

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND I CORINTHIANS 12-16

STEPHEN S. SMALLEY

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

ON FIVE occasions in Paul's letters (four, if he did not write Ephesians) we are given a list of spiritual gifts belonging to the body of Christ.¹ These lists are interesting in themselves as well as in relation to each other, and throw obvious and important light in many directions on the Pauline doctrine of *ecclesia*. But the particular reason for drawing attention to them here is to propose that there is a connection between the order of the lists in I Cor 12 and the literary relationship of the five final chapters of that epistle, I Cor 12-16.

I

Unlike the lists in Rom 12 and I Cor 12 8-10, which refer chiefly to *χαρίσματα* as such, and that in Eph 4, which refers to Christians who exercise an individual gift, the two lists in I Cor 12 28-30 allude to both. But in all five cases the emphasis is undoubtedly on the corporate sharing of personal gifts by members of the *σῶμα Χριστοῦ*, rather than on the structured hierarchy of those who are endowed with particular gifts. "*Munus* in the sense of *donum* has not yet passed into *munus* in the sense of *officium*," even if they have begun to shade into each other.² It may therefore be argued with reason that the over-all order adopted in these lists is without significance, and that we should be cautious about constructing large cases on slender foundations such as these. The descriptions are certainly informal. All five appear in relation to a specific ecclesiological context, and none is concerned with classifying spiritual gifts or offices in strict preferential order. No two lists correspond exactly in both order and contents; and even allowing for some overlapping of functions described differently, four or possibly three lists mention gifts which are not included in the others.³

¹ Rom 12 6-8; I Cor 12 8-10, 12 28, 12 29 f.; Eph 4 11. The Greek is conveniently set out in Robertson and Plummer, *ICC, I Corinthians*, pp. 283 f.

² *Ibid.*, p. 284. Ephesians clearly moves further than the others in the later direction. See, e. g., B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, ad loc.*, pp. 62 and 170 f.

³ In I Cor 12 28, *ἀντιλήμψεις* may perhaps be taken with *ὁ προϊστάμενος* (Rom 12 8) and *κυβέρνησις* with *διακονία* (Rom 12 7). This coupling seems more logical than that suggested by A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

Granted, then, that the precise order of these lists cannot be regarded as critically important, it is notable that in I Cor 12 8-10 (A), 12 28 (B), and 12 29 f. (C), as in Rom 12 and Eph 4, certain gifts appear high up in the list while others occur low down. Glossolalia, for example, appears in A, B, and C (not at all in Rom 12 or Eph 4) at the foot of the list.⁴ On the other hand, the repeated *ἀπόστολοι* – *προφήται* – *διδάσκαλοι* of B and C feature in one form or another in four of the five lists (or perhaps in all of them⁵), and occupy a prominent position. It is this triad that is offered for further consideration.

Two of the gifts which appear in A, B, and C are (using different terminology) common to all five lists: *προφητεία* and *διδασκαλία* (appearing in A as *λόγος γνώσεως*). *Ἀποστολή* (in the form of *ἀπόστολοι*) occurs in B and C and Eph 4. In A it could lie behind the phrase *λόγος σοφίας*, since true wisdom rather than false was regarded by Paul as one distinctively apostolic gift (I Cor 2 6, *σοφίαν δὲ λαλοῦμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείοις*), marking out the apostle of Christ Jesus who had been called (*κλητός*, 1 1) from the one who had not (cf. II Pet 3 15, *Παῦλος κατὰ τὴν δοθεῖσαν αὐτῷ σοφίαν ἔγραψεν ὑμῖν*). It is also not without significance that there is a NT christological link between Jesus as the model *ἀπόστολος* (Heb 3 1) and Jesus as the supreme *σοφία θεοῦ* (I Cor 1 24, 30; in vs. 30 the phrase is actually *σοφία ἀπὸ θεοῦ*). In Rom 12 there is no term or phrase equivalent to *ἀποστολή* (*ἀπόστολος*), but this does not mean that the idea is completely absent. Each of the seven gifts listed there by Paul is an apostolic gift;⁶ and this need not surprise us when we recall that in the NT generally as well as in the Fathers, apostles (like the modern paragon) were regarded as capable of doing everything.

