

**Raymond E. Brown, The Churches the Apostles Left Behind**  
New York: Paulist Press, 1984, 156 pages.

(Detailed summary)

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The following attempts to summarize his book: The Churches the Apostles Left Behind. New York: Paulist Press, 1984, 156 p.

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1: The Sub-Apostolic Era in the New Testament](#)

[Chapter 2: The Sub-Apostolic Era in the New Testament: \*Church Structure\*](#)

[Chapter 3: The Pauline Heritage in Colossians/Ephesians: \*Christ's Body to Be Loved\*](#)

[Chapter 4: The Pauline Heritage in Luke/Acts: \*The Spirit\*](#)

[Chapter 5: The Petrine Heritage in 1 Peter: \*The People of God\*](#)

[Chapter 6: The Heritage of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel: \*People Personally Attached to Jesus\*](#)

[Chapter 7: The Heritage of the Beloved Disciple and the Epistles: \*Individuals Guided by the Paraclete-Spirit\*](#)

[Chapter 8: The Heritage of Jewish/Gentile Christianity in Matthew: \*Authority That Does Not Stifle Jesus\*](#)

[Conclusion](#)

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Chapter 1: The Sub-Apostolic Era in the New Testament, p. 13-30

The question arises: what happened when the last apostolic witnesses disappeared from the scene and the Church could no longer rely on the testimony of those who could say, "I have seen"? In the past, to answer this question, people turned to works produced after the New Testament, because it was assumed that the books of the New Testament had been written by the apostles, and the sub-apostolic period began after the New Testament. Today, we can say that most of the books of the New Testament were written after the death of the last known apostle.

Indeed, even though several are called "apostles" in the New Testament, we only have detailed information about three of them. Let us first consider the Twelve. Most of them are little more than names to us. Excluding Judas Iscariot, the first four names stand out, first the two brothers Peter and Andrew, then the other two, James and John. Although they appear regularly with Jesus in the Gospels, Andrew disappears from the rest of the New Testament, James dies a martyr in the 40s (Acts 12:2), and John is only mentioned in Peter's shadow in a few scenes (Acts 3:1; 4:13; 8:14; Galatians 2:9). Later tradition will enhance John's biography by identifying him with the beloved disciple of the fourth Gospel, but this identification is far from certain. In the end, Peter remains the only member of the Twelve about whose ecclesiastical career we are fairly well informed, thanks to Paul's letters to the Galatians and Corinthians, the book of Acts, and the letters of the Petrine tradition. Apart from the Twelve, we have good information about Paul, thanks to the 13 letters attributed to him and the biographical information in the Acts of the Apostles. James, the "brother of the Lord," was probably an apostle, even though he was not part of the group of Twelve. His importance as leader of the Jerusalem community is attested to both by the Pauline letters and by the Acts of the Apostles, as well as by the letter attributed to him and the letter of Jude, whose author identifies himself by his relationship to James. According to a very reliable tradition, Peter and Paul died in Rome in the 60s, and James also died in Jerusalem in the 60s. Thus, by the end of the second third of the first century, i.e., in the year 67, the three apostles about whom we know details of their lives had disappeared from the scene.

The term "apostolic period" should therefore be confined to the second third of the first century, and the last third of that century should be designated as the "sub-apostolic" period. Therefore, with the exception of Paul's undisputed letters (1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon), most of the New Testament texts were written in the last third of the first century, a period when authors wrote without using their names and, occasionally, under the guise of the earlier apostles. Later tradition tended to attribute authorship to the initially anonymous gospels in order to give them a certain authority. As for the Deutero-Pauline epistles (the Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians, and Colossians) and the Catholic Epistles, the designation of authors such as Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude probably represents a claim to belong to a specific apostolic tradition rather than an objective designation of apostolic writing. For what matters in this sub-apostolic period is fidelity to certain great apostles.

Finally, the term "post-apostolic period" refers to the period beginning at the end of the century, when Christian writings were published under their own authority, for example, the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch and the Letter from the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, known as 1 Clement. These "third generation" writings move away from the direct claim to the heritage of the apostles.

A. Various scientific approaches to the sub-apostolic period

Let us return to the problem stated at the outset, where the Church could no longer depend on the testimony of those who could say, "I have seen"? Clement of Rome's response (see 1 Clement 42 and 44), around the year 96, was to affirm that, just as Jesus appointed apostles (understood to be the Twelve with Paul), the apostles also appointed bishops or presbyters to succeed them. Consequently, it was considered that there had been an orderly succession of authority in the sub-apostolic era. This classical thesis has been challenged by modern studies (both Roman Catholic and Protestant), which have shown that Clement's view was too simplistic and not universal.

Various biblical scholars have offered their answers.

- i. In a somewhat Hegelian view of church history, the thesis and antithesis would be represented by James and Paul, a pro-Jewish conception of Christianity (James) in conflict with a pro-pagan conception (Paul). In the 2nd century, a synthesis emerged around the figure of Peter, symbolizing a Christianity that was intermediate between that of Paul and that of James. This hypothesis is based on the late dating of certain New Testament writings, such as the Acts of the Apostles, which is questioned by modern criticism, which considers that the attitudes represented by James, Paul, and Peter were simultaneous and early.
- ii. During the New Testament period and its immediate aftermath, there were many diverse and contradictory Christian opinions, and it was only in the 2nd century that a dominant view emerged, which became orthodoxy; this orthodoxy spread from Rome to the East. It must be acknowledged that there was a certain diversity during the New Testament period. But this theory fails to adequately explain how such orthodoxy came about.
- iii. Another answer is based on the observation that at the end of the apostolic and sub-apostolic periods, Ephesus and Rome emerged as the major Christian centers with which many New Testament books can be associated. Rome was considered to represent Jewish Christianity, which was more conservative from the outset and advocated a high ecclesiology and a weak Christology (the emphasis was on the humanity of Jesus). Ephesus was associated with the epistles to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and the fourth gospel, works with a low ecclesiology, in the sense that they attached little importance to the structure of the Church, but with a high Christology (where the emphasis was on the divinity of Jesus). Despite the nuances that could be added to this view, the fact remains that this intuition is valid.

Our approach will be different. We will examine a number of different ecclesial situations reflected in the sub-apostolic works of the New Testament, focusing on the most important element that enabled each church to survive after the departure of its hero or apostolic guide.

## B. Different Churches Detectable in the New Testament

### 1. The Pauline tradition

Let us begin with the sub-apostolic descendants of the apostle **Paul**. In the 20 years following his death, divergent schools of thought developed within the communities that were under his influence. At least three different post-Pauline currents can be detected through an analysis of the New Testament works associated with Paul: one illustrated by 1) the Pastoral Epistles, another by 2) the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, and the last by 3) Luke/Acts.

- The author of Luke/Acts idealizes Paul, dividing Christian history into two almost equal periods centered first on Peter and then on Paul. The latter embodies God's plan to spread Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome and "to the ends of the earth." However, the author of Acts never mentions that Paul wrote a letter and reveals no knowledge of Paul's letters.
- In line with the Pauline heritage represented by Colossians and Ephesians, Paul is greatly honored as an apostle capable of addressing communities with authority, as one of the apostles (and prophets) on whom the Church is founded (Eph 2:20). It is also very clear that the author of Ephesians was familiar with many of Paul's letters, especially Colossians, and that he drew inspiration from them in formulating his own thoughts.

Thus, if the author of Luke/Acts and the author of Ephesians went further than Paul did, the former did so apparently independently of Paul's writings, while the latter did so with heavy reliance on them.

When it comes to relations with Judaism, there are also differences.

- i. In the epistle to the **Ephesians**, the relationship between Jews and Gentiles seems to have been resolved peacefully. The wall of hostility has been torn down; those who were once far away have been brought near; Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in one body with God through the cross (Eph 2:11-22).
- ii. On the other hand, for the author of **Acts** (28:25-29), Paul's very last words at the end of the book indicate that the Jews will never see, hear, or understand; they are definitively excluded from the Gospel. According to the Paul of Acts, salvation is intended for the Gentiles who will listen and understand. We

are therefore faced with two communities that have very different views on the future relationship between Jews and pagans.

- iii. Both attitudes are far removed from that of the historical Paul in the Epistle to the **Romans**, who argues that the Gentiles converted to make the Jews jealous, that the Jews themselves will eventually convert, and that the Gentiles are only a branch of wild olive grafted onto the tree of Israel (Rom. 11:11-26).

When we turn to the **Pastoral Epistles**, namely 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, we find an even different post-Pauline situation. The author of these works remains concerned about the Judaizers (among others) and their demand for circumcision. In addition, he insists on the structure of the Church and the appointment of church leaders. This insistence is absent in both Colossians/Ephesians and Luke/Acts, even though both works acknowledge the existence of church officials. As we can see, there is a great deal of variety in what is considered important in the conception of the Church. All these variations occur within the Pauline tradition, in works that are directly or indirectly related to the apostle! We can assume that the churches to which these works are addressed, even though they were probably in communion with each other, had different ways of thinking, emphasizing different aspects of the great Pauline tradition.

Given such variations within a single tradition, the Pauline tradition, it is not surprising to find variations with traditions other than the **Pauline tradition**, such as the **Johannine tradition**.

## 2. The Johannine tradition

Let's give two examples of variations between the two traditions.

### a. Christology

John presents us with a "high" Christology, emphasizing the divinity of Jesus. Certain similarities can be found between the fourth Gospel and the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians in terms of "high" Christology, in which the pre-existing divinity of Jesus is emphasized. However, such a Christological criterion would distinguish Luke/Acts from the fourth Gospel (and the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians), since there is no explicit mention of pre-existence in Luke's writings.

### b. The relationship to Judaism

In John, Christians were expelled from synagogues (9:22; 16:2); Jews are practically another religion, or even worse, since they have the devil as their father (8:44). The liturgical feasts inherited from the Old Testament are now "Jewish" feasts (6:4; 7:2) and therefore do not concern Christians. Even though tradition places the writing of the fourth gospel in Ephesus, the same city to which the Epistle to the Ephesians is addressed, it is difficult to imagine that in Johannine Christianity the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles had been broken down, as in the situation envisaged by the Ephesians.

We have already noted that **Ephesus** was one of the major Christian centers of the apostolic and sub-apostolic periods, with which many books of the New Testament were associated. It is very likely that Ephesus had different churches with different theologies. We must remember that the Christian situation in a large city involved a number of house churches where 20 or 30 people gathered; there is therefore no reason why there should not have been house churches of different traditions in the same city, for example, of the Pauline tradition, the Johannine tradition, the Petrine or apostolic tradition, and even the ultra-conservative Judeo-Christian tradition. Even though house churches of one tradition probably had relationships of communion with those of another tradition, Christians could not easily change churches. Furthermore, according to 2 and 3 John, it is clear that once an internal schism had taken place, there was no longer any communion between the two parties within the same tradition, nor admission into the respective house churches (2 John 10; 3 John 9-10).

**Ephesus** is also associated with both the Johannine tradition and **Revelation**. What is the truth of the matter? The harsh remarks about the "synagogue of Satan" and "the Jews" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9) once again suggest the existence of a group in which the wall of hostility had not been broken down (unlike Eph. 4:14). " (Rev. 2:9; 3:9) once again suggest the existence of a group in which the wall of hostility had not been broken down (contrary to Eph. 2:11-22).

When we compare Revelation with the Johannine tradition, we note both similarities and differences.

### a. Similarities

- The theme of the replacement of Jerusalem and the earthly Temple by a heavenly Jerusalem and the presence of God and Christ
- Revelation and 1 John both emphasize the purifying and sanctifying power of the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 1 John 1:7 and 5:6-8).

### b. Differences

- Revelation emphasizes final eschatology, while the fourth gospel emphasizes realized eschatology

- 1 John highlights the existence of false teachers (1 Jn 2:27) and false prophets (4:1) among those who have seceded from the Johannine community. But in Revelation, there are prophets in the communities (Rev 11:10; 16:6), including the author himself (1:3; 22:9, 19), who is a prophet. Revelation also knows of false prophets (16:13) and false teachers who do not yet seem to have been expelled from the community (2:20).
- Neither the fourth Gospel nor the Johannine epistles mention the apostles, while Revelation shows respect for the “apostles and prophets” (18:20) and particular veneration for the twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:14).

What could this community behind the Book of Revelation have been, which would explain both these similarities and differences? It is possible that it was a branch of the early Johannine community that had not yet been catechized by the fourth gospel in its final version.

Finally, it should be noted that Revelation differs from the Pauline tradition in its anti-imperial attitude: the Roman Empire and the cult of the emperor are the beastly puppets of Satan (Rev. 13), and the numerical value of Nero's name (666) is the number of the beast (Rev. 13:18). This certainly differs from the pro-imperial attitude attested in Romans 13:1-7.

### 3. Epistle to the Hebrews

#### a. Relationship with the fourth Gospel

The Epistle to the Hebrews is similar to the fourth Gospel in proclaiming Jesus as God, a Son through whom the world was created (Heb 1:2-3, 8). Nevertheless, John does not attribute to Jesus' humanity the limitations found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, such as being tempted (Heb 4:15), learning obedience (Heb 5:8), and being made perfect (Heb 5:9). It is certain that the Johannine Jesus, who refused to pray to be delivered from the hour of death (Jn 12:27-28), could not be described as crying out with tears to God, who was able to save him from death (Heb 5:7).

#### b. Relationship with Paul

In the Eastern Churches and later in the universal Church, the Epistle to the Hebrews was considered to be Paul's fourteenth letter, an opinion that virtually no scholar shares today. The style of the Epistle to the Hebrews is completely different from that of Paul, and nothing in the apostle's writings corresponds to the radical and prolonged criticism of Israelite worship that is at the heart of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Indeed, in chapters 9 to 11 and 15 to 16 of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul shows himself to be much more conservative about Judaism and its cultic language than the Epistle to the Hebrews, which would replace the sacrifices, priesthood, and tabernacle of the Old Testament.

### 4. Epistle from 1 Peter

Although 1 Peter is written in the name of the first of the Twelve, most scholars believe that it was written by a disciple of Peter after his death. It represents the point of view of the Roman Church, to which the Epistle to the Hebrews was addressed as a correction. For example, 1 Peter 1:13–2:10 applies the entire experience of Israel's Exodus to pagan converts, so that they left their former bondage and were redeemed by the blood of a lamb, while going through a period of wandering toward a promised inheritance. Thus, while in the Epistle to the Hebrews the **Levitical priesthood** was replaced by Christ, in 1 Peter the Christian people constitute a **royal priesthood**. Preservation and transformation, rather than replacement, characterize the theology of 1 Peter. The language of Judaism is used as if it belonged to Christianity and there were no other claimants.

### 5. Epistle from James

The perspective of the Epistle of James is even more Jewish. While the First Epistle of Peter is addressed to the chosen exiles of the diaspora (probably Christians of pagan origin), that of James is addressed to the twelve tribes of the diaspora (perhaps Jewish Christians). James 2:2 assumes that the Christian recipients gather in a synagogue. There are no passages dealing with Christology, but there is an emphasis on the morality of the prophets of Israel: religion consists in “visiting orphans and widows in their affliction” (Jas 1:27); and no partiality should be shown to the rich over the poor (Jas 2:1-7). It is therefore possible that James was addressing a Christian community in the last third of the century, where belief in Jesus meant an exaltation of Jewish values, but not a real break with Judaism. We know that in post-New Testament literature, such as the Pseudo-Clementines, James became the hero par excellence of Christians of Jewish origin who differed from Jews only in their faith in Christ, but not in their observance of the law. This would explain why the author writes this letter claiming the authority of James, for we read: “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all” (Jas 2:10). It is certain that the emphasis on the fact that “a man is justified by his works and not by faith alone” (2:24) reflects values different from those of Paul in Romans 3:28: “A man is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law.”

### 6. Gospel according to Matthew

The Gospel according to Matthew is similar in many ways to the letter of James, even though it is clear that Matthew is addressing a Jewish Christian community that included a large number of Christian followers of pagan origin. This mixed community learns that not even the smallest detail of the Law will pass away until everything is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18). Although Jesus' attitude, "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you" (Mt 5), instills attitudes that are not very legalistic, the perspective is not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the divine purpose that underlies it. Paul and Matthew may have reached similar practical conclusions regarding individual obligations, but Paul would have done so based on the principle that Christ is the end of the Law (Rom 10:4), while Matthew would have considered Jesus to be the perfect and demanding lawgiver of the eschatological period.

