

## Diversity in the Church of the New Testament

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### Preamble

In July of this year I led a party of Oxford theology students on a study-tour of Israel. Many of them I did not know well beforehand, though I had taught almost all of them in a large class for New Testament Greek. We travelled round in a minibus, covering some 2,000 miles in 12 days. This left plenty of time for discussion, and discussion raged freely and widely, sometimes to the detriment of the sites and countryside through which we were passing. It took us two hours to cross the fantastic scenery of the Negeb, during all of which time an animated discussion on sin dominated everything, so that my attempts to draw attention to various features fell on ears not deaf but closed to anything but the theological topic under discussion. By no means all the students were Catholic, and the Christian tradition from which they came and in which they had been formed emerged only spasmodically and gradually. At the Eucharist some of them did not receive Communion but presented themselves for a blessing, and this was a particular pain for me. I certainly felt as united in faith and in Christ with some of those who did not receive Communion as I did with others who did receive. I am too traditional a Catholic in my liturgical practice to attempt to overrule this courtesy on the part of (presumably) non-Catholics. Despite a fair amount of ignorance and misunderstanding of the beliefs and practice of one another's ecclesial communities, there was certainly a close and important bond of faith, prayer and love.

This raised for me the question, What sort of unity is required for Christian *koinōnia*? This is not quite the same question as that

which has been decided by ecclesiastical authority. What sort of unity is required for eucharistic sharing? But it does carry the danger that eucharistic sharing can become almost an irrelevance. Is eucharistic sharing the sign of complete or of developing *koinōnia*?

Within a few days of returning I was asked to give a paper in this series on Building the Bridge.\* It dictated my topic of Diversity in the Church of the New Testament. The Canon of Faith view, so important for Newman, stems from Vincent of Lerins, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*. The faith of the Church is what has always been believed by all from the beginning. Yet, despite his impeccable Catholic credentials, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, in a recently re-published essay,<sup>1</sup> questions whether the virginal conception of Jesus really was believed from the beginning. The 'seamless robe' view of theology is not the most obvious, for even within the New Testament different Christologies jostle each other. How compatible is the Jesus of Hebrews 5:7, who

-during his life on earth offered up prayer and entreaty with loud cries and with tears to the one who had the power to save him from death, and winning a hearing by his reverence learnt obedience through suffering

with the triumphant Christ of the Johannine Passion Narrative who cannot ask the Father to save him from the hour (Jn 12:27) and reigns from the Cross? Such topics carry important reflections, particularly in the matter of development of doctrine.

In this paper I want to ask two related questions. Firstly, What sort of unanimity is required for *koinōnia*? The second question is an ecclesiological one: In view of the variety of structures in the New Testament communities is the Catholic structure of a church community the only possible ecclesial structure?

### **What Sort of Unanimity is Required for *Koinōnia*?**

For the first question I want to give an example of differences between Christians by examining attitudes to the Jewish Law which

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\* An expanded version of a lecture given at Salford University, and dedicated with great affection to Fr. R.J.Raja, S.J.

<sup>1</sup> "The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament," originally published in 1973, now available in *To Advance the Gospel*, 1998.

were abroad among the first generation of Christians. There were fairly fundamental differences between them, but did these constitute a break in *koinōnia*? It is possible to distinguish four attitudes of different Christian missionaries towards the Jewish Law.<sup>2</sup>

1. Christians who demanded full observance of the Jewish Law. Christianity was a Jewish sect, in the sense that only full Jews could be Christians. Such people first enter into controversy with Paul at Antioch before the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-2). This must also have been the attitude of the 'false brothers' who wished to 'reduce us to slavery', as Paul says in Gal 2:4, by insisting on circumcision. Paul opposes this again at the end of the letter, "I, Paul, give you my word that if you accept circumcision Christ will be of no benefit to you at all" (5:2). They appear to have been active also at Philippi, for Paul writes, "Beware of self-mutilators! We are the true people of the circumcision since we worship by the Spirit of God and make Christ Jesus our only boast, not relying on physical qualifications" (Phil 3:3). It may be opposed that Paul's intemperate language excludes the possibility that he felt himself to be in communion with these people.

