

Waiting Table in God's Household: A Personal Theology of Ministry by Mark Hepner*

Introduction

This paper presents a preliminary statement of the author's personal theology of ministry. "Waiting tables" refers to one of the basic senses of the primary "ministry" word group utilized throughout the books of the New Testament (diakoneō 'to serve', diakonia 'service', and diakonos 'servant')¹ and this concept 'serves' as an apt metaphor for Christian ministry since it denotes the taking of resources provided by the Master of the house and distributing them to those gathered around the Master's table to sustain the physical and spiritual health and well-being of the Master's family. Though it is the ministry of the Christian church, engaged as it is in carrying out "the revealing and reconciling mission of Jesus"² which is the topic of this paper, the phrase "theology of ministry" places the focus on God (it is after all a *theology* of ministry and not an *anthropology* of ministry) and thus "ministry" in this paper will be presented mainly in terms of service carried out at God's direction and on God's behalf, by God's servants, for the continuous growth, health and joy of God's people. From this perspective then, it is God, rather than his table guests, who determines the needs of the church—sets the menu so to speak—and who decides which person will serve what to whom and in what order and quantity.

The metaphor of ministry as waiting tables will be explored and applied more fully in the discussion below. Along the way, a Biblical foundation or model of ministry will be presented using the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians as the particular textual base from which several key components of a theology of ministry will be derived. Then, picking up on the repeated occurrences of the word diakonos "servant" in that chapter (Col. 1:7, 23, 25), the fundamental or characteristic quality of ministry will be developed via a brief study of the diakoneō / diakonia / diakonos word group referred to earlier. Finally, a brief discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in equipping and empowering God's people for ministry will round out the presentation.

A Biblical Model for Ministry: Colossians 1:1-29

The Relational Context of Ministry (Col. 1:1-2)³

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

The apostle Paul and his "brother" Timothy write to their "brothers and sisters" in Colossae, and include in their salutation a wish for grace and peace

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from the their mutual (“our-inclusive”) “Father.” Clearly for Paul the relational context of his ministry to the Colossians was as sibling members of the immediate family of God’s household. Though Paul had never visited the Colossian Christians, he claims the same Father as they do, and so writes as an (older) brother with a genuine “kinship” concern for the spiritual health and well-being of these as yet unmet brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus Christian ministry is at heart a family affair—loving service done for the benefit of those with whom we share the closest and most supportive of human relationships—with each family member committed to promoting his or her brothers’ and sisters’ “progress and joy in the faith” (Phil. 1:25).

The Pattern of Ministry (Col. 1:3-8)

³ In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷ This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸ and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

From these verses can be distilled the basic pattern of ministry. The gospel is proclaimed, people hear and recognize the truth of the message and the hope that is being offered to them, and so respond by placing their trust for salvation in Christ Jesus (1:5b-6a). Then as they receive continued instruction in the gospel they come to comprehend in increasing measure the nature of the new life that has been imparted to them and the magnitude of God’s gracious goodness to them (1:7a). At the same time, along with increased understanding of who they are and what they are to become, their lives begin to bear the Holy Spirit-inspired fruit of Christ-like behavior that is characteristic of every true member of the family of God (1:4b, 6b, 7b-8). As this passage suggests, the preeminent mark of the Christian is love, and particularly love for “all the saints.” This is the motivating love (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14) that transforms them from recipients of ministry into ministers themselves. It is this full-circle pattern of ministry that lies behind Paul’s thankfulness for the Colossian believers and the loving concern they have reciprocated to him in the person of Epaphras.⁴

The Goals of Ministry (Col. 1:9-14)

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you

grow in the knowledge of God.¹¹ May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.¹³ He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul's ceaseless prayer for the Colossians delineates many appropriate goals for Christian ministry. Ministry strives for mutual growth in wisdom, that is, an understanding of the way things "really are" in terms of the order God has designed into the world, and the way the Creator works to bring about his purposes and intentions for his world. This steadily growing knowledge of God's person and acquaintance with his ways enables God's people to live their lives in harmony with his will, so that God's desires become their desires, resulting in deeds that are truly good because they are fully pleasing to the Lord and contribute to the working out of his purposes in the world.

