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Unity and Schism: Determinative Biblical Principles 2

A Skevington Wood

This is the second part of Dr Wood's study of the biblical principles concerning the doctrine of the church; part 1 was published in this Bulletin (67, Autumn 1973, pp. 9-15).

Schism

The noun schism (*schisma*) which occurs eight times in the New Testament, is derived from the verb *schizō* to split, to separate, to tear apart, to cleave, to rend. *Schisma* can sometimes simply mean an actual tear, as in Matthew 9: 16 where Jesus says 'No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made' (cf. Lk. 5: 36; Mk. 2: 21). The verb is used to describe the rending of the temple veil (Mt. 27: 51; Mk. 15: 38; Lk. 23: 45); the threatened tearing of Christ's seamless tunic (Jn. 19: 24); the fish-net that hauled in a huge catch and yet was not torn by the weight of it (Jn. 21: 11); the fracture of rocks by an earthquake (Mt. 27: 51); and the splitting open of the heavens at our Lord's baptism (Mk. 1: 10).

Metaphorically *schisma* is a dissension or a division. It occurs three times in the Fourth Gospel to describe the division of opinion amongst the Jews concerning Jesus occasioned either by his teaching or by his miracles (Jn. 7: 43; 9: 16; 10: 19). The three occurrences in 1 Corinthians, with reference to dissensions within the Christian church, are determinative for the theological significance of the term and to these we must devote more extended attention. Two explanatory observations should be made by way of preface, however. The divisions in question do not involve separation from the church, although clearly they might lead to such a step. Furthermore, these are party divisions within the local congregation at Corinth and not between different factions in the church as a whole, although again they might easily lead to a more widespread schism.

We begin with Paul's appeal in 1: 10 and the paragraph which immediately follows it. The apostle pleads in the name of Christ himself as the one Head of the church that the Corinthian believers may agree amongst themselves, and 'that there be no dissensions' amongst them. 'Be united,' Paul urges, 'in the same mind and the same judgment.' He has received a report from some members of Chloe's household (she was evidently a leader of considerable standing and substance) to the effect that there are quarrels amongst the church members. It is significant that in dealing with the problems and difficulties besetting

the Corinthian church — including the question of idol meat, of the involvement of Christians in litigation, of divorce and mixed marriages, and even a case of incest — Paul puts this at the head of the list to deal with first and at the greatest length, covering four chapters. Such is his assessment of its seriousness.

As yet the schism is within the body of believers. It has not resulted in a break-away. No actual rupture has taken place, but if the party spirit described in verse 12 is allowed to dominate the situation without being checked, then even the external unity of the church might be jeopardized. Its internal unity has already been impaired. Hence the impassioned plea for 'unity of mind and thought', as the New English Bible renders the last clause of verse 10. Literally the Greek is 'that you all speak the same thing', and some commentators wonder whether Paul is exhorting them all to call themselves by the same name. But, as Lightfoot pointed out, this is a common classical expression used of political communities which are free from factions, or of different states which entertain friendly relations with each other.¹ Paul is not, then, asking for a stereotyped uniformity of language but for a deeper harmony of outlook and attitude.

The verb translated 'united' means to be firmly joined together. It is used to describe fishermen mending their nets (Mk. 1: 19). In surgery it refers to setting a dislocated joint. Christian unity restores the church to its proper condition and adjusts it so as to function effectively. Notice, however, that Paul is not content merely to recommend that schisms should be repaired. He deplores the very fact of their existence. Unity was not intended to be broken, but when it has been, then the hurt must be healed without delay.

The unfortunate state of affairs in Corinth is presented dramatically in verse 12 in the form of direct speech. We hear the party slogans bandied about between the contenders. It is all monstrously antiphonal. One cries to another and claims, 'I belong to Paul', 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas'. 'Each one of you say' — there is the essence of schism. It is the assertion of personal preferences and attachments. 'I' is put foremost — 'I am for Paul', 'I am for Apollos', 'I am a supporter of Peter'.