2. Christians who demanded observance of some prescriptions of the Law by non-Jewish Christians. These were prescriptions which would prevent strict observers of the Law from being defiled by associating with Christians who did not observe the full Law. After Peter had converted Cornelius it was the fact that Peter had been associating with the uncircumcised and eating with them that upset 'the apostles and the brothers in Judea' (Acts 11:1). Peter replied by telling the story of the sheet-vision, which should have abrogated kosher food laws, but the Apostolic Letter, sponsored by James, still prescribed certain customs for gentile Christians. It is not sufficient to say that these were merely social regulations to save strict observers from discomfort, for this is the material of the major row between Paul and Cephas reported in Gal 2. There are further traces of this attitude elsewhere in the new Testament, for instance in Matthew's omission of Mark's comment, 'thus he pronounced all foods clean' (Mk 7:19); this was presumably too strong for Matthew.

3. It is also worth noting that even Paul is outraged by infringement of the prohibition of marriage within the forbidden degrees (1 Cor 5) and insists on excommunication of the

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2 Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *Antioch and Rome*, 1982, p.2-8

offender.<sup>3</sup> In all his hortatory sections at the end of his letters he demands observance of the Ten Commandments and the high standards of Jewish morality. There are occasions when the Acts show Paul observing the Jewish Feasts and worshipping in the Temple, even to the fulfillment of a vow. According to Acts 16:3, he even had Timothy circumcised because his mother was a Jew; this would be a fairly extreme action if it was intended simply to keep people happy. From Paul's own letters we know that he at least tolerated scruples about food laws; far from pooh-poohing them, he encouraged 'the strong' to show consideration for 'the weak' who found value in them (1Cor 8:10). He may have been responsible for the slogan of the Corinthians, 'For me everything is allowed', but he discourages any brash application of this principle. The warmth with which he proclaims his own Jewishness shows that there is at least vestigial pride in being physically descended from Abraham. To the question, 'Is there any advantage in being a Jew?' (Rom 3:1) he answers firmly in the affirmative, filling his answer out substantially in Rom 9-11. God cannot abandon his people. Raymond Brown puts the question (which he calls 'facetious', but which is truly a test case), Would Paul have had his son circumcised in order to integrate him into the heritage of Abraham in this way too?

4. At the end of the scale are those who see Judaism as entirely a thing of the past. Among these must be numbered, at least temporarily, the Paul of Galatians. He is driven so far by his opponents that he denies all value to the Law. It has served its purpose as a *paidagogōs* leading children to Christ (Gal 3:24). With regard to the present he has nothing good to say for it: all who depend on the works of the Law are under a curse (3:10). It is incapable of giving life (3:22). Elsewhere, as we have seen, Paul is far more positive towards Judaism. For Stephen in Acts 7, however, the whole history of Israel has been an unrelieved disaster, from the stiff-necked people who resisted Moses through the unsuccessful attempt to build a house for God ('the Most High does not live in a house that human hands have built', 7:48), to the 'stubborn people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears' who are still resisting the Holy Spirit (7:51). Similarly for the author of Hebrews, the value of Judaism is only as *skia tōn mellontōn* (Heb 10:1) a sort of pre-shadow, which has no substance of its own, but merely shows the shape of things to come. Since those who first heard the good news were prevented

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3 Nor should it be forgotten that the same prohibitions basically hold even today!

from entering the place of rest by their refusal to believe, God fixed another day (4:6). The law could not make anything perfect, has been abolished because of its weakness and ineffectiveness (7:18-19).

The New Testament evidence suggests that there was *koinōnia* between protagonists of these views, with the possible exception of the first. Paul does call even these 'brothers', but 'false brothers'. The differences between these are pretty extreme: how extreme do differences need to be before *koinōnia* is broken off?

### **Is the Catholic Structure of a Church Community the Best or Only possible Ecclesial Structure?**

We will see that there is, even within the New Testament, a plurality of views and attitudes about the importance of various values in community. Why was it that certain of these values came to be considered more central and important than others? Was it mere historical chance? Within a few years of the completion of the New Testament, possibly even before the latest books of the New Testament came to be written, Ignatius of Antioch shows us a model of the Church which is dominated by a monarchical episcopate, "You should all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father... Nobody must do anything that has to do with the Church without the bishop's approval" (*Ad Smyrn.* 8.1). Even earlier than this Clement of Rome (probably the presbyter in charge of external affairs rather than the bishop of Rome) writes to the Church at Corinth, showing that the model of the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon is already developed there. Why was it that the pattern evident in these two communities prevailed? Were they any closer to the intentions of Jesus? Was it out of respect for that amazing martyr Ignatius? Was it because of the secular dominance of Rome? Does this model have an intrinsic strength which makes it better adapted to the needs of a Church? If it, and the subsequent panoply of the medieval papacy, developed through historical circumstances, did it and does it have any weaknesses, so that reform was required? Have they been reformed? Within or outside the Catholic Church?<sup>4</sup> Does any one model have the fullness of truth? On what criteria can one judge?

