

PREACHING AS CHARISMA. THE PAULINE PERSPECTIVE ON PREACHING

ADRIAN C. MOCAN*

ABSTRACT. The Pauline preaching has a multitude of typologies and paradigms. In the following we will refer to preaching as a divine gift, in the context in which the holy apostle Paul speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This homiletical typology is specifically Pauline and it is based on the most important paradigms in the preaching of the apostle. Pauline concept of charisma is about the diversity of gifts that originate in the Holy Spirit and are operated by him. They are the completion and individualization of the divine grace. Every Christian is a member in the Body of Christ, and therefore one who practices the spiritual gifts. The ultimate purpose of the manifestation of these gifts is to build up the Church of Christ in all love and righteousness, as none of the gifts of grace is worthless or different in quality.

KEY WORDS: preaching, paradigms, Paul, Christianity, charisma

Introduction

Most evangelical scholars who address the issue of Pauline preaching believe that the great apostle established a homiletic pattern that is still valid. Therefore, the apostle Paul is regarded as not only a great Christian thinker, but one of the greatest preachers in the history of Christianity as well (see Bailey 1991: 19; Thompson 2001: 16). Greidanus considers that Pauline epistles are some of the sermons he delivered remotely. In that context they were also read in public, thus having a proclamatory dimension as well (Greidanus 1988, reprinted in 2000: 314). Thompson, on the other hand, studies the moral dimension of the Pauline epistles in particular and argues convincingly that they are thought of in homiletical terms (since the analysis of Pauline epistles' linguistics leads to the assumption that they were written in order to be listened to, not just to be read from, see Thompson 2001: 30-35). Thompson argues that the argumentative pattern and stylistics of Paul's epistles are obviously of a strong homiletical character. He also claims that Paul's preaching is essentially pastoral: "The supreme test of the quality of pastoral preaching is the transformation of the community into a holy people" (Thompson 2001: 105).

* ADRIAN C. MOCAN is PhD candidate in Theology at "Aurel Vlaicu" University in Arad, Romania. E-mail: adi_mocan2003@yahoo.com.

Even if generally apostle Paul articulates profound theological concepts, he always does it while encountering a specific need of his recipients or considering a pastoral need. Thus, here he apostle handles this particular concern with the same attitude that a pastor or a preacher would manifest towards the community he serves. The epistles are clearly not theological treatises, but rather sermons of teaching, recorded in writing and then read to a specific audience. The Pauline preaching has a multitude of typologies and paradigms. In the following lines we will refer to preaching as a divine gift, in the context in which the holy apostle Paul speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This homiletical typology is specifically Pauline and is based on the most important paradigms in the preaching of this apostle of gentiles (see Patte 1984: 16-17. Daniel Patte synthesizes three of the paradigms of Pauline epistolary preaching, namely the charismatic, typological and eschatological paradigms). This is why we decided that our research should particularly refer to this aspect of the Pauline preaching. The apostle Paul's preaching is indeed a very complex topic, but for our purpose here we will only consider it as a special gift of the Holy Spirit.

An Overview of Charisma

The church as defined by Paul through his metaphor “the Body of Christ” is the realm in which Saint Basil the Great inferred that “the spirit keeps the limbs connected by the interconditional gifts. All the members endowed with different gifts complete through it the Body of Christ...” (St. Basil quoted by Stăniloai 1997: 211). In Paul's noetics, the charisms are placed in a close relationship with the divine person of the Holy Spirit, a fact to which we owe the expression “gift of the Spirit”. Gordon Fee, for instance (1994: 714) argues that the use of the name Holy Spirit with reference to the third person of the Holy Trinity is intended to highlight the sanctifying ethical role of the Spirit in the life of believers. However, Paul's pneumatology is centered in Christ, as it can be seen in 2 Corinthians 3:17) ὁ δὲ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν, “now the Lord is the Spirit”) for, as we have previously stated, the Body of Christ, which is the Church, is the place where the Holy Spirit is manifested through the “gifts of the Spirit” (χάρισμα πνευματικῶν).¹ Paul's pneumatology has several other characteristics, one of which is its eschatological perspective (Pate 1995: 149; the same perspective on Paul's eschatological pneumatology can be found in Ladd 1993: 526). The reception of the Spirit is therefore the sign that the world has entered the age of the last days (see Arrington 1978: 134). A second characteristic of the apostle's pneumatology is, as previously mentioned, Christocentrism (see Ridderbos 1997: 215). Christocentric pneumatology always has an ecclesiological frame of reference. Paul's ecclesiological image

1 For our purpose here, the NIV and KJV versions are used for Bible quotations.

that best describes this aspect is the Body of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who manifests himself through his gifts in the church of Christ.