Schism not only reflects personal likes and dislikes. It also attaches itself to personalities. In this it introduces the spirit of the world into the church. There was a tendency in the pagan cults of the first century

¹ Cf. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Tyndale Press, London, 1958), pp. 38-39.

to exalt teachers to the status of *theioi anthrōpoi* — men endowed with divine qualities.² But it is unthinkable that Christians should in effect be guilty of similar adulation. The lionization of leaders has no place in the fellowship of Christ.

It may be that the four parties are listed in the order of their appearance at Corinth like the cast of a play. Paul's party perhaps emerged before the rest since he had been responsible for bringing the gospel to Corinth. It was certainly not with his approval or encouragement that such a group had used his name, as is made clear in verses 13 and 14. Paul had been careful not to attract a coterie to himself. It is a natural tendency for converts to idolize the evangelist under whose ministry they came to Christ. It still happens. But it is quite unjustifiable and indeed reprehensible. Paul expresses his strong disapproval and thus establishes his own impartiality in the whole matter. If anyone might have felt that a measure of deference was due to him, it was the apostle who had founded the Corinthian church. But he will have none, and thus at a stroke demolishes the counter-claims in the names of others. It is tempting to find a caption for each of these parties, for they keep cropping up again still. Paul's party is the party of evangelical cretinism. It suffers from arrested development. It has not advanced beyond the infantile dependence of a baby on its mother's breast.

The party of Apollos (or Apollonius) attached itself to the learned Jew from Alexandria of whom we read in Acts 18: 24-28. He was instructed more accurately in the Christian faith by Aquila and Priscilla when he visited Ephesus in AD 52. He went on to Corinth where we are told that 'he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus' (Acts 18: 28). Evidently his eloquence and expository skill greatly impressed the Corinthians. With his Alexandrian background he was no doubt an adept at allegorization. It is not surprising that some aligned themselves with his presentation of the gospel, although there is no hint of any personal rivalry between Paul and Apollos. Apollos watered what Paul had planted, but both knew that it was God who gave the increase (1 Cor. 3: 6-9). The more florid style of Apollos appealed to some hearers more than Paul's plainness of speech (1 Cor. 2: 1-5; 2 Cor. 10: 10). Preference passed into partisanship and so the Apollos faction appeared. We might christen it the party of homiletical intellectualism.

Peter's party must have been the original rock group! They looked to the one on whom Jesus himself had declared that the church was to be founded, without realizing, it seems, that our Lord was referring to Peter's confession of faith rather than to his personality. It is not certain whether Peter ever paid a personal visit to Corinth (1 Cor. 9: 5). Dionysius of

Corinth supposed that he did.³ In any event, there were Christians there who professed their allegiance to his name. After all, he was the leader of the twelve apostles and a Christian long before Paul. Those who joined this faction may have tended towards a modified Judaization, as F. F. Bruce is inclined to surmise.⁴ Unlike that attacked in Galatians, it did not insist on circumcision; but it did seek amongst other things to enforce the food restrictions imposed on Gentile Christians by the decree approved by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15: 28, 29; cf. 1 Cor. 8: 1-13; 10: 25-33). This was apparently an attitude adopted by others in the name of Peter, for there is no evidence that Peter himself was directly implicated. If he had been, it would have constituted a contravention of the working agreement between Peter and Paul which underlies the passage in Galatians 2: 6-10. The Peter party at Corinth was no doubt strongly nationalistic, and we may be justified in assuming that Paul had them in mind when he vindicated his own apostolic claims, with characteristic reluctance. 'Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I' (2 Cor. 11: 22). We could therefore dub this the party of legalistic conservatism though, as we have seen, it was in a modified version which avoided the more excessive extremes of the thoroughgoing Judaizers.

