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Energizing Church Development in Africa Through the Gifts of the Spirit

by Danny McCain

Introduction

The gifts of the Spirit are special abilities given to individual Christians that aid in the building up of the body of Christ and the spreading and strengthening of God's kingdom on earth. This definition or one similar to it is the common understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The question is whether this is as complete and comprehensive a definition as it should be. It is the thesis of this paper that the definition is not comprehensive enough to include all that is implied by the "gifts of the Spirit."

The word "gift" comes from the Greek word *charisma* and is most often simply translated "gift." The verb form of the word, *chariszomai* simply means to give something to someone graciously. Several things were given in the New Testament including sight (Lk 7:21), safety of people (Acts 27:24), an inheritance (Gal 3:18), suffering (Phil 1:29), and a name (Phil 2:9). Perhaps the most extensive use of the verb form of the word refers to forgiveness that is freely given (Lk 7:42, 43, 2 Cor 3:7, 10, 12:13, Eph 4:32, Col 2:13, 3:13).

Apart from Peter's statement which says, "*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others*" (1 Pet 4:10), all of the other 16 references to the noun *charisma* are found in Paul's writings. Paul uses the word *charisma* to refer to the gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23), Christ's gift of salvation (Rom 5:15-16) and the gift of singleness (1 Cor 7:7). Paul uses the word in a more intangible manner where he tells the Philippians, "*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him*" (1:29). We would not ordinarily think of suffering as a gift. However, that is the way Paul describes it. However, most of the time, Paul uses the word *charisma* to describe those special abilities given by the Holy Spirit to individual believers that made them strong (Rom 1:11). These no doubt included many different abilities but Paul specifically mentions the gift of healing three times (1 Cor 12:9, 28, 30). Though this is not the exclusive way gifts were given to people, Paul tells Timothy that the gifts were given through the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6).

The general idea is that when individuals become believers, the Holy Spirit either gives them a special spiritual ability or enhances in a special way a natural ability they already have so that they are capable of contributing to the building up of God's kingdom. Everyone has something to contribute. No one has been left out of being a part of God's team to build and strengthen the church. Therefore, every believer has been given some kind of special ability to bless and build up the church.

An Overview of the Gifts of the Spirit

Although there are disagreements about individual gifts, especially the supernatural gifts, the issue of the gifts of the Spirit is not overly controversial. The following questions and answers provide a brief overview of the basic issues related to the gifts of the Spirit:¹

1. *What is the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit?* They are designed to build up and support the body of Christ.
2. *Are the gifts of the Spirit supernatural or natural?* Most of them are natural abilities that have received special enhancement by the power of the Holy Spirit. Some gifts, such as the gift of miracles, are definitely supernatural.
3. *Who has these spiritual gifts?* Every believer has been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit and at the same time was given at least one special gift by the Spirit.
4. *Is it possible to have more than one gift?* Yes, it is possible and likely that most people have multiple gifts.
5. *Is the list of the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament complete?* Probably not. Nowhere in the New Testament is the gift of music mentioned. However, it is almost certainly a gift of the Spirit that blesses and benefits the body of Christ.
6. *Are all the gifts of the Spirit still with us?* Some believe in the cessation of the supernatural gifts after the apostolic age. In light of any clear statement in Scripture to that effect, I do not accept the cessationist theory. Though we may not often see the supernatural gifts, the Holy Spirit has the authority to distribute them as he wishes.
7. *How can Christian believers discover their spiritual gifts?* This is a difficult question to answer quickly. However, I would encourage people to focus on these ideas:
 - a. Experiment with opportunities.
 - b. Examine your feelings.
 - c. Evaluate your effectiveness.
 - d. Expect confirmation from others.
8. *What is the primary illustration of the gifts of the Spirit?* The various gifts of the Spirit are compared to various members of the body.

¹ I discuss the gifts of the Spirit in more detail in *We Believe: Vol. 1 An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, ACTS, Bukuru, 2004. The chapters include "Introduction to Spiritual Gifts" (pp. 265-280) and "Individual Gifts of the Holy Spirit" (pp. 281-306).

