

***Mission and Meaning
Essays Presented to Peter
Cotterell***

Edited by

Antony Billington

Tony Lane

Max Turner

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Mission and Meaning in Terms of 'Unity' in Ephesians

Max Turner

The ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus were understood by the early Christians to offer 'Good News' and 'hope' to a beleaguered and suffering human existence. As Melancthon put it, to know Christ is to know his benefits. Yet each New Testament writing gives its own contextualised (and so distinctive) witness to these. In the epistle of James, such witness is almost eclipsed by other concerns. By contrast, the letter known as 'Ephesians' elucidates perhaps more comprehensively than any other New Testament writing what we might call the new 'meaning' which the Christian message offers to humanity. The majority of the letter is dominated by an extensive (and sharply antithetical) contrast between the 'then' of the readers' pre-Christian existence and the 'now' of their new life in Christ (cf. esp. 2:1-10; 2:11-22; 4:17-24; 4:25-5:2; 5:3-14; 5:15-18).¹ Of especial interest is the way the writer expresses this principally in a duality between erstwhile *alienation* and present participation in cosmic *reconciliation* or *re-unification* in Christ. This latter theological emphasis has important implications not merely for a Christian view of the church, but also for a fundamental understanding of the nature of human personhood in redemption.

1 The best overall treatment of this contrast in early Christianity is that by P. Tachau, *'Einst' und 'Jetzt' im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), esp. 134-43. But for an English summary and criticism of his handling of Ephesians see e.g. A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 86-88, 125-26.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the writer's understanding of the theme of 'unity', which lies at the theological heart of the letter, and to assess its significance. We shall examine: (1) cosmic reconciliation and the mission of the church in Ephesians 1-3; (2) the consequent exhortation to unity (and its implications) in Ephesians 4-6, and (3) some implications for theology and church today.

1. Cosmic Reunification in Ephesians 1-3

(a) In Ephesians 1:9-10 and its Background

As the climax of his opening eulogy (1:3-14), Paul² proclaims God blessing (1:3) on the grounds that he has made known to us (in understanding and in experience) the ineffable 'mystery' of his eternal will (1:9-10). The content of that grand divine purpose is then expressed in 1:10b. It is 'that all things might be brought back into unity (*anakephalaiōsasthai*) in Christ – the things in the heavens and the things on earth in him'.

The translation of the verb *anakephalaioō* as 'to bring back into unity' requires some brief justification. While the NIV follows an exegetical tradition that takes the verb to mean 'bring under one head', this should probably be rejected because it would suggest (incorrectly) that the verb derives from the noun *kephalē* ('head') rather than from *kephalaion* ('main point', 'summary').³ Etymology would thus rather support the sense 'to sum up' (as in Rom. 13:9) or possibly 'to recapitulate' (if weight is given to the prefix). In the rhetorical works, the recapitulative 'summing up' in question regularly means 'to draw together the main points' (see e.g. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoris* 6.1.1). When the same verb is then applied to Christ's eschatological relationship to a multitude of entities (including personal beings) scattered through the cosmos, it is inviting to understand God's 'summing up' of these entities in Christ as his act of bringing all things together in (and under) Christ, i.e. his unifying of them in some way in Christ.⁴ What is more, the phrase 'all things... the things in the heavens and the things on earth in him' strongly evokes the centre-piece hymnic passage of the sister letter, Colossians (1:15-20). The latter asserts that all things 'in the heavens and on earth' were initially created in Christ (1:16), and that

2 The majority of scholars today think Ephesians was written after Paul's death by a disciple (but see M. Goulder, 'The Visionaries of Laodicea', *JSNT* 43 (1991), 15-39, for an intelligent recent response setting the letter within Paul's ministry). Paul, however, is at least the 'implied author', and whether that is the same as the 'real author' does not effect what follows.

3 This interpretation was championed by H. Schlier, 'κεφαλῆ, ἀνακεφαλαιόμαί', *TDNT*, Vol. III (1965), 681-82, and adopted in the commentaries by Schlier and Barth, but there on the grounds that Jesus is described as 'head' over all things in 1:22.

4 Cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 33.

through the death and resurrection-exaltation of Christ 'all things' 'whether on earth or in the heavens' would eventually once more become reconciled (i.e. brought back from warring alienation into peaceful unity under God).⁵ The Colossians parallel thus suggests that the 'summing up' of all things in Christ envisaged in Ephesians 1:10 is *God's bringing of them back into harmonious unity in and through Christ*. Ephesians 1:9 supports this by describing God's eschatological intent as one 'in accord with' (*kata*) the divine goodwill 'set forth' in Christ – a reference to his ministry aimed at reconciliation (cf. §3 (a) below) and above all to his death seen as enabling it (cf. Rom. 3:25 for closest parallel to the divine *proetheto en autō[i]*). As we shall see, the rest of the letter confirms such an interpretation.

The conceptual background of the hope for cosmic 'unity' was first critically examined by Stig Hanson.⁶ Hanson could point to a wide interest in the topic in the Greek philosophical world, arguing that, in general, Greek thinking from the pre-Socratics to the first century discerned some type of 'unity' behind the visible diversity of substances and beings that make up our cosmos, and into which (according to most schools) they would finally be resolved. If the nature philosophers located this unity in some primordial *substance* or *element* (for Thales it was water, for Anaximenes, air), Heraclitus traced it to *divine fiery flux*,⁷ and the Eleatics (Xenophanes, Parmenides) to the highest (aboriginal) *god* – a view developed (in quite different ways) by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Neo-Pythagoreans. In each of these systems, Hanson argues,

5 See e.g. R.P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), ch. 7, and P.T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC (Dallas: Word Books, 1982), *ad loc.*

6 *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians* (Uppsala: Almqvist, 1946). Other significant works include P. Benoit, 'L'Unité de l'Église selon l'Épître aux Ephésiens', *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus*, I (Rome: PBI, 1963), 57-78; K.M. Fischer, *Tendenz und Absicht des Epheserbriefes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1973), 40-78; W.A. Meeks, 'In One Body: The Unity of Humankind in Colossians and Ephesians', in J. Jervell and W.A. Meeks (eds.), *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 209-21; K. Usami, *Somatic Comprehension of Unity: The Church in Ephesus* (Rome: PBI, 1983). More accessible is M. Kitchen, *Ephesians* (London: Routledge, 1994), 35-42, 66-68, 71-75, 79-83.

7 Heraclitus' fragmentary teaching is particularly difficult to assess, and his divine 'fire' may well be a seething principle of contrast and plurality rather than of harmonious unity. Hence can Colin Gunton take Heraclitus and Parmenides as polar opposites, the former as the champion of plurality behind all merely apparent unity, the latter as the archetypal defender of universal unity despite merely apparent diversity and particularity: cf. *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), *passim*, but esp. 17-19.

[the] original principle, being a unity itself, stands in a *genetic* or a *causal* relationship to plurality, and thus creates unity in this multiplicity. Often this causal relationship between unity and plurality is combined with a *teleological* one. The cleavage and plurality prevalent in the world will once cease, that which is divided will be joined, multiplicity will merge into unity, which constitutes the purpose and ultimate goal of the universal process.⁸

Such an understanding might provide important clues as to how his mainly Gentile readers would be prepared for Paul's teaching, but as Hanson rightly perceived, the more immediate background to the teaching in Ephesians is to be found in the Old Testament, Intertestamental and Jewish-Christian thinking. The Old Testament maintained the universe was the creation of God who was One, without peer or rival, and all was initially in harmony with him (cf. Deut. 6:4 [the *Shema* recited daily by Jews] and Gen. 1-2). But, according to Jewish understanding, the willing subjection of all things to God had dissolved into a rebellion of competing claims. Humanity became progressively alienated from God and then from its own kind, symbolised in Genesis 3-11 in the downward spiral from exclusion from the Garden, to the murders of Cain and Lamech, the catastrophe of 'the watchers', the flood, and the final alienation of languages in the fiasco of Babel. God was still perceived to be the Lord of the universe (as all from Joshua 3:11 to Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.24 affirm); he still gave it *some* measure of unity, and that unity came to clearest expression in Israel's obedience to the One God, following one Law and worshipping in a single temple. But the nations remained divided from God, and from Israel, by their worship of idols. And even Israel, called to express within herself the unity of creation, was marred by factions, divided within herself. At the bottom of all this, as far as some groups of Judaism were concerned, was the conflict between the LORD God, and the powers of Satan. By contrast with the present state of affairs, the day of the Lord was to be seen as the day when God subjects all competing powers to himself and thus restores the universe to harmony. So, as Zechariah 14:9 puts it, 'And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be *one* and his name *one*.' The Messiah can accordingly be anticipated as a Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) who even pacifies and transforms nature (cf. e.g. Isa. 11:1-9; 1 *Enoch* 52:8-9; 2 *Baruch* 73:1). All opposition would then be torn down, Israel would be restored as a light to the nations, the Gentiles would consequently come to revere the one God (cf. e.g. Tobit 14:6;