The most intriguing group is the last. How are we to interpret the Christ party? Is it Paul's intention to suggest that the only party to which Christians may legitimately belong is that of Christ himself — namely, the universal church? Or is this to be regarded as a fourth group, and if so — what does it stand for? It rather looks as if we are meant to see here yet another of the factions which split the Corinthian congregation. The context indicates that all these slogans are equally to be deplored. In that case, this is the most reprehensible of all. There were believers in Corinth who dared to claim a monopoly of Christ himself. As over against those who professed their attachment to human leaders like Paul, Apollos and Peter, this superior circle of the spiritually élite assumed that they (and presumably they alone) were the real Christians. 'I belong to Christ' — and that was calculated to settle the matter of precedence. The same arrogance persists today amongst those who refuse to recognize any but themselves as authentic believers — and that damaging outlook is to be found amongst extreme Protestants as well as amongst extreme Romans. The Christ party is the party of spiritual exclusivism. They alone are the elect, according to their own calculations.

Paul is utterly scandalized by the blasphemy of attempting to use the name of Christ in any narrowly restricted sense. This is nothing less than prostitution. 'If any one is confident that he is Christ's,' he tells his readers in 2 Corinthians 10: 7, 'let him remind himself that as he is Christ's, so are we.' These ultra-spiritual people are not the only pebbles on the Christian beach. Whereas the other three parties de-

⁴ Bruce, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

² Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (New Century Bible, Oliphants, London, 1971), p. 32.

³ Eusebius, *H.E.* 2.25.

tracted from the supremacy of Christ by elevating human leaders to the position of pre-eminence which belonged alone to the Head of the church, the Christ party dishonoured him even more by claiming exclusive rights to his person. In effect, they tried to take him prisoner and confine him to their own camp. But Christ cannot so be bound, and those who imagine that they alone possess Christ, and can interpret his mind and will, eventually discover that not only does he belong to others beyond their narrow conventicles, but that he has himself repudiated those who want to keep him to themselves. Christ cannot be possessed. It is he who possesses us and all others who are his own, whatever their ecclesiastical affiliation.

Paul breaks in with a crushing rejoinder in verse 13. It is a question which must needs concern us all. 'Is Christ divided?' The very suggestion is blasphemous. The church is one with the Lord. To divide the one is to divide the other. It is inconceivable that Christ should be divided, and it is equally inconceivable that the church should be divided. It would be a contradiction in terms. Hence Paul's plea for unity in the name of Christ in verse 10.

The further implication of the question in verse 13 is even more relevant to the situation at Corinth, with its rival factions. 'Is Christ divided?' means not only 'Has Christ been divided up?' but 'Has Christ been divided up amongst your parties?' The verb has to do not simply with dismemberment but with redistribution. A divided Christ is a Christ parcelled out to particular groups or only to one group. On this latter supposition Christ is reduced to a single quadrant of a circle. All this is quite unthinkable, argues the apostle, and then proceeds to cite his own example. He had been scrupulous in refraining from any attempt to gain a personal following. With only a few exceptions, he did not even baptize his own converts. He wanted to do nothing to infringe the sovereign rights of Christ.

So far from imagining that Christ could be rented out, as it were, to one party or many, the New Testament sees the church as one body in which the whole Christ is to be found either in the whole church or in any one of its parts. A schism within the body or from the body is incompatible not only with the New Testament doctrine of the church, but also with the New Testament doctrine of Christ. This was evidently the conviction that in the end prevailed in Corinth. Paul's warnings appear to have been heeded. The divisions were abandoned. The breach was healed. We hear no more about the several parties nor is there any indication that the canker which threatened Corinth spread to other areas. It was simply a local aberration. But it might have had serious repercussions both in Corinth itself and beyond. 'Never has any disruption of the unity of Christianity appeared of equal importance,' wrote Dean Stanley; 'never has any disruption which once appeared of importance (with the exception perhaps of the Paschal contro-