Ministry, fortified as it is by the power of Christ (Col. 1:29), should also be mutually encouraging and strengthening, thus enabling the community of faith to endure trials and persecutions with patience and the power of God and so arrive at the goal of their faith with the circle of their fellowship unbroken. There truly is "strength in numbers" and a crucial goal of ministry is to foster a unified community that affirms and confirms each individual in the hard and often counter-cultural choices that need to be made in order to keep living a life "worthy of their calling."

Since these ministry goals are contained in the words of Paul's prayer, the underlying natural assumption is that it is God who actually will make all of these things become a reality for the Colossian believers.⁵ Thus the wisdom Paul desires for them is Spiritual, the strength he longs for them to possess comes from God's glorious power, and it is the Father who enables them to share in the inheritance of the saints by rescuing them from their enemies' control and placing them under the control of his own beloved Son. Ministry is thus fundamentally a *divine* activity. This kind of Spirit-inspired ministry is aimed at promoting and nurturing and even actualizing to one degree or another a "kingdom of Christ" way of life among God's people in the present in anticipation of the time when the Son returns and such a way of living in his kingdom will not only be the norm, but will be experienced in undiluted fullness.⁶

The Cosmic Context of Ministry (Col. 1:15-20)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things

hold together.¹⁸ He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Reference to the kingdom of God's "beloved Son" leads Paul into an extended hymn-like exaltation of Jesus Christ that provides the cosmic context of ministry. Jesus occupies the highest position of privilege and authority over all creation. This is because, as Paul asserts, Jesus himself is the focal point around which all of God's intentions and desires for all the things he made in heaven and on earth are organized. From the work of creating, to the work of maintaining creation, to the work of bringing a wayward creation back on course to arrive at the divinely appointed end for which it was originally made, all of this was conceived with the Son in mind as the one who would implement these divine plans and bring them to their divinely appointed end.

Christian ministry within the church is, then, part of Christ's cosmic program of reconciling all things in heaven and on earth to the will of God, bringing them back into a "friendly" relationship with their Creator, fully submissive to the purposes and intentions he originally had in mind when he made them. Ministry, thus conceived and carried out is first and foremost aimed at establishing Jesus Christ as the one who has first place over all things in the world, and especially over his body the church. Then secondly, ministry aims at promoting the glory of Christ by working to bring the life of the church into line with his world-reconciling agenda. Such ministry promotes a proper perspective on human existence because it is guided by God's priorities, which are ultimately "all about Jesus" as one worship chorus puts it.⁷

The Necessity for Ministry (Col. 1:21-23)

²¹ And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him-- ²³ provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

All people are born into a relationship with their Creator that Paul here characterizes as "estranged" and "hostile" and marked by the willful rebelliousness of "evil deeds." In this context of human need, ministry—"serving the gospel" as Paul puts it—is actually Christ, through his body the church, working to reconcile God's enemies back into a relationship of loving friendship with him who is their true Father so that they will qualify for one day being welcomed without reservation into his very presence (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

But ministry is also the equally crucial work of maintaining Christ's people in unwavering covenant faithfulness to God by keeping them from deviating from the hope held out to them in the good news that formed the basis of their original entrance into salvation. All of this work is carried out by everyone in the body of Christ who, like Paul, are to be reliable waiters and waitresses of the gospel, taking what the Master provides and distributing it to each other without adding anything "a la carte" to it on the way to the table.⁸ The Mode, Authority, Scope and Power Source of Ministry (Col. 1:24-29)

²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵ I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

For Paul, the *mode* of ministry is incarnation. Bringing people into the body of Christ requires continued acts of suffering in the same way that Christ suffered—"for righteousness' sake" (Mt. 5:10). Paul's Christ-like suffering was due to his Christ-like commitment to make known God's intention to incorporate all peoples, Gentile as well as Jew, into God's covenant community of faith. The goal of this incarnational ministry was to "present everyone mature in Christ." In this sense, the mode of ministry also becomes the goal of ministry, that is, ministry can be described from an incarnational perspective as "Christ in me, working (and suffering) to form Christ in you, and vice versa." The end result of this process is a unified church body, full grown and looking remarkably like its Lord.⁹

As with Paul, the *authority* of every servant in the body of Christ to carry on ministry derives from the commission of God. Ministry is simply carrying out the will of the Master with regard to a particular service he wants performed for his people. This does not preclude individual creativeness in doing ministry, but again, it does proscribe the kind of "ad-libbing" that abandons heavenly wisdom in favor of the latest successful marketing strategy.