When comparing Matthew to Paul, we note that he probably did not go through the Pauline crisis regarding the Law and was able to maintain a more moderate and positive attitude toward the Jewish heritage. If new wine cannot be put into old wineskins without destroying them, Matthew encourages an arrangement that allows all wineskins, new and old, to be preserved (Mt 9:17). The relationship of the Matthew community with Judaism was perhaps less disruptive than that of the Johannine community, but more troubled than that of the community addressed by James. It is not without reason that the Gospel of Matthew was the first, and not only in the order of the canon.

#### 7. Gospel according to Mark

This Gospel presents a difficult case, because we are unable to identify its sources and therefore unable to specify how it may have been modified for catechetical purposes. It is true that Mark describes the Twelve as uncomprehending because Jesus had not yet suffered, but this treatment implies nothing more than the fact that their important role after the crucifixion required a difficult period of initiation: all Christians believe through the prism of the cross, even the greatest ones. This encouragement is addressed to Christians who are themselves suffering. And if Mark was written for the Roman Church, he may have wanted to reassure readers that Peter's recent sufferings and death under Nero were not a defeat, but a step toward victory.

#### 8. Final thoughts

We found a remarkable diversity of sub-apostolic thought: evidence of three different forms of post-Pauline thought (the Pastoral Epistles, Colossians/Ephesians, Luke/Acts), evidence of two different forms of post-Johannine thought (the followers of 1 John and their secessionist opponents), works exhibiting both Pauline and Johannine similarities (Revelation, Hebrews), a post-Petrine witness (1 Peter), and some witnesses of a more conservative, Law-observant Christianity (Matthew, James). I have highlighted the significant differences between these witnesses, whose relationships are very complex.

In reconstructing the community situations of the sub-apostolic period, a serious methodological problem is determining whether the thought expressed is specific to the author or whether it is truly shared by a community. When it comes to epistles or letters, the situation is often easier to determine. Nevertheless, since all these works have been preserved, we can be certain that at least some Christians found guidance in them. Another methodological problem concerns the caution that must be exercised regarding the extent to which the writing reflects the opinions of the community. While the pastoral epistles emphasize the presbyteral structure and the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians emphasize the body of Christ, this does not mean that the Christians who received the pastoral epistles and the author who wrote them were unaware of the theology of the body of Christ, nor that those who participated in the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians were unaware of the presbyteral structure. We can only be certain of the positive emphasis that Christians heard in a particular work.

In the following chapters, we will see how the different emphasis placed in each of these seven testimonies responded to the question of survival after the death of the great first generation of apostolic guides or heroes. For the problem of continuity and succession inevitably arises with the disappearance of the original leaders of a movement. The crisis is all the more serious because these leaders innovated by distancing their disciples from previous criteria of authority. At the time of the apostles' death, the churches had already distanced themselves or broken with much of what had previously constituted authority in Judaism; from then on, they had to survive without the living tutelage of the great figures of the first generation. The responses of their immediate successors have been repeated throughout the ages, not in the sense that one church repeated one response and another church repeated another, but in the sense that each church repeated several of the responses.

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### Chapter 2: The Sub-Apostolic Era in the New Testament: *Church Structure*, p. 31-46

In our study of sub-apostolic continuity in the New Testament, let us begin with Paul's legacy through the two letters written to Timothy and the letter to Titus, as the context suggests that Paul is nearing death: "The time of my departure has come; I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race" (2 Tim 4:6-7). Consequently, his thoughts turn to the Christians he is leaving behind. How will they survive, especially since a huge danger threatens them in the form of false teachers who could lead them astray (Titus 1:10; 1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Tim 3:6; 4:3)? In other words, Paul's interests are no longer primarily missionary, but pastoral; he is concerned with caring for the existing flock.

A. The answer to the Church's survival: structuring the community

The advice given by Paul on his deathbed to Timothy and Titus on how to survive: establish an ecclesiastical structure. For some Pauline communities have shortcomings in that they lack local authorities, but this situation must now be remedied and presbyter-bishops appointed in each city (Titus 1:5, 7). The authority of these men will preserve the local ecclesial communities from disintegration.

a. Appointing presbyters/bishops

What is a presbyter? The Greek word *presbyteros* is the comparative form of *presbys*, "old," so it literally means "older than," and thus refers to the elders of a community. Although the term refers to age, the custom of seeking advice from the older men of a community meant that "elder" or "presbyter" came to refer to an official chosen ideally for his wisdom, often older, but not necessarily so. Jewish synagogues had groups of elders or presbyters who set the policy of the synagogue. Christian presbyters, however, had a pastoral role of supervision that went beyond that of their Jewish counterparts; this is why they are designated by a second title, *episkopos*, "overseer, supervisor, bishop." It should be noted that during the century and a half preceding Christianity, the Essenes described in the Dead Sea Scrolls had, in addition to presbyters, officials called "overseers" who had teaching, warning, and administrative roles almost identical to those of the bishops in the pastoral epistles. Essene religious overseers were figuratively described as "shepherds," just like Christian bishops (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:1-3). It is therefore plausible that Christians borrowed from the synagogue a model of groups of presbyters for each church, while the role of pastoral supervisor (*episkopos*) assigned to all or most of these presbyters came from the organizational model of close-knit Jewish sectarian groups such as the Dead Sea Essenes.

It should be emphasized that nothing in the pastoral epistles suggests that presbyter-bishops were involved in the Eucharist or baptism. Nor do we know how presbyter-bishops were appointed, although at the time the Acts were written (in the 80s or 90s), Barnabas and Paul could be described as having appointed presbyters in each church (Acts 14:23). The fact that this image was simplified to the extreme is indicated in Titus 1:5, where it is clear that there were cities in Paul's mission without presbyters. According to the *Didache* 15:1 (circa 100?), Christians were invited to appoint their own bishops and deacons.

b. The role of presbyters/episcopos

But how do these functions of presbyter-bishops answer the question of the survival of Paul's communities after his death?

- i. First, in the pastoral epistles, presbyter-bishops must be the **official teachers** of the community, adhering to the sound doctrine they received from Paul through Titus and Timothy and rejecting any new or different teaching. They can protect the community from false doctrines because they can silence bad teachers (Titus 1:9-2:1; 1 Tim 4:1-11; 5:17).
- ii. Second, since the Church is "the house of God" (1 Tim 3:15: a comparison reinforced by the fact that the Church met in a house), presbyter-bishops must be like fathers assuming **responsibility for a household**, administering its affairs and setting an example and providing discipline. Stability and close relationships, similar to those of a family home, will enable the Church to remain united in the face of the forces of disintegration that surround or invade it.

c. Requirements for this role

These requirements are suitable for any institution with a family atmosphere.

- The leader must be blameless, upright, and holy; he must be self-controlled and not arrogant or quick-tempered (Titus 1:7-9).
- He must be able to manage his own household well and control his children (1 Tim 3:4).
- He must be able to manage his own household's budget; in particular, he must not be greedy (1 Tim 3:3, 5), because he administers the common money of the Christian community.
- He cannot be a drunkard (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3).
- He cannot have been married more than once.
- He cannot be a recent convert.
- His children must be Christians (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim 3:2, 6).

d. Requirements that deviate from Jesus' attitude

Do these requirements not differ from the attitude of Jesus, who welcomed sinners and marginalized people, tax collectors and zealots? It must be acknowledged that Jesus was not structuring a society; he did not live in an organized Church; the Twelve were chosen not as administrators but as eschatological judges of a renewed Israel (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:30). But once the movement associated with Christ was sufficiently organized to become a society called "Church," it began to decide that certain standards of religious respectability were very important for the

common good. Individuals, however talented, who did not meet these standards had to be sacrificed. For example, the exclusion of new converts:

- For the presbyter had to serve as a model as a father of a family. A man who converted after his children had grown up could be a natural leader, but if he did not meet the requirement of having believing children, he could not be appointed a presbyter-bishop.
- Sometimes new converts lack confidence or are not mature in their Christian judgment.
- Other times, they are driven by an extraordinary zeal that can galvanize a community. The pastoral epistles did not allow any recent convert, talented or not, to exercise the function of presbyter, because he did not possess the desired wisdom.

There is something ironic about these requirements when we consider the figure of Paul himself, who would probably not have been able to meet several of the requirements that the pastoral epistles imposed on presbyter-bishops. "Not quick-tempered" (Titus 1:7) hardly describes Paul, who called the Galatians "foolish" (Gal 3:1). "Prudent and of good behavior" (1 Tim 3:2) would not correspond to Paul, who wished that his circumcised opponents would slip with the knife and castrate themselves (Gal 5:12) and who could utter insults such as "Their god is their belly" (Phil 3:19). Raw vitality and a willingness to fight barehanded for the Gospel were part of what made Paul a great missionary, but these characteristics could have made him a poor supervisor of a residential community.

e. The Church's right to set standards

Against the right to set standards, one could argue that the Twelve were not residential clergy and that Jesus never lived in a structured Church. Similarly, one could question the idea that the requirements imposed by the Pastoral Epistles are eternally valid. On the contrary, since these requirements sometimes relate to public respectability, they can and must evolve over time. The early Church had prejudices against the remarriage of widowers (1 Tim 5:9, 11; 1 Cor 7:8), reluctantly allowing it only for ordinary people. Consequently, the Pastoral Epistles did not tolerate remarried presbyter-bishops (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6); they had to live up to the ideal. Today, few Protestant churches would refuse ordination to remarried widowers. On the other hand, the requirement to be "the husband of one wife" is echoed in many Protestant churches, which require their clergy not to remarry after divorce (even though they allow remarriage for lay people). Roman Catholicism has imposed Paul's personal standard ("It is good for them to remain single as I am": 1 Cor 7:8) on all its priests. One may still question the wisdom of the individual requirements that different churches have imposed on their clergy, but the right to impose such requirements seems to have been assumed from the outset.

f. "Early Catholicizing" of the Church

The institutionalization of the Christian movement was one aspect of what scholars call "early Catholicization," referring to the ecclesiastical characteristics that were later found in Roman Catholicism. But it must be admitted that, if the Church is a society, regulations, whether constitutive or otherwise, are an inevitable sociological development that is in the very nature of the Church.

B. Strengths and Weaknesses of this Response

All answers to a theological problem, necessarily partial and conditioned by time, come at a price. An insistence, however necessary it may be at a given moment, will inevitably lead to neglecting the truth contained in another answer or insistence. What, then, are the strengths and weaknesses of this answer centered on the ecclesial structure in the pastoral epistles?

1. The idea of preserving the apostolic heritage against radical ideas and teachers

a. What this means

This emphasis on preserving the apostolic heritage leads to impressive **stability** and solid **continuity** in the institutional structure (presbyters-bishops and deacons). It highlights the unique character of the apostle, especially Paul, and at the same time extends his **influence** beyond his lifetime by passing on his legacy to the presbyter-bishops under the supervision of Timothy and Titus. Paul is clearly **a teacher**, "a teacher of the nations" (1 Tim 2:7; see also 2 Tim 1:11); and the main function of his heirs is to teach "sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1), continuing the teaching given by the apostle to his converts. The bishop must "hold fast the sure word as he has been taught" (Titus 1:9). Timothy, who had observed Paul's teaching (2 Tim 3:10), is exhorted: "Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, knowing from whom you learned it" (2 Tim 3:14).

This role demonstrates his effectiveness in the face of teachers who introduce new ideas, a group described as rebellious, talkative, and seductive men who love "controversies" (1 Tim 6:4-5; Titus 3:9). The apostle of the pastoral epistles would like these propagators of new and different ideas to be prevented from teaching (1 Tim 1:3): "They must be silenced, for they are upsetting whole families by teaching what they have no right to teach, for dishonest gain" (Titus 1:11). . The faithful are reminded to submit to leaders and authorities, both secular and religious (Titus 3:1). We thus find here the ancestor of the theology of the

deposit of doctrine and ecclesiastical developments such as the approval of professors, *imprimatur*, an index of prohibited books, and supervision of ecclesiastical presses—features that are by no means unique to Roman Catholicism, even if the same names are not used in other churches and control is not as obvious.

b. The value of this idea

The historical circumstances in which the Pastoral Epistles were written were fraught with danger due to the spread of **Gnosticism**, which had gained followers among Christians (1 Tim 6:20). The deadly struggle that would culminate around 180 in Irenaeus's *Adversus haereses* had now begun. The "Paul" of the Pastoral Epistles had already guessed that the best response to a plethora of opinions claiming to be revealed and even traditional was an authentic tradition, implying a link between the apostolic era and approved church leaders. Irenaeus would only refine the argument when he appealed to a chain of bishops from major Christian centers in his refutation of Gnostic doctrines. This approach enabled the Roman Catholic Church to survive the tumultuous days of the Reformation; it enabled Luther's movement to survive an anarchic Protestant left spawned by its own protest against Rome; today, it should enable the traditional churches to survive the Bible sectarians. The Church has a right not to be destroyed from within.

c. The risks of this idea

The great danger of an exclusive emphasis on officially controlled teaching, however, lies in the fact that once introduced in times of crisis, it becomes a permanent way of life. A true pastoral policy requires instead a relaxation of these strict controls once the crisis has passed. This is what Vatican II did by abolishing some of its negative doctrinal controls.

Moreover, the fear of new ideas that is evident in the pastoral epistles can become endemic in the structured Church. We forget that Jesus challenged the religious authorities of his day. At times, the greatest danger facing a well-ordered institutional Church is not that of new ideas, but that of a lack of ideas. It could fall under the condemnation of the Gospel parable of the talents against the third servant who was perfectly happy to return what he had received, but who was considered by Jesus to be wicked and lazy because he had added nothing new (Matthew 25:24-30).

In short, this idea, translated as "deposit of faith" (2 Tim 2:14), has severe limitations if it projects the image of a safe that sterile protects what was deposited in it in the first century. Each generation must enrich this deposit with its unique experience of Christ in its own time. The presbyter-bishops of the Church must "hold fast to the faithful word as taught" (Titus 1:9), and woe to them if any part of the deposit of faith is lost under their administration. But woe also to them if they do not encourage constructive ideas that enrich and nuance the sound doctrine they are required to teach. A weakness of the Pastoral Epistles is that this latter duty is never mentioned.

2. The sound institutional virtues required of pastors

a. The value of this profile

With an emphasis on prudence, sobriety, and balance, these requirements ensured a benevolent, holy, and effective administration of the community. The "clergy" appointed by Timothy and Titus were to be composed of good, sound, and easygoing individuals who would serve as resident pastors.

b. The risks of this profile

Such a professional profile was probably not likely to attract dynamic "drivers" who would change the world. Someone like the historical Paul would not have qualified for such a profile, he who had new and risky ideas about Christ as the end of the Law and an indomitable restlessness that enabled him to successfully open new frontiers for Christ, but which aroused much opposition; according to his opponents, Paul did not adhere to the sound doctrine taught by Jesus (in the tradition of Matthew 5:18), namely that not even the smallest stroke of a letter, not even the smallest part of a letter, of the Law would pass away. But Paul was a missionary, not a resident pastor.

Furthermore, by forgetting that the pastoral epistles established criteria for dealing with a particular situation, we make the mistake of seeing them as an ideal ecclesiastical order suitable for all ages. And the tendency to favor very cautious leaders, attached to the past, creates an orientation that does not favor the innovations necessary for a dynamic mission, especially in times of change. Thus, ecclesiastical authorities rejected pastors who were disruptive because they saw that new things needed to be done, and those who were impatient with the inertia they encountered, in favor of the blandness of continuity.