versy) been so completely healed.'⁵

We have devoted prolonged but not disproportionate attention to this crucial passage in the opening chapter of the Corinthian correspondence. We must now review more briefly the other two occurrences of the word *schisma* in this letter. We move on to chapter 11 and its treatment of disorders connected with the Lord's Supper from verses 17-34. In giving the instructions which occupy this section, Paul frankly confesses that he finds himself unable to commend what has been going on. There is something in the congregational gatherings at Corinth which is much more serious than the peripheral question as to whether women should cover their heads (*cf.* vv. 2-16). It has the effect of turning what should be a source of blessing and a means of grace into an occasion that tends to do more harm than good (v. 17b). In verse 18 Paul reveals what this major hindrance is: 'I hear that there are divisions among you.'

These are not the party divisions dealt with in chapter 1. They are social distinctions which have been destroying the harmony of the church. It is when the Corinthians assemble as a congregation for Christian worship that these schisms manifest themselves. It is not merely a matter of personal relationships: it affects the central act of the church's worship, namely the observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The tense of the verb reveals that Paul has not only heard of this in the past, but he continues to do so at present. Paul gives them the benefit of the doubt, but he is compelled to conclude that there is some truth in the rumour. The apostle is not credulous: there may have been exaggerations. But the reports are so persistent that he cannot ignore them.

It seems that the divisions were caused by discrimination against the poorer members of the church. The communion service was intended to be a common meal in which the food and drink brought by the participants would be pooled and shared amongst all. But instead of this, those who came were simply eating and drinking their own provisions. The result was that the well-off had enough and to spare whilst the socially underprivileged were not only unsatisfied but also felt neglected. This sort of class distinction must not continue, Paul insists (v. 22). 'What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you for this? No, I will not.' Unseemly divisions in the church, then, may arise as a result of social discrimination (often unconscious) as well as from partisan factions. Since they threaten the unity of the church they are equally reprehensible and need to be dealt with and disposed of with despatch.

⁵ Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Murray, London, 1876), p. 30. At the end of the first century the church at Corinth was disturbed by agitators who deposed the elders who had the oversight of the congregation, but there is no indication that the former divisions still existed or were revived. *Cf.* Clement of Rome, *1 Cor.*

We shall be considering verse 19 of this chapter when we come to deal with heresy.

Meanwhile we pass to chapter 12 and verse 25 — 'that there may be no discord (*schisma*) in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another'. Paul's famous analogy of the body and its various parts begins in verse 12 and continues to the end of chapter 12. The same simile had been applied to the body politic by Menenius Agrippa.⁶ Paul resorts to it, though not so fully, in Romans 12: 4, 5; Ephesians 4: 6 and Colossians 2: 19. In each case he applies it to the Christian church. He has the local congregation primarily in mind although, of course, what he says is applicable also to the universal and the ideal church. We are to think, however, of the relationship of individual believers to their Lord and to one another, and not of the relationship of Christian groups to one another in any federal fashion.

In verse 24 Paul explains that God has so adjusted the human body as to accord special honour to the humbler organs. All this is in order that there may 'be no sense of division in the body' (NEB) but that each of its members may feel the same concern for the other. The 'but' is very strong here. So far from countenancing dissension, God has positively planned for mutual care. If there is discord in our bodies between one part and another then it is an indication that we are unwell. The health of the body involves the harmonious functioning of every member. It is not otherwise in the church, for Paul declares in verse 27: 'You are the body of Christ and severally members of it'. As the subsequent verses show, the context is that of the various ministries to be exercised within the church and the charismatic gifts which the Spirit 'apportions to each one individually as he wills' (verse 11). These manifestations of the Spirit are given 'for the common good' (verse 7). They are not to be regarded as rewards or decorations. They are not to be exercised for the glory of those who have received them but for the glory of him who gave them. They are intended to promote the unity of the church and not to jeopardize it.