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4 A non-Catholic student of mine arrived one morning recently in a great state of excitement. He had decided that he wanted to become a Catholic. Everything that

With these questions in mind we consider the data of the New Testament itself.

## 1. Jesus' Own Community

What sort of community did Jesus gather round him? The problems of whether we can know anything at all about the historical Jesus through the veil of the gospels cannot be discussed explicitly. It seems to me that if we can know anything about Jesus it is that he set about the renewal of Israel. In Galilee the legal controversies – and more especially the sayings at their heart, which may often be enshrined in a controversy-story influenced by the pressures and interests of the earliest Christian community – show that Jesus could not accept as a valid expression of God's kingship Judaism as it was being lived at the time: "It is not the healthy who need the doctor but the sick"; "The son of man is master of the Sabbath"; "Man is not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man"; "It is not what goes into a person that defiles, but what comes out." Consistent with this is Jesus' behaviour in Jerusalem, his controversies with the leaders ("Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's") and his rubbishing of the Temple, that noble centre and symbol of the whole of Judaism, as a sign that Judaism as it was currently lived was bankrupt.

So much for the negative. On the positive side we can regard Jesus' disciples as a deliberate nucleus for the New Israel. The number is so deeply rooted that it had to be kept up even after the defection of Judas. It is far more stable in the tradition than the actual names of the members, which vary in different versions of the list. The deeply traditional saying at the Last Supper about the New Covenant is again a firm guarantee that Jesus saw his community as the successors of Israel: the new covenant in Jesus' blood mirrors the Sinai covenant, confected in the blood of the paschal sacrifice, by which that rabble of runaway slaves became God's own holy people.

At the same time, however, Jesus' viewpoint was firmly eschatological. We cannot disregard the constant emphasis of sayings like "There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingship of God come in power" (Mk 9:1) or "You will

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at the Reformation needed to be reformed had now been corrected, and there was no reason not to return to the complete unity of the Church.

see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power" (Mk 14:62). Similarly, weight must be given to the eschatological enthusiasm of the earliest teaching (he gave the Thessalonians the impression that Christ's triumph over death implied that none of his followers would die before the arrival of the eschaton) and letters of Paul. Consequently there is little or no evidence that Jesus envisaged any enduring structure for his new Israel. It is not closed to the future, for he commands them, at any rate in the earliest, Pauline, version (1 Cor 11:24, 25) to repeat the covenant-action in *anamnēsis* of him. The whole atmosphere, however, is shot through with urgent expectation of the fulfillment of God's kingship. "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mk 14:25). Consistently with this, there is no provision for future organisation or structure or entrance procedure or cult. On the principle of multiple attestation we must accept that there is a leader, Simon, who is given the name 'Rock'. Even in Mark it is clear that Simon has a special position: he is the only disciple who has a real speaking part rather than a mute walk-on role. In each of the other gospels there is a scene and a saying which attributes a special part to him, and their very variety is evidence of the firmness of the tradition. Matthew's promise at Caesarea Philippi is echoed by Luke's scene at the supper and John's dialogue at the lakeside of the repentant Peter with the Risen Lord. Furthermore, these dialogues use imagery traditional of Israel, the *Qahal* in Mt, flock and sheep in the others. So there is a leader but not organisation. In the time-span envisaged by Jesus this would no doubt have been quite sufficient structure.

## 2. The Churches of Paul

The earliest evidence we have for Christian communities and their structure is, of course, the letters of Paul. It is tempting to consider these in conjunction with the evidence of the communities founded by Paul which is provided by Acts. For Paul, however, this is secondary evidence, and I shall here prescind from it, postponing it till we consider Luke-Acts explicitly.

