THE ENIGMA OF EPHESIANS: RETHINKING SOME POSITIONS ON THE BASIS OF SCHNACKENBURG AND ARNOLD

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1 INTRODUCTION

The appearance of Schnackenburg's widely acclaimed EKK commentary (1982) in English (Schnackenburg 1991a) allows one the opportunity to discuss, in view of the author's conclusions, some issues with regard to the letter to the Ephesians. Before doing this, however, it may be worth our while to say something about the formal aspects of the Schnackenburg commentary. The book contains more than seven pages of literature as well as specialised literature on each section of Ephesians. An introduction deals with the literary form, author and addressees, the relationship to Colossians, and the date and circumstances of composition. The letter to the Ephesians is divided into four main sections on which extensive commentary, extending from page 39 through 292, is delivered. This section contains one excursus on the church (293-310). It is followed by a discussion of the letter's influence on history (311-342) and its probable meaning for the present day (343-344). In addition there are a number of indices.

From the wide-ranging and penetrating discussions and insights of this highly respected and mature scholar, I have selected just two topics for this paper, of which the aim is to rethink, on the basis of Schnackenburg and with the assistance of others, some questions regarding the setting of Ephesians and its
theology. By ‘setting’ I mean, in this context, the problems of authorship and addressees, together with the accompanying search for the situation or context in which the letter came into being and for which it had a message to communicate. The lack of any definite clues as to the situation of the letter and the difficulty of determining a situation which can stand up to the available facts are partly the reason why one has to speak of the enigma of Ephesians. The various answers given for the above questions, determine the perspective one has on the theology of the letter, resulting in the carrying over of the enigmatic nature of its provenance and existence into the field of the letter’s communicative content.

2 RECENT TRENDS REGARDING THE SETTING OF EPHESIANS

Whereas Percy (1946:8) was able to state that the question of the authenticity of both Colossians and Ephesians could not be regarded as settled, for Gnilka (1971:17) it had become clear ‘daß Paulus als Verf. nicht mehr in Frage kommt’. Notwithstanding Schnackenburg’s (1991a:27) mention of Van Roon (1974) as returning ‘to the conclusion that Paul, along with another man from his circle, could be the author’, and that ‘in his large commentary of 1974 M. Barth still pleads for Pauline authorship’, the rejection of the letter’s authenticity has now won almost unanimous approval among prominent scholars in the case of both Ephesians and Colossians.

The question might be posed whether anything can be gained by once again opening the issue of authorship (cf Robertson 1985:107-117). In addition to the fact that, notwithstanding the almost complete consensus regarding the pseudonymity of the letter, commentators still deem it necessary to state the reasons for this, I would like to suggest that the very wide consensus in itself necessitates careful consideration of all aspects of the argument. In view of the wide consensus, scholars no longer seem to argue the case from all perspectives, but rather to list only the arguments in favour of the consensus point of view. What this in fact implies is that the consensus opinion has attained the status of dogma. It now only needs to be confirmed. Variant opinions are regarded as aberrations that need not be taken seriously.

In this respect the position of Schnackenburg is interesting and, in fact, my reason for choosing the authorship question as a focal point. First of all he lists himself as among those Roman Catholic scholars who have made a turn-about with regard to the question of authenticity, having previously accepted Paul as writer, but having now come to regard the letter as post-Pauline (1991a:24, see also n16). Then, having acknowledged that there indeed still remain a few proponents of Pauline authorship, he goes on to state (1991a:25):

If the consideration of style, language and theological content cannot give a completely unambiguous picture, we must ask whether an exegesis on the assumption of
a Pauline or 'deuteropauline' origin would lead to a better hypothesis. Would the Epistle as a whole be more comprehensible if it stemmed from the lifetime of the Apostle and went back to Paul himself (or his circle of co-workers) or if it is placed only at the beginning of the 'post-apostolic' period (around AD 90)?