The *scope* of Christian ministry is limited only by the number of people groups in the world. It is Paul's contention in this passage that the mystery of the gospel that God has commissioned him to make fully known is that the benefits of what Christ accomplished are so plentiful that they are enough to help not only the Jewish people, but all the non-Jewish people too. Thus the scope of the

proclamation or evangelistic aspect of Christian ministry in particular includes all of mankind equally.

Finally, the source of Paul's *power* for ministry is God. This does not mean that Paul does not himself work hard at ministry. On the contrary, he asserts that he toils and struggles to accomplish the task given him by God with all the might he possesses. Yet in the same breath he is quick to make it clear that he is energized to expend himself in this way by the very power of God.¹⁰ Very likely Paul intends to imply that this power is mediated to him by the Holy Spirit,¹¹ as the NRSV rendering above correctly implies.

It seems clear from this survey of Colossians 1 that, "the key concept of the Church is that it is a Spirit-led people of God who carry out Christ's mission in the world."¹² That mission includes both evangelism (service to unbelievers in the world) and edification (service to believers in the church). The picture of Christian ministry distilled from Paul's words to the Colossian believers may thus be summarized as "the living Christ active in each member of the family of God through the sensible, powerful presence of his Holy Spirit, working in and through them to form them individually and corporately into a body that looks like him, loves like him, perseveres like him, obeys like him, suffers like him, relates to the Father like him, and strives to see God's purposes realized in the world like him."

The Core Concept of Ministry: Life-sustaining service

As mentioned in the introduction, the primary word group used by New Testament authors to denote Christian ministry includes the verb *diakoneō* "to serve" and its cognate noun *diakonia* "service". An additional cognate noun form, *diakonos* refers to one who performs acts of *diakonia*, i.e. a "servant." The use of this trio of words to designate Christian ministry appears to be something of a departure on the part of the New Testament writers from the 'official' ministry vocabulary of the LXX.¹³

diakoneō

A survey of the uses of *diakoneō* in the NT indicates a basic meaning of "giving someone what is necessary to sustain their physical life." Consequently the word is frequently used in the gospels to mean "set food before someone" or "wait on someone." In Mt. 4:11 angels "attend" Jesus in the wilderness after his very long period of fasting. Later on, Peter's mother-in-law "begins to wait on" Jesus and his disciples after being healed (Mk. 1:31). Luke relates Martha's complaint to Jesus that her sister has left her alone with the "work" of providing Jesus and his disciples with a meal (Lk. 10:40). There are numerous other references in the gospels and Acts where this word is used to denote "serving food to" or "waiting table on" people, e.g. Lk. 12:37; 17:8; 22:27; Jn. 12:2; Acts 6:2. Beyond the idea of setting food before someone to eat, the word may also denote any act of generosity that supplies what is necessary to sustain everyday physical life. Luke tells of women who

“supported” Jesus and his disciples out of their own means (8:3; cf. Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:41).

The use of diakoneō to refer to the provision of what is necessary to sustain material or physical life continues on into the epistles. In Rom. 15:25 Paul refers to his task of delivering and overseeing the distribution of an offering to alleviate the material needs of impoverished believers in the church in Jerusalem as “serving” the saints. In 2 Tim. 1:18 Paul remembers with fondness Onesiphorus for the many ways he helped Paul in Ephesus, surely a reference to service aimed at meeting the practical needs of staying alive. Finally, the author of Hebrews reassures his readers that God will not forget their past and current practice of “helping his people,” again most likely a reference to providing practical assistance to God’s people to meet the needs of day-to-day survival, probably in the face of persecution (Heb. 6:10).

