

PAULINE CHURCHES OR EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES?
UNITY, DISAGREEMENT, AND THE EUCHARIST.*

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I: Introduction

Given the prominence of the Eucharist as a facet of contemporary church practice and a stumbling block in much ecumenical discussion, it is unsurprising that it is a topic, like other weighty theological topics, much explored in NT studies. These studies have, over the years, ranged across many specific topics and questions, including: the original form of the eucharistic words of Jesus; the original character of the Last Supper (Was it a passover meal?); the original form or forms of the early Christian Eucharist and its subsequent liturgical development. Some studies have also addressed broader issues, such as the theological and eschatological significance of Jesus's table fellowship, and the parallels between early Christian meals and the dining customs of Greco-Roman antiquity.¹ Indeed, one of the key arguments of Dennis Smith's major study of early Christian meals is to stress how unsurprising it is that the early Christians met over a meal: 'Early Christians met at a meal because that is what groups in the ancient world did. Christians were simply following a pattern found throughout their world.' Moreover, Smith proposes, the character of the early Christian meal is again simply explained: 'Early Christians celebrated a meal based on the banquet model found throughout their world.'²

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¹ For a brief but valuable introduction, see I. HOWARD MARSHALL, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, Exeter, 1980.

² DENNIS E. SMITH, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World*, Minneapolis, MN, 2003, 279.

In this paper, however, I shall approach the topic of the Eucharist somewhat indirectly. The first main part of the paper addresses a broader question — highly relevant to the theme of unity and diversity in New Testament ecclesiology — about the character of the early Christian communities. It is a broad approach, but one which I think is important in terms of shaping how we imagine and conceptualise the kinds of communities within which the Eucharist was celebrated. The conclusions from this first section then form a basis for specific reflections on the Eucharist and its significance within earliest Christianity in the second section of the paper. By the conclusion of the essay, the meaning of both parts of my title will be apparent, as well as my sense as to the way these two parts relate together.

II: Were there ‘Pauline’ communities?

In 1998 Richard Bauckham published a provocative essay, ‘For Whom Were Gospels Written?’, in a book he edited developing the essay’s theme and thesis.³ This essay, and the book of which it forms a part, has generated considerable discussion and debate, at least in English-speaking New Testament scholarship.⁴ Bauckham sets out to challenge the widely held view that the Gospels were shaped by, and written for, specific and different local communities, Markan, Matthean, Lukan, and Johannine respectively.

³ RICHARD J. BAUCKHAM, *For Whom Were Gospels Written?*, in *idem*, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians*, Edinburgh, 1998, 9-48.

⁴ It is Bauckham’s essay that sets out the key thesis to which other papers in the book relate, and thus forms the focus for discussion and critique. Among the important discussions of Bauckham’s thesis are PHILIP F. ESLER, *Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham’s Gospels for All Christians*, *SJT* 51 (1998) 235-48 (with response from Bauckham); DAVID C. SIM, *The Gospels for All Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham*, *JSNT* 84 (2001) 3-27; WENDY E. SPROSTON NORTH, ‘John for Readers of Mark? A Response to Richard Bauckham’s Proposal’, *JSNT* 25 (2003) 449-468; MARGARET M. MITCHELL, *Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that “The Gospels Were Written for All Christians”*, *NTS* 51 (2005) 36-79. On the important points raised by Mitchell, see n. 11 below. ESLER (*Community*, 244-47) and NORTH (*John, passim*) also raise questions specifically about Bauckham’s treatment of John as intended to supplement Mark; Esler argues that John reflects an introverted sectarian ethos. Indeed, the Johannine literature might perhaps be taken to reflect the existence and outlook of (a) distinctive Christian group(s); certainly Bauckham’s case needs to be assessed, to some extent, on a ‘case-by-case’ basis.

Instead, he argues, ‘the Gospels were written for general circulation around the churches and so envisaged a very general Christian audience’.⁵ Bauckham does not deny that ‘the community in which a Gospel was written is likely to have influenced the writing of the Gospel’,⁶ though he suggests that many of the issues faced by such communities and addressed (indirectly) in the Gospels would have been faced not only by one specific Christian community, but by many of the churches of the time.⁷ Furthermore, the evangelists most likely travelled, or were in other ways made aware of the trans-local dimensions of the Christian movement, a movement in which networks functioned to facilitate communication across a wide geographical area.⁸ Thus, Bauckham proposes, the ‘historical context’ of the Gospels is ‘not the evangelist’s community. It is the early Christian movement in the late first century’.⁹

One of Bauckham’s criticisms of the established redactional-critical approach to the Gospels is that the Gospels have been interpreted as if they were letters: this, he claims, is a crucial hermeneutical error. Letters, of course, *were* sent to specific communities to address their particular needs and problems.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the arguments Bauckham proposes in relation to the Gospels can prompt some comparable questions to be raised about the so-called ‘Pauline’ communities, which we know primarily through the Pauline letters. By pursuing these comparable questions, I do not intend to indicate uncritical acceptance of Bauckham’s thesis, though I do think the case has important

⁵ RICHARD J. BAUCKHAM, Introduction, in *idem*, ed., *Gospels*, 1-7, here p. 1.

⁶ BAUCKHAM, *Gospels*, 44.

⁷ Bauckham makes this point with reference to the example of expulsion from the synagogue, as addressed, at least on J.L. Martyn’s thesis, in John 9: ‘If John 9 addresses that situation, it addresses, not a circumstance peculiar to the Johannine community, but a circumstance that would have been common in the churches of the late first century’ (*Gospels*, 23). Issues regarding law-observance would be another such instance.

⁸ BAUCKHAM, *Gospels*, 44-45. Cf. further MICHAEL B. THOMPSON, *The Holy Internet*, in BAUCKHAM (ed.) *Gospels*, 49-70, and specifically in relation to the production and circulation of early Christian literature, LOVEDAY C. ALEXANDER, *Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels*, in BAUCKHAM (ed.) *Gospels*, 71-105.

⁹ BAUCKHAM, *Gospels*, 46.