3. The clear distinction between those who teach and those who are taught

a. What this means

Only carefully selected presbyter-bishops can safely transmit doctrine, with the result that other teachers arouse suspicion. Here is what 2 Timothy 3:1-9 says:

1 But understand this: in the last days there will come times of stress. 2 For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 inhuman, unforgiving, slanderers, profligate, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Have nothing to do with such people. 6 For among them are those who make their way into households and gain control over weak women burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses, 7 who will listen to anybody and never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. 8 As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these oppose the truth—these people of depraved mind and counterfeit faith. 9 But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

There is a clear distinction in the pastoral epistles between the *ecclesia docens* (the teaching Church) and the *ecclesia discens* (the learning Church). And among the “taught,” the author explicitly names women, who are ungraciously portrayed as “weak” and examples of ignorant and impulsive people who are easily led astray. This reflects the conservative Greco-Roman milieu, which often attributed the proliferation of esoteric cults and superstitions to irresponsible women who felt emancipated by them. The New Testament is not immune to the limitations of the perceptions of its time.

b. The value of this idea

This distinction between teacher and learner is valid as long as we recognize that membership in both groups is fluid: at one time or another, every Christian is or should be part of the teaching Church, and everyone should be part of the learning Church. Furthermore, considering the situation described in the pastoral epistles, the Gnostic teachers who were attacked may have deserved some of the adjectives used to describe them. Therefore, deviating from standard teaching may indeed be a sign of false teachers who must be opposed.

c. The risks of this idea

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that, where only approved teachers thrive, those who ask probing questions about standard doctrine are portrayed as adversaries of God’s truth. In other words, driven by struggle, the pastoral epistles present a dualistic view of true and false, whereas ordinary church life is rarely dualistic. For example, deviating from standard teaching can be a sign of constructive thinkers whose ideas, surprising at first glance, can lead designated teachers to perceive more clearly what has been entrusted to them to guard with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14). One need only think of the Galileo case.

The pastoral epistles suggest that, with the exception of presbyters, all others belong to a fixed class of learners who, if not taught by official teachers, will be misled by false teachers. There is then a danger that little creative thinking or intellectual contribution will be expected from learners, who constitute the majority of the community. The fact that the author disregards ideas “from below,” as if all insight came from above in the structure, does not prepare ordinary readers of the pastoral epistles to play an active role in teaching. Such a one-sided situation will become increasingly disastrous in all parts of the world where lay people are highly educated and quite capable of making a significant contribution to the overall religious growth of the community. Some lay people, once educated, are quite capable of being teachers themselves, not only passing on what they have received, but also making their own contributions. This is a weakness of the pastoral epistles.

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Chapter 3: The Pauline Heritage in Colossians/Ephesians: *Christ's Body to Be Loved*, p. 47-60

The Epistle to the Colossians was probably composed in the decade following Paul’s death, making it closer to him in time than any of the other Deutero-Pauline epistles. It displays so many characteristics of authentic Pauline thought (but not Pauline style) that even some biblical scholars believe that Paul composed it, at least through a secretary. It is not known to what extent the author of the Epistle to the Colossians was familiar with earlier Pauline writings (beyond the Epistle to Philemon), but the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians was familiar with most of them. In any case, the question that interests us is: given that the apostolic figure has disappeared (or is disappearing) from the scene, how do these writings enable the communities to which they are addressed to survive?

A. The proposed solution: a mystical vision of the Church

1. Similarities and differences with the pastoral epistles

Just as 1 Timothy 3:15 speaks of “the house of God, which is the church of the living God,” so Ephesians 2:19 speaks of “the family of God” that has been integrated into “the building that has the apostles and prophets as its

foundation, and Jesus Christ himself as its cornerstone.” Similarly, ethical behavior is expected of members of the Christian household.

However, unlike the author of the pastoral epistles, the authors of Colossians and Ephesians do not emphasize apostolic succession or the institutional aspects of the Church. We hear nothing significant about the functioning of “pastors and teachers.” This silence cannot be explained by a different situation. Even though Col 2:8-23 and Eph 4:14 mention false teachers, the emphasis is on a positive and idealistic vision of the Church.

2. A comprehensive and absolute vision of the Church

In Paul’s undisputed letters, we see him frequently using the term “church,” but most often in reference to local communities, for example, “the church of God in Corinth,” “the churches of Galatia,” “in every church.” But in Colossians/Ephesians, the absolute and global term “the Church” comes to the fore. Note that this global vision of the Church is more than the sum of individual churches. Indeed, it seems to be more than an earthly reality, for it affects the heavenly powers.

3. Body image

Paul had made imaginative use of the “body” of Christ in his undisputed correspondence, particularly to overcome jealousy over charisms in Corinth. He spoke of the resurrected body of Christ, of which every Christian is a member (1 Cor 12:21-31). The author of the Epistle to the Colossians, followed by the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, adopts Paul’s image of the body and develops it in a new way to emphasize the Church. “In his body of flesh, through his death, Christ reconciled those who were far away (Col 1:21), and they were called to form one body (3:15). This body is now identified as the Church, and Christ is its head (Col 1:18, 24; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23). Thus, we have a collective understanding of Christian life with Christ as Lord of this body (Eph 4:4-5).

4. A dynamic vision of the Church as a body

For the Colossians/Ephesians, the Church is a growing entity that lives the very life of Christ. While there are different ministries, they exist “for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain [...] the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13). “We must grow in every way toward him who is the head, that is, toward Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, ... grows and builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

5. A Church born in love

According to Ephesians 5:32 and the above, God’s mystery or hidden plan involves Christ’s love for the Church. Thus, “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25); in other words, the purpose of Christ’s life and death became the Church. Therefore, the love between husband and wife should be modeled on Christ’s intense love for the Church (Eph 5:21-33).

6. A Holy Church

Christ died to sanctify the Church and purify her so that she might be presented as “a radiant bride, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). The two become one (Eph 5:31-32) so that the holiness of Christ may be seen in the Church, his body, which is built up in love (Eph 4:16).

7. The Church is a form of kingdom

The Colossians liken the Church to a form of kingdom: the Father “has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). Thus, the Church without darkness, of which Christians are members, is the kingdom of the Son of God in which “they share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12). This is possible because, in the context of realized eschatology, Christians are told: “You have been raised with Christ through faith” (Col 2:12). Another passage (Col 3:1-3) indicates that heavenly glory is still to come; but Eph 2:6 considers even this aspect to be partially realized: God “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

8. The Church includes angels

For Christ has reconciled all things on earth and in heaven (Col 1:20; Eph 1:10), and the powers and principalities are subject to him who is the head of the Church. Thus, in a certain sense, the angelic and superhuman powers that recognize Christ can be considered part of the Church as the body of Christ. Therefore, the body and the head extend from earth to heaven. It is not surprising, then, that the Church has an almost divine character, as shown in the doxology of Eph 3:21: “To him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

B. The strengths and weaknesses of this solution

1. The love of an institution that ensures its survival?

The image of the body of Christ personalizes the Church and encourages our love for her, in imitation of Christ's love for his bride. The advice given in the pastoral epistles should enable effective and benevolent administration. But ultimately, people do not love a structure or an institution for its own sake. And the institution or structure is inevitably influenced by secular models and constitutes that aspect of the Church that is not easily perceived as having a connection with Christ or God. Before Vatican II, it was often referred to as the "Mother Church" and sometimes had a patronizing attitude. Despite all its faults, the "Mother Church" was both personal and familial; and even when a mother exaggerates her role, she can still be loved by her children.

An implication of a personal Church conceived as the body loved by Christ is found in a statement attributed to Paul: "I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body, which is the Church" (Col 1:24). This attitude stems from the principle that Christ "gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). If Christ was willing to give himself for the Church, his apostle must also be willing to give himself for the Church. And once the apostle has left the scene, if there are still others willing to give themselves for the Church, she will survive. Thus, if the Church is loved in a personalized relationship, she becomes a cause that attracts generosity from generation to generation, as the history of cathedrals testifies.

2. A Holy Church?

a. The value of this notion

Inevitably, members of the Church sin; even during Paul's lifetime, marital disputes, incest, and the desecration of the Eucharist tarnished the Church of Corinth. It is no coincidence that the New Testament's directives to presbyters explicitly or implicitly warn against greed and arrogant domination (1 Peter 5:2-3; Acts 20:32-35). Scandals related to sin jeopardize the survival of the Church. Yet the author of the letter to the Ephesians, who knew of scandals that had taken place in the churches founded by Paul, could nevertheless describe the Church as a spotless, holy, and unblemished bride. His appreciation of the Church was not naive romanticism, but a mystical vision. Those who follow his example will be able to recognize sins while relativizing them through their love for the Church. Institutional scandals and stupidities, even at the highest administrative levels, will not prevent people with this vision from accomplishing "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). As long as people have this faith, the Church will endure.

b. The weakness of this notion

- i. Paradoxically, the emphasis on the holiness of the Church can be a weakness if it begins to mask existing flaws. Sometimes, an ecclesiology of holiness has led Christians to hide sins or stupidities, especially those of public figures in the Church, on the grounds that their disclosure would cause scandal. Yet oppression, venality, and dishonesty undermine the internal vitality of the Church; they must be denounced and combated. Silence can prolong the harm done to Christians who suffer from these sins. Moreover, when repression lasts for a long time, Christians do not learn to deal maturely with the tension surrounding a spotless Church filled with sinners. Thus, a Church whose holiness must be perceived in faith, but whose flaws are physically visible, embodies the mystery of the divine in the human. An exclusive focus on holiness can become a vehicle for Gnosticism rather than the gospel.
- ii. A second weakness of this ecclesiology concerns the possibility of reform. It is difficult to imagine reforming a spotless bride. If the members of a body are united in growth that comes from God and are built up in love, is there room for defective and cancerous growths, for disease, and for corrective surgery? The triumphalism inherent in the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians leaves little room for failure. It is not surprising that Vatican II, a council of self-reform, preferred the biblical image of the "people of God" rather than speaking of the "body of Christ." The impressive holiness of the body of Christ, which is the spotless bride, did not lend itself to self-reform. Indeed, Catholic resistance to the reforms of Vatican II was often based on the thesis that such changes implied some previous error or fault on the part of the Church. Thus, perhaps without taking into account the dynamism of change, the council facilitated reform by turning to the image of the people of God, a people unique because they are of God, but who may nevertheless be composed of sinners, a pilgrim people on their way to the promised land, sometimes wandering and needing to be brought back to the right path. This image was necessary, alongside that of the body of Christ, to express the tension that exists in ecclesiology between holiness and the constant need for reform.

3. The Church and Local Churches

A third weakness is that the emphasis on the Church in these epistles weakens the role of local churches in ecclesiology. Rather than speaking of a local church, we tend to speak of a parish or a diocese, and to apply the term "Church" without qualification to the universal entity, symbolized by "Rome." Yet, in a very real sense, the Church finds its center when the community of believers celebrates a liturgy in which the word of God is preached and the Eucharist is received. Without losing sight of the concept of the Church, those who have been formed by the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians must work with the holiness of the local community.

4. The Church as the ultimate goal of God's plan of salvation in Christ?

The fourth weakness is to focus exclusively on the Church as the ultimate goal of God's plan of salvation in Christ, failing to explicitly take into account a large part of the world that has not yet been renewed in Christ. Indeed, no real consideration is given to the many inhabitants of this world who are neither believers nor hostile. It is true that the inability to deal with a "third world" that is neither light nor darkness is common in the New Testament; it is simply more apparent in the ecclesiology of the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians.

In conclusion, however, we must reaffirm the extraordinary power of the ecclesiology of Colossians/Ephesians with its elements of holiness and love. No church can survive without giving it the importance it deserves. Within Roman Catholicism, while we can expect another decade of dominance of the image of the people of God, the motif of the body of Christ should reappear. After all, Israel was the people of God. What distinguishes the Christian Church is its relationship with Christ and the particular holiness that flows from that relationship.

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#### Chapter 4: The Pauline Heritage in Luke/Acts: *The Spirit*, p. 61-74

Unlike the authors of the pastoral epistles or the epistles to the Colossians/Ephesians, the author of Acts did not write a work of Pauline theology; he wrote a narrative in which Paul plays a decisive role as a missionary witness, not as a doctrinal authority. Biblical scholars are far from agreeing on the target audience of Acts, an audience that was perhaps less specific than the recipients of the epistles. Nevertheless, we can assume that Luke was addressing primarily churches of pagan origin that were at least indirectly affected by Paul's mission.

Even though we use the name "Luke," there are many reasons to believe that the author was not a companion of Paul and did not know him personally. Perhaps even the audience had not been in direct contact with the historical Paul. But for the author and presumably for the audience, Paul was an extremely important figure in God's plan to bring Christ to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth. Paul had become the guarantor of the legitimacy of these churches of pagan origin. While the purpose of Luke/Acts may be complex, it certainly involves the basic geographical line drawn in Acts 1:8, which serves as the book's table of contents: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts begins in Jerusalem, passes through Judea and Samaria, and ends in Rome. Through the persons of Peter and Paul in almost equal proportions, the testimony of Jesus is brought before Jews and Gentiles during the first three decades of Christian life (from the early 30s to the early 60s). The account was written decades later. But what interests us is how Luke/Acts could help a Christian audience survive the death of the apostles.

##### A. The proposed solution: a Church in continuity with Jesus and driven by the Spirit

###### 1. A Church in continuity with the ministry of Jesus and the entire tradition of Israel

Lucan ecclesiology is marked by a sense of continuity in which the Church is closely linked to what preceded it, and first and foremost to Jesus. Jesus' ascension on Easter Sunday concludes Luke's Gospel (Lk 24:51), and the Acts of the Apostles opens with a repetition of the ascension narrative, which introduces everything that is to come. This is a partial answer to the question of the relationship between the kingdom preached by Jesus and the Church. Indeed, when asked if he will restore the kingdom at that time, the risen Jesus replies that it is not for the apostles to know the time, but that they must bear witness throughout the earth. Therefore, more attention must be paid to bearing witness to what Jesus did than to waiting for his coming. Jesus' response makes the existence of the Church both understandable and essential until the coming of the kingdom. It also helps us understand why Luke wrote a book describing this existence.

This continuity does not depend solely on Jesus, but also on those who accompanied him during his ministry and joined the early Christian community, and on Paul, even though he does not receive the title of apostle, who was commissioned by the risen Jesus. Thus, not only are the early stages of the Church's life in continuity with Jesus, but the later stages represented by Paul are also in continuity with the early stages represented by Peter. If Peter performs the same kind of miracles as Jesus, then Paul performs the same kind of miracles as Peter. The sermons that Peter and Paul preach are remarkably similar, a sign of a continuous message and continuous power. After Paul's departure, continuity will be ensured by the elders he has appointed (Acts 14:23).

Continuity does not only concern what follows Jesus' ministry, but also what precedes it, i.e., the entire tradition of Israel. The characters in Luke 1-2 (Zachariah, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, Mary, Joseph) who accept Jesus are devout Jews, and everything is done according to the Law (Lk 1:6; 2:22-27, 37, 39), just as the early Christians in Acts are faithful to the piety of Israel (Lk 2:46; 3:1; 5:42). The Spirit of God that animated the prophets of Israel is clearly active in a prophetic way at the beginning of Jesus' story (Lk 1:15, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25-27) and at the beginning of the Church (Acts 1:8, 16; 2:4, 17).

###### 2. A Church under the power of the Holy Spirit

Another distinctive feature of Lucan ecclesiology is the dominant presence of the Spirit. The 70 occurrences of the word *pneuma*, "spirit," in Acts constitute nearly one-fifth of the total use of this word in the New Testament. Some biblical scholars have been surprised that Acts never mentions the deaths of Peter or Paul. Luke is not interested in these men as individuals, but as vehicles of the Spirit, bearing witness to Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The Spirit is the main actor.

In Acts, after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the apostles look up to the sky with a sense of being orphaned. It is the gift of the Spirit that will then take Christ's place on earth. The author does not clearly state whether he considers the Spirit to be a person, but there can be no doubt about the power of the Spirit. The crucial scene of Pentecost is shaped by the image of the wind as the Spirit of God moving over the surface of the waters at creation (Genesis 1:2), and by the image of the God of the storm descending on Mount Sinai to make a covenant with Israel as his people (Exodus 19:16 ff.). In the last days, a new creative act of God takes place, corresponding to the first creation; Jerusalem has replaced Sinai as the place of a renewed covenant that will affect all peoples. And then a sound like a mighty rushing wind is heard, while tongues of fire spread out, filling with the Holy Spirit those who are to proclaim this renewed covenant (Acts 2:14-17).

Immediately after the resurrection, the apostles did not publicly proclaim what God had done in Jesus and through him, for lack of understanding and courage. It is the Spirit who will bring the disciples out of their torpor and stir up a missionary movement, the Spirit with whom the apostles were baptized and who gave them the power to speak (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:33; 4:8, 31). And throughout the Acts, the Spirit is constantly at work:

- The Spirit directs missionaries to promising regions (Acts 8:29, 39), as in the case of Cornelius.
- He guides them toward the admission and baptism of the first pagans (Acts 10:38, 44-47; 11:12, 15).
- The Spirit impels Barnabas and Paul to embark on a mission that would convert entire pagan communities (Acts 13:2, 4).
- He guides Peter and James' decision to admit pagans without requiring circumcision
- The Spirit prevented Paul from making a detour that would have delayed the establishment of Christianity in Europe (Acts 16:6-7)
- It was in the Spirit that Paul made his decision to go to Rome.
- When Paul bid farewell to Asia, the Holy Spirit was providential in establishing elders who were overseers (bishops) of the flock (Acts 20:28).