9. *What are the gifts of the Spirit that are mentioned in the New Testament?* The gifts of the Spirit can be divided into three general categories:
- a. *Speaking Gifts*
 - 1) Apostle (Ephesians 4:11)
 - 2) Prophet (Ephesians 4:11)
 - 3) Evangelist (Ephesians 4:11)
 - 4) Pastor-Teacher (Ephesians 4:11)
 - 5) Teaching (1 Corinthians 12:28)
 - 6) Exhortation (Romans 12:8)
 - 7) Knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8)
 - 8) Wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8)
 - b. *Serving Gifts*
 - 1) Service/Helps (Romans 12:7a; 1 Corinthians 12:28)
 - 2) Hospitality (Romans 12:13)
 - 3) Giving (Romans 12:8)
 - 4) Administration (1 Corinthians 12:28)
 - 5) Mercy (Romans 12:8)
 - 6) Discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10)
 - c. *Supernatural Gifts*
 - 1) Healing² (1 Corinthians 12:9)
 - 2) Faith (1 Corinthians 12:9)
 - 3) Miracles (1 Corinthians 12:9, 27)
 - 4) Tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10)
 - 5) Interpretation of Tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10)

A Broader Application of the Gifts of the Spirit

Although there are some variations within the way the gifts of the Spirit are understood and applied, there is general agreement about that which has been presented so far. However, there is another application of the gifts of the Spirit that I would like to stress.

Not only are individual believers given to support and strengthen the local church, I also believe this same kind of individual gifting and blessing applies to larger bodies as well. In other words, some local churches or other subdivisions within Christianity develop certain specialties and use those to bless the wider body of Christ. Those individual churches or bodies, in turn, become like arms and eyes and ears to a bigger portion of the body of Christ or even the overall body of Christ like an individual does to a local congregation.

This thesis is supported in several ways in the New Testament. First, the word church is used in both a local and corporate sense. When Jesus was

² The gift of healing may not always be supernatural. It is likely that many physicians, nurses, therapists and other health professionals have a special ability to aid in healing, though it would not be supernatural.

teaching his disciples how to correct a brother who had fallen, the ultimate step of discipline was to “*tell it to the church*” (Matthew 18:17). This obviously was referring to the local worship assembly of which the person was a part and not all of the believers in the world. However, when Jesus said, in response to the confession of Peter, “*I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18) he was not referring just to a local congregation but to the worldwide movement we call Christianity. In the only two times Jesus used the word church, he used it in two different senses.

This same distinction is made in the epistles. Paul wrote to the “*churches*” (plural) in *Galatia* (Galatians 1:2) These were individual local congregations that make up the overall body of Christ in that area. He wrote to individual churches (1 Corinthians 1:2) and even a church that met in a house (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:15). However, when Paul refers to the church in Ephesus, he was referring to all of the followers of Christ wherever they are. Christ is the head of all Christians in the world not just the local Church (Ephesians 1:22). It is the whole body of Christ that submits to Christ (5:23) and it is all the believers all over the world who make up the bride of Christ (5:27).

The local church and the worldwide Church have similar characteristics.

- They both have leaders over them.
- They both are made up of smaller units.
- They both represent Jesus Christ on the earth.
- They both are submissive to the lordship of Christ.

The passages in 1 Corinthians 12 that talk about the “*body of Christ*” appear to be referring to the local church and therefore the primary application is that individual members of various local churches are the ones that possess the gifts necessary for that local body to function. However, the reference to the body of Christ in Ephesians 1:22 (see also Colossians 1:18, 24) is clearly a reference to the worldwide body of Christ. Although these passages do not make this specific point, it is reasonable to assume that just as individual believers make up the local church and bring various expertise and wisdom to that local congregation, so various congregations and other corporate Christian groups make up the various components of the larger body of Christ. If that is true, then we can apply the “*parts of the body*” illustration equally to the worldwide body of Christ as we can to the local congregation.

I believe this is precisely what we must do if we are going to energize Church development in Africa. We must recognize that various denominations and para-church organizations have individual gifts and abilities and expertise and emphases that can be a blessing to other parts of the body of Christ. In fact, we must go beyond just recognizing this and actively cooperate together to make sure that each body part that is strong in one area helps to compensate for those who are weak in that area.

