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The Congregation of Christ — A Charismatic Body

An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 12

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This paper was prepared for presentation at a conference on charismatic gifts held at Way of the Cross Lutheran Church in Coon Rapids, Minn., Oct. 29—31, 1968. Rather than clothe my thoughts in more academic dress for journal presentation, I have chosen to retain the intimacy of the occasion in first person address. This will do greater justice to the more than academic interest that this subject is currently arousing in widespread circles. It will also explain the choice of emphases.

My original assignment was a little vague. I knew I was to deal with the New Testament materials which treat in general with the subject of charismatic gifts. There would be other specialized presentations on specific gifts. It was not until I received a promotional brochure that I was given a formulated subject: "The Lordship of Jesus and Charisma for His Body." This formulation of the subject and the slogan for the conference, "Jesus is Lord," suddenly made it quite clear to me how I should approach my topic. There is really only one passage in the New Testament in which the slogan "Jesus is Lord" is brought into close conjunction with the concept charisma. That is 1 Corinthians 12. This passage has the further advantage of being St. Paul's own generalized discussion of charisma in prepara-

tion for special attention to that gift which was the major focus of interest in Corinth and which is undoubtedly the major focus of interest today, namely, the gift of tongues. I had flirted with the possibility of concentrating on the specialized discussion of the tongues phenomenon in 1 Corinthians 14 until the program brochure made it quite clear that what was wanted from me was something that I felt better able to provide. What was called for was an objective exegetical study of Paul's foundational discussion. All that was required was a slight rephrasing of the topic to fit it more closely to the mold of my thought: *The Congregation of Christ — A Charismatic Body.*

METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

If we had only chapter 12, we would probably never have surmised that the focus of Paul's practical concern throughout chapters 12, 13, and 14 of First Corinthians is the tongues phenomenon. So cautiously and with such relative objectivity does Paul lay his groundwork in this initial chapter. "And now concerning" (περὶ δέ) begins the chapter. This is a catch phrase repeated six times in the second half of the letter. It is in each instance an almost certain indication that Paul is responding directly to a set of questions addressed to him in a letter from the Corinthian congregation. What the precise

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questions were can only be inferred from Paul's responses. They were, of course, well known to the original correspondents and needed only Paul's allusion to call them to mind. In this instance we have trouble already with that allusion: *περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν*. Summon your Greek and remind yourself that *πνευματικῶν* can be either neuter or masculine. Which shall it be? "And now concerning the spiritual things [presumably gifts]?" Or, "And now concerning spiritual men?" Admittedly, it may not make much of a difference. But it just possibly might, as we try to reconstruct the original set of concerns.

Suppose the questions were not just relatively cool inquiries about certain spiritual phenomena in the congregation's life, but hotly engaged questions about certain individuals in the congregation. These individuals would have claimed special spiritual powers and perhaps even dubbed themselves the *πνευματικοί* par excellence. Students of 1 Corinthians are increasingly agreed that there was such a group of individuals; that they are indeed the major source of Paul's concern throughout the letter, especially in the all-important first four chapters. These self-styled "pneumatics" (this frank transliteration seems preferable to the slightly Anglicized "pneumatists") were disrupting congregational life on all levels as they pridefully stood on their vaunted wisdom and insight. That would, however, be the subject for another discussion. At this point I would only suggest that it is these pneumatics who may very well be Paul's underlying concern here as well, and that the translation should be "And now concerning the pneumatics." These pneumatics apparently saw in the conspicuous gift of tongues the very war-

rant they sought for their claim to superiority. Here was proof that they really did have a special corner on the *πνεῦμα*, the Spirit. The questions addressed would then have sought Paul's opinion concerning these disruptive claims. Favoring this would be chapter 14:37, where the word is found in a form that is unambiguously masculine: "If anyone seems to be a prophet or a *πνευματικός*, let him recognize that what I say is the command of the Lord." It does not take a skilled exegete to catch the challenge of disguised irony in that use of *πνευματικός*. Against this reading of the word in 12:1 would be its use in 14:1, for here it is unambiguously neuter: "Pursue love, and strive for the spiritual gifts" (*πνευματικά*). The questions would then have had less of a personal bite. "Are there gradations in spiritual gifts, Paul? And is the gift of tongues, as some claim, really the best gift of all?"

