach to the baptism of handicapped persons who might not be able to answer for themselves.)

Among other evidence I advance in the study referred to is that inferred from epitaph inscriptions from the third and fourth centuries of young children who were baptized just prior to death. An American scholar, Everett Ferguson of Abilene in Texas, has argued that paedobaptism began from the clinical baptism of very young children.²⁴ That is to say, baby baptism was perhaps at first given only to dying babies, while others were baptized as and when they could answer for themselves.

The debate about origins was not exhausted by the celebrated exchange between the German scholars Joachim Jeremias and Kurt Aland some twenty years ago.²⁵ On balance Aland probably had the better of that controversy; it is unlikely that in the first few decades of the church babies were baptized. But it is also true that baby baptism, when it did develop, seems to have been accepted with little or no protest. Tertullian objected (as he did to a good deal else), but on the basis of a baptismal theology and a view of the 'innocence' of infants neither of which many today could share. Those who hold that only professing believers were baptized in the New Testament congregations p. 339 cannot

²³ Cf my article, 'The Origins of Infant Baptism—Child Believers Baptism?', *SJT* 39 (1987) 1–23.

²⁴ 'Inscriptions and the Origins of Infant Baptism', *JTS* ns 30 (1979) 34–46.

²⁵ For the bibliographical details, see my study, *art cit* (n 23 above) 2, n 4.

comfortably dismiss the fact of the development of infant baptism within a century or so. The situation may have required that degree of historical distance from apostolic Christianity's polemical attitude to circumcision in the conflict with the Judaizers for Christians to have perceived a proper parallelism with the Old Testament's covenantal seal.

'BELIEVERS' BAPTISM'

So let us not abandon the question how baptism began. At the same time there is a second issue we should take up together across 'the waters that divide'. When paedobaptist churches baptize persons of mature years on profession of faith are they administering believers' baptism? To put it another way: can we reach an agreed theological understanding about our respective baptisms *of those who answer for themselves*? This may seem a non-issue, but I assure you that it is a substantial one. In the course of recent discussions between representatives of the Church of Scotland and the Baptist Union of Scotland it has become apparent that some in the Church of Scotland deny that it ever practises believers' baptism. The phrase 'believers' baptism' seems to carry with it a theology of baptism that they reject. It would be helpful if both sides could find an agreed, new way of describing the baptismal practice in question. 'The baptism of those who can answer for themselves' is too much of a mouthful, but it avoids the unhappy sound of 'believers' baptism' in some Reformed ears. But the challenge to reach agreement in this quarter goes deeper than words. Again *BEM* is a good starting-point, with its pregnant sentence, 'Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift'.²⁶ It is perhaps the gravest consequence of the division that has separated our two baptisms that each practice has attracted to itself a one-sided theology. Paedobaptists have allowed the passivity of the baby in baptism to become the supreme paradigm of the reception of divine grace, so that baptism of those who have brought themselves at least physically to the font has to be hedged around lest it fail to express the priority of grace over faith. Baptists, on the other hand, have made personally articulated faith so constitutive of baptism that it has become a testimony to their own religious experience rather than to the grace of God. How many of those who have been baptised as believers were taught to think of what was happening to you in terms **P. 340** of [Romans 6](#)—or even of [Acts 2:38](#)—'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'? (There is indeed scriptural warrant for confessing 'baptism for the remission of sins' along with the Nicene Creed.) Baptists and paedobaptists urgently need to talk together, not first and foremost about what they do differently but what they, *prima facie*, do alike—namely, baptize professing converts.

REBAPTISM TODAY

But probably the most sensitive issue in this field is the one with which I began and to which in conclusion I return—rebaptism, *BEM* declares, 'Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided'.²⁷ This is a curious use of language. If baptism is strictly unrepeatable, ie, incapable of being repeated, why should it be necessary to warn against repeating it? Perhaps a second baptism never,

²⁶ 'Baptism' para 8.

²⁷ *Ibid*, para 13.

in the courts of theologians if not of heaven, repeats a first baptism but merely cancels it out altogether. Is *BEM* asserting that 're-baptism' never happens, but that we ought to be extremely careful not to let it appear that it is happening? We should probably discern in this statement in *BEM* unhappiness with the practice of conditional baptism on the opposite pole of the baptismal spectrum.

It remains to be seen whether in the 'double-practice' churches, the pastoral pressure for rebaptism increases or decreases. It is, of course, absolutely fundamental to the 'double-practice' position that a person may receive only one form of baptism. But in these churches for the first time some who have been baptized as babies will be exposed to the administration of baptism on believing profession as one of the church's two norms. It is quite conceivable that in this context requests for rebaptism will grow in number.²⁸

Two particular points about this question should be stressed. First, we must all do our utmost to sympathise with the deep-seated dismay, even revulsion, felt in the traditional paedobaptist churches at this p. 341 practice. It is sometimes more instinctive than articulately rational, but it arises from a sense that from its beginnings the church has unambiguously affirmed 'one baptism'. Behind this conviction lies too often an uncritical lumping together of the very different kinds of rebaptism encountered in church history, which I have attempted to disentangle from each other in this lecture. But although they differ, they have all been rejected by the vast majority of the Christian world. The church in its history has manifested for the most part a profound antipathy to repeating baptism.

In the second place, those who belong ecclesiastically to the mainstream tradition must come to terms with the fact that one kind of demand for rebaptism currently abroad among the churches lacks historical precedent and is animated by the utmost seriousness about baptism. The rebaptism that ensues when someone ceases to believe that infant baptism is the genuine article is nothing new; it was what the Anabaptists did in the sixteenth century. Unprecedented, however, is the desire for rebaptism on the part of those who, while not rejecting infant baptism in principle, have come to the position of being unable to accept that their own baptism satisfied the requirements of true Christian baptism. It is important to notice immediately that this conviction may be reached not only about one's baptism as a baby but also about one's prior baptism as, allegedly, a believer. We can all visualize baptisms whose circumstances raise the sharpest doubts in our minds about their meaningfulness to anyone involved, apart perhaps from the baptizing minister.

This is sensitive territory, and must be trodden warily, if not delicately. One may have not a little sympathy with the attitude I have summarized, but disquiet at the same time. On the one hand, the case has not been won by the rigorists, like Colin Buchanan, in some of the Grove Booklets, whose arguments seem to amount to saying 'a baptism is a baptism', and cannot ultimately escape from an *ex opere operato* stance about the reality (but not necessarily the efficacy) of every formally valid baptism.²⁹ The uncompromising opponents of rebaptism need to give greater consideration to the earthly or human pole of the baptismal event. If *BEM* is correct in saying that 'Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift', does baptism exist if there is no human response? Or is the human response constituted merely by the (passive) receiving of baptism? To p. 342 put it another way, in the language of initiation, is a beginning which has no continuation and leads nowhere a real beginning at all? Do we not gravely devalue

²⁸ However, recent correspondence with Principal Martin Cressey of Westminster College, Cambridge, has disclosed that the pressure for rebaptism in congregations of the United Reformed Churches is not related to the URC's 'double-practice' order, but arises especially from charismatic experience (see below).

²⁹ cf his *One Baptism Once* (Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship, Bramcote, 1978) 61.

Christian baptism if we insist that every baptismal rite, however perfunctorily and unfruitfully and unbelievably received, must bear the full weight of the great New Testament theology of baptismal incorporation in Christ?

On the other hand, counter arguments lie ready to hand. It is disturbing that behind such a pursuit of rebaptism there often lurks an unhealthy preoccupation with giving expression to one's own experience rather than humbly recognizing the marvel of God's electing grace, when he set his love upon us in Christ before the world began, and of all he accomplished for us in Christ without our knowledge and before our hearts ever consciously opened to his love. Moreover, in the pastoral context, the lines must be exceedingly difficult to draw, although in the last resort we must not let this 'thin end of the wedge' argument prove decisive.

But we must surely stand firm in resisting requests for a second baptism from those who do not repudiate their first. This would be brazen rebaptism. It often smacks of a safety-first policy ('you can never be too sure ...') that is profoundly un-Protestant. You can indeed have too much of a good thing. To grant rebaptism to those who want to feel that they really have done the right thing by the New Testament, beyond the shadow of a doubt, would be a more blatant depreciation of their first baptism than anything we have considered so far. I would therefore support a point that was made in the report on recent discussions between Scottish Baptists and Church of Scotland representatives. They advised Baptist ministers considering requests for a second baptism to point out to the persons concerned that they were in effect denying their first baptism.³⁰ Objection was taken to this recommendation by some in the Church of Scotland, who were aghast that such a possibility should be even canvassed in a report to which their representatives were party, but I believe it was soundly based.

Much more could be said, and no doubt will be said. May it be said not to score party points off each other, but in an endearour to recover the baptismal grounding of Christian life and church life to which the New Testament bears ample witness. It has long been my conviction, not least as a result of reading in the great Reformers, that evangelical Christians have not faced up to the heavily realistic ways of talking about baptism used by the New Testament writers. [p. 343](#)

If more remains to be said, let it also be marked by a readiness to reexamine cherished traditions on all sides. *BEM* addresses sharp questions to practitioners of each of the two main inherited patterns of baptism, in particular, let those who deny the genuineness of baby baptism, yet acknowledge the genuineness of the churches that practise it, ask themselves whether they are not implicated in a deep inconsistency. Above all, let us not acquiesce in our difficulties in giving reality to 'one baptism', whether it is the baptism common to all Christians of [Ephesians 4](#) or the Nicene Creed's once-for-all baptismal response to the gifts of God in the gospel.

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³⁰ Cf *Reports to the General Assembly 1986* [of the Church of Scotland] (Edinburgh, 1986) 311 (para 6.12).

Apostleship: Evidence from the New Testament and Early Christian Literature

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INTRODUCTION

There are several good reasons for beginning a study of the New Testament evidence with the Pauline literature.¹ The most obvious is that most if not all of Paul's epistles were written before the gospels. Other reasons cited by C K Barrett are as follows: (1) 'Paul is in any case the centre of theological thinking in the New Testament'; (2) 'We have his own words ... No other Christian writer has left us an account of what it meant to him to be an apostle'; (3) 'Paul was deeply, thoughtfully, and passionately convinced of his call to be an apostle'; (4) 'Paul's conviction that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus was tested by the scepticism of his rivals and the indifference of his converts; this obliged him to work out what his apostleship meant, and on what grounds it rested.'²

One does not need to follow Barrett in seeing an irreconcilable conflict between Pauline and Lucan concepts of apostleship to appreciate the force of these considerations.

THE PAULINE LITERATURE

Various significant questions necessarily arise in any consideration of Paul's epistles.³ What was his self-understanding as an apostle? Did he see himself as possessing a key eschatological role? Whom else did he recognise as apostles, and on what criteria? Did he make a clear distinction in his own mind between 'apostles of Jesus Christ' and 'apostles of the churches'? To these questions we now turn. **P. 345**

Paul's self-understanding

In recent years, many scholars have insisted that Paul's understanding of apostleship is to be set in the context of that eschatological way of thinking that forms the framework of New Testament theology. The first to do this in a systematic way⁴ seems to have been A Fridrichsen in a seminal paper entitled *The Apostle and his Message*, first published in 1947. Fridrichsen stressed that one characteristic trait of this thought-pattern was belief in a 'predetermined series of eschatological events' which is 'bound up with certain elected persons who have a distinct and particular place in God's plan of salvation, and

¹ This is the procedure adopted by Walter Schmithals and other recent writers.

² In *The Signs of an Apostle* (London 1970) 35f.

³ Against most modern scholars, I regard Paul as the author of all the epistles attributed to him. Limitations of space preclude a defence of this position. Evidence from Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles will, however be treated separately.

⁴ Earlier, in 1939, G Sass had argued that 'there are many apostles of Christ, but only one eschatological apostle to the peoples, to whom all other apostles are only helpers in his work'. *Apostolat und Kirche* (1939) 141.

who have been given to play a strictly definitive role in the great final drama, a role to which they and they alone are called—and for which they are specially equipped’.⁵ Fridrichsen argued that Paul saw himself in these terms as ‘an eschatologic person’. This line of argument was taken up by J Munck in his influential work *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, in which he maintained that ‘it is above all on the shoulders of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, that the task is laid of bringing about the fulness of the Gentiles’.⁶ This position has been accepted by B Gerhardsson⁷ and many other scholars.⁸ It has certainly not achieved universal recognition, however. W Schmithals, for example, believes that ‘Paul places himself wholly within the one unified context of the primitive Christian apostolate.’⁹ In the light of this debate we turn afresh to the evidence, beginning with Galatians, since it may well be the earliest of Paul’s epistles that we possess,¹⁰ and it contains an impassioned defence of his apostleship.