¹⁰ BAUCKHAM, *Gospels*, 26-27.

merits, and raises important issues to address.¹¹ Just as Bauckham forcefully questions the validity of the concepts ‘Markan community’, ‘Matthean community’, and so on — arguing that they ‘should disappear from the terminology of Gospels scholarship’¹² — so we might ask how valid are the terms ‘Pauline community’, ‘Pauline church’, ‘*paulinische Gemeinde*’, and other equivalents, which appear in abundance in the scholarly literature.¹³ Bauckham suggests that the terms ‘Markan community’, ‘Matthean community’, and so on, became part of the standard vocabulary of Gospels scholarship without serious and critical reflection on precisely what those terms convey and how valid they are.¹⁴ Similarly, one may question whether the term ‘Pauline church’ has likewise become unreflectively embedded in the language of our scholarly discourse.

It should, however, be stressed that the issue I consider here is not the same as is central to Bauckham’s essay. Bauckham is mainly concerned to discuss whether the Gospels were written for specific local or for wider Christian audiences (and this is the issue on which Margaret Mitchell’s critique focuses).¹⁵ My concern is to ask whether the local communities to which the letters were undoubtedly sent can in any sense be

¹¹ Cf., e.g., MITCHELL, *Patristic Counter-Evidence*, who accepts some of Bauckham’s central points, but also argues, in an important critique, that the patristic evidence does not support Bauckham’s assertion that the notion of a Gospel being addressed to a specific, local Christian community arises only in modern redaction criticism. On the contrary, the patristic writers saw the Gospels as addressed to the needs and concerns of specific audiences but also as having importance for a wider, and indefinite, Christian readership. Thus Mitchell questions the dichotomy Bauckham sets up, between either ‘written for a specific local community’, or ‘written for all Christians’. In what follows, however, I am not concerned with the question about whether Paul’s letters were addressed to local communities — they undoubtedly were! — but with the question as to whether these local communities can be meaningfully described as ‘Pauline’.

¹² BAUCKHAM, *Introduction*, 4; cf. *Gospels*, 45.

¹³ The terms are so common that it would be pointless, and perhaps invidious, to single out specific examples. Indeed, it is interesting that BAUCKHAM adopts this standard language at one point in his response to Esler’s critique, referring to Christian leaders ‘found at different times living in several different Christian communities (often both Pauline and non-Pauline)’. However, he immediately proceeds to note, rightly in my view, that there is ‘very little to suggest exclusive orientation to a particular network of like-minded churches distinguished from others (evidence for this is not found in Paul’s writings, where we should have expected to find it if anywhere)’ (*Response*, 251).

¹⁴ Cf. Bauckham, ‘Gospels’, pp. 13-17.

¹⁵ MITCHELL, *Patristic Counter-Evidence* (see nn. 5, 11 above).

meaningfully labelled ‘Pauline’. In other words, the issue is not one of geographical localisation but of theological or ideological distinctiveness.¹⁶

First I should make clear that I do not intend to dispute two rather indisputable data: that Paul was the founder of a number of early Christian communities, and that he wrote letters to specific Christian communities. Insofar as the term ‘Pauline community’ is used as implicit shorthand in relation to either of these basic facts — to denote a church that Paul founded or the view of the church depicted and promoted in the Pauline letters — it has a certain historical legitimacy. But it is the further connotations that deliberately or unconsciously expand this denotation that may prove more problematic. Indeed, even with regard to the two ‘facts’ mentioned above, some caution may be in order.

On the first point, we may suspect Paul of a certain amount of rhetorical exaggeration when he insists on his singular role as founder of any particular church. Take the Corinthian church as an example. When Paul is seeking to defuse Corinthian factionalism and dismantle party allegiances, he insists that he (alone) ‘planted’ (εὐοργῶν εὐοφυτεύσα, 1 Cor 3,6), laid a foundation ‘like a skilled master builder’ (3,10, NRSV), and, indeed, gave them birth (εὐοργῶν ὑμῶν εὐογενήσας, 4,15). Yet elsewhere it becomes apparent that the founding mission at Corinth was not conducted by Paul alone but by Paul, Silvanus and Timothy (2 Cor 1,19) — who also, incidentally, co-author 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 1,1). Moreover, there is the distinct possibility that there were Christians in Corinth prior to Paul’s arrival there: Prisca and Aquila, according to Acts (18,2) had come to Corinth having been expelled from Rome by Claudius, and provided Paul’s first point of contact and hospitality. Acts does not record that they were already Christians on arriving in Corinth, but neither is there any mention of their conversion there; and the fact that Paul makes their household his base suggests their Christian sympathies.¹⁷ Such factors complicate the picture of Paul as the sole founder of known

¹⁶ This issue is also relevant in the case of the Gospels. If we use the term ‘Markan community’ do we mean ‘the local early Christian community in which Mark was located and for which he particularly wrote’ or ‘the particular community that shared a distinctive set of theological presumptions, issues, practices, etc., which Mark’s gospel reflects or confronts’? The use of terms like ‘Markan community’, etc., can allow such distinctions to be blurred or to remain unexamined.

¹⁷ For arguments that Prisca and Aquila were already Christians before leaving Rome, see HELGA BOTERMANN, *Das Judenedikt des Kaisers Claudius*, *Hermes Einzelschriften* 71, Stuttgart, 1996, 46-47;

Christian communities. And, of course, there are other churches to which Paul writes or refers, such as those in Antioch or in Rome, which he certainly did not found.

On the second point, it is worth noting that Paul sometimes addresses his letters to a broad geographical area (e.g. 2 Cor 1,1), or urges that a letter be widely read (1 Thess 5,27; cf. Col 4,16),¹⁸ or, indeed, gives an indication that his letter is addressed to all Christians everywhere (1 Cor 1,2) — so the later circulation of Pauline letters as documents of universal Christian importance only picks up a claim already expressed within the letters themselves. Furthermore, as we shall see, insofar as the historical realities are concerned, Paul's letters themselves do not even depict the churches to which he writes as 'Pauline' communities, in the sense of being theologically and ideologically distinct communities, with 'little contact'¹⁹ with other competing factions. So even the idea that the term 'Pauline community' might validly describe the church as depicted in Paul's letters is not entirely secure. We might perhaps want to suggest that the term Pauline community could be used in a sense analogous to the use of 'ideal' or 'implied' reader — to refer to the 'ideal' or 'implied' church as it is constructed and envisaged by the author of the letters, Paul. Such a church would, by definition, be a 'Pauline' church, since it would dance to the tune of Paul's instructions and accept his authority without question. Yet the historical churches, even as Paul allows us to glimpse them in his letters, never conformed neatly to such Pauline ideals, whatever the Apostle might have wished.

