

Stomach, Hands, Legs, Feet, Eyes, Ears, Mouth, Upper and Lower Teeth, Molars, Eyebrows and Head: The Unity of Christians and the Ancient *Topos* of Body and Members

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Summary

This article stems from the question of the source from which the Christian author Paul took the image of the body and its members and its head. This image appears in several forms in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as well as in Romans, Colossians and Ephesians. The author asks how Paul used it when addressing the issue of the relationships among believers in the church as well as the relationship between the church and Christ. The author maintains that Paul adopted and adapted the ancient topos of the body and its members which appears in many authors from Classical and Hellenistic times, as in Stoic texts of Paul's era. The key texts are reproduced in Croatian translation. Against these sources the author investigates how Clement of Rome used the same topos. The author concludes that ancient writers adjusted the topos to the aims of their texts and messages. The same applies to the aforementioned Christian writers. Of the two, Paul adapted and developed (more thoroughly than did Clement) the ancient topos to the Christian teaching about the church, and filled it with theological meaning.

Key words: *topos, body, head, members, body of Christ, Church, Corinthians, ecclesiology, Paul, Clement*

Introduction

The church, as the fellowship of believers, is one of the more evident topics of the New Testament and ecclesiology occupies a crucial place in Christian thought

and practice.¹ One of the most significant biblical elaborations of the notion of the church is found in the twelfth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 12:12-30). In addition to numerous, often speculative, insufficiently grounded or unconvincing answers to the question about the origin of Paul's image of the Christian church as the body,² the most widespread is the view that Paul, in that respect, relies on the *topos* of the body, i.e. of the members and the head which stems from pre-Christian times. Those interpretations differ among themselves, though, with regard to the quantity of information which they list concerning the ancient *topos*; some interpretations only mention the fact of the long-lived career of the *topos* in passing while others refer to several sources. Interpretations of First Corinthians which reproduce the full text of one or two sources are rare, let alone providing a more comprehensive development of this *topos*, even in footnotes. The explanation for this can be found in the fact that the interpretations of this passage of First Corinthians focus primarily on the interpretation of Paul's argument in its immediate context, with a possible brief comment about the manner in which, and degree to which, Paul, in the elaboration of the adopted *topos*, deviated from its earlier use or application.

This article is an attempt to provide a fuller picture of the history of the use of the ancient *topos* of the body and members from its emergence, or at least from its oldest confirmed record. In the process, I will point out its various adaptations to different contextual environments in which it appears. The survey encompasses the span of eight centuries, from the seventh century BC to the end of the first century AD. The sources used are not listed in chronological order, but are connected with associative links, although every citation includes information about its time of writing. The sources used include texts from the

- 1 Some of the footnotes have been revised, and some material from the Croatian version of the article deleted as it is not relevant to the North American readership, particularly the observations dealing with the niceties of the Croatian translation and some Croatian bibliography.
- 2 Among the ideas which can be mentioned as possible sources of Paul's image are: Paul's Adam Christology, Paul's mysticism which is reflected in the expression "in Christ", the notion of "corporate personality", the argument from Paul's understanding of Messiah and the people of God, the claim that the idea originated from Paul's Damascus road experience when the Risen Christ asked him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?...", the Gnostic Primal Man myth, and the sacramental understanding of Christ's body. See summary in James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998:549-550. Dunn considers the suggestion that Paul uses a pre-Christian *topos* of the body and its members to be best founded. Among other modern authors who provide a brief summary of the historical transmission of the *topos* and its interpretation in Paul are: Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NIGTC, Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans and Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000:989-994; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007:588-604.

fields of philosophy, politics, history and religion. The last two texts of this study were written by Christian authors: the Apostle Paul and Clement of Rome. They will receive a somewhat more extensive treatment in order to highlight continuity or discontinuity vis-à-vis the use of the *topos* of the body and members in other sources.

It is worth mentioning that the pre-Christian (and non-Christian) texts which utilize the body *topos* are presented in full for two reasons. First, the available scholarly theological literature in Croatian does not provide such an extensive survey. Second, the reading of relevant passages in their entirety will provide the reader with a fuller insight into the development and adaptation of the *topos* over a longer period of time and across different thematic contexts.

From Aesop to Paul

The title, Father of Fables, is customarily ascribed to Aesop (ca. 620 BC – 560 BC) whose orally delivered stories were, according to the prevailing tradition, written down by one of his disciples. The collection of Aesop's fables contains over a hundred stories, and one of them relates the conflict between the body and the stomach:

In former days, when the Belly and the other parts of the body enjoyed the faculty of speech, and had separate views and designs of their own, each part, it seems, in particular for himself, and in the name of the whole, took exception at the conduct of the Belly, and were resolved to grant him supplies no longer. They said they thought it very hard that he should lead an idle good-for-nothing life, spending and squandering away, upon his own ungodly guts, all the fruits of their labor; and that, in short, they were resolved, for the future, to strike off his allowance, and let him shift for himself as well as he could. The Hands protested they would not lift up a finger to keep him from starving; and the Mouth wished he might never speak again if he took in the least bit of nourishment for him as long as he lived; and, say the Teeth, may be rotten if ever we chew a morsel for him for the future. This solemn league and covenant was kept as long as anything of that kind can be kept, which was until each of the rebel members pined away to the skin and bone, and could hold out no longer. Then they found there was no doing without the Belly, and that, as idle and insignificant as he seemed, he contributed as much to the maintenance and welfare of all the other parts as they did to his (Aesop, 1865:175-176).