Thus, every essential step in this story of how the witness of Christ was carried from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth is guided by the Spirit, whose presence becomes evident in important moments when human agents would otherwise have hesitated or made wrong choices.

## B. The strengths and weaknesses of this solution

### 1. The strengths

- a. The continuity between Israel, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and their successors contributed to the survival of the Church.

Luke does not mention the deaths of Peter and Paul, as if they were unimportant, because the mission continues without them. When Paul delivers his farewell speech to the presbyter-bishops of Ephesus, he entrusts them with the care of the flock, since they will not see him again (Acts 20:25, 28). The chain of continuity shows God's meticulous plan leading to the spread of the gospel throughout the earth.

Luke has incorporated into his outline of God's plan certain elements that could give Christians of pagan origin a sense of pride. To show the great dignity of the Christian faith in relation to various Eastern religions, he presents it as a religion that affects political figures around the world, placing the various characters in his stories in a setting that includes emperors, governors, and Roman officials. And it is not insignificant that he ends his account of the Acts in Rome, the center of the world at that time.

- b. The intervention of the Holy Spirit also contributed to the survival of the Church.

The role of the Spirit in the survival of the Church is even more important. In fact, Peter and Paul were only great instruments of the Holy Spirit. For it was the Spirit who brought faith to the pagans and led Paul to Rome, and who will continue to act unceasingly and help the Church in difficult times. Today, it is this faith that allows us to believe in the survival of the Church, despite the errors and stupidities of its leaders. The magnificent insight of Acts that the Spirit was at work in the history of the Church has since then constituted a lasting legacy in Christian self-analysis.

### 2. The weaknesses

- a. The danger of a triumphalist view of the Church

Reading the Acts, we note that all setbacks are temporary and quickly turn into good in a Christian movement that continues to grow numerically (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:1,7; 8:12; 9:31; 21:19-20) and geographically (Acts 1:8). At the end of Acts, the reader can logically conclude that very soon the whole world would become Christian. Taken in isolation, such an ecclesiology will leave Christians perplexed when their institutions begin to close, when their churches are abandoned due to a lack of members, and when their overall numbers in the world begin to decline. We will try to reassure ourselves in the face of these losses by telling ourselves that the Church cannot fail, especially when Islam has spread throughout the world. Similarly, when God deprived the

Roman Catholic Church of half of Europe through the Protestant Reformation, Catholics consoled themselves with the thought that He had given it an even greater number of Catholics in Central and South America.

We must recognize today that this perception of things, consciously or unconsciously, was influenced by the program of world conversion outlined in Acts 1:8. If we want to prevent the triumphalism of Acts from becoming impossible to believe in an era when Christianity is in numerical decline, we can turn to the Old Testament, which is also part of the canon, and which tells how God's people went from twelve tribes to one, how religious institutions failed (monarchy, priesthood, sacrificial worship), and how Israel learned much more about God in the ashes of the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians than during the glorious period of that Temple under Solomon. All of this can warn readers of the Bible that God's message to his people is not an unconditional promise to increase the number of his followers to the ends of the earth.

b. The danger of triumphalism surrounding the role of the Spirit

Indeed, the question arises: can we be sure that the Holy Spirit will always come to the rescue? Doesn't the image given in Acts easily lead to a conception of the Spirit as a *deus ex machina*? Has God really given a blank check so that, in every important case, the Spirit will ensure that the Church comes out on top? Two examples illustrate the strength and weakness of an ecclesiology in which the intervention of the Spirit plays a major role.

- i. The first example concerns the history of ecumenism during this century, and more particularly the World Council of Churches, a movement of Protestant origin. Even the Orthodox Churches began to show interest, but the Catholic Church was categorically opposed, until this opposition was overturned at the Second Vatican Council. As a result, in a single decade, the 1970s, more was accomplished in terms of religious dialogue among Christians than in the previous 450 years since the Augsburg Confession. But should we then assume that the Spirit will bring this work to a triumphant conclusion? If, over the next two decades, the churches do not seize this opportunity, is it not possible, even probable, that this opportunity will never arise again? Almost by definition, the Spirit surprises, but sometimes the surprise may be that the Spirit allows God's people to pay the price for their failures.
- ii. A second example of the complexity of the role assigned to the Spirit concerns the three different forms of ecclesiology in the Pauline heritage. Indeed, before the council, the Holy Office, of which the pope himself was the prefect, exercised its role as priest-bishops officially teaching against false doctrines, as mentioned in the pastoral epistles, by preparing documents for the council participants that would deal with Scripture: the two sources of revelation. This preliminary document was extremely negative toward modern theology and biblical research, supporting its warnings with references to the modernist heresy of the early part of the century. The Council Fathers forcefully rejected the preliminary document that had been submitted to them and that reflected the official teaching of the Holy Office. The Doctors of the Church rose in the council hall and challenged other Doctors of the Church on the very orientation of Scripture. The Spirit-filled leaders envisioned in the pastoral epistles were at odds with one another. During the discussion, the image of the body of Christ in the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians gradually gave way to the image of the people of God in order to facilitate the self-reform of the spotless bride. In other words, the three post-Pauline ecclesiological elements functioned in tension.

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### Chapter 5: The Petrine Heritage in I Peter: *The People of God*, p. 75-83

This letter was written in Rome by a disciple of Peter, probably around the 80s or 90s. The significant parallels between the First Epistle of Peter and Paul's Epistle to the Romans may be explained by the fact that Paul sought to make his theology acceptable to the Christian community in Rome. This Church was strongly attached to its Jewish origins and closer to the missionary work of James and Peter than to Paul's mission. The main idea of the ecclesiology of 1 Peter differs from that of the three post-Pauline ecclesiologies we discussed in the previous chapters, as it emphasizes the description of the Church in the context of Israel, a difference that corresponds to the image of Roman Christianity attached to its Jewish roots.

The first epistle of Peter (1:1) is addressed "to the elect exiles in the diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Based on the content of the letter, the recipients are pagans who have recently converted to Christianity. It is likely that most of the designated region was north of the boundaries of Paul's mission. Three of the five names (Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia) appear in the list in Acts 2:9, a list that could describe the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem; this region could therefore have been evangelized by missionaries loyal to James and Peter. This would explain why the region is mentioned in Peter's name from Rome, as it is plausible that Peter was more closely associated with the push into pagan regions of the Jerusalem mission. Rome, the place of Peter's death, seemed to consider itself responsible for continuing this mission.

A. The proposed solution: the Church as the people of God

1. A metaphor taken from the story of the exodus of Israel

The story of the Exodus, recounting Israel's wandering in the desert and its journey to the Promised Land, is used to describe the conversion of the pagans and present the foundations of Christianity. If this experience in the desert turned the slave tribes of Egypt into a people, indeed the people of God, Christian conversion turned the pagans, who were formerly no people at all, into the people of God. In this way, the author of the letter draws a close parallel between the Exodus and the situation of his audience.

- While the Hebrews who left Egypt were ordered to prepare to leave quickly (Ex 12:11), Christians are invited to prepare themselves mentally (1 Pet 1:13).
- While in the desert the Israelites murmured and wanted to return to the meat pots of Egypt (Ex 16:2-3), Christians of pagan origin are warned against desires to return to their former ignorance (1 Pet 1:14).
- Just as Israel wandered in the desert before reaching its inheritance in the Promised Land, so Christian life is a time of exile or sojourn in the hope of an inheritance yet to be acquired (1 Peter 1:17; 1:4).
- Just as the Old Testament (Ex 6:5-6; Dt 7:8; Is 52:3) describes Israel's redemption from Egypt with the image of the payment of a ransom, so in 1 Pet 1:18 we read: "You know that you were redeemed from the futile traditions of your fathers."
- If the Hebrews were spared from the tenth plague of Egypt (Ex 11:2) after worshipping the calf made of silver and gold, thanks to the blood of the spotless Passover lamb that marked their houses (Ex 12:5-7), so too were the Christians of the community "... redeemed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

## 2. A metaphor about Christ as a stone

The second chapter of 1 Peter, where he discusses worship, uses the metaphor of Christ as a stone to challenge his audience: "You yourselves, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Further on, he specifies that these spiritual sacrifices consist in part of good conduct that will bear witness to the pagans (1 Pet 2:12). However, even though 1 Peter is familiar with the presbyteral structure, he does not use it to encourage his audience, who are undergoing a fiery trial (1 Pet 4:12). For him, Israelite imagery centered on God's people is what matters in meeting the needs of Gentile Christians.

## B. The strengths and weaknesses of this solution

To answer this question properly, we must first reconstruct the situation in which the recipients of the letter found themselves. It is likely that their real problem was alienation and ostracism. Indeed, in the remote regions of northern Asia Minor, those who had become Christians felt cut off from the surrounding society. In the eyes of their pagan neighbors, they formed a strange and secret sect. Later Roman accounts mention accusations of atheism, because Christians did not worship the civil gods, and accusations of antisocial behavior, because they organized meals and meetings behind closed doors. There was inevitably a risk that converts, feeling this contempt, would return to the "passions of their former ignorance" (1 Peter 1:14).

### 1. The strength of this solution: giving a sense of belonging

The author of the letter assures converts from paganism that they have found a new family, a new home, a new status that makes them a special people with an imperishable heritage, as was the case with the Israelites. Instilling this proud sense of belonging is a challenge, because among the Jews there is a form of blood union, while these pagan converts were of diverse origins with little in common. "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy (from God), but now you have received that mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). In other words, as Christians, the converts were told that they had found something better: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9).

This ecclesiology, centered on a sense of belonging to the Church, has real advantages. If people feel they are getting something worthwhile out of belonging to a church, that church will survive the passing of Peter and the other apostles. The more undefined the family or social context from which new members of a community come, the more deeply they will be attracted to loving attention that gives them a new identity or dignity. Today, we see this reflected in the appeal that religious sects or various types of charismatic communities have for those who are dissatisfied with their families, their Church, civil order, or the world in general. This appeal poses a particular challenge to traditional churches where Sunday attendance has been a matter of obligation or social expectation. In the past, in rural or agricultural areas of the country, the church or chapel to which one belonged was the center of life. Ways must be found to divide parishes into smaller groups that provide a sense of belonging, allow for active participation in the liturgy, friendship among peers, and a healthy social life for a highly marginalized age group.

As a corollary, the ecclesiology of 1 Peter recalls the "priesthood" of all the baptized. It is unfortunate that today we only talk about the ordained priesthood. It is precisely because much of Protestantism has ceased to refer to Christian ministry as a priesthood (based on the New Testament, where presbyters and bishops are never called "priests") that Roman Catholic theology has reinforced the ordained priesthood. Even Vatican II insisted that the difference between the ordained and the non-ordained was a difference in nature and not simply in degree. As a result, Catholicism has placed little emphasis on the priesthood of believers. It is essential to restore to the people a sense of the priestly dignity and spiritual sacrifices spoken of in 1 Peter, precisely in order to emphasize the status

conferred on all Christians. Similarly, holiness has been too strongly associated with particular forms of Catholic life, such as religious vocations and the observance of vows. The unique status of holiness given by baptism to all believers must be emphasized.

2. The weakness of this solution: creating a sense of elitism

This feeling stems from the designation of a group as belonging more closely to God. Let us remember that while the awareness of being God's chosen people enabled Israel and the Jews to survive for more than 3,000 years of world history, it also explains some of the aversion and hatred directed against the Jews. If Christian converts in northern Asia Minor needed 1 Peter to reaffirm their special status in order to sustain them against the ostracism and contempt of their pagan compatriots, we can be sure that this sense of special status inevitably led to even greater hatred of Christians by pagans.

Even if the idea of "God's people" includes the recognition of God's choice by pure grace, we must recognize that, in an increasingly pluralistic society, the exclusive nature inherent in this concept is inevitably poorly perceived by outsiders and embarrassing for many members of the community. This is one aspect of the problem of "outside the Church, there is no salvation." Whatever the original meaning of this statement, most Christians have an instinctive feeling that it cannot be true that only Christians are saved. Unfortunately, Christians have never found a satisfactory way to reconcile the unique gift of God's grace through Christ with God's merciful love for all.

Corollaries

a. Are the Jews no longer God's people?

With supreme confidence, Peter writes to pagan Christians: "You are God's people," without mentioning that another group had previously claimed this title, namely the Jews. Perhaps the author believed that, through faith in Christ, pagans joined the existing people of God, Israel, and could thus appropriate Israelite symbolism. But 1 Peter never mentions Israel or the Jews, nor the union of the two into one people. It is as if there had never been any other claimants to the title than Christians! Following this implication but going further, in the following century, Christians would explicitly deny that the Jews were still the people of God, because they had been replaced by Christians. Today, some Christians are revisiting this decision, asserting that there are two peoples of God or two groups within the one people of God: his children of Israel and his children through Christ. But other Christians categorically refuse to grant the title of "people of God" to the Jews. Such is the exclusivity inherent in this concept.

b. No holiness among non-believers?

In the ecclesiology of 1 Peter, the status of holiness was acquired by coming to Christ or entering the Church. There is no reference to the existence of holiness among outsiders or to the need to reach out to non-Christians by appreciating the goodness they already possess. In Vatican II, the document "On the Church in the Modern World" called on Christians to appreciate the possibilities and structures of the world around them, even if they are not Christian. Curiously, this call was made at a time when the image of the "people of God" was widely adopted. In emphasizing the pastoral value of this image, its negative side may have been overlooked, unless the intention was to create a bond between Christians and others in this world. Yet, biblically, the status of God's people reduces all others to the status of non-people.

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**Chapter 6: The Heritage of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel: People Personally Attached to Jesus, p. 84-101**

The ecclesiology of the fourth Gospel is distinguished by its emphasis on the relationship of each Christian with Jesus Christ. Of course, for him, God saved a people in Christ, and salvation is perceived collectively, as shown by the symbolism of the vine and the branches in chapter 15 and that of the shepherd and the flock in chapter 10. Nevertheless, within this collective presupposition, there is an unparalleled focus on the individual believer's relationship with Jesus.

A. The proposed solution is based on his Christology.

1. We move from a Jesus who will return to a Jesus who has come.

Ecclesiology in the fourth Gospel is dominated by the extraordinary Johannine Christology. Indeed, only John *explicitly* posits a pre-existing career of the Son of God. Pre-existence before creation appears poetically in John 1:1-3, but also in prose as an affirmation by Jesus himself in John 17:5 (see also John 8:58). The Johannine Jesus had glory with his Father before the world began. He came down from heaven to this earth, became flesh, and revealed to men what he had seen and heard when he was with the Father.

A common image in the early Church was that after an earthly ministry that ended with crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus ascended to the right hand of his Father until he finally returned to earth in glory to exercise his judgment. Without denying a final coming, John radically transformed the Gospel image by insisting that Jesus had already come down from heaven to earth in glory, so that his public ministry constituted a judgment: "This is the judgment:

the light has come into the world, but people preferred darkness to light" (Jn 3:19). Until then, no one had seen God (Jn 1:18); but since Jesus came from God, whoever saw Jesus saw the Father (Jn 14:9). Indeed, because as the Son he has the life of the Father, he can give us the very life of God (Jn 6:57). The fundamental idea is so simple that it is breathtaking. A child receives life from a parent, and the only life our natural parents can give us is the life of the flesh (Jn 3:6). But if God begets us, we are God's children and we have his eternal life. This generation comes through water and the Spirit to those who believe in Jesus (Jn 1:12-13; 3:3-6).

2. We move from Jesus as the foundation to Jesus as the present source of life.

Rather than using the image of the cornerstone to describe Jesus' role in the Church, an image associated with an inert and past reality, as some New Testament writings do (see Mt 16:18; Eph 2:20), John preferred the image of the vine, with Christians as the branches that draw their life from the vine. More than the founder of the community, Jesus is its animating principle, always "alive and present" within it. He is the shepherd who cares for his sheep, knowing them and calling each one by name. To obtain eternal life, one must continue to follow the shepherd or adhere to the vine (Jn 10:27-28; 15:2-6). This is an ecclesiology particularly influenced by Christology. In the collective imagery of the vine and the flock, the heart of ecclesiology is a personal and ongoing relationship with the one who gives life, who came down from God.

