

SUMMARY

***PAUL'S TEACHING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER:
A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE PAULINE ACCOUNT OF
THE LAST SUPPER AND ITS GRAECO-ROMAN BACKGROUND***

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BACKGROUND**

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***By Panayotis Coutsoumpos
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The Lord's Supper was understood as a memorial of Christ's sacrificial death on the basis of a tradition handed down to the Corinthians by Paul, who reminded them of its real significance based on Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples. Paul makes it clear that the Corinthians are not maintaining the Christian tradition associated with the Lord's Supper. The main focus in 1 Corinthians 11 is behaviour that calls for correction. The problem is that socio-cultural customs prevailed over Christian distinctives at the Meal. The Corinthians behaved in accordance with the social norms of the Graeco-Roman society. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-26 Paul highlights and summarizes directives to regulate the church's practice. A careful exegesis of these verses provides a basis for the explanation of the whole of chapter 11.

The examination of previous works in chapters 2 and 3 indicates that scholars disagree on the influence of mystery religious meals and social meals in the Graeco-Roman world on the Lord's Supper. However, the social customs in the church demonstrate that the Corinthian practice of the Lord's Supper was in tune with the common practice of the Graeco-Roman society. For instance, the *eranos* meal (a common social meal in the Hellenistic world) at Corinth was a "potluck dinner."

Chapter 4 attempts to reconstruct aspects of the social setting that affected Corinthian attitudes. For both the weak and the strong Christians, eating meat sacrificed to idols created problems (1 Cor. 8, 10). A gluttony and drunkenness on the part of the richer and socially more powerful members created tension between groups. Paul attempted to correct the problem and promote social integration rather than divisiveness.

The exegesis in chapters 5 and 6 suggests that the Lord's Supper as a rite was not intended to be a personal or social meal only for a special group, but a meal for the benefit and fellowship of the whole church. As it has been proposed in this thesis, the tension at the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian Church was mainly caused by the difficulty of some of the members' adapting to their new social and religious community.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of biblical, archaeological and early patristic writings follow those listed in the "Instructions for Contributors," JBL 107 (1988): 584-587. Reference to Philo texts follow the ones given in R. Radice and D. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: An Annotated Bibliography, 1937-1986* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), xxxi. Reference to classical texts follow the list in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), ix-xix. Below are abbreviations of journal, series, and reference-book titles.

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
<i>ABR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>Affirmation</i>	<i>Affirmation</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, <i>A Greek-Lexicon of New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>DPL</i>	R. P. Martin, G. Hawthorne and D. Reid (eds.), <i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i>
EDNT	H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds.), <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>Exp Tim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>

<i>Hesp</i>	<i>Hesperia</i>
<i>HibJ</i>	<i>Hibbert Journal</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBD</i>	J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer (eds.), <i>Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Joseph and Asenath</i>
<i>JBC</i>	R. E. Brown et al. (eds.), <i>The Jerome Biblical Commentary</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>NBD</i>	New Bible Dictionary
<i>NewDocs</i>	G. H. R. Horsley (ed.), <i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i>
<i>NIDNTT</i>	C. Brown (ed.), <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>Nov T</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NT</i>	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

OCD	Oxford Classical Dictionary
OT	Old Testament
POxy	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
RelSRev	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RevistB	<i>Revista Bíblica</i>
RevQ	<i>Revue de Qumrân</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SCHNT	Studia ad Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti
SE	<i>Studia Evangelica</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
Str-B	(H. Strack and) P. Billerbeck, <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i>
TDNT	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
ThRu	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
TJ	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TS	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO AND OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The apostle Paul established a Christian Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:6,10; 4:15; Acts 18) during the second missionary journey to Greece (Acts 18:11,18). As leader and founder Paul kept a continuing association with the church community there, and wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians. Paul's epistles were written to solve problems and to encourage the church members in their faith.¹ In 1 Corinthians Paul refers to a specific form of idolatry which he apparently had discussed in a previous letter. Another issue was the conflict caused by gluttony and drunkenness. As chapter three of this thesis suggests, gluttony was characteristic of the *symposia*, especially at the *eranos* dinner party. In Paul's view these gluttony and drunkenness were the main causes of factions in the church.

The apostle probably had two groups in mind, those who had their own meal and those who had nothing. In other words, as in the common practice of the *eranos*, or "potluck dinner" (a social custom instituted in classical Greece through the Roman Empire), the participants brought their own food-basket. The ones who arrived late often had neither time nor money to prepare sufficiently for themselves. This conduct was not a problem for the wealthy Gentile Christians at Corinth. In the Gentile social context, this was common behaviour.