The combination *ἀπόστολοι* – *προφήται* – *διδάσκαλοι*, which could thus be said to belong to each of our five lists in one form or another, is not confined in the NT to these passages; although it is only in B and C that we have the triad as such. We meet elsewhere the variant triads *κῆρυξ* – *ἀπόστολος* – *διδάσκαλος* (I Tim 2 7; II Tim 1 11, describing the writer himself) and *ἄγιοι* – *ἀπόστολοι* – *προφήται* (Rev 18 20); as well as the pairs *ἀπόστολοι* – *προφήται* (Eph 2 20, 3 5; cf. Luke 11 49) and *ἀπόστολοι* [–*πρεσβύτεροι*] (Acts 15 22). In patristic writing the same kind of association between apostles, prophets, and teachers, variously combined, is also found (e. g., Origen, *Comm. in Jo.* 1 18, *ἀπόστολοι* –

⁴ Cf. E.-B. Allo, *Saint Paul: Première Épître aux Corinthiens*, p. 326: "Ce n'est pas sans intention que Paul place à la queue ce don que les Corinthiens paraissent estimer pardessus tout."

⁵ There may be a case for implying *ἀπόστολοι* in Rom 12 6-8; *vide infra*. In A, Paul's selection and terminology obviously owe something to his gnostic readership.

⁶ Cf. I Cor 14 6, 3 5; Acts 15 35, 2 40 (15 31); I Thess 2 8 (using *μεταδιδόναι*); I Thess 5 12 (using *προϊστάναι*); Luke 12 33 (cf. II Clem 16 4).

προφήται – εὐαγγελισταί, as in Eph 4 11; *Hermas, Sim.* 9,16,5, ἀπόστολοι – διδάσκαλοι).

II

Let us now turn to consider more closely the lists in I Cor 12 (A, B, and C). In the light of the informality of all five lists, noted earlier, it is perhaps significant that there is an important resemblance between the three lists in I Corinthians. They are fairly similar in content, although different in order. They all mention the didactic, therapeutic, miraculous, and ecstatic gifts of the Spirit to the church, and assign roughly the same degree of prominence to each of them. Although the whole chapter belongs to the section of the epistle which is introduced by the title appearing in 12 1 (περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν), the three lists are allocated to an immediate context. The first (A) occurs in a description of the "varieties of gifts" which the Spirit bestows (12 4); the second (B) and third (C) relate this diversity to the doctrine of the church as a body, as part of Paul's argument that the body can and indeed must be articulated in diversity while remaining a unity.⁷ The fact that lists B and C stand closer to each other than either does to A, is no doubt accounted for both by the change of immediate context and by the simple fact that C follows B immediately as an interrogatory recapitulation. However, it is not an exact repetition, and this may suggest that there is a reason for the common elements.

In I Cor 12, then, the triad which introduces lists B and C is anticipated by A. It will help to have the Greek before us.

B	C	A
1. ἀπόστολοι	1. ἀπόστολοι	1. λόγος σοφίας
2. προφήται	2. προφήται	6. προφητεία
3. διδάσκαλοι	3. διδάσκαλοι	2. λόγος γνώσεως
(7. κυβερνήσεις)		

We may also notice a marked and unusual enumeration in B, not appearing in A and implied in C: ἔθετο ὁ Θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας, τρίτον διδασκάλους. Having gone that far, Paul passes from the specific to the less specific (δυνάμεις, χαρίσματα λαμάτων, κτλ), introducing the remaining gifts and functions with a vague

⁷ For the view that in I Cor 12 Paul defends diversity within unity, rather than the reverse, see J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology*, pp. 58-61; also J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 190-92. The way for the σῶμα imagery of I Cor 12 is prepared by the eucharistic reference in 10 17, and by the double "body" reference in 11 29.