8 Hanson, *Unity*, 56.

Sibylline Oracles 3:808), and all would worship him in the one temple in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-4; 56:6-7; 60-62; Mic. 4:1-4; Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16-19; *Jubilees* 4:26). All this could be called cosmic reconciliation.⁹

Of greatest importance as 'background' to Ephesians is naturally Paul's own christologically focused version of the above pattern. The eschatological hope of 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 is that when all enemy 'dominion, authority and power' is eventually reduced to subjection through Christ's own rule, the ultimate sovereignty will be handed over to the God and Father 'from whom all things came' (1 Cor. 8:6) so that God might finally 'be all in all' (15:28). For Paul this ultimate cosmic reunification in God is already essentially guaranteed in the reconciliation of the Christ-event (esp. Rom. 5:9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17-21),¹⁰ and even *inaugurated* in the church which is united with God 'in Christ' (Gal. 1:22; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:14 cf. 1 Thess. 1:1 - 'to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ', 2 Thess. 2:1, etc.). Such a church already constitutes the eschatological unity celebrated in the confession of Galatians 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (cf. also 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11). It is a similar, and still essentially eschatological, hope that lies behind Colossians 1:18-20 and in Ephesians 1:9-10. Though 1:19-23 (and what follows) presents this hope as already inaugurated in the church (to the point where several scholars have argued Ephesians collapses Paul's eschatology into the church (Lindemann) or into *Christian Existenz* (Schlier)),¹¹ we shall nevertheless confuse matters if we forget that 1:9-10 speaks specifically of a plan for 'the fullness of the times'. This apocalyptic term must at least include (if not principally denote) the times which follow the end of 'this (evil) age' (1:21; cf. 2:2; 5:16; 6:13), and belong to 'the (glorious) age to come' (1:21), or the 'kingdom of Christ and of God' (5:5), beyond the as yet still *awaited* 'day of redemption' (4:30). Thus while 'the fullness of the times' may commence with the Christ-event (so e.g. M. Barth, Schnackenburg and Lincoln), the author can hardly be suspected of believing the cosmic *anakephalaiōsasthai* has been completed. And

9 This all-too-brief summary is modified from M. Turner, 'Ephesians', in D.A. Carson, *et al.* (eds.), *New Bible Commentary* (Leicester: IVP, 1994 4th edn), 1222-1244 (1223 - as are some other passages, especially in §2). For more adequate description see Hanson, *Unity*, 5-23.

10 Cf. Martin, *Reconciliation, passim*, and I.H. Marshall, *Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Theology* (London: SPCK, 1990), ch. 14, on these.

11 A. Lindemann, *Die Aufhebung der Zeit: Geschichtsverständnis und Eschatologie im Epheserbrief* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975); H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser: Ein Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Vlg., 1957, 1971 2nd edn).

such a view would, of course, make nonsense of the description of the Gentile world as still 'now' (2:2) strongly controlled by the powers of evil (2:1-3; 4:17-19) against which even Christians themselves must fight (6:10-20; cf. 4:22, 25-32; 5:3-12). The re-unification is not yet complete; rather, in the present age, the church must *grow towards it* (4:12-16).¹²

(b) *In Ephesians 2:1-22*

This section comprises three parts (2:1-10, 11-18, 19-22). The first of them contrasts the believers' erstwhile 'death' in sin (the switch from 'you' in 2:1-2 to 'we' in 2:3 implicates Gentile and Jew alike)¹³ with their present life-giving union with Christ which entails some kind of participation in his resurrection and exaltation in the heavenly places (2:5-6; par. 1:20-21).¹⁴

12 Against Lindemann's view, the major work on eschatology in Ephesians (H.E. Lona, *Die Eschatologie im Kolosser- und Epheserbrief* [Würzburg: Echter Vlg., 1984], esp. 418-48) has argued the writer is much closer to traditional Pauline views (though with a greater emphasis on realised eschatology). For briefer accounts in English see e.g. C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, SNTSMS 63 (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 145-58; E. Best, *Ephesians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 73-76; A.T. Lincoln and A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 114-19.

13 *Contra* E. Best, who claims 'the author does not describe the Jewish world' and that it is merely Gentile existence which the writer (exaggeratedly) castigates ('Two Types of Existence', *Interp* 47 [1993], 42). I am especially grateful to Professor Best for the gift of the excellent articles on Ephesians referred to in this essay.

14 2:1-10 has been misunderstood when taken to imply a triumphalistic co-resurrection with Christ that goes beyond what is implied in Romans 6:4-6, 8, 10-11 (here believers have not merely 'died' with Christ and been left in limbo until resurrection, but have also been 'made alive' to God as Christ has [10-11]), i.e. [metaphorically] co-resurrected) and Colossians 2:12 and 3:1 – indeed Ephesians 2:5-6 is modelled partly on these Colossian parallels where the eschatological tension is clearly maintained (cf. Col. 3:3). If 2:6 even associates us with Christ's enthronement at God's right hand, this is sharply qualified 'in Christ' and 'through faith' (2:8) – i.e. these eschatological things are only *now* true of us at all in the sense that we are in faith union with the Christ whom God has already exalted to his right hand. Cf. A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 37-69 (on Rom. 6) and 70-83 (on Col. and Eph.). The unusual assertion of union with Christ *at the very place of his enthronement at God's side* is probably polemical: partly addressed to Gentile fears of the great magical powers associated with Artemis (see Arnold, *Ephesians, passim*, esp. 104, 147-52), partly against a judaising mission (as in Colossians) which gave undue authority to torah-supporting and accusatory angelic powers allegedly seen by holy visionaries on entering the heavenly places (cf. Col. 2:18, 13; cf. Goulder, 'Visionaries', 24-25).

The second part (2:11-18) is more directly relevant to our investigation as it explicitly takes up the language of reconciliation and unity, but we need to be aware of the polemic that has shaped it. The reference to the Gentiles as 'the uncircumcision' (2:11) implies a judaising group on the horizon who are using this as a term of derogation of the Gentile believers.¹⁵ Paul counters *first* with the implied challenge that those who look on the Gentile believers this way are but the 'so-called circumcision' (one performed merely by human hands; 2:11 cf. Phil. 3:2-3; Rom. 2:28-29; Col. 2:11), and *second* by claiming that while the Gentiles were formerly alienated from Israel, and so without its benefits, its hope and its God (2:11-13), now in Christ a new entity has emerged which transcends even Israel itself (2:14-18, 19-22). If 2:13 suggests the gospel has enabled the Gentiles who were 'afar off' to have been 'made near' (i.e. joined with empirical Israel and permitted to enjoy her messianic benefits) – which may be how the judaisers saw matters¹⁶ – Paul subverts this in 2:16-17. He applies the language of Isaiah 57:19 to *both* Israel (as the 'near') and the Gentiles (the 'far off'), claiming *both* were alienated from God and so needed to be reconciled to him (2:16), and to receive his promised messianic 'peace' in and through Christ (2:17), in order to have access to him (2:18).

Correlated with this vertical reconciliation, 2:14-15 (whatever its original form) asserts a correspondingly startling horizontal one between the two 'realms' of circumcision and uncircumcision, through the 'creation' of 'one new man' in Christ (cf. Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:45-49, etc.).¹⁷ This new creation is said to be enabled by the tearing down of what caused the 'enmity', namely the division of humankind erected and maintained through the Mosaic Law and associated purity regulations (2:15). The effect of Paul's argument is to establish the church as a third entity over against both the Gentile world and national torah-centred Israel. *But the particular form in which this third entity exists is precisely as the beginning of cosmic re-unification.* It is forged by the re-unification of the two major

15 So, correctly, Goulder, 'Visionaries', 16, and *contra* Mussner and Barth who maintain Ephesians was written to prevent the Gentile *hybris* of anti-Semitism.

16 And it is how M. Barth understands Ephesians 2:11-22: see *Ephesians 1-3*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1974), *ad loc.* and *The People of God* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1983), 45-48. For criticism see A.T. Lincoln, 'The Church and Israel in Ephesians 2', *CBQ* 41 (1987), 605-24, and his commentary, *Ephesians*, 122-65.

17 For critical discussion of postulated Gnostic backgrounds in which the redeemer unites in himself the earthly and heavenly realms, see e.g. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 161-66. We do not need to depart from Paul's Adam christology, however, to explain the text as it stands: see e.g. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 143-44.

mutually alienated divisions of humanity (seen from a Jewish perspective!) as *one new* humanity, in Christ (the eschatological Adam), reconciled to God.