Does that leave us with a draw? Perhaps. In either case it is clear in the broader context of the three chapters that tongues were somewhere near the heart of the questions addressed to Paul. But I think we are no longer quite at the point where we started. We should be just a little more aware than we might have been how deeply involved our passage is in the specifics of a unique and unrecoverable — let alone repeatable — historic situation. We should be wary of rash generalizations and should appreciate the cautious advice that any direct comparison of a situation in Corinth with a modern situation is apt to be misguided.

So I am grateful that I restrained my impulse to jump immediately into chapter 14. We do better to approach the issue of tongues as Paul does, with his own con-

sidered statement of the place of *χαρίσματα* in general in the life of the congregation. With that we introduce what seems to have been Paul's own chosen term for spiritual gifts. He did not regularly refer to them as *πνευματικά*, but as *χαρίσματα*. This is almost exclusively a Pauline term in the New Testament. Sixteen of the seventeen occurrences are in the Pauline epistles, and the exception is in a letter greatly indebted to Paul for theology and vocabulary — First Peter. A statistical indication that we have focused on the right chapter is that five of those sixteen Pauline uses are in 1 Corinthians 12.

Although Paul's statement is still embedded in the Corinthian situation, we may feel confident that in this foundational chapter he is expressing what lies close to his heart for the life of every congregation. He wishes to set the specific Corinthian dilemma into the perspective of his vision of what every congregation of Christ is and must be. When we see how Paul approaches the phenomenon of tongues in the Corinth of his day from this broad perspective, we may with somewhat greater confidence approach whatever the analogous phenomena may be in our day.

We begin with a thesis: *For Paul every congregation is a charismatic community, a body shaped and informed by the Spirit of Christ and His gifts.* First Corinthians 12 is not a description of the church as it once was in one place. It is a statement of our Lord's abiding will and expectation for the church of all times in every place. That the Corinthian congregation in many ways contradicted the ground plan of 1 Corinthians 12 does not alter this fact. The congregation was distorted, not because it was charismatic but in spite of its charis-

matic endowment. Or, if you will, it was a perverted vision of what charismatic endowment entails in congregational life that created the problems. The cure does not lie in the eradication of charisma, for that cure would kill the patient. The church, the congregation of believers in any place, if it is alive at all, lives by the charismatic infusion of the Spirit. Paul's thanksgiving at the very beginning of the letter (1:4-7) contains the first instance of the word charisma and is a summary statement of what is essential to the life of any Christian congregation: "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in Him with all speech and all knowledge — even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you — so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift."

The key words are at the beginning and at the end of that sentence. There is no way to convey in English the subtle emphasis in the word play: "I give thanks to God for the grace (*χάρις*) of God which was given you . . . so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift (*χάρισμα*)."
χάρις and *χάρισμα* — the one the essential life-giving gift, the other the gift that sustains and nurtures that life. *χάρις* and *χάρισμα* — the gift of God's love in Christ and the gift of Christ's love in His Spirit. *χάρις* and *χάρισμα* — without the first there would be no message to proclaim, without the second no vitality in the proclamation. *χάρις* and *χάρισμα* — the first to restore man to fellowship with God and to a life of community in the new humanity, Christ's body; the second to set that man a task in that body and to empower him to act.

We all carry bits and pieces of melodies and poems in our minds, stray sentences and fragments of forgotten conversations. They rise unbidden from the subconscious again and again — sometimes at the strangest moments — to remind us that they are still there. There is a sentence prayer that has played this haunting game with me for years. It seems to be always just off stage, and its frequent intrusions into consciousness are my closest experience of the fact that prayer can be "without ceasing." "Come, Holy Spirit," runs the prayer. "Revive Thy church, beginning with me." It is my prayer for charisma. It is my recognition that the church is not bringing to the world the answer of God's grace, His χάρις, not at all as it should. It is my confession that I am typical of the church as she is and that therefore I am responsible for that lack of power. Is it perhaps not also, in my repeated suppression of that prayer, my acknowledgment that I do not have that power because I do not really want it?