ἔπειτα (*bis*). Again we must not overplay the significance of this, but it happens to accord with the Semitic habit of singling out for particular mention the first three (presumably as the most important) of a general group (Moffatt compares Gen 32 17-20 and Matt 22 25 f.⁸); and apostles, prophets, and teachers (in that order?) were obviously leading, if not *the* leading, figures in the primitive church. It also accords with a general biblical pattern of "threefoldness" to which Dr. Mitton has drawn attention in the teaching of Jesus, and Professor Ackroyd (as the source of that pattern for the dominical teaching) in the Canaanite poetry from Ras Shamra-Ugarit and in the poetry of the OT itself.⁹ Finally, and for our purposes most significantly, it picks up a triplet lying close to hand; for the sum of τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα (12 31) is listed as πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη, τὰ τρία ταῦτα (13 13).¹⁰ This triplet, which on Paul's own authority actually follows the order ἀγάπη - πίστις - ἐλπίς,¹¹ occurs twelve times altogether in the NT, eight (or six) times in the Pauline corpus.¹² It is also taken up in patristic writing (e. g., Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Res.*, Migne 46,96 A-B, which comments on I Cor 13; also Maximus Confessor, *Capit. de Car.* 3,100).

III

We are now in a position to apply our deductions to the final section of I Cor (12-16). We have seen that there is a marked emphasis in B and C, also present (if diffused) in A and Rom 12-Eph 4, on the triad "apostles-prophets-teachers," and that this threefold pattern picks up in turn the triplet "love-faith-hope" which is familiar to us from I Cor 13 and other parts of Paul and the NT generally. Could this sequence have any bearing on the literary structure of I Cor 12-16?

J. C. Hurd's recent volume on the structure and meaning of I Corinthians (*The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 1965) is among other things a reconstruction of the dialogue between Paul and the Corinthian Christians which in Hurd's view brought to birth the letter as we now have it. The argument is that the whole of I Corinthians was "directly or indi-

⁸ J. Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, *ad loc.*, p. 190. But see also E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament*, ET, pp. 143 f. (15e); 181-83 (22bc).

⁹ C. L. Mitton, "Threefoldness in the Teaching of Jesus," *ExpT*, 75 (1963-64), pp. 228-30; P. R. Ackroyd, *ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁰ A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *ad loc.*, p. 300, compare the Johannine triplet, light-life-love.

¹¹ Although, as Origen saw, the triplet represents in fact a developing sequence, from faith through hope to love the completion of faith. See M. F. Wiles, *The Divine Apostle: The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles in the Early Church*, pp. 105 f.

¹² Rom 5 1-5; (I Cor 13 13); Gal 5 5 f.; Eph 1 15, 18, 4 2-5; Col 1 4 f.; I Thess 1 3, 5 8; Heb 6 10-12, 10 22-24; I Pet 1 3-8, 21 f. See A. Resch, "Agrapha: Aussercanonische Schriftfragmente," *TU*, n.f., 15 (1906), pp. 155-61.

rectly the result of Paul's disagreements with the Corinthians," particularly over conformity to the apostolic decree, and that the order and contents of this letter were thus dictated by the Corinthian reply to Paul's previous letter, a reply which was received by him in oral form (producing I Cor 1-6) or written form (7-16).¹³ The details of this thesis need not concern us at the moment; we may simply notice that Hurd divides our section (12-16) broadly into three, as follows: (a) 12-14; (b) 15; (c) 16.¹⁴ Without desiring or needing to run counter to this basic idea, we can now go one step further than he and suggest that these five chapters in fact compose one section basically, not three, and that their order was determined by Paul himself as much as by the Corinthian reply. The following evidence is offered in support of this suggestion.