The third part (2:19-22) articulates the consequences of 2:14-18 in a more eschatological perspective (but still directed against any judaising, whether real or merely potential): the Gentiles are fellow citizens with Jewish believers in the one heavenly temple which will be revealed at the end. Thus according to 2:19 they have been privileged to become fellow-citizens with 'the saints' (that is, not with Jews [Barth] or Jewish Christians [Martin], but with the rest of 'God's people' [Lincoln, NIV]) and full members of God's (heavenly) city-temple household. Already in Galatians 4:26 Paul had upstaged the judaisers by saying Christians belong not to the earthly Jerusalem, but to the heavenly one (cf. Phil. 3:20).¹⁸ The theological force of the assertion derives from the assumption that the age to come is already realised in heaven, and Jerusalem, as *she shall be* in the new creation, is waiting to 'descend' (cf. e.g. Rev. 21:1-4 and 21:10-22:5). To say believers are *already* citizens of that temple city is to say they *now* (in union with Christ) participate in that heavenly city, and that it shall finally be revealed and displace all that we know of as reality in this age.¹⁹ If Jewish and Gentile believers already share this heavenly and eschatological unity, which will one day embrace the cosmos, the judaising mission has no rationale.

(c) *In Ephesians 3:6, 8-10*

These verses bring together the strands identified above. If in 1:9-10 the divine mystery revealed to us concerns the re-uniting of all things in Christ, and 2:14-18 elucidates how, in Christ, Jewish and Gentile believers have been made one new humanity, 3:6 identifies the content of the revealed mystery more specifically as the divine intent to make the Gentiles *co-heirs, co-body members* (Paul coins a new word, *sussōma*, to make the point) of a new people of God, and *co-sharers* of the promise of new creation in Christ.²⁰ Each of the three

18 See A.T. Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology*, SNTSMS 43 (Cambridge: CUP, 1981).

19 For a similar view, namely that the church now participates in (and manifests) the worship of the end-time glorified congregation of the saints in the heavenly city, see Hebrews 12.22-24. Cf. e.g. P.T. O'Brien, 'The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity' in D.A. Carson (ed.), *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987), 88-105.

20 On the relation of 3:5-6 to 1:9-10, see e.g. E.D. Roels, *God's Mission: The Epistle to the Ephesians in Mission Perspective* (Franeker: Wever, 1962), 165-69; C.

terms Paul uses begins with the same prefix, meaning 'with', and so underscores the radical new unity of the eschatological community. Then, in 3:8-10 Paul states he has been given the task of bringing people *to see* the cosmic mystery at last revealed (and to see how God has chosen to work out his eternal purpose).

The verb used (*phōtizein*) means 'to enlighten' and assumes a fog of spiritual darkness to be dispelled. While this and related metaphors commonly refer to conversion (cf. Acts 26:17-18; 2 Cor. 4:4-6; 1 Thess. 5:4-5; Eph. 5:8-14), the 'enlightenment' Paul envisages here is rather an *ongoing* and *deepening* spiritual understanding effected by his own teaching ministry and intercessory prayer for his churches (see e.g. 1:18; 3:18).

The significance of this ongoing 'enlightening' is brought out in 3:10, where God's whole purpose in Paul's preaching, teaching, and praying ministry is that *the church* should be the manifestation of God's richly variegated wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms.

Strangely, this is the closest the writer comes to stating a mission for the church with respect to third parties (though cf. 5:13).²¹ But to whom is it addressed? And what does it involve? The powers in mind are probably the *whole* host of heavenly beings; not merely God's angels (as W. Carr holds),²² nor merely the evil powers of 6:12 (as Arnold and Lincoln hold), but both. They are the assembled witnesses before whom God vindicates his wisdom, and he does this through a church which brings his wisdom to expression. The divine wisdom in question is none other than his eternal purpose in Christ (3:11), which, as the reader knows, is God's intent to unify all things in Christ (1:9-10). This wisdom is thus partly 'made known' to the powers *by the very existence* of a universal church where Jew and Gentile live and worship together as one body, in harmony with God and with brothers and sisters in Christ (cf. 2:11-22; 3:6).²³ But God's wisdom is evidently all the more powerfully made known where the

Caragounis, *The Ephesian 'Mysterion': Meaning and Content* (Lund: Gleerup, 1977), ch. 3.

21 R.P.M. Meyer, *Kirche und Mission im Epheserbrief* (Stuttgart: KBW, 1977), is even forced to unearth such a mission from 6.18-20 (assuming an implicit call to imitation of the apostle).

22 W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background Meaning and Development of the Pauline Phrase hai archai kai hai exousiai*, SNTSMS 42 (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), 93-111.

23 Cf. Roels' assertion, 'For the church, even as she is now, though primarily passive in this particular aspect of her witness... is God's witness to the... powers... that his purpose has been accomplished' (*Mission*, 166).

truths of the gospel are illumined through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and so grasp and strengthen the heart, mind and will of the congregation. Hence Paul's prayers in 1:18-2:10 and in 3:15-19.

If it surprises us that Paul should speak of a mission *to the powers* (rather than to the world), we need to remember that Ephesians is written as a companion letter to Colossians.²⁴ Opposed in the latter, apparently, is a judaising mysticism in which the heavenly powers are believed to mediate wisdom to the church. This 'wisdom' (largely in the form of torah-regulations and semi-ascetic regimens) was considered to control access to the heavens and to the angelic worship of God before the throne (cf. 2:8, 16-18, 20-23; contrast 3:1-11, etc.).²⁵ In Paul's view such teaching not only marginalised the Christ-event and ignored or played down the significance of the believers' union with the heavenly Lord (cf. esp. 3:3), but it also threatened to divide the church by exerting yet again a judaising (separatist) pressure upon it. Much of Ephesians implicitly negates such false teaching.²⁶ The church, for example, has no need of the opponents' wisdom for greater access to the heavenly realm if, through her unity with him, she is seated with the heavenly Lord in the most prestigious position in the heavens (2:6; cf. 1:20-21), and if, by 'the Spirit of wisdom and revelation', the eyes of her heart are enlightened with transforming comprehension of her own status and destiny (1:18-2:10). Nor has she need to judaise in any way if she has been created by the *removal* of the dividing wall of the Mosaic Law and if she has already 'become' the most holy of all places, the eschatological heavenly temple (2:19-22). But Ephesians 3:10 represents the peak of Paul's subtle polemic in that it sets out to reverse the opponents' programme: rather than the powers giving wisdom to the church, it is instead the church which makes God's

24 See Goulder, 'Visionaries', *passim*. This is not in doubt amongst those who accept the letter as Pauline. Even on the assumption of a deutero-Pauline authorship, however, it should be clear the writer intends to complement Colossians, not to replace it.

25 See F.O. Francis and W.A. Meeks, *Conflict at Colossae* (Missoula: Scholars, 1975); Lincoln, *Paradise*, 110-18; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, xxx-xxxviii; C. Rowland, 'Apocalyptic Visions and the Exaltation of Christ in the Letter to the Colossians', *JSNT* 19 (1983), 73-83, and Goulder, 'Visionaries'. The view has been challenged by (*inter alios*) M. Hooker, N.T. Wright, and most carefully by R.E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), but we do not find his arguments convincing. The interests of the false teachers are better illumined from the revelatory wisdom depicted in 1 Enoch than from middle platonism.

26 See e.g. Goulder, 'Visionaries' – though we are not by any means convinced by all aspects of his thesis.

multi-faceted wisdom known to the heavenly powers. And the wisdom made known is primarily the wisdom of God's *uniting* Jew and Gentile believer in one body, in Christ, as the beginning of the cosmic reconciliation of *all* things. In God's wisdom the church has been made the place Christ already fills (i.e. savingly rules, and so unites in harmony), just as he will eventually fill *all* things and so bring them into unity under him (1:22-23).²⁷

(d) *Conclusion*

While there are certainly other aspects of hope and meaning brought by the gospel, Ephesians 1-3 centres on the restoration of harmonious relations – reconciliation and 'unity' – both vertically with God and horizontally between Jew and Gentile; both now and at the End.

2. The Consequent Exhortation to Unity in Ephesians 4-6

(a) *The Opening Exhortation to a Life that Expresses New Creation Harmony (4:1-6)*

4:1-6 calls the readers to live in a way that corporately expresses the cosmic unity God has inaugurated. It both sets the tone for the remainder of the letter and provides the thematic link with what has gone before.²⁸ The passage consists of an exhortation to unity (4:1-3; partly expanding Col. 3:12-15) and a confession emphasising it with a seven-fold repetition of the word 'one' (4:4-6).²⁹ While the exhortation proper begins (4:1b) with the familiar general encouragement to live in a way that is worthy of God's calling (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; Rom. 12:1; Col. 1:10), it immediately goes on to spell this out in terms of the corporate humility, the gentleness and the

27 On the implied cosmological significance of the church as Christ's body and fullness, see e.g. J.D.G. Dunn, 'The Body of Christ', in M. Wilkins and T. Paige (eds.), *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin*, JSNTS 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 146-62 (esp. 152-53, 157-60 – though his assertion that Ephesians 1 'equates' the church with the cosmos [158] rests on a premature blending of 'head' and 'body' metaphors in 1.22-23).