All preachers have favorite sermon illustrations. One of mine has to do with Lorenzo de Medici. Lorenzo loved to stage magnificent displays for the people of Florence. One Pentecost he outdid himself. He had the original story of Pentecost re-enacted, complete with tongues of fire. During the performance the draperies in the chancel of the church caught fire, and before that Pentecost was over the church had burned to the ground. So it was that Pentecost in Florence, and so it would be if my prayer were answered: "Revive Thy church, beginning with me." How much in my life and in the life, forms, and structures of my church would simply be burned up?

We restate our thesis: *Every congregation is a charismatic community, a body shaped and informed by the Spirit of Christ and His gifts.*

But is that really so? Can even this chapter be in any way universalized? Does not our initial dilemma with the introductory phrase point us in the right direction still? What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 — not just in chapter 14 — applies in an unrepeatably and untranslatable way only to Corinth. Aside from homiletical rhetoric and general observations about χάρις and χάρισμα, someone might insist, this chapter is a closed chapter of a past history. This richness of gifts, this use of χάρισμα in the plural, this embarrassing variety of the Spirit has simply ceased. Why, with scarcely any exceptions, we cannot even know with any degree of scholarly certainty what the several gifts were that Paul names in his lists. For the Corinthians the simple naming of the gifts sufficed; for us the names stand alone as isolated riddles. All that is left is the ability imaginatively to reconstruct some faint image of what once seems to have been. Well, this point of view is itself quite ancient. Already in the middle of the second century after Christ it appears that the gifts of the early church were spoken of only in retrospective reminiscence, not as in any way descriptive of the present life of the community.

If this viewpoint is correct, however, we could spare ourselves the trouble of studying 1 Corinthians 12. It might even be that this reminder of the charismatic life of the early community would eventuate in a paralyzing legalism. We could set up a model of congregational life which, with the best of will, we could not approximate.

In our anxiety to reproduce the primitive *χαρίσματα* we could stifle what charismatic freedom we have in Christ's Spirit. And all in the name of charisma and the Spirit. First Corinthians 12 would not have helped but have harmed us!

But this restricted view of our chapter will not do. This is not just a private matter between Paul and the Corinthians. It is of the utmost significance that when Paul writes to the Romans, he includes in chapter 12 a description of congregational life which, in its essentials, agrees with that of 1 Corinthians 12 — precisely also in the inclusion of a list of charismatic gifts and the figure of the church as a body in which those gifts are to be employed. Paul addresses a distant congregation, not known by him, not founded by him, in essentially the same way he addresses that congregation which more than any other was known to him in the nitty gritty of a specific and highly compromised situation. What does that mean if it does not mean that "Christian congregation" means to Paul in general what it means to him specifically in Corinth? For Paul the congregation lives entirely in and of the Spirit, that Spirit who calls every member to service and endows each with unique gifts for service to that body which is not just a collection of individuals but a congregation, a multi-functioning organism.

Must we not consider the possibility that we have made our access to Paul's understanding of congregational life needlessly difficult, if not impossible? This is because we tend to approach the picture of 1 Corinthians 12 with preconceived notions of what is meant by charismatic gifts. Our mental picture is so strongly colored with

enthusiastic and ecstatic elements that the gifts are almost totally removed from that which most of us experience in our everyday Christianity. Yet it could be that in our mental construct we are thereby closer to that picture of congregational life which Paul combats than to that which he recommends. It is as if we read 1 Corinthians backwards and understood chapter 12 in the light of chapter 14 — in the uncorrected light, moreover, of the Corinthians' own valuation of ecstatic gifts and not of Paul's sober corrective. Shall we look at Romans 12 once more? Is it of no consequence that that gift which was so highly valued by the Corinthians and which, above all, has given an enthusiastic coloring to our picture of the *χαρίσματα* is not even mentioned there? Tongue speaking is conspicuously absent.