The role of the stomach and its alleged uselessness for the external functions of the body, as well as the metaphorical possibility of this relationship, evidently arrested the interest of the people of the ancient world. There is yet another

shorter fable by Aesop which carries the motifs and proffers a message similar to those from the aforementioned fable:

The stomach and the legs quarreled about strength. Since the legs denied any single argument posed by the stomach by saying that they surpass it by their strength so much, and that they also carry the stomach itself, the stomach replied: "My dear legs, if I do not receive food, neither will you be able to carry" (Ezop, 1963:77).³

It appears that these two fables emerged, or were transmitted, independently of each other and the second text could even be seen as a summary of the first. United under the umbrella of the same *topos* and concluding morale, they still differ in two important ways. First, the plot in the first fable revolves around the perception of the usefulness of the stomach, if not around the abuse of its position, while the second fable emerges from a competition in "power." Second, the first fable does not contain direct speech as does the second fable.

At the beginning of the first century AD, the historian Titus Livius (59 BC – AD 17) wrote an extensive treatise on the history of Rome. In the episode dealing with Menenius Agrippa (History of Rome 2.32.9-12), it can be clearly observed that the biological reality of the wholeness and interdependence within the human body transforms into interdependence in human society. Livius thus describes the foundation of Rome during the reign of August. Despite the successfully completed war, the internal political circumstances in Rome were characterized by political chaos: the abdication of the dictator Valerius, the confrontation between the Senate and the people, and the uncertainty about who would receive the backing of the Roman army which had recently lost its chief military commander. The possible revolt of the army, but also of the people, against the Senate, could have sparked civil war. The Senate decided to send the skillful orator Menenius Agrippa to the people as its own representative, held in high esteem among the people because he too came from their ranks. His objective was to "establish harmony and concord among the citizens." Menenius addresses the gathered people and retold, word for word, Aesop's story about the stomach and the body.

In the days when all the parts of the human body were not as now agreeing together, but each member took its own course and spoke its own speech, the other members, indignant at seeing that everything acquired by their care and labor and ministry went to the belly, whilst it, undisturbed in the middle of them all, did nothing but enjoy the pleasures provided for it, entered into a conspiracy; the hands were not to bring food to the mouth, the mouth was not to accept it when offered, the teeth were not to masticate it. Whilst, in their

3 The author could not find the English rendition of this fable. Following is an English translation by the author from a Croatian collection of Aesop's fables.

resentment, they were anxious to coerce the belly by starving it, the members themselves wasted away, and the whole body was reduced to the last stage of exhaustion. Then it became evident that the belly rendered no idle service, and the nourishment it received was no greater than that which it bestowed by returning to all parts of the body this blood by which we live and are strong, equally distributed into the veins, after being matured by the digestion of the food (Livius, 1905:II.32).

The modern reader ought to make note of the one and only difference in relation to Aesop's original fable. Where Aesop states that the members of the body realized that the work performed by the stomach is not a *small thing*, Menenius relates that the members of the body realized that the stomach is not an *idler*. With this relatively small alteration and adjustment, the only one in relation to the Aesop's original fable, Titus Livius/Menenius evidently harkened to the basic complaint of the impoverished Roman people from whose point of view the activity of the Roman aristocracy in the Senate appeared like an idle waste of time and the enjoyment of the fruit of the work of the plebeians. Menenius Agrippa's speech manages to convince the people that the aristocracy is indeed necessary for the proper functioning of the society. In this way, he manages to achieve the reconciliation of the confronted groups; by thus showing that the internal rebellion of the body is similar to the anger (wrath) of the people against the Senate and the patricians, Menenius moves the hearts (spirits) of the people. After that, they discussed concord and agreed on the terms. After the death of Menenius Agrippa, Titus Livius describes him as the "interpreter and decision-maker of the concord of the citizens," i.e. as the mediator who succeeded in re-establishing harmony (*concordia*) (Livius, 1905:II.32).

The image of the operation of the human body and the interrelationship of its members was one of the more common metaphors for the functioning of an individual in the political life of ancient towns and cities, and in the society as a whole (*politeia*), in the Greco-Roman world. Furthermore, it has survived in political parlance even now. The basic argument is clear: If the political body is similar to the human physical body, then its members ought to act in harmony for the well-being of the political whole. It is perfectly evident that the metaphor of the body and its members was used, and is still being used, for maintaining the political status quo, whatever it might be, and against its change. The metaphor presupposes that the hierarchy is natural and necessary for the health and life of the body. It is not surprising, then, that in antiquity, the metaphor was regularly used precisely in the context which was characterized by discord, unrest, revolt and upheaval. It is also manifest that the speeches and written texts which utilized the metaphor of the body also used the rhetoric of reconciliation, order and harmony (*concordia*), certainly as perceived from the perspective of the one who used the metaphor.

The Wars of the Jews, the work which Josephus Flavius (AD 37 – ca. AD 100) wrote at the end of the first century AD, is a good example of unrest and revolt as a wider context for the comparison of the body as an example of mutual dependence. In one paragraph (4.406), Josephus describes the spreading of unrest during the Jewish revolt against the Roman authorities, and compares it to an illness which spreads through the body.