However, and this is what I find interesting, in outlining the arguments of the case, it is virtually all the old and well-known arguments that are listed. What intrigues me is why these arguments that were previously found unconvincing have now become compelling. Of course Schnackenburg would answer that it was not these arguments on their own that swayed the opinion, but rather acceptance of them that led to a better theory regarding the context of the letter. But surely we have a circular argument here. Once the post-Pauline provenance is accepted, the exegesis has to follow suit. I am left with the question whether the arguments for pseudonymity (together with a better explanation of a fitting context), which are in themselves so difficult to make a decision about, and which are responsible for the existing dilemma with regard to Ephesians, have suddenly attained new persuasive force, or whether it is not simply peer pressure that has occasioned the change of opinion. As more and more scholars of renown take the deuto-Pauline position for granted, and are no longer even willing to debate the issues, it becomes more and more difficult to hold on to an opinion that is regarded as outdated by all and sundry (see e.g. Adai 1985:17-24).

Schnackenburg (1991a:24, n16) lists the following as Roman Catholic colleagues who have also previously accepted Pauline authorship, but no longer do so: Schmid, Muhner and Schlier (the last 'in a verbal communication'). He also lists the views of other Roman Catholic scholars: Rigaux and Benoit thought of someone from Paul's school, but Blank, Gnirka and Ernst assumed a non-Pauline, that is, later provenance. To his list can be added the name of Pfammatter (1987:7-8), and the authors of most modern introductions, Protestant and Roman Catholic alike.

For Schnackenburg (1991a:33) a date around AD 90 seems most probable. What are the circumstances that would fit the writing of this letter at this date? Schnackenburg would not accept Fisher's opinion that the letter's context was the 'constitutional problem' created by 'the transition from the Pauline missionary association to the new episcopal church order', nor that of Lindemann that it was to be found in a situation of persecution. Rather the pragmatic objectives of the author show that he is concerned with two basic tenets:

[T]he idea of the internal unity of the congregation which is intensified by the motif of the one Church founded by Jesus Christ and inseparably bound to him; and the concept of a commitment, growing out of God's calling, to a distinctly Christian way of life which should be distinguished from and contrasted to the unchristian life-style of the environment (Schnackenburg 1991a:34)
Now both these ideas would have had particular significance around AD 90. Disunity in the church would be linked to false teachings of the kind encountered in a number of post-apostolic writings and, in the case of Ephesians would be indicated *inter alia* on account of the reference to πλάνη in 4:14, and a leadership crisis that can be deduced from 4:11-16 and that would be indicative of the apostles and prophets having passed away. This would then account for the fact that this author ‘gives a pre-eminent place to the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20), unlike Paul, who describes Christ himself as the unalterable foundation (1 Cor 3.11)’ (1991a:34).

However, this line of argumentation is severely flawed. Schnackenburg (34) himself acknowledges that the 'problem of unity and harmony within the congregations was already a cause of concern for Paul.' What is more, the statement regarding the pre-eminent place given to the apostles and prophets by the author of Ephesians simply does not stand up to scrutiny. In the image of the church as a building of God (2:20-23) Christ retains his pre-eminence through his position as cornerstone within the structure of God's building. Over against this, 1 Corinthians 3:11 is not concerned with the idea of the structure of God's building at all, but uses the imagery to detail the various phases in the process of bringing God's word to his people: the first step, without which no work of God is ever done, is the missionary preaching of salvation through Christ, that is, the laying of the foundation upon which others then build to consolidate God's people (see Roberts 1963:36-38, 60-66, 122-129; 1983:10-11, 15-16. See also Wessels 1988:225, and *passim*). The time-worn argument repeated here by Schnackenburg amounts to nothing more than a ridiculous comparison of apples and pears!

As to the second concern of the letter, namely that of encouraging Christians to adopt a new way of life, Schnackenburg concedes that this was also a concern of Paul's. However, he believes that the length and emphasis of this paratext, its ‘special motifs and new accents (cf 5.6-14) betray an urgent, topical interest’ (1991a:35). There would have been an extended period of instruction and a developed congregational life 'as is evidenced by the liturgical echoes, the verses 5.19f, and the *Haustafel*'. With this the author of Ephesians had moved closer in line with the later developments of the second and third centuries which regarded the church as a third race alongside Jews and Gentiles. But, again, has not Paul himself arrived at this perception of the church in I Corinthians 10:32 by distinguishing between Jews, Greeks, and the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ? And further, can the special motifs and accents, the urgent and topical interest, not just as well be explained with reference to the contingent nature of Paul's letters (Lemmer: 1988:27)? Proof of this, I believe, is to be found in the recent presentation by Arnold (1989).