¹A. Chapple, "Local Leadership in the Pauline Churches: Theological and Social Factors in Its Development" (Ph. D. diss., Durham University, 1984), 1ff.

In addition, there were the problems of temple banquets and food sold in the marketplace (*macellum*). These practices were a regular part of life in the Graeco-Roman city of Corinth. The eating of meat offered to idols (cultic meals) was evidently so common, no one gave it a second thought. Thus, the problem in chapter 8 to show the background of the Gentile Christians of Corinth who had been participating in such banquets and buying meat sacrificed to idols. Paul deals with this problem directly in chapters 8 and 10, and indirectly in chapter 9. Related to the above issues are the following questions: (a) What was the Corinthian attitude towards participation in table fellowship with pagans and the use of meat offered to idols? (b) Did Paul approve or disapprove of such attitudes? (c) What was Paul's answer to their question regarding εἰδωλόθυτα?

Another piece of information can be obtained from Paul's explanation of the unique situation of the church at Corinth. His first epistle indicates that the practice of the Lord's Supper, together with the worship activities, corresponds to the same practice of sacred meals, especially the *eranos* normally held in Graeco-Roman societies.² Further, the existence of αἵρέσεις and σχίσματα among the church members (1 Cor. 1:10; 11:18) was only one cause of the many problems Paul had with the Corinthians. It is possible, therefore, that some of the divisions in Corinth arose from divisions among household gatherings.

²Frequently, the patterns of Jewish religious associations are assumed to have had the greatest influence on early Christian socio-religious structures. However, a warning must be considered against the tendency to find single socio-cultural explanations for the various organizations of Christian groups throughout the Graeco-Roman world.

This dissertation addresses the problem that arose from their not having been adequately resocialised into the traditions of their newly adopted Christian religion. It seems clear that some members still participated in religious meals in the pagan temples (1 Cor. 8:10; 10:20-21). Many were invited to meals where the food served had been offered to the idols (1 Cor. 10: 27-32). Consequently, it is no surprise that Graeco-Roman social practices with regard to Greek *eranos*,³ within the context of religious societies, had a considerable impact on the structure, customs, and decorum of the Lord's meal eaten at Corinth. It may be significant to put forward the thesis that these conflicts have a social background.⁴ Consequently, understanding social distinctions and practices is an essential part of understanding the Corinthian letter.

The apostle evidently regarded the eating of idol food and participating in a banquet in a pagan temple as a much more serious problem than he had dealt with before. This matter strikes at the heart of both the Lord's Supper and the gospel tradition handed down to the Corinthian Church by Paul. These issues, as well as additional ones, will be studied as part of the whole picture of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.

³Peter Lampe, "The Corinthians Eucharistic Dinner Party: Exegesis of a Cultural Context (1 Cor. 11:17-34)," *Affirmation* 4 (1991): 1-3. "*Eranos* can be translated as 'potluck dinner,' although 'potluck' has a narrow definition as a meal where all the food brought by the participants is shared on a common table." Further discussion regarding the *eranos* meal will appear in chapters 2 and 5 of this thesis.

⁴Especially significant here is the information we can obtain from 1 Cor. 11 on the conflict at the Lord's Supper. In this chapter, Paul is silent regarding theological issues. It seems clear that the problem is of a social nature.

1.2 The Significance of the Problem

This study is significant, first of all, as a contribution to the understanding of several specific conflicts which arose in Paul's church community at Corinth. It also explores the internal social dynamics and the relationship between Paul and the church members as they dealt with those problems. This research has to consider both the character of this particular congregation and the socio-theological issue involved in the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 8, 10, and 11 clearly show that there was disagreement and factiousness (σχίσμα) among the church members because of gluttony, drunkenness, and the lack of tolerance in understanding one another's social and religious differences. These difficulties within the Corinthian congregation had led to animosity among church members, especially in regard to participation in the Lord's Supper. Thus, this investigation is significant as a study of the social, theological, and cultural conflict within the Christian Church and of Paul's way of dealing with such difficulties.

This research is significant for understanding the apostle's particular approach to socio-ethical problems, and especially Paul's response to the Corinthian dilemma regarding the Lord's Supper. The discussion is basically about interpersonal behaviour between the church members. It is important for this study to know the way Paul deals with those specific problems at Corinth.