That does not mean that to open up 1 Corinthians 12 for ourselves we must rationalize and despiritualize it. Everything in the chapter has to do with the Spirit and His gifts. And as for tongue speaking, Paul himself claims the gift: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; nevertheless, in church [i. e., in the assembled congregation] I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in tongues" (14:18 ff.). That is the major point of Paul's corrective. Charismatic gifts, in Paul's understanding, are related to the congregation. Therefore the charismatic individual, too, even when his gift is of an ecstatic nature, is first and always a responsible member of the congregation. If, then, Paul is not in principle a rationalistic debunker of unusual spiritual phenomena, where does the real point at issue lie in our chapter?

THE FUNDAMENTAL CRITERION

With that we are once more back at the beginning of our chapter. In the first three verses Paul draws a distinction which is decisive for his definition of what church is. The young congregation at Corinth — at the most 5 years old — has fallen into a crisis of incomparable magnitude. This crisis is characterized by catch phrases which are on every mouth: "Jesus is cursed," "Jesus is Lord." How understand this? These cannot be just hypothetical possibilities. Some people must actually be saying, "Jesus is cursed," i. e., "Damn Jesus!" And they must be supporting this with the claim that they are therein guided by the Spirit. "Tell us, Paul, what are we to make of it?"

Scholars are increasingly agreed that a wave of Gnostic speculation had broken over the congregation. This was a movement which had its own gospel, a gospel, in its own way, of redemption. It claimed to utilize Christ as well. And, above all, it was a gospel which spoke of nothing so much as of the Spirit. For the Gnostic the Spirit and the present experience of His power was everything. The Jesus of history and the Gospel of redemption through His cross were less than nothing. Redemption came through knowledge, and knowledge was given through the Spirit, who was probably identified with the heavenly, glorified Christ. With this redemption came liberating experiences of spiritual power and spiritual ecstasy — living proof that the πνευματικός (for so the Gnostic called himself) had arrived already now into the fullness of the divine kingdom.

So, the same vocabulary here and there — with Paul and with his Gnostic oppo-

nents. And, above all, on both sides of the battle line, the Spirit! Endless talk about the Spirit! A lesser man might have called a truce, a period of agreed silence in which all talk of the Spirit would be given the quietus. But Paul does not desert the position he had taken in his first letter to the Thessalonians, written significantly during his first stay in Corinth: "Quench not the Spirit" (5:19). But this is the question: Who *is* the Spirit? How does He manifest Himself? How can one recognize Him? On both sides — the apostle's and the gnostic's — it is boldly asserted that the congregation lives by the Spirit. "So much talk about the Spirit, Paul, that we can't find our way through it any longer."

How does Paul answer? In breathtaking simplicity and unexcelled directness. The Spirit of God is that Spirit who gives us the ability to say, "Jesus is Lord!" Three words in English, two in Greek; κύριος Ἰησοῦς. Yet with these words we are on some of the holiest ground in all of Scripture. For here we catch in unmistakable authenticity the earliest of all Christian creeds and the heart of every other creed the church has ever elaborated. In antithesis to the Gnostic formula, in the present context this confession means no less than that the heavenly κύριος is none other than the historic Jesus of Nazareth. But what, for our purposes, we must realize above all is the intimate relationship between the lordship of Christ and the Spirit. If the Spirit creates in a man the confession of Jesus as Lord, then the Spirit is at once the Agent in whom Jesus Christ is made present and available for faith. But that must mean that for Paul every Christian has the Spirit; the Spirit belongs to the essence of Christian existence. This

is for Paul to be taken in all literal seriousness. "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ," he says in Rom. 8:9, "does not belong to Him." That proposition can and must be convertible: "If anyone belongs to Christ, he has His Spirit."