In view of the above, it is refreshing to find in the work of this author, after much careful study, a conclusion that flies in the teeth of accepted (if not dog-
mantic!) opinion. Whereas scholarship in general has recognised the overwhelming importance of the church in this letter, Arnold, without trying to diminish this importance, has drawn attention to the fact that spiritual powers, and over against them the idea of God’s power, play an important role in Ephesians and form the backdrop to the setting of the letter (Arnold 1989:41-102). This letter, more than any other book in the New Testament, pays singular attention to evil powers and to God’s and Christ’s position of absolute power over all things, that is, (also) power over the evil powers. Why should this be the case? Arnold seeks to answer this question in terms of the problem of the letter’s situation or context.

When one views (as I and many others have done—but see Roberts 1986a:75) the theme of the church as the overarching, even single, issue about which the letter revolves, one might postulate a context for this letter where the sociological and political enmity of Jews and Greeks in the Hellenistic world, and especially in the Roman province of Asia (western Asia Minor) spilled over into the church once its membership became mixed and even predominantly Greek (Roberts 1986a:76-77). Ephesians would then have been written (by Paul or someone quite near to him) to stress, in this situation, the unity of the church as the one body of Christ, the one building of God, the eschatological people of God comprising all who believe in Christ whether they be Jew or Greek (see also, although accepting a later provenance, Stuhlmacher 1974:344-345, 350-357, and especially n33, 35 and 63).

In accordance with his acceptance of the post-Pauline authorship of Ephesians, Schnackenburg (1991a:33), whilst acknowledging that ‘[t]here may be an element of truth in the idea that there was tension in their communal life between Jewish and Gentile Christians if the section Eph 2.11-22 indicates a situation actually existing’, would rather determine the context of the letter in terms of the stress on the unity of the church and the call to a commitment to a new and ‘distinctly Christian way of life’ (1991a:34). Behind the stress on church unity, he sees the emergence of ‘deviant doctrine’ (4:14) coupled with ‘a “crisis of leadership” which is connected with the dying-out of the “apostles and prophets” and the transition to the post-apostolic period’, and which resulted in the fundamental position given by this author to apostles and prophets (see above). The urge to adopt a new way of life would be in keeping with such a setting late in the first century because the author looks back on a long period of instruction (4:20) and the developing awareness of the fact that the Christians constitute a third race over against Jews and Gentiles (1991a:35). As we have seen, Schnackenburg proposes that a reading of Ephesians against such a background is better suited to solving the exegetical problems posed by the text.

Over against this, however, Arnold can, in view of the special emphasis given to the powers and God’s supreme dominance which subjugated them to
Christ, posit a context which very well befits a setting in the time of Paul (1989:167-172). Arguing from the importance of the Artemis cult and magical practices (brought into relief by the reading of the magical papyri) for the vicinity of Ephesus and western Asia Minor, he formulates the following hypothesis:

Ephesians appears to have been written to a group of churches in western Asia Minor needing help in developing a Christian perspective on the ‘powers’ and encouragement in their ongoing struggles with these pernicious spirit-forces (Arnold 1989:167).

On the basis of this he concludes:

The Epistle to the Ephesians is therefore not a response to cosmic speculation. It is a response to the felt needs of the common people within the churches of western Asia Minor, who perceived themselves as oppressed by the demonic realm.