Although these observations, then, are important qualifications of data all-too-easily assumed at face value, it is the question about whether there were Pauline *communities* that I particularly want to address. It was Ferdinand Christian Baur, of course, who famously placed onto the agenda of New Testament studies the thesis that early Christianity was riven by a two-fold division between Petrine, law-observant,

PETER LAMPE, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, London, 2003, 11-13.

¹⁸ Col 4.16 would be a particularly revealing indication of letters being intended to be shared beyond their local context, but since there are doubts about Colossians' authenticity I do not rely on this to show Paul's view of his letters.

¹⁹ This phrase is taken from SIM, Response, 11 (see n. 5), on which see below.

Jewish Christianity and Pauline, non-law-observant, Gentile, ‘universal’ Christianity.²⁰ Although widely criticised, this basic thesis still has its contemporary proponents.²¹ The particular question that concerns us here is not whether Baur was right or wrong, but whether the divisions and arguments that undoubtedly existed in some forms in the early Christian movement were embodied in distinct *communities*. David Sim, in his response to Bauckham’s thesis, presumes that this was the case. Given the very strong disagreement over questions of law-observance, we should speak, Sim insists, not of the Christian movement, but ‘of very different Christian movements’.²² Taking the Pauline epistles as evidence, Sim argues that ‘[o]ur sources strongly suggest that the rival Christian factions had little contact with one another’.²³ Different churches were aligned with different early Christian factions and those with one theological perspective on the law would not have recognised those of a different perspective as belonging to the same movement.²⁴ Thus, according to Sim, each Gospel writer would have written for their own community — not necessarily ‘a single church’, but perhaps ‘a cluster of churches linked by geographical proximity and a shared theological perspective’²⁵ — so while ‘Mark wrote for a Christian community that did not observe the Torah... Matthew wrote for one that did’.²⁶

But does the evidence from the Pauline letters — the most important source for the earliest period — support Sim’s conclusions? Let us briefly survey that evidence,

²⁰ FERDINAND CHRISTIAN BAUR, *Die Christuspartei in der korinthische Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des petrinischen und paulinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom*, *Tübinger Zeitschrift* 4 (1831) 61-206. Cf. also the extract from Baur, with discussion and other literature, in EDWARD ADAMS and DAVID G. HORRELL, eds, *Christianity at Corinth*, Louisville, KY, 2004, 13-16, 51-59.

²¹ Notably MICHAEL D GOULDER, *SOFIA in 1 Corinthians*, *NTS* 37 (1991) 516-34; *idem*, *A Tale of Two Missions*, London, 1994; *idem*, *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth*, Peabody, 2001.

²² SIM, *Response*, 10.

²³ SIM, *Response*, 11.

²⁴ Cf. SIM, *Response*, 14, 20.

²⁵ SIM, *Response*, 24. This comment links, and effectively blurs together, geographical and ideological specificity; they should, I think, be distinguished (see above with n. 16).

²⁶ SIM, *Response*, 25.

moving through the letters in what may approximate to their chronological order, though nothing in particular hangs on this choice of order.

1 Thessalonians, probably the earliest letter, might certainly be taken as evidence that the church at Thessalonica was, at this time at least, a 'Pauline' community, so long as we qualify that by insisting that it is Paul, Silvanus and Timothy who founded the church there and now write to its members. There is no explicit indication of any anti-Pauline opposition in, or known to, the church, nor any mention of other leading Christian figures. 2 Thessalonians, though probably inauthentic, does reveal that a certain version of Paul's gospel now has to be defended against alternatives, but this text, if a later and pseudonymous attempt to correct mis-readings of Paulinism, may not be particularly revealing of conditions specifically in Thessalonica. Nonetheless, given the early date of 1 Thessalonians, its silence on any non-Pauline influences in the community should not be overinterpreted as indicating that the churches of Thessalonica continued to be exclusively 'Pauline'. Indeed, the inclusion of Silvanus in the team of those who founded this church, and that at Corinth, is in itself a significant qualification of the idea that these churches were 'Pauline' as opposed to 'early Christian': Silvanus/Silas first appears in Jerusalem, helping to bear a letter from there to Antioch, after which he joins Paul's missionary team (Acts 15,22-40). John Elliott goes too far in claiming Silvanus as a chief representative of a *Petrine* circle (cf. 1 Pet 5,12), but neither should he be seen as an exclusively Pauline collaborator.²⁷

Galatians may or may not be early, but the information it yields does not depend on its chronological placement. The letter provides a glimpse of Christian communities in two different areas: in Antioch and in Galatia. Without needing to resolve the many complex questions about the incident at Antioch, we may make some key observations. First, the table-fellowship, presumably eucharistic, includes both Gentile Christians and

²⁷ See JOHN H. ELLIOTT, Peter, Silvanus and Mark in 1 Peter and Acts: Sociological-Exegetical Perspectives on a Petrine Group in Rome, in W. Haubeck and M. Bachmann, eds, *Wort in der Zeit: Neutestamentliche Studien. Festgabe für Karl Heinrich Rengstorff zum 75. Geburtstag*, Leiden, 1980, 250-67; here p. 250; cf. *idem*, 1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB37B; New York, 2000, 127-30, 889-90. For criticisms, see DAVID G. HORRELL, The Product of a Petrine Circle? A Reassessment of the Origin and Character of 1 Peter, *JSNT* 86 (2002) 29-60. Similar things may be said about (John) Mark (see HORRELL, *Petrine Circle?*, 48-50).

Jewish Christians, and, more specifically, includes Paul and Barnabas on the one hand, associated especially with the Gentile mission, and also Peter on the other. And when ‘certain people from James’ come to Antioch, they come to this very church, and cause the divisions Paul so bitterly laments. We do not know what happened after the incident, but up to this time at least, there is, as far as we know, an early Christian community (or communities) in Antioch, in which Gentile and Jewish believers share the Lord’s meal, and to which Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and people from James come when they visit the city. It would be possible to suggest, following the incident, and particularly following the subsequent council in Jerusalem, that henceforth distinct Jewish-Christian and Gentile-Christian missions led to distinct communities. But further evidence from Paul’s letters suggests that this did not in fact happen.