The overwhelming impression is of extremely loosely-constructed communities. There is no mention in Paul of any leadership other than his own - no bishop or overseer or elder or even deacon - except in the introduction to Philippians, whose letter is addressed to God's holy people with its overseers ('presiding elders'?)

and deacons. Was this church exceptional, perhaps because of its background in a Roman military *colonia*? The impression given by Rom 16 is that there was a large number of little house-churches, meeting across the city: the church that meets at the house of Prisca and Aquila, the household of Narcissus (Rom 16:5, 10,12). This sort of structure should not be surprising, for archaeologists claim that no house has been discovered in ancient Corinth with a room which would seat comfortably more than 30 people. At Corinth it was Chloe's household which sent envoys to Paul (1 Cor 1:11). In the complimentary final chapter of Romans Paul congratulates a number of people for working so hard for the Lord; he even calls Andronicus and Junia<sup>5</sup> 'outstanding apostles', but there is no suggestion that 'apostle' is an official position.

The clearest picture of a community we get from Paul's letters is the community at Corinth. Here there seems to be massive disunity and fragmentation, unhampered by any structural elements. When Paul reports that they claim variously 'I am for Paul' or 'I am for Apollos' or 'I am for Cephas' or even 'I am for Christ' (1:12) it is clear that there is no resident leader. In the case of recourse to gentile courts he sneers, with the sarcasm which is such a feature of this part of the letter, "Is it impossible to find in the community one sensible person capable of deciding questions between brothers?" (6:5). Similarly, in the fracas in Galatia, there is no indication that the "trouble-makers among you who are seeking to pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:7) claim any official status, or that there is anyone of official status to oppose them. At Corinth the 'super-apostles' (2 Cor 11:5) who are trying to infiltrate the community and impose their authority, are obviously from outside rather than resident, since they send letters of commendation. Again they claim no official status. The argument from silence is a tricky one to handle, but in all these circumstances Paul would surely have made some mention of a structure if there were one. This argument from silence may be strengthened by the fact that Paul uses priestly language plentifully enough, but of the service of the gospel, e.g. Rom 15:16: "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit".

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5: The standard translation of this name is 'Junias', a name of masculine formation, which in fact never occurs elsewhere. The word (in the accusative) is much more likely to be the accusative case of 'Junia', a frequent feminine name.

In fact the structure of the body at Corinth seems to have been entirely different. It is a body, the body of Christ, living (indeed, bubbling) with Christ's Spirit. Paul insists that every member has a ministry of some kind, every member has something to contribute to the whole. In one passage he does outline a hierarchy of gifts, 'first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers' (1 Cor 12:27), but in the same breath he rejects decisively any idea of hierarchy of honour: "It is the parts of the body we consider least dignified that we surround with the greatest dignity and our less presentable parts are given greater presentability" (12:23). The whole Body goes to make up Christ, devoid of any dominant member, and the foot can say 'I am not a hand and so do not belong to the body' no more than the hand, the eye or the ear (12:15).

Paul himself has a special position, but it is won only by his personal authority. This is clearest in Second Corinthians, where his means of establishing his authority is the famous 'boast' of his sufferings. His authority stems from the sufferings and his endurance as the servant of Christ; it is because he has undergone more than his rivals that his authority is greater (2 Cor 10-13). The authority of his teaching comes not from any position he holds, but from the weight of his message: "we commend ourselves to every human being with a conscience by showing the truth openly" (2 Cor 4:2). As he twice says, it is an authority 'for building up and not for breaking down' (10:8; 13:10). The allusion here to Jeremiah's task, and his allusion in Gal 1:15 to being called from his mother's womb show that Paul considers his authority to be primarily prophetic rather than jurisdictional. Anyone who claims to be a prophet or to have any spiritual powers must, says Paul, recognise that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37). It is only as a last resort, and with a brevity which marks his short temper, that he departs from this prophetic stance. Having exhausted every argument he can muster against women having uncovered heads in the assembly, he is finally driven to stamp his foot and say, "If anyone wants to be contentious, I say we have no such custom nor do any of the churches of God" (1 Cor 11:16).

### **3. The Church of Luke-Acts**

The churches of Acts are very different from this model. The Twelve are of vital importance as witnesses to the resurrection and

yet for the most part they play a curiously marginal role in the polity of the Jerusalem community. One puzzle is the appointment of the Seven. Theoretically the purpose of this is to ensure even-handedness in the distribution of food to the widows of the two sections in the community, Hebrews and Hellenists. This solution, however, does not work, for two reasons: firstly, the Seven do not distribute food, but rather preach and administer the sacraments in the same way as the Twelve; Secondly, it would be as idiotic to appoint all the ministers from the Hellenists as it was to leave the distribution entirely in the hands of the Hebrews; the only sensible system would be half-and-half committee. I suspect that Luke is concealing a discreditable breach of the unity he stresses so repeatedly, and that in fact a hierarchy of Seven is being appointed for Christians drawn from the Hellenists, parallel to the Twelve for Christians drawn from the Hebrews.<sup>6</sup> The full story would indicate a division in the community which Luke is not prepared to broadcast.