Here then, according to Scripture, is a further possible cause of schism. Division may be occasioned not only by the formation of pressure groups or the intrusion of unwarranted class distinctions, but also through the abuse of charismatic gifts and the ministries related to them. It is noteworthy that Paul immediately proceeds to his eulogy of *agapē* in chapter 13. It is only as Christians follow the 'still more excellent way' of love (12: 31) that they will be enabled to avoid the discord in the body of Christ which may result from the undisciplined exercise of the *charismata*.

Before leaving the consideration of schism in the New Testament, we must notice in passing a parallel word to *schisma* which occurs twice. It is *dichostasia*, which means standing apart or dissension. In Galatians 5: 20 dissension is included amongst the works

of the flesh along with anger, selfishness and party spirit. All these are in the plural, as if to suggest repeated and multiplied displays of the evils in question. It comes as something of a shock to realize that dissension between fellow-Christians is condemned as severely as the more obvious carnal sins like 'immorality, impurity, licentiousness' with which the catalogue opens, and 'drunkenness' and 'carousing' with which it closes (cf. vv. 19, 21).

In Romans 16: 17 Paul urges his readers to keep their eyes open for 'those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine you have been taught'. The word translated as 'difficulties' is actually *skandala*, so that the modern phrase 'the scandal of our divisions' does have a scriptural basis. It is often said that doctrine divides. That is only so with false doctrine. True doctrine unites and the church's oneness depends upon it. That is why it is so essential that the apostolic gospel should be safeguarded within the church and the apostolic faith retained as the criterion of acceptable theology. The unity of the church can be maintained or restored only on the basis of truth. We must not suppose that as evangelicals we are alone in this conviction. Here is a distinguished spokesman of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Archbishop Methodios Fouyias, making a point we often reiterate. 'We live in a time of apparent Christian charity which, I think, could destroy the vitality of the Christian churches. . . . All too often we are satisfied with a charitable ambiguity at the expense of truth.'⁷

Hersey

The Greek word for heresy (*hairesis*) is derived from the verb *haireō*, to take. In classical literature it can refer to the seizure or capture of a city. In the middle voice the verb means to choose, and appears in this sense several times in the New Testament (Phil. 1: 22; 2 Thes. 2: 13; Heb. 11: 25). So the noun can signify a choice or an inclination. It may then gain a purposive tone and indicate a resolve, an enterprise, an effort directed to a goal. This becomes the dominant element in Hellenistic usage. The term is a technical one to denote a philosophical doctrine and more especially a specific school of philosophy. Schlier stresses several important aspects of *hairesis* in this sense.⁸ He includes the gathering of the *hairesis* from a comprehensive society and hence its delimitation from other schools of thought; the self-assumed authority of the teacher; the dogmatic assertiveness of its teaching despite its disputable validity; and the private character of all these features.

In the LXX *hairesis* is sometimes found in the general sense of choice (Gn. 49: 5; Lv. 22: 18, 21; 1 Macc. 8: 30). More important is its connotation in

⁷ Methodios Fouyias, *Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism* (Oxford University Press, 1972), p. vii.

⁸ Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ET, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964-), vol. 1, p. 181.

⁶ Livy, 2.32.

Judaism. Philo used it to denote a Greek philosophical school and also the society of the Therapeutics.⁹ Josephus describes the Jewish religious parties as *haireseis* — the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes.¹⁰ The equivalent term in Rabbinic literature is *min* which at first designated a sect (or a sectarian) within Judaism. But when some of the *minim* separated themselves from the orthodox tradition it was used only in the pejorative sense with reference to trends within Judaism opposed by the Rabbis. By the end of the first century AD a malediction pronounced on the *minim* was incorporated into the Prayer of the Eighteen Petitions. At the close of the second century, however, the term had acquired a new meaning. It was now applied to the adherents of other faiths, especially Christians and Gnostics. It begins to correspond to the Greek *schisma*.

