

## LAY LEADERSHIP IN PAULINE COMMUNITIES

Dr. Aloysius Xavier  
St. Peter's Pontifical Institute  
Bangalore

At the time of Paul there was no clerical hierarchy and Christian community was non-institutionalised organisation. It was more charismatic and the community was run by lay leaders both men and women. The major letters of Paul and deuteropauline letters do not indicate signs of a clerical hierarchy. If there are references to bishops, elders and deacons in pastoral letters, they are of later origin

Any organised community needs leadership. Paul's Christian community also needed an organisation and leaders. Paul had two models of organisation and leadership to follow in his time. The first the Jewish organisation was centered on the synagogue. After the disappearance of monarchy in the seventh and fifth century B. C. and after the Exile, the leadership flourished on the synagogue model. The leaders of the synagogue were guiding and ruling the Jewish community in their locality. All the villages had their synagogue and *Archisynagagos* played an important role with patronage and philanthropy. Paul had another model called *Politeia* and *Oikia* prevalent in Greco-Roman world. Without going into details about the leadership that existed at the time of St. Paul we shall see the leadership in Pauline community. Though holding offices was common in city government of Greco-Roman world, we find nothing comparable when leading roles in the Pauline communities are mentioned. The New Testament writers do not use the word *arche* in the sense of office or its synonyms. However slowly the different roles played by some members for the welfare

and organisation of the community began to be differentiated and their relative importance began to be discussed. In the First Letter to the Thessalonians, Paul exhorts the members of the community to acknowledge "those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you" (1 Thess 5:12). The First Letter to the Corinthians indicates that the position of authority grows out of the benefits a member of the community offers to the community.<sup>1</sup>

The existence of lay leaders in Pauline community can be inferred from the various terms. Paul uses to denote the leaders in his community. Paul had no disciples but had many associates. Paul in his letters (including Pastorals) mentions names of 36 persons, his associates in his ministry and they are classified under nine designations. The designations are brother, apostle of the Church, servant, fellow servant, partner, worker, fellow soldier, fellow prisoner and co-worker.<sup>2</sup> Here we shall see the role played by the three, namely apostle of the Church, co-workers and servants among the above mentioned nine categories of workers. In addition to these, there were other two important categories of lay leaders namely the leaders of household churches and charismatics contributing to the welfare of the community.

## APOSTLES

In the letters of Paul, *apostolos* is an administrative designation for envoys, delegates and representatives. Their titles and functions are given in 2 Cor 8:23 as "envoys of the churches" that is, envoys<sup>3</sup> appointed and sent out by the churches to represent them. These are the people designated to accompany the collection to Jerusalem. One of these apostles was Epaphroditus who brought money from the Philipian Christians to Paul in prison (Phil 2:25). Their authority seems to be derivative and limited.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians the Social World of Apostle Paul*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 134.

<sup>2</sup> E.E.Ellis, 'Paul and his Co-workers', *NTS* 17 (1971) 437-438.

<sup>3</sup> H.D. Betz, Art, "Apostle", *ABD* Vol. I, New York: Double day, 1992, 309.

<sup>4</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 133.

## CO-WORKERS

Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15), Apollos (1 Cor 3:9) Aquilla and Priscilla (Rom 16:3), Luke (Col 4:10), Mark (Phil 24), Philemon (Phil 2), Timothy (Rom 16:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23) are some of the prominent companions of Paul mentioned as co-workers in the letters of St. Paul. The term or title "co-worker" is the most used description of Paul for those helped him in his ministry. Of the thirteen uses of this term in the NT, all but one (3 Jn 8) are in the Pauline letters.

St. Paul does not yield his authority to any one but he honoured his companions by using this term of co-workers, thereby consolidating their authority in the Church. It can not be considered merely a sociological title honouring the companions. It serves as a theological statement that lays emphasis on the fact that Paul and they are in the same service. In other words, they are God's helpers and fellow workers (1 Cor 3:9). The co-worker in 1 Cor 3:9 corresponds to *Diakonos* in 3:5.<sup>5</sup>

Paul not only mentions them co-workers but goes further and says they are co-workers of God (1 Cor 3:9). It is a theological claim that they share with the Apostles in the ministry of reconciliation. In 1 Cor. 16:16 their co-workmanship also gets connected with hard labour in their ministry to the community (1 Cor 16:15). E. A. Judge calls Paul's co-workers as Paul's Retinue. This shows Paul's mission was a collective enterprise and points to its corporate nature. Barnabas can be called as the first co-worker of Paul. Later when they separated Paul had other co-workers.