Galatians

It is clear from [Galatians 1](#) that Paul’s Galatian converts had been informed that his apostolic commission was derivative; that ‘he had no commission apart from what he had received from men who had been [p. 346](#) Christian leaders before him, whether the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church or the Christian leaders of Damascus or Antioch’.¹¹ This Paul passionately denies in [1:1](#) and [1:11–2:10](#). His apostolic commission did not come from men (ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων), nor did it come through a human intermediary (δι’ ἀνθρώπου). J B Lightfoot comments that ‘in the first clause he distinguishes himself from the false apostles, who did not derive their commission from God at all; in the second he ranks himself with the twelve, who were commissioned directly from God’.¹² He views the prepositions as retaining their proper sense, and this seems indisputable. In the light of such language it seems likely that Paul did make a distinction between ‘apostles of Jesus Christ’ and ‘apostles of the churches’ (cf [2 Cor 8:17](#)).¹³ In all of his letters except Romans, where equivalent words are used ([Rom 1:1, 5](#)), Philemon and Philipplans, where his relationship with the recipient church was exceptionally close, and 2 Thessalonians, where his authority does not seem to have been challenged, Paul refers to himself as art apostle of Jesus Christ/Christ Jesus. This title, implying a direct commission from Jesus Christ, clearly was seen by Paul as giving him authority over the churches.¹⁴

⁵ A Fridrichsen, ‘The Apostle and his Message’, *UVA* (Uppsala 1947:3) 3.

⁶ J Munck, ‘Paul and the Salvation of Mankind’ (ET, London 1959) 277.

⁷ B Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Lund 1961) 292.

⁸ Most recently by P R Jones, ‘I Corinthians 15:8: Paul the Last Apostle’, *Tyndale Bulletin* 36 (1985) *passim*.

⁹ W Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (ET, New York 1969) 59.

¹⁰ Accepting the ‘South Galatian’ theory with early dating as argued by, eg F F Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Exeter 1982) 8f, 55f.

¹¹ Bruce, *Galatians*, 72.

¹² J B Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London 1876²) 71.

¹³ This is denied by D Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* ed J Riches (ET, Edinburgh 1986) 35.

¹⁴ Cf [1 Cor 14:37f](#), [2 Cor 2:9](#), [13:2f](#), [10](#); [Phil 2:12](#). Compare C E B Cranfield’s comment: ‘The word points away from the apostle’s person to Him whose apostle he is. It is thus both a very humble word and also at the

In [1:12](#), [16](#) Paul speaks of a special revelation¹⁵ of Jesus Christ,¹⁶ a clear reference to his Damascus Road experience (cf [1 Cor 9:1](#), [15:8](#); [Phil 3:12](#)). Even more significant are Paul's words in [1:15](#), which are strongly reminiscent of [Jeremiah 1:5](#) and [Isaiah 49:1–6](#). In the latter passage, both in verse 1, where we read in the Septuagint ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου ἔκαλεσεν; and in verse 5 where we read κύριος ὀπλάσας [p. 347](#) με ἐκ κοιλίας δοῦλον ἑαυτῶ; the ideas of God's election and call from the womb are very similar to Paul's words. J Munck points out that 'these two ideas are, in fact, linked in the text with the call to be a light to the Gentiles, and this fits in well with Paul's next sentence ([Gal 1:16](#)): εὐαγγελιζῶμαι σὺτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν.'¹⁷ Similarly Jeremiah was appointed as a prophet to the nations (εἰς ἔθνη) even before God formed him in the womb (ἐν κοιλίᾳ). We may compare Paul's application of [Isaiah 49:6](#) to himself and Barnabas in [Acts 13:47](#); [Acts 26:12–18](#) with its further echoes of [Jeremiah 1:7f](#) and [Isaiah 42:6f](#) and [61:1](#) (also 'Ebed Yahweh texts'); and [Acts 9:15](#) with its echo of [Jeremiah 1:10](#).¹⁸ In the light of this evidence it seems clear that Paul saw his call as being on a par with that of an Old Testament prophet. Moreover, as F F Bruce comments, 'in Paul's view it was for others to take up the Servant's mission to Israel, but he knew himself called to fulfil that part of the Servant's vocation which involved the spreading of God's saving light among the Gentiles, near and far, as he indicates in the verses which follow'.¹⁹

In [1:16ff](#) Paul is at pains to assert his independence of those who were apostles before him. In [1:17](#) προ ἔμου is certainly temporal; to whom then does he refer? Walter Schmithals argues that he cannot be referring to, or including in his thought, the twelve, on the grounds that all apostles are missionaries (and we have no record of any missionary work by the twelve except Peter), and that 'elsewhere he does not count the δώδεκα among the apostles'.²⁰ However, Paul's whole argument depends on his independence of those with authority in the church, those who beyond all dispute were apostles of Jesus Christ, and this must certainly mean primarily the twelve. Whether or not Paul regarded James as an apostle will be discussed below.

In [2:2](#), [6a](#), [9](#); Paul refers to James, Cephas and John as those reputed to be leaders/pillars. Bruce's verdict that δοκοῦντες 'carried no insinuation of sarcasm or irony, as though they only *seemed* to be [p. 348](#) leaders but were not really so'²¹ is surely to be

same time expressive of the most august authority.' *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh 1975) 1.52; also E Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London 1961) 242.

¹⁵ p. Kim argues that 'Insofar as Paul describes his vision of the risen Christ exalted at the right hand of God in heaven as the ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, he indicates that his vision, like those in Jewish apocalyptic writings, was of the heavenly reality that will be revealed at the end of time and so it was an anticipation or prolepsis of the eschatological ἀποκάλυψις of Jesus Christ'. *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Tübingen 1981) 73.

¹⁶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ should probably be taken as an objective genitive. "Call" and conversion are regarded as simultaneous.' E Best, 'The Revelation to Evangelise the Gentiles', *JTS* (1984) 35 n 16.

¹⁷ Munck, *Paul*, 26. εἰς ἔθνη and εἰς τὴν μεριτομήν are intended racially and not geographically.

¹⁸ Details in Munck, *Paul*, 127f. OT references are of course to the LXX. As regards [Acts 26:16–18](#) and [9:15f](#) Munck comments that 'it is justifiable to assume that the accounts in Acts go back to Paul, as they show a close connexion with the description in Galatians, not only in the narration of the previous history, but also in the explanatory words'. *Ibid.* 29.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Galatians*, 92. Best denies that Paul gave his own position eschatological significance in the light of his reading of the OT, but his arguments are unconvincing. See 'Revelation', *JTS* 35, 21f.

²⁰ Schmithals, *Office*, 82.

²¹ Bruce, *Galatians*, 109. Pace C K Barrett, 'Paul and the "Pillar" Apostles', in J N Sevenster and W C van Unnik (eds) *Studia Paulina* (Haarlem 1953) 5f.

accepted, in the light of Paul's words in verse [2b](#). 'His commission was not derived from Jerusalem, but it could not be executed effectively except in fellowship with Jerusalem.'²² Moreover, as a former Pharisee, steeped in the scriptures, Paul would certainly see the Holy City as having a fundamental role in God's plan for the last days, as Gerhardsson äs argued²³ (compare eg [Isa 2:2f](#), [Rom 15:19](#)). Thus an agreement with the leaders of the Jerusalem church was clearly vital to him. The somewhat 'dismissive' tone²⁴ he uses of them in verse [6](#) is explained by the fact that some were clearly appealing to their status and prestige to diminish his own.

The agreement which was arrived at ([2:7–10](#)) was clearly what Paul had hoped for: 'a remarkable parallel is drawn between Paul's divinely empowered mission to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews—a parallel discerned not only by Paul himself but also (it appears) by the "men of repute"'.²⁵ The prominent positions given to Peter²⁶ and Paul as leaders of the respective 'apostleships' is remarkable: note Paul's words 'the grace given to me'²⁷ in verse [9](#); Barnabas is merely associated with him in his apostleship to the Gentiles.²⁸ Fridrichsen's comment is thought provoking:

'Obviously Paul pictures to himself the eschatological situation of the world p. 349 in this way: in this world, soon disappearing, the centre is Jerusalem with the primitive community and the twelve, surrounded by the mission field divided between two apostolates: one sent by the Lord to the circumcised, the other to the Gentiles. Peter, and Paul himself, are the chosen bearers of the gospel, flanking the portals of the world to come.'²⁹

Romans

The evidence of Romans confirms the impression gained from Galatians. In [1:5](#), [13f](#) it becomes clear that Paul sees himself as an apostle as having responsibility for all the Gentiles, even for those Gentile churches that he did not personally plant (cf [Col 2:1](#)). Ernst Käsemann speaks of the 'tremendous claim' of verse [5](#), where 'stress falls on ἐν πᾶσιν,

²² *Galatians*, 111.

²³ Gerhardsson, *Memory*, 274ff: 'He too (ie as well as Luke) recognised the principle that the Word of God would proceed from Jerusalem in the last days. He too accepted the twelve Apostles and the first Christian congregation as guardians of that logos which proceeded from Jerusalem.' cf J Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London 1958) 36ff.

²⁴ Cf J D G Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London 1977) 408 n 49.

²⁵ Bruce, *Galatians* 119.

²⁶ Space precludes a discussion of why Paul uses 'Peter' rather than his usual 'Cephas' in [2:7f](#); H D Betz suggests the possibility of an 'underlying official statement', *Galatians* (Philadelphia 1979) 97.

²⁷ Clearly the 'grace' of apostleship is in view (cf [Rom 1:5](#), which should be read as a hendiadys). Kim comments that 'Paul never connects χάρις as directly with the office of another Christian as with his own apostolic office', *Origin*, 292.

²⁸ Richard Bauckman in 'Barnabas in Galatians', *JSNT* 2 (1979) convincingly argues that 'Paul's language reflects his recent disappointment over Barnabas' behaviour in the crisis at Antioch ([Gal 2:13](#))', 61; 'Paul's response to this crisis involved an intensification of his apostolic consciousness', 67; 'The agreement was not a commissioning but an agreement between equals. Barnabas is excluded from these claims', 66.

²⁹ Fridrichsen, 'Apostle', *UVA* (1947:3) 6. Barrett suggests that originally the term στυλοὶ as applied to James, Cephas and John in [Gal 2:9](#) was 'strictly eschatological' in meaning, marking them out as 'the basis' of the new people of God. 'Paul', *Studia Paulina*, 15ff. If Barrett is correct, Paul sees himself as sharing this eschatological role.

which indicates the cosmic scope' of his commission. He sees Paul's problem as being that 'the authority which he asserts does not accord with what is conceded to him in fact',³⁰ and hence his careful language in [1:11f](#). In verse [14](#) it is clearly his special apostolic obligation that is in view, and equally clear that it embraces the whole Gentile world.

Paul's awareness of his apostleship to the Gentiles comes out clearly in [11:13](#) in his words εἰμι ἐγὼ ἐθνῶν ἀπόστολος. E Best comments that 'the absence of the articles in the phrase does not necessarily imply that Paul is suggesting he is *an* apostle (minister). The context alone can decide the meaning',³¹ and in this case it clearly supports the restricted meaning 'the apostle'. Käsemann comments that Paul 'magnifies his ministry when, as in v. [12](#), he speaks of the fullness for the world which is connected with it. There were before and alongside him other missionaries to the Gentiles who also called themselves apostles ([2 Cor 11:13](#)). But their commission did not have the universal scope of the task in virtue of which Paul calls himself the "apostle to the Gentiles"'.³² Paul's role as 'apostle to the Gentiles' will, according to [Romans 9–11](#), result not only in their salvation, but in that of 'all Israel' ([11:26](#), cf [14](#)).³³ 'Nowhere is the apostle's p. 350 unbounded sense of mission more apparent and nowhere is it more evident that apocalyptic is the driving force in Paul's theology and practice.... Paul is not content to be merely an apostle to the Gentile world. He has obviously learned from [Deuteronomy 32:21](#) that God will convert his people by provoking it to jealousy of Gentile-Christians'. Hence it is 'that the apostle is trying with almost impossible speed to traverse the whole world in order to spread the "riches of the Gentiles"'.³⁴

In the light of this evidence it seems likely that when Paul speaks of ἡ προσφορὰ τῶν ἐθνῶν in [Romans 15:16](#), the reference is not to the self-offering of Christians which the apostle brings about, but rather the Gentile church as such. 'The notion is apocalyptic and corresponds to [11:11ff](#)'.³⁵ J Knox correctly affirms that Paul 'clearly ascribed to his apostleship a special, perhaps even a unique character'. He suggests that Paul 'may well have believed that on him particularly God had laid the responsibility of *defending* the preaching to the gentiles, of establishing and protecting the *right* of the gentiles to the gospel'.³⁶

1 Corinthians

In [1 Corinthians 3:10](#) Paul speaks of himself as 'laying a foundation' as a wise master-builder. Earlier in verse [6](#) he speaks of himself as 'planting'. Peter Jones has pointed out that in the Old Testament both of these expressions are used of God's creation of the world

³⁰ E Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (ET, London 1964) 15, 19f.

³¹ Best, 'Revelation', *JTS* (1984) 19. He quotes in support J M Moulton and N Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3.179f, and gives similar examples as [1 Cor 12:27](#), [3:9](#), [16](#); [Rom 1:20](#), [2:5](#); [Phil 2:16](#), [4:3](#); [1 Thess 5:8](#).

³² Käsemann, *Romans*, 306.

³³ Cf J Munck, *Christ and Israel* (Philadelphia 1967) *passim*.

³⁴ Käsemann, *Romans*, 306.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 393. Cf Best, 'Revelation', *JTS* 35, 19. J Knox comments that 'it occurred to Paul to describe the territory already evangelised in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor and Greece in circular terms because he is thinking of the whole evangelistic enterprise to which he is committed as lying within the circle of the nations around the Mediterranean Sea'. 'Romans 15:14–33 and Paul's Conception of his Apostolic Ministry', *JBL* 83 (1964) 11.