We cannot correctly grasp the New Testament significance of heresy apart from this Hellenistic and Jewish background. It must be borne in mind as we examine the incidence of the term. Schlier has concisely analysed the evidence.¹¹ The usage in Acts exactly corresponds to that of Josephus and the earlier Rabbis. *Hairesis* denotes a Jewish party. In Acts 5: 17 Luke refers to 'the party (*hairesis*) of the Sadducees'. In Acts 15: 5 there is a similar allusion to 'the party (*hairesis*) of the Pharisees'. In his defence before King Agrippa the apostle Paul declares that 'according to the strictest party (*hairesis*) of our religion' he has lived as a Pharisee. Christianity itself is labelled a heresy by its opponents. Tertullus castigated Paul as 'a ringleader of the sect (*hairesis*) of the Nazarenes' (Acts 24: 5). The apostle politely declined the appellation and preferred to regard himself as a follower of the new Way (v. 14). The Jews in Rome told Paul that they were eager to know what his views were, for they added, 'all we know about this sect (*hairesis*) is that none has a good word to say for it' (Acts 28: 22, NEB). In his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin Martyr represents the Jews as regarding Christianity as a 'godless and lawless sect' (*hairesis*).¹² In all these passages *hairesis* simply means a school, a party, or a sect. It has not yet acquired the theological significance it gains elsewhere in the New Testament and in later Christian writings.

According to Schlier 'the basis of the Christian concept of *hairesis* is to be found in the new situation created by the introduction of the Christian *ekklēsia*. *Ekklēsia* and *hairesis* are material opposites. The latter cannot accept the former: the former excludes the latter.'¹³ This is borne out by such passages as Galatians 5: 20, where heresy ('party spirit', rsv) is reckoned amongst the works of the flesh along with 'enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, envy' which are all associated with it. This is even more

apparent in 1 Corinthians 11: 18, 19 where Paul recognizes the incompatibility of *hairesis* with *ekklēsia*. There can be no comfortable co-existence. The *ekklēsia* cannot tolerate *hairesis*. If indeed there must be sects amongst the Christians it is only in order that the genuine may be sifted from the counterfeit. An eschatological dimension is introduced here, since such distinctions anticipate the final separation of the judgment day. Meanwhile, when such controversies arise, true believers will stand out from the rest because of their adherence to the faith once delivered to the saints and their refusal to be involved in uncharitable disputation. In all this, however, it is noticeable that *hairesis* has not acquired the technical meaning of a doctrinal deviation.

This latter and more usually accepted definition is only attested in one later New Testament verse. In 2 Peter 2: 1 there is a warning against false teachers who 'secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction'. Here is what *hairesis* eventually comes to mean. It is obstinate persistence in self-opinionated views contrary to revealed truth and the propagation of such distortions. The discipline of the church cannot for a moment countenance these falsities or allow those who peddle them to remain within the fellowship unless they repent and adjure them. Otherwise 'the way of truth will be reviled' (2 Pet. 2: 2); that is, the apostolic gospel will be brought into disrepute. Nothing less is at stake than the faith the church exists to proclaim.

Were the church to tolerate heresy in its ranks it would in fact be guilty of according recognition to a counter-church. A new society would have arisen alongside the true *ekklēsia*. Those who preach 'another gospel' (2 Cor. 11: 4; Gal. 1: 6) belong to another church and to the New Testament another church is unthinkable. There is only one faith, one church, one Lord. If the church accedes to *hairesis* Schlier contends, it will itself become a *hairesis*.¹⁴ If the church allows false doctrine it betrays itself. Our task, then, as evangelicals, is to ensure that the church fulfils its own calling and maintains the apostolic faith. That the primitive church had learned this lesson thoroughly is reflected in a passage from the letter of Ignatius to the Ephesians. He has heard from their Bishop Onesimus that their attitude in this respect is exemplary: 'You all live according to the truth and no heresy has any home among you. Nor do you even so much as give a hearing to anyone who speaks otherwise than about Jesus Christ in the truth.'¹⁵

The tension between truth and love, which constitutes the continuing dilemma of the church, is resolved by the apostle Paul as he writes to the Ephesians about the unity of the faith which is attained through an increasing knowledge of the Son of God in mature Christian manhood. It is only when

⁹ Philo, *De plantatione* 151; *De vita contemplativa* 29.