28 Cf. the *oun* ('therefore') which grounds the exhortation in the earlier teaching (as at Rom. 12:1).

29 4:4 is reminiscent of Colossians 3:15b, but spelled out in terms of the major themes of Ephesians 2:14-17 (one body); 2:18-22 (one Spirit) and 1:11-14, 18-23 (one hope). The second triad (4:5) could well be a traditional baptismal affirmation (see the commentaries) and is modelled partly on the *Shema*. For parallel confessions of 'the one' in Greek writings and in the early church see Hanson, *Unity*, 149-51.

patient, forgiving love that exemplifies reconciliation (4:2). 4:3 then *specifically* clarifies this as the exhortation to a life eager to maintain the unity which the Spirit grants. Barth attempts to capture something of the urgency of this appeal in the gloss, 'the imperative... excludes passivity, quietism, a wait-and-see attitude... Yours is the initiative! Do it now! Mean it! You are to do it!... – such are the overtones in verse 3.'³⁰

While Paul will later specify how to build towards eschatological unity, here, rather, the call is to *stay within* ('Maintain!') the unity God has already brought them in Christ. The thought appears to be that the Spirit ushers believers into the messianic 'peace' of God-given reconciliation and harmony described in 2:14-17, and the readers have experienced this as a 'uniting bond' bringing together Jew and Gentile as a loving and worshipping community (cf. Col. 3:14). The Spirit may also be thought of as strengthening this bond of unity between believers by enabling the spiritual comprehension of the love of Christ described in 3:16-19, an understanding which the writer considers transforming and as bringing to expression in a person that fullness of God (3:19b) which will eventually reconcile all into unity (1:20-23). Paul is aware, however, that the 'uniting bond' in question can be weakened or even perhaps severed – not merely by the arrogance, falsehood, pride, and selfish assertiveness he will address in 4:17-5:14, but by the pressures to judaise surfacing anew in the Lycus valley. For the writer these things threaten the very essence of the church's mission to exemplify God's grand purpose to reunify the cosmos in the love of Christ.

(b) Christ's Victory Gifts Granted to Support Growth Towards Unity (4:7-16)

Immediately following the opening exhortation and preceding the detailed paraenesis, Paul offers a vision of the church and its ministries dominated by its one eschatological goal. This whole section is carefully fashioned as an implicit call to the *universal church*³¹ to grow as a unified body (4:15-16) from the union *already* given in Christ (2:11-22) towards the full union with Christ in cosmic harmony that will characterise the passing of this age, and the appearance of the new creation (4:13, 15). *Each* Christian, it is emphasised, is given a vital part in this (4:7, 16b) in accordance with the grace given to him or to her by the ascended and liberating Christ (4:8-10). And Christ has given certain types of leader

30 M. Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 428.

31 Hence the first person plurals (in 4:7 and 13 onwards) which bind the readers' congregations with that of the writer.

(fundamentally those with different kinds of teaching gifts),³² precisely to promote and direct such growth, and to ensure cohesive unity (4:11-13; 16a). It is thus 4:13-16 that carry the main 'message' of the paragraph, though several points within it require clarification.

According to 4:13, the leaders are given to accomplish the tasks outlined in 4:12 'until we all attain to the unity inherent in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God' (so REB). The writer is not describing some future *historical* period when the church gradually reaches unity of beliefs and organisation, and becomes a mature church (as NIV could suggest). He anticipates rather the coming of Christ which will consummate the cosmic unity inaugurated at the cross (2:11-22).³³ By faith, and in their knowledge of the Son, the readers already participate in this unity (4:2), but they yet wait to see it fully realised. Only at Christ's coming shall 'we' (the universal church) corporately attain 'the mature man',³⁴ measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ'. The thought here is essentially that of Colossians 3:4, but with added emphasis on the corporate existence of the universal church as a single body that expresses the fullness of Christ.³⁵ The leaders are given to fulfil the functions of 4:12, then, 'until' the Parousia brings this church to complete maturity. But that 'until' also has the implications of 'towards'; what Christ will accomplish fully at the end, is the goal towards which (by God's grace) the leaders are already given to work.

By making 4:14 a new paragraph, and by starting it with the word 'then' (replacing the Greek *hina*, which means 'so that'), NIV again suggests a future golden era for the historical church. But 4:14-16 are still part of the same single sentence begun in 4:11, and the thought is rather that Christ has given these leaders in the meantime to provide the direction the gospel and the believers' hope point in. That is, he gave them 'so that' the church may no longer be trapped in the immaturity of infancy (prey to every pressure) but instead begin to grow up towards the anticipated maturity, the very likeness of Christ. And while the imagery so far could almost suggest the church grows towards an

32 On the ministries in 4:11, see above all H. Merklein, *Das Kirchliche Amt nach dem Epheserbrief* (Munich: Kösel, 1973), esp. 73-99, 332-403, but also E. Best, 'Ministry in Ephesians' *IBS* 15 (1993), 146-66.

33 But not in Barth's sense, according to which the 'mature man' of 4:13 refers to Christ himself and so affirms that we go out to meet the Christ (*Ephesians* 4-6, 489-96): see R. Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 255. On the eschatology of 4:13 see Lona, *Eschatologie*, 325-34.

34 That the *anēr teleios* owes little if anything to Gnostic conceptions (as H. Schlier, *Christus und die Kirche im Epheserbrief* [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1930], 28-35 advocated) has become increasingly clear: see e.g. Hanson, *Unity*, 159-60. It is rather to be explained as part of a larger metaphor in which it contrasts with the childhood immaturity of the present church in 4:14.

35 *Contra* the quite persistent individualising interpretations which take 4:13 to mean something like 'until we each become the mature person' (or GNB, 'we shall become mature people'). The image is rather of the whole church corporately becoming *one* 'mature man' (emphatically Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 256).

independent manhood *like* Christ's, the switch of imagery at the end of 4:15 reminds the reader that Jesus is Lord ('head') of the whole process, and that the church is intended to grow into more intimate union with him. Paul closes the paragraph with a revised form of Colossians 2:19, which attempts to sum up everything said so far. It asserts that the whole body's growth ultimately comes *from* Christ, but that this body grows precisely as each part does its apportioned building work in love (reaffirming 4:7, and clarifying that it is not just leaders who build the church). And all along, the 'upbuilding' and 'growth' is held in unity and cohesion by the 'supporting ligaments', the teaching leaders.

(c) *Exhortations to Abandon the Life of the Old Humanity and Live According to the New Creation Humanity Revealed in Jesus (4:17-6:9)*

This major part of the letter takes up the exhortations of Colossians 3:5-4:2 (and other traditional material). But while in Colossians Paul couched his description of Christian life mainly in terms of a contrast between seeking the things which are above, and putting to death the earthly nature (3:1-6: to redress a different and unhealthy interest in heavenly things), in Ephesians the dominating contrast remains that of 2:1-22; namely the 'then'-now contrast of former alienation and the now inaugurated new creation unity and harmony. Although the language used in the heading here is actually found only at 2:15 and 4:22-24, this nevertheless provides a master metaphor appropriate to much of 4:17-6:9.³⁶ Constraints of space clearly make it impossible to discuss all this material, and we shall confine ourselves to the following observations:

(1) If chapters 1-3 have largely spelt out cosmic reconciliation/unity in terms of the bringing together of Jewish and Gentile believers as one new people of God, 4:17-5:2 (building on the description of the church's mission and destiny in 4:13-16) radicalises this as a call to participate *in a whole new way of being before God and with others*. Believers are called in 4:22 actively to engage in 'putting off' (as one might soiled clothes) 'the old man/humanity' which formerly characterised them. This was a humanity marked by alienation from the life God intended (4:18b), a state of 'fall' exemplified in ignorance of God stemming from rebellious independence (= 'hardness of heart', 4:18c) and in a consequent callousness of life centred in the person's own desires (4:19, 22; cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Believers are rather to 'put on the new man/humanity' (4:24) which corresponds with the divine truth embodied in Jesus (4:20-21).

³⁶ See Turner, 'Ephesians', 1237-44.

For Barth, the 'old man' to be put off is Adam and the 'new man', to be put on, Christ (as at Rom. 6:6; 13:14; cf. Gal. 3:27b).³⁷ But both the Colossians parallel (3:1-4 and 8-10) and 4:24b-32 suggest a different nuance. Here Paul is not thinking of the representative heads of old and new creations as much as the different kind of human nature that characterises each creation. Paul is encouraging the readers to be renewed in mind (contrast the futile mind and what it leads to in 4:17-19), and live according to the new creation nature that God is already making in us. According to 4:24b, that 'new nature' is 'created in God's likeness' (cf. Col. 3:10b; something Paul would hardly say of Christ), and is characterised by a holy righteousness that springs from and mirrors 'the truth'. The 'new man/humanity' is thus both distinct from but closely related to Christ himself; it is the form of humanity created 'in Christ' by uniting Jew and Gentile in him (cf. 2:15).