³⁶ Knox, *art cit*, 5f. The latter point comes out in [Gal 2](#) rather than in [Rom 15](#).

([Isa 51:16](#), [Prov 3:19](#)) and of the people ([Isa 5:7](#), [14:32](#), [28:16](#)). Moreover these notions both have an eschatological aspect. In the New Covenant passages ([Jer 31:27–28](#) and [Ezek 36:36](#)) God says that he will watch over his people to build and to plant. The Qumran Community, which believed itself to be the community of the New Covenant, is also described as ‘a foundation to the Building of Holiness, an eternal plantation’ (IQS 11:8). Jones argues that ‘on the basis of this Old Testament and Jewish background the statements of Paul in [1 Cor 3](#) about his apostolic task would indicate that he is claiming more than [p. 351](#) simply the honor of being the first missionary at Corinth,³⁷ or a successful church-planter, as we moderns understand that term. Rather Paul is affirming his eschatological role in establishing the terms and content of the New Covenant’.³⁸ This position is supported by Paul’s explicit references to himself as a minister of the New Covenant in [2 Corinthians 3:5](#), and a further description of this New Covenant ministry in [2 Corinthians 16:10](#) with terms taken directly from the New Covenant prophecy referred to above ([Jer 31:28](#)).³⁹

An eschatological note may also be seen in Paul’s reference to ‘us apostles’, put on display by God ‘as last in the show’⁴⁰ in [1 Corinthians 4:9](#). It seems likely that in speaking of the apostles as ‘a spectacle to the whole world, angels and men alike’, Paul is not merely using a vivid figure of speech but underlining that eschatological struggle characterises true apostolic ministry (cf [2 Cor 4:12](#), [11:29](#),⁴¹ [Gal 4:19](#), [Col 1:24](#)). The eschatological concept of ‘the birth-pangs of the Messiah’ is clearly relevant here.

Finally, in regard to Paul’s record of the resurrection appearances in [1 Corinthians 15:3–11](#), an eschatological element is clearly seen in his words, ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὥστερει τῷ ἔκτρωματι⁴² ὠφθη κάμοί, in verse [8](#). This verse must first be placed in its setting.⁴³ Verses [3b–5](#) are almost uniformly regarded as comprising traditional material. Ralph Martin speaks of

‘certain tell-tale marks of the passage’ which ‘stamp it as a credal formulary: i) the fourfold repeated “that” (hoti) introduces each line of the creed (vv [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)); ii) the vocabulary is unusual, containing rare words ... [p. 352](#) and expressions that Paul never uses elsewhere ...; iii) the parallelism of the lines; iv) the dependence on isaiah [53](#), which in other places betokens the presence of quoted material (eg [Rom 4:24f](#)); and v) the emphatic preface of

³⁷ P R Jones, in ‘The Apostle Paul: Second Moses to the New Covenant Community’ in J W Montgomery (ed), *God’s Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis 1974) 235 n 18, notes that C K Barrett denies this in *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London 1973) 87. He argues that ‘Barrett must admit that the Corinthians are not the foundation, but if this is the case, then Paul’s claim as foundation-layer must be seen in other than missionary/evangelist terms’.

³⁸ Jones, ‘Paul’, in Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word*, 221.

³⁹ He speaks of his authority (ἐξουσία) for building (εἰς οἰκοδομήν) and not for destroying (εἰς καθαίρεσιν).

⁴⁰ The translation is that of Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 109. Pace, eg F W Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London 1953) 106 n 12.

⁴¹ Cf M L Barré, ‘Paul as “Eschatological Person”’, *CBQ* 37 (1975) 517f, who sees the verse as summarising and climaxing the whole trials list, and referring to Paul’s trial ‘in the fires of the eschatological ordeal’.

⁴² Understandings of ἔκτρωμα are too numerous to name: cf H Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia 1975) 259, nn 95, 97, 98.

⁴³ For this pericope, see also P Winter, ‘1 Cor. 15:3b–7’, *Nov Test* 2 (1958) 145f.

verse [3](#), which indicates that Paul is drawing on precomposed tradition and utilising it as part of his appeal to accepted apostolic belief (v. [11](#)).⁴⁴

As regards verses [6ff](#), Bruce's verdict that 'Paul adds further information about resurrection appearances, culled from various sources, to what he has ascertained during those fifteen days in Jerusalem'⁴⁵ would seem to be unexceptionable. Verse [6](#) seems clearly to include Pauline additions. For our purposes, it is the sequence εἶτα (v [5](#)) ... ἔπειτα (v [6](#)) ... ἔπειτα (v [7](#)) ... εἶτα (v [7](#)) ... ἔσχατον (v [8](#)) that is crucial. As Ernest Best comments, 'within the sequence then, then, then, ἔσχατον can only imply that there will never be another appearance of the risen Christ to anyone'.⁴⁶ Paul clearly regards his Damascus Road experience as being of the same order as the appearances he has just listed. Bruce wisely remarks that 'if Paul uses the same languages of his own experience as of the appearances to Peter and the others, it is to suggest not that their experience was as "visionary" as his, but that his was as objective as theirs'.⁴⁷

The objectives of Paul's listing of the resurrection appearances would seem to be twofold.⁴⁸ First, they show the lines of continuity between the witnesses to the resurrection, so that their testimony is seen to comprise a unity—a fact used by Paul as a basis for his assertion in verse [11](#), 'whether I or they'. Second, the climax of the list in verse [8](#) (κάμοι is in an emphatic position) serves to link the resurrection appearance with Paul's apostleship. It should be carefully noted that Paul has ordered the list in such a way that the immediate antecedent of ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων is ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν in verse [7](#). Paul is clearly indicating that his apostleship is as valid as that of Peter, James and the rest because based on identical grounds.

It is necessary, therefore, to challenge the views of J M Schütz, who argues in his book *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* that 'Paul goes to the question of authority, not to the question of p. 353 legitimacy'.⁴⁹ On the contrary, legitimacy is central to his argument here. The echatological aspect is also clearly present, and has been brilliantly brought out by Peter Jones. Jones argues that in this passage 'Paul is making a definite, unambiguous and theological claim to be the final apostle'.⁵⁰ Against those who argue that Paul is merely putting himself in the last place as unworthy of the name apostle because he has persecuted the church, Jones argues that 'ἔσχατος is principal, not circumstantial ... Paul uses the term ἔσχατος but six times, of which five occur in 1 Corinthians and four in the 15th chapter ([4:9](#), [15:8](#), [26](#), [45](#), [52](#); [2 Tim 3:1](#)) ... The other occurrences in 1 Corinthians ... refer to final, definitive events in the history of redemption, indicating we ought to expect as much of the ἔσχατος of v [8](#)'.⁵¹ He suggests that there is an implicit comparison with Peter, the first mentioned in the list (cf [Matt 10:2](#) ὁ πρῶτος) and argues that Paul has the two apostolates, to Israel and to the Gentiles, at the back of his mind. This is suggested by the language of verse [10](#), οὐ κενὴ and ἐκοπίασα, which constitutes a

⁴⁴ R P Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation* (Eerdmans 1984) 97f.

⁴⁵ F F Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London 1971) 141.

⁴⁶ Best, 'Revelation', *JTS* (1984) 20.

⁴⁷ Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 142.

⁴⁸ Cf Martin, *Spirit*, 98f.

⁴⁹ J M Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge 1975) 107 and *passim*.

⁵⁰ Jones, '1 Corinthians 15:8', *TB* (1985) 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 20.

direct allusion to [Isaiah 49:4](#), part of the Servant-Song in which the two 'missions', to Israel and to the Gentiles, are clearly distinguished. Jones argues that 'this Isaianic eschatology clearly stands behind ... Paul's view of apostolic history'.⁵²

2 Corinthians

In [2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4](#) Paul defends his apostolic claims and outlines his understanding of the apostolic ministry. Space precludes a proper study of these chapters, but a few points may be made. Paul sees himself and his colleagues as 'commissioned by God' ([2:17](#)), 'ambassadors for Christ' ([5:20](#)), 'ministers of a new covenant' ([3:6](#)). The eschatological significance of God's work seen in 'our gospels' ([2 Cor 4:3](#)) is brought out by Fridrichsen. 'What a work it is! Paul puts it on a par with the creation of light in the beginning.⁵³ He cannot find a stronger expression for his conviction that he has received a revelation of unique importance and of cosmic scope, a knowledge which is a main element in the development of the eschatological situation.'⁵⁴ The apostolic ministry is clearly seen to involve intense [p. 354](#) suffering ([4:7–18](#); [6:3–10](#)), a necessary prelude to the eternal glory which lies ahead ([4:17](#)).

Jones has argued that in [2 Corinthians 3](#) Paul not only compares himself with Moses, but also claims the ministry of the second Moses, a ministry characterized by eschatological glory. In the light of the expectation in apocalyptic Judaism of the appearance in the last days of a prophet like Moses,⁵⁵ seen especially in the portrayal in the Qumran Scrolls of the Teacher of Righteousness as a second Moses,⁵⁶ he argues that Paul consciously assumes the role of the second Moses. Since, however, 'Paul only once expressly compares himself with Moses and never explicitly uses the terms "second Moses" or "prophet like Moses"',⁵⁷ it would be unwise to base too much on this possibility. The comparison with Moses is undeniable, however, and is certainly remarkable. 'The greatest man in the history of Israel is put beneath the travelling tentmaker.'⁵⁸ As Jones comments, 'this is not to imply some ontological superiority in Paul himself, only the superiority of the office and mission to which in grace he is called'.⁵⁹

[2 Corinthians 10–13](#) will be considered below. Reference may briefly be made, however, to Paul's clear conception of his apostolic authority ([10:8](#), [13:2](#), [10](#)). He is a true apostle of Christ, in contrast to the false apostles ([11:13](#)), a claim substantiated both by his signs and wonders ([12:12](#)) and by his weaknesses and sufferings ([11:21ff](#)). The

⁵² *Ibid*, 23.

⁵³ [2 Cor 4:6](#).

⁵⁴ Fridrichsen, 'Apostle', *UVA* (1947:3) 16.

⁵⁵ Cf [Deut 18:15ff](#).

⁵⁶ Especially in the Damascus Document (CD) the Testimonia (4Q Test) and the Hodayoth (IQH). See P R Jones, *The Apostle Paul: a Second Moses according to II Corinthians 2:14–4:7* (Princeton Theological Seminary, PhD dissertation 1973) 187ff. Jones goes so far as to state that 'it is the Teacher of Righteousness, the second Moses of Qumran who provides the essential model for Paul's apostolate'. *Ibid*, 376. This is certainly overstated.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 375.

⁵⁸ Munck, *Paul*, 100f.

⁵⁹ Jones, 'Paul', in Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word*, 233.

essence of his apostolic task is to preach the gospel in virgin territory ([10:14–16](#); cf Rom [15:20](#)).⁶⁰

Summary

It has become clear that Paul saw himself not only as an ‘apostle of Christ’, of equal standing with the twelve and James; but also as ‘the [p. 355](#) apostle of the Gentiles’,⁶¹ with a responsibility to reach them with the gospel and ground them in the faith. This task had eschatological significance.

PAUL’S RECOGNITION OF OTHER APOSTLES

Whom else did Paul recognise as valid apostles? Did he use the word in different senses? By what criteria did he recognise apostles? To these questions we now turn. As we do so, it will prove helpful to bear in mind the statements of Schmithals, that ‘Paul knows only of a single apostolic circle, which means that early Christianity possessed only one apostolate’⁶² and of J Andrew Kirk, who believes that ‘the New Testament writers in fact present only one view of apostleship, in different forms according to different circumstances’.⁶³ Are these statements true? We begin with a consideration of those who have a claim to be named as apostles by Paul. Of these, Barnabas, Silas and Apollos are regarded by E E Ellis as occupying a distinctive position: ‘None of these persons, at least in Paul’s letters, is presented as being under Paul’s authority, and it may be significant that all of them are termed apostles.’⁶⁴

Barnabas

We have already seen that according to [Galatians 2:9](#) Barnabas as well as Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church, with a view to going ‘to the nations’. From [1 Corinthians 9:1–6](#) it seems clear that Paul was happy to give the title ‘apostle’ to Barnabas. In verses [1f](#), he speaks of his having seen Jesus (surely a reference to his Damascus Road experience) and of his church-planting work in Corinth as marks of his apostleship. In verse [5](#) he mentions ‘the other apostles’, who together with the brothers of the Lord and Cephas are accompanied by ‘a sister as wife’⁶⁵ on their [p. 356](#) travels. It is in this context of apostleship that he mentions Barnabas in verse [6](#) as one who, like himself, worked for a living during his travels. The reference to Barnabas is important insofar as the evidence suggests that they had not worked together for some

⁶⁰ For a more detailed analysis of Paul’s apostleship in 1 and 2 Corinthians, see C Kruse, *New Testament Foundations of Ministry* (London 1983) 106–114.