The co-workers of Paul assumed a wide range of functions. Silvanus (Col 1:1) Timothy (2 Cor 1:1) and Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1) appeared as co-authors of letters. Timothy was sent from Athens to Thessalonica to see how strong was the faith of Thessalonian Christians and how loyal they were to Paul (1 Thess 3:2). Silvanus played a great role in establishing Christian community in Corinth (2 Cor 1:19). Titus was a trouble-shooter in Corinth (2 Cor 2:13). Priscilla and Aquilla, among many other roles they played, functioned as theological instructors of Apollos.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Betram, art, "συνεργός", TDNT VII, 874.

<sup>6</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 133.

In the letter to the Philippians, St Paul mentions two women, Euodia and Syntyche who struggled together with Paul in the gospel along with Paul's other co-workers (Phil 4:2-3). This shows the two women as Paul's co-workers. St. Paul uses the verb "laboured". The corresponding verb in Greek verb suggests not a passive role in the spreading of the gospel but a real activity, difficult struggles, and may be remarkable sacrifices.<sup>7</sup>

The extent of the relationship between Paul and Co-workers remains varied. Timothy very clearly depended upon Paul's directions and authority. The relationship between Paul and some co-workers extended over a long period, and that of some others was limited to certain time and place.

## DEACONS

Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15), Apollos (1 Cor 3:5), Archippus (Col 4:17), Epaphras (Col 1:7), Mark (2 Tim 4:1), Phoebe (Rom 16:1) were some companions of Paul who were called deacons. The verb *Diakonew* is used for their service. In the Acts of the Apostles *Diakonew* may be used as service and waiting at table. In Pauline community also the word "deacon" may refer to different types of services rendered to the community. First, in Paul's community, deacons were those who preached the gospel. Deacons are those who toil and suffer in the service of the gospel. St. Paul calls himself a deacon in this regard (2 Cor 11:23, 29). Deacons in the Pauline community could be taken as church workers. It has a more restricted meaning. The term is used of preachers or with reference to preaching. Deacon is a teacher, i.e. one who has been entrusted with and is sent to communicate the mysteries of God. In Pauline community deacons appeared to be a special class of co-workers active in preaching and teaching.<sup>8</sup> Phoebe who is numbered among the deacons in Pauline community deserves special attention. Paul praises her service to the community in Rom 16:1-3. He describes her as a *diakonos*, deacon. The term *prostasis* ( helper) in the following verse may explain what this

<sup>7</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, SNTSMS 59, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1988, 112.

<sup>8</sup> E.E.Ellis, 'Paul and his Co-workers', 441-442.

means. It may describe the activities of those who exercise important functions in the churches. This could suggest that Phoebe was engaged in teaching and leading in her local church at Cenchreae.

The words *diakonos* (deacon) and *diakonia* (service) refer also any service rendered to the community. For Paul providing hospitality is itself a service and we have references of at least four Corinthian Christians with whom Paul stayed: Gaius, Aquila, Priscilla and Titus Justus.<sup>10</sup>

## HOUSEHOLD CHURCHES

Paul's Christian communities did not have a building or structure to come together. Their assembly was held in houses and rarely all the Christians of a city or town came together. Rather Paul's community had household churches. It was modeled on the household of Greco-Roman world in which culture family functioned as basic unit.

The head of the household church was a rich man and he had somewhat bigger house to accommodate around 60 persons. The Christians of that locality came together to his house for Eucharistic celebration and other meetings. The Christians generally were poor and their houses were of single room. Each community in the city must have had one or several churches. Paul in his letter refers to the Church in somebody's house like Aquilla and Priscilla together with the church in their house. It means that house of this couple served as the meeting place for some Christians in Ephesus. The phrase *Kath Oikon* refers to the basic cell of Christian movement. Paul mentions the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15), Crispus (1 Cor 1:14), Gaius (Rom 16:23), Philemon (Phil 2), Nympha (Col 4:50) and Priscilla and Aquilla.

The leader of the household played an important role and he or she was held in high regard. We can presume something about their work and we see the esteem in which Paul held them. St.

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<sup>9</sup> R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Gerde Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982, 89.

Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians tells about Stephanas : "You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia and they have devoted themselves to the service of Saints. I urge you to subject to such man and every fellow worker and labourer" (1 Cor 16:15-16).

As it has been observed, Stephanas must have had a big house to hold the Christians of his locality. He must have been rich enough to supply supper for all who assembled in his house to celebrate Eucharistic meal. He has devoted himself to the service of Saints and the service of others. There came a real change in a Christian church. The household church in a way was resembling the office of *Politeia* in Greco-Roman world which was based upon the Client / Patron relationship. The patron had authority and the clients were at the service of patron. Patron demanded submission from the clients and exercised authority over them. But we see here the fruit of the Pauline teaching for the obverse side of client / patron relationship i.e. the role of Christian patron. Stephanas, the Christian patron is standing as an example of service (*Diakonia*) (1 Cor 16:15).<sup>11</sup>

Paul's exhorts Corinthian Christians to show respect to Stephanas the first convert of Achaia. Paul is doing this not because Stephanas had any status or rank but because of his commitment to the service of the Saints.