And now a fourth misfortune arose, in order to bring our nation to destruction. There was a fortress of very great strength not far from Jerusalem, which had been built by our ancient kings, both as a repository for their effects in the hazards of war, and for the preservation of their bodies at the same time. It was called Masada. Those that were called Sicarii had taken possession of it formerly, but at this time they overran the neighboring countries, aiming only to procure to themselves necessities; for the fear they were then in prevented their further ravages. But when once they were informed that the Roman army lay still, and that the Jews were divided between sedition and tyranny, they boldly undertook greater matters; and at the feast of unleavened bread, which the Jews celebrate in memory of their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage, when they were sent back into the country of their forefathers, they came down by night, without being discovered by those that could have prevented them, and overran a certain small city called Engaddi: – in which expedition they prevented those citizens that could have stopped them, before they could arm themselves, and fight them. They also dispersed them, and cast them out of the city. As for such as could not run away, being women and children, they slew of them above seven hundred. Afterward, when they had carried everything out of their houses, and had seized upon all the fruits that were in a flourishing condition, they brought them into Masada. And indeed these men laid all the villages that were about the fortress waste, and made the whole country desolate; while there came to them every day, from all parts, not a few men as corrupt as themselves. At that time all the other regions of Judea that had hitherto been at rest were in motion, by means of the robbers. Now as it is in a human body, if the principal part be inflamed, all the members are subject to the same distemper; so, by means of the sedition and disorder that was in the metropolis, had the wicked men that were in the country opportunity to ravage the same. Accordingly, when every one of them had plundered their own villages, they then retired into the desert; yet were these men that now got together, and joined in the conspiracy by parties, too small for an army, and too many for a gang of thieves: and thus did they fall upon the holy places and the cities; yet did it now so happen that they were sometimes very ill treated by those upon whom they fell with such violence, and were taken by them as men are taken in war: but still they prevented any further punishment as do robbers, who, as soon as their ravages [are discovered], run their way. Nor was there now any part of Judea that was not in a miserable condition, as well as its most eminent city also (Flavius).

The cited text contains only one claim which can be connected with the *topos* of the body and its members, and which borrows from the original fable by Aesop: the element of an illness which gradually occupies all body members. This holistic understanding of the (human) body contains Josephus' interpolation about "the noblest" organs. Josephus does not mention nor hint that he borrowed his example from Aesop, but it is obvious that by his time the *topos* had entered general culture and that various authors were using it and adjusting it to their aims and goals.

One of the older examples of similar metaphorical use of the *topos* of the body and its members is provided by Xenophon (431 BC – 355 BC) who, in the fourth century BC, wrote (2.3.18),

At present, you are in the same case as if the two hands, which the gods have made to assist each other, should neglect this duty, and begin to impede each other; or as if the two feet, formed by divine providence to cooperate with one another, should give up this office, and obstruct one another. Would it not be a great folly and misfortune to use for our hurt what was formed for our benefit? And indeed, as it appears to me, the gods have designed brothers to be of greater mutual service than the hands, or feet, or eyes, or other members which they have made in pairs for men; for the hands, if required to do things, at the same time, at greater distance than a fathom, would be unable to do them; the feet cannot reach two objects, at the same time, that are distant even a fathom; and the eyes, which seem to reach to the greatest distance, cannot, of objects that are much nearer, see at the same time those that are before and behind them; but brothers, if they are in friendship, can, even at the greatest distance, act in concert and for mutual benefit.

Xenophon advocates harmonious and united, though varied, functioning among "brothers," i.e. members of the same social community. In this paragraph, Xenophon underlines that diversity contributes to the mutual benefit of such harmonious operation. This refers both to the body and the society, and reflects God's plan and aims. Any and all deviation from that ideal is harmful, irrespective of cause or goal. One ought to notice that Xenophon does not say that the members necessarily act out of malice. Even accidental disharmonious act is harmful.

Later, the Stoic would stress that one member is subordinate to the whole of the body which consists of the unity of members, and that a single member ought to subjugate itself and its own benefit to the benefit of the body as a whole. While considering various virtues, Marcus Aurelius (AD 121– AD 180) comments on the traits which must characterize interpersonal relationships. Marcus Aurelius maintains that doing good to another person is mandatory in the same way that body members are apportioned their particular tasks. To deviate from the proscribed duties means to disturb natural order. What is more, the motivation for any human action must come from within, from the realization that all members

complement each other and not from the mere sense of common belonging. This particular distinction is borne by the contrast between the “member” (*melos*) and the “part” (*meros*). Here are two quotes from *Antiquities* (2.1; 7.3):

But I who have seen the nature of the good that it is beautiful, and of the bad that it is ugly, and the nature of him who does wrong, that it is akin to me, not [only] of the same blood or seed, but that it participates in [the same] intelligence and [the same] portion of the divinity, I can neither be injured by any of them, for no one can fix on me what is ugly, nor can I be angry with my kinsman, nor hate him. For we are made for co-operation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth. To act against one another, then, is contrary to nature; and it is acting against one another to be vexed and to turn away.

Just as it is with the members in those bodies which are united in one, so it is with rational beings which exist separate, for they have been constituted for one co-operation. And the perception of this will be more apparent to thee if thou often sayest to thyself that I am a member of the system of rational beings. But if thou sayest that thou art a part, thou dost not yet love men from thy heart; beneficence does not yet delight thee for its own sake; thou still dost it barely as a thing of propriety, and not yet as doing good to thyself.