(2) An essential contrast between the old and the new humanity envisaged is the relational and profoundly corporate nature of the latter. Already the letter has hinted that it is a humanity proceeding from unity in Christ with God (2:15, 17) and moving towards *full* corporate and harmonious unity in Christ (4:13-16) in the cosmic re-unification of all things (1:9-10, 22-23). Here 'new creation' in God's image (4:24; cf. 4:32; 5:1-2) *means* a humanity fundamentally structured towards a reconciling and loving 'belonging' (if not *perichoresis*) with one's 'neighbour' which builds together with him and with her towards the goal of deeper eschatological unity.

(3) It is thus no accident that the very first injunction illustrative of this new humanity is that the reader should 'put off falsehood' and rather 'speak (only) truth with one's neighbour' (cf. Zech. 8:16), and that this is grounded in the assertion 'because we are members of each other' (4:25). The lie is above all the device of the alienated individualist. It represents a sharp closure of the self and, at the same time, a dehumanising distancing and imperious manipulation of the neighbour. These are the marks of 'fallen' humanity in the image of the first Adam who sought independence of God (ironically in the form of wisdom) and received it as his dreadful fate (in the form of all-encompassing alienations [from God, from the neighbour, and within the 'self']). By contrast, those shaped by the new humanity treat their neighbour³⁸ as one *with* whom and *to* whom they truly belong as *interdependent* 'limbs' of one unified body in Christ.

³⁷ Barth, *Ephesians* 4-6, 506-507, 509, 536-45. Against, see e.g. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 283-89.

³⁸ The term 'neighbour' here (as in Jewish tradition) means primarily fellow covenant member, and so Best ('Two Types', 45) is right to see a commitment to truth only made with respect to others *within* the church, not extended to outsiders. But it is difficult to believe that one who understands the theological logic that informs the ethic would readily accept a different standard in respect

(4) Nor is it any accident that the ethics of this whole part of the letter are largely the ethics of community unity. The opening subsection (4:25-5:2) directs primarily against sins such as anger and falsehood, which could cause dissension and alienation in the church, and promotes virtues which lead to corporate unity instead. The injunction in 4:26 is then quite misunderstood when it is taken to commend righteous anger (indeed *all* anger is condemned at 5:31), rather it is a warning: 'If you become angry, beware! You are at sin's door!' Jewish tradition was strongly aware of the divisive, Satanic, and corrupting power of anger (cf. the incisive criticism of it in *Testament of Dan* 1:8-5:2). Anger, and the related sins of 4:29, 31, are the epitome of socially destructive and alienating sins, and so characteristic of the old creation. These things and others of their kind 'grieve the Holy Spirit' (a telling allusion to Isa. 63:10) in the sense that they oppose the very direction of his reconciling, unifying, new-creation work, inaugurated in the believer. In place of these socially destructive activities, Paul advocates corresponding ones that are cohesive, upbuilding, and pattern the new creation existence epitomised and brought into being in Christ: the erstwhile thief should turn philanthropist instead (4:28); speech should not be used to befoul and to tear down, but for good (4:29; cf. 5:19-20); in place of anger, the believers should demonstrate the forgiving character of God (4:32; 5:1) and the self-sacrificial love of Christ who died to atone for us (5:2).

There is little evidence to suggest that Paul was actually aware of the sins in question as a real (rather than a potential) problem in the congregations addressed (*pace* Goulder). Nor is the readiest explanation of the virtues promoted (and the evident lack of attempt to commend the same virtues in relations *to the world*) simply that of sectarian self-interest (so Best).³⁹ It would appear rather that the ethics genuinely flow from the Christo-soteriology and ecclesiology of 1:20-23, 2:11-22, 4:7-16, and 4:17-24, i.e. from the presentation of the church as the place where eschatological reconciliation and cosmic reunification in Christ invade history. It is (by and large) an 'ethics of corporation', written to and for the *community* of unity and reconciliation, not more general advice for the *individual* believer in the broader range of either personal spirituality or conduct in the world.

(5) It may be the attempt to offer an idealising ethic of the reconciled community of eschatological 'unity' that best explains

of the as-yet unreconciled world, and one that was intrinsic to the alienated state of that world.

³⁹ Best, 'Two Types', 49-50.

certain features of the household rule on husbands and wives (5:22-33). The writer has expanded the Colossians parallel from 19 to some 200 words, yet (so unlike the Paul of 1 Corinthians 7) is strangely silent on the problems of *mixed* marriages between believers and unbelievers. In making the husband-wife relationship parallel that of Christ and the church he offers an ethic which Professor Best claims inappropriate and pastorally inadequate for the Christian partner married to an unbelieving spouse (especially if the latter were the husband).⁴⁰ Best deduces this cannot be Paul, but a later writer who 'did not know very much about the membership of the churches to which he was writing'.⁴¹ But this is not a very satisfying explanation, for it is difficult to envisage many churches in the early post-Pauline period that lacked mixed marriages. The writer must have known of them and of the problems they created (and if it was not Paul himself but a disciple it was one who evidently knew 1 Corinthians and its teaching on husbands and wives).⁴² If he ignores the problems of mixed marriages, this can only be deliberate; and a possible explanation is that the writer is more concerned here to elucidate the ideals that most effectively mirror his soteriology of re-unification.

Marriage between Christians serves him especially well as an example of the sort of 'unity' he has in mind between the 'head' (whether the husband or Christ) and his 'body'. A reading of the letter to this point has given some the impression that Christ as 'head' relates to the church as his 'body' in the way the anatomical head relates to the trunk, i.e. to the parts of the body from the neck downwards,⁴³ and some have even suggested Paul thinks

40 E. Best, 'The Haustafel in Ephesians (Eph. 5:22-6:9)', *IBS* 16 (1994), 157.

41 Best, 'Haustafel', 150.

42 See the regular parallels to 1 Corinthians in C.L. Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Its Authorship, Origin and Purpose* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 280-314. Ephesians 5:22-33 itself has several such parallels: Eph. 5:23//1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:25//1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:28//1 Cor. 7:3-4; Eph. 5:30//1 Cor. 12:12, 27; Eph. 5:31b//1 Cor. 6:15-16.

43 The most powerful presentation of such a view is given by C.E. Arnold, 'Jesus Christ: "Head" of the Church (Colossians and Ephesians)', in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 346-66. But in 1:22 Jesus is 'head' over all things, i.e. lord over the cosmos, and the church as his 'body' is not merely his 'trunk' but the complete body (including 'head', as in 1 Cor. 12:14-27) to which he is given as Lord. In other words the 'head' and 'body' here are *separate* metaphors. Similarly at Ephesians 4:15-16 the point can barely be that the church as a mere trunk grows up into its head, Christ; for no Jew or Greek could ever have conceived of a body growing into its anatomical head! Rather the church as a whole body/person (thus including a head) grows up in love into fuller unity with her 'head' (= lord); see,

analogously about the husband-wife relationship: he is the controlling and supplying 'head'; she the subservient 'trunk'. But it is unlikely that the husband is portrayed as the wife's *anatomical* head at any point in the metaphor in 5:23, 28-32 (nor is the wife portrayed there as the parts below his neck). Rather the sense of the word *kephalē* in 5:23 is not 'anatomical head' but 'head' in the sense 'master' or 'lord',⁴⁴ and here Paul simply expresses the conventional view that the husband is master of the household to whom the wife should be submissive (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1, 5-6). But in what follows Paul rescues the apparent subjugation of 5:22-23 from the possibility of its degeneration into an alienating domination.⁴⁵ The Lord's own self-denying sacrificial love for the church is the pattern for the husband's 'lordship', and it is that of the ardent lover which seeks only the good of the beloved (5:25-27). It is within this context that Paul returns to 'body' language (5:28-30), but not principally as an anatomical metaphor, rather as a relational one based on the 'one flesh' union of Genesis 2:24 (cf. 5:31-32).⁴⁶ For the writer the marriage relationship is such an intimate and close unity that in love the husband (a whole body, not just a head) should count her (equally a

above all, J. Meuzelaar, *Der Leib des Messias: Eine exegetische Studie über den Gedanken vom Leib Christi in den Paulusbriefen* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1961).

44 For the lexical semantics of this see Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), 141-45.

45 I am aware that feminist theologians may not consider the rescue attempt goes far enough: cf. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 266-70.