⁶¹ Cf also [2 Tim 4:17](#), which according to Best is a particularly ‘clear expression of the uniqueness of Paul’s Gentile apostolate’. The phrase πάντα τᾷ ἔθνῃ should be understood in the sense that all are ‘representatively present in Rome’, ‘Revelation’, *JTS* (1984) 26. Space forbids a discussion of [Eph 3:2–13](#). On Paul’s role according to this passage see C C Caragounis, *The Ephesian Mysterion* (Lund 1977) 142f.

⁶² Schmithals, *Office*, 88.

⁶³ J A Kirk, ‘Apostleship since Rengstorf’, *NTS* 21 (1974/5) 261.

⁶⁴ E Earle Ellis, ‘Paul and his co-workers’, *NTS* 17 (1970/1) 439; cf B Holmberg, *Paul and Power* (Lund 1978) 61f.

⁶⁵ Probably to be interpreted as ‘a believing wife’.

time (cf [Acts 15:39](#)).⁶⁶ Clearly Barnabas was continuing to pursue his apostolic calling.⁶⁷ B Holmberg surmises that ‘the reference to Barnabas, a person known and respected in Jerusalem, Antioch and also in the Pauline churches, is not made merely to gain esteem by association, but above all in order to connect Paul’s abstention from his rights with a practice common to *all* apostles to the Gentiles’.⁶⁸ This is by no means certain.

Silvanus/Silas

Silvanus is mentioned by Paul together with Timothy in [2 Corinthians 1:19](#), and in the superscriptions of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. It is clear from these verses that Silvanus had preached to the Thessalonians and to the Corinthians in company with Paul. (There is common agreement that he is to be identified with the Silas of [Acts 15–18](#).) He is always mentioned before Timothy, and thus would seem to be of superior status to him (cf [Acts 15:22, 32](#)). In [1 Thessalonians 2:7](#) Paul writes that ‘we might have made demands as apostles of Christ’. The question arises as to whether or not he regarded Silvanus and Timothy as apostles of Christ. E M Askwith argues that ‘there is a very good case for interpreting “we”, when it occurs in the Pauline Epistles, as a proper plural’.⁶⁹ W F Lofthouse agrees with this,⁷⁰ but points out that in 1 Thessalonians ‘he speaks of the trio as he could hardly have spoken of himself without ostentation. ... There is nothing self-assertive, nothing that does not suit the little band of evangelists as a whole.’⁷¹ Bruce translates ἀπόστολοι in [1 Thessalonians 2:7](#) as ‘messengers’, believing that ‘the word is used in a rather general sense: Paul associates his companions with his apostolic ministry—in which [p. 357](#) indeed they shared’.⁷² Best persuasively argues that ‘at this stage on the second journey he may not have formulated fully his own position as an apostle as he did later in 1 Cor 9:1, 15:5ff, [2 Cor 10:13](#), and therefore may have been able to consider Silas and Timothy as apostles alongside himself’.⁷³ The doubt concerning whether Paul later saw Silas and Timothy as full ‘apostles of Christ’ emerges, as J B Lightfoot argued long ago,⁷⁴ because Paul clearly distinguishes between himself as an ‘apostle’ and Timothy as a ‘brother’ in [2 Corinthians 1:1](#); [Colossians 1:1](#). Elsewhere, where Paul links Timothy’s name with his own, he drops the title of ‘apostle’ eg [Philippians 1:1](#) ‘Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ’. F F Bruce argues that the term ‘apostle’ ‘can scarcely be stretched to include Timothy, his own “son in the faith” ([1 Tim 1:2](#)), whatever

⁶⁶ Barrett’s conjecture that [1 Cor 9:6](#) is ‘evidence that he (ie Barnabas) rejoined the Pauline mission’ is unfounded (*1 Corinthians*, 204). If he had done so, there would surely have been other references to him in the Pauline corpus; (though cf [Col 4:10](#)).

⁶⁷ Barnabas is also called an apostle by Clement of Alexandria (Strom II 6:31; in 7.35 he is called an apostle and numbered among the seventy disciples). Lightfoot believed that ‘the apostleship of Barnabas is beyond question’, *Galatians*, 96.

⁶⁸ Holmberg, *Paul*, 65.

⁶⁹ E H Askwith, ‘“I” and “We” in the Thessalonian Epistles’, *Expositor* 8 (1911) 153.

⁷⁰ W F Lofthouse, ‘“I” and “We” in the Pauline Epistles’, *BT* 6 (1955) 80: ‘It would appear that in Paul’s use of the singular and plural there is neither caprice nor carelessness. When he says “I” he means “I”.’

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 74.

⁷² F F Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco 1982) 31.

⁷³ E Best, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 100.

⁷⁴ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 96 n 2.

may be said of Silvanus'.⁷⁵ As regards Silvanus, it must be said that there is no evidence that he worked as an apostle independently. It is possible that he eventually became the co-worker of Peter and cooperated in the writing of 1 Peter,⁷⁶ but his identification with the Silvanus of [1 Peter 5:12](#) must remain uncertain.

Apollos

In [1 Corinthians 4:9](#), as we have seen, Paul speaks of 'us apostles'. It is possible to argue that Paul has Apollos in view, in the light of the reference to him in [4:6](#) and in [3:4ff](#), [22](#). This, however, seems unlikely. A study of the whole context, especially verses [14ff](#), shows that 'he is thinking specially of his own position'.⁷⁷ There is no evidence that Apollos experienced any of the suffering referred to in verses [10-13](#). If he has any particular individuals in mind, they are more likely to be Silvanus⁷⁸ and Timothy,⁷⁹ who had shared his sufferings in the church-planting work. Cephas might also qualify, as one known to the Corinthians. But on the whole, it seems likely that Paul has apostles as a class in mind rather than any particular individuals. That Apollos is regarded by him as an apostle seems [p. 358](#) unlikely in view of the clear distinction made in [1 Corinthians 3:6, 10](#) between his own work as a 'planter' and 'skilled master-builder' who has laid a foundation, and that of Apollos, who is a 'waterer', one who builds on the foundation. Paul is fully conscious that he has received a special commission from God for his work ([1 Cor 3:10](#)), but nothing similar is said of Apollos. J B Lightfoot notes that Apollos is distinctly excluded from the apostolate by Clement of Rome (I Clement 47), whom he describes as 'a contemporary' who 'probably knew him'.⁸⁰ That he knew him is far from certain, however. Earle Ellis notes that 'Paul and Apollos always appear to work independently'⁸¹ (cf [1 Cor 16:11f](#), [Titus 3:13](#)).

Andronicus and Junta(s)

The reference in [Romans 16:7](#) to these two is of the greatest importance. Although it is just possible to translate *ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις* as 'outstanding the eyes of the apostles' (NEB), it is much more natural to translate it as 'outstanding among the apostles'. Cranfield regards this latter translation as 'virtually certain' and notes that this was the way it was taken by all known patristic commentators.⁸² In such a case, it must be recognized that Paul acknowledged a sizeable group as apostles, not merely the two mentioned by name in [Romans 16:7](#).

⁷⁵ Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 31.

⁷⁶ So E G Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London 1947) 9-17.

⁷⁷ Lofthouse, '“I” and “We”', *BT* (1955) 75.

⁷⁸ So Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 96 n 2.

⁷⁹ So J Murphy-O'Connor, 'Tradition and Redaction in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7', *CBQ*, 43 (1981) 589.

⁸⁰ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 96 n 2.

⁸¹ Ellis, 'Paul', *NTS* (1970/1) 439.

⁸² Cranfield, *Romans* 2. 789.

Recent research has indicated that Andronicus' partner was almost certainly a woman. R R Schulz⁸³ and B Broston⁸⁴ have shown that all the Church Fathers who quote this text or comment on it at all give the name of either Junta, or Julia (a minority).⁸⁵ Moreover 'from the time accents were added to the text until the early decades of this century Greek New Testaments printed the acute accent indicating a word of the first declension which is predominantly the feminine declension'.⁸⁶ If taken as masculine with an acute accent, we would be left with Junias, a name otherwise entirely unknown, whereas Junta is a common Roman female name. The circumflex accent would require a p. 359 contracted masculine form of the first declension, a very rare form. Moreover, if taken as a familiar or endearing form of a longer Latin name, the problem arises that 'Latin names of endearment normally lengthen rather than shorten.'⁸⁷ Junta is therefore by far the most likely alternative. Cranfield's suggestion that 'most probably Andronicus and Junta were husband and wife'⁸⁸ is very likely to be correct. For a woman to work on her own as an apostle, given first century cultural attitudes, would have been virtually impossible.

The question remains as to the sense in which 'apostle' should be understood. J Murray suggests that if they are to be regarded as apostles at all, which he regards as improbable, the word 'apostle' is 'used in a more general sense of messenger (cf [II Cor 8:23](#); [Phil 2:25](#))'.⁸⁹ In the light of the fact that they have shared one of Paul's imprisonments (cf [2 Cor 11:23](#)), however, it is more likely that they were itinerant missionaries.⁹⁰ Moreover, it is difficult to conceive of a class of 'messengers' among whom Andronicus and Junta were outstanding. The words *συγγενεῖς μου* are probably to be understood as 'fellow-countrymen', ie Jews, as in [Romans 9:3](#).⁹¹ That they were 'in Christ' before him leaves open the possibility that they may have seen the risen Christ. The almost casual way in which they are introduced in the middle of a greetings list, however, suggests that they did not possess great authority in the church.

'False apostles'

The existence of a class of missionary apostles is increased by Paul's reference to his opponents in Corinth as 'false apostles' in [2 Corinthians 11:13](#). From chapters [10](#) to [13](#) as

⁸³ R R Schulz, 'Romans 16:7: Junia or Junias?', *ET*, 98 No 4 (Jan 1987) 108-110.

⁸⁴ B Broston, 'Junia ... Outstanding among the Apostles' in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, ed L and A Swidler (New York 1977), 141-144.

⁸⁵ "Ιουλίαν is found in the very early P46 manuscript, but is otherwise very poorly supported. This reading is probably due to a clerical error.

⁸⁶ Schulz, 'Romans 16:7', *ET*, (Jan 1987) 109.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 109.

⁸⁸ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2. 788.

⁸⁹ J Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids 1965) 2.230.

⁹⁰ For hypotheses connecting them with the foundation of the Ephesian or Roman churches, see B W Bacon, *ET* 42 (1930/1) 300ff, and G A Barton, *ET* 43 (1931/2) 359ff.

⁹¹ In [Rom 16:17-21](#) six persons are called *συγγενεῖς*. W M Ramsay, *The Cities of St Paul* (London 1907) 176 ff, infers membership of the same Tarstan civic tribe, but this is unlikely.

a whole⁹² we learn that the intruders claimed an apostolic authority superior to Paul's, based on the following signs: their rhetorical eloquence and impressive personal bearing, their boldness and missionary achievements, their special [p. 360](#) religious knowledge derived from extraordinary visions and revelations, and their ability to perform miracles.⁹³ In [2 Corinthians 11:13](#) they are described as μετασχηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀποστόλους χριστοῦ. Barrett comments, "They made themselves look like (and this must include, they claimed to be) apostles of Christ when they were no such thing."⁹⁴ Almost certainly they were Jewish (cf [11:22](#)), though not necessarily Judaisers. It is unlikely that they were Jewish-Christian Gnostics, 'since every reference to "knowledge" in 2 Cor is unqualifiedly affirmative'.⁹⁵ V P Furnish's verdict that 'the evidence as a whole strongly favors the view that Paul was confronting Christian missionaries whose background was, like his own, Hellenistic-Jewish'⁹⁶ seems eminently sensible. The relationship of these missionaries with the Jerusalem church is controversial, and need not detain us. In the light of [Galatians 2:1-10](#) it is inconceivable that they were, or included, members of the twelve. The fact that they could plausibly claim to be apostles in Corinth proves that the number of apostles was not definitely restricted.

'The other apostles'

In the light of the foregoing conclusions, it is likely that Paul's reference in [1 Corinthians 9:5](#) to 'other apostles' should be understood as a reference to a class of itinerant missionaries. They are distinguished both from 'the brothers of the Lord' (cf [Mark 6:3](#); [Matt 13:55](#)) and from 'Cephas' ie Peter. The fact that they are associated with major figures in the church suggests that they have status and importance (cf [1 Cor 12:28](#)). The fact that Cephas is distinguished from them makes it unlikely that they were, or included, the twelve.⁹⁷

'Apostles of the churches'

In Philipplians [2:25](#) Epaphroditus is referred to as ὑμῶν ... ἀπόστολον. From the context it is clear that this should be translated [p. 361](#) 'your messenger', and that Epaphroditus was an authorised agent of the Philippians, sent to minister to and to help Paul. There is no record of his doing any missionary work. Similarly, in [2 Corinthians 8:23](#) the reference to ἀπόστολοι ἐκκλησιῶν is clearly to two brethren who are agents of the churches. This is expressly stated of one of them in [8:19](#); although he is a famous preacher ([8:18](#)), his role in this case is clearly that of ensuring that the collection for the church at Jerusalem is rightly administered. The other brother ([8:22](#)), who has often been tested, is clearly chosen for the same task because of his proven faithfulness. Paul praises these two highly

⁹² We cannot here enter into the question of whether or not [2 Cor 10-13](#) originally constituted a separate letter. For a convincing argument denying this, but stressing their distinctiveness, see D A Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity: an Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Grand Rapids 1984) 4ff.