That is Paul's first and fundamental response to the Corinthians' question about pneumatic men and pneumatic charismatic gifts. Whatever else one may say of the Spirit, one thing is basic and primary: the first gift of the Spirit is the gift to wager a life of confessional commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. There could be, and in Corinth there evidently was, a speaking about spiritual gifts and a pride in charismatic endowment in which these gifts became important in themselves — separate from the lordship of Christ. *They* became the guarantees of the Spirit. *They* became the undeniable proof that a man was pneumatic and had the Spirit. The Spirit was privatized, was made the cloistered possession of the few. It is obvious that certain *χαρίσματα* counted for more in Corinth than others: *χαρίσματα* like tongue speaking, which in its ecstatic and enthusiastic character marked the possessors as privileged men of the Spirit.

Paul employs two critical standards to challenge these assumptions — the one negative, the other positive. The negative standard is his allusion to the Corinthians' own pagan past in verse 2: "You know that when you were heathen, you were led away to dumb idols, however you may have been moved." The translation does not convey the strength of the Greek verbs, which suggest the rapture of ecstatic spiritual experience. Phenomenologically considered — Paul's negative criterion implies — there is nothing to choose between

ecstatic experiences in a pagan temple and in a Christian assembly. The phenomena themselves bear no essential Christian character. The same psychophysical manifestations are here and there. Enthusiastic gifts, even tongue speaking, are no guarantee of the Spirit of God. What is needed is a positive criterion for judgment. And that has already been given in the Spirit-won commitment to Jesus as Lord. The question about the Spirit is thus, at bottom, a question about the Christ.

THE VARIETY OF GIFTS

With that we may turn our attention to the two charismatic lists of verses 4-11 and verses 28-30. Much scholarly ink has been poured over these lists. Discussion revolves especially around two questions: (1) What is the precise nature of the spiritual functions here listed, and (2) How are they to be related, if at all, to specific churchly offices, such as those suggested by the list in Ephesians 4:11: "And His gifts [the word is not *χαρίσματα* but *δόματα*; compare 4:8] were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." One might also think of such offices as bishop and deacon as these are outlined in the Pastoral Epistles. Now it seems quite clear that in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is not primarily concerned about church offices and individuals chosen by congregational right to undertake certain community functions. Only in the case of the first gift of the second list might one, so to speak, assert a "personal union" between the gift and a limited group of individuals: "God has appointed in the church, first apostles" (v. 28). Not every member could aspire to this gift. Indeed, the Spirit

Himself was limited by the unique function of apostleship in His choice of those to whom this gift might be conferred. But the very next gift in that list is in principle open: "God has appointed first apostles, second prophets." Prophecy, however, is the very gift which Paul in chapter 14:1 encourages all members to aspire to in preference to tongues: "Earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." Paul, then, is focusing his interest in the Spirit and in His gifts and is interested in the individual recipients of the gifts primarily as they employ these for the good of the body.

It is not implied either that the gifts are given once and for all as a lifetime endowment to an individual. If the metaphor of the body should be pressed, one might reach this conclusion. For here the individual members with their gifts are compared to organs of the body, each with its specific function. But the chief emphases here are that each member of the church is important and that all gifts, no matter how mean, are valuable, not that each member is predestined by a specific gift received to play an unchanging role in the community. Let's look again at the second list—and here the Greekless reader is really at a disadvantage; only the first three gifts in the list are personal terms for functionaries, the rest are abstract nouns for functions. This is unfortunately disguised in the RSV, where all the nouns are translated personally: "God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues." The King James retains the value of the Greek: "And God hath set some apostles, some

prophets, some teachers" — and now watch! — "after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." To repeat, it seems clear that Paul is primarily concerned about the Spirit and His freedom to dispose His gifts when and as He chooses. His gifts are in principle free, and open for the surprise of His own gracious bestowal.

So much for the question of how the gifts are related to specific church offices. This chapter is evidently not designed to answer that question. It does, however, at the very least strongly suggest that the limiting of spiritual functions to isolated functionaries in the practical life of the church is a highly venturesome, if not a dubious undertaking in the Spirit's charismatic community. Yet here we must move cautiously with the control of other Biblical materials.