(i) I Cor 12 is a "lead" chapter; it concerns the subject of spiritual gifts not in isolation but in relation to the church as the body of Christ. These gifts are described and discussed generally in ch. 12 and specifically in chs. 13-16. The title phrase of 12 1, *περὶ δὲ τῶν πνευματικῶν*, thus belongs to chs. 12-16 and not only to ch. 12.

(ii) That this is so becomes evident when the duplicated triad, *ἀπόστολοι - προφήται - διδάσκαλοι*, of B and C is related to the material of the chapters that follow. We have already decided that the over-all significance and order of that triad should not be exaggerated; these gifts and their bearers (overlapping in any case, as they do) were sufficiently common and outstanding in the primitive Christian community to warrant mention, even special mention, in any list of this kind. But on the other hand they were by no means insignificant; and in the immediate context of B and C, carefully enumerated by *πρῶτον - δεύτερον - τρίτον*, they seem to have provided Paul (consciously or unconsciously) with a literary model from which to work. Thus, the hymn of I Cor 13 deals with the (supremely) apostolic gift of love (Paul and John are two obvious examples), ch. 14 with the (particular) prophetic gift of tongues (which follow *προφητεία* closely in A), and ch. 15 with the didactic gift of doctrinal instruction (in this case, on the subject of the resurrection).

(iii) This triadic order, apostolic-prophetic-didactic, is emphasized by the occurrence in 13 13 of the triplet love-faith-hope. Is it accidental merely that the triplet moves in counterpoint with the triad (cf. also I Cor 13 2)? For the apostolic gift of ch. 13 is *ἀγάπη* itself, without which all spiritual gifts are worthless; in ch. 14 the gift of *προφητεία* is asso-

¹³ J. C. Hurd, pp. 294 f., *et passim*. But see C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 6-8, for a critique of Hurd's position.

¹⁴ J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 293. Hurd's subdivisions do not affect the broad structure he proposes.

ciated above all with *πίστις* (vs. 22, *et passim*); and in ch. 15 the subject matter is eschatological *ἐλπίς*. We now have the following relation:

(13)	<i>ἀπόστολοι</i>	———	<i>ἀγάπη</i>
(14)	<i>προφήται</i>	———	<i>πίστις</i>
(15)	<i>διδάσκαλοι</i>	———	<i>ἐλπίς</i>

(iv) This suggests that I Cor 12–15 belongs together as one section. But need we exclude ch. 16? As we saw from an earlier table, the gift of *κυβέρνησις* (= *διακονία*, in part at least?) is not far away from the *ἀπόστολοι* – *προφήται* – *διδάσκαλοι* of B; and the kindred *ἀντίλημψις* is even nearer. The closing vss. of I Cor 16 may be detached as a normal epistolary ending, dividing either at 16 20 (with RSV; the arrangement in NEB suggests that verses 22–24 are a postscript following the ending and signature) or at 16 19 (with J. A. T. Robinson, if in 16 22 Paul is quoting an early eucharistic liturgical sequence current in the Corinthian church, which then brings vs. 20, with its mention of mutual greetings and the kiss of peace, into direct relation with vss. 21–24¹⁵); but otherwise the chapter deals essentially with the practical matters of contribution (*λογεία*, 1 f.) and service (*διακονία*, 15).¹⁶ Even the hymn in ch. 13 begins, significantly, with reference to all four classes of gifts mentioned in B, and includes administrative (*ψωμίσω, παραδῶ*, 3) as well as ecstatic, didactic, and miraculous endowments (1–3). Once more we have in microcosm the subject matter of a much wider canvas, the whole section I Cor 12–16.