1.3 General Introduction to this Study

The problem of the influence of sacred and social meals in the Graeco-Roman world on the Lord's Supper has not been the focus of an in-depth study. For instance, D. E. Smith's dissertation deals only with the social meal in the Graeco-Roman world, but does not touch on sacred meals in Graeco-Roman pagan religion. W. L. Willis, on the other hand, studied the pagan mystery religion meals, but does not consider social meals in the Graeco-Roman world.⁵ Besides the superficial treatments in several commentaries on social issues, there is only one series of seminal essays on the social aspect of the Lord's Supper.⁶ Although Smith's and Willis' dissertations consider many problems found in the present study, there are important differences which make the three investigations distinct and useful.

Furthermore, some of the social customs and problems (discussed in chapters 2 and 5) in the Corinthian assembly were quite similar to the ones in Graeco-Roman culture. For example, in the Corinthian Church there were problems of divisions and factions, similar to those of the ancient *symposia* and the *eranos*. These factions stemmed from competition over status issues such as place of honor, and portion or quality of food and wine. Additionally, as well as the differences in food, location, and posture, the length of time one had to eat were important. The

⁵D. E. Smith, "Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in 1 Corinthians in Comparison with Graeco-Roman Communal Meals" (Th.D. diss., Harvard, 1980); W. L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁶Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, trans. J. H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

wealthy Corinthians, after a series of exercises at the bath, arrived first at the meal, while the poor working class came later. This would explain Paul's suggestion to wait for one another (1 Cor. 11: 33, 34).

Another important point typical of the *eranos* meal is the conduct of the host and sometimes the guests. The wealthy ones did not have any problem with their consciences when they began eating before the others arrived. Nobody at a Graeco-Roman dinner party would ask the latecomers whether they had already eaten. Thus, the way the Gentile Christians behaved at Corinth did not correspond to the spirit of selflessness exemplified in Christ.

According to the Graeco-Roman “potluck” custom, each member brought his or her own food, but some came early and began to eat before the others arrived. This corresponds to the pattern found in the Christian *eranos* meal at Corinth. The Corinthian Gentile Christians simply continued to behave as a part of the Graeco-Roman society.

In his monograph, *The Social Setting of Christianity*, Theissen studies the “Social World of Early Christianity.” In four essays he considers Paul’s exchange of letters with the Corinthians. These essays contain a coherent exegetical study and give a point-by-point exposition of Theissen’s innovative, yet generally accepted, way of interpreting the social context of the New Testament. He adds that “Exegetical attention has largely concentrated on the theological dimensions of the dissension in Corinth.”⁷ But more than merely a theological controversy, this

⁷Theissen, 18f.

conflict has a social background and becomes clearer when we connect its social conditions with the theological issues in 1 Cor. 11:17ff.

The next section of this dissertation tackles the problem of meat sacrificed to idols. Barrett rightly points out that “The subject is one that raises several of the most pressing problems in the literary study of 1 Corinthians and the historical study of the life of Paul, to say nothing of important theological issues.”⁸ The problem of eating εἰδωλόθυτα occupied part of a letter written to Paul by the Christian Church at Corinth. The question is whether Paul is consistent in what he says when he rebukes the church for eating food sacrificed to idols and participating in the Lord’s Supper at the same time. It seems contradictory since Paul is against eating εἰδωλόθυτα, yet in vv. 25ff. he tells the congregation that they are free to eat anything sold in the *macellum*.

Much of the exegetical work which has been done on 1 Cor. 11:17-26 focuses on the theological dimension (especially vv.23-25). We will attempt, however, to link an exegesis of the theological and sociological issues. Very little attention has been devoted to the sociological problems involved in the practice of the Lord’s Supper in the Hellenistic Corinthian Church. Even the commentaries on the epistle (such as Barrett, Conzelmann, and Fee), because of their larger interests, have not thoroughly explored the important role of the social background.

⁸C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 35-40. Barrett says that Dr. Ehrhardt accepts Hans Lietzmann's argument that all or almost all the meat that was sold in the *macellum* was εἰδωλόθυτον, sacrificed to idols in nearby temples. This argument is not completely acceptable because H. J. Cadbury, in his article published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, “The Macellum of Corinth,” shows that “the meat may have been sold on the hoof or slaughtered in the *macellum* as well as sold already butchered or sacrificed in a temple.”

W. Marxsen tries to show in his book (*The Beginnings of Christology*), that the Christological nature of the Lord's Supper is based upon what "happens after Easter and in light of Easter." For Marxsen, the words of interpretation (*Deuteworte*) and the proclamation are part of what he calls the implicit Christology. He shows little interest in the social aspect of the controversy, but rather emphasizes the theological issues. Concerning the Christological nature of the Lord's Supper, agreement and difference with Marxsen's work will be evident in the discussions of particular issues. However, it is not my intention to follow the same kind of argument proposed by Marxsen, but rather to make a critical analysis of his work.