⁹³ For convincing exegetical reasons for seeing them as identical with the 'superlative apostles' of [11:5](#), [12:11](#), see V P Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, (Garden City 1984) 503f, *pace*, eg, E Käsemann, C K Barrett.

⁹⁴ C K Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London 1982) 93.

⁹⁵ Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, 53.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 53.

⁹⁷ A Harnack, however, thinks that 'the collocation of λοιπῶν ἀποστολῶν with the Lord's brothers renders it very probable that Paul is thinking here of the twelve exclusively', *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (ET, London 1904), 1.404.

as ‘the glory of Christ’ (8:23), but there is no indication that he regards them as missionaries or apostles in their own right.

James

It was argued above that the reference to ‘those who were apostles before me’ in [Galatians 1:17](#) must refer, at least primarily, to the twelve. Should the statement ἕτερον δὲ τῶν ἀποστόλων οὐκ εἶδον εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον, be translated ‘the only other apostle I saw (apart from Cephas) was James’, or ‘I saw none of the other apostles, but I did see James’, or ‘Apart from the apostles, I saw no-one but James’?⁹⁸ The third possibility has been effectively removed by G F Howard, who has argued that if Paul had wished to say this, he would have expressed himself differently.⁹⁹ The second possibility is far less natural than the first, which should therefore be accepted. It should be noticed that James clearly held pre-eminence in the Jerusalem church after AD 44 (cf [Acts 12:17](#), [21:18](#) and the order of the names in [Gal 2:9](#)). There is no evidence, apart from the reference in [1 Corinthians 9:5](#) to ‘the brothers of the Lord’, that he ever engaged in missionary work, and in the light of his responsibilities in Jerusalem this seems unlikely. He clearly sent out delegates to different churches, however ([Gal 2:12](#)).

‘All the apostles’

The meaning of this phrase in [1 Corinthians 15:7](#) is difficult to determine. Bruce has argued that if in [1 Corinthians 15:5–7](#) Paul ‘links the appearance to Cephas with a following appearance to “the twelve” (to whose number Cephas belonged), his linking of the appearance to James with a following appearance to “all the apostles” suggests that he included James among “all the apostles”’.¹⁰⁰ Barrett points out that p. 362 ‘the order of the words in Greek (τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν) lays stress on the noun’, and thinks that ‘this may have the effect of excluding James from their number’.¹⁰¹ The stress on the noun is better explained, however, by Paul’s desire to connect his own ‘resurrection appearance’, referred to in the previous verse, with apostleship.

The complexity of the issues here requires a careful form and redaction critical evaluation. The first necessary observation is that the syntactical structure of verses [5](#) and [7](#) is the same. Harnack argued that both sentences describe a relationship of authority, and what we have here are ‘legitimation formulae’. James stands first in the circle of the apostles, as Peter does of the twelve.¹⁰² Whether or not this is accepted, the question of the identity of ‘all the apostles’ still remains open, however. In a rigorous study Jerome Murphy-O’Connor has denied the claim that verse [7](#) is a Pauline composition modelled on verse [5](#). He points out that there is no evidence that Paul indulged in such imitations. Moreover, ‘were v [7](#) a Pauline composition, one would expect him to begin with *eita* after the *epeita* in v [6](#), as he in fact does in vv [23^b–24](#). If he did not do so, it must be because *eita* already existed as the link between “James” and the “apostles”. Thus it seems more probable that *lakōbō eita tois apostolois* came to Paul as a fixed formula.’¹⁰³ If so, why did

⁹⁸ So L P Trudinger, *Nov T* 17 (1975) 200–202.

⁹⁹ G F Howard, ‘Was James an Apostle?’, *Nov T* 19 (1977) 63f.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce, *Galatians*, 101.

¹⁰¹ Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 343. He regards this conclusion as ‘uncertain’, however.

¹⁰² A Harnack, *Dogma und Denkstrukturen, Festschrift for E. Schlink*, 1963, 63ff.

¹⁰³ Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Tradition’, *CBQ* (1981) 587.

Paul conserve the tradition, which adds nothing to what seems to be his purpose in verse [6](#), namely to exclude the likelihood of hallucination and to underline the availability of witnesses? As argued above, the answer would seem to be; because the words οἱ ἀπόστολοι suited his purpose, namely to associate himself with the apostles as one who had also experienced a resurrection theophany. Who, then, does Paul refer to in these words? Murphy-O'Connor points out that in verse [9](#) Paul refers to himself as ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων. He argues that

'it is inconceivable that he should here be using "apostle" in the very wide meaning well-attested in his letters. There would be no sense, particularly in this context, in a claim to be less than people like Silas ... or Barnabas. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that Paul would have introduced the clear contrasts in vv [10-11](#) ... were he using "apostle" in a sense that included his own closest collaborators. Hence, Paul must be claiming to be an "apostle" in a special limited sense, and this forces us to think in terms of [p. 363](#) the equality with Peter, James and the other apostles who were also called directly by Christ'.¹⁰⁴

Further arguments may also be adduced in support of this conclusion. First, as F Godet argued, 'the expression "all the apostles" does not naturally express the idea of a circle larger than the twelve'.¹⁰⁵ The emphasis is on a strictly limited circle, whereas other Pauline references to apostles in the sense of itinerant missionaries (eg [Rom 16:7](#)) give the impression of an open, large group. Second, if it is accepted that here we are dealing with a piece of early tradition, it seems doubtful if the word 'apostle' in the sense of 'itinerant missionary' would have become embodied in a fundamental statement of beliefs at such an early stage in the church's life.

If the reference here is to the twelve and James, as seems likely,¹⁰⁶ it is necessary to ask whether or not Paul regarded it as a necessary condition of apostleship (including the sense of 'itinerant missionary') to have seen the risen Christ. On the basis of [1 Corinthians 15:7f](#) and [1 Corinthians 9:1](#), this question is frequently answered in the affirmative.¹⁰⁷ Kirsopp Lake has argued, however, that the argument that Paul 'thought that an apostle need have seen the Lord is a rather rash conclusion from 1 Cor IX.1 ... "Am I not free? am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" are three separate claims to distinction, and it is an exaggeration to say that Paul only regarded as "apostles" those who had seen Jesus'.¹⁰⁸ It is of course *possible* that Barnabas, whom Luke records as a member of the primitive community ([Acts 4:36f](#)), Silas, who likewise was one of the 'leading [p. 364](#) men among the brethren' of the Jerusalem church ([Acts 15:22](#)) and Andronicus and Junia, who

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 589. He notes that such an understanding ties in with Paul's apologia in [Gal 1-2](#). 'Precisely the same association of (1) birth-language (2) grace, and (3) time of apostolic call that we find in [1 Cor. 15:8-9](#) also appears in [Gal. 1:15-17](#)', 589, n 41.

¹⁰⁵ F Godet, *1 Corinthians*, 2, 336f.

¹⁰⁶ The assessment given here, though supported by some older scholars (eg Harnack) goes against the position held by most modern scholars. The explanation of the fact that in other places (eg, probably, [1 Cor 9:5](#)) Paul uses the word in a wider sense, whereas here the sense is narrower, may be accounted for by the fact that Paul is dependent on tradition here.

¹⁰⁷ Eg by H von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (ET, London 1969) 23: 'The decisive factor is the encounter with the Risen Lord, which was frequently both experienced and understood as a special call or commission.'

¹⁰⁸ K Lake, *Beginnings* V. 50f. Similarly, Harnack argues that one cannot prove from [1 Cor 9:1](#) that one must have seen the risen Lord in order to be an apostle. 'The four statements are in an ascending series ... It is clear that the third and fourth statements are meant to attest the second, but it is doubtful if they contain an attestation which is absolutely necessary.' *Expansion*, 402 n 1.

were 'in Christ' before Paul ([Rom 16:7](#)), had seen and been commissioned by the risen Lord.¹⁰⁹ It is dangerous, however, to build too much on arguments from silence.¹¹⁰ It seems safer, then, to see a commissioning by the risen Lord as essential to those 'who had been constituted by him public witnesses to his resurrection'¹¹¹ and hence enjoyed substantial authority¹¹² in the church, a group seemingly confined to the twelve, James and Paul, but not to those itinerant missionaries who were also known as apostles.

Summary

Contrary to the views of Schmithals and Kirk (see above), it may be suggested that Paul did use the word 'apostle' in at least three different senses.¹¹³ He spoke of those with special authority to witness of the risen Christ, of itinerant missionaries and church-planters such as Andronicus and Junia, and of church delegates who were not (at least, not primarily) missionaries. It may also be suggested that Paul saw Peter (Cephas) and himself as a bridge between the first two classes of 'apostle'. They were both specially commissioned representatives of the risen Lord with divinely given authority on the one hand, and leaders of the respective 'apostleships' or missions, to Israel and the Gentiles, on the other. Other readings of the evidence are possible, but this understanding has most to commend it.

PROBLEM PASSAGES

There are at least two verses where the sense in which Paul is using the **P. 365** word 'apostle' is not immediately clear, but where the meaning is of vital importance given current Restorationist claims.

1 Corinthians 12:28

In this verse Paul states that God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then various charismata. The verse is important because of its statement that apostles enjoy primacy in the church, at least in some sense. J D G Dunn has argued that 'Paul refers to the particular apostles who established the church in question', in this case 'presumably Paul and Barnabas'¹¹⁴ ([1 Cor 9:6](#)). As apostles they

¹⁰⁹ cf Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 98.

¹¹⁰ For a typical example of such an argument, cf von Campenhausen, 'The apostles are thus the plenipotentiaries of their heavenly Lord, and their authority ... is based *in all probability* on a call by the risen Christ himself', *Ecclesiastical Authority*, 22.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 23.

¹¹² On Paul's view of his authority as an apostle, cf J Goldingay, *Authority and Ministry* (Btamcote 1976) 14, 17; D Cameron: 'Authority in the Church—New Testament Period', *Churchman* 95 (1981) 27.

¹¹³ Pace, eg, J D G Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London 1975) 273f, who sees only two senses. Dunn is typical in this of many modern scholars. Compare, however, the wise comments of C K Barrett: 'Does Paul use the word "apostle" in a third sense, to denote a body of men who were more than church messengers but less than apostles such as himself and Peter? What were Andronicus and Junias?... When the whole Pauline evidence is reviewed, it is much easier to establish the two extremes—apostles of Christ Jesus, such as Paul himself and Peter, and envoys of the church—than to pick out a clearly defined intermediate category', *Signs*, 46f.

¹¹⁴ Dunn, *Jesus*, 275; but better, Paul and Silas ([2 Cor 1:19](#)). Barnabas was probably known to them merely by repute.

provided a link not so much between the local church and other churches elsewhere (the universal church) as between the local church and the gospel'.¹¹⁵ This interpretation has the merit of respecting the context, which speaks of the church in Corinth as 'a body of Christ' ([1 Cor 12:27](#)), (ie the emphasis is on particularity), and of stressing that the reason why apostles are first in the church is because of their key role as those who, having been commissioned by the risen Lord, are mediators of the gospel and of the authoritative tradition associated with it.¹¹⁶ K p. Hemphill, however, suggests that Dunn seems 'to over-emphasise the local community to the detriment of the larger Christian community'. He draws attention to an article by H Schlier in which he shows that 'there are repeated attempts in this letter to link the individualistic Corinthians to the whole church ([1:2](#), [4:17](#), [7:17](#), [11:16](#) and [14:33](#))'.¹¹⁷ It may thus be suggested that it is at least arguable that the reference in [1 Corinthians 12:28](#) is to 'apostles of Christ', at least two of whom were involved in the planting and growth of the Corinthian church.

Further light is shed on the verse by consideration of the context. K p. Hemphill remarks that 'Paul has emphasised that God organised the body in order to provide for its unity. With particular emphasis on these functionaries, Paul seems quite clearly to be saying that there is a leadership structure which has been established in the church by God. To fail to recognize the work of these individuals is tantamount to [p. 366](#) ignoring the will of God (cf [14:33ff](#))'. Moreover, 'by bringing the apostles, prophets and teachers into close juxtaposition with manifestations such as gifts of healing and tongues, Paul is pointing out, much to the surprise of the spirituals, that these men too are charismatic'.¹¹⁸ Their authority in the church is based, at least in part, on their supernatural gifting. This is the context in which the primacy of apostles must be seen. But whether or not Paul envisaged a continuing authoritative role for church-planting apostles who did not, as he did, enjoy a special commissioning and revelation, is not clear from this verse alone.¹¹⁹

Ephesians 4:11f

These verses are crucial for a Restorationist understanding of the need for a continuing apostolic ministry. Many commentators agree that Paul envisioned this. Markus Barth, for example, comments that 'in 4.11 it is assumed that the church at all times needs the witness of "apostles" and "prophets"... [Eph 4](#) does not contain the faintest hint that the charismatic character of all church ministries was restricted to a certain period of church history and was later to die out'.¹²⁰ It must be confessed that this is certainly the impression that the passage gives. The main exegetical problem with this interpretation

¹¹⁵ Dunn, *Jesus* 274f, cf K p. Hemphill: 'The listing of individuals almost certainly would have caused the Corinthians to think concretely of persons with whom they were acquainted who were carrying out these functions', *Pauline Concept*, 91.