(v) J. C. Hurd, in company with many others, has drawn our attention to the importance of the *περὶ δέ* formula which occurs six times in I Cor 7–16.¹⁷ Hurd concludes that each appearance of the formula marks the answer to a question from the Corinthians, and he ties this conclusion in to his thesis about the structure of the letter. The last three occurrences belong to chs. 12–16, once in 12 and twice in 16 (12 1, 16 1, 12). It looks as if Paul has therefore embarked in the last section of I Cor on three separate questions, concerning spiritual gifts (hardly “men”), the contribution for the saints, and brother Apollos; and possibly the suggestion that I Cor 12–16 forms one section should be modified in the light of this. But it could work both ways. The apparently abrupt transition to the subjects of the contribution and Apollos certainly owes its origin at some point to questions from the Corinthians. The actual placing of Paul’s reply, however, may well be the result of the logical

¹⁵ J. A. T. Robinson, “Traces of a Liturgical Sequence in 1 Cor. 16: 20–24,” *JTS*, n.s., 4 (1953), pp. 38–41. But see C. F. D. Moule, “A Reconsideration of the Context of *Maranatha*,” *NTS*, 6 (1959–60), pp. 307–10; also C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

¹⁶ Although Paul would be the last to drive a wedge between *διακονία* and *λειτουργία*, especially since the practical gifts are also for him spiritual gifts.

¹⁷ J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–74.

sequence already in his mind since he had expressed it in B, where the practical gifts of administration were connected with the "didactic" gifts of wisdom, prophecy, and teaching itself. The *περὶ δέ* formula in 12 1 may therefore still govern the section 12-16, while the same formula in 16 1 and 16 12 may be taken as subheadings parallel to the phrase which introduces the earlier subsection of ch. 15, *γνωρίζω δὲ ὑμῖν* (15 1).

IV

It is argued here that consciously or unconsciously Paul has been influenced in the arrangement of his material in I Cor 12-16, not so much by the order of the questions asked by the Corinthians as by the sequence of spiritual gifts listed at 12 28 (B) and 12 29 f. (C). It is an open question whether the triadic structure *ἀπόστολοι - προφήται - διδάσκαλοι*, followed by *κυβερνήσεις*, occurred to Paul inevitably or accidentally; but for whatever reason, it appears more or less in duplicate at a strategic place in the section, and (supported by similar sequences in the immediate area) balances in a striking fashion the literary structure of I Cor 12-16. The obvious unity of purpose belonging to I Cor 12-14; three chapters which are drawn together by the immediate but subsidiary theme of "tongues," also extends, that is to say, to 15-16 in terms of a much wider unity which shapes 12-16 as one section.

If this is correct, two conclusions follow. One is that the question of the authorship and integrity of I Cor 13 receives illumination from a new direction. It is well known that scholarly opinion on this issue is divided;²⁸ but if Paul has imposed this kind of structure even informally on I Cor 12-16, it suggests that we need not look further for the author of ch. 13 or for an answer to the problem of its origin. Even if doubt about its authorship remains, doubt about its integrity as part of I Cor must be excluded.

Secondly, if I Cor 12-16 is a genuine unity, and the spiritual gifts dealt with there belong together in an existential and not merely a literary manner, the "practical" gifts which Paul regards as shared by the body of Christ (*ἀντίλημψις, κυβέρνησις, διακονία*, and so on) acquire a depth and importance that affects not only the actual contents of I Cor 16 but also the whole issue of ministry within and beyond the Christian *ecclesia*.

²⁸ E. g., A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 285 (I Cor 13 is a Pauline digression, which nevertheless forms a step in his treatment of spiritual gifts); J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, pp. 309-12 (Pauline, but originally placed after ch. 8); E.-B. Allo, *op. cit.*, pp. 340 f. (a digression "dans la forme littéraire," but integral to Paul's subject and written by him for this occasion); A. Loisy, *Les Origines du Nouveau Testament*, p. 287 (non-Pauline and nonintegral); J. Hering, *La Première Épître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, p. 115 (Pauline, but not integral); J. C. Hurd, *op. cit.*, pp. 189 f. (Pauline and integral); C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 197, 199 (Pauline, but inserted). None of these scholars treats I Cor 12-16 as a unity.