G. Wainwright has commented that most books on Eucharistic theology treat only three main aspects: The presence of the Lord at the sacrament, the cross in relation to the sacrificial nature of the sacrament, and the effects on the individual of participating in the communion.⁹ Furthermore, he is concerned with an element that has been neglected in previous works: The eschatological nature of the Lord's Supper.

1.4 The Limits of the Study: Materials to be Considered

A. The Purpose of This Section

The purpose of this section is to establish the passages to be considered in the study of the Pauline account of the Lord's Supper and determine the reasons for focusing on them: 1 Cor. 11:17-26; 1 Cor. 10:14-22; and 1 Cor. 8:1-13. Having

⁹G. Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 64-68.

examined the characteristics which make it reasonable to study these passages together, we will look briefly at some other passages that could have been included in this group, but for various reasons will not be considered.

B. 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

The first passage is Paul's account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:17-26. The particular characteristics of the Pauline account of the Last Supper have made it a focus of attention for many generations of scholars.¹⁰ Many different aspects of the passage as well as its relation to the Gospels have been noted. My focus is on the conflict and socio-theological tension in Corinth and the social significance of the Lord's Supper.

Paul begins by criticising the congregation in which the different parties, probably the same groups he has criticised at the beginning of this letter, broke the spirit of unity, especially when they partook of the Lord's meal (κυριακὸν δείπνον). What went wrong in the church at Corinth? Why did some members remain hungry while others were well fed and got drunk (1Cor. 11:21)? As it has been mentioned before, the Christian Church at Corinth celebrated the Eucharistic meal as a "potluck dinner" (*eranos*). This *eranos* custom was the normal practice of the Graeco-Roman dinner party of the first century C.E.¹¹ We have here a Graeco-Roman cultural and social custom that seems to explain the church members' behaviour. Gentile Christians celebrated their Eucharistic meal according to the *eranos* custom,

¹⁰Eduard Schweizer, *The Lord's Supper According to the New Testament*, trans. J.M. Davis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), iiiiff.

¹¹Lampe, 3.

each of them bringing his or her own food. Some of the rich members came first and started eating before the latecomers did. This behaviour was considered normal in Graeco-Roman society, but caused many problems for the *ekklesia* at Corinth.

The apostle also calls them (the Christians at Corinth) *σχίσματα* (factions), a term which brings attention to the leaders of the parties who were guilty of deliberate challenges to the Eucharistic teaching (extreme lack of concern for others and social favouritism) which Paul had previously (1 Cor. 11:23) handed down to the church. Paul charged them not to eat the Lord's Supper when they came together as a church, "because brotherly fellowship was absent."¹² Social differences seem to have been one of the root causes of the disorderliness of the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian Church.

In the Corinthian Church, groups rather than individuals, were involved in the social tension. The distinction was between the haves and the have-nots.¹³ The behaviour of the haves, according to Paul, was destroying and humiliating those of lesser means (1 Cor. 11:22). Furthermore, the situation was even worse when the early arrivers ate without waiting for the rest. Paul instructed them to eat at home because their behaviour was totally contradictory to the spirit of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23).

¹²A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 70ff.

¹³Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 81ff.

The Corinthian Church members needed to be reminded of the solemn nature of the Eucharistic breaking of bread, which was in great danger of being destroyed by the selfish behaviour of some of the church members. They must remember above all that the Lord's Supper commemorated the death of the Lord until He should come again (1 Cor. 11:26). Paul's aim for the Corinthian Church was social integration within the community's celebration of the Lord's Supper.

C. 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

In 1 Cor. 10:14-22, Paul starts by warning the Corinthians against εἰδωλολατρία. Although the issue of eating sacrificial meat is found first in chapter 8, it seems to have been raised by the congregation in a letter written to Paul. This passage differs from 1 Cor. 10:1-13, both in content and emphasis. Paul no longer uses typology from the Old Testament. Grammatically, διόπερ links vv. 14ff. with what precedes in 1 Cor. 10.¹⁴ Paul's warning in 10:14 is in the imperative: φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας. With this verse, Paul definitely brings to an end the long argument with the Corinthians that began in 8:1, related to their attending temple banquets. The reason for Paul's restriction is twofold. First, he understands the sacred meal as "fellowship" (κοινωνία), the only way the believers share in the worship of God who was thought to be present. Second, Paul believes, based on the Old Testament, that idolatry is "a locus of the demonic."¹⁵

¹⁴Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second Revision, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 198. They observe that this contraction is not used very often.