¹¹⁶ Cf Dunn, *ibid*, 275.

¹¹⁷ Hemphill, *Pauline Concept*, 90 n 126, citing H Schlier, 'Über das Hauptanliegen des 'Briefes an die Korinther' in *Die Zeit der Kirche* (Freiburg 1956) 155. He concludes that 'the local ecclesia is representative of the universal'.

¹¹⁸ Hemphill, *Pauline Concept*, 92f.

¹¹⁹ Cf D E Aune, *Prophecy in Earliest Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids 1983): 'As founders of Christian communities, apostles were accorded the prestige and respect associated with the founders of various Greco-Roman social and cultural institutions ([1 Cor 3:4-10](#); [Gal 4:12-20](#))'.

¹²⁰ M Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Garden City 1974) 437, cf 437 n 72, 'Ephesians distinctly presupposes that living apostles and prophets are essential to the church's life'.

is that early in the letter, in [2:20](#) and [3:5](#), apostles and prophets have been spoken of in a somewhat different way.

In [3:5](#) we read that the mystery of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people has now been revealed to Christ's holy apostles and prophets. Wayne Grudem correctly points out that 'ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη and αὐτοῦ (referring to χριστοῦ in vs [4](#)) make it certain that OT prophets are not referred to'.¹²¹ Whether or not one should understand here and in [2:20](#) 'apostles who are also prophets', as [p. 367](#) Grudem argues,¹²² is a question we need not go into. More important for our purpose is the use of the adjective ἅγιος. This is often taken as an indication against Pauline authorship. It may be argued, however, that it represents Paul's awareness that he, along with and as chief representative of other apostles and prophets (cf vv [3, 8ff](#)), has been favoured with a special eschatological role¹²³ as recipients of divine revelation concerning the church. This suggests that such a role may not be a continuing one.

As for [2:20](#), Grudem rightly comments that its nearness and similarity in content to [3:5](#) mean that 'the reader is justified in thinking that the same people are spoken of in both verses'.¹²⁴ An important exegetical issue is whether one should understand in [2:20](#) a genitive of origin, giving the reading 'the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets' (NEB), or a genitive of apposition, giving the reading 'the foundation consisting of the apostles and prophets'. The latter reading is by far the most natural;¹²⁵ the former is motivated by a desire to harmonise [Ephesians 2:20](#) with [1 Corinthians 3:11](#), where the foundation is Christ himself. But Paul is quite capable of using metaphors in two different ways. Moreover, in Ephesians Christ is the corner-stone¹²⁶ distinct from the foundation, which strongly supports the latter reading.

In what sense, then, are apostles (and prophets) the foundation of the church? H Schlier convincingly argues that it is through their preaching of Christ: 'There is no access to Christ other than through the apostles and prophets, who have preached him and who themselves become and remain in their preaching the foundation.'¹²⁷ Martin similarly speaks of the 'unique role' of the apostles and prophets according to this verse, and argues that this foundational role should be understood 'to include both their oral witness and their literary [p. 368](#) deposits in the New Testament'.¹²⁸ This understanding, though slanted to dogmatic considerations, is supported by the fact that in the context Paul is speaking of the universal, not the local, church. We conclude that in both [2:20](#) and [3:5](#) the

¹²¹ W A Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington DC 1982) 92. The grammatical construction used (one definite article governing two nouns joined by καί) can certainly bear this sense. It is accepted by R P Martin, *The Family and the Fellowship* (Exeter 1979) 74f, who mentions P Jouon, J Pfammatter and J Murphy-O'Connor as others who accept an order of 'apostle-prophets'.

¹²² *Gift*, 97–105, esp 103. Bruce denies this on the grounds that 'in [Eph 4:11](#) they are distinct orders of ministry', *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids 1984) 315 n 29.

¹²³ Cf. Kruse, *Foundations*, 'In Ephesians the scope of his (ie Paul's) apostolic influence is extended to cosmic dimensions ... Further, Paul's apostolate is integrally related to God's plan for the ages', 175; Caragounis, *Mysterion*, 143: 'he has a central place in the declaration of the eternally-hidden *mysterion* of eschatological import'.

¹²⁴ *Gift*, 92.

¹²⁵ It is adopted by, eg, H Schlier, M Barth, C Masson.

¹²⁶ *Pace* J Jeremias, *TDNT* 4 (1967), sv λίθος, 275; this wording is to be preferred to 'keystone'.

¹²⁷ H Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Düsseldorf, 1957) 142; translation by R P Martin.

¹²⁸ Martin, *Family*, 74.

reference is to a unique role of apostles and prophets which by definition cannot be continuing. Revelation once clearly given need not be repeated. A foundation once laid need not be re-laid.

Given the restricted sense of ‘apostles and prophets’ in [2:20](#) and [3:5](#) it is *a priori* unlikely that a wider use is present in [4:11](#). Consideration should also be given to the insertion of the term ‘evangelists’ which suggests, as Armitage Robinson argues, that ‘already the term “apostle” is becoming narrowed and confined to the Twelve and Paul’.¹²⁹ The difference in domain of meaning between ‘itinerant church-planters’ and ‘evangelists’ would not seem to be sufficient to warrant the introduction of a second term, if indeed apostles in the sense of ‘itinerant church-planters’ were in view here. The argument that Paul must have had in view a continuing ministry of living apostles in [Ephesians 4:11](#) ff is by no means conclusive. Apostles and others are given πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἀγίων; in [2 Timothy 3:17](#) scripture is said to be given ἵνα ἄρτιος ᾦ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρτισμένος. It would thus seem to be not inappropriate to Paul’s thought to see the continuing ministry of apostles for the equipping of the saints as occurring through their writings which have been recognised as scripture.¹³⁰

THE LUCAN CORPUS

There are some thirty-four uses of the word ‘apostle’ in Luke, and his writings therefore merit special treatment. More importantly, many scholars¹³¹ have seen him as having a rigid view of apostleship, a view representing a late development in the use of the word, and [P. 369](#) incompatible with Paul’s position. Recently Kevin Giles has argued¹³² that while it is true that ‘Luke develops the idea that the twelve are apostles in a special sense¹³³ ... it is quite untenable to argue that all this is Lukan invention’.¹³⁴ The merits of the respective arguments must now be assessed.

The Gospel

References to apostles in the sense of the twelve appear in [Luke 6:13](#), [9:10](#), [17:5](#), [22:14](#), [24:10](#). A reference in [Luke 11:49](#) to a statement of Jesus which is part of a prophecy of judgement couched in wisdom terminology (‘I will send them prophets and apostles’) is not of primary importance. It may represent Lucan redaction of a Jewish saying whose Matthaean wording ([Matt 23:34–36](#)) is more original. Crucial is [Luke 6:13](#) (‘he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles’), since it is the only place

¹²⁹ J Armitage Robinson, ‘Christian Ministry’ in H B Swete (ed), *Essays* (1918). A reference to ‘apostles of Christ’ would be more accurate than a reference to ‘the twelve and Paul.’ We cannot be sure of the limits of the number commissioned by the risen Lord.

¹³⁰ The reference in [2 Tim 3:17](#) is of course to Old Testament scripture, but from a theological perspective which stresses the guiding hand of the Holy Spirit on the church, the argument is valid.

¹³¹ Eg Barrett, *Signs*, 52f.

¹³² K Giles, ‘Is Luke an Exponent of “Early Protestantism” ...?’, *EQ* 55 (January 1983) 8.

¹³³ So G Klein, *Die Zwölf Apostel* (Göttingen 1961). With Luke, ‘For the first time the twelve are elevated to the status of apostles’, 203. Luke, writing at the beginning of the second century, makes the twelve apostles, and hence the only legitimate bearers of the divine message, a part of his struggle against gnosticism.

¹³⁴ So I H Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter 1970) 505.

in the gospels which states that Jesus used the term ‘apostles’ for the twelve.¹³⁵ J Roloff suggests that one should understand ‘whom he (later) called apostles’,¹³⁶ ie at the time of the sending of the twelve out on mission. In such a context ([Luke 9:10](#), where Luke reproduces the substance of [Mark 6:30](#) with his own stylistic variations), apostleship might be regarded as being a short-term affair, merely for the duration of the mission. In the light of the further references to the disciples as apostles, however, it is clear that for Luke, at least, their apostleship was not a temporary matter. It is worth noting that Luke, alone among the evangelists, also records a sending-out of seventy(-two) disciples in addition to the twelve. Especially noteworthy is the statement in [Luke 10:3](#) ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω ὑμᾶς ὡς ἄρνας ἐν μέσῳ λύκων. Colin Kruse has argued that this statement ‘suggests at least that he regarded their commission (sic) as applying to the troubled times that came with and immediately followed his death’.¹³⁷ It is interesting that this saying [p. 370](#) is used in the context of a mission-charge to the twelve in [Matthew 10:16](#). (In [Matt 10:2](#) the ‘twelve apostles’ are named.)¹³⁸

It should be noted that while Mark and Matthew generally restrict the word ‘disciple’ to the twelve, and never use it of a large group, Luke speaks explicitly of many disciples (eg [Luke 6:17](#), [19:37](#)). Commenting on [Luke 6:12f](#), K Giles remarks that ‘we thus have in Luke two separate groups who are followers of Jesus. The many “disciples” and the twelve “apostles”’.¹³⁹ In some cases the title ‘apostles’ is clearly due to Lucan redaction.¹⁴⁰ The reason for this redaction becomes clear through a study of the Acts of the Apostles. It should be stressed, however, that the Lucan redaction was not arbitrary, but had a basis in the tradition.

The Acts of the Apostles

A brief survey of the use of the title ‘apostle’ in the Acts reveals that apart from [Acts 14:4, 14](#) the title is restricted to the twelve. Indeed, in chapter one, it is shown that the number twelve is vital. Steps are taken as a result of which Matthias is ‘enrolled with the eleven apostles’ ([1:26](#)). The apostles emerge in the early chapters as leaders of the community

¹³⁵ It is possible, however, that Luke is dependent on [Mark 3:14](#) at this point, where there are many strong external witnesses for the reading οὗς και ἀποστόλους ὠνόμασεν. Thus ‘neutral’ text is often discounted as the *lectio faciliar*.

¹³⁶ J Roloff, *Apolstat-Verkündigung-Kirche* (Götersloh 1965) 179.

¹³⁷ Kruse, *Foundations*, 33 cf 27f.

¹³⁸ This is the only verse in Matthew where the word ‘apostles’ occurs. Elsewhere Jesus speaks of ‘the Twelve’ ([26:14](#), [20, 47](#)), of the disciples (*passim*), or of ‘the twelve disciples’ ([10:1](#); [11:1](#); [20:17](#)). The context is one of mission. Similarly, in [Mark 6:30](#), the only occurrence in Mark of the term ‘apostles’ (if the variant reading in [Mark 3:14](#) is rejected), there is in the context no thought of the creation at this time of a permanent office, but rather the fulfilment of a specific commission. V Taylor (*Mark*, 319) therefore suggests that ἀπόστολοι in this verse ‘appears to mean “the missionaries”’. C E B Cranfield comments, however, that ‘while it is probably right to see in the fact that Mark does not elsewhere refer to the Twelve as ἀπόστολοι an illustration of the primitive character of his gospel, it seems rather unlikely that on this one occasion when he does use the word he would use it of the Twelve without having in mind the technical sense which it commonly had by the time he was writing ... The true significance of the official title is here being underlined: the significance of the Twelve lies in their being sent, commissioned by Jesus.’ *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Cambridge 1972⁴) 214f. Similar comments apply equally well to Matthew’s single use of the word ‘apostles’.

¹³⁹ K Giles, ‘Apostles before and after Paul’, *Churchman* 99 (1985) 243.

¹⁴⁰ Eg in [Luke 22:14](#) (cf [Mark 14:17](#), [Matt 26:20](#)).

active in teaching (2:42), performing miracles (2:43, 5:12), witnessing (4:33), receiving gifts (4:35ff), suffering (15:18, 40), appointing other leaders (6:6 cf v 2 'the twelve'), praying that new converts might receive the Holy Spirit (8:14, 18). Apart from Peter, they remain in Jerusalem (18:1, 14, 9:27). A startling fact, however, is that after 11:1 they virtually disappear from the stage, being p. 371 mentioned after this point only in company with the elders of the Jerusalem church (15:2, 4, 5, 22, 23, 16:4).