It is generally known that not all segments of the body of Christ are equally developed or knowledgeable in all areas just as individual Christians are not equally developed and knowledgeable in all areas. Some denominations have a better understanding of one particular doctrine or practice of Christianity than others. And those who have a particular specialty in one area tend to stress and emphasize that and see the whole of Christianity through that particular mixture of understanding and specialty.³ In so doing, they provide that emphasis and specialty to other parts of the body of Christ that may not yet have a good understanding of that particular issue.

Unfortunately, when a particular group of people discover or rediscover a particular truth, sometimes they appreciate it so much they tend to over-emphasize it and, at times, will so over-emphasize it as to get it out of balance. However, their overemphasis of a particular Christian doctrine or practice helps to pull the rest of the body of Christ back closer to a more balanced approach to that doctrine. In actual fact, the peculiarities of a particular denomination or group sometimes are the very things that the rest of Christianity needs to balance it up properly.

Two Illustrations

I believe that this is the value of various movements throughout church history. Two examples will illustrate this point.

³ Bill Gothard gives an illustration of this on an individual basis in a story in which a plate of food falls on the floor in a room with seven different people who have seven different gifts of the Spirit. Each responds in a different way (See *We Believe*, p. 278).

1. The Gift of Prophecy
 - a. "That's what happens when you're not careful."
 - b. The Motivation: To correct his life.
2. The Gift of Mercy
 - a. "Don't feel badly. It could have happened to anyone."
 - b. The Motivation: To relieve embarrassment.
3. The Gift of Serving
 - a. "Oh, let me help you clean it up."
 - b. The Motivation: To fulfill a need.
4. Gift of Teaching
 - a. "The reason that fell is that it was too heavy on one side."
 - b. The Motivation: To discover why it happened.
5. The Gift of Exhortation
 - a. "Next time, let's serve the dessert with the meal."
 - b. The Motivation: To correct the future.
6. The Gift of Giving
 - a. "I'll be happy to buy a new dessert (or plate)."
 - b. The Motivation: To give a tangible need.
7. The Gift of Administration
 - a. "Jim, would you get the mop. Sue, please help pick it up and Mary, help me fix some other dessert."
 - b. The Motivation: Achieve the immediate goal of the group.

1. The Holiness Movement

In the 19th century, the followers of John Wesley gradually divided into two parts. One group became the followers of John Fletcher who emphasized the progressive nature of sanctification. The other followed Adam Clarke, who emphasized the crisis or instantaneous aspect of sanctification. These men would probably not have disagreed with each other. Each man believed in both a crisis and process aspect of sanctification. However, these two emphases gradually led to two movements. The John Fletcher emphasis led to the mainstream Methodist Church which has had a distinctive history, especially in the pioneer days of America.

The Adam Clarke stress on crisis sanctification led to what has been called the “holiness movement.” This group was made up in America of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of Churches, the Free Methodist Church, the Pilgrim Holiness Church (which merged with the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1968 to form the Wesleyan Church) and the Church of the Nazarene. The Salvation Army in the UK also grew out of this same emphasis. There were smaller groups and mergers and coalitions within this movement.⁴ There was also some disagreement in the movement about the best way to describe this crisis experience of sanctification. However, the overall stress of the movement was on personal holiness. This was preached and taught and looked for in Bible passages and stressed so much that it is likely that the movement over-emphasized the doctrine of holiness and, in so doing, strayed into error. However, the emphasis of this movement, though not always entirely balanced, helped to influence the overall body of Christ, particularly in the 19th century. This encouraged a greater consciousness of sin in the overall American church and a greater emphasis on personal piety. I believe it can be demonstrated that as the holiness movement began to lose some of its emphasis and to decline as a movement in America in the 20th century, there was a corresponding decline in public and private holiness in America.

Whereas the American holiness movement over-stated some doctrines and even misunderstood certain concepts of holiness, and certainly emphasized the doctrine of holiness beyond what is found in the Bible, the strong emphasis on holiness influenced the whole Christian community to some extent, making it more aware of the seriousness of sin. Even though the overall body of Christ did not accept or even appreciate all of the beliefs and emphases within that movement, they were influenced in a positive way to practice more holiness because of the emphasis of this movement.