The occasion for Galatians, indeed, is that the communities of Christians initially persuaded by the so-called ‘law-free’ Pauline gospel have since come under the influence of ‘Judaisers’, who regard adoption of the marks of Jewish Torah-observance as crucial for membership of God’s people, for Gentiles as well as Jews. If these counter-missionaries had been operative and influential in different and distinct communities, then Paul’s anger might never have been fired: it is the fact that his Gentile converts are subject to persuasion from these teachers that provokes him. There is a competition for influence in the same Christian communities. In other words, the agreement recorded in Gal 2,7-9 regarding the distinct and complementary missions of Paul (to the Gentiles) and Peter (to the Jews), did not in practice lead to distinct communities or factions, with ‘little contact’ with one another. This is shown not only by the evident influence of Jewish-Christian missionaries, including Peter himself (see below on 1 Corinthians), on Paul’s Gentile converts, but also by the indications that the communities to which Paul writes contained Jewish as well as Gentile members, though the latter were generally in the majority.²⁸

²⁸ E.g., at Corinth Gentiles seem to have formed the majority (1 Cor 8,7; 12,2), though there were certainly Jews among the membership too: Prisca and Aquila, along with Lucius, Jason and Sosipater (Rom 16,21), and Crispus and Sosthenes (Acts 18,2. 8. 17; 1 Cor 1,1. 14; 16,19). Cf. also 1 Cor 7,18-19, which implies a Jewish presence among the congregation, since otherwise it would have been without significance to them. At Rome the evidence also suggests a largely Gentile church with a minority of Jewish Christians (see e.g.,

1 Corinthians, again written to a community founded by Paul, along with Silvanus and Timothy, reveals a comparable picture with regard to the character of the early Christian communities, although there is no indication that circumcision and law-observance were issues of controversy at Corinth. Though Paul was their founder, as he insists, there are those in the community who express allegiance to Apollos, who is evidently known to the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor 1,12; 3,4-22; 16,12; Acts 18,24–19,1), or to Peter, who may or may not have visited Corinth but who clearly also has his following there (1 Cor 1,12; 3,22; 9,5).²⁹ Again the point is this: there *is* no separate Petrine community down the road. In one and the same church, or group of churches — i.e. among those Christians to whom *Paul* writes — the influences of Paul, Apollos, Peter and others, jostle alongside one another, with all the tensions that represents.

The various letters that comprise 2 Corinthians give similar indications. As in Galatians, so in 2 Cor 10–13 Paul is angry not least about the false apostles who have been persuading the Corinthians and turning them against him. Again it is clear that these missionaries have Jewish connections, as did Paul's opponents in Galatia (2 Cor 11,22). Certainly Paul makes the bold claim that these Corinthian converts are *his*, such that others should keep their hands off: he feels what he legitimates as a 'divine' jealousy for his converts (11,2), and accuses the other missionaries of transgressing their geographical or ethnic limits in intruding upon his ecclesial space (10,13; cf. Gal 2,9; Rom 15,20). Thus it seems that Paul indeed wants there to be Pauline communities, and does his best to keep others out of the way, at least when driven to polemic by a dangerously successful opposition. Yet Paul's polemical insistences should not be assumed as historical realities. And the fact that these opponents are, once again, competing for influence among the very same converts Paul claims as his own, operating in the very

PETER LAMPE, *The Roman Christians of Romans 16*, in KARL P. DONFRIED, ed., *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Edinburgh, 1991, 216-30, here pp. 224-225; ANDREW D. CLARKE, *Jew and Greek, Slave and Free, Male and Female: Paul's Theology of Ethnic, Social and Gender Inclusiveness in Romans 16*, in PETER OAKES, ed., *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, Carlisle, 2002, 103-25, here pp. 109-13.

²⁹ C.K. BARRETT argues that Cephas had visited Corinth: *Cephas and Corinth*, in O. BETZ, M. HENGEL, and P. SCHMIDT, eds, *Abraham unser Vater. FS Otto Michel*, Leiden, 1963, 1-12, reprinted in C.K. BARRETT, *Essays on Paul*, London, 1982.

same Christian communities, should make it clear that Paul's ideal does *not* correspond to the reality of early Christian communities, in Corinth and the wider province of Achaia, as well as in Antioch and Galatia.

The church or churches of Philippi seem to have enjoyed a generally warm and close relationship with Paul (cf. Phil 1,3-11), providing him support on more than one occasion (Phil 4,15-16) and, presumably along with the Thessalonians, contributing to his collection project willingly, despite their poverty (2 Cor 8,1-5). Yet here too Paul is concerned that the promoters of the circumcision gospel may exert their influence, and gives the Philippians a stern warning to beware of them (Phil 3,2-6). Insofar as the Philippian church, like that at Thessalonica, is a largely Gentile church which seems to follow Paul's lead in relation to issues of law-observance, it might be described as a 'Pauline' community. But it is equally important to note Paul's fear: not that his converts will be enticed away to another assembly down the road, but that, as elsewhere, Judaizing opponents will turn up in *this* community and persuade its members to alter their perspective and practices.

Romans is of course written to a church or group of churches³⁰ not founded by Paul and not previously visited by him (Rom 1,10-15; 15,22). Whatever flavour or flavours of Christianity characterise the Roman churches, they cannot be meaningfully called Pauline; indeed, some suspicion of Paul's gospel would seem to be evident in Rome (Rom 3,8).³¹ Tensions and disagreements between Jewish and Gentile Christians, or between the law-observant and non-law-observant of whatever background, are evident, and Paul seeks to effect their reconciliation and unity, such that their communal

³⁰ It is most likely that Romans 16 indicates the existence of several house-churches in Rome; see LAMPE, *The Roman Christians of Romans 16* (n. 28), 216-230; *idem*, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 359-65.