This explanation also provides a more plausible background to Ephesians than the views which appeal to the anachronistic and dubious Gnostic redeemer myth (e.g. Lindemann, Fischer, Schmithals, Kásemann, and Pokorny, among others). The references to the cosmic ‘powers’ are better explained on the basis of the flourishing belief in the demonic realm evidenced in the papyri, inscriptions, and Jewish texts. The setting I postulate also has the advantage of explaining the motivation behind the author’s accentuation of ‘cosmic Christology’ and ‘realised eschatology’. The Ephesian author does not betray Gnostic influence on his thought; rather, he has the pastoral intention of admonishing his readers to depend completely upon Christ in their struggle with the forces of evil.

This understanding of the power-motif in light of the epistle’s setting naturally has some obvious implications for the question of authorship. The power-motif in its variety of facets is not an alien addition to Pauline theology, but rather appears to be a Pauline emphasis called for by the ‘situation’ addressed. My view of the ‘situation’ also provides helpful perspective on the motive behind the letter’s distinctive accents in Christology and eschatology. I have not found a sufficient basis for characterizing these aspects of the theology of Ephesians as discontinuous with the generally accepted Paulines. In light of this...I believe that the apostle Paul himself surfaces as the most viable candidate for the role of author. There is no difficulty in regarding Paul’s personal awareness of their situation, and his demonstrated pastoral and apostolic concern for Christians in western Asia Minor—whom he knew lived in genuine dread of the demonic realm—as having prompted him to send them such relevant instruction and encouragement (Arnold 1989:171).

In terms of setting, the above leaves us on the one hand with Schnackenburg as representative of many who would pose a post-Pauline context around AD 90 where, for instance, deviant teaching and lack of leadership necessitated a message concerning the unity of the church and the importance of a new way of life. On the other hand we find a context determined by, for instance, inner strife between Jewish and Gentile Christians, leading to a message regarding the unity
of the church, or determined by widespread fear of the demonic realm, leading to a message of the dominance of God and Christ over all powers that be and the availability of this source of strength to the Christian community.

It should be clear that choices made in connection with the setting of Ephesians has direct bearing on one's understanding of the theology of the letter.

It is a pity that Kruger (1991), in formulating the specific theological thrust of Ephesians, did not comply with the aim of the editors to establish first of all the letter's context so as to argue the theological content from that vantage point. His argument on the basis of a content analysis leaves unanswered the question regarding the reasons for the special nuances of this letter's communication.

In a later work by Schnackenburg (1991b:52-53), he modifies his viewpoint somewhat, giving acknowledgement to Arnold, and stressing the readers' 'Weltangst' and insecurity in view of their struggle against the evil powers, as well as tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians. He now poses a date around AD 80.

3 THE THEOLOGY OF EPHESIANS

3.1 Two tenets

It is true that the main thrust of the letter touches on many theological aspects. In dealing with the theology of Ephesians, Arnold (1989:123-166) has shown that his view on the context has implications for Christology, anthropology, ethics, eschatology, soteriology and ecclesiology. It is not our aim to discuss here these and related features of the letter's theology, but rather to comment on its special communicative spearhead, the theological contribution that it messaged to its readers in their special circumstances.

As has been shown above, whether a Pauline or post-Pauline authorship is accepted, it is possible to design a context which will explain the letter's insistence on the unity of the church. It has also been shown that a context existed in the Pauline era that can explain the letter's interest in spiritual powers. The question to be answered here is whether there is a theological connection between the theme of the church and that of the powers, and how this relates to the situation of the letter.

In dealing with the letter's pronouncements on the church, Arnold (1989:158) acknowledges that if 'not the chief theme of the epistle', this topic 'is certainly very important to the writer'. He goes on to show that in the three images of the church (head/body, new temple and marriage) there exists 'an inseparable link between ecclesiology and Christology', and that these images 'also portray (1) the unity of the church, and (2) the divine empowering of the church' (158). By stressing the aspect of empowerment, Arnold has undoubtedly made a major contribution towards understanding the letter to the Ephesians. However, his conception of the function of the two themes in the letter remains
unclear. What is their functional relation, and what situation can explain these two tenets—that is if they do not simply co-exist as a 'dual message' (Arnold 1989:159)?