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquitates* 13.171, 193; *Bellum Judaicum*, 2.118; *Vita* 191, 197.

¹¹ *TDNT*, vol. 1, p. 182.

¹² Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 17.1; 108.2.

¹³ *TDNT*, vol. 1, p. 183.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ignatius, *Eph.* 6.2.

this has been realized, that we will no longer be like children 'tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, *speaking the truth in love*, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love' (Eph. 4: 14-16).

The last word must needs be with love. Love is the first of the Spirit's fruit and the highest of the Spirit's gifts. Love is the royal law and love is the golden rule. 'So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love' (1 Cor. 13: 13). Love and unity belong together. Where there is love there must be unity. Where there is no unity there can be no love. In the Johannine Epistles, *agapē* is the love which shows itself in unity. *Agapē* is unity. It is the love with which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father in the perfect unity of the Godhead (1 Jn. 4: 16; cf. Jn. 12: 26). This is the love which Christians are to show to one another and to those who have not yet been drawn into the fellowship of love. 'We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren' (1 Jn. 3: 14). Such love and union is what makes the church the church and shows it to be the church.

On the basis of the New Testament teaching which we have sketchily reviewed, we find ourselves unable to evade the challenge of some comments from Dean Richardson with which we conclude. 'Church unity is not "a desirable feature in the life of the Church":

it is the condition of the Church's existence, the test of whether the Church is the Church. A divided Church is a contradiction of its own nature as Church: it is witnessing to a falsehood. Its evangelism cannot be effective. Jesus prayed "that they all may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (Jn. 17: 21; cf. 12: 23). If we took the New Testament point of view seriously we should expect to find that the single most serious obstacle to the evangelization of the world is the disunity of "the Churches".¹⁶

Our concern in these two articles has been to elucidate the determinative biblical principles relating to the four issues of unity, continuity, schism and heresy. It is only as a proper understanding of these is attained that the prevalent confusion of thought will be dispelled. Until we are shown by the Spirit what God's Word requires of us in our contemporary situation, we shall be unable to resolve our agonizing dilemmas or to act in obedience to the divine will.

As the editor indicated in his introduction, this is an area where evangelicals themselves differ considerably in their views. Is it satisfactory to regard such divergent attitudes as reflecting legitimate interpretative variations, or can it be that we have not yet allowed the Scripture to impress upon us the unambiguous truth of God?

¹⁶ Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

Gnosticism and the New Testament 1

John W Drane

Gnosticism is a confusing subject. What was it? Was it a pre-Christian religion or a post-Christian heresy? Has the New Testament been affected by Gnostic ideas? Does the idea, e.g., of a redeemer coming from heaven to save men on earth derive from Gnostic mythology, as Bultmann suggests, or is the relationship the other way round? We are grateful to Dr John Drane, who did research on the subject at Manchester University, for this two-part article, in which he guides us through the complexities of the current debate.

The study of Gnosticism has for long been a *sine qua non* for the student of the New Testament, not

least since the discovery in the late 1940s of a complete library of Coptic Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi in upper Egypt. Some of these texts, like the *Evangelium Veritatis* and the Gospels of *Thomas* and *Philip*, have become widely known, but the interpretation of the majority of these texts, and their relationship to the picture of Gnosticism given by the Church Fathers, is a task that still lies in the future. Most of the texts thus far published have tended to confirm the patristic evidence, though one or two of the documents have been claimed to give evidence of a pre- and non-Christian Gnosticism. Work is going ahead in the translation and editing