³¹ Cf. further RAYMOND E. BROWN and J.P. MEIER, *Antioch and Rome*, London, 1983, 105-27. K. BEYSCHLAG suggests that in writing Romans, Paul accommodated his views 'in bezug auf die theologische Voraussetzungen einer Gemeinde... die eine andersartige, unpaulinische Tradition bewahrte, deren Abbild uns dreißig Jahre später der römische Clemensbrief präsentiert' (*Clemens Romanus und der Frühkatholismus: Untersuchungen zu 1 Clemens 1-7*, BHT 35, Tübingen: Mohr, 1966, 349). It is questionable, however, whether such a later source can reliably be used to construct a picture of pre-Pauline Christianity in Rome.

meals — again, one assumes, eucharistic meals³² — may proceed in a spirit of mutual tolerance and welcome.

We may now draw some conclusions from this brief sketch. First, although some of the communities Paul addresses (those at Thessalonica and Philippi) might be thought of as ‘Pauline’ churches, in the absence of any explicit indication of other influences present and in view of their general adherence to Paul’s gospel, the general picture is one in which competing and conflicting perspectives relate to and are present in the same early Christian communities. There is no clear evidence of any alternative Petrine or Jacobite community, down the street from a Pauline one. Rather, these figures and their representatives turn up in the same communities and compete for influence among the same groups of converts.³³ Nor do missionaries necessarily belong clearly or exclusively to one ‘team’, Pauline or other: Silvanus/Silas, as we have already mentioned, first appears as a letter-bearer from the Jerusalem church; and Barnabas, though initially a close collaborator of Paul’s, was persuaded by the arguments of James’s people to side with Peter at Antioch, much to Paul’s annoyance (Gal 2,13; cf. Acts 15,35-40). The ‘networks’ which were so crucial for the growth of early Christianity, and certainly for the spread of information and literature within the movement,³⁴ were not, it seems, separate and isolated networks of Pauline workers, Petrine adherents, and so on, but

³² Cf. JOHN M.G. BARCLAY, “Do we undermine the Law?” A Study of Romans 14.1–15.6, in J.D.G. DUNN, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, WUNT 89, Tübingen, 1996, 287-308; here pp. 302-303. DAVID G. HORRELL, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics*, London & New York, 2005, 182-89.

³³ I do not think that the evidence of Acts contradicts this scenario, though it is difficult to be sure. In particular, Acts 19,1-7 suggests that there were ‘disciples’ who understood baptism differently (cf. also Acts 8,14-16), and/or retained an allegiance to John the Baptist. Whether these people represent distinct ‘communities’ of believers, or of disciples of John, is unclear. It is notable, however, that even such apparently ‘heterodox’ groups of disciples are precisely those with whom Paul makes contact (or, in Acts 8, to whom Peter and John are sent): Paul is simply described as having ‘found some disciples’ in Ephesus (Acts 19,1). To what extent Luke’s theological interests have shaped the narrative — with the Jerusalem apostles and Paul depicted as bringing ‘orthodoxy’ and blessing to various groups of converts — is hard to determine.

³⁴ See THOMPSON, *The Holy Internet* (n. 8 above).

instead — notwithstanding certain ‘team-like’ allegiances — facilitated contacts within and across the early Christian movement. Indeed, even where we might perhaps speak in broad terms of a Pauline community, in Thessalonica and possibly Philippi, it is important to note that there is absolutely no indication of any other Christian community in those cities. In short, there is nothing to support Sim’s argument that ‘the rival Christian factions had little contact with one another’ or that different churches were aligned with different early Christian factions.³⁵ The evidence we have seems to point strongly in the opposite direction. When a travelling missionary arrived in Antioch, Galatia, Corinth, or elsewhere, whether their theological allegiances were Pauline, Petrine, or whatever, they went to the same communities, joined in meals and found hospitality there. Indeed, it is precisely this that led to Paul’s engaging in such combative and aggressive writing. Bauckham, in the context of his argument that the Gospels were intended for wide, rather than only local, circulation, argues that the early Christians were conscious of belonging to a world-wide movement (rather than to a Markan, Matthean, or even Pauline community).³⁶ A similar observation would seem to be true in relation to the local Christian communities to which Paul wrote: they did not think of themselves as ‘Pauline’ churches, whatever Paul might on occasion have wished, but rather as ‘early Christian’ churches (though even this is an anachronistic and etic label). And rather than Mark, Matthew, or indeed Paul, writing to confirm the beliefs and practices of different communities that were respectively law-observant (Matthew) or non-law-observant (Mark, Paul), as Sim suggests, it seems much more likely that each of them sought to *persuade* early Christians of the validity of their approach, in the face of evident and competing alternatives.

None of this is intended to cast doubt on the idea that early Christianity was characterised by diversity and by frequent conflict, a point Bauckham also stresses. Walter Bauer has rightly warned us not to conceive of early Christianity as an originally unified and ‘orthodox’ body, from which heretical groups later arose and split off; on the contrary, orthodoxy was created and imposed upon an always diverse and varied

³⁵ SIM, Response, 11, 14.

³⁶ BAUCKHAM, Gospels, 33.

movement.³⁷ Nonetheless, what our earliest evidence suggests is that, though often characterised by disagreement, and by diversity associated with differences in cultural background, geographical location, ethnic identity, and theological persuasion, the early Christian movement found communal embodiment in early Christian communities, and not in Pauline, Petrine, Markan, or Matthean communities.³⁸

III: Consequences for understanding the Eucharist and its social significance

In what ways might these conclusions shape our understanding of the Eucharist and its social significance in earliest Christianity? It is tempting, especially given a certain contemporary theological or ecumenical agenda, to add to these conclusions a conviction about the ubiquity of the early Christian Eucharist and then to suggest that the earliest eucharistic celebrations were much more ‘ecumenical’, much more reflective of a basic ‘early Christian unity’, than we might assume if we think of them as occurring in distinctively Pauline, Petrine, Matthean, or Johannine communities. While there is some validity in such a conclusion, there are reasons to avoid a too easy or hasty move in this direction. The lack of direct evidence for the earliest period limits every attempt to draw historical conclusions about the nature and practice of the earliest Christian meals. And the evidence that we do have, precious though it is, is fraught with questions: How far do the Last Supper accounts reflect eucharistic practice in the churches? How common is the liturgical and practical framework of which Paul reminds the Corinthians? And so on.