As for the question concerning the precise nature of the functions here listed, I shall in what follows make a few tentative suggestions. But even the gift of tongues, of which we are most fully informed, remains a partial enigma in its precise Corinthian manifestation. If this is true of tongues, how much more so of such a vaguely designated gift as "helps," or even, if you will, "administrations."

Let us, then, limit ourselves to the chief accents in Paul's listing of the *χαρίσματα*. If we begin with verses 4-6, we note that three different terms are used for the gifts, each associated with one of the Persons of the Trinity. The first is the term "charisma" which, as we have seen, associates the gifts with the Spirit. The second is the term "services," "ministries" (*διακονίαι*), which appropriately associates the same gifts with the Lord Jesus, who in His

ministry gave the example for all later gifts of service. The third term is "energies," "workings" (ἐνεργήματα), and here the same gifts are associated with God, who through the Spirit of His Son is the ultimate Energizer, the ultimate Worker. In all the gifts He is exercising His sovereign will in and for His church. This remarkable Trinitarian passage strikingly reminds us of both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the Spirit's gifts. In the vertical dimension we see that all spiritual gifts ultimately derive from the heavenly Father, who is the only Giver of all that is good. And in the horizontal dimension we see that no gift has value which is not finally rooted in the Son's self-giving service for others.

Respect is urged here for the vertical dimension, respect, that is, for the Giver — and respect for every one of His gifts. For as the picture of the body emphasizes, "God arranged the organs of the body, each one of them, as *He* chose (12:11)." Paul has cause for emphasizing this because of the prideful disdain in which the self-styled pneumatics held those whom they regarded as less gifted, if gifted at all. Thus if the vertical dimension is lost to sight, there can only be disastrous results for the horizontal dimension. The word that is first spoken in chapter 13 is already the determinant. First Corinthians 12 does not stand without chapter 13, and chapter 13 is the key to chapter 12. Everything hinges on love. Who does not see as surrounding, sustaining, and infusing this list of the Spirit's gifts for the public good that other list of private gifts from Galatians 5:22 ff: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"?

To be endowed with a conspicuous public gift is a temptation to forget those primary gifts of the Spirit without which the greatest charisma is waste: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (13:1). I leave it for you to supply the rest of that key passage mentally. Every man does want to play first fiddle, and if that instrument has fallen to him, he is not content unless he sits in the front row, center. Paul is dealing with elemental human traits, and he speaks elementary language, the ABC's of Christian faith and life.

Does the unspoken reference to love give us a clue to the differences between the lists of charismatic gifts, the two in our chapter and the third in Romans 12:6-8? I believe that it does. No two lists are the same; none, therefore, is meant to be exhaustive. They are all illustrative of the creative novelty of the Spirit as through love He inspires the faithful to "do their own thing" for the good of the body. The list in Romans especially begs to be extended in the multifarious ways that love alone can know. The list concludes: "He who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." "He who" — but that is for the Spirit to continue and for him who has been summoned by the Spirit in the Word of God's grace to a life of love.

Should we remind ourselves further that charismatic gifts are not to be simply equated with what we normally call natural human gifts and endowments? They are, I suspect, at least in part somehow related, but in ways known only to the Spirit. Thus there are churchly activities

—undoubtedly even some in Paul's lists— which can be learned. There are others to which one may even have to be born. Not every man, I am sure, can be that "administrator." Yet even in such instances, what value have these activities for the community's life without the Spirit's charisma, the Son's will to service, and the Father's energizing power?

One can undergo a prolonged course of seminary preparation, but that does not as yet insure the gifts which Paul names: "the utterance of wisdom" and "the utterance of knowledge." Nor does that make a "prophet." One may have years of graduate training, and one may have acquired all of the techniques of scholarship: that does not yet qualify a man to be in Paul's sense a "teacher." For that, something else is required. And those of us who teach, those of us who preach, those of us who quietly witness in the nameless paths of love, know it. Can you see that everything we do in and for the community and everything that we do through the community for the world must be charismatic if it is to avail? I am not hereby trying to drag down Paul's charismatic gifts into categories that match our experience in the workaday church. I am rather trying to give voice to my apprehension that what Paul is here challenging us to do is to elevate those workaday activities in our own minds by seeing them as in essence charismatic.