How should we view the function of the twelve according to the Acts? Their main function seems to be that of being a bridge between Jesus' earthly ministry and the life of the early church.¹⁴¹ They are proof that the risen Lord is one and the same as the earthly Jesus. Hence Luke's stress on their commission to be Jesus' witnesses (1:8); they are able to bear witness both to his earthly life (hence the qualification laid down in 1:21ff), and to his resurrection (1:23).¹⁴² Witness to his earthly life is stressed in 2:22f, 5:6 and 10:37ff; witness to the reality of his resurrection in 2:32, 3:15, 4:33, 5:15, 32, 10:41, 13:31f. The stress on the necessity for eye-witnesses fits in with Luke's introduction to his two-volume work (Luke 1:1-4), where he explicitly states his reliance on 'those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses' (1:2). Kevin Giles stresses that 'in Acts 4:20 (cf 26:16) we read, in terms of common Jewish legal usage, that the apostles, as reliable witnesses, only bear witness to what they have seen and heard ... In this role they are the guarantors of the Word which brings the Christian community into existence.'¹⁴³

Why is the number of apostles limited to twelve, at least in the early chapters of Acts? It seems clear that in addition to their authenticative function the apostles have a symbolic role. The significance of the number twelve is brought out in the gospel in 22:30, where the apostles (22:14) are promised that they will 'sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel'.¹⁴⁴ This should not be understood as an indication that Luke portrays the twelve as founding fathers of a new Israel: rather, 'For Luke the twelve symbolise the fact that God in Christ p. 372 is restoring Israel to what it should be.'¹⁴⁵ The stress on the number twelve recurs in the narrative in Acts 1:21ff. 'The point of the story is not that twelve men are needed for the task, but that the apostles must number twelve. No attempt is made to fill the place of the martyred James (Acts 12:2). Death removes James from the work but not from the number.'¹⁴⁶ It is in the light of this symbolic number that one should consider Luke's restriction of the number of apostles.

¹⁴¹ The use of ἐξελέξατο in Acts 1:2 in the phrase 'the apostles whom he had chosen' reflects the use of the same verb in Luke 6:13. 'They serve as an important link between Jesus and the early church', J A Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (Garden City 1981) 253.

¹⁴² Cf I H Marshall: 'The apostles had to be men who had been companions of Jesus.... This Lucan emphasis is no doubt to be explained by the necessity that those who bore testimony to the resurrection must be men who had already known Jesus and therefore were properly qualified to recognise that it was the same person who had risen from the dead', Luke: *Historian*, 43.

¹⁴³ Giles, 'Exponent', *EQ* (Jan 1983) 7.

¹⁴⁴ Giles (*ibid*, 5) claims that in leaving out the number 'twelve' before thrones in his version of the pericope, Luke 'implies that the promise is to all disciples'. But the omission is better explained on stylistic grounds (the repetition of 'twelve' being redundant—cf Matt 19:28).

¹⁴⁵ K Giles, 'Apostles', *Churchman* (1985) 245; cf J Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis 1982) 75f, 'Luke does not see the church as the new Israel', cf 41-74.

¹⁴⁶ Giles, 'Exponent', *EQ* (Jan 1983) 5; cf K H Rengstorff: 'the re-establishment of the apostolate of the twelve (sc. in the Matthias narrative) proves that the risen Lord, like the historical Jesus, has not given up his claim to incorporate the twelve tribes of Israel into his Kingdom', 'The Election of Matthias' in W Klassen and G F Snyder (eds) *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (New York 1962) 191f.

The disappearance of the apostles from the stage in the second half of Acts must not be considered. Giles comments that ‘once Luke can show that the authenticity of the kerygma had been established, and that Israel had been reconstituted, the importance of the twelve apostles diminishes’.¹⁴⁷ Thomas Weiser suggests a reason for this: ‘At the decisive turn of events, during the struggle for and the debate over the status of Gentile Christians, the principal actors are Paul on the one side and James ... the fact that the twelve were followed by other Apostles, principally Paul, is for Luke evidence of the continuance of God’s history of salvation ... The institution of the twelve has no further role in the mission among the Gentiles. According to Acts this is Paul’s role.’¹⁴⁸ Jervell has pointed out that the role of the twelve shifts after chapter 7, where Stephen’s sermon signifies the end of the apostles’ direct missionary activity to Israel. After this point their role is stressed on just three significant occasions. First, [Acts 8:14ff](#) connects them with Samaria (cf [1:8](#)). Second, the twelve legitimize Paul ([9:26ff](#)). Third, ‘the initial reference to “the nations”, to the peoples outside Israel (chaps [10–11](#)) is related to Peter, who throughout Luke-Acts is reckoned as one of the twelve’.¹⁴⁹ These observations tend to support Weiser’s thesis. Giles also comments that ‘indeed once the twelve apostles’ basic role is exhausted the title “apostle” is not limited solely to the twelve’¹⁵⁰ (cf [Acts 14:4, 14](#)).
p. 373

It should be clearly understood that this assessment of the evidence is controversial. The consensus of German scholars¹⁵¹ is that in [Acts 14:4, 14](#) Luke is following a source, and that he understands Paul in these verses to be a missionary of the church of Antioch, not an apostle of equal standing with the twelve. Schmithals, for example, writes that ‘when Luke in [Acts 14:4, 14](#), following a source, also calls Barnabas and Paul apostles, he therewith reveals that the concept of apostle for Paul was not unknown to him, but at the same time he tendentiously makes it clear that Paul bears this title only as does Barnabas, i.e. not in the sense of a fundamental authority that authenticates all tradition and goes back to Christ himself, but in the general and relatively unimportant sense of a missionary sent out by the community at Antioch’.¹⁵²

Against such an argument various points may be raised. As Ward Gasque puts it, ‘it is obvious that Paul is Luke’s hero and church-planting missionary par excellence’.¹⁵³ Similarly Stephen Wilson points out that Paul is equal to Peter when it comes to miracles, is called God’s ‘chosen vessel’ ([Acts 9:15](#)) and is distinguished by his suffering.¹⁵⁴ It should be recognized that Luke places great emphasis on Paul’s call and commissioning as an apostle to the Gentiles, recording it three times ([9:1–19](#); [22:1–21](#); [26:2–18](#)), and containing the verbs ἐξαπόστέλλω ([22:21](#)) and ἀποστέλλω ([26:17](#)) in his account of

¹⁴⁷ Giles, ‘Exponent’, *EQ* (Jan 1983) 7.

¹⁴⁸ T Weiser, ‘Notes on the Meaning of the Apostolate’, *IRM* (April 1975) 131.

¹⁴⁹ Jervell, *Luke*, 77f; cf W Hendriksen’s interesting comment: ‘The Twelve, by recognising Paul as having been specifically called to minister to the Gentiles, were in effect carrying out through him their calling to the Gentiles’, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh 1959) 50.

¹⁵⁰ Giles, ‘Exponent’, *EQ* (Jan 1983) 7.

¹⁵¹ One thinks of Haenchen, Conzelmann and Vielhauer as especially influential scholars in this respect.

¹⁵² Schmithals, *Office*, 277.

¹⁵³ W Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids 1975) 241, n 118, criticising Haenchen.

¹⁵⁴ p. G Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge 1973) 116.

Paul's testimonies to it. Colin Brown's summary is sound: 'In encountering the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul fulfilled a basic qualification for apostleship, that of being "a witness to his resurrection" ([Acts 1:22](#)). He did not fulfil the other condition, that of being a follower of Jesus in his earthly ministry. In short the picture that Acts paints is not that Paul was not an apostle, but that he was an apostle extraordinary which is consonant with Paul's own account ([1 Cor 9:1ff](#); [15:5-9](#); [Gal 1:12-17](#)).'¹⁵⁵ Finally, to quote Wilson p. 374 again, 'if it was imperative for Luke to restrict the title to the twelve, it is difficult to understand why he did not omit [14](#): If or at least erase the word "Apostle"'.¹⁵⁶

Finally, it should be recognized that Luke's major concern is not ecclesiastical office. 'In reality Luke is much more concerned about tracing the growth of the church in various parts of the eastern Mediterranean world and with the spread of the Word of God through it to "the end of the earth" ([Acts 1:8](#)) than in the details of church structure.'¹⁵⁷

OTHER NEW TESTAMENT LITERATURE

John's Gospel and Epistles

The word ἀπόστολος occurs in these writings only in [John 13:16](#), where it is clearly used in the non-technical sense of messenger. The 'twelve' are referred to in [John 6:67, 70](#) and [20:24](#), but they are not given the title 'apostle'. It is clear, however, that they are to play an important role in the community after Jesus' resurrection. The Holy Spirit will teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus taught them ([14:26](#)). He will 'guide them into all truth' ([16:12](#)). They have been chosen and appointed to go and bear fruit ([15:16](#)). Not only will the Holy Spirit testify about Jesus; they too must testify as those who have been with Jesus from the beginning ([15:26f](#)). Others will believe in Jesus through their message (17.20). It is especially noteworthy that they are sent into the world by Jesus, just as Jesus was sent into the world by the Father ([John 17:18, 20-21f](#)). In the former verse, the verb ἀποστέλλω is used of the sending of the disciples as well as the sending of Jesus. In the latter passage, Jesus breathes on them that they may receive the Holy Spirit to equip them for their task. For Peter, this will include feeding Christ's sheep ([21:15ff](#)). Barrett summarises the significance of the twelve in John's gospel as follows: 'That they have seen is their true significance; their importance is that they are witnesses, those who have seen, and because they have seen declare what they have seen. They are not important as theologians or administrators, but only as bearers of a word of testimony.'¹⁵⁸ p. 375

The first few verses of 1 John ([1:1-3](#)) reflect an identical theme. Barrett speaks of 'a subtle interplay between the pronouns "I", "we" and "you" in [1 John 1:1, 3, 2:1, 3, 3 John 12f](#) and other similar verses. He suggests that 'between them the gospel and epistles raise in the acutest form the question of what authority is to be ascribed to the eyewitnesses of the work of Jesus, and the related but distinct question of how this authority, whatever it may have been, is transmitted within the life of the church.'¹⁵⁹ These questions are too

¹⁵⁵ C Brown, *NIDNTT* I, 136, cf I H Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester 1980) 35: Luke 'recognises that there was a group of apostles, commissioned by Jesus, wider than the twelve, and he does not deny that Paul and Barnabas belong to this group'.

¹⁵⁶ Wilson, *Gentiles*, 116.

¹⁵⁷ Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, 256.

¹⁵⁸ C K Barrett, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament* (Exeter 1985) 48.

¹⁵⁹ Barrett, *Signs*, 62f.

large to pursue here. It may be noted in passing that the ‘eye-witness’ role of the twelve in John is very similar to the role they play in Luke’s writings.

Finally, the role of itinerant missionaries in 2 and 3 John should be mentioned. In [2 John 7–11](#) the recipients are warned against ‘many deceivers’ who may come to them bringing false teaching. In [3 John 5–8](#) reference is made to brothers who have gone out ‘for the sake of the Name’, who are to be given hospitality.

Hebrews

No mention is made of the twelve or of apostles in this epistle (though cf [2:3f](#)). Its distinctive feature is its reference in [3:1](#) to Jesus as ‘the apostle and high priest whom we confess’. To speak of Jesus as an apostle is reminiscent of the Johannine emphasis that Jesus was sent by the Father into the world (eg [John 3:17, 34; 5:36ff, 6:29, 57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3; 1 John 4:10](#)). In context, it seems that the author is indicating that in Jesus the functions of Moses and Aaron are combined. Giles comments that ‘these ideas are a development on what is found in the synoptic Gospels, but here also emphasis is placed on the sending of the son by the Father and on his authoritative representory role’¹⁶⁰ ([Luke 4:18, 43; Mark 12:1–11](#) and par; [Matt 15:24](#)). Justin in his First Apology (12:9; 63:5) also calls Jesus ἀπόστολος. The fact that the word could be used of Jesus by the author of Hebrews would tend to indicate that at the time of writing it had not yet acquired an exclusive technical meaning, but could be used in different senses.

1 and 2 Peter and Jude

In the first verse of 1 Peter, Peter introduces himself as ‘an apostle of [p. 376](#) Jesus Christ’ in a manner reminiscent of the Pauline letters. Similarly, [2 Peter 1:1](#) speaks of ‘Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ’ (cf [Rom 1:1; Tit 1:1](#)). In [2 Peter 1:16, 18](#), Peter speaks as a representative of the apostles in general: ‘we made known to you the power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ’; ‘we were eye-witnesses of his majesty’. Richard Bauckham points out that the verb ἐγνωρίσαμεν is ‘frequently used in the NT for imparting revelation. Here it is used of the apostles’ preaching of the gospel, which included the expectation of the Parousia’.¹⁶¹ The reference in [3:2](#) to ‘the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles’ is controversial. Bauckham remarks that ‘the double possessive genitive in this expression is awkward. It must mean that the commandment is primarily Christ’s, but also in a secondary sense the apostles’ because they were the people who preached it to the readers.’¹⁶² Michael Green argues that the reference here must be to apostles of Jesus Christ, not ‘your missionaries’, because ‘it is they and they alone who are put on a level with the Old Testament prophets’¹⁶³ (cf v [2a](#)). Bauckham convincingly insists, however, that ‘the natural meaning of “your apostles” is those apostles who preached the gospel and founded the churches in the area to which 2 Peter is addressed, contrasted implicitly with the rest of the apostles (... cf ... 1 Clem 44:1, where “our apostles” are the apostles who founded the Roman church)’. He remarks that

¹⁶⁰ Giles, ‘Apostles’, *Churchman* (1985) 242.

¹⁶¹ R J Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco 1983) 214.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 287.

¹⁶³ E M B Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (London 1968) 125.

'evidently the readers' apostles included Paul ([3:15](#)),¹⁶⁴ a fact which removes the force of Green's objection to this interpretation.