In any case, the community of new believers at Jerusalem is surely intended as a model and ideal for all Christian communities. The two keynotes are brotherhood and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The watchword is *homothumadon*, a word which occurs at least 10 times in Acts and only once elsewhere in the NT, meaning 'of one mind and heart'; the believers are united in prayer, generosity and community of goods, going together to the Temple to pray, persevering in the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:41) and praising God together (2:46). Throughout the Acts there is a strong sense that every decision and every appointment is guided by the Spirit. It is only when the Spirit comes at Pentecost that the life of the community begins. The officials (e.g. the Seven) are chosen because they are 'filled with the Spirit'. The Seven are presented by the community to the apostles, but it is the community<sup>7</sup> who finally appoint them by laying

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6 From Paul's letters it is clear that he set great store by the collection he was taking up to Jerusalem to prove the loyalty of the gentile churches to the mother church at Jerusalem, in other words, to heal the wound which had been festering ever since the row at Antioch reported in Galatians. All we hear about this money is that Paul was instructed to pay for the performance of a vow in the Temple (Acts 20:24). What Luke may well be suppressing is that the 'brothers' told Paul that he could keep his gentile money, or at best could launder it by using it liturgically in the Temple.

7 In the most likely reading, corrected by the Western text, which inserts a relative to attribute the laying on of hands to the apostles.

hands on them. Similarly, when Barnabas and Saul are sent off on their mission by the community at Antioch, this mission is laid upon them by the community, united in prayer with their prophets and teachers, under the direct guidance of the Spirit, and after the community has empowered them by the laying on of hands (13:1-3).

For the communities which Paul founds he appoints elders (Acts 14:23; cf. 20:17). This corresponds to the polity known in the Jewish communities scattered round the mediterranean from inscriptions and the ancient Jewish sources. They were ruled by a council of elders presided by the temporary *archisynagogos*.<sup>8</sup> Luke is perfectly aware of the existence of *archisynagogo*i, but mentions them only in Jewish communities (Acts 13:15; 18:8, 17), never in their Christian counterpart. Perhaps he is implying that the harmony among Christians and the guidance of the Spirit were such that no presiding elder was required.

It is perhaps to emphasise that this Spirit-led egalitarianism actually works that Luke stresses so consistently the unity which reigns among them. The picture is idealised and partial. From Paul's own letters one might gather that the dispute at Antioch reported in Gal 2:11-14 between Paul and the Judaisers was the father and mother of a row. After it Paul was deserted by Barnabas and John Mark (C.K. Barrett calls Paul, perhaps exaggeratedly, 'the most hated man in the ancient world'), and set about forming his own new team of helpers. There is no sign that he ever spoke to Peter again, no sign of a reconciliation with the Jerusalem church until the - possibly abortive - attempt at reconciliation by means of the great collection for the poor at Jerusalem. Acts gives no hint of a rift or of any disagreement, but smoothly shows Paul regularly returning to Jerusalem in amity and collegiality.

#### 4. Matthew's New Israel

A good case can be made for locating the composition of Matthew's gospel at Antioch. The authority which it carried, and its rapid diffusion (of the four, it is the gospel most used in the second century), would suggest that it carried the weight of an important

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<sup>8</sup> This official was presumably elected for a fixed period. One tombstone claims that its owner was seven times *archisynagogos* of his community.