3.2 A single thrust

It is interesting to note that the ideas of the church and its unity, and of empowering, are linked to each other in various pericopae, while in other cases they alternate in subsequent pericopae. The opening berakah (1:3-14) deals with ‘us’ who have already been blessed by God in Christ, referring to salvation and being chosen as his people—then states that the readers have now also joined this blessed group. Although the contrast between the ‘we/us’ and the ‘you’ should not be understood as signifying directly Jewish and Gentile Christians (see also Schnackenburg 1991a:35-36,63-64), the passage does contain a transitional clue to the rest of the letter. What emerges is the church as people of God, the union resulting from God’s work of salvation in Christ, the outcome of the economy of peace between the heavenly world of God and the degenerate world of man’s existence, planned and executed by God under the heading: The Christ (1:10). The later passage, 2:11-18, referring to ‘you’ who have previously been outside the covenants with Israel, but have now become part of it, both Gentiles and Jews having been incorporated in one new man, cannot be read but with a view to the ‘we’ and ‘you’ as both being included in the eschatological people of God. The same accounts for the Gentiles now being co-heirs, fellow members and partakers in the promises of God in Christ (3:6).

The combined thanksgiving/prayer section (1:15-21) links up with the previous in that the author now prays for these new members of God’s singular people that they might come to an understanding, particularly of the allpowerfulness of God as demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ—his power which is available to us who have put our trust in Him (1:19).

The subsequent section, a confessional statement (1:22-23—see Roberts 1986b:193-196,198-199; 1988:87-91), combines both the above-mentioned beliefs: God has exalted Christ above the whole of the universe which He subjected to him, and God gave this Head above all to the Church as Mediator of its salvation. The Ruler above all is God’s gift to his church for its salvation. Therefore the church is his body, the receptacle filled to the brim by the Saviour who fulfilled, that is, completed fully everything needed for salvation, completed it fully in every respect. (For the exegesis see Roberts 1991:55-60.)

Three explanatory pericopae follow on the confessional statement, clarifying its meaning for the new believers. The first of these (2:1-10) pictures their previous life as an existence, death rather than life (see the discussion by Best 1981:16-20), under the rule of evil powers—a situation which held true for all mankind, at least suggesting that both Jews and Gentiles suffered this fate. God
has changed all this, however, by making them alive in Christ (accepting the reading $\epsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\omicron\nu\ \chi\rho\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\nu\tau\omicron\nu$ in 2:5), and giving them a part in his resurrection and exaltation, that is, the power of God working in them to render the influence of the evil one powerless. In this section it would seem that stress is placed on the conquering power of God, empowering the believers to a life in Christ, although the solidarity in sin of all men does point, in view of the larger literary context, to the redeemed community as consisting of believers from among the Jews as well as the Gentiles.

The second explanatory pericope (2:11-18) demonstrates the fact that they, who previously had no part in God's dealings with his people, have now been made part of it so that Jewish and Gentile believers together form the 'one new man' created by God through the reconciliation of Christ who brought peace between the former enemies—as He did between God and man. In this section the unity of God's people, the one body of Christ, emerges as the thrust of the argument: the meaning for the readers, implied by the confessional statement, is that they have become part of God's covenant people which includes both Jews and Gentiles (see also Stuhlmacher 1974:347-350). This also holds true for the third pericope (2:19-22) which renders the readers part of God's citizenry and household, living stones in the building of God, together with believers from among the Jews with whom they have collectively been joined in the building upon the same cornerstone and foundation.

The prayer, starting at 3:1 and continued in 3:14-19, once again contains petitions for the strengthening of the readers in order that they might experience the full complement of God's graceful salvific enterprise. The focus in this passage, as in the case of the subsequent doxology (3:20-21), is on the all-encompassing power of the God who, in Christ, has become their God.