3. We move from a discourse on the kingdom or reign of God to a discourse centered on the person of Jesus.

The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels introduces and proclaims the kingdom, reign, or dominion of God in the world, and most of the parables refer to the dynamism of its growth. But in John, figurative or allegorical images refer to Jesus himself; for example, he is the bridegroom (Jn 3:29). Most often, the metaphors are the predicate of his sovereign "I am": I am the vine (Jn 15:1, 5); I am the gate of the sheep or the shepherd (Jn 10:7, 9, 11, 14); I am the bread of life that came down from heaven (Jn 6:35, 41, 51); I am the light of the world (Jn 8:12; 9:5). Thus, instead of entering the kingdom of God as a place, as in the synoptic Gospels, in John one must be in Jesus to be part of the community.

4. We move from sacramental instructions for the Church to Jesus' current action for the disciples.

In Matthew 28:19, the risen Jesus commands the eleven disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Similarly, in Luke 22:19, Jesus commands during his last supper: "Do this in memory of me" (see also 1 Corinthians 11:25). These two actions will take place after Jesus' departure and concern the Church. There is therefore a dichotomy: Jesus healed and preached, but the Church baptizes and celebrates the Eucharist. John avoids this dichotomy in two ways. First, his Gospel contains no institutional instructions concerning baptism and the Eucharist. In fact, there is no Eucharist at the Last Supper, but only the washing of feet. Second, Johannine sacramental references are made in relation to what Jesus normally did during his life. For example, the most direct Eucharistic reference, with an allusion to eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood (Jn 6:51-58), is found in the commentary on the multiplication of the loaves. The other Gospels do not mention any Eucharistic consequence of the multiplication; but for John, when Jesus fed people during his lifetime with physical bread, he was referring to that other food which lasts for eternal life (Jn 6:27); John focuses on the sign. The same is true in the dialogue with Nicodemus (Jn 3:3-6): when Jesus speaks of birth, he is referring to birth through water and the Spirit. It is the same again in Jn 9, where the evangelist tells us how Jesus, the light of the world, gave physical sight to a man born blind, a parable about how spiritual sight was acquired when the man came to faith in Jesus after being judged by the Jewish authorities.

In chapters 6 and 9, John's readers thus discover a Jesus who, during his life, fed the hungry and restored sight to the blind through wonderful deeds that were, in turn, signs of a heavenly reality. At the same time, by including ecclesiastical and sacramental language in these chapters, the Johannine author taught that Jesus continues to give the illumination of faith and the nourishment of eternal life through the signs of baptism and the Eucharist. Jesus is not simply the one who instituted the sacraments of the Church; he is the one who gives life and remains active in and through these sacraments. Thus, John's unique emphasis on the Christian's relationship with Jesus is underscored by sacramental imagery.

5. We move from charisms in the service of the Church to the prominence of the status of disciple.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the imagery of the body and the necessity of all its members to affirm the necessity and importance of all charisms (apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, speakers in tongues). But John is not interested in the various charisms that distinguish Christians: he is interested in a fundamental status, that of receiving life, which all enjoy. The absence of distinction based on charisms or functions is particularly notable in Johannine ecclesiology with regard to the question of apostles. In the rest of the New Testament, the importance of the apostle is clear. Someone like Paul constantly emphasizes his own apostleship (Gal 1:1; 1 Cor 15:9-10; 2 Cor 11:5). He places the apostleship at the head of the charisms that God has established in the Church (1 Cor 12:28; see also Eph 2:20; 4:11). After the death of the well-known apostles, they are prominently commemorated in the Synoptics, Acts, post-Pauline and post-Petrine writings, and Revelation. But the term "apostle" is completely absent from the Johannine writings, both the Gospel and the three epistles. No named apostle is exalted as the great hero of this community, as was the case in the Pauline and Petrine legacies. On the contrary, the figure par excellence is a disciple, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Even though he knows the Twelve (Jn 6:67, 70, 71; 20:24) and the act of sending them on mission (Jn 17:18), for John the apostolate is not what

constitutes the primary dignity in his ecclesiology. He prefers to emphasize the status of disciple, a status enjoyed by all Christians; and in this status, what confers dignity is the love of Jesus.

The difference between Johannine ecclesiology and that of other New Testament authors on this point is illustrated by the constant contrast in John between the beloved disciple and Peter.

Synoptics	John
Peter is the spokesperson for the Twelve when he addresses Jesus (Mt 16:16; 17:24; 18:21).	At the Last Supper, Peter must instead address Jesus through the beloved disciple who is closest to Jesus, leaning on his chest (Jn 13:22-26).
Peter is the only one of the Twelve to follow Jesus after his arrest in the courtyard or palace of the high priest.	Simon Peter cannot follow Jesus into the courtyard until the disciple has obtained permission to enter (Jn 18:15-16).
Peter ends up abandoning Jesus, so that none of Jesus' disciples are standing near him when he dies on the cross.	At the foot of the cross stand the beloved disciple and Jesus' mother (19:26-27).
Peter was the first among the Twelve to see the risen Jesus (Lk 24:34; see also 1 Cor 15:5).	At the empty tomb, the beloved disciple is the first to believe that Jesus has risen (Jn 20:8).

Thus, the beloved disciple embodies Johannine idealism: all Christians are disciples, and among them, greatness is determined by a loving relationship with Jesus, not by a function or office. When the conclusion of chapter 21 of the fourth Gospel addresses the pastoral question as Peter is given the role of shepherd, Peter must answer the question: "Do you love me?" If authority is given, it must be based on love for Jesus. Moreover, Jesus continues to speak of "my lambs, my sheep." The sheep do not belong to Peter or to any human leader of the Church; they continue to belong to the one who said, "I am the model shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (Jn 10:14). And if Peter is entrusted with the task of shepherding, he must meet the Johannine criteria for being a shepherd, namely that "the model shepherd lays down his life for his sheep" (Jn 10:11). That is why, after telling Simon Peter three times to feed/guard the sheep, Jesus immediately tells him (Jn 21:18-19) how he will be put to death. This death will be proof that, in his role as shepherd, Peter gave priority to the love of the disciples: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another... And no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 13:35; 15:13).

#### 6. Transition from a hierarchical church to an egalitarian church

We have seen that in the ecclesiology of the pastoral letters there is a distinction between teachers and learners, and we have emphasized the danger that this distinction becomes fixed rather than flexible, so that the capacity of many "learners" to teach in turn is ignored. In particular, 2 Timothy 3:1-9 refers to women among the disciples as being excessively gullible: "They will listen to anyone and will never be able to arrive at the truth." Even if "they" does not refer to all women, this categorization is degrading; and the practical result is clearly expressed in 1 Timothy 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must remain silent." There was therefore a tendency toward discrimination against women in some New Testament churches, particularly those where community functions were more rigorously structured.

John's attitude toward women, as it appears in the pages of the fourth Gospel, is remarkably different, a difference that is all the more interesting if John's writings are contemporary with the pastoral epistles. In Chapters 4, 9, and 11, the Samaritan woman, Martha, and Mary are characters just as important as the blind man and Lazarus. In the description of the main believers, both men and women, there is no difference in intelligence, liveliness, or reaction. Martha serves as the spokesperson for a confession of faith (Jn 11:27: "You are the Christ, the Son of God"), which is placed in Peter's mouth in Matthew 16:16-17, earning him Jesus' blessing and recognition that divine revelation has been at work. While at the Last Supper, the Johannine Jesus prays for those who will believe in him through the word of his (male) disciples (Jn 17:20), an entire village comes to believe in Jesus through the word of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:39). In Jn 20:14, it is not Peter but Mary Magdalene who is the first to see the risen Jesus; and when she goes to the disciples, she is the first to proclaim Easter: "I have seen the Lord." If rank in the community of disciples is determined by love for Jesus, as illustrated by "the disciple whom Jesus loved," it is said: "Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5).

#### B. The Strengths and Weaknesses of this solution

##### 1. The Strength and Weakness of this Emphasis on a Personal, Loving Relationship with Jesus

###### a. The Strength

The first and greatest strength comes from the fact that the individual relationship of church members with Jesus is a necessary component of a healthy ecclesiology. The ecclesiologies discussed in the previous chapters presuppose attentive pastoral supervision and reliable Christian doctrine, a sense of continuity with the past, the intervention of the Spirit, belonging to the people of God, and being members of the body of Christ. But none of this replaces the relationship with Jesus. Even though the ecclesiology of the body in Colossians/Ephesians gives a central place to Christ, the fact remains that Christ, who is the head of the body, remains faceless. This is the result of the Pauline tradition, which never speaks of the historical Jesus except to recall the words of his

last supper. But the kind of person Jesus was and the reasons why people followed him during his lifetime never come through in these letters. Thus, in the epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians, the image of Christ remains abstract and impersonal, failing to satisfy the religious desire to encounter God in a personal way. John's description of Jesus responds to this need in an extraordinarily effective way.

Thus, John used the evangelical form as a vehicle for his thought and therefore had to integrate the mystery of Jesus' ministry into his ecclesiology. We speak of the "mystery" of Jesus' ministry in order to do justice to an element of Jesus' life that eludes any discursive description. For Jesus is remembered as someone who manifested love in his actions and who was deeply loved by those who followed him. Of course, love was not everything, but it was part of the picture. If we ask the question: how did love for Jesus survive after his death? The answer is that it survived only because love for Jesus was seen as a permanent feature, even among those who had never known him during his ministry. It can therefore be said that the loving relationship with Jesus, which was part of the lives of Jesus' disciples during his lifetime, remains an intrinsic necessity in the Church.

Thus, in addition to providing doctrine and pastoral care, liturgy and sacraments, as well as a sense of belonging to a caring community, a Church must bring people into personal contact with Jesus so that they can discover for themselves what initially motivated people to follow him. Churches that do this will survive. That Christ wanted or founded the Church may be adequate theology for some, but an abstraction, centered on the past, will not be enough to keep others faithful to a Church unless they encounter Jesus there. They will join small groups where they will find an encounter with Jesus, even if these groups are tangential or separate from the Church.

This is the observation of the pastors of our Roman Catholic parishes, who note that worship alone, without personal spirituality, is not enough to retain certain people. Even in liturgical celebration, the Church can seem distant from the Jesus described in the pages of the Gospel. To what extent will large, impersonal parishes of all denominations lose more parishioners, not only because they do not have an active sense of belonging to a community from which they derive their identity, but also because they do not encounter Jesus in the Church? Therefore, John has a corrective role to play in traditional churches when he is read critically rather than harmonistically. He can remind them, as he did the Christians of the first century, that belonging to the Church is not a sufficient goal, because the Church must lead to Jesus. Church members receive life by being attached to Jesus and must be in a loving relationship with him.

b. The Weakness

The main weakness of this approach in Johannine ecclesiology is that it tends to promote Christian individualism to the point where the meaning of the Church is lost. When John is read to support the mentality that "Jesus is my personal savior," some may logically conclude that they really have no need for community, sharing with others, liturgy, or sacraments. Pietistic groups for whom certain passages of John constitute the gospel should reflect on the pastoral epistles, the epistles to the Colossians/Ephesians, and the first epistle of Peter as a corrective.

2. The Strength and Weakness of an Egalitarian View of Membership in the Church

a. The Strength

A second strength of Johannine ecclesiology is its egalitarianism, that is, the sense of equality among members of the community. In other New Testament churches, which recognize different charisms (apostles, prophets, teachers, etc., see 1 Cor 12:28) or have developed regular functions (presbyter-bishops and deacons in the Pastoral Epistles), there is a tendency to give priority to one charism or function over another. This reflects the evolution of any society where primacy is equated with value. This explains various passages in the Gospel that correct the attempts of the Twelve to occupy the first place in the kingdom or to be the greatest (Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-40; and par.). This attempt is not mentioned in the fourth Gospel; ambition is not a factor if all are disciples and if primacy or status comes from the love of Jesus. The Johannine correction is perhaps more important today, when many feel like second-class citizens in the Church because they have no authority—a tacit recognition of the importance that power has taken on in the Church. Those who are ambitious and want authority and those who are sad because they don't have it have not understood the lesson of the vine and the branches.

b. The Weakness

Such an ecclesiology does not allow for the integration of the function of an ordained priesthood. With reference to 1 Peter, we have emphasized that the presence of an ordained priesthood can have the unfortunate side effect of minimizing the appreciation of the priesthood of all believers. With regard to the equality of Christians as disciples, it is particularly difficult for the ordained priesthood to remain in the category of service (to God and to the community), because the ordained are often considered more important and automatically more holy, superior to ordinary Christians. In my own Church, some would find surprising this almost elementary statement: the day a person is baptized is more important than the day he or she is ordained a priest or bishop. After all, the first sacrament touches on salvation; it makes the individual a child of God, a dignity that goes beyond appointment to special service to God. Recent popes have commendably renounced one after another the royal attributes associated with the installation into the papal office, such as the tiara, the coronation, etc.

But why should he not decide not to accept the special royal name but to retain his baptismal name, explaining that he wants to be known to the Church by the name with which he was sealed as a Christian and presented to Jesus Christ? This gesture could dispel the mistaken feeling shared by many outsiders to the Church that the pope claims royal power, as it would demonstrate the conviction that, in terms of salvation, Christian identity is more important than the identity acquired through authority. This gesture would bring to life what John was trying to say when he compared the beloved disciple to Peter.

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## Chapter 7: The Heritage of the Beloved Disciple and the Epistles: *Individuals Guided by the Paraclete-Spirit*, p. 102-123

One very important aspect of Johannine ecclesiology remains to be addressed, namely the role of the Spirit under the title of Paraclete. However, in order to understand the importance of the Paraclete in Johannine thought and the subsequent destiny of the Johannine community as illustrated in John's epistles, at least a brief overview of the history underlying the fourth Gospel is necessary.

### A. The History of the Johannine Community

It would therefore seem that, at least in its origins, Johannine Christianity was not too far removed from the dominant style of Christianity in the movement centered on Jesus, as evidenced by John 1: 35-51, with the presence of disciples known from the other Gospels (Andrew, Peter, Philip) and the usual titles given to Jesus (Messiah, Son of God, King, Son of Man). In chapter 4 of John, however, with the Samaritans converting and worship at the Temple in Jerusalem being declared to have lost its importance, John departs considerably from the description of the ministry in the other gospels and moves closer to the developments described in Acts 6-8. There, the Hellenistic Jewish Christians separate administratively from the majority of Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem who are faithful to Temple observances; and (in the person of Stephen) Hellenistic preaching proclaims that God does not dwell in the Temple. It was these Hellenistic Christians, not Peter or the Twelve, who converted Samaria. Thus, Johannine Christianity was not composed only of the type of Hebrew Christians whose heritage is preserved in many other works of the New Testament, but also of groups similar to the Hellenists, who were more radical in their attitude toward Judaism. There were also Samaritan converts. This mixture may have accelerated the innovative developments in Johannine Christology and made Johannine Christians particularly troublesome to Jews who did not believe in Jesus.

From Chapter 5 onwards, a dominant theme in the Johannine account of Jesus' ministry is the hatred that "the Jews" have for Jesus because he pretends to be God. The divinity of Jesus as the one who came down from God is publicly evoked and attacked. There are lengthy debates between Jesus and "the Jews" that become increasingly hostile. What lies beneath the surface becomes evident in the story of the man born blind in John 9: there is a debate about whether Jesus comes from God. The synagogue and the Johannine community are thus opposed to each other as disciples of Moses and disciples of Jesus; and through the struggles of Jesus' life, the struggles between these two groups are recounted. (In other words, the fourth gospel tells a story on two levels: the level of Jesus' life and the level of the community's life). Just as the man born blind is judged before the Pharisees or "the Jews," the members of the Johannine community were judged by the leaders of the synagogue. Just as the man born blind was expelled from the synagogue for confessing that Jesus came from God, the Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogue for confessing Jesus (see also Jn 16:2). And during this action by the synagogue, considered persecution, the Johannine Christians were put to death, either directly by the Jewish authorities or indirectly by being denounced to the Roman authorities (Jn 15:20; 16:2-3). Faced with this treatment, the Johannine Jesus's rhetorical response is bitter: the Jews who are trying to kill him are the children of the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:40, 44).