Epictetus (AD 55 – AD 135), on the other hand, highlights the organic connection between citizens and state which parallels that of the members of the body and the body. Members are always subordinate to the whole, but in this they do not lose their value. A consciousness of the whole encourages a “holistic” way of functioning for the members (2.10.3-4):

Besides, you are a citizen of the universe, and a part of it; not a subordinate, but a principal part. You are capable of comprehending the Divine economy; and of considering the connections of things. What then does the character of a citizen imply? To hold no private interest; to deliberate of nothing as a separate individual, but rather like the hand or the foot, which, if they had reason, and comprehended the constitution of nature, would never pursue, or desire, but with a reference to the whole. Hence the philosophers rightly say, that, if it were possible for a wise and good man to foresee what was to happen, he might co-operate in bringing on himself sickness, and death, and mutilation, being sensible that these things are appointed in the order of the universe; and that the whole is superior to a part, and the city to the citizen. But, since we do not foreknow what is to happen, it becomes our duty to hold to what is more agreeable to our choice, for this too is a part of our birthright.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC) was also interested in the question of the human being's duty to others. In his work *On Duty* (3.5.22) he establishes an essential Natural Law, or the given of duty: in satisfying his or her own needs, an individual must not harm other people. A morality which shows no respect to the

other leads to the deterioration of the body and the state.

For a man to take anything wrongfully from another, and to increase his own means of comfort by his fellow-man's discomfort, is more contrary to nature than death, than poverty, than pain, than anything else that can happen to one's body or his external condition.¹ In the first place, it destroys human intercourse and society; for if we are so disposed that every one for his own gain is ready to rob or outrage another, that fellowship of the human race which is in the closest accord with nature must of necessity be broken in sunder. As if each member of the body were so affected as to suppose itself capable of getting strength by appropriating the strength of the adjacent member, the whole body must needs be enfeebled and destroyed, so if each of us seizes for himself the goods of others, and takes what he can from every one for his own emolument, the society and intercourse of men must necessarily be subverted. It is, indeed, permitted, with no repugnancy of nature, that each person may prefer to acquire for himself, rather than for another, whatever belongs to the means of living; this, however, nature does not suffer, – that we should increase our means, resources, wealth, by the spoils of others.

Another Stoic, Lucius Aeneas Seneca (4 BC – AD 65), addresses the question of the unity of universals and particulars in a slightly different manner in his *Epistles* (95.52). The *topos* of the body here transcends the *metaphorical* human body and the *metaphorical* society. The aforementioned Nature sets the most general framework of existence: the origin, purpose and form of becoming and being human.

Yes, if I can only tell you first everything which ought to be afforded or withheld; meantime, I can lay down for mankind a rule, in short compass, four our duties in human relationships: all that you behold, that which comprises both god and man, is one – we are the parts of one great body. Nature produced us related to one another, since she created us from the same source and to the same end. She engendered in us mutual affection, and made us prone to friendships. She established fairness and justice; according to her ruling, it is more wretched to commit than to suffer injury. Through her orders, our hands are ready to help in the good work.

The Apostle Paul

The New Testament author who was the first to take over the ancient *topos* of the body and its members was Paul (ca. AD 5 – ca. AD 67). The *topos* appears in several places. In chapters nine to eleven in the letter to the Romans, Paul explains the message of reconciliation to the Jewish Christians and the Christians who converted from other nations, and instructs them in how they ought to co-

operate. After an appeal to obedience, self-sacrifice and conversion (Ro 12:1-2)⁴, Paul directs them to mutual love and the use of spiritual gifts and services in the Christian congregation (Ro 12:6f.). These two injunctions are connected by the *topos* of the body and its members: “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Ro 12:4-5).

Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians was written as a response to the problems which marred Christian unity in the Corinthian church of Paul’s time around AD 54. Among them, Paul mentions divisions (*shismata*) in 1:10 and immediately after quarrels (*erides*) about “party affiliation” in 1:11, that is, about personal loyalty to and devotion to Paul, Cephas, Apollos or Christ. First Corinthians provides instruction about the ways to solve open problems and advocates the re-establishment of unity. The letter contains Paul’s longest exposition about the unity of Christians and the most elaborate argument from the ancient *topos* of the body and its members:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 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.

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. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that 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. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

4 All biblical quotations are from the *New International Version*.

And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way (1 Co 12:12-31).

The manner in which Paul uses the *topos* of the body and its members in this passage contains certain differences and deviations from the aforementioned non-Christian sources. The most significant observation is probably that Paul does not mention the body as a metaphor or simile. In other words, the Christian church in Corinth is not *like* the body, nor should it function *like* the body; it *is* the body. Further, it is not a mere organic unit which has the characteristics of a body, but it is precisely the *soma Christou*, the body of Christ. This can be gleaned from Paul's unusual statement at the end of v. 12. Instead of the expected statement, "so it is with the community of believers," Paul writes, "so it is with Christ."⁵ This fact bestows an ontological distinctiveness upon the church from which ensues functional as well as ethical distinctiveness. Unity, that is, mutual inter-relatedness and belonging, was born out of conversion which was experienced by all Corinthian Christians and of a common spiritual experience.⁶ In this way, unity, or rather "oneness," is given.