By now it is evident that Paul stands at a world's remove from the Corinthian pneumatics with their self-centered standards and their self-glorious valuations of the Spirit's gifts. They were isolated virtuosos; Paul summons them to lowly service in the body. They denied the Spirit

to those who did not share their splendid and showy gifts; Paul affirms that the Spirit is shared by all who claim Jesus as Lord. Every Christian is a pneumatic man. The entire drift of the argument in chapters 2 and 3 is to claim that private sectarian name *πνευματικός* for every Christian who has bowed in believing submission to the word of the cross. In our chapter it is not only the confession of Jesus as Lord that signalizes the possession of the Spirit. It is, above all, the baptismal sign and pledge that does so, for "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (12:13)." Baptism is no private rite, and the baptismal infusion of the Spirit is no sectarian monopoly. For "all were made to drink of one Spirit."

Does this also mean that Paul would regard every Christian as a pneumatic, in the sense that each is charismatically endowed? I should like to think that he would also have affirmed this. In verse 7 he says: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good," where "manifestation" is clearly another variant expression for charisma. One could convincingly argue that the major emphasis lies on the last element in the sentence: "for the common good." The point would not be so much that each has a charisma but that each man who does should take it out of the cupboard where it is locked away in selfish vainglory and should employ it for the good of the body. Yet the concept charisma has been so amazingly broadened by Paul, he has found so many variations to play upon the theme, and he has so clearly indicated that the leitmotiv is love, that it would seem the very heart of his revolutionary approach—as compared with the Corin-

thian sectarians — is to assert the charismatic endowment of every man who possesses the Spirit by Baptism and in faith. Paul is revolutionary precisely because he shifts the accent from the unusual, the impressive, the bizarre, from that which radically distinguishes the few, and focuses attention on service to that body into which all have been baptized in the "one Spirit." If the entire body is charismatic, is it not because each member is charismatically endowed? The picture of the body, each member functioning with his gift or gifts, implies no less.

Our thesis is confirmed: *For Paul every congregation is a charismatic community, a body shaped and informed by the Spirit of Christ and His gifts.*

But there is one question that remains. From our modern viewpoint it is perhaps the most difficult question of all. Paul would, I feel confident, affirm that all members of every congregation are charismatically gifted. Would he also assert that each congregation must have every charismatic gift before it can realize its spiritual potential? Do the variations in the list again suggest the answer? Paul does not pretend to give an exhaustive listing, nor does he presume to dictate to the Spirit by his lists how He must channel His powers in the ever new and ever changing situations of the church. He joyfully accepts as gifts of the Spirit all expressions of the Christian life that bear the unmistakable confessional stamp of commitment to the Lord of the church and of loving service to His body. And he recommends an openness to the Spirit's promptings and a readiness to follow wherever He may lead.

One thing is clear: pride of place in

all of the lists is given to those gifts which magnify the Word of God's grace and which assist in its proclamation to the world and its application to the life of the community. Here — in the Word and in the community gathered by it and faithfully obedient to it — everything is in essence already given. I cannot resist reading once again the keynote of our letter from chapter 1: "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in Him with all speech and all knowledge — even as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you — so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift." So that — ὥστε — result! Where the testimony of Christ is proclaimed in all speech and in all knowledge and where men obediently follow the Spirit's promptings through that Word, the results must follow; the community will not lack any spiritual gift that is vital for its good.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS

But have I not avoided discussing some of the gifts? Indeed, I have: miracles, and healings, and tongues. I might beat a retreat into Romans and the fact that Paul himself avoids mentioning these gifts there. I might note that Paul assigns the last place in both lists of our chapter to tongues, as if he would push them from the list entirely. Yet I would then be untrue to my own hermeneutical principle of respect for context and for the primacy of the original historic situation. Paul is not passing judgment on the various gifts in some absolute value scale. The inferior position of tongues is situationally moti-

vated. Never does Paul deny that this, too, can be a gift of the Spirit.