2. The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement

In the 20th century, we have seen a similar phenomenon in the growth and development of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The primary

⁴ See Donald Dayton, “Holiness Movement, American,” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Editor: J. D. Douglas, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1974, pp. 474-475.

characteristic of this movement has been a return to a stress on the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit, including the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal movement began similar to the holiness movement (and in fact, grew directly out of the holiness movement). By stressing certain doctrines and practices, people who were sympathetic to these ideas gradually gravitated to this movement, and churches and denominations were born that emphasized these distinctives.

However, in about mid-century, a new phenomenon took place. There gradually developed a stress of similar issues within the mainstream branches of the Christian church through organizations like the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International and other Charismatic bodies. In this way, the refocus of attention on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which was being practiced by individual churches and denominations, now began to show up in practically all denominations. The separate movement had now influenced the whole body.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in Nigeria. Pentecostal styles of worship have penetrated nearly all churches in the last 20 years. Pentecostal terminology and Pentecostal music have become commonplace in evangelical and even mainline denominations.

From the viewpoint of the overall body of Christ, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have gone too far with their beliefs related to the Holy Spirit. It is believed by the mainstream denominations that they over-emphasize the ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit to the point that they are in error. However, there is little question about the significant influence of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements on the overall body of Christ. It certainly can be argued that the Pentecostal movement has helped to pull back the mainstream church closer to a more balanced and Biblical understanding and appreciation of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit and a more "spiritual" form of corporate worship.

Regional Gifts of the Spirit

Just as various movements have had contributions to make to the overall body of Christ, various regions of Christianity also have developed strengths and specialties that can be of assistance to other parts of the worldwide Christian communion. We see some hints of this in the church as it developed during the apostolic period. When Paul writes to the Thessalonians, he compliments them on their spiritual progress and then says,

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

Paul felt the way the Thessalonians had received the gospel and had started adjusting their lives and even the way they were evangelizing others was a model to various parts of the body of Christ in other places. That meant this particular strength in their church was making a contribution to the church in other parts of the world. In some sense of the word, it was a gift of the Spirit to other parts of the Church.

We see this support and blessing of one part of the body of Christ to another demonstrated in practical ways through financial support. Even the brand new church in Antioch was apparently financially stronger than the church in Jerusalem and sent a gift to the church within a short time of its creation (Acts 11:29-30). Paul later took up additional offerings from the missionary churches in Macedonia to help the church in Jerusalem in its time of need (2 Cor 8:10-21).

In addition, when one looks at the seven churches in the book of Revelation, again one sees specific characteristics or “strengths” in the various churches.

- The Church at Ephesus was hard working and persevered.
- The Church at Smyrna was spiritually rich, in spite of persecution.
- The Church at Pergamum was faithful loyal in times of stress.
- The Church at Thyatira was characterized by deeds, faith, love, service and perseverance.
- The Church at Sardis was characterized by a few pure and holy people.
- The Church at Philadelphia was characterized by deeds and opportunities.
- The Church at Laodicea was characterized by wealth and some deeds.

It is true that most of these churches were also known by certain weaknesses or negative characteristics. However, even in their weakened and compromised conditions, most of the churches still had something to contribute to other parts of the body or some strength that was worth modeling by others.

These examples suggest that there is a strong precedent for one segment of the body of Christ developing an ability or a strength or asset that can be useful to another part of the body of Christ that may not be quite as strong in that area. We can assume that these are gifts of the Spirit, just as much as individual abilities are gifts of the Spirit to the local church. We can also assume that these strengths and abilities of one part of the body of Christ are designed to assist the rest of the body of Christ. If this was true in the New Testament time, we can assume that it is true today.

Perhaps the best example of this is in the field of missions. Where one part of the body of Christ is strong, it can help another region of the world develop. The church in the western world planted the church in Africa and then for the next one hundred years aided it in its development. The church in the western world has also aided the rest of the world through a growing

awareness of human rights. This started during the time of William Wilberforce who helped to outlaw slavery in the British Empire. Over the next two centuries this movement has helped to make the worldwide body of Christ more sensitive about discrimination and human rights.