Given the lack of early evidence, and the diversity of form and content that certainly characterises the ritual meals of Christianity in post-New Testament period, the claim that there was a single original form is historically precarious and ideologically loaded — seeking to legitimate ‘orthodox’ church practice with the sanction of pristine

³⁷ WALTER BAUER, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, London, 1972.

³⁸ It may well have been that diversity in the earliest decades was as much connected with geographical location as with theological alignment; rather than think of distinctions between Pauline and Petrine Christianity, we should perhaps think of differences between Thessalonian Christianity and Corinthian Christianity, and so on. See further JOHN M.G. BARCLAY, *Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity* JSNT 47, 1992, 49-74; EDWARD ADAMS, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul’s Cosmological Language*, Edinburgh, 2000. The question as to whether the Gospels were written for local or wider audiences then has a particular pertinence (see above with nn. 15-16).

originality. Andrew McGowan, in an important investigation of the eucharistic traditions of earliest Christianity, argues against both the unitary original form proposed by Gregory Dix and the twofold original pattern proposed by Hans Lietzmann — with the Pauline eucharist of bread and wine on the one hand, a sacrificial meal focused on Christ's death, and the Jerusalem type on the other, which continued the table-fellowship of Jesus with his disciples and in which bread alone was the item of significance.³⁹ Focusing primarily on the bread-and-water eucharists of various ascetic groups of the second century and beyond, but considering the roots of eucharistic practice in the New Testament, McGowan valuably shows the considerable diversity of culinary and liturgical forms in early Christian ritual meals.⁴⁰ According to McGowan, the more ascetic eucharists, in which meat and wine are not included, reflect a stronger rejection of pagan society and its 'cuisine of sacrifice' than those in which the sacrificial imagery and food retain a central place.⁴¹ So there was, McGowan argues, no single, standard form of eucharist, celebrated across the *oikoumene* of earliest Christianity.

Yet, even if we follow McGowan for the moment in accepting this picture of diversity, it is important again to notice that, at least insofar as we can glimpse it in the earliest period, the pattern of diversity does not correlate with a distinction between, say,

³⁹ ANDREW MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, Oxford, 1999, referring to GREGORY DIX, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, London, 1937, and HANS LIETZMANN, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, Leiden, 1979. Cf. the similar point made by SMITH, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 4-5. One of SMITH's key arguments is that early Christian meals, in varied forms adapted to various settings, drew on and shared a common, though broad and diverse, ancient banquet tradition (cf., e.g., p. 287: '...the thesis of this study, that earliest Christian meals developed out of the model of the Greco-Roman banquet'). LIETZMANN summarises the difference between the two 'primitive types', as he sees them, as follows: 'on the one hand, continuation of the table-fellowship with the Lord, characterized by the breaking of bread at the beginning of the meal; on the other, remembrance of the last meal and consequently of the death of the Lord, with the breaking of bread at the beginning and the wine-cup at the conclusion as symbols of the body and blood of Christ' (p. 206).

⁴⁰ E.g. MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 250.

⁴¹ E.g. MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 273: 'To participate in the Christian meal is, for Paul, to renounce the table of demons, but it is also to create another table whose logic is actually quite similar to that which he attacks (1 Cor. 10:16-21). The bread-and-water tradition, on the other hand, tends to be anti-sacrificial generally.'

Pauline and non-Pauline churches, each respectively with a Pauline and a non-Pauline form of eucharistic meal (*pace* Lietzmann). Just as Bauckham has raised questions about the notion of distinctively Matthean or Markan communities, so too we cannot plausibly imagine a ‘Pauline’ wing of the early Church celebrating a distinctively ‘Pauline’ eucharist.

Firstly, there are evident differences of custom and practice within some of the assemblies to which Paul writes. At Corinth, some eschewed the eating of meat while others claimed a liberty to eat without restriction (1 Cor 8,1–11,1); some indulged to the point of drunkenness while others went without (1 Cor 11,21).⁴² In Rome, some restricted themselves to vegetables and water, while others consumed both meat and wine (Rom 14,2. 21);⁴³ and in both cases their eating is explicitly described as eucharistic (Rom 14,6). To be sure, the mere use of the verb *eu0xariste/w* does not suffice to indicate that the meal is a ‘Eucharist’ — depending, of course, on how we define our terms (see below) — since the Jewish custom of giving thanks before meals was evidently also adopted in Christian contexts (cf. 1 Cor 10,26-30; Eph 5,20; 1 Tim 4,3; 1QS 6.4-6; 10.14-15; *m. Ber.* 6,1-8,8; *y. Ber.* 6,1-8,8; *b. Ber.* 35a-53b).⁴⁴ Nonetheless, and despite the somewhat scanty level of information, it seems most reasonable to assume that those in the Roman churches who avoided meat and wine did so at the Eucharist as well as at other meals (see also below, on 1 Tim 5,23). It would be odd to assume the opposite —

⁴² On the social situation underlying the Corinthian meal, see GERD THEISSEN, ‘Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor 11:17-34’, in *idem*, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Edinburgh, 1982, 145-74; PETER LAMPE, *Das korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis*, ZNW 82, 1991, 183-213.

⁴³ Only a restriction to vegetables is explicitly mentioned in 14,2, and the discussion focuses on matters of eating. Yet Paul’s mention of eating meat and drinking wine in 14,21 as behaviour that may cause a sibling to stumble suggests that wine was also at issue; Jewish parallels to such asceticism also make this a plausible conclusion (e.g. Dan 1,8-16; Esth 4,17x LXX; *T. Isaac* 4,5, etc.).