Why not be more forthright? In speaking of such gifts I fear I would be like a blind man talking about colors. But let me quickly add: I have learned from Paul and, I believe, from the Spirit of God that I must be open to any possibility.

I am, for example, not much impressed with those who claim that such gifts belonged to the infancy of the church and have died out. There are too many of my brothers in Christ—members with me of His body—who claim that simply is not so. I should, however, like to challenge any easy assumption that the modern phenomena of glossolalia may without reservation be simply equated with the “types of tongues” (γέννη γλώσσων) of I Corinthians or the maddeningly elusive references to tongues in the Book of Acts. The phenomenological descriptions of those occurrences are simply inadequate for any confident reconstruction. The modern occurrences, moreover, are also described phenomenologically in curiously inexact terms by various reporting participants. But does that really alter the fundamental insight? The major point of our previous observations was that the Spirit is free in the fashioning and the bestowal of His gifts. Who am I to assert that modern glossolalia, whether exactly like or quite unlike the primitive Christian phenomena, cannot be a gift of the same Spirit?

Neither am I impressed by those who claim that such gifts are necessarily divisive. They are, if they are employed in prideful isolation as they were in Corinth, or in disruptive fashion in a public setting. But if they are employed in loving service,

and if there are those who pridefully disdain them because they go beyond the realm of their own limited experience, who really are those who are divisive? Who then are the sectarians? When a glossolalist, for example, claims that this gift has opened him up to a life of joyful witness and has given new vitality to the highest gift of love, who am I to say he is deluding himself? “By their fruits shall ye know them.” “Now the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy.” (Gal. 5:22)

I may suspect in the phenomena an element of rebellion against the institutionalized church. But who of us does not, in some form, share that rebellion and recognize in a certain overwhelming dissatisfaction with the church as she is one of the Spirit’s primal instincts? Thus we have Paul’s dissatisfaction to thank for much that is in his letters.

I may also suspect in the glossolalist a rebellion of the nonrational and emotive human forces against the dominance by the rational in much formal religious experience. But who has not had the impulse to break through traditional formalism and, as it were, dance naked before the Lord with David?

I may further suspect in the phenomena a certain longing for a security in religious conviction that is experientially based. Personally, I would ask my most probing questions right at this point, for I know the fickleness of experience and the void that threatens when the experience is past. Yet who of us does not require the reassurance and the validation for religious commitment that can come alone from the experience of communion with the Spirit of God?

Neither, finally, am I impressed with

those who, pursuing the same line of attack, claim that phenomena such as healings and tongues are open to psychological and sociological explanations. I am certain that they are so open, and we should welcome the objective study of any phenomena in the church's life. But, then, what in our religious life is not open to such investigation — open, too, to such explanations? The Spirit claims and uses us as we are — men, psychologically motivated, sociologically conditioned men. Yet would you wish to grant to the human and social scientist that his explanations, valid within the realm of scientific investigation, explain all?

I am a blind man speaking about colors, yes! But a blind man who can listen to those who claim to have sight and be instructed.

A CONCLUDING QUESTION

In closing, we may ask whether Paul is describing what for him is a reality or whether he is merely describing a utopia in his picture of the church as a charismatic body. Was that picture already irreparably shattered for him by the everyday realities of congregational life as it was, and still is — with its burdens and tensions, its painful divisions and party quarrels, with everything that Paul calls the "daily care for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28)? Or has he chosen to neglect the all-too-human aspects of the church in his concentration on the Spirit? Clearly not the latter, for it is the all-too-human in the Corinthian congregation that shapes his entire discussion. Paul was an embattled man who knew the realities intimately well. He can and he does "say it as it is." But he knows, too, from personal experi-

ence in his own life and in the life of his congregation that the Spirit and His power are the ultimate realities.

We must direct two questions to ourselves. Must we not realize that we constantly resist becoming that which God through His Spirit would have us be? Must we not pray constantly that God would make us that which of ourselves we can never be: Christians, members of His body?

"Come, Holy Spirit. Revive Thy church, beginning with me."

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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