The African American Church in the last 100 years has experienced many things, including the Civil Rights Movement. This movement was primarily led by pastors and Christian leaders such Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, Rev. Andrew Young, Rev. Jesse Jackson and others. The African American church leadership has learned much about responding to discrimination, suffering, violence, hatred, injustice, racism, prejudice and other social evils. They overcame these things in a most amazing and commendable way. It is my conviction that those Christian leaders who led that movement have something to contribute to the rest of the body of Christ around the world, especially where those vices are still be practiced. African American Christian leaders have something to teach the rest of the world about justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, non-violence, and social mobilization to respond to evil. Certainly these are examples of the work of the “*Spirit of truth*” working in the lives of this distinct part of the body of Christ. This work becomes one of the gifts of the Spirit to help other parts of the body.

Contributions of the African Church

In light of the general principles outlined above, what application is there in this for the church in Africa? How can these observations help to energize and mobilize the African church to move forward?

Here are two additional questions that will give direction to the response: What are the gifts that the various parts of the Christian community in Africa have that they can share with each other and, in so doing, strengthen the whole? In addition, what are the gifts of that the African Church have that can be useful to the worldwide body of Christ?

1. Using African Gifts to Build Up the Body of Christ in Africa

Although the church in Africa is quite strong overall, it is unfortunately uneven in its development. Obviously, there are very strong parts and other parts that are still weak and vulnerable. The church in Africa is still relatively young, compared to the church in Europe or America. However, I believe that the church in Africa has matured to the point that it has the ability to offer substantial assistance to the less developed parts of the church in other parts of Africa. I will mention two specific illustrations.

1.1 Assistance with Evangelism and Missions

Although the church was initially planted by foreigners in Africa, it is now being spread almost exclusively by Africans. And Africans are proving to be very adept at evangelism and missions. The ECWA Missionary Society (EMS) is the largest African missionary agency in Africa, with over 1000 missionaries doing cross-cultural missions work. The Nigerian Evangelical Missions

Association (NEMA) is a coalition of over 100 missionary agencies that are all doing cross-cultural missions work. These kinds of agencies are why the church in Nigeria continues to grow at a phenomenal rate.

However, only about 50 percent of the continent currently identifies themselves as Christians. Who is going to reach the rest of the continent? Will it be necessary for foreigners to come from outside to expand the church in Africa? I think not. Various bodies in Africa have developed expertise and demonstrated that they are capable of evangelism and church planting. Thus, it will be Africans who complete the evangelism of the rest of the continent.

In light of this, I think it is necessary for the church in Africa to continue looking inward for the personnel, the financial resources and the strategies to continue expanding the Christian message in Africa. I believe that there is now enough experience and expertise in African missions that Africa Christianity is very capable of completing the evangelization of the rest of Africa.

1.2 Responding to HIV and AIDS

The HIV and AIDS pandemic that has exploded across Africa in the last 25 years is the biggest single problem facing the African continent. Though from my perspective, the church was a little slow in getting engaged in the HIV and AIDS battle, it has been the church and individual Christians who have primarily led the fight against HIV and AIDS. The first body, outside of the medical field, to respond to the AIDS crisis in Plateau State was the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS). Their response eventually led to the "Aid for AIDS" division of FCS. FCS has trained millions of young people and thousands of teachers in public schools. In addition, their leadership has led to the creation of many different kinds of responses and organizations that are responding to the HIV crisis. The major denominations in Nigeria have also not been idle. Several denominations have created strong responses to the HIV/AIDS problem including the Catholics, Anglicans, ECWA and COCIN.

What these successful examples demonstrate is that there is experience and expertise related to HIV and AIDS in several parts of the body of Christ. And, using the body illustration and the lessons we can learn from individual gifts of the Spirit, we believe that there is enough strength and "gifts" in the church in Africa to help all other churches in Africa respond appropriately to the AIDS crisis.

