

THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF ST PAUL: ONE CHURCH OR UNITED CHURCHES? THE UNIVERSAL DIMENSION OF THE ONE CHURCH IN THE EPISTLES OF ST PAUL

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<https://doi.org/10.47433/tv.xcviiin5-8.20>

Abstract

The ecclesiology of Saint Paul is a subject that gains more and more attention in the present time. The scholarship on this issue would have a considerable impact not only on the theological level but also on the pastoral and ecumenical. Each strives to discover, whether there is the notion of the One and Universal Church or not in the Epistles, which no one doubts their genuineness. Besides, many ask about the necessary elements that allow the designation of a community as a Church. Furthermore, numerous studies still tackle the relation between the Church of God and the People of Israel in Romans 11.

This study endeavors to elucidate the universal communal consciousness in the apostolic era by studying the term Church in its technical sense, including its theological connotations. Moreover, it inquires as to the essence of the Church's roots within the elected people of God. The aim is to prove that the Church encompasses all the branches of the olive tree in Romans 11, both from Jewish and Gentile origins. Finally, it aims to clarify the perplexity produced by Saint Paul's usage of the term Church, both in its singular and plural forms, to explain how the local churches may manifest the One Holy Universal and Apostolic Church.

Keywords: Ecclesiology, New Testament, Apostle Paul and the Pauline Letters, Pauline Theology, People of God, Israel, Church, Synagogue, Baptism, Eucharist, Body of Christ

I. Introduction

Was the Church ever one? How did all the apostolic congregations in the first century realize their fellowship? Did they show self-assurance to be independent churches, regardless of their bond of unity with the rest of the local Churches over the world? What enabled them to be called Church? The answers to these