However, diversity or difference is equally so given. The basic message of Paul is not that the body is one *despite* the fact that it has many members, or that unity ought to exist *despite* diversity. The foundational message is that the body, despite being one, does not consist of one member but of many, so that they must indeed be different. Paul probably reacts to the situation in the Corinthian church in which some believers, obviously those who were able to impose their understanding on others, entertained a tendency to claim that all believers must have certain spiritual gifts. This led to a forced leveling, or at least to an attempt at achieving a leveling. For this reason, in v. 14, Paul rejects uniformity and elevates harmony, concord and co-operation. In the following verses (15-18), Paul, weaving the well-known *topos* into his instructions to the readers, addresses individuals who suffered from an inferiority complex. Their doubts and defeatism are the

5 This is well noted, for example, by Boor (1974:220).

6 De Boor (221) maintains that the text points to baptism as the act of joining the church. Gordon Fee, however, argues that the text does not refer to (water) baptism because it is not expressed with an absolute noun, but refers to the experience of one Spirit. The second statement, the one about the taste of the same Spirit, according to Fee, is not the second experience of the Spirit, but a parallel semantic metaphor which expresses basically the same idea as the first, and refers to the experience of conversion in general (See Fee, 1987:603-606).

consequence of the views of others, so they can, to a large degree, be considered victims of values that have been imposed upon them, but even they have their place in the body. They do not even have to attempt to imitate others because each one has received a gift and value from God – the distribution of members of the body is of divine origin. This is followed by injunctions (19-21) to the believers who suffer from a superiority complex to whom Paul enjoins the exercise of positive discrimination (22-23). In addition, these believers ought to take pride in other believers which differ from them by their giftedness/endowment. To all these differences, Paul directs the message that the believers are not one body because they are parts of each other, but because they are members of Christ, and that is why they are one body in him.

It should be noted that in addition to spiritual differences Paul also addresses ethnic and social differences within the Corinthian church. Despite the often spiritualization of this passage, it should be observed that the application of the principle of unity in diversity in Paul also incorporates those distinctions which normally cause divisions and conflicts among people, and which obviously had the same effect within the Corinthian church. In this place, as in his other letters, Paul abandons the notion of the Christian community as an ethnic national state (Israel) and, as it were, takes over the picture of a political community which includes members that come from different ethnic backgrounds and whose survival depends on cooperation and respect. The same claim certainly applies to the fact that the Corinthian believers came from different social strata which caused friction, addressed elsewhere in First Corinthians, between the rich and the poor. This tension was manifested on the occasion of socially obligatory feasts at which food was offered which had previously been offered as a sacrifice at pagan temples, as well as on the occasion of celebrating the Lord's Supper. In this context, Paul's warning that some believers "do not discern the body" (1 Co 11:29) most probably refers to the endangering of the unity of the body of Christ, by which Paul meant the church whose members should have been united.⁷

In the end, it should be mentioned that the *topos* of the body and its members is used somewhat differently in Ephesians (1:22; 5:23) and Colossians (1:18;

7 In addition to their "sociological" interpretation, especially Roman Catholic authors usually advocate the view that Paul refers to the mystical nature of Christ's body which is being consumed at the Eucharist, and consequently refers to the mystical nature of the church itself. David Wenham mentions an interpretation which falls somewhere between the two. According to his view, Paul possibly borrowed two previously unrelated motifs – the church as the body of Christ and the sacramental view of the body of Christ – and melded them into one image: by consuming the body of Christ at the Eucharist a believer becomes a member of the body of Christ as the church (Wenham, 1995:185-186).

2:19).⁸ There the *topos* is not applied to the local community of believers, but it morphs into a metaphor for the universal church: “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16). Even in these verses, however, the church is not *like* a human body; it is the body of Christ and Christ is its head. It should also be noted here that there is a different adaptation of the *topos* of the body and its members, particularly in comparison with its use in First Corinthians. In First Corinthians, Paul mentions the head as one of the equal members of the body, i.e. the “head” might be, in the metaphorical sense, applied to any individual Christian and his or her specific ministry or gifting. Here, the “head” is Christ, and is in some way distinct from the “body”.

Clement of Rome (? – AD 101?)

At the end of the first century AD, probably around AD 96, the church in Rome sent a letter to the church in Corinth. The letter was signed by a certain Clement, one of the early Roman popes, or alternatively one of the leading members of the church who was charged with the correspondence of the Roman Church.⁹

- 8 In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul uses the *topos* of the body in yet another sense: as the image of the personal connection between a believer and Christ. In this passage, Paul argues that believers, as the “members” of Christ, cannot have sexual relations with prostitutes.
- 9 Academic literature in Croatian dealing with this and other issues related to the letter to the Corinthians by Clement of Rome are relatively scarce. The first complete translation into Croatian was just published in 2007. It was prepared by Marijan Mandac who supplemented the translation with useful interpretations and discussion: *Clement Rimski, Poslanica Corinthians*. Split: Služba Riječi, 2007. Sections of the letter have been published in Roman Catholic literature, such as Koloman Rac and Franjo Lasman, *Izbor iz stare književnosti kršćanske*. Zagreb: Tisak kr. zemaljske tiskare, 1917:7-11; and Željka Bišćan i Tomislav Zdenko Tenšek, *Otačka čitanja u molitvi crkve*. Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2000. See also: Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, *Povijest kršćanske književnosti I*, Zagreb, Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1972:66-88; Juraj Pavić and Tomislav Zdenko Tenšek, *Patrologija*. Zagreb, Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1993:15-17. For the Protestant point of view, see: Davorin Peterlin, “The First Letter of Clement” *Encyclopaedia Moderna* 4(44) (1993):299-307; “The Corinthian Church Between Paul’s and Clement’s Time” *Asbury Theological Journal* 53/2 (Fall 1998) 49-57; “The Corinthian Church in A.D. 96: Clement’s Exhortation to Unity” *Bogoslovni vestnik* 4 (1996):477-484; “Clement’s Answer to the Corinthian Conflict in A.D. 96” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39/1 (1996):57-69; Kenneth A. Strand, “Petar i Paul u odnosu na biskupsku sukcesiju u crkvi u Rimu.” *Biblijski pogledi* 4 (1994):151-164.