Meanwhile the diversion contained in 3:2-13 emphasizes Paul's mission. God has revealed to him the secret, previously unknown, that the time has arrived for the Gentiles to be included in the church as συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμετοχά τῆς ἐπαγγελίας. Therefore we find in this passage that the one church as eschatological people of God, no longer comprising only 'Israel' to whom the promises of God were made, but also Gentiles who now share in these promises, occupies the centre stage. On the basis of the secret's content the church has now become God's visible sign, communicating to the spiritual powers (God's opposition in the struggle) that He has accomplished the economy of salvation as He had intended. What is of special importance in this pericope, is the fact that the realisation of the union of the church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, is coupled with the idea of empowerment. God has conquered; his power is at work through the very medium of the one church where it is to be seen by all God's adversaries (3:10). Paul was also empowered to fulfil the mission whereby this church was established (3:7). Equally important is the fact that
God's power was at work in the believers in order to make them understand the economy of God (3:4), since this establishes a relation between the fact of the one church consisting of Jews and Gentiles on the one hand, and on the other the power of God and the need of the church to know about and experience that power.

The pattern observed in the above, holds true for the second part of the letter as well. Chapter 4:1-6 starts off with the admonishment to adhere to and maintain the unity brought about by the gospel because this is in accordance with God's will to unite in the church both Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ. Following on this, 4:7-16 points the way to a form of church life that would serve this unity through the utilisation of the gifts provided by the all-conquering Christ and where all members of the body would work harmoniously towards the building up of the whole in love. The double content of οἰκοδομή is reflected respectively in 4:13 and 4:14-15a in terms of missionary outreach and internal consolidation. Now, we have noted above that Schnackenburg (1991a:34) utilises the occurrence of πλανή in 4:14 to establish a context around AD 90 in which heresy had become a problem. In view of the above, however, it is very much the question whether this can indeed be the case. What is at stake in 4:1-6 and 4:7-16 is the need of the Christian community to adhere to the union of faith created by God in Christ, the need to work together to establish through missionary work and to strengthen through mutual love their bond as members of the one body of Christ. In view of this, the evil and deceitful teachings of men, their treachery that leads astray, should be interpreted antithetically in terms of the need to maintain the unity of the church. Especially it should be understood as the actions of those who would drive a wedge between the Jewish and the Gentile components built into the one building of God. Thus the power that flows from the Head, Christ, who is in control, who provides his gifts of gifted people (as God is said to do in 1 Cor 12:28-30) to act as joints and conduits, qualifies the members for the task of building up the church through love. The author is painting a picture of the church where everyone is bonded to everyone else, where all are working together through the power of the Lord to hold fast to one another, serve one another, love and not hate one another (as Jews and Gentiles do in society at large).

Towards the end of the letter the trend is repeated in the Haustafel, while in the final call to arms (6:10-20) it is all about empowerment. The Haustafel uses the relationship of Christ and the church as an example for the relationship between husband and wife (5:22-33). Christ is Saviour of his body for whom He has surrendered himself, providing for her complete salvation (5:23,25). As Lord and Head of the church (5:22-23) He not only bears supreme authority, but also takes care of the church's needs (5:24,29-30).
We now have to return to the question whether these two tenets, running through the letter as a whole (the unity of the church and the power of God over the powers of evil), represent a dual message, as Arnold contends, or rather function in relation to each other in order to communicate a single and coherent message to readers in a specific situation. This, of course, also poses the question as to what this situation or context might have been.

The situation, as Arnold sees it, was one where the individual convert to Christianity, having previously lived his life in fear of all kinds of spiritual powers, would, even after his acceptance of the Christian faith, still be overawed by those powers and in need of the assurance of God's and Christ's absolute power over all, which is then given in this letter. However, were this the case, one would have to assume that this need existed throughout the Mediterranean world. Therefore why the stress in this letter on powers, coupled with the equally important stress on the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church?

I believe that the above overview has indicated that the theme of church unity in Ephesians is so central to the letter as a whole that it cannot simply be understood as a dual theme more or less unrelated to the other—the need to provide assurance to those who still feared all kinds of spiritual beings. It is, to my mind, undeniably tied up with the situation of the communities to which it was directed. For this reason I would venture the theory that the two themes are related—indeed that the context of Ephesians was one where the enmity of Jewish and Gentile Christians, carried over into the church from the age-old strife that existed between Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor (as of course elsewhere), was understood to be the work of the evil spiritual beings, the existence of which was accepted by all in that society. This implies that the actual problem of the communities was indeed one of disunity between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and that the author of Ephesians chose to deal with this problem by firstly suggesting that it was caused by the power of evil, and, secondly, that it could be overcome by the utilisation of God's all-encompassing power.