The fact that they were expelled from the synagogue because they believed that Jesus came from God inevitably strengthened and reinforced the Johannine Christians' adherence to their high Christology. Jesus is so one with the Father (Jn 10:30) that he is not only Lord, but also God (Jn 20:28). The fourth Gospel expresses contempt for Jews who believed in Jesus but did not want to confess him openly for fear of being excluded from the synagogue (Jn 12:42). There is hostility towards Jewish disciples who openly followed Jesus but who objected when it was said that he came down from heaven and could give his flesh to eat (Jn 6:60-66) or because he is described as existing before Abraham (Jn 8:58). These criticisms of others suggest that Johannine Christians must have been extremely controversial because of their Christology, which was contested both by Jews who did not believe in Jesus and by those who did believe in him.

The judicial atmosphere of the fourth Gospel, with its constant emphasis on testimony, accusation, and judgment (Jn 1:19-21; 5:31-47; 7:50-51; 8:14-18; etc.) and its debates about the implications of scriptural texts (Jn 6:31-33; 7:40-43, 52; 10:34-36) reflects the controversies and the way in which they were conducted. The struggle with the synagogue and the resulting polemical atmosphere are very important for understanding what is present in John, but also what is absent. The leaders of the synagogue apparently believed that John's confession of Jesus as God denied the fundamental faith of Israel: "The Lord our God is one." In response, the evangelist defended Jesus' divinity so forcefully that the fourth gospel leaves little room for human limitations. Jesus cannot ask a simple question without a Johannine footnote explaining that he already knew the answer (Jn 6:5-6). Jesus cannot choose a disciple who strays from the right path without John insisting that he had foreseen it from the beginning (Jn 6:70-71). Jesus cannot utter a prayer of supplication without the assurance that he is only teaching the spectators the truth that the Father always listens to him (Jn 11:41-42). Jesus cannot ask that the hour of passion pass him by (as he does in the other Gospels), because his arrival at that hour is intentional (Jn 12:27). Jesus' passion cannot be recounted in a way that would place him at the mercy of his captors, because he has the sovereign power to lay down his life and take it up again (Jn 10:18; see 18:6).

The entire presentation protects Jesus from anything that might call his divinity into question. If asked whether Jesus was human, the Johannine evangelist would undoubtedly have replied, "Of course, he walked among us." But the evangelist does not emphasize this humanity, because it was never questioned by the polemicists of the synagogue. Similarly, ethical or moral guidelines are almost entirely absent from John—there is nothing like Matthew's Sermon on the Mount—almost certainly because fundamental principles such as the commandments were not a matter of dispute between the Johannine community and the synagogue. The evangelist may have presupposed a more complete portrait of Jesus, but the one he painted is somewhat monochromatic, because the struggle with the synagogue limited the palette to black and white.

B. The proposed solution: the action of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter

1. The Spirit as a substitute for Jesus' personal presence

The early Christians had very different notions of what the term "Spirit" meant. Since the Greek word *pneuma* is neuter and the Spirit is referred to as "he" in the New Testament writings, it is difficult to determine to what extent Paul, Acts, or 1 Peter considered the Spirit to be a person. But once again, Christology had a powerful impact on John's views, for in the fourth Gospel's account of the Last Supper, the Spirit must come from God after Jesus' return to the Father. The motif of replacement is so strong that almost everything said about the Spirit has already been said about Jesus. The Spirit clearly appears as a personal presence, the continuing presence of Jesus while he is absent from the earth and with the Father in heaven.

2. The Holy Spirit as advocate to support and console, as Jesus would have done

In its original meaning, the Greek term *parakletos* means "called [*kletos*] beside [*para*]"; and like its Latin equivalent *advocatus* ("called [*vocatus*] to [*ad*]"), it has a judicial or legal usage. When people are in trouble, they call on a lawyer, advisor, or defender to accompany them to court. The legal context corresponds to the Johannine story, in which members of the community had to defend themselves for their Christological opinions. Their help and guarantee was the Paraclete-Spirit who dwelt in them and correctly interpreted the meaning of Jesus. Another reason why the Spirit is "called to their side" is for consolation in difficult times, hence the Comforter or Holy Spirit. In the context of the Last Supper, Jesus is leaving, but the Paraclete dwells in every believer forever (Jn 14:15-17). Thus, the Paraclete is a more intimate and lasting presence. This is another facet of John's emphasis on the individual's relationship with Jesus. Just as Jesus represents on earth the Father who sent him, the Paraclete represents on earth Jesus who sent him.

3. The Holy Spirit as Teacher and Innovator

The Paraclete acts as a teacher: "The Paraclete... will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you... and will tell you things to come" (Jn 14:26; 16:13-14). Jesus received everything he had to say from the Father, but he actualized this revelation by proclaiming it to his disciples on earth. The Paraclete will receive everything he has to say from Jesus; but, dwelling in the heart of every Christian, he will actualize it in every age and in every place, thus enabling Christians to face the things to come. Thus, the Paraclete has a dual role: to preserve the past without corrupting it, for he receives everything from Jesus and gives no new revelation, but at the same time to give a living teaching that is not content to repeat a tradition of the past. If the presbyter-bishops of the Pastoral Epistles were to teach by holding fast to what they had been taught (Titus 1:9), the Paraclete not only declares what he has received from Jesus (Jn 16:14), but through this means he also declares things to come (Jn 16:13). If we look for an example of what the old and the new mean in the teaching role attributed to the Paraclete, we can turn to the fourth Gospel itself. This constitutes the testimony given by the Paraclete through the beloved disciple and evangelist. It is a gospel, like the other gospels, centered on the public activity of Jesus leading to his death and resurrection; but it presents this story in a truly innovative way, so that every page is transformed by the unique perception of Johannine Christology.

C. The strengths and weaknesses of this ecclesiology

1. The strengths

a. This ecclesiology provides assurance that the Christological perception of the community is correct.

Since the Paraclete came from the Father (Jn 15:26), was sent by Jesus (Jn 16:7), and spoke only what he had heard from Jesus (Jn 16:13), the Johannine community that bears witness through him (Jn 15:27) feels unshakable in its Christology. Thus, the death of the great figures of the first generation who had seen Jesus on earth or resurrected, whether they were apostles or not, cannot weaken the confidence of Johannine Christians in the accuracy of their current perceptions. The figures of this first generation bore significant witness, but only because they possessed the Paraclete; and this same Paraclete remains in the hearts of the second and third generations of Johannine Christians.

b. This ecclesiology promotes egalitarianism in the community.

The idea that God would be worshiped neither in Jerusalem nor on the Samaritan mountain, but in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:21-23) means that there are no second-class Christians in **geographical** terms. God is Spirit (Jn

4:24), and the Spirit of truth dwells in every Christian, everywhere. The idea that the Paraclete is given to everyone who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments, and that he remains with them forever (Jn 14:15-16), means that there are no second-class Christians in terms of **chronology**. Certainly, those who saw Jesus and believed were privileged, but blessed are those who have not seen Jesus and yet believe (Jn 20:29). Jesus prays for those who believed during his ministry (Jn 17:8-9), but he also prays for future generations who will believe because of their word (Jn 17:20). Thus, Johannine ecclesiology is devoid of any barriers of status, space, or time that might distance some from Jesus more than others.

## 2. The weaknesses

It does not take much imagination to guess the weaknesses of this ecclesiology, for one need only observe what happened historically to the Johannine community.

Let us first consider the data from the Johannine letters. Written less than ten years after the fourth gospel, the Johannine epistles reflect a surprising change in the community's situation. There is a split within this community, a split so serious that it is described in apocalyptic terms: the author speaks of antichrists, of the coming of the last hour, of people who have left the community (1 Jn 2:18-19). The author of the epistle writes with such urgency because the secessionists are engaged in ongoing missionary activity that undermines the adherence of his disciples; he hopes, through his writings, to stem their success, for the whole world is listening to them (1 Jn 4:5). The issue reaches its climax in 2 John, which is a warning addressed to a peripheral community that has not yet been affected by the secession: the author therefore begs the Christians there not even to let these people enter the door of the house church (2 John 10).

What can we reconstruct of the secessionists' thinking? They are progressive innovators (2 Jn 9) in the eyes of an author who considers himself conservative, sticking to what has been taught from the beginning (1 Jn 3:11a). Christologically, the secessionists are accused of neglecting the "flesh" or humanity of Jesus (1 Jn 4:2; 2 Jn 7). This probably means that they did not attach salvific importance to the whole of Jesus' life, including his death, because it was the simple fact of the pre-existent Word entering the world as light that gave eternal life to those who believe (Jn 3:16-17). Ethically, the Secessionists considered that the only sin was to refuse to believe in Jesus. Consequently, without encouraging licentiousness, the secessionists would have proclaimed that there is no salvific value in doing good deeds or obeying the commandments, and that there is no sin as long as one believes (1 Jn 1:8, 10). Against such Christological and ethical opinions, the author would assert that from the beginning it was known that salvation came not only from the incarnation of the Word, but also from the death of Jesus as an essential component. Jesus came "not only in water, but in water and blood" (1 Jn 5:6). God's supreme love was to send his Son into the world, certainly, but as an atonement for our sins (1 Jn 4:9-10); and this atonement was accomplished by the blood of Jesus, which cleanses us from our sins (1 Jn 1:7). The way Jesus "walked" on earth was very important, not only from a Christological point of view, but also from an ethical point of view, because we must walk as he walked (1 Jn 1:7), purify ourselves as he was pure (1 Jn 3:3), avoid sin as he was sinless (1 Jn 3:5-6), and act justly as he was just (1 Jn 3:7). The author of the epistle does not deny that it is through faith and baptism that we receive eternal life from God, but there is still a future development. "Yes, beloved, we are now children of God, but what we will be has not yet been revealed" (1 Jn 3:2). This revelation will come at the Last Judgment, before which we must be careful not to be ashamed of what we have done (1 Jn 2:28-3:2).

All this raises the question: how could the community situation have evolved to the point of such a schism? It is highly likely that all this stems from a divergent interpretation of the Gospel according to John. And this is the weakness of Johannine ecclesiology. In fact, it highlights four weaknesses inherent in the Johannine tradition, because this tradition was shaped by controversy and claimed unquestionable guidance from the Paraclete.

### a. The unilateral nature of a theology shaped by controversy

This controversy ultimately led to exaggeration and division. Emphasizing what "the Jews" and other Christians denied—the pre-existing divinity of Jesus—was appropriate in a setting where the fourth gospel was read by Johannine Christians who took for granted that Jesus was human, that while the incarnation had brought light into the world, that light could only be fully perceived after death and resurrection, and that belief in Jesus necessarily implied a continuing commitment to live in a manner worthy of that belief. The emphasis on belief or unbelief as judgment made sense as long as it was proclaimed in a context where Jesus' ultimate return as judge was simply taken for granted, a return that would reveal the blindness of those who claimed to be believers. But the problem arises when what is passed on to the next generation is only that which has been the subject of struggle. From then on, the one-sided nature of the fourth gospel could become, and did become, a stumbling block for those who were unaware of the presuppositions.

The reason the author of the epistle has to go back to "the beginning" to refute the secessionists is that there is dangerously little in the fourth gospel itself to refute them. They read that during his public ministry, Jesus offered eternal life to those who believed that he was the light that had come into the world, sent by the Father. How could readers without traditional training know that this eternal life only became possible after Jesus died for our sins? Of course, the fourth gospel contains a statement about "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and there are references to Jesus dying as a Passover lamb, which implies that his very coming into the world took away the sin of the world. " But without a good knowledge of earlier tradition, these allusions were too subtle for the new generation. Moreover, since Christians had been expelled from the

synagogue, this generation was no longer in touch with the moral meaning of Judaism, according to which God must be served by living according to the commandments of his covenant.

The fourth gospel produced by the controversy is like a diamond that has been made to shine by the cuts of the cutter, but only the polished face attracts the eye. The controversy made this gospel exciting and attractive, but uneven. In contrast, Luke/Acts is a less exciting work theologically, but more balanced. Therefore, one cannot accept the Johannine gospel without being aware of its polemical context and the limitations of its one-sided character.

Thus, if the members of the Johannine community were sufficiently convinced of the pre-existing divinity of Jesus to be expelled from the synagogue on charges of worshipping another God, and if this expulsion made them more categorical, so that in their description of Jesus they avoided human traits that could provide the synagogue with arguments against them, it was inevitable that some members would go further by completely minimizing humanity, causing horror among those who thought this went too far. It had taken enormous courage to separate from the synagogue; it would take less for a new split to occur within the group itself.

For the author of the Johannine epistles, the secessionists left the community by going too far in their evolution. We can be sure that, for the secessionists, the author of the letters and his supporters were in the wrong, because they did not see the potential of the community's ideas and were trying to freeze them at a particular stage. The author claimed that he was sticking to the tradition as it had been understood from the beginning; the secessionists probably claimed that they embodied the momentum that had given birth to the tradition.

b. The expulsion from the synagogue led to a loss of heritage.

The controversy between Johannine Christians and Jews, followed by their expulsion from the synagogue, led to a loss of heritage. It is tragic that, within a group expelled after a controversial confrontation, a schism often occurs when some push for exaggeration. Perhaps even more tragic is that the expulsion itself tends to create such a wide gap with the original group that much of the heritage that had never been disputed is now lost. Despite the differences caused by their insistence on the pre-existent divinity of Jesus, the Johannine Christian community had more in common religiously with the synagogue Jews who had expelled them than with the pagan religious world in which they lived. They shared with the Jews of the synagogue a belief in one God, the Scriptures, liturgical feasts, the fundamental ethics of the Law, etc. Yet shortly after the expulsion, we read in the fourth Gospel, in reference to the Jews, the expression "their law" (Jn 15:25), as if the law of the Old Testament (in fact, in this case, the Psalms) did not also belong to Christians. The great feasts of Passover and Tabernacles are in John feasts "of the Jews" and foreign to Christians. There is a division between the disciples of Moses and the disciples of Jesus, as if the disciples of Jesus were not also disciples of Moses. In other words, the great common heritage disappears from view as the points of division become more pronounced.

The gap will tend to widen if there is an internal split among those who have been expelled, with some taking to extremes the theological vision of the community that caused the problem in the first place. A final stage then occurs when the parent group and those who were expelled, who once had so much in common, become two different religions. Ironically, they may then feel awkward, defensive, or sensitive about the commonalities that remain. For example, in the middle of the 2nd century, the great common heritage that remained between Jews and Christians was the Old Testament; but they could not agree on the interpretation of the Old Testament and accused each other of distorting or falsifying it!

We can see, then, that the more brilliant the insight, the more likely it is that other aspects of the truth will be relegated to the background, often neglected and forgotten. A balanced religious group, sufficiently confident in its great ideas, is not afraid to look back peacefully in order to recover what has been lost as a result of its strong emphasis on those ideas. But when controversy has been the catalyst that gave rise to a community's identity-forming ideas, the possibility of looking back to recover some of the lost heritage is greatly reduced. In such a situation, the community's own identity has been reinforced by propaganda against the lost values, as if they were worthless. In the fourth gospel, Jesus is presented as speaking about the main Jewish festivals, replacing their meaning with statements about his own gifts. How, then, can members of the community shaped by this gospel question the lost liturgical values when they have been expelled from the synagogue?

Attempting to recover some of these losses while continuing to advance what had been gained is what the author of the Johannine epistles attempted to do in the aftermath of the brilliant period of the fourth gospel in the history of the Johannine community. At no point does he deny the ideas of the fourth gospel, but he seeks to place them in the context of assumptions that the evangelist probably took for granted but never mentioned or emphasized. Through his efforts, the author of the epistles proved to the theologians of the later Church that the fourth Gospel (which, in the 2nd century, was the focus of Gnostic commentaries) was perfectly capable of serving orthodox Christianity.

c. Love becomes confined to "brothers" and hostility is felt towards strangers.