Christian centre, which Antioch certainly was, an important commercial centre with a large Jewish population. It was, of course, at Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called 'Christians'. Incidentally, it is Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch in the very early second century, who first quotes Matthew - three times (*ad Smyrn.* 1:1; *ad Polycarp* 2:2; *ad Ephes* 19:2-3). The prominence of Peter in Matthew's gospel would suit a city where Peter was at one time so influential (Gal 2).<sup>9</sup> Further, Matthew's famous exceptive clause, permitting divorce in the case of *porneia* could be the result of the Apostolic Letter sent from the Council of Jerusalem to the churches of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, which forbids marriages which are *porneia*. Matthew's intimate knowledge of all things Jewish would also fit this community. In particular his pre-occupation with the failure of Judaism to acknowledge Jesus, and his insistence that they will lose their heritage ("many will come from east and west and sit down at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the children of the kingdom will be thrown out", Mt 8:11-12) would fit well in a community where an explosive situation had already occurred about the relationships between Christianity. After a first insistence on a separation between gentile and Jewish Christians, had matters gone from bad to worse?

Wherever the gospel was written, the well-springs of Matthew's ecclesiology are two. The heart of the Matthean community is the presence of Jesus in the community and the imitation by the members of the community of Jesus' obedience to his Father. Just as the presence of God made Israel God's people, so the presence of Jesus is integral to Matthew's new Israel. This arches over or brackets the whole gospel, from the opening promise of 'Emmanuel, God with us' in Mt 1:18 to the final commission by the risen Lord on the mountain in Galilee, concluding with "I am with you always, yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28:20). The second well-spring of the Matthean church is morality, for teaching plays a large part in the material which Matthew has added to Mark. The main principle of action in the Matthean community is fulfillment of the Law, or doing the will of the Father.

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9 B.H. Streeter called Peter 'the supreme Rabbi' of the Church (*The Four Gospels*, 1953, p.212) because of the promises of Mt 16 and 18. In view of Matthew's prohibition of the title 'Rabbi' this is not entirely complimentary!

If Matthew was written at Antioch, this again would supremely apt in a community where Jewish elements and background were so important. But the difference from Judaism is that in Matthew doing the will of the Father is always in imitation of Jesus, whose prayer is 'Thy will be done', both at the heart and centre of the Sermon on the Mount and at the Agony in the Garden which sets the tone for the account of the Passion. Matthew's community is, therefore, fundamentally Christocentric both in its being and in its action.

With regard to elements of order in the church Matthew adds a couple of new elements. Firstly, there is Matthew himself - if indeed the scribe is a self-portrait: "every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old" (Mt 13:52). Matthew's attention to scribes and consistent care to soften or remove any criticisms of them<sup>10</sup> suggests an affinity with them. He is without doubt a careful teacher, richly dependent on Jewish traditions of exegesis and instruction, and ordering his material with consummate art. The teacher has an important place in his community, since teaching is an integral part of the final commission, "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you" (28:19-20). Here, then, is at least one more office within the community besides that of Simon the Rock. The office of teacher does not, however, detract from the centrality of Christ and total direction toward the will of the Father, for all teaching is dependent on the Father: "you have only one Master.., only one Father and he is in heaven, only one Teacher, the Christ" (23:8-10). This element again accords with Antioch, where the 'prophets and teachers' are explicitly mentioned and listed (Acts 13.1).

The other new element which we can glimpse in Matthew's community is the community assembly in action. Matthew is a practical realist. To say that he is a casuist, the first casuist in the Christian sphere, would be unfair. But it is part of his Jewish way of thinking (against a background of law) that he envisages different situations, and how moral principles will apply in them. The legislative texts of the Pentateuch of course consider the application

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. David E. Orton, *Matthew, the Understanding Scribe* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), especially ch 7.

of the laws, and the writings of the rabbis will soon become heavily preoccupied with such case-lore. There is a delicate balance in Matthew's attitude: on the one hand he warns against legalism by insisting three times on the text 'what I want is love not sacrifice'. On the other hand, Matthew's community is one which feels safer if it can appeal to rules. He is the only New Testament author to make provision for the difficulties which occur in every human community. This is the only generalised (by which I mean to make exception for the very particular story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5) glimpse we receive of the community confronting the reality of human sinfulness. In Mt 18, the chapter on community relations, the concentration is on failure and its remedies, such as the Christian's duty to search for the lost sheep.<sup>11</sup> The chapter ends with the long parable of the unforgiving servant. It would, suggests Matthew, be absurd to pretend that offences will not occur; better be frank and concentrate on the remedies. It is in this context that Matthew legislates - with his usual meticulous detail - for the judgement of offences between brothers, prescribing three stages: private confrontation, confrontation before witnesses, referral to the community. Here again we see that we are dealing with a community sprung from Judaism, for the process has a close analogy in the Qumran text, which gives the same three stages:

They shall rebuke one another in truth, humility and charity. Let no man address his companion with anger or ill-temper. Let him not hate him, but let him rebuke him on the very same day lest he incur guilt because of him. Let no man accuse his companion before the Congregation without having admonished him in the presence of witnesses (1 QS 5:25-6:1).