⁴⁴ In 1 Cor 10,26 Paul cites Ps 24,1, used in rabbinic literature, as C.K. BARRETT notes, ‘to justify the use of benedictions over food’ (*Things Sacrificed to Idols*, NTS 11, 1965, 138-53, cited from the reprint in *idem*, *Essays on Paul*, 40-59, here p. 52; cf. *m. Tam.* 7,4; *y. Ber.* 6,1; *b. Ber.* 35a: ‘To enjoy anything of this world without a benediction is like making personal use of the things consecrated to heaven, since it says, *The Earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof*). Cf. also EDUARD LOHSE, *Zu 1 Kor 10 26.31*, ZNW 47, 1956, 277-80.

that they avoided wine *except* at the Eucharist — without any evidence in Paul’s text to suggest this. Indeed, it is precisely at eucharistic gatherings that the tensions of diet and custom are most likely to have become evident and problematic. Paul appears to urge the ‘strong’ to an accommodation to the practice of the ‘weak’, of avoiding meat and wine, in the interests of unity (14,21). Again, this situation of practical ‘accommodation’ seems most likely to be envisaged for the celebration of *the* ritual meal of the Christian communities, namely the Eucharist.⁴⁵

Secondly, in terms of differing stances towards ‘the world’ — something that may well find expression, as McGowan argues, in different culinary customs — there appear to have been differences among as well as within the churches, again in ways that do not correspond to a Pauline/non-Pauline division. The Christians at Corinth, on the whole, seem to have had a less apocalyptic and negative view of the world than those in Rome or Thessalonica, and may have been correspondingly more socially integrated into their wider civic society.⁴⁶

Thirdly, later conflict between ascetic and non-ascetic views on food and drink appears to have developed within circles that appealed to Paul: Colossians and 1 Timothy notably attack an ascetic stance promoted by the opponents they are concerned to refute (Col 2,16-23; 1 Tim 4,3-5; 5,23). A more ascetic Paul is depicted in the *Acts of Paul*, where fasting is emphasized positively, in contrast to sumptuous food and wine.⁴⁷ Here it is especially relevant to note 1 Tim 5,23, where ‘Paul’ urges Timothy to stop drinking only water, and to use a little wine (mhke/ti u9dropo/tei, a0lla\ oi1nw| o0li/gw| xrw~). Howard Marshall notes that the verb u9dropote/w, “‘to drink [only] water”, seems to be used always as the opposite to drinking wine. Hence the command is not to stop drinking water (!) but not to drink only water’.⁴⁸ In effect, McGowan suggests, Timothy is exhorted to stop being a ‘water-drinker’ — a practice which again probably relates (albeit

⁴⁵ Cf. BARCLAY, “Do We Undermine the Law?”, 302-303 (see n. 32 above).

⁴⁶ See further BARCLAY, Thessalonica and Corinth; ADAMS, Constructing the World (n. 38 above).

⁴⁷ See MCGOWAN, Ascetic Eucharists, 185-86; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 8, 13, 23; *Acts of Paul* 5, 7.

⁴⁸ I.HOWARD MARSHALL, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC; Edinburgh, 1999, 624, with reference to various ancient sources in n. 172.

not exclusively) to eucharistic contexts.⁴⁹ Unlike in Rom 14-15, where the ascetics who avoided meat and wine were protected by Paul, with the ‘strong’ having to accommodate their practice to take account of such sensibilities, here the voice of Paul is invoked against a water-drinker, calling for an end to such restrictive practice and for the acceptance of wine.

McGowan, we should note, operates with an ‘inclusive definition’ of ‘eucharistic meals’, as ‘the communal meals of early Christians, in which these processes of giving thanks tended to play a central part’.⁵⁰ Indeed, he suggests, it is both historically and theologically dubious to define what counts as eucharist on the lines of later orthodoxy, and thus to marginalise as (merely) *agapai* or fellowship meals the other kinds of meals that took place. We may, of course, protest that McGowan has opened the definition too wide: given the established Jewish (and then also Christian) custom of giving thanks at meals, effectively all shared meals are included under the umbrella of ‘eucharist’. If we defined our terms more narrowly, reserving ‘Eucharist’ for the ritual meal in which bread and cup were shared with words like those of the institution, how different would the argument look?

First, it would still seem notable that the ritual meal itself was subject to a certain diversity, or at least, that different Christians held different convictions as to what could and could not legitimately be eaten as part of this meal. There were clearly controversies and disagreements about the character of early Christian table-fellowship that were not easily resolved (Gal 2,11 ff). Concerning the specifically eucharistic ‘elements’ the evidence that some early Christians avoided wine is most significant. The Paul of Rom 14-15 seems to imply that a bread-and-water Eucharist is an acceptable path to avoiding division; while the Paul of 1 Timothy urges water-drinkers to start taking wine.

Secondly, however, in relation to the wider theme of this essay, there would still be no basis for concluding that the (so-called) Pauline churches celebrated a distinctively Pauline form of Eucharist. The various forms of the words of institution, preserved in the three Synoptics and by Paul (Matt 26,26-29; Mark 14, 22-25; Luke 22,15-20; 1 Cor

⁴⁹ McGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 231. MARSHALL (n. 40) does not comment on the possible eucharistic implications of this discussion in 1 Tim 5,23.

⁵⁰ McGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 12.

11,23-25), show some interesting variations — not least the two cups mentioned by Luke — but also share closely the key elements and words over the bread and the cup.

Consequently, although there does clearly seem to be some considerable diversity in the forms of early Christian eucharistic meal, this cannot — *pace* Lietzmann — be taken to correspond to a twofold distinction between a Pauline and a non-Pauline form. This confirms our earlier conclusion that it is historically meaningless to talk of ‘Pauline communities’, at least in the New Testament period, and it adds to this conclusion the further corollary that it is misleading to imagine Pauline communities celebrating a particularly Pauline form of Eucharist.

We may also be able to suggest some more positive conclusions, albeit tentatively. Eating a common ritual meal⁵¹ does seem to have been characteristic, unsurprisingly,⁵² of early Christian gatherings, and McGowan points out that ‘[o]ne thing Christian ritual meals in the early centuries virtually all seem to have in common is the giving of thanks (*eucharistia*) or of blessing (*eulogia*)’.⁵³ Moreover, recent anthropological studies of food and meals may help us to see these meals not as merely the material setting for the theologically more crucial activities of teaching, prayer, and so on, but as centrally bound up in the process of forming and maintaining Christian identity.⁵⁴ ‘As the most powerful instrument for expressing and shaping interaction between humans’, Johan Pottier notes, ‘food is the primary gift and a repository of social

⁵¹ Whether and when the elements of the Eucharist became quantitatively token, rather than constituting (part of) a ‘real’ meal is open to some discussion. It is difficult to find any evidence, I think, to contradict the natural assumption that the earliest eucharistic meals were indeed real meals, except by presuming a distinction between agape meal and eucharist (so e.g. JUSTIN J. MEGGITT, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, Edinburgh, 1998, 189-93) which does not seem to exist at this time. As MCGOWAN points out, ‘for the majority of people’, ‘bread and wine or water were in fact the typical, central, or only food and drink of a meal’, so that there is nothing odd about their forming the focus of the early Christian ritual meal (*Ascetic Eucharists*, 10-14).