Aquilla and Priscilla were also leaders of household. Their service is praised in Romans 16:4. Here we are told that they 'risked their necks' for Paul. Verse 4 suggests strongly the large impact they had on the Gentile church as a whole. One gets the impression that Aquilla and Priscilla were two of Paul's closest and most reliable workers, and they must have been involved in a wide range of activities ranging from providing hospitality to Paul, to church planting, teaching and preaching ( Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Acts 18:1-3, 26-28).<sup>12</sup> There was also Gaius in whose house the whole congregation met (Rom 16:23). Thus we may infer the social

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001, 195-199.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 114.

status of Gaius. From there Tertius wrote the letter to the Romans. That makes it appear as if other tasks were customarily performed from this house. There were other leaders of the household churches like Philemon.

## CHARISMATICS

The last group who contributed to the growth and welfare of the community were the charismatics who had charisms or gifts of God. The gifts had God or Christ as their author. The task of the Holy Spirit is to apportion them to everyone and manifest them through individuals for common good (1 Cor 12:7,11; 14:12). The different terms used to describe the charisms bring to the fore the different facets of their character: the revealing characteristics (manifestation) (1 Cor 12:7) dynamic quality (working) and their social purpose (service) (1 Cor 12:4,6). The charisms are not given merely to help the church get started but are intended as a main constituency of their gatherings as long as they continue to exist. Paul enlists the charisms given to the members of the community in four of his letters:

<b>1 COR 12:28-30</b>	<b>1 COR 12:8-10</b>	<b>ROM 12:6-8</b>	<b>EPH 4:11</b>
Apostles (first)	wisdom	Prophecy	apostles
Prophets (second)	<i>gnōsis</i>	<i>Diakonia</i>	prophets
teachers (third)	faith	the teacher	evangelists
miracles	healing gifts	the exhorter	shepherds
healing gifts	working miracles	the donor	teachers
assistances	prophecy	the patron	
guidances	distinguishing	the one who	
kinds of tongues	spirits	shows mercy	
(interpret: 30)	kinds of tongues		
	interpretation of		
	tongues		

In Corinthians wide range of gifts and specific items are mentioned. In Romans we have a shorter list and in Ephesians we have even more restricted and structured list. Thus Paul nowhere gives a systematic and full description gifts available in Christian community.<sup>13</sup>

Each person within the community receives at least one charism for the benefit of his fellow Christian (1 Cor 12:7-11; Rom 12:3, Eph 4:7) but not all have the same gifts. Paul underlines that the gifts are used for local Christian community itself (Rom 4:6, Eph 4:4, 12-16) when Christians are in contact with one another. The charisms are used for every aspect of community life.

The use of charisms can be classified into four directions.

1. Charisms are directed towards the growth of understanding in the community. It takes place through the exercise of prophecy, teaching, exhortation, discernment of Spirits and interpretation.
2. The second group of gifts is primarily directed towards psycho – social well-being of the community i.e. integrity and harmony of the group and of its members. These gifts are important because they have a pastoral orientation, and are practiced through helps and acts of mercy.
3. The third group is directed towards the physical welfare of the community. Paul never suggests that the charisms affect only spiritual dimension. The rendering financial assistance, the exercise of gifts of healing, and performance of miraculous works are relevant here.
4. The fourth group of gifts appears to direct towards unconscious life of the community. There are things, which our spirit wishes to communicate with God, of which our conscious minds are unaware (Rom 8:26-27). It is the function of speaking in tongues and singing in the spirit that make this possible.

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<sup>13</sup> W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christian*, 135.

Thus the charisms have been designed by God to encompass every aspect of communities' life. The gifts concern every aspect of members' activities.<sup>14</sup>

Some Christians today, touched by the grace of renewal and Spirit's activity within the Christian community always bring about the flowering of various kinds of charisms. In the present day also those who have received charisms can contribute to the growth and welfare of the Christian community. The Second Vatican Council aware of importance of spiritual gifts insists that the role of those who have received these gifts should not be ignored, since through them they contribute to the renewal and edification of the Church (LG 12).

### CONCLUSION

In Pauline communities there were lay leaders rendering different services to the community. Of course the household church leaders, co-workers and deacons were playing an important role. It is true that they were to some extent well to do in the community. However they must have had the spirit of sacrifice. But for them the various Christian communities established by Paul in Greco-Roman world would not have flourished and grown up. They were real helpers and collaborators of Paul in the growth of the Church. As for Charismatics, Paul gives the impression that each and every member of his Christian community had a charism and each one contributed to the welfare of other members of the community. Thus each and every Christian of Pauline community had realised his duty and responsibility towards the growth and welfare of the Church.

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<sup>14</sup> R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 103.