Metaphorically, diakoneō is used to refer to serving people in the interests of preserving and enhancing their spiritual life with God. Thus Jesus came to serve by ransoming God’s people from the forces that held them captive (Mt. 20:28). It was also a spiritual service that the prophets of old provided for the saints in ages to come (1 Pet. 1:12). Whether referring to physical or spiritual sustenance, diakoneō generally denotes the practical acts of service that help people by supplying what they need to ‘carry on with’ the business of daily life.

diakonia

Given the highly suggestive basic meaning of diakoneō, it comes as no surprise that the nominalized form of the verb becomes in the New Testament the standard term to denote the act of providing to God’s people that which creates and sustains both their physical and spiritual life “in Christ.” Indeed, this word, used to refer to the distribution of food in Acts 6:1, is just as easily applied to the distribution of God’s word to the members of the church a few verses later (Acts 6:4). It is in this extended sense that the word is used to designate the evangelistic program of Barnabas and Saul in Acts 12:25. Similarly, in Acts 20:24 Paul refers to the proclamation “of the gospel of God’s grace” as the “service” the Lord has given him to do.

Ministry as diakonia provides what is necessary for each member of the body of Christ to stay alive, to grow to maturity, and to “discharge all the duties” (2 Tim. 4:5) of their divinely assigned tasks. Ministry is expressed in a variety of forms (1 Cor. 12:5) all of which are aimed at helping every member of the body in every way possible to arrive at the goal of their faith. As 2 Cor. 6:3 makes clear, ministry is the opposite of causing people to stumble. In other words, ministry makes it easier, not harder, to keep believing in Jesus and following him as Lord. This is because ministry is service to the saints (2 Cor. 8:4) received from the Lord (Col. 4:17) who intends by it the building up of his body (Eph. 4:12).

diakonos

This third member of the NT “ministry” word group is used to designate the person who “serves” (*diakoneō*) by doing acts of “service” (*diakonia*) on behalf of a master) Here the emphasis is on the nature of ministry as discharging the duties laid upon the servant by a person of higher status and authority. As a king orders his servants and they obey (Mt. 22:13), so the servant-minister acts in strict accordance with the will of his or her Master (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5 (NIV): “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.”). Thus believers are variously described as servants of Jesus (Jn. 12:26; cf. Col. 1:7)), of God (2 Cor. 6:4), of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6), of the gospel (Eph. 3:7; cf. Col. 1:23), and of the church (Rom. 16:11; cf. Col. 1:25).

If believers are servants of Christ their Lord, they are also servants of Christ's body, the church (Col. 1:25). In the first instance believers serve the will of One who is infinitely superior in authority and status. In the church however, where all members (ideally) share the same status in Christ, ministry is carried on among equals. In this context the Christian minister is at heart one whose actions are dictated by the need-requirements of his or her brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus a minister in the household of God is one who makes the needs of the rest of the family *equal to the command of Christ himself* (Mt. 20:26; 23:11).

To sum up, this survey of the *diakonia* word group indicates that the core idea of ministry is *supplying what people need to keep on living as Christ's body in the world*. Christian ministry is fundamentally a *practical* activity, consisting of acts of service to others for the purpose of sustaining their life as a community of faith, promoting their maturity and growth in Christ-likeness, and enhancing their ability to carry on the mission of Christ. Ministry is *obedient service* done on behalf of the Master for the benefit of his people. Ministry is *making the needs of fellow believers equivalent to the command of the Lord himself* and willingly distributing to them what the Master has placed in their hands to meet those needs.

The Substance of Ministry: “Serving up” the gifts of the Spirit

If ministry is “waiting tables in God's house,” then what is on the menu? What is it that we as members of the body of Christ bring to each other from the Master's table to sustain each other in our life of faith and discipleship to Jesus?

Referring again to the portrait of ministry derived from Colossians 1 earlier in this paper, Gordon Fee has pointed out that although “Spirit” terminology is only minimally present in Colossians due to Paul's need to address what are primarily Christological deficiencies in the Colossian Heresy (see note 8 above), there are nevertheless several references in the first chapter of Colossians to the Spirit's activity in the lives of both the Colossian believers and in Paul himself. These include references to Spirit-inspired *love* (1:8),

Spirit-imparted *understanding* (i.e. the “insight into God’s will that the Spirit provides;”¹⁴ 1:9), and the Spirit-infused *energy* that empowers Paul for the hard work of ministry (1:29).¹⁵ These three references provide a fairly complete summary of the role of the Holy Spirit in providing the substance of Christian ministry: 1) *knowledge* of what God wants done, 2) *power* to carry out the divine mandate, and 3) *acts of service* (“love in the Spirit” manifesting itself in “love to the saints”) which are to be provided to fellow members of the body of Christ to sustain their life in Christ and in the world.