Clement 47:1-4 explicitly quotes Paul's words from First Corinthians 1:10-12 about divisions and the party-spirit which had infected the Corinthian church in Paul's time, and elsewhere further refers to First Corinthians (Wong, 1977:34). In Clement's time, a similar situation developed at the church in Corinth when a relatively small group of believers, backed by the silent majority, overthrew the duly elected church presbyters. Responding to this general context marked by disputes (1,1), upheaval and disorder, Clement writes a letter of encouragement in an attempt to resolve the problems and restore harmony (*concordia*) (9:2,4; 34:5-8; 50:5; 63:2; 651).

The key term which Clement uses in his exhortation is the order which God has established. The Corinthian Christians needed to understand that any aberration or deviation from the will of God is disobedience to his will. In Corinthians 40:1-42:5 Clement mentions one example of the order which God has established: It is the Old Testament temple worship in Jerusalem which serves as a kind of blueprint for the organization of New Testament Christian worship.

The whole of the twenty first chapter of Clement's letter is a recital of further examples. Day and night, sun and moon, heaven and sky, elements and seasons, earthly and heavenly beings that move according to their apportioned trajectories, according to his will, always in concord and peace, point to the pattern of God's Perfect reign.¹⁰ This argument from natural order is usually considered an example of the Stoic influence on Clement. That, however, is far from proven. The Stoic usually considers the natural order which has come into being on its

10 The heavens, revolving under His government, are subject to Him in peace. Day and night run the course appointed by Him, in no way hindering each other. The sun and moon, with the companies of the stars, roll on in harmony according to His command, within their prescribed limits, and without any deviation. The fruitful earth, according to His will, brings forth food in abundance, at the proper seasons, for man and beast and all the living beings upon it, never hesitating, nor changing any of the ordinances which He has fixed. The unsearchable places of abysses, and the indescribable arrangements of the lower world, are restrained by the same laws. The vast immeasurable sea, gathered together by His working into various basins, never passes beyond the bounds placed around it, but does as He has commanded. For He said, "Thus far shall you come, and your waves shall be broken within you." The ocean, impassible to man, and the worlds beyond it, are regulated by the same enactments of the Lord. The seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, peacefully give place to one another. The winds in their several quarters fulfill, at the proper time, their service without hindrance. The ever-flowing fountains, formed both for enjoyment and health, furnish without fail their breasts for the life of men. The very smallest of living beings meet together in peace and concord. All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony; while He does good to all, but most abundantly to us who have fled for refuge to His compassions through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be glory and majesty forever and ever. Amen. (Corinthians 20,1-11). All quotes are from the translation of *First Clement* by Roberts-Donaldson available at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-roberts.html>.

own and asks about the identity of the power which has structured it. In Clement, the argument follows a different sequence, and the foundational idea is not so much about natural order as it is about the will of God. “The Stoic starts with the cosmological design and deduces a divine force; Clement starts with the Creator, expects a created design, and then draws from that design the will of the Creator” (Wong, 1977:83). In addition, even the non-canonical literature of the Palestinian Jews abounds with cosmological pictures which present how creation functions in harmony with God’s precepts and his will: 1 Henok 2-5; 41:5-8, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Naftali’s Testament 3, The Assumption of Moses 12:9-10, and The Psalms of Solomon 18:12-14 (See Unnick, 1950:181-189).

Another example of order and harmony is presented in Corinthians 37:

Let us then, men and brethren, with all energy act the part of soldiers, in accordance with His holy commandments. Let us consider those who serve under our generals, with what order, obedience, and submissiveness they perform the things which are commanded them. All are not prefects, nor commanders of a thousand, nor of a hundred, nor of fifty, nor the like, but each one in his own rank performs the things commanded by the king and the generals. The great cannot subsist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture in all things, and thence arises mutual advantage. Let us take our body for an example. The head is nothing without the feet, and the feet are nothing without the head; yea, the very smallest members of our body are necessary and useful to the whole body. But all work harmoniously together, and are under one common rule for the preservation of the whole body (Corinthians 37:1-4).

This paragraph contains four statements about unity. The first expresses the thought that the survival of the whole depends on the inter-relationship of its parts. It is further interesting that Clement uses the term *krasis* in 37:4 which, in medical terminology, is used to describe a blend of two or more elements melded in an indissoluble stable combination. The second term which Clement had at his disposal but did not use is *miksis* which points to a combination of elements without the necessary mutual influence. It can be noted in passing that the term *krasis* was also used in the political terminology of the day to mean a healthy admixture of different social elements in the *polis*. There is also, and it refers to an observation rather to an explicit claim by Clement, the fact that in this paragraph, in contrast to chapter 20, Clement introduces the notion of mutual dependence and mutual necessity of different elements. It is also worth noting that Clement asserts that both particularity and diversity are necessary and inevitable; the small must exist as must the great, like soldiers of various ranks. Fourth, the pattern of behavior which Clement highlights in his model of a military structure is that which would be termed in modern speech, “the chain of command.” One person gives commands and others execute them depending on their place in “the chain

of command.” This thought appears earlier in Clement’s letter, only in the most general sense, as the submission to the will of God, as in the ebb and flow of the tide or of the celestial bodies, while here it is more directly tied to the root problem of the problem in Corinth. According to Clement, some members of the church disrupted the order which God had established by mounting a revolt against those who were, in this “chain of command”, located above them, and deposed them.