The Church in Africa has grown to the point that it needs little from outside Africa. What it does need is to be challenged to look inward to those denominations, para-church organizations and other bodies who have the gifts of the Spirit that can guide and support other parts of the body of Christ as they develop their responses to the AIDS crisis.

2. Using African Gifts to Build Up the Body of Christ Around the World

Not only is the African Church capable of aiding the other parts of the African church in various kinds of specialty ministries, the African Church is

capable of using its many gifts to assist and strengthen the church outside of Africa as well. The time is past when the Africa church can be viewed as a “receiver only” church. The African Church is now strong and has the ability to aid other parts of the body of Christ. How is that going to be done and, specifically, what are the contributions that the African church can make?

2.1 Historical Orthodoxy

For the last 250 years or so, orthodox Christianity has been battered by various movements including classic liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, secularism and other less than orthodox interpretations and applications of Christianity. Obviously some of these issues and proponents found their way to Africa. However, as the African Church has matured and taken over the leadership of their denominations and theological institutions, there has been a decided shift back toward historic orthodoxy within the African Church.

A case in point is the Anglican Church. A generation ago, many Anglican priests had studied abroad in institutions sympathetic toward non-traditional theologies. However, with the growth of Anglican seminaries and training institutions in Nigeria and the taking over of the leadership of the various Anglican provinces by African leadership, there has been a steady move back to traditional orthodoxy and even evangelicalism.⁵

The Primate of Nigeria, the Most Revered Peter Akinola, gave a press conference in Lagos on 30 January 2008 in which he announced the upcoming Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) to be held in Jerusalem. He explained the purpose of the conference: “That conference is called by those members of the Anglican Family who see themselves as orthodox Anglicans, who are upholding the authority of scriptures, and believe that the time has come to come together to fashion the future of our Anglican family.”⁶

One major contribution of the Anglican bishops has been to resist the pressures from the US and Canada to remove prohibitions against ordaining practicing homosexuals. Without this resistance, it is likely that the Anglican Communion would have changed their rules against homosexuality, which

⁵ Why is it that the African church feels more comfortable with traditional orthodoxy and is not attracted to theological liberalism? I believe the answer lies in the traditional worldviews of most Africans. Theological liberalism is based upon rationalism which is primarily anti-supernatural at its foundation. However, traditional life in Africa has been anything but anti-supernatural. African traditional religions were characterized by all kinds of supernatural phenomenon. Therefore, it was easy for new believers to accept and appreciate the supernatural aspects of Christianity and there was no attraction to get rid of them. Therefore, attempts to compromise the Christian faith have not been well received, especially since the Christian church has matured in Africa.

⁶ GAFCON Website: <http://www.gafcon.org/>

would have been a serious step away from historic orthodoxy.⁷ In fact, due to ongoing pressure from African bishops, the American and Canadian branches of the Anglican Communion were not invited to the following Anglican Consultative Council, because of their failure to repent over the homosexuality issue.⁸

However, not only is the church in Africa holding onto traditional orthodoxy and in some cases returning to it, the African church is serving as a catalyst to call the western church back to her historical and theological heritage. In an interview with the BBC during the 1998 Lambeth conference, the Right Reverend Benjamin Kwashi, bishop of the Jos Diocese, said, "The American church must look inward, seriously looking at how to call its own people to faith and order."⁹ In the same article, an American bishop, the Right Reverend Keith Ackerman, Bishop of Quincy, Illinois, declared, "The people of Africa and Asia for the most part have been able to take us back to the scriptures, and they've been very specific about the authority of Scripture."¹⁰ This demonstrates the point very clearly. The African church understands and is committed to traditional orthodoxy and is well prepared to correct the other parts of the body of Christ that are straying from the faith. This commitment to traditional orthodoxy is certainly a gift of the Spirit of truth that is positively influencing the worldwide body of Christ.

2.2 Holistic Christianity

During the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th century, western and particularly American Christianity fought many battles over what was then called the "social gospel."¹¹ The social gospel was an attempt to address the many ills of society using Christian principles. Its opponents, however, believed that an overemphasis on the social gospel encouraged the church to neglect the more important parts of Christianity such as evangelism and discipleship. It is likely that many churches did swing too far in one direction or another. For example, the opponents of the social gospel were no doubt overly influenced by the secularism of the western world, accepting the belief that the work of the church was primarily "spiritual" and not social.