These acts of sustaining service that the Spirit provides through Christ’s people and for Christ’s people should not be confused with the “fruit of the Spirit” which are typically produced from within the life of every believer (Gal. 5:22-23) and which provide the “quality control” for all service performed within the body of Christ.¹⁶ In addition to these “fruits” of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit also gives “gifts” to his people in a variety of forms and functions (cf. the different lists in Rom. 12, 1 Cor. 12, and Eph. 4) to equip them for ministry in the building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12) by promoting the “common good” (1 Cor.12: 7) of the group. Such gifts as leadership, preaching, teaching, miracles, healing of various kinds, helping, wisdom, mercy, evangelism, discernment, etc. provide the actual “substance” of ministry, that is, the specific services that members of God’s community of faith provide to each other in order to sustain the physical and spiritual life of the body of Christ and grow it into a size and shape that is in correct proportion to its head (Eph. 4:13).

Conclusion

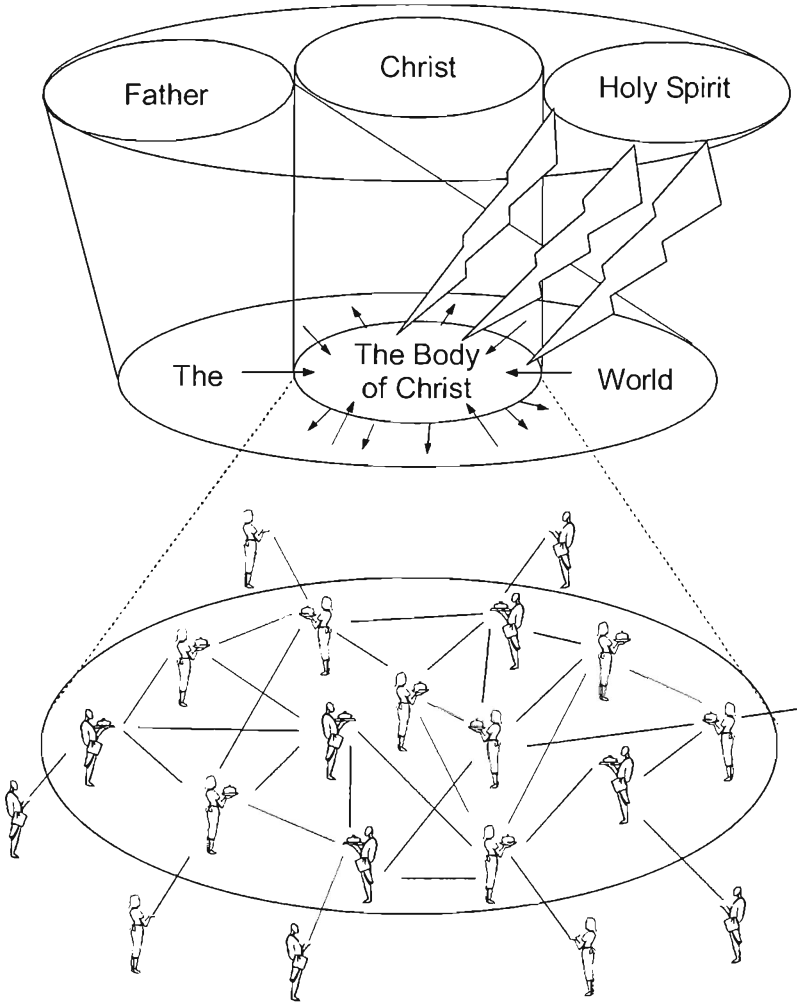
“Waiting tables in God’s household” is a metaphor for describing Christian ministry as an activity of humble service dictated by the Master of the house in which divinely supplied sustaining grace is placed before those gathered around the Master’s table, in need of the nourishment required to maintain their physical and spiritual lives. Ministry as waiting tables means that all members of the household are at the same time both the table guests and the waiters and waitresses whose job it is to bring the “food” of Holy Spirit-inspired service to each other, imparting strength and encouragement and providing all the practical necessities that continued life as the incarnate presence of Christ in the world requires.