46 The argument of 5:29-30 has often been taken to mean that just as a man never hates his own bodily existence, but looks after his own particular bundle of muscle and bone, so Christ looks after the church, and, implicitly, man should look after his wife, who is joined to him as one flesh. But this is not what Paul says, nor, perhaps, what he means. The words 'his own flesh' probably denote not the man's tissue, but his wife (and the change from 'body' to 'flesh' anticipates 5:31). If it be objected to this that plenty of men have hated their wives, it could equally be argued that plenty of men (not least in the ancient world) hated their bodies too! The statement 'No man ever hated his own flesh' seems rather to be contracted speech for 'no-one that has recognised his wife as "one flesh" with him has been prepared to hate her'. This seems to be born out by two considerations: (1) *thalpō* must be used here to mean 'cherish' or 'comfort', rather than its literal meaning, 'keep warm'; else Paul cannot say 'as Christ does the church'. But the sense 'cherish' or 'comfort' cannot naturally be applied to one's own tissue; only to another person; (2) this is apparently confirmed by the analogy with Christ's loving the church as a Bride; he is not described hereby as loving an extension of himself; but another, joined to himself. 5:30 then means he loves us because he recognises us as members that belong to the body to which he has united himself (so Barth).

whole body including a head) as part of what he is. In that sense he is to treat her as 'his own body': i.e. a full personal being (with head and body) who truly belongs to him, and is so closely related to him that she is a fundamental part of his true personal existence. Had he chosen to, I would suggest, Paul could have said the same to the woman: i.e. 'regard your husband as one body with you',⁴⁷ though of course in co-text this would clash with his use of the metaphor 'head' to express 'lordship'.

Only finally in 5:29-32 does Paul use the unity of the two as one in marriage (by no means merely a sexual union, but a personal and spiritual one too)⁴⁸ and its key text (Gen. 2:24) to illuminate the Christ-church relationship. Paul was perfectly aware of the literal meaning of Genesis 2:24, but he sees the mystery of cosmic unity in Christ, and especially the union between Christ and his body, as in a sense prefigured in the marriage bond (itself already 'refreshed' in the light of Christ's love for the church). For him there is a typological relationship between creation initially in unity with God and redemption eschatologically bringing all back into unity with God. That original unity was nowhere better exemplified than in Adam's pre-fall union with Eve, and Paul holds that Christ's union with the church is its redemptive counterpart. The parallel was not accidental: as Lincoln observes, 'Christ had already been seen in Adamic terms in Eph 1:22..., and so a text that refers to Adam's bodily union can now be claimed for Christ's union with the Church.'⁴⁹ In the light of 5:25b-27 and 5:28-29a, the church is thus likened to a bride (and, reciprocally, marriage is interpreted in the light of that Christ-church union, thereby giving the world the highest ideal of marriage it knows). All this gives a new dimension to speaking of the church as Christ's 'body'. It is not as an anatomical 'part' of him that the writer thinks Christ views her, rather the Lord sees the church as a *whole bodily person* – like a beloved bride – yet so closely related to him that he considers believers as the body *belonging* to him; *his* body, the one totally committed to *him* as *he* is to

47 *Contra* e.g. Lincoln, in Lincoln and Wedderburn, *Later Pauline Letters*, 162. I am aware that a majority claim 'Paul' can only refer to the wife as the husband's 'body' on the basis of his understanding of the Church as Christ's 'body'. On this basis S.F. Miletic and others argue the Christ-church relationship is analogically prior to the husband-wife relationship described in Ephesians ('One Flesh': Eph. 5:22-24, 31: *Marriage and the New Creation* [Rome: PBI, 1988], 27).

48 Cf. T. Moritz, 'The Use of Israel's Scriptures in Ephesians' (unpublished PhD dissertation, King's College, London, 1994), 132-73. Moritz finds the teaching of this passage much closer to the Paul of 1 Corinthians 6-7 than is usually admitted.

49 Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 382.

her (cf. 1 Cor. 7:4). In brief, in Ephesians 5 the 'body' metaphor is not primarily *anatomical*; it is *relational*. Paul uses it primarily to portray marriage as a personal unity of love which regards the other as so truly belonging to and with the self that they become two persons in one being (i.e. one 'being-in-communion').

While this is evidently an 'ideal' of marriage (and even, by analogy, of other personal human relations), it is less clear to me why it should be regarded as 'inappropriate' for mixed marriages (as Professor Best implies). The *perichoresis* (loving personal co-indwelling) of husband and wife envisaged in marriage, and typical of the Christ-church union, is simply a renewal of the expectation of the creation narrative for *all* humanity.

(d) Conclusion

The paraenesis of Ephesians 4-6 clarifies further the kind of 'unity' the writer regards to be at the centre of God's eschatological will to reunite all things in Christ. The unity between Jew and Gentile as one reconciled and renewed people of God is but the outer expression of a more fundamental 'unifying'. This consists in the reorientation of personhood from closure to God and neighbour (alienation) to a corporate unity in Christ of which the bonds are reconciling love. Just as the husband and wife are called to recognise each other as 'one body', so the individual members of the congregation(s) are called to see themselves as interdependent 'limbs' (4:25) joined to become one mutually enriching body that grows in unity together (4:13-16). For the writer this orientation towards unity is not simply a matter of pragmatism (a united church is stronger than a divided one); as the predominating 'once-now' contrast of the letter indicates, it goes to the heart of the gospel itself: such unity in love is *the* distinguishing mark of the new humanity over against the alienated world doomed to pass away. For this reason, truly to 'comprehend' the incomprehensible love of Christ is already to be filled with that fullness of God that will eventually reunite all things at the End (3:18-19). In the meantime, the implicit mission of the church is to live out that unity in a way that constitutes a light which reveals the darkness of the alienated world (cf. 5:7-14; 4:18, etc.). And it is life in this new truly personal community – the first installment of cosmic reconciliation – that brings true 'meaning' to otherwise meaningless dehumanised existence.

3. Implications for Theology and Church

Constraints of space permit only brief discussion under three heads.

(a) *The Importance of 'Unity' in Ephesians compared with that in the Other Major New Testament Witnesses*

If Ephesians makes 'unity' central to its theological agenda, to what extent is this supported by the major New Testament witness of Luke, Paul and John?

(1) *In Luke-Acts*. While the specific *language* of unity is relatively insignificant in Luke-Acts, the *concept* of Israel's reconciliation with God, and of her consequent transformation as an integrated community is central. The theme of the 'kingdom of God' is God's reconciling eschatological presence in liberating power to 'restore' Israel as a light to the nations. In terms of the hopes of the *Magnificat* (esp. Luke 1:51-54) and the *Benedictus* (1:68-79) this involves the removal of all alienating oppression in its diverse forms, and the creation of an Israel at peace, free to serve and worship God without fear, in holiness and righteousness. G. Lohfink, M.J. Borg and P. Stuhlmacher have demonstrated that Jesus' ethical teaching, grounded in the new possibilities created by the presence of God's reign, is a programme for a community of reconciliation and 'peace'.⁵⁰ This involves living out of a sense of reconciliation with the Father and extending that forgiveness, peace, and loving care to the neighbour and even to the enemy. In Borg's terms it implies a replacing of the Pharisees' alienating and exclusive 'purity' paradigm for Israel with a reconciling 'mercy' paradigm. I.H. Marshall and J.O. York have elucidated the substantial degree to which the 'reversals' anticipated in the *Magnificat* are seen to be fulfilled in Jesus' ministry and teaching, and in the life of discipleship to which these point.⁵¹ The summary passages of Acts

50 G. Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (London: SPCK, 1985); M.J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1984); P. Stuhlmacher, *Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), ch. 1. Also significant are Martin, *Reconciliation*, ch. 10, and L.D. Hurst, 'Ethics of Jesus', in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 210-22.