Usually, when analyzing the issue of charisms, the two ensuing lists from Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are brought forward. The fact that these two lists are not identical, as they only have one charism in common, *i.e.*, prophecy (or the gift of prophecy) suggests the possibility that they are not exhaustive (Tipei 2003: 294). It is fair to say that any sermon ought to have a prophetic dimension (see Grudem in Alexander and Rosner, eds., 2000: 701). Grudem makes an interesting comparison between the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament preachers, reaching the conclusion that there are many common elements between the two categories. Therefore, it is also fair to say that Paul's perspective on charisms in general and on prophecy in particular helps us understand what preaching is according to him. There is indeed a wide debate on the relationship between the gift of prophecy and the preaching of God's Word in that they are antithetic terms, and it usually wreaks havoc between the Pentecostal or charismatic evangelicals, and the cessationists, traditionalist or Calvinist evangelicals. The first claim, that the manifestation of the prophetic gift is also shown separately from preaching, continuing in the same time of revelation specific to the first days of the early church (see Goll 2007; Markham 2020; Schoenheit 2013) comes into contrast with the second claim shared by the cessationists, who believe that the distinct manifestation of prophecy in its original form ceased with the formation of the biblical canon (see Bloom 2018; MacArthur 2013). However, there is a common denominator between the two antinomic perspectives, namely that they both hold as true that genuine preaching contains a prophetic element which is the Word of God for us today.

Etymology

The word most often used in the Greek Scriptures for "spiritual gifts" is (το) χάρισμα, -ατος, which can be translated as: grace granted, gift, charisma (Carrez and Morel 1999: 314). Most theologians agree that the term χάρισμα comes from the root word χάρις (see Kittel and Friederich 1992: 372-402). The noun χάρις can convey meanings like grace, favor, beauty, gratitude, delight, kindness, expression of favor, good occasion, benefit, and in plural duty of gratitude, gratitude, reward, thanksgiving (see Bromiley 1988: 547). The noun "charisma" implies connotations like favor received on the basis of divine mercy, and is can only be found in the pre-Christian literature in one version of the Septuagint (LXX). The verb "harito" appears in a few passages of the LXX and the extra-canonical writings (Bromiley 1988: 115), although always in connection with the concept of divine blessing.

The Bible shows that “we have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us” (Romans 12:6). The connection between the two terms, χάρισμα and χάρις is not solely linguistical, as grace is a fundamental concept in Pauline soteriology. Rudolf Bultman summarises Paul’s thought on this issue very well when he writes that, for Paul, grace is “the eschatological act of God” (Bultmann 1955 I: 48). For both the apostle of the gentiles and the preachers of the patristic period, the preaching of divine grace was in an eschatological paradigm. In Brian E. Daley’s opinion (1991: 105), the great preacher John Chrysostom always directed his listeners’ attention towards what would happen at the end of history. Moreover, we gather that the end of history began at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Dunn (1995: 201-205) believes that the apostle Paul used the words “Spirit” and “grace” in order to best describe the believer’s experience with God. Therefore, Dunn broadens the perspective by correlating the terms χάρις and πνεύμα (Spirit), thus stating that it is necessary to consider both terms when speaking about gifts. He emphasizes that χάρισμα and χάρις often times overlap, making us think of “God’s undeserved generosity that he shows toward the believer” (Dunn 1995: 206). Some theologians make the connection between the noun χάρισμα and the verb χάριξομαι, which means “to give, to offer” but also “to act gently with grace” or “to forgive” (see Carrez and Morel 1999:314).

From an Orthodox and Catholic perspective, a distinction must be made between the saving grace and the priestly grace (which, to be sure, also includes charisms in the office of priesthood). As John Chrysostom also states while interpreting Jesus’ unusual gesture after his resurrection, “and with that he breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”, “the disciples now have received grace (apostolic grace, which includes the priesthood)”, see Mircea 1982: 373). It follows from Chrysostom’s point of view that the distinction between grace and charisma must be taken into account, even if the two terms are obviously related.

Schutzmann (1989: 4) argues that, due to such low frequency of the term, χάρισμα cannot be generally considered a technical term. However, contrary to Schutzmann’s assertion we believe that, at least in the context of Romans and 1 Corinthians, the word entails a certain technical meaning. Most often than not, this term denotes “a manifestation of grace in the community of believers” (Schutzmann 1989: 5). When used in the plural, it begets a special status, thus becoming a theological concept.