To sum up then, a final definition of ministry could be stated as follows: “God’s people, energized by God’s Spirit, ‘dishing up’ a variety of concretized forms of God’s grace to each other in loving ways in order to sustain each other’s life of faith in the world and aimed at growing and maturing each other into the body of Christ which increasingly looks like the Lord Jesus, serves each other and the world like the Lord Jesus and is ultimately welcomed into the presence of God the Father like the Lord Jesus.”

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. .

. . . Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve (diakoneō) one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves (diakoneō) must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; 1 Peter 4:8-11 (NRSV)

GOD



A Model of Christian Ministry: "God's people, energized by God's Spirit, 'dishing up' a variety of concretized forms of God's grace to each other in loving ways in order to sustain each other's life of faith in the world and grow and mature each other into the body of Christ which looks like the Lord Jesus, serves the world like the Lord Jesus and is ultimately welcomed into the presence of God the Father like the Lord Jesus."

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Notes

¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985): 152.

² Gerry Breshears, "The Body of Christ: Prophet, Priest, or King?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (March 1994), 4.

³ The following "boxed-in" Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

⁴ "[T]heir 'love for all the saints,' mentioned already in v. 4 [of Colossians 1], is now acknowledged as specifically directed toward Paul as well." Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994): 639.

⁵ "From the gift of life and provision of all things needed for the sustaining of life, to the provision for people to exchange enmity with God for a place in God's household and under God's supervision and under God's personal patronage, God is the one who supplies our lack, who gives assistance in our need." David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 133.

⁶ Writes Ray S. Anderson, "The Spirit that comes to the church comes out of the future, not the past. The presence of the Spirit is the anticipation of the return of Christ. . . . When Christ returns to bring to consummation this pledge made by the gift of the Holy Spirit, it will be the 'last century.' The Spirit is thus preparing the people of God for this 'last century.' . . . The praxis of the ministry of the Holy Spirit can be understood in light of that which God desires to become a reality at the end, not merely to replicate that form of ministry during the first century." *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) : 105-106.

⁷ Matt Redman, *The Heart of Worship* (Thankyou Music, 1997).

⁸ It is widely acknowledged that Colossians was written to counter a line of unorthodox teaching confronting the Colossian believers. This teaching combined aspects of asceticism, particularly dietary restrictions, with elements of Judaism such as circumcision and the observance of special religious festivals, and also a form of mystical "knowledge" gained through visions, and perhaps even some kind of angel worship. This teaching, normally referred to as the "Colossian Heresy" implied that the work of Christ needed to be augmented with these 'additional' religious exercises in order to negotiate successfully the multiple layers of supernatural powers in the world and gain access to God. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984) : 17-26.

⁹ The words of Prof. Christos S. Voulgaris on this topic are striking: "Christ and the Church together form a 'whole;' without Christ the Church is nothing; in him the Church is everything. Without the Church, Christ the Son is not incarnate, because after his incarnation the Son can be thought of only as both divine and human and, therefore, only with the Church, while the Church can be thought of only in Christ and with Christ as his human body, i.e. as 'the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph. 1:23)." "The Church as the Body of Christ." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43 (1998), 555.

¹⁰ "While Paul works, earnestly expending all his energies in the prosecution of his ministry, he gladly acknowledges that the strength for such unremitting labor comes from above . . ." Peter O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982) : 91.

¹¹ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 637-638.

¹² Breshears, "The Body of Christ," 3.

¹³ "Despite the fact that the Greek-speaking world offered to the early Church a rather rich vocabulary for the notion of 'ministry,' most NT writers instead utilized a comparatively rare Greek word that hardly ever appears in the LXX: *diakonia*, "service" (especially of a place at table)." R. Eduard Schweizer, "Ministry in the Early Church," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) , 4 : 836.

¹⁴ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 637.

¹⁵ Cf. Fee, 636-645 for the entire discussion of Spirit language in the Colossians 1.

¹⁶ "Spiritual fruit is produced from within; spiritual gifts relate to Christian service. The fruit of the Spirit, especially love, should be the context for the operation of

the gifts of the Spirit.” Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) : 303.