Jude introduces himself as 'a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James'(1). In verse [17](#) he speaks of 'the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ' in a way that would seem to distinguish himself from them. Jude is almost certainly to be identified with Judas, brother of James and Jesus, and mentioned in [Matthew 13:55](#), [Mark 6:3](#) and Hegessipus (ap Eusebius H E 3.19.1–206). Most scholars regard the letter as pseudonymous, partly on the basis of verse [17](#). J N D Kelly, for example, argues that 'the whole tone of the verse leaves the impression that "the apostles" constituted a revered group belonging to an earlier generation'.¹⁶⁵ It seems likely, however, that the brothers of Jesus were not known as 'apostles' in the early church (cf 1 Cor 9:5). p. 377 Bauckham states that 'early Christian literature never explicitly calls them "apostles"'.¹⁶⁶ He argues that in verse [17](#) 'the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ' are not all the apostles, 'the apostolic college' seen through the reverent eyes of a later generation (Kelly), but, naturally in the context, those apostles who founded the church(es) to whom Jude writes'.¹⁶⁷ This is certainly a possible interpretation, but by no means the only one. Green points out that Jude 'is clearly not very early in the New Testament period. The faith has had time to be crystallised and to be corrupted. The warnings of the apostles have had time to be circulated and proved true ([3](#), [4](#), [17](#), [18](#)).' He regards a reference to 'the apostolic college' as likely, but argues that 'the fact that Jude refers to what the apostles *said* rather than *wrote* suggests that we are still moving within the oral period'.¹⁶⁸ Certainly Jude regards the apostles as having great authority, and it is a priori likely that he is referring to those directly commissioned by the risen Lord.

Revelation

Within this book, the word 'apostle' is used in very different ways. In [2:2](#) the church at Ephesus is commended because they 'have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not'. Barrett comments that 'the fact that it seems worthwhile to lay a false claim to be an apostle proves that there were real ones, and proves at the same time that the apostles in question were not the twelve apostles of the Lamb, whom it would have been easy to identify and to distinguish from the shams. It seems natural to suppose that the secondary apostles circulated among the churches; had they remained at one spot their false credentials would have been immediately exposed'.¹⁶⁹ We may compare them with the 'false apostles' of [2 Corinthians 11:13](#), and the itinerant preachers of 2 and 3 John.

Another reference to apostles comes in [18:20](#), where 'saints and apostles and prophets' are called to rejoice over the fall of Babylon. The collocation of apostles and prophets is reminiscent of [Ephesians 2:20](#) and [3:5](#). R H Mounce suggests that 'if we interpret the verse in light of its parallel in [12:12](#) then the saints, apostles and prophets would be "you that dwell therein". It is the church glorified, not p. 378 believers on earth,

¹⁶⁴ Bauckham, *Jude*, 287f.

¹⁶⁵ J N D Kelly, *Peter and Jude*, 281. The question of pseudonymity and relationship to 2 Peter cannot be entered into here.

¹⁶⁶ Bauckham, *Jude*, 24.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 104.

¹⁶⁸ Green, *2 Peter*, 46f.

¹⁶⁹ Barrett, *Church*, 44.

who are invited to rejoice.¹⁷⁰ Apostles and prophets seem to represent the leaders of the church.

An altogether different sense is to be found in [21:14](#). The wall of the city rests on twelve foundations upon which are inscribed the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The reference to the twelve as foundational is reminiscent of Luke's view of the twelve. As for the image of a foundation, Barrett has pointed out¹⁷¹ how prevalent it is in the New Testament. He sees its roots in the expectation in Jewish eschatology of a new temple (cf [1 Pet 2:5](#)). The image of a building being founded on a person, or persons, is already found in the Old Testament ([Isa 51:1f](#)—Abraham), and is found in the New Testament in connection with Peter ([Matt 16:17f](#)), James, Cephas and John as 'pillars' ([Gal 2:9](#)), apostles and prophets ([Eph 2:20](#)), and here of the twelve.

EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

References to 'apostles' in the Apostolic Fathers may be divided into two categories: those that indicate a wide application of the term, and those that restrict it to the twelve (plus Paul).

Wider use

The Didache

The full title of this composite work is 'The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles, through the Twelve Apostles'. J Draper's assessment that 'the core of 1–6 is Jewish and pre-Christian (c 100BC–50AD) and the work as a whole had probably received its present form by the end of the first century AD'¹⁷² is typical of the modern consensus.¹⁷³ Draper also points out that the full text is available only in a manuscript (M54) from the eleventh century, so that the possibility of later changes and additions cannot be excluded.

The classic study is that of Harnack.¹⁷⁴ He points out that 'the very p. 379 addition of the number in this title is enough to show that the book knew of other apostles as well'.¹⁷⁵ More importantly, in 11:3–6 the book gives instructions on how to deal with itinerant apostles and prophets who visit them. Clearly 'apostles of Christ' with authority over the churches are not referred to, since they are not to be allowed to stay more than one or two days, and are not to be supported financially (cf [1 Cor 9:4ff](#)). They are to be treated κατὰ τὸ δόγμα τοῦ ευαγγελίου, which seems in context to refer to [Mark 6:7–13](#)/[Matthew 10:1–15](#). Harnack concludes that 'to be penniless, therefore, was considered absolutely essential for apostles and prophets'.¹⁷⁶ He compares [3 John 7](#), Origen (*Contra Celsum*, III.ix) and Eusebius (*HE* iii.37). He also argues that 'the second essential for apostles, laid

¹⁷⁰ R H Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids 1977) 332.

¹⁷¹ Barrett, *Church*, 16f.

¹⁷² Jon Draper, 'The Jesus Tradition in the Didache' in D Wenham (ed) *Gospel Perspectives* 5 (Sheffield 1984) 271.

¹⁷³ Though J A T Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London 1976), 352, dates it c AD 40–60.

¹⁷⁴ See *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* 1 (ET, London 1904) 417–444, summarising an earlier (1884) and more detailed work.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 407.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 435f.

down by the *Didache* side by side with poverty, namely, indefatigable missionary activity (no settling down) is endorsed by Origen and Eusebius also'.¹⁷⁷

It should be emphasized that though the *Didache* mentions apostles, 'it is clear that it is only interested in the prophet who played such an important part in the life of the community'.¹⁷⁸ G L Carey suggests that apostle may be just another name for prophet,¹⁷⁹ but this seems unlikely since the two are mentioned together. B M Streeter conjectures that the word 'apostle' may be a deliberate archaism, since the *Didache* purports to come from the hands of the apostles.¹⁸⁰ This is possible, but unlikely given other evidence (eg [Rev 2:2](#)). On the whole, it seems probable that the *Didache* does bear witness to a class of itinerant missionaries who, however, were treated by the end of the first century with great caution, at least in the (Syrian?) community represented by the *Didache*. Michael Green points out that these roving missionaries represented a real danger: 'Quite unsupervised in their teaching, they could go seriously astray doctrinally or ethically, and could involve whole churches in their weaknesses.'¹⁸¹

The 'Shepherd' of Hermas

This is a moralistic treatise, probably written at Rome in the early part [p. 380](#) of the second century AD. From a reference in his 'Vision of the Tower' (Vision [3:5](#)), it seems clear that 'he sees the apostles as revered church officers of a past generation'.¹⁸² He is certainly more interested in the figure of the prophet: 'Like the *Didache* there is considerable discussion on how to discern the true from the false prophet.'¹⁸³ References should be noted, however, to the number 'forty' used in connection with the apostles in *Similitudes* 9:15.4, and 9:16.5. In the former reference, the stones fitted into the building are referred to as follows: "'The first ones", said he "the ten that were put into the foundation, are the first generation, and the twenty-five are the second generation of upright men, and the thirty-five are the prophets of God and his servants, and the forty are apostles and teachers of the preaching of the Son of God"'.¹⁸⁴ It would clearly be wrong to take the number 'forty' literally; but it does tend to suggest a fairly wide circle of apostles and teachers, or at least a circle distinguished from the 'foundational' few of 'the first generation'.

Other works

The *Epistle of Barnabas*, possibly to be dated about AD 130, speaks (in 5.9) of the Lord's choice of his own apostles (ἴδιοι ἀπόστολοι), and therefore seems to know of some other

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 437f.

¹⁷⁸ G L Carey, *The Ministry in the Apostolic Fathers* (MTh thesis, London University 1964) 56.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁰ B H Streeter, *The Primitive Church* (London 1929) 143.

¹⁸¹ E M B Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London 1983) 167.

¹⁸² G L Carey, *Ministry*, 70. He compares also Sire 25.2, 'Apostles and teachers who preached to all the world', cf also *Sim* 17.1.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 71, cf *Mand* 11.12.

¹⁸⁴ From the translation by Edgar J Goodspeed (London 1950).

apostles.¹⁸⁵ The *pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, which represent the opinions of believing Pharisees and their successors, speak (in 11.35) of ‘apostles, teachers and prophets’. Not much can be made of this. The same must be said of the reference in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which speaks of him as ‘a teacher in our own day who combined both apostle and prophet in his own person’¹⁸⁶ (16.2). Origen (*Contra Celsum*, II.65) sees the reference in [1 Corinthians 15:7](#) to ‘all the apostles’ as referring to Christ’s seventy disciples. p. 381

Narrow use

I Clement

This epistle by Clement of Rome to the Corinthians, probably written about AD 96–100, clearly speaks of the apostles in terms of the twelve. In section 42:1f they are said to have been commissioned by Christ, and to have had their doubts set at rest by the resurrection. In section 47.4 Paul is said to be, together with Peter, an apostle of the highest repute, but the title is denied to Apollos. In section 44:1, the apostles are said to have appointed bishops and deacons.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius, though highly conscious of his authority and status, makes clear the fact that he does not regard himself as an apostle: ‘I am not issuing orders to you, as though I were a Peter or Paul. They were Apostles and I am a condemned prisoner.’¹⁸⁷ In *Philadelphians* 5:3 he speaks of himself as clinging to ‘the Apostles as the collective ministry of the church’, an unclear reference. He has nothing to say about apostolic succession, though twelve times in his letters he speaks of the three orders of ministry (viz bishop, presbyters and deacons). The reference in *Smyrnaeans* 12:2 to ‘Burrhus, whom you and brethren of Ephesus have jointly sent as a companion for me’, reminds us of ‘the apostles of the churches’ in [Philippians 2:25](#) and [2 Corinthians 8:23](#). But Burrhus is not given such a title by Ignatius.

Polycarp

The *Epistle of Polycarp*, bishop of Smyrna, to the Philippians, speaks of ‘the Apostles who brought us the Gospel’ (6:3). The reference seems to be a narrow one, since in 9:2 he speaks of ‘Paul himself and the other Apostles’ as men who are now with the Lord. Irenaeus tells us that the youthful Polycarp had been ‘instructed by apostles and had had friendly intercourse with many who had seen Christ’ (Haer 3:3, 4).

Didache

¹⁸⁵ So Harnack, *Expansion*, 406. This may well be reading too much into the expression, however, especially since in 8.3 the epistle speaks of those to whom Christ gave authority to proclaim the Good News, as being a dozen, as a token of the tribes.

¹⁸⁶ Translation by M Staniforth, *Early Christian Writing* (Harmondsworth 1968) 161.

¹⁸⁷ *Romans* 4:3 (cf *Trallians* 3:4). Translation by M Staniforth, *Writings*, 104f. Harnack claims that the fact Ignatius disclaims apostolic dignity for himself is nevertheless ‘a proof that there was a possibility of one who had not been an original apostle being nonetheless an apostle’, *Expansion*, 408 n 1. This claim is unjustified.

The title bears witness to the concept of 'the twelve Apostles' as having a unique authority.¹⁸⁸ p. 382

Summary

W Bauer comments that in early Christian literature generally, 'the number twelve stands so fast that exceedingly often twelve disciples are spoken of where actually only eleven can be meant eg Gospel of Peter 5:9; Ascension of [Isaiah 3:17](#); [4:3](#); [11:29](#); Kerygma Petrou'.¹⁸⁹ Much is said in the apocryphal Acts and Epistles of the various views and activities of the apostles after the ascension, especially of their missionary work throughout the world. Paul is not deliberately excluded from the number, but 'it was only when Marcion and later Jewish Christianity began to play Paul against the earliest apostles that thought was given to the circle of apostles, and the Early Catholic Church maintained that "the twelve and Paul" qualified as apostles'.¹⁹⁰ As regards the apostolic writings, it was probably the rise of Montanus, who advocated 'the new prophecy', that is the continuing revelation of the Holy Spirit as in apostolic times, that raised the hermeneutical question of the status of apostolic and post-apostolic writings respectively. Gerald Bray comments that 'Tertullian is the first Christian writer to regard the apostolic age as definitely over, and to quote the writings of the apostles on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures as a matter of course'. He points out, however, that 'the fact that he could do this without argument shows that the apostolic writings must have been regarded as Scripture even before his time'.¹⁹¹

Andrew C. Clark was formerly a student of London Bible College. p. 383

Journals referred to in this issue

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¹⁸⁸ Cf also *Epistle of Barnabas*, 8:3 (n 240).

¹⁸⁹ W Bauer in E Hennecke (ed), *N.T. Apocrypha* II. 35.

¹⁹⁰ L Goppelt, *Apostolic Times*, 181.

¹⁹¹ G Bray, 'Authority in the Early Church', *Churchman* Vol 95 No 1 (1981), 45.