However, African Christianity was developed in a culture with two distinct qualities that made it more sympathetic toward the church being involved in compassionate ministries and issues related to justice and human rights. First, Africans have not been baptized by the western concepts of secularism, in which some parts of society are considered sacred and others are considered

⁷ *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, August 7, 1998; "Lambeth Conference, Part Two," <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week149/feature.htm>

⁸ *BBC News*, Q&A: Anglican Church Split, 26 February 2008; http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4298253.stm

⁹ *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, August 7, 1998

¹⁰ *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, August 7, 1998

¹¹ See *Wikipedia Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Gospel

secular. Africans move more freely back and forth between the “religious” and the other parts of society. Second, most Africans were raised with a first hand understanding of poverty, disease, injustice, ethnic conflict and other social ills. Therefore, these issues are less theoretical and more personal than they are in large portions of the western world. Thus Jesus’ addressing such issues is natural and expected.

Because of this, the dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular really does not exist in the same way as it does in the western world. Evangelism is obviously God’s work but taking care of the poor and needy is just as much God’s work. In my humble opinion, the African church has gotten the wholistic gospel concept right and this is a major “gift” that must be shared with the rest of the Christian world.

Prerequisites to Being A Blessing to Others

If the corporate gifts of the Spirit found in various churches and institutions and other bodies are going to be a blessing to others, there are certain attitudes that the various parts of the body of Christ must have. These are suggested in the body illustration. Although the interpretation and primary application of this illustration relates to individual gifts that serve and assist the local congregations of which they are part, I believe there is a legitimate application of local bodies and other corporate entities relating to the larger body of Christ.

The body illustration begins in 1 Corinthians 12:12: *“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”* Paul continues:

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. (1 Cor 12:14-18).

How does the body illustration help energize the development of the African church?

1. We Must Celebrate the Diversity of the Body of Christ.

The body illustration shows us the diversity of the human body and consequently the diversity of the body of Christ. Paul specifically refers to the foot, the hand, the eye and the ear. Each of these has a unique function that is designed to support the entire body. All look different and have different functions and none exists simply for its own benefit.

Obviously the original application is that we as individual members of the church have different gifts that enable us to fulfill different roles in the body of

Christ. Some of these roles are specifically outlined later in 1 Corinthians 12. However, as stated above, I believe that there is an application of this truth to the relationship between the corporate bodies and the overall body of Christ. There is diversity within the body because of culture, personality and conviction. And that is to be acknowledged as something good, not something bad. Each of the distinct members of the body of Christ has something to offer.

- The Catholic Church tends to focus more on a ceremonial and celebratory approach to Christianity. Protestants tend to focus on a more expository and individualistic approach to Christianity.
- The Wesleyan/Arminian tradition focuses on human responsibility. The Calvinistic tradition focuses on divine sovereignty.
- The Baptist Church focuses more on evangelism and outreach. The denominations from the pietistic movement focus more on personal and spiritual development.
- The Pentecostal movement focuses on the subjective and emotional part of humanity. The Reformed part of Christianity focuses on the rational part of humanity.
- The old-line churches are much more formal. The newer independent churches are much less formal.

It is my conviction that all of these bodies have an element of truth in them and something from which others can learn. It is also true that all of them may have some element of error in them. I believe that God has given to each of these movements a particular focus and emphasis and particular distinctives that are part of the gift of the Spirit to the whole body. Understanding that fact is the first step in energizing the church for development.

No one person can teach Sunday School, lead the choir, take up the offering, serve as an usher and preach the sermon at the same time. It is also true that no particular church or denomination can have all the knowledge, skills, gifts and emphases that the whole world needs to respond properly to God. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge the diversity found within our denominations and other Christian bodies and find ways to work together rather than looking for ways to criticize and compete with each other.

2. We Must Appreciate the Unity of the Body of Christ.

The body illustration also demonstrates to us the unity of the body. Not only is the body a diverse thing having many different parts, all of those parts join together to make one unified whole. As Paul said, the ear does not complain because it is not an eye. Both are attached to the same body, both are fulfilling a role for the body as a whole and the body would be considered handicapped without each one.