⁵² Cf. SMITH, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, who stresses that in eating a meal at their gatherings together, early Christians did what any group in the ancient Mediterranean would do when meeting for social or religious purposes (see pp. 1, 174, 176, etc.).

⁵³ MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharists*, 12.

⁵⁴ I am grateful to Louise Lawrence for suggesting these studies to me. See further LOUISE J. LAWRENCE, *Reading With Anthropology: Exhibiting New Testament Religion*, Carlisle, 2005.

meanings'.⁵⁵ More specifically, through ethnographic studies of the Greek island of Kalymnos, David Sutton explores the ways in which food provides a key medium through which memory is constructed and maintained, and therefore serves as a crucial means by which identity is made and reproduced.⁵⁶ Ritual ceremonies, he suggests, building on Paul Connerton's work, have a 'mnemonic power' that 'rests on generating sensory and emotional experiences that sediment memory in the body'.⁵⁷ Just one indication of the potential of such ethnographic research to stimulate reflections on the Eucharist may be found in the suggestive remarks of Pierre Mayol on the significance of bread for the working class in France:

Bread arouses the most archaic respect, nearly sacred, to throw it out, to trample over it is a matter of sacrilege; the scene of bread thrown in the trash arouses indignation; it cannot be separated from the working class condition: to throw bread in the trash means to forget the story of poverty. It is a *memorial*.⁵⁸

The early Christian eucharists, and the bread eaten in them, serve of course as a particular kind of memorial: a thankful memorial of Jesus and his fellowship with his followers. While the extent to which the elements and the liturgy evoke 'the cuisine of sacrifice' may vary (so McGowan), the basic memorialisation of Jesus is common to the early Christian meals, and gives them a shared core meaning beyond that of a simple everyday meal. At the same time, of course, these meals play their part in making and maintaining Christian identity. Not only do they forge a sense of *koinwni/a*, of *Gemeinschaft*, among the participants and with the divine, they also — to echo Connerton again — generate 'sensory and emotional experiences that sediment memory in the body'.⁵⁹ Shared experience and shared memory, extending back through time to last week, and the week

⁵⁵ JOHAN POTTIER, Food, in A. BARNARD and J. SPENCER, eds, *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, London and New York, 1996, 238-41; here p. 238.

⁵⁶ DAVID SUTTON, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*, Oxford, 2001.

⁵⁷ SUTTON, *Remembrance*, 19, discussing PAUL CONNERTON, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge, 1989.

⁵⁸ PIERRE MAYOL, Bread and Wine, in L. GIARD, ed., *The Practice of Everyday Life, Volume 2: Living and Cooking*, Minneapolis, 1998, 85-100, here pp. 86-87, quoted from SUTTON, *Remembrance*, 32 n. 5, who discusses the significance of bread on Kalymnos on pp. 31-42.

⁵⁹ SUTTON, *Remembrance*, 19.

before, and to a time before that — as well as looking forward to an anticipated eschatological event (1 Cor 11,26) — generate a particular sense of shared identity among those who ‘eat this bread and drink this cup’.⁶⁰ Without downplaying the diversity of form and practice in early Christian eucharists, and the associated diversity of meanings, we can nonetheless speak broadly of a common identity forged among those who, in their shared ritual meal, give thanks to God for Jesus.

IV: Conclusion

The conclusions of the first part of this paper — that we should not envisage early Christianity as embodied in ideologically distinct communities, Pauline or otherwise — can therefore support a significant conclusion about early Christian ecclesiology and the place of the Eucharist within that ecclesiology. The basic point is this: in any particular locality, rather than a *Pauline* church celebrating the Lord’s Supper, or whatever we might call their ritual meal, we have an *early Christian* church doing so. In terms of its local, communal, and commensual embodiment, early Christianity may indeed have been more ‘ecumenical’ than we imply when we talk of Pauline, Matthean, or Petrine communities and imagine these partisan communities celebrating their own eucharist. However, this does not mean that these early Christian communities were united, harmonious, or theologically monochrome. We can and must accept that the early Christian churches were from the start diverse, internally and in comparison with one another; early Christian missionaries proclaimed different versions of the gospel, and — at least if Paul is anything to go by — argued vehemently against those who thought differently; there was no single original form of the eucharistic meal. However, there is no evidence to support the notion that, in its earliest period, Christianity’s diversity was embodied in distinct communities in which there was a shared allegiance to a particular form of Christianity, Pauline, Petrine, or whatever. Indeed, the disagreements so blatantly

⁶⁰ Contemporary reflections on the significance of the Eucharist might find stimulus here in Sutton’s comments on how globalization and commodification affect the kinds of memory and the forms of identity that the preparation and consumption of food create (SUTTON, *Remembrance, passim*). Something changes when people lose their connection with local, and culturally-specific, forms of food production and consumption, something all-too-likely under the pressure of what has been labelled the ‘McDonaldization’ of society (G. RITZER, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Thousand Oaks, CA, 1995).

evident in Paul's letters only make sense on the opposite scenario: that these diversities and disagreements were evident and encompassed within local early Christian communities, in which, again in diverse and varied forms, all shared in common eucharistic meals.

This leads us to one final conclusion, which may be of some significance for the ways in which we conceptualise the ecclesiology of earliest Christianity and convey implications about its unity and diversity: there seems no clear justification for speaking of 'Pauline churches', or at least, not without heavily qualifying exactly what that might mean. Just as Gospels specialists have been forced to think hard about whether to use terms like 'Markan community', and, if they do, what exactly they mean by them, so too Pauline scholars should now pause to think about their use of the term 'Pauline community' — and whether its use is justifiable in view of the historical evidence.