The Definition of χάρισμα (τα)

The naive hope that one could define the term χάρισμα (with the plural χάρισματα) in only one sentence is shattered by the simple, even fugitive

browsing of the literature on this subject. Ernst Käsemann, for instance, defines “charisma” as the “individualization of grace, our participation in the pneuma and the concretion of our Christian faith” (Käsemann 1980: 333; see also Parks 1974: 21). He follows the same line of thinking as Moltmann, who said that “the charism, according to Paul, is the first of the gifts, the concretion and individualization of one and the same Spirit, the result of grace and power and finally the call to serve one’s neighbor and even the enemy” (Moltmann 1977: 295). This service, as we shall see, is directly linked also to preaching:

The charism is πνευματικῶν put in the service of Christ”, Käsemann argues (1980: 336). Even if the idealist-naturalistic interpretation of F. C. Baur has long been outdated, his conclusion could hardly be avoided, *i.e.*, that “either they are all charismatic Christians – in the sense of charismatic adherents – , or they are not Christians at all. (Hollemveger 1972: 429)

This statement cannot be easily rejected, precisely because, if one defines the “Christian” as a person in whom Christ lives, it also means that the life of that person is subject to Christ. We must therefore agree that the Spirit also dwells with Christ in him. It follows that, because of the presence of the Spirit, that person will at some point be used by Christ to build up the Body of Christ, so he can be called charismatic. Even if theologians like Rahner (see 1979: 36) define charisma strictly within dogmatic parameters, it can be stated that from a biblical point of view, it is not enough to just juxtapose the charisms and the institution of the Church (see Schutzmann 1989: 9). Therefore where there is the Spirit, we also have the manifestation of the grace of Christ, through various charisms.

In approaching this topic from a biblical perspective, Ray C. Stedman defined the spiritual gift (χάρισμα πνευματικῶν) as “a certain capacity for service, which is given to every true Christian without exception and which no one possesses before becoming a Christian (Stedman 1972: 39)”. Stedman’s definition depicts the spiritual gift as being given to the believer by God, an idea that the very phrase, “spiritual gift” encompasses. Because χάρισμα πνευματικῶν is something that the Christian did not have before becoming a Christian, Stedman distinguishes between the spiritual gift and what we call natural talent. Natural talents are also gifts from God, since „every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17), but they are for both Christians and non-Christians. These particular gifts are considered to be native abilities that do not have any connection whatsoever with someone being or not being a Christian. On the other hand, spiritual gifts are not talents, for the simple reason that they are given only to fulfill spiritual goals and exclusively to Christians. Spiritual gifts are

“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12; see also Stedman 1972: 39). Therefore, charisma in a logical order precedes the saving grace. In the same line of thought, preaching is not the manifestation of a native ability to be a good communicator, but a consequence of the prior manifestation of the grace of Christ. Finally, when it comes to serving God, one’s talent is more important than human ability. Unfortunately, we often find that in today’s preaching, the preacher’s oratorical ability prevails over everything else, whereas John Chrysostom states that the Church is a school of God, where the preacher has the role of a teacher Chrysostom in Maxwell 2009: 2).

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

Apostle Paul establishes that the purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is fundamentally twofold. Firstly, the gifts are to bring glory to Jesus Christ through the mediating work of the Spirit. His recognition as “the Lord” is the ultimate test of the practice of the gifts. Gordon Fee’s assessment of this criterion is worth quoting, since he is convinced that “any event that deviates from this, even if it were a legitimate expression of the Spirit, begins to depart from Christ and shifts to a pagan fascination, which sees the spiritual activity as a scope in itself” (Fee 1971: 621).

Secondly, the gifts serve to build the church. They are always oriented towards the others and not towards the one who received them. Paul said that “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). We gather from this that the benefit of the others is the absolute criterion that cannot be circumvented. Therefore, there should be no spiritual gifts that have personal benefit as a primary purpose (even if by extension the fact that we serve others help us at a personal level. While writing these lines under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul must have been thinking of a church that works on the same principles of interrelationship and interdependence present in a living organism. Charisms are mere expressions of the divine grace and they are manifested in the church through Christians in a wide, countless range of activities. God works in the Church and society through us, the Christians, is manifested in numerous ways, and he does so according to the interests of his heavenly kingdom. That is why the great preachers have always known how to relate to their listeners. When Peter speaks to the Jewish pilgrims gathered at Pentecost in Jerusalem, he preaches the gospel using quotations from the Old Testament with which they indeed were familiar. When the apostle Paul preached to the Athenians in Acts 17: 22-24, he “stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked

around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.” Some preachers believe that reporting to the audience compromises the inner content of the gospel, but this is how we receive a lesson in wisdom in this case. It is essential that the sermon be directed to the listeners (that is why the preacher must know the context in which he speaks), while at the same time the preacher must keep the content of the gospel intact (even if there is the risk that the listeners reject the message). This balance between form and content does not always guarantee that the impact of the preaching is the desired one. In Peter’s case, we find that nearly 3,000 people received the gospel (see Acts 2:41). In what the apostle Paul is concerned, the impact was not similar, even though he employed a congruent method of preaching, see Acts 17:32-34: “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject. At that, Paul left the council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.” Even though the success of the preaching work is not always visible at the desired level, God’s Word still works and it ultimately bears fruit plentifully. The preacher must be aware that he is absolutely dependent on God, and his message is an expression of God’s grace. That is why in 1 Corinthians 3:7-9 the apostle Paul said that „neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

Preaching includes both the personality of the proclaimer and the divine election, as Paul shows in Ephesians 4:11-12: „he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of Body of Christ.” Despite the fact that the preaching of the gospel is, in a way, every Christian’s responsibility, there is still a category of people that have been “chosen” to proclaim the Word of God. In the quoted text from Ephesians, the one who makes the choice is Christ, but in the same context the Holy Spirit is mentioned because, even if the ministry is a manifestation of the Spirit, this is for the edification of the Body of Christ, who is the head of the Church (see also Ephesians 4:30, “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption”). In this diverse and harmonious manifestation of the grace of preaching there is one

evident thing, namely that “he who remains sovereign is God (see O’Brien 1999: 280). O’Brien believes that this passage reflects the relationship that every believer has with each person of the Trinity, thus the unity in diversity that characterizes the Holy Trinity stands as a model for Christian relationships. Also, the Pauline pericope is shaped under the auspices of the eschatological expression “already but not yet”. This is because here Paul makes use of the ecclesiological metaphor “the Body of Christ”, which is a “heavenly entity”, but still an “earthly reality”. The present and the future intertwine in the life of the Church of Christ, where it is the Holy Spirit that imparts gifts, and decides to manifest himself as he pleases (see, for instance, 1 Corinthians 12:11).

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul brings forward a list of nine gifts to illustrate the principle of diversity in unity. The 1 Corinthians text is not the only one that contains a so-called charismatic list (manifestations of grace or gifts of the spirit). Biblical scholars have compiled no less than six such lists in chapters 12-14 of this epistle only, but there are others, such as Ephesians 4:11, Romans 12:6-8, etc. (see Green 1980: 192-193). In the ensuing lines, and in order to strengthen his arguments, Paul uses the image of the human body, which has various members, and so the church is made up of living limbs. Referring to of this Pauline image, Cullman states that, “when the unity is destroyed, charisma ceases to be charisma” (see Cullman in Mircea 1982: 393) and Schutzmann sums it up, saying that “the purpose of charismatic endowment is attained only when the well-being of the whole body is..., and each will take his reward according to his labor (1989: 9).” The aim of preaching is not to divide, but as a charisma it must “build” the unity of the church. In the Romanian evangelical context, this is one of the things that requires special emphasis, because the scenario of divisions created in the church of Corinth around some preachers is often repeated in our faith communities.

Conclusions

It can be argued that Paul’s concept of charisma encapsulates a diversity of gifts that originate in the Spirit and are operated by the Spirit. They are the manifestation and the individualization of the divine grace. Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ, therefore every Christian exercises the spiritual gifts. However, every Christian is also an active member of human society, so that the manifestation of the “gifts of the Holy Spirit” is reflected in this world, especially when the gifts that are included in the office of a proclaimer of the gospel are concerned. Every Christian should be able to talk about Christ, but those called to the office of preaching carry some specific manifestations of God’s grace in their lives.

Charisma is given for service, not for self-satisfaction. The ultimate purpose of the manifestation of these gifts is to build up the Church of Christ in all love and righteousness. None of the gifts of grace are worthless or different in quality (see also Taylor 1975). This means that χάρισματᾶ should not be understood hierarchically, even if apparently some gifts are considered to be more important than the others. This should not give way to spiritual pride, because even though we have different gifts “according to the grace given to each of us” (Romans 12:6), there is still one Body. Therefore, the quality of a preacher does not place him higher up in his relationship to his fellow Christians, who in turn may display other manifestations of the divine grace in their ministry. Moreover, one of the fundamental purposes of preaching is to build up the church of Christ. The church is described in the Bible as a spiritual edifice, and according to 1 Peter 2:5 we “like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This spiritual edification is also accomplished by God through preaching.

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