The fourth Gospel describes Jesus' adversaries in extremely harsh terms, particularly "the Jews." The devil is their father, a murderer from the beginning; he is a liar, and therefore they refuse to believe the truth (Jn 8:43-46, 55). They prefer darkness to light because their deeds are evil (Jn 3:19-21; 12:35); indeed, God has blinded

their eyes (Jn 12:40). When the focus of John's conflict shifted from external unbelievers to internal schism, as evidenced in the Epistles, it is interesting to note that the same opprobrium is applied to the secessionists. They are like Cain, who belonged to the Evil One and killed his brother (1 Jn 3:12); they are the children of the devil who has been a sinner from the beginning (1 Jn 3:8-10). They are liars (1 Jn 2:22) and they have a spirit of deception opposed to the Spirit of truth (1 Jn 4:1-6). Darkness has blinded their eyes (1 Jn 2:11).

At first glance, it is difficult to reconcile this apparent hatred with the observance of Jesus' commandment in the fourth Gospel: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34; 15:12,17). But in reality, this commandment concerns only mutual love or love of one's brother. There is no requirement to love one's neighbor as in the synoptic tradition (Mt 5:43; Lk 10:27), where the context clearly indicates that one's neighbor includes enemies and strangers (Mt 5:44; Lk 10:29-37). It can therefore be said that the Johannine tradition does not emphasize love for strangers; John's ideal is love for the children of God who have come into being through faith in Jesus. If, in the Epistles, this love does not seem to extend to dissenters, it is because they have left and are no longer members of the community or children of God.

In other words, closeness to Jesus, which is the great strength of the ecclesiology of the fourth Gospel, tended to create a closed group for which most others constituted an evil outside world. In the fourth Gospel, "the Jews" are the first example of the world that refuses to believe in Jesus (Jn 16:8-9); in the Epistles, the secessionists belong to the world (1 Jn 4:5). The coming of Jesus into the world produced a division between those who come to the light because they act in truth and those who prefer darkness to light because their works are evil (Jn 3:19-21). Subsequently, the evangelist equates the world and darkness with the kingdom of Satan, who is the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). This is why Jesus does not pray for the world (Jn 17:9) and his disciples, although they are in the world, are not of it (Jn 17:14-18). This attitude is found in the Epistles, where the author speaks of a "sin that leads to death," a reference to the secessionists who left the community: "I am not saying that we should pray for that" (1 Jn 5:16-17).

Such a narrow conception of Christian love does not do justice to Jesus, who truly cared for strangers, that is, sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. Is it a coincidence that such openness is not described in the fourth Gospel? On the contrary, the Last Supper begins with the words: "Having loved his own... he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). The fourth Gospel was written by a spokesman for a group persecuted by strangers, and today it will be increasingly appealing to those whose main concern is their own community. In short, we must highlight the serious problem posed by the Johannine writings, which, without ever saying "hate the world," say "do not love the world" (1 Jn 2:15).

d. The uncontrollable division when everyone calls upon the Paraclete

Perhaps the most serious weakness in Johannine ecclesiology, and the most apparent in the Johannine epistles, concerns the role of the Paraclete. The idea that there is a divine teacher living in the heart of every believer—a teacher who is the permanent presence of Jesus, preserving what he taught but reinterpreting it for each generation—is certainly one of the greatest contributions made to Christianity by the fourth Gospel. But the Jesus who sends the Paraclete never tells his disciples what will happen when believers who possess the Paraclete disagree with one another. The Johannine epistles tell us what frequently happens: they break communion with one another. If the Spirit is the highest and only authority, and if each side appeals to him to support its position, it is almost impossible to make concessions and find compromises.

In the conflictual situation encountered in the Johannine epistles, the author appeals to tradition as it was "from the beginning" to support part of his interpretation. But it is very clear that he is counting on the fact that his readers have been anointed with the Spirit and can therefore recognize the truth that comes from him when they hear it. If the author of the Johannine epistles were a presbyter-bishop according to the model of the pastoral epistles, he could silence his opponents by his own authority (Titus 1:11). One of his tasks as an appointed teacher would have been to discern sound doctrine (Titus 2:1). But the author of the Johannine epistles is bound by the Johannine tradition that the Paraclete is the one who guides people into all truth (Jn 16:13). Therefore, even in the midst of this great schism, he must write: "The anointing you received [...] remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you" (1 Jn 2:27).

However noble it may be, his principle did not work and will not work. The secessionists who had been members of the Johannine community had been anointed with the Paraclete Spirit, and this anointing, which is supposed to be "true and without falsehood" (1 Jn 2:27), did not prevent them from becoming liars. Therefore, the author of the Johannine epistles addresses this issue by emphasizing that there is a spirit of deception as well as a spirit of truth, and that spirits must be tested (1 Jn 4:1-6). The test he proposes is that those who listen to him have the spirit of truth, while those who disagree with him have the spirit of deception. It is easy to imagine that the secessionists would advocate the opposite: if you agree with us, you have the Spirit of truth. And in fact, the author seems to admit that the secessionists prevail numerically in this fierce struggle, for "the world listens to them" (1 Jn 4:5).

As we can see, there is no way to control such a division in a community guided by the Paraclete. The Johannine community discovered this, for it divided and ceased to exist. Based on evidence from the 2nd century, the larger group of Johannine Christians, who were of a secessionist tendency, turned to Gnosticism, taking with them the fourth gospel. Another group reconciled with the main body of Christians, whom Ignatius calls "the

Catholic Church” (Smyrnaeans 8:2)—a Church that included teachers such as presbyter-bishops and, ultimately, the sole bishops of each region. The epilogue of the fourth gospel, which may represent the last stage of the Johannine writings that have come down to us, recognizes the authority of a human shepherd (Jn 21:15-17), even if it frames this authority with Johannine guarantees. Thus, a branch of the Johannine community had to familiarize itself with the ecclesiology of the pastoral epistles, however rigid and formal it may be, in order to integrate into a non-Gnostic Christianity. Perhaps the most serious weakness in Johannine ecclesiology, and the most apparent in the Johannine epistles, concerns the role of the Paraclete. The idea that there is a divine teacher living in the heart of every believer—a teacher who is the permanent presence of Jesus, preserving what he taught but reinterpreting it for each generation—is certainly one of the greatest contributions made to Christianity by the fourth Gospel. But the Jesus who sends the Paraclete never tells his disciples what will happen when believers who possess the Paraclete disagree with one another. The Johannine epistles tell us what frequently happens: they break communion with one another. If the Spirit is the highest and only authority, and if each side appeals to him to support its position, it is almost impossible to make concessions and find compromises.

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## Chapter 8: The Heritage of Jewish/Gentile Christianity in Matthew: *Authority That Does Not Stifle Jesus*, p. 124-145

We must recognize that Matthew has an undeniable ecclesiological priority. It is the only Gospel that uses the word “Church.” Of all the Gospels, it is the one that best responded to the multiple needs of the later Church, the one most quoted by the Church Fathers, the one most used in the liturgy, and the one most useful for catechetical purposes. Even though in biblical research over the last two centuries, Mark has attracted attention as the oldest gospel, for a millennium and three quarters, Mark was practically eclipsed by Matthew and had no influence on the life of the Church. Luke may be a more serious rival to Matthew in the affection of Christians, but he is not really comparable in terms of the fundamentals: whether we think of the Lord’s Prayer, the Beatitudes, or the Sermon on the Mount, it is Matthew’s version that is best known. The evangelist we call Matthew had a brilliant talent for collecting traditions and organizing his material, which made his Gospel the best guide for practical Christian living.

### A. The work of Matthew

When it comes to detecting life in the last third of the first century (the sub-apostolic period), Matthew is almost as revealing as John, perhaps because these two gospels were written in highly conflictual situations. Luke wrote a separate Acts of the Apostles to recount what happened to Jesus’ disciples after the resurrection, and as a result, Luke’s gospel itself is not particularly revealing about the life of the Church. For Matthew, however, there is no period of the Church separate from the period of Jesus. Both Matthew and John integrated their understanding of the post-resurrection era into the account of Jesus’ public ministry. In Matthew, for example, those who are presented as hostile

are a mixture of Jesus' adversaries during his lifetime and the adversaries encountered by Matthew's community in post-70 Judaism, when the Pharisaic rabbinic establishment at Jamnia had become a dominant authority and the Sadducee priests, who had played an important role in Jesus' death, were gradually disappearing from history. The deep memory that during his lifetime Jesus was concerned only with Israel and not with the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5-6) is combined with a gradually acquired understanding that the apostolate entrusted by the risen Jesus to his disciples included all nations (Matthew 28:19). The Twelve are the spokesmen for a misunderstanding of Jesus, minimizing his sufferings—a relevant presentation of Jesus' ministry that Matthew drew from Mark—but also the spokesmen for a deep faith in Jesus as the Son of God, derived from divine revelation after the resurrection (Mt 14:32-33, compared to Mk 6:51-52; Mt 16:15-23, compared to Mk 8:29-33).

Who is Matthew? He was probably a former scribe, i.e., a Jew who became a Christian. This is reflected in his meticulous technique of commenting on the childhood narratives and certain parts of the ministry with Old Testament quotations considered to be fulfilled (cf. Mt 4:12-17 with Mk 1:14-15); he probably benefited from the work done by a school where different versions of the Scriptures were available. The esteem for a perceptive scribe in Matthew 13:52 is probably autobiographical: "Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." Matthew's harsh treatment of the scribes and Pharisees who opposed Jesus betrays his frustration with their blindness, which prevented them from seeing, as the evangelist saw, that Jesus did not contradict their best religious values, but actually preserved them. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Mt 5:17). The Pharisees began as a liberal movement which, by appealing to oral tradition, sought to actualize the real spirit of the written law of Moses. The problem in Matthew's eyes was that this oral interpretation had become as rigid as the written tradition and was sometimes counterproductive. The Jesus who repeatedly says, "You have heard that it was said, but I say to you" (Mt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) thus preserves the purpose of the Law by ensuring that a past adaptation of God's will is not considered exhaustive of that will. Matthew's Jesus is more demanding of people with regard to the Law than the legalists who set strict limits on what God wants. "And I say to you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

## B. The Church of Matthew

### 1. A Christianity faithful to Judaism

Matthew probably wrote his gospel in Antioch, the place where Paul and Peter had a conflict over the Eucharistic table: while Peter initially agreed to share meals with Christians of pagan origin, he distanced himself from Paul's position under pressure from James' supporters. Paul, feeling too isolated to remain in Antioch, is said to have left for Asia Minor and Greece, where he could better defend his position. The Gospel of Matthew represents a middle ground adopted in Antioch to reconcile the more reasonable supporters of James and Paul: the law is binding, but only in its radical reinterpretation by Jesus.

The Matthew Church appears to have been an ethnically mixed community. The frequent mention of scribes and Pharisees, the likelihood that the author was a scribe, the emphasis on how Jesus' ethical teaching can be linked to the Law—these factors, among others, suggest that the Matthew tradition was forged in Jewish Christianity. Indeed, one of the reasons Antioch is proposed as a likely candidate for the location is the early history of Christian conversions among the Greek-speaking Jews who lived there. However, the openness of Matthew's Christianity to pagans is also evident in the Gospel. The two commands given to the disciples, "Do not go to the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:5) and "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), probably represent the history of Matthew's community: it was born out of a mission to the Jews and then opened up to the Gentiles.

Matthew's community would have been closer to a form of Hebrew Christianity associated in Acts with the Twelve and in particular with Peter—a Christianity faithful to the Temple and to Judaism, but learning to its great surprise that pagans could receive Christ and should be accepted. As for loyalty to Jewish worship, Matthew's community seems to observe the Sabbath (Mt 24:20), unlike the Johannine community, for whom the Sabbath is a feast foreign to the Jews (Jn 5:1, 9). Jerusalem remains "the holy city" (Mt 27:53), even though its sacred house (the Temple) is abandoned and desolate (Mt 23:38). Here again, this attitude differs from that of the Hellenist Stephen, for whom God does not dwell in the "house" of Jerusalem (Acts 7:48-49), and from that of Jn 4:21, where the time is near when the Father will no longer be worshipped in Jerusalem.

### 2. A Christianity that opens itself with amazement to those coming from paganism

The astonishment of the conservative Jewish Christians in Matthew's community at the arrival of pagan converts perhaps echoes Jesus' reaction to the Roman centurion in Capernaum: "Even in Israel I have not found such faith. Many will come from the east and the west and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 8:10-11). The massive arrival of pagans must have caused pain, because it was linked, temporally and psychologically, to the fact that Jews were no longer coming to Jesus in large numbers. And so the passage continues: "But the sons of the kingdom [that is, the Israelites who should have inherited] will be thrown into outer darkness" (Mt 8:12). The parable of the vineyard leased to vine-growers who do not bear fruit was borrowed by Matthew from Mk 12:1-11, but a "punch-line" was added (Mt 21:43) that betrays the sad realization reached by the Jewish Christian author of the first Gospel. The chief priests, the elders of the people, and the Pharisees are told: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce its fruit."

When Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee rather than Judea, Matthew 4:12-17 sees this as the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1-2: "Galilee of the nations, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." When Jesus' healing on the Sabbath provokes a plot by the Pharisees to destroy him, forcing him to withdraw from the synagogue (Matthew 12:9-21), Isaiah 41:1-4 is fulfilled: "I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations... and in his name the nations will hope." The Jewish Christians of Matthew's community must learn to live in harmony with Christians of pagan origin, without envy. Indeed, this mixed community is called "the Church," for the significant name by which Christian disciples will be known is foretold by Matthew's Jesus. This is a designation from the Old Testament: Deut 23:1 (Septuagint), when describing those who must be excluded from the community of Israel in order to ensure its purity, calls this community "the church of the Lord." By using the expression "my Church" (Matthew 16:18) to refer to a mixed group, Matthew indicates his conviction that, according to Jesus' criteria, pagans do not harm the purity of the true Israel. Once again, Jesus becomes the ultimate interpreter of God's will.

Matthew's account of Jesus' childhood allows him to distinguish three groups in relation to Jesus. First, there are the "righteous" Jewish Christians who respect the law and who, by accepting Jesus, made possible the survival and spread of the good news. This group is represented by Joseph, who receives the revelation that the child to be born of Mary by the Spirit is Emmanuel, "God with us." The second group consists of pagan converts represented by the pagan magi who spontaneously come to seek Jesus; nevertheless, they can only succeed if the Jewish Scriptures are interpreted for them (2:1-5). Unfortunately, there is a third group: the Jewish king, the chief priests, and the scribes of the people. They have a revelation in and through the Scriptures that they are able to interpret as referring to the Messiah; but instead of coming to worship as the pagan magi did, they seek to kill Jesus (Matthew 2:3-5, 20). In this last group, Matthew sees the Pharisee rabbis of his day, from whom all hope of the kingdom is thus withdrawn.

### 3. Christianity in a conflict-ridden environment

Slander and persecution are an integral part of Christian life (Mt 5:10-11; 10:22), coming both from synagogues and Jewish sources (Mt 10:17, 23) and from pagan authorities (Mt 10:18; 24:9). The sad result is that some Christians abandon Jesus (Mt 13:21; 24:10). Even though there are a number who have special charisms, such as prophets, wise men, scribes (Mt 23:34), the ability to heal and perform exorcisms (Mt 10:8), or even faith that can move mountains (Mt 17:20), Matthew must intervene so that they are welcomed (Mt 10:41), or must denounce false prophets and evil miracle workers (Mt 7:22-23; 24:5, 11).

Another potential source of conflict lies in the fact that there were rich people among the poor in Matthew's community. While Luke speaks of small sums of money and copper coins, Matthew, in his version of the tradition, inflates these amounts to large sums and adds gold and silver. He does not hesitate to point out that Joseph of Arimathea, who did Christ a service after his death, was a rich man (Mt 27:57). When it comes to wealth, Matthew's pastoral attitude is much more nuanced than that of Luke, who curses the rich (Lk 6:20-25), condemns them to Hades (Lk 16:19-25), and denounces the accumulation of goods (Lk 12:13-21). Even though he recognizes that the pleasure of riches can stifle the fruitfulness of God's word (Mt 13:22) and that the rich will find it difficult to enter the kingdom (Mt 19:23), there is nevertheless a chance for the rich, for if they are not poor in reality, they can be poor in spirit, and if they do not physically suffer from hunger, they can hunger and thirst for righteousness, and thus be included in Jesus' beatitude (Mt 5:3, 6)—a beatitude for which, in Matthew, there is no corresponding curse against wealth and abundance.

As in many first-century communities, there are false prophets and charismatics who behave badly. How should this situation be handled? Matthew's pastoral approach is nuanced, as shown in the parable of the weeds growing among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43). Matthew's Jesus warns that purging troublemakers could harm good members, and that the situation must therefore be tolerated until divine judgment is rendered. Sects can boast of a purism that drives out all those who do not meet an ideal, but a Church must show patience and mercy.