51 I.H. Marshall, 'The Interpretation of the Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55', in C. Bussmann and W. Radl (eds.), *Der Treue Gottes Trauen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 181-96; J.O. York, *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke*, JSNTS 46 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991). The 'poor' are exalted in multiple senses: the sick are healed (and rise on the shame/honour scale); the pious poor receive 'good news' that the kingdom of God is theirs; Jesus befriends the poor; the 'poor' in the sense of the *excluded*; 'the sinners' and other marginalised groups – are reintegrated; the hungry are fed (spiritually and physically); those with possessions are urged to use their riches to benefit these poor, etc. Similarly the 'rich' are sent empty away in multiple senses too: they are warned of the woe that comes upon them (e.g. 6:24; 12:16-21; 16:13); warned that if they do not

(esp. 2:42-47 and 4:32-35) portray a society in which these hopes are significantly realised. The disciples are now regarded as a united 'fellowship' (2:42), which is portrayed as a generous community of 'friends' who have all things in common (2:44; 4:32), and as a united brotherhood of reconciliation (cf. 'of one heart and soul', 4:32; 'one together', 2:44, 46; 5:12), enjoying table-fellowship (2:42, 46), joyfully worshipping God (2:47), and being held in high esteem by the rest of the people (2:47; 5:13). There are no poor left in need, nor hungry to mourn, nor rich who oppress. The description thus corresponds in considerable measure to the 'salvation' envisaged in Luke 1:71-76, and to the aims of Jesus' ministry for Israel's transformation.⁵² The rest of Acts (esp. Acts 15) emphasises the church as a congregation striving to live in unity.⁵³

(2) *In John.* John 17 puts the issue of 'unity' at the centre of the theological agenda by making Jesus' Testamentary Prayer for the church virtually exclusively a request that the future church be enabled to live in a unity of love that mirrors that between the Father and the Son (see 17:11, 21). From the perspective of this passage, the world can only be expected to believe when the church lives out a perichoretic uniting love which confronts the world with a totally new way of 'being' and which defies explanation in merely human terms. It can only be explained as the indwelling of these disciples by the God revealed in Jesus. Or, in broader Johannine categories, it is only explained by the new creation (cf. John 3:3-16) and the indwelling of the community by the Spirit who glorifies the Father and the Son by structuring its existence to mirror the mutually indwelling love of the Father and the Son (John 14-15).

(3) *In Paul.* We have already indicated something of the background to the Ephesians theme of 'unity' in the Pauline tradition.⁵⁴ Professor Martin has attempted to argue that such

use their riches to benefit the poor they will suffer torment (16:19-31); a rich man unwilling to part with his riches departs from Jesus (18:18-23) and the rich leaders of Judaism oppose him (as do Pharisees who 'love riches', 16:14). The arrogant proud are humbled, while the lowly and marginalised become examples of the blessed (18:9-14; 7:36-50; 10:25-37; 14:15-23). In the community of the disciples, the paradigm for leadership becomes service rather than domination (22:24-27), etc.

⁵² For this argument in detail, see M. Turner, *Power from on High: The Charismatic Spirit of Israel's Restoration in Luke-Acts*, forthcoming from Sheffield Academic Press.

⁵³ Cf. Hanson, *Unity*, ch. 2, and P.J. Achtemeier, *The Quest for Unity in the New Testament Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), esp. chs. 2, 5-6.

⁵⁴ See §1 (a) above, and Hanson, *Unity*, ch. 3.

'reconciliation' could be regarded as the *centre* of Pauline theology.⁵⁵ While there are problems with defining such a 'centre', it may be pointed out that eschatological 'unity' was a *theologoumenon* for which Paul willingly risked his life. During the close of his Aegean ministry Paul brought together a collection from all of his predominantly Gentile churches for the Jerusalem church. It would seem it was largely an attempt to seal the unity of the Gentile and Jewish-Christian churches. In accepting the gift of these 'material blessings', the Jerusalem church (often profoundly suspicious of Paul's Law-free gospel) would admit the Gentiles had indeed 'come to share in their spiritual blessings' (so Rom. 15:27).⁵⁶ As Romans 15:30-32 indicates, Paul was well aware both of the delicacy of the issue, and of the physical danger he ran in any high-profile return to Judea. The testimony of Acts is that he went ahead with the journey to Jerusalem, knowing full well it would lead to prison and possible martyrdom (cf. 21:4, 11-13, etc.). If he was not released following his trial in Rome, but eventually martyred there, then there is a real sense in which Paul was to die for his *credo* 'There is neither Jew nor Greek for all are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28), and for the visible unity of the church in love which expressed it. It is then little wonder that Ephesians gives such centrality to the theme.

Given the (brief) indications above, it is hardly surprising that Stuhlmacher and Martin have claimed the theme of 'reconciliation' or 'unification' is not merely at the centre of *Paul's* theology, but properly a centre for *New Testament* (and so potentially also for *Systematic*) *Theology*.

(b) *The Theme of 'Unity' and the Theology of Personhood in Redemption*

As our conclusions to §2 imply, the theology of unity in Ephesians (and in John) finds its richest fulfilment in those contemporary theologies which articulate true human personhood primarily in *relational terms*.⁵⁷ Western theological anthropology stemming from

55 *Reconciliation*, 8 and *passim* (following J. Weiss, T.W. Manson and P. Stuhlmacher).

56 See e.g. S. McKnight, 'Collection for the Saints', in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 143-47 and the literature there. See also the essay by Daniel Chae, 'Paul's Apostolic Self-Awareness and the Occasion and Purpose of Romans', in this volume.

57 See e.g. J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (London: DLT, 1985); Zizioulas, 'On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood', in C. Schwöbel and C.E. Gunton (eds.), *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 33-46; A.I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), *passim*; C.E. Gunton,

Augustine (it is claimed) has inclined instead to elucidate humanity made in God's image largely in terms of the *rational* powers of the soul. When this tendency is fuelled by (neo-)Platonism and strengthened by Cartesian epistemology ('I think, therefore I am') and its post-Enlightenment developments, it can naturally lead to the radical individualism endemic to the societies of western democracy. Within this, full 'personhood' may be perceived as innate to human existence, essentially prior to and independent of relations to others. Correspondingly in *theology* there is the propensity to explain trinitarian relations within God in defective forms of 'Social Trinity' which verge on tritheism (three individual gods – Father, Son and Spirit – who nevertheless get on remarkably well!).⁵⁸

By contrast to this, there has recently been a healthy resurgence of views of human personhood owing their inspiration more to the fourth century Cappadocian Fathers (esp. Basil of Caesarea) and to the tradition of the Eastern church. Within such an approach, the personhood of the Father cannot be abstracted from his relationships to the Son and the Spirit (God is 'Father' precisely *in relation* to God as 'Son' and 'Spirit'). And correspondingly, humankind in the image of the three-in-one who co-indwell in love is created not single (Adam), but as a pair ("Let us make man in our image"... in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them', Gen. 1:26-27). The two achieve distinct true personhood only in loving relationship to God and to each other – i.e. as each relates in openness to the other, and as they explore their sameness and distinctness, and as the pair engage each other mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally. Adam only becomes 'man' in the process of his relation to these others; the God who calls him into partnership and the 'woman' who is flesh of his flesh.⁵⁹

'Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of Imago Dei', in Schwöbel and Gunton (eds.), *Persons*, 47-61; Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), *passim* (but esp. chs. 6 and 8).

58 Of course, the predominant danger in western theology has (for quite different reasons) been the opposite one, namely that of collapsing divine personhood into divine substance.

59 Cf. McFadyen, *Personhood*, ch. 1. Building partly on such a paradigm, and taking the gender difference and relation as 'the paradigmatic case of structural distance and relation in human being' (31), McFadyen argues towards a definition of the person as: 'An individual who is publicly identifiable as a distinct, continuous and integrated social location from (*sic*) whence communication may originate and to which it may be directed; who has the capacity for autonomous engagement in social communication, and who has a unique identity sedimented from previous [personal] interaction' (317).

Within such a theological structure, a central aspect of 'fall' is that it represents that pursuit of independence from the other which led to the pathological closure and dislocation (internalisation of personhood) from God and neighbour which characterises humanity outside Christ. Arguably most subsequent sin is rooted in such failure to recognise God and neighbour as those with whom our own authentic personhood is bound up (for I would be much less liable to lie to, steal from, ignore, or otherwise mistreat, beings whom I genuinely saw as one with me in love). It is this state which we characterise theologically as 'alienation' (and it will be clear why I earlier suggested it is epitomised in individualism). Redemption, by contrast, is the move towards the recovery of the Paradisal personhood in unity/harmony with God and neighbour. It is genuinely theocentric in its recognition that God set forth his eschatological reconciling purpose in Christ and it is Christofocal in its recognition that Jesus is the image of true personhood in relation to God and to humankind.⁶⁰ But the same theology of redemption should inevitably lead to a vibrant *ecclesiology* in so far as the very essence of this redemption consists in the move away from the alienations of closure and dislocation towards personal reunification in Christ with God and neighbour. Such a move inevitably constitutes 'the church', which is precisely the (re-)bonding together of humanity in Christ, the beginning of the one corporate 'new man' towards which, by grace, it should grow. While John 17 grounds this new unity *theologically* (i.e. as the image of the mutual love of the Father and the Son), Ephesians articulates the same redemptive pattern *ecclesiologically* and *anthropologically* in its call for a church united in love thereby increasingly becoming 'one body', or the 'mature man', corresponding to the fullness of Christ. That the writer regards this 'new humanity' as a *process attained in engagement with others*, and leading up to the Parousia rather than merely 'given' at conversion, is made clear by the imperatives in 4:22, 24 (contrast Col. 3:9-10) and in the evident teleology of 4:13. For the writer of Ephesians the new humanity (and consequently all true human personhood) is *essentially* (not merely accidentally) relational and corporate, and so ecclesial.⁶¹

60 For a theology of redemption consistently written from the latter perspective, see P.E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1989).