In Matthew the seriousness of this process is then underlined by the two corresponding statements that the decisions taken on earth by the community are binding in heaven,<sup>12</sup> and - the reason for this - that where two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name, he is

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11 This emphasis of Matthew on the Christian duty to look after the brethren is proper to him. Luke, also characteristically, uses the parable to emphasise the joy in heaven at a sinner's repentance.

12 Here the promise made individually to Peter is being repeated to the community. This is surely reflected in the Vatican I declaration on papal infallibility, that the Bishop of Rome *eadem infallibilitate gaudet qua pollet ecclesia*. The individual infallibility of Peter's successor is correlative to that of the Church.

present among them (18:18 - 20). Here again it is the presence of Christ in the community which is the clue to Matthew's thinking.

## 5. The Pastoral Letters

The authorship of the letters of Timothy and Titus is not our problem. Suffice it to say that modern scholarship is almost unanimous in denying their authorship to Paul. Certainly the picture of the community they present is light-years away from the unstructured charismatic communities of the classic Pauline letters. Here there is an institutionalised church with a plethora of appointed officials and orders. The spirit of the author also is light-years away from Paul's confidence and openness, as he searches for radical solutions to new problems, and argues for them in the light of Christ's resurrection with his inimitable vivacity. The search is no longer to find new solutions to new problems but to preserve the inheritance: 'this is a teaching you can rely on' is a phrase repeated five times in the letters. Initiative and questioning are not encouraged; the emphasis is all on 'sound teaching' (1 Tim 6:3). One wonders how Paul himself would have fared, faced with the strictures on 'a weakness for questioning everything and arguing about words' (1 Tim 6:4). There is not going to be much development of doctrine here; the aim of the author is undisturbed calm, respectability and reliability. Women should be dressed quietly and modestly; during instruction they should be quiet and respectful, they should live a sensible life (1 Tim 2:9-15). The chief virtue (6 times) is *semnostes*, decency or respectability.

These are the virtues furthered by the structures which Timothy and Titus are instructed to set up and keynote of the virtues prescribed for their incumbents. At the top, and outside the communities themselves are Timothy and Titus, the disciples of Paul. They are to set up the structures, but are not themselves part of them. Within the communities there reappear the elders of the Jewish diaspora communities whom we met in Acts (1 Tim 5:17-19; Titus 1:5); each one of them must be 'a man of irreproachable character'. How would Jesus' motley band of fishermen, tax-collectors and converted prostitutes have stood up to this?

With them and above them, is the presiding elder, who is also called *episkopoi*. This title has occurred once, in the greeting of

Philippians, but there it is in the plural, whereas here it designated always a single person.<sup>13</sup> It surely corresponds to the *mebaqqer* or Guardian of the Qumran documents. Incidentally, the instructions for this official at Qumran are distinctly more pastoral than for the official in the Pastorals. The Guardian "shall love [the members of the Congregation] as a father loves his children, and shall carry them in all their distress like a shepherd his sheep. He shall loosen all the fetters which bind them, that in his Congregation there may be none that are oppressed or broken" (1QS 13:8-12). Legislation about the presiding elder is concentrated more on efficiency of administration and security from possible accusations against him.

## 6. Clericalism

The one dominant feature of the modern Church which is glaringly absent from the New Testament is the priesthood. Apart from two documents, Hebrews and the Book of Revelation, the word 'priest' (*hiereus*) is used exclusively of Jewish priests. The Letter to the Hebrews uses both 'priest' and 'high priest' frequently of Jesus, but of no one else. Priests simply do not feature in the earliest Christian community, let alone dominate. It is, so to speak, an entirely non-clerical society. The group of Christians as a whole are described by 1 Pet 2:5, 9 as a *hierateuma*, but this is quite a different thing. Of individuals the nearest approach to a priest is the overseer/*mebaqqer* who appears in the Pastoral Letters. Do we need to revise our presuppositions?

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<sup>13</sup> It does occur in the plural at 1 Tim 5:17, but here it envisages the class of presiding elders. It will be remembered that in the Jewish communities the office of *archisynagogos* was temporary.