After these injunctions, Clement goes on to borrow yet another *topos* which he had at his disposal, i.e. the *topos* of the body and its members:

Let our whole body, then, be preserved in, Christ Jesus; and let everyone be subject to his neighbor, according to the special gift bestowed upon him. Let the strong not despise the weak, and let the weak show respect to the strong. Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because He has given him one by whom his need may be supplied. Let the wise man display his wisdom, not by [mere] words, but through good deeds. Let the humble not bear testimony to himself, but leave witness to be borne to him by another. Let him that is pure in the flesh not grow proud of it, and boast, knowing that it was another who bestowed on him the gift of continence (Corinthians 37:5 – 38:2).

Clement here invites the readers/listeners to consider the example of the actual human body. This is manifest from the fact that he enumerates concrete members: head, legs and “the smallest members.” They are all important; they complement each other and one cannot exist without the other. This is also supported by Clement’s choice of the term *melos* instead of the term *meros*, particularly if he was familiar with the opposition which was explained by Marcus Aurelius. Finally, all members are united around a common goal: the preservation of the whole human body.

Certain considerations still lead to the conclusion that by using the example of the body Clement actually had the Christian church in Corinth in mind from the very outset, and thus the example of the actual human body is really melded with the object which it refers to in the metaphorical sense. It is curious that in this paragraph Clement uses the term “our body” three times, a term with the personal pronoun in the plural and not in the singular. In other words, Clement does not invite the readers/listeners to consider the body which each person has as an individual, but the body which they have as a collective of individuals. Second, some weight must also be ascribed to the adjective “the whole” in the expression “the whole body” which, in this paragraph, also appears three times. Clement could have omitted the adjective “the whole” without adversely affecting the meaning of the text. In light of this, the emphasized expression “the whole body” implies that Clement cares for the preservation of all, and not only some

parts of the body. In the wider context of the situation in the Corinthian church, this would mean that Clement cares for the holistic healing of all, including the troublemakers.

Third, this observation about the concern for all members of the church flows into a similar inference based on the absolute use of the pronoun “all” (*panta*) in plural in 7:5: “All fit together.” This neuter nominative plural pronoun is followed by the verb in the third person singular. However, the Greek pronoun *panta* fits with the noun “members” from the previous verse (which is neuter), so that the grammatical sense might be that each “member” of the body “fits” with each other member” of the body. It is worth noting, finally, that the possible translation of the statement “All fit together” is somewhat bland, and that it hides an important theological nuance. The verb “to fit” (*sunpneo*) morphologically consists of the prefix *sun* (“with”) and the verb *pneo* (“breeze”). If this is given due consideration, then a free translation of the statement “All fit together” might be, “Each member is inspired by the same spirit this permeates the whole body.” Similar statements can be found in Greek medical writings. Also, Clement’s claim that the Spirit inspires and permeates all members of the body might represent one of the relatively rare *direct theological* connections with Paul’s usage of the *topos* of the body and its members in First Corinthians in which Paul describes how the Spirit unites and is the source of spiritual gifts. It is manifest, for instance, that in the letter to the Corinthians by Clement of Rome, the expression “body” is mentioned only as a physical human body, and there is no trace of the typical Pauline thought about Christ as the Body of the church who governs the body and effects unity. Also absent is the typical Pauline theological expression “in Christ”, although Clement comes close with his exhortation, “Let, therefore, the whole of our body be saved *in Christ Jesus*.”

The fourth observation ensues from the above discussion. This is because, in Clement, the body, and then also the local Christian congregation, is only an organism which operates harmoniously when all parts perform the tasks for which they were created. Clement isolates several groups of people: the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the wise (and those who are not) and those who are physically clean (and those who are not). In First Corinthians 12, Paul does not mention any of these groups (although some of them are mentioned elsewhere in First Corinthians and others elsewhere in his letters, for instance “the strong and the weak” in Romans).

Clement uses the expression *soma* and the *topos* of the body and its members in only one other place in his letter to the Corinthians:

Why are there strifes, and tumults, and divisions, and schisms, and wars among you? Have we not [all] one God and one Christ? Is there not one Spirit of grace poured out upon us? And have we not one calling in Christ? Why do

we divide and tear to pieces the members of Christ, and raise up strife against our own body, and have reached such a height of madness as to forget that “we are members one of another?” Remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, how He said, “Woe to that man [by whom offences come]! It were better for him that he had never been born, than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of my elect. Yea, it were better for him that a millstone should be hung about [his neck], and he should be sunk in the depths of the sea, than that he should cast a stumbling-block before one of my little ones. Your schism has subverted [the faith of] many, has discouraged many, has given rise to doubt in many, and has caused grief to us all. And still your sedition continues (Corinthians 46:5-9).