61 It was not until I had virtually completed this essay that I discovered Christoph Schwöbel's essay, 'Human Being as Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology', in Schwöbel and Gunton (eds.), *Persons*, 141-65.

(c) Unity, Plurality and Ecumenicity

Ephesians portrays the church as the reconciling community of the reconciled; the firstfruits of cosmic re-unification and harmony. It is for this unity that it is to 'strive' (4:3). But what forms of the struggle does Ephesians support, and what would it regard as distortions of the attempt?

(1) The evangelical tradition has quite rightly fostered the unity of the local congregation, though it is not always clear on what grounds other than that Scripture evidently commends it. When it has failed to articulate the underlying theological basis for such unity it has often allowed western individualism to shape its understanding of the gospel. Accordingly, promises made to the church *corporate* are collapsed into promises to each individual (e.g. that God will guide, interpret scripture, make the 'mature person', etc.), and unity before God and together is too easily confused with a clear majority vote after what is occasionally a somewhat short and sharp exchange of resolutions and views in a church business meeting. This latter procedure, which regularly leaves alienated minorities and increasing polarisations, is only with difficulty squared with the vision of Ephesians. The main thrust of the writing would rather commend the patient attempt to hear all sides with due respect, the giving of sufficient space in important decisions for corporate prayer, and listening to God, and the vigorous attempt to reconcile divided parties in a corporate *consensus* (as in Acts 15).

(2) Another questionable form of the search for congregational unity comes in the various recommendations for homogeneous unit churches (whether this is innocently based in the sheer pragmatism of Church Growth principles or articulates some form of the evils of racial discrimination and *apartheid*).⁶² As Peter Cotterell has emphatically stated, this runs clean contrary to the vision in Ephesians 2 where the church mirrors eschatological and cosmic reconciliation in its *historical* reconciliation of Jew and Gentile, thus demolishing what was then 'the most intractable racial barrier of all':

Entirely contrary to what the American school of Church Growth thinking has proposed, the local congregation is a community within which rich and poor, black and white, men and women, old and young are to find a commonality in Christ. The New Testament precisely does

The congruence between the thrust of Ephesians and many elements of his essay I found especially striking.

⁶² For the definitive treatment of the issue in relation to Ephesians 2, see W. Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1978).

not propose homogeneous churches... Instead it proposes a grand breaking down of all sociological barriers.⁶³

Homogeneous churches might represent little more than another variation of the collapse of the many into the one which is endemic in so many forms of existence outside Christ (whether collectivism, communism, or despotism), and a failure to recognise that Trinitarian theology provides an ontology of particularity and of diversity in unity (in personhood, society and nature).⁶⁴

(3) One may suspect a similar collapse of the many into the one in the tendency to set up authoritative ministries which exert 'unity' by institutional or charismatic compulsion.⁶⁵ Such 'unity' may be little more than 'conformity' imposed by the leader, and, if so risks, becoming alienating and de-humanising, rather than serving the gospel promoted by Ephesians. While all leadership and discipline involves delicate issues of 'authority' and 'freedom', Ephesians 4:7-16 emphasises that these should liberate the church to a corporate personal unity of love promoted by the contribution of each member, and serving the more general unity of the universal church. The style of leadership exercised needs to recognise the essentially dialogical nature of personhood (rather than regarding the congregations as empty vessels to be filled, or vanquished vassals to submit). A truly corporate and personal model of ministry based in Ephesians 4 would suggest that even where authority rests on revelatory charismata, these need to be tested by the whole community of believers (as indeed 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 14:29 require). Furthermore, a recognition of the *universal* church as Christ's one body in unity would suggest that significant teachings and emphases should be submitted (in a spirit of humility and consultation, not one of confrontation) to the *wider* church (and then not merely to one's sister congregations).⁶⁶

(4) Protestant tradition has tended to seek broader unity than the local church through *confessional* unities (whether within

63 Peter Cotterell, *Mission and Meaninglessness: The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder* (London: SPCK, 1990), 234 and n.17 (cf. 150).

64 See Gunton, *One, passim*.

65 I have considered some of the issues in 'Restorationist' churches with which I have enjoyed membership in M. Turner, 'Ecclesiology in the Major "Apostolic" Restorationist Churches in the United Kingdom', *VoxEv* 19 (1989), 83-108.

66 This takes place to some extent in the community of theological scholarship (I anticipate this article may elicit corrective questions and comments from my colleagues near or far!) and in interdenominational conferences and consultations.

denominations, or across them). While these, like the creeds, may be a tool of unity as long as they are directed at matters at the heart of Christian faith, they may equally be tools of division and alienation when they 'unite' around less central matters (e.g. predestination, charismata in the church today, the nature of final retribution), or even around such comparative adiaphora as the mode of water baptism, or doctrines of subsequence and initial evidence. That is certainly not to say the attempt to express clear teaching on matters of disagreement is wrong. The quest for 'unity' does not mean silence in disagreement. On the contrary, silence is a capitulation of my personhood to that of the other, and perhaps the failure lovingly to resist distortion in the other (cf. Col. 1:28-29).⁶⁷ But when the church actually becomes *divided* over such issues she must weigh whether her pursuit of some particular truth has not subverted the more central truth of her call (as a universal church) to mirror God's inauguration of cosmic reconciliation in Christ. Ultimately the 'unity of faith' (Eph. 4:13) for which we strive this side of the Parousia is not so much agreement in details of biblical interpretation and Dogma as the corporate personal unity of love in Christ inherent in our faith and witnessed to in our proclamation and in our life as a church.⁶⁸ There is little reason to believe Paul thought he would be able to bring about extensive agreement in matters of biblical interpretation between his largely Gentile congregations and the conservative Jewish ones in Judea. But this did not prevent him from attempting to unite these bodies more closely in mutual loving recognition of each other. Instead it led him to find theological space for tolerance of diversity *within* the unity (cf. Rom. 14).⁶⁹

(5) Protestant evangelical tradition has tended to be *laissez-faire* in its attitude to the unity of the church universal, and to rest in the given unity of the *invisible* church. Unfortunately such invisible unity in Christ does not fulfil the expectation of John 17:20-21; nor does it conform with Paul's ministry and teaching which was aimed at visible expression of reconciliation and corporate belongingness in the universal church. The Ecumenical movement has taken the New Testament mandate more seriously, and such is to be welcomed. Blocking the full integration this may have hoped for, however, is above all the Roman Catholic exclusive claims to the fullness of the gospel and the legitimating ministry (anchored in the papacy). This

⁶⁷ See McFadyen, *Personhood*, ch. 6.

⁶⁸ Cf. Usami's contention that unity in Ephesians is *not* orthopraxis, nor doctrinal unity, but *community* unity (*Unity*, 183-84).

⁶⁹ For an engaging ecumenical discussion along such lines, see O. Cullmann, *Unity Through Diversity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

has meant that the emphasis within the Ecumenical search has come to fall primarily on the institutional issues of sacraments and recognition of ministry which enable full mutual recognition. These are clearly important issues, especially where disagreement prevents Eucharistic celebration between the churches. However, we need to remember they are not the real locus of unity in Ephesians. The sacraments are not even mentioned in the letter, at least not explicitly. And the very types of ministry around which the church was called to rally in Ignatius' day (and to which some sectors of the Ecumenical movement look for unity today) – ruling overseers/bishops and elders – are conspicuously absent from the Ephesian scene.⁷⁰ Rather the letter would suggest that at the heart of any truly ecumenical move must be the recognition that the masses of faithful worshipping and serving believers form local and trans-local expressions of a new type of humanity and personhood in Christ that is already, *of its essence*, potentially strongly uniting. Ephesians 4 suggests leadership is given to facilitate the inherent unities and promote them across the present divides in every practical way, while also working to remove the dividing theological obstacles at national and international conciliary bodies. In evangelical circles such unity is promoted at the local level by joint sponsorship of services, of evangelistic endeavours, and of different types of Christian education. At national (and international) level it is encouraged by such institutions as Spring Harvest, the Evangelical Alliance, and by a multitude of interdenominational para-church organisations. Amongst these last we should make special mention of the Bible Colleges, which Peter Cotterell has so faithfully served, and of one of which he has been Principal. To him, as both friend and colleague, this essay is gratefully dedicated.

⁷⁰ The absence of these figures from 4:11-12 is so unexpected in a late Pauline or post-Pauline letter that it led Fischer (*Tendenz*) to suspect the purpose of Ephesians was to oppose an increasingly early catholic tendency to impose uniting rule through these offices at the expense of the more charismatic ministries Ephesians honours. This speculation has found virtually no support. On Käsemann's contention that Ephesians is itself 'early catholic', see Lincoln and Wedderburn, *Later Pauline Letters*, 137-41, and on the relation of Ephesians to the ecumenical endeavours, see 153-56.