Another potential source of conflict concerns the payment of the tax imposed on Jews for the support of the Temple or the payment of the poll tax imposed by the Romans on Jews (*fiscus judaicus*). Matthew's nuanced response is provided by the story of the coin in the mouth of the fish (Mt 17:24-27). Remember that the question is quite understandable among the Jewish Christians of Matthew's church: are they still Jews, so that the obligations imposed on Jews apply to them? Matthew clarifies the principle, but shows pastoral sensitivity regarding when the application of a principle is not worth defending at all costs; hence the answer put into Jesus' mouth: the disciples are in fact exempt from this tax, but in order not to cause offense, the tax will be paid.

### 4. A Christianity with a strong sense of organization and authority

While Matthew rejects Pharisaic legalism, he refuses to dispense with the Law. For him, Jesus' non-legalism is faithful to the law. Thus, he puts these words in Jesus' mouth: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, so practice and observe everything they tell you, but do not do what they do." (Mt 23:1-2). The idea of an authoritative judgment seat is not foreign to Matthew's Christianity, for elsewhere we hear that the Twelve who followed Jesus will sit on twelve thrones to judge the tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). Even if this is only to take place "in the new world," rabbinic models of authority are not far from Matthew's mind and seem tolerable as long as it is recognized that authority ultimately comes from Jesus.

Thus Peter and the disciples receive the power to bind and loose, a power clearly formulated in rabbinic terms. The image of the keys of the kingdom given to Peter (Mt 16:19) has its origin in Isa 22:22, where it expresses the power

of the prime minister of the Davidic kingdom who controls access to the king. Once again, all these examples illustrate the power given by Jesus, but they clearly demonstrate that Matthew's Church has a keen sense of organization and authority. It is precisely this fact that explains why Mt 23:8-11 takes care to prohibit the use of rabbinical titles (Rabbi, Father, Master). With so many characteristics of Jewish authority taken up by Matthew's Church from the synagogue and/or the school of Jamnia as part of the blending of the new and the old, the wise Christian scribe who writes the Gospel must take precautions to ensure that the spirit of the Pharisees does not enter the Church.

#### C. The strengths and weaknesses of this Church

##### 1. The strengths

- a. First, Matthew instills a great respect for the Law and for authority. The sentiments expressed in Matthew 9:8 could well describe the faithful members of Matthew's community: "They glorified God, who had given such authority to men."
- b. Second, the evangelist shows remarkable nuance in his treatment of pastoral issues, thus ensuring that he preserves Jesus' attitudes in the interpretation of the Law and the exercise of authority. The voice of Jesus must be heard when interpreting the law: "You have heard it said" (which would be equivalent to the law), but also "I tell you" (which keeps alive a vibrant demand, preventing the past law from absolutizing God's will). The evangelist insists that all members of the Church derive their power from Jesus and must exercise it according to his standards.
- c. For Matthew, Jesus promised his continued presence: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Jesus' teaching, illustrated in the five great sermons of the first Gospel, is the means by which Jesus remains present to a community that is willing to live according to his commandments. For Matthew, this teaching is part of what he calls "the gospel of the kingdom," because for him the gospel is not reduced to the simple proclamation of justification in Jesus as in Paul, or to the narrative of Jesus' life as in Mark; it consists largely of the teaching through which Jesus made the reign of God present in people's lives. Matthew is part of the late first-century trend of identifying the Church with the kingdom, and the Church-kingdom must be a place where Jesus' teaching is put into practice.

##### 2. The weaknesses

- a. A great respect for the Law and for authority can lead to rigid morality, hence the dangers of legalism, authoritarianism, and a form of clericalism.
- b. There is the danger of abuse of power. Left to themselves, authority figures inevitably begin to act like the scribes and Pharisees. Through Jesus' attacks on the Jewish authorities, Matthew corrects emerging attitudes within the Church.
- c. The danger that the Church will become a self-sufficient entity ruling (in the name of Christ, of course) by its own authority, its own teaching, and its own commandments. To the extent that the Church is an institution or society with laws and authority, it will tend to be influenced by sociological principles and to conform to the societies of the surrounding culture—in Matthew's case, to conform to the synagogue and Pharisaic rabbinic structures.

#### D. Excursus on Matthew 18

This chapter has been called Jesus' discourse on the order and life of the Church. It is perhaps the most profound practical treatment of the Church in the New Testament and illustrates Matthew's nuance in anticipating the dangers facing the Church precisely because it is structured and has authority. The discourse is addressed by Jesus to the "disciples," and for Matthew, it is addressed to those who act with authority in the Church and have pastoral responsibility.

##### 1. Mt 18:1-4: The greatest in the Kingdom

The chapter begins with a question asked by the disciples: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Since Matthew tends to locate and reify the "kingdom" and identifies the Church on earth as the kingdom of the Son of Man, this chapter deals with the practice of the Church on earth, and therefore the question asked concerns primacy in the Church. The desire for primacy will always manifest itself, whether the authority of the Church is exercised through charisms or functions. Sociology does not allow an organized society, religious or otherwise, to avoid the question of who holds the greatest authority. In practical business language, the first question that arises when trying to understand a large company is, "Who holds the power here?"

According to the norms of other societies, the greatest authority or power makes someone the most important figure in the group. Matthew would argue that such a norm cannot be accepted in the Church, where the norms of Jesus must prevail. The answer to the question of who is greatest in the kingdom is given through the example of a little child. Remember that children were considered at that time to be defenseless and dependent beings, without

any power. In the kingdom of heaven, God holds supreme power or authority; closeness to God and therefore greatness in the kingdom depend on the degree to which people surrender themselves to God, placing him first in their lives. The value system of the kingdoms of this world is reversed in relation to the kingdom of heaven, for in Jesus' eyes it is not power, but the absence of it that can make a person great. The first question for a Church that wants to survive in the world as a society of Jesus is how to avoid accepting the inverted values of the surrounding societies. In his treatment of the life of the Church, Matthew ensures that the disciples bring this question to the forefront with their initial question, so that from the beginning of the discourse, the otherness of Jesus' teaching is clear.

2. Mt 18:5-9: the scandal

The following section deals with scandal. All disciples, even those in positions of authority, were invited to have the vision of children; but the warning against scandalizing "one of these little ones" shows a particular sensitivity toward the most vulnerable members of the community. The language of this passage is too traditional (see Mt 5:29-30) for us to know whether serious scandals actually occurred in the history of the Matthew community, especially scandals caused by those who were supposed to lead the Church. When this happened in history, those who were disappointed by the scandal were sometimes lost to the Church permanently; this is why Matthew, out of foresight if not hindsight, has good reason to introduce Jesus' stern warnings on this subject.

3. Mt 18:10-14: The sheep that went astray

The section begins with a warning not to despise the little ones, a warning that contrasts with 2 Tim 3:6-7, which disparages weak women considered incapable of attaining knowledge of the truth. It continues with a parabolic lesson on searching for the lost sheep. At that time, the shepherd was often used as a symbol to designate the figure with pastoral responsibility, so the question concerns the pastoral obligation towards a stray member of the community. Once again, Matthew shows that he understands the likely direction that behavior will take in an organized society. Indeed, most of the time, the "Caiaphas principle" is applied (see Jn 11:49-50), whereby it is better to let one person perish than to see the whole institution destroyed. But Matthew insists that his community must have a different set of values, namely the values of Jesus who came to save lost sinners and whose example as a shepherd must be the model for the shepherds of the Church. Yet in reality, no large Christian church and virtually no parish operates or can operate according to the principles of Matthew's parable. The 99% of members who have not gone astray would revolt if they were neglected in favor of the 1% who have gone astray and would accuse those in charge of not having a pastoral attitude, as ironic as that may seem.

Yet Matthew cannot be considered a parabolic exaggeration. There is an eschatological requirement similar to that of not resisting evil, turning the other cheek when struck, letting those who take your coat also take your cloak (Matthew 5:39-40), to take nothing with you to proclaim the Gospel (Mt 10:9-10), to sell everything you have to follow Jesus (Mt 19:21), to pay the hourly worker as much as the full-time worker (Mt 20:1-15). All of this illustrates God's attitudes; and when they are put into practice, at that moment and in that place, the kingdom of God becomes a reality. If they are ever put into practice universally, "this good news of the kingdom will have been preached throughout the world, to serve as a testimony to all nations."

4. Matthew 18:15-20: Brotherly correction

The treatment of those who stray is also the theme of this section. While echoing existing disciplinary practices, this section illustrates Matthew's preference for love over authority in relationships with other Christians. Once again, Matthew shows his insight into the workings of most societies, whether secular or religious. The tendency is not to address the person causing the problem directly, but to go over their head and address someone who has the power to correct them. This avoids confrontation and is more effective. In verse 18, Matthew shows that he is very aware that there is authority in the Church; but in itself, this authority is neither Christian nor non-Christian. This quality comes not only from the way authority is exercised, but also from the reluctance to appeal to it.

Although verses 19-20 (praying together) were originally independent, by placing them where he did, Matthew explains why the entire church community is the court of last resort that can make the decision to quarantine or excommunicate the recalcitrant sinner. The members of the community gather in prayer in the name of Jesus, because the issue is clearly religious and not simply administrative; and in this gathering, the continuing presence of Jesus is activated (Mt 28:20; 18:20). The power to bind and loose must not be exercised independently of Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Mt 28:18). Bureaucratic procedures are inevitable sociological developments, but Matthew's vision does nothing to encourage them.

When the recalcitrant "brother" is quarantined or expelled in verse 17, the decision is "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"—a judicial sentence reflecting Jewish roots where Gentiles are foreigners with whom one should have as little contact as possible, and tax collectors are public sinners outside the law. But for Matthew's community, composed of Christians of Jewish and pagan origin, and whose gospel ends with the instruction to go to the pagans and teach them (Mt 28:19), what does this mean? Is the excommunicated person totally rejected? It is likely that the community is far from finished with the brothers or sisters against whom it had to appeal to authority. This is confirmed by the following section.

5. Mt 18:21-35: Forgiveness

Peter is once again an authority figure receiving instructions from Jesus on how he should act. He shows himself to be very generous, because forgiving someone seven times would exceed normal charity. Today, most of us operate according to the rules of baseball: three strikes and you're out! Peter is quite noble in extending the rules to seven strikes.

Jesus responds to his gracious proposal in an incredible way: seventy times seven times, or an infinite number of times! Doesn't this response imply that forgiveness must relentlessly pursue the repudiated brother of Matthew 18:17? Jesus' insistence on forgiveness is illustrated by a striking parable about a servant who received totally gracious forgiveness for an immense debt but refused to forgive a minor debt to another servant. The Matthew who referred to authority in the Church now attempts to prevent its abuse. Experience shows that organized societies are more inclined to abuse their authority than to relinquish it. The command given in Chapter 18 proclaims that the power to forgive indefinitely is a greater Christian good than the power to excommunicate. Matthew's pastoral judgment on those in the Church who refuse forgiveness is the very harsh conclusion of the parable. In their case, Matthew's Jesus defined the unforgivable sin: it is not to forgive.

In order to survive in the world after the death of the apostles, the Church had to be a society existing among other societies. A Church that lives and acts according to the spirit of Matthew 18 will be a society distinct from others, a society where what counts as wisdom in other societies has not been able to stifle the voice of Jesus, who came to challenge much of the religious wisdom of his time. The great anomaly of Christianity is that it is only through an institution that the message of a non-institutional Jesus can be preserved. Matthew does much to ensure that, in this preservation, the message will remain alive and not simply be commemorated.

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### Conclusion, p. 146-150

In this book, different models of the Church in the New Testament have been presented, because none of the biblical authors cited intended to give a comprehensive picture of what the Church should be. We examined a number of New Testament books in search of an explicit or implicit answer to a specific question: what were Christians in the sub-apostolic period (the last third of the first century) taught in order to enable their respective churches to survive the death of the authoritative apostolic generation? These works contained no evidence that a coherent or uniform ecclesiology had emerged. On the contrary, the writings addressed to different communities in the New Testament emphasized very diverse aspects. Although each emphasis could be effective in particular circumstances, each had glaring shortcomings that would be dangerous if that emphasis were isolated and considered sufficient for all times. Taken collectively, however, these emphases constitute a remarkable lesson in early idealism regarding Christian community life.

Living in the churches of the 20th century, what can we conclude from such a study? There are, of course, Christians who still reject the existence of diversity in the New Testament. Some do so on the basis of a rigid theory of divine inspiration that disregards the human situation of the New Testament writings and insists that their message must be uniform, because only the voice of God can be heard. Others reject diversity in the New Testament because they project onto the first century an ideal situation in which Jesus planned the Church, the apostles were unanimous in carrying out his directives, and the only ones who differed were the troublemakers condemned by the New Testament authors. None of these ultra-conservative objections to New Testament diversity are defensible in light of the evidence. To go further: religiously speaking, neither is a particularly good solution, and in fact, both have hindered the development of a mature Christian position capable of recognizing nuances.

On the other hand, some biblical scholars turn the perceptible diversity of the NT into dialectical struggles and contradictory positions. Yet no one can demonstrate that any of the churches studied broke communion with another. It is also unlikely that the NT churches of this sub-apostolic period had no concern for Christian fellowship and were autonomous conventicles following their own path. Paul is eloquent about the importance of fellowship, and in the Pauline heritage, concern for Christian unity is visible in Luke/Acts and Ephesians. Peter is a pivotal figure in the New Testament, and the concept of the people of God in 1 Peter requires a collective understanding of Christianity. Despite all its individualism, the fourth gospel knows of other sheep that are not of this flock and Jesus' desire that they be one. Matthew has a conception of the Church and broadens the horizons of Christianity to all nations. Most of the New Testament was written before the major breaks in communion detectable in the 2nd century, and so the diversity of the New Testament cannot be used to justify the current Christian division.

If we can neither ignore the ecclesiological differences in the New Testament nor use them to justify the current status quo, how are these differences useful to us? In short, they strengthen and challenge us.

1. First, they strengthen us. Most of us belong to a particular Christian church—Presbyterian, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Episcopal, etc.—because we were born into families that were members of that church. However, as we grew up, if we remained faithful to the church of our birth, it was because we found characteristics there that brought us closer to Christ and the love of God. Those who left one church to join another did so, at least in part, to find what they felt was a better context for living out the gospel. Thus, membership in a church has become a matter of conviction. A study of the different orientations of the New

Testament churches can illustrate the strengths we admire in our own church and increase our appreciation of how that church has remained faithful to its biblical heritage.

2. However, using the New Testament to strengthen people's appreciation for their own church is hardly new in the Christian world. In a divided Christianity, we have a long history of using Scripture to prove that we are right, whether as churches or as individuals. The greatest contribution of modern New Testament studies may therefore be to highlight the ways in which Scripture can challenge us constructively. Recognizing the ecclesiological diversity of the New Testament makes it much more difficult for any church to claim that it is absolutely faithful to Scripture. We are faithful, but in our own specific way; and both ecumenism and biblical studies should make us aware that there are other ways of being faithful that we do not do justice to. It is a strength for a church to preserve the emphasis on solid doctrinal authority in the Pastoral Epistles; but such a church may then need to question the role that John attributes to the Paraclete-Spirit as a teacher dwelling in every Christian. Small churches that combine Johannine imagery and Pauline charisms may need to question the meaning of historical continuity from Acts to the "Catholic Church" of the second century and ask how their highly individualistic position does justice to this. The governance of each church must be challenged by the voice of Jesus in Matthew 18.

In short, a frank study of New Testament ecclesiologies should convince every Christian community that it is neglecting part of the New Testament witness. This does not mean that we should attach equal importance to every New Testament witness, because our respective histories have led us to different proportions in our evaluation of Scripture. But if churches have accepted the canon of the Bible, they cannot allow their preferences to silence a biblical voice. In a divided Christianity, instead of reading the Bible to assure ourselves that we are right, we would do better to read it to discover where we have failed to listen. As Christians from different churches, if we try to listen to the previously silenced voices, our vision of the church will broaden and we will move closer to a common vision. The Bible would then do for us what Jesus did in his day, namely, convince those who have ears to hear that all is not perfect, because God is asking more of them than they thought. This could be the metanoia or transformation that would prepare the Church for the kingdom.

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André Gilbert, February 2026