This paragraph is significant for several reasons. First, taken together with the following chapter which mentions divisions in the Corinthian church in Paul’s time, it represents Clement’s most extensive judgment against divisions in the Corinthian church in Clement’s time. Second, several terms appear in this paragraph which are characteristic of the discourse, the purpose of which is to overcome social disunity and to re-establish harmony: dispute (*eris*), jealousy (*zelos*),¹¹ division (*shisma*), war (*polemos*), rebellion (*stasis*).¹² Third, Clement’s¹³ arguments in favor of unity probably rely on Paul’s arguments:¹⁴ God is one, every person of the Trinity guarantees unity, there is one call by which all Christians have been called, and the reference to the one outpouring of the Spirit may point to baptism which is also a pledge of unity. Fourth, the expression “the body of Christ” does not appear in this passage; what we do encounter is the phrase “my own body” (*to soma to idion*). It is clear, though, that Clement precisely has “the body of Christ” in mind since his “own body” consists of “Christ’s parts,” i.e. members. Fifth, Clement here uses the same term *melos* (part) twice. This term does not emerge in Corinthians in any paragraph which features the *topos* of the body and its members. With his choice of the term *melos* and not *meros*, Clement most probably consciously, although inconspicuously, stressed the “organic”

11 The terms jealousy (*zelos*) and dispute (*eris*) appear in First Corinthians together and without other elements five times, and also appear in the rest of the New Testament: see particularly 1 Co 3:3; also 2 Co 12:20 f.

12 These expressions appear elsewhere in the text of the letter to the Corinthians alongside several others added by Clement. See in particular Corinthians 3:2: “jealousy (*zelos*) and envy (*thumos*), dispute (*eris*) and revolt (*stasis*), persecution (*diogmos*) and upheaval (*akatastasia*), war (*polemos*) and imprisonment (*aihmalosia*).”

13 In the same way, Clement, in Corinthians 37:5, admonishes the Corinthians to be united in “one submission.”

14 See e.g. Eph 4:4-6: “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.”

relationship among the members of Christ's church.

In the above representative examples of the use of the ancient *topos* of the body and its members, the head does not appear at all as one of the individual members of the body. In the works of extra-biblical authors, the term "head" determined an individual, or a person, the source of life, and later also a goal or fulfillment. In the texts of early Christian authors which deal elaborately with the *topos* of the body and its members, only Paul and Clement (who may have followed Paul in this) mention the "head" as one of the body members. The reason for this occurrence lies perhaps in the lexical and pictorial affinity of the metaphorical notion of Christ as the head of the church which consequently becomes logically "sucked into" the *topos* with which it originally had no semantic presence. Neither Paul nor Clement, however, in the passages mentioned above explicitly state that Christ is the body of the church, although Paul does in his letter to the Ephesians.

Conclusion

In the light of the cited ancient texts, it can be concluded that the Apostle Paul and Clement of Rome were the first Christian writers who adopted and adjusted the ancient *topos* which was used before them by poets, philosophers, historians and political theoreticians, and that the origin of the image of the body and its members, utilized in their letters, need not be sought elsewhere. However, all quoted authors, pre-Christian and Christian, have a wider literary context in common as well as the sociological *Sitz im Leben* of a potential disharmony or actual conflict within the broader human community into which these authors inculcate the image of the body and its differing and conflicting members. The resolution of the tension among the members of the body, or the manifestation of the conclusion that this tension is harmful for all, depicts the solution which is proposed, in the case of the Corinthian church of Paul and Clement's times, to the disunited communities of believers. Paul provides a theological expansion and deepening of the *topos* of the body, and enriches it by particular Christian emphases and applications such as the organic unity of Christ and the Church, or the unity found in the diversity of different gifts and ministries or the ontological uniqueness of the church. In contrast to Paul, Clement of Rome does not elaborate on the *topos* of the body, but instead uses, although in a similar context, a version of the outlines which is more akin to the pre-Christian notion of the framework.

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Davorin Peterlin

Želudac, ruke, noge, stopala, oči, uši, usta, gornji i donji zubi, kutnjaci, obrve i glava: Jedinstvo kršćana i drevni *topos* tijela i udova

Sažetak

*Rad proizlazi iz pitanja odakle je kršćanski pisac Pavao preuzeo sliku o tijelu i udovima i glavi, koja se u nekoliko inačica pojavljuje u Prvoj poslanici Korinćanima i u Rimljanima, Kološanima i Efežanima, te kako ga Pavao rabi pišući o odnosu vjernika unutar Crkve i o odnosu između Crkve i Krista. Autor zastupa stav da je Pavao preuzeo i prilagodio drevni *topos* tijela i udova koji se pojavljuje kod mnogobrojnih klasičnih i helenističkih pisaca te u stoičkim tekstovima iz Pavlova vremena. Ključni tekstovi navedeni su u hrvatskom prijevodu. U svjetlu istih autor razmatra i način na koji Klement Rimski rabi isti *topos*. Autor zaključuje da su pisci prilagođavali *topos* potrebama svojih tekstova i poruka. Isto se odnosi i na spomenute kršćanske pisce od kojih je Pavao (temeljitiše od Klementa) prilagodio i razradio drevni *topos* kršćanskome učenju o Crkvi i ispunio ga teološkim značenjem.*

Ključne riječi: *topos, tijelo, glava, udovi, tijelo Kristovo, Crkva, Korinćanima, ekleziologija*