Sometimes individual Christians get so involved in their own ministries they forget how important other members of the body of Christ are. For example, those to whom God has given the gift of evangelism tend to think that evangelism is about all that there is to Christianity. Teaching does not

really interest them; fellowship seems to be a waste of time; worship is good but the end product should always be the “salvation of souls.” However, the evangelist must recognize that without the gifts of all the other members of the body of Christ, all of his or her effort would be in vain. If there was no one to teach and build up the new believers in the faith, they would be like the seed that springs up for a while, but because of the heat of the sun and the shallowness of the roots, they soon fall away (Luke 8:7). If there were no believers interested in Christian fellowship, which helps absorb new believers into the body of Christ, evangelism would simply be wasted effort.

I believe this same parallel exists within the overall body as well. We are one unified whole. The truth and ministry of Christianity does not exist within just one denomination. It exists in all of the diverse parts of the body of Christ. Therefore, the whole body of Christ is actually one.¹² Paul stresses this when he said,

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:3-6).

The emphasis of the book of Ephesians is upon the whole body of Christ. Thus, this passage, which refers to this oneness as the “*unity of the Spirit*” seems to be referring specifically to the unity and oneness of the whole body of Christ all over the world.

Too often we Christians have been narrow-minded and jealous of the strengths of other Christian traditions or organizations. If the church in Africa is going to be energized to move forward, we will need to recognize that the diversity within the church is a part of our overall unity and is a strength to be appreciated, not a liability to be criticized. The diversity that helps produce unity is one of gifts of the Holy Spirit to the body of Christ as a whole.

3. We Must Accept the Interdependence of the Body of Christ.

Though the various parts of the body are very different from one another, they are also interdependent upon one another. The eye needs the hand and the foot needs the eye. In fact every body part needs every other body part. If there is only one member of the body that is missing or is in some way incapacitated, the whole body is handicapped to that extent.

In 1 Corinthians 12:25, where the illustration of the body is developed, Paul says, “*There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*” The various body parts

¹² This is not a denial that there are heretics or false believers or cults that use the name “Christian” nor is this a call to embrace every “*wind of doctrine*” (Eph 4:14) that blows through the Christian community. It is an acknowledgement that there is great diversity within the body of Christ as illustrated in Romans 14.

are not in competition with one another. They are working together for the common good of the whole body.

Again, I acknowledge that the primary application of this passage must be related to how individual believers interact and respect each other. However, I also believe that as we recognize that various corporate parts of the body of Christ also have gifts, specialties and special insights into certain truths that they can offer to the rest, should we not have that same level of commitment to and respect for and interdependence upon our various Christian faith traditions?

- Should not COCIN Church be concerned if an ECWA Church is burned?
- Should not the Protestant Churches celebrate when schools are given back to the Catholic Church?
- Should not the Assemblies of God offer the right hand of fellowship and promise of cooperation to the new independent Pentecostal church nearby?

If what I have said is true, this means that there should be greater interaction and communication between the various parts of the body of Christ. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) must become more than just a tool to speak to government on behalf of the Christian community. It or some similar body needs to create a forum whereby the various parts of the body of Christ are encouraged to take greater advantage of their unity and diversity and encourage a greater appreciation for our interdependence. Older and stronger churches should reach out with encouragement and assistance to the newer ones. We must all recognize that we need each other if we are to see God's kingdom established on earth as it is heaven.

Conclusion

James declares, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* (1:17). Since there is unity in the Trinity, a gift from God is also a gift from the Holy Spirit. One of the particular gifts that Paul asked from God was this: *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better"* (Ephesians 1:17). The Holy Spirit is a gift to us that provides us with wisdom and revelation. The Holy Spirit also gives to individual parts of the body of Christ special abilities. It is only as we recognize those special and unique abilities in our denominations and para-church organizations and become willing to share them with others and recognize them in others and receive them from others that we will be known as people of *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all"* (Ephesians 4:5). Thus, it is the gift and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that must energize the church in Africa to establish God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

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