In substantiation of the above, one should note firstly that nowhere does the letter play on the believers' fear or awe of the evil powers. What it does, is to accentuate that God's and Christ's power transcends all else and is available to God's people. This need not be construed as a sign of believers' fear of the spiritual powers, but might just as well be a sign that the author wished to stress the inferiority of these powers for another reason of his own.

Secondly, it is of special significance that in 3:2-13 the letter relates the idea of spiritual powers directly to the idea of the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church as has been shown above: the one people of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles (συνοικίαςωματα), is empowered to understand the economy of God's salvation in Christ by which the heathens were brought into the body of
Christ—and this one, united body is God's sign to all powers that be of his triumph over evil. Clearly the function of this is to communicate to the readers that the strife between Jews and Gentiles in the church not only flies in the teeth of God's plan of salvation, but stands in direct opposition to the message of God's triumph over the evil powers: a divided church, instead of being a sign of God's conquering power in Christ, reflects the negative message of a victory by the forces of evil. Since the author has, however, established, as a matter of faith, the triumph of God's powerful action in Christ, not only in this pericope but throughout the letter, the pragmatics of this pericope is to effect a change of heart resulting in mutual acceptance of each other by Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Thirdly, in 4:7-16 the churchly way of life by means of which the unity of the church was to be preserved and promoted, is insolubly linked to the message of Christ's conquering triumph and the related passing on of his gifts. Empowered by his gifts, all members of the unified body of Christ were to serve the building up of the church through love and were not to allow themselves to be led astray into disunity (see above, and also the stress on love in 4:1-6). The function of this pericope within the scope of the letter as a whole is to bring about that change of heart that would lead to mutual acceptance of all members, whether from Jewish or heathen extraction, understanding that they belonged together because they belonged to Christ, stressing the need to lovingly serve all members, working toward the growth and building up of all God's people and guarding against all evil intentions to lead God's people into schism. In 6:18 their prayerful perseverance, as those empowered by God, for all God's people once more reflects the sentiments of the message which the author wished to convey in the situation of a cluster of Christian communities threatened by the inner strife of opposing groups.

Fourthly, the pattern which determines much of the letter, by which the ideas of church unity and power are either closely linked within a pericope or follow each other in subsequent pericopae is highly suggestive of the pragmatics set out above.

4 CONCLUSION

In view of the many questions that still await an acceptable solution the enigma of Ephesians remains. Yet this study may have indicated at least one possible answer in terms of the letter's context and the way it was written.

In view of the very central conception of the unity of the church consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers, the situation of the readers probably was similar to that of more or less mid first century Christian communities in the province of Asia that were experiencing the centrifugal forces of disunity, caused by the
enmity between Jews and the heathen populations of the cities and which was carried over into the church.

To counter the problem, which was still in its initial stages since the letter does not reflect the existence of schismatic ‘churches’ or groups, the author, who might very well have been Paul, applies the strategy of first establishing the accomplishment of God’s economy of salvation in Christ as resulting in the union of God’s people for which He should be praised. According to this, the era has dawned in which Gentiles are to become part of God’s people. Together with the believing Jews they have now been built into the one building of God—together they have become members of the one body of Christ. Secondly, he points out the implication of God’s and Christ’s triumphant power over the forces of evil which have been the opponents of God’s plan of salvation and whose ruin has been effected by the accomplishment of God’s plan. This, thirdly, suggests that any schismatic movement and even the existence of strife between the two groups of believers within the church carries with it the implication that the forces of evil have the power to withstand the conquering might of God, that is, it would be in direct opposition to the accepted statement of faith. So, fourthly, the pragmatic implication would be to heed the call to preserve and promote by all means, by utilising the full complement of God’s arsenal of power, the unity of God’s eschatological people, the body of Christ.

WORKS CONSULTED

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