¹⁵Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 463. "The κοινωνία / κοινωνός word group is obviously the key both to the presuppositional examples in vv. 16-18 (the Lord's table; the Jewish sacrificial meals) and to the description of the pagan meals in vv. 20-21."

The answer given by Paul in these passages to the problem of εἰδωλολατρία is closely related to κοινωνία. In one instance of κοινωνία, Paul points to the Lord's Supper by quoting an early Christian tradition. One must ask about pre-Pauline traditions and the Pauline interpretation of the Christian meal. How does Paul understand the Lord's Supper, and what is the importance of referring to it here? One should ask also about the Pauline description of the pagan and Jewish meals. How significant are these meals in his argument? What was the problem with this meal and how does Paul address it here?¹⁶ Several questions are relevant to this study: What harm could there be in attending these feasts? Does Paul think that food sacrificed to idols is anything or that an idol is anything? (1 Cor. 10:19). Paul's response seems to be inconsistent. "No, but what the heathen sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; I do not want you to be partners with demons." Paul is in no doubt as to the existence and bad influence of these powers;¹⁷ to participate in their worship and cultic meals is to lay oneself open to their control.

Furthermore, how is it possible to have κοινωνία both with Christ and with demons? To eat at the table of demons (pagan gods) is to make a laughing-stock of the Lord's Supper. Higgins rightly comments that the Lord has a table and a cup, and by participating at his table believers enter into close communion with the Lord.¹⁸

¹⁶Svere Aalen, "Das Abendmahl als Opfermahl in Neuen Testament," *NovT* 6 (1963): 128-143. He says that one must differentiate three main topics in dealing with pagan meals: (1) Paul's understanding of pagan cult meals, (2) Paul's theological explanation of such meals, and (3) the parallels between such meals and the Christian meal.

¹⁷Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 2:8; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 6:11f; Col. 2:8.

¹⁸Higgins, 68.

D. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

The major issue that begins with 8:1 and continues through 11:1, the question of the legitimacy of eating “idol food,”¹⁹ is presumably connected to the admonition in 1 Cor. 5:10-11 against associating with “idolaters.”²⁰ If this is the case, eating “meat sacrificed to the pagan idols” refers to a specific form of idolatry which the apostle mentioned in his former letter.²¹ It seems probable that the Corinthians, in their letter to Paul, had not taken into consideration Paul’s earlier admonition.

Some significant questions arise in the study of 1 Corinthians 8: 1-13: (1) What happened in the Corinthian Church regarding the eating of food offered to idols? (2) How did this problem affect the congregation at Corinth? (3) What was the message sent to Paul about this in their letter to him? (4) What was Paul’s response and what advice did he give them? (5) What relationship does chapter 8 have to the discussion in chapters 9 and 10? Answers to these questions must be taken from implications in 1 Corinthians 8-10. However, Fee points out that not everyone is in agreement regarding the nature of the problem.²² The classical answer is that Paul is replying to an internal conflict in Corinth between the “weak”

¹⁹J. Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987), 161f. Gk. εἰδωλόθυτα (lit. “things sacrificed to idols”).

²⁰The term εἰδωλολατρίαι appears in 1 Cor. 5:10, 10:7, and as a final warning in 1 Cor. 10:14: φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας.

²¹J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origins of 1 Corinthians* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), 115-149.

²²Fee, 358-360.

and the “strong” members over the inquiry about food sacrificed to idols and sold in the temple market. For the “strong,” eating such food does not pose any problem (1 Cor. 8:7-13); some, perhaps, even attended the cultic meals at the temples (1 Cor. 8:10, 11; 10:14-22). Hence, the conflict in perception and consciousness with regard to idol and idol meal also needs to be understood as a sociological problem.

On the other hand, for the “weak” eating meat sacrificed to idols is a matter of conscience. The basic problem, then, is food sold in the market. Paul answers by first addressing the “strong” and mentioning the stumbling block principle (1 Cor. 8:1-13; cf. 1 Cor. 10:30-11:1). In 1 Cor. 10:23-29, Paul seems to be encouraging the “weak” to be open-minded. In chapter 9, Paul gives his own example of giving up his freedom for the sake of others. As an aside, Paul also prohibits the attendance at pagan temples in 1 Cor. 10:14-22. This passage, like the previous two, is introduced by several problems in the Corinthian Church. In contrast to what Hurd²³ has said, the Corinthians wrote a letter to Paul asking his advice and guidance on the matter of idol food.

The problem was brought to Paul’s attention because of the behaviour of the “strong.” It thus appears that Paul was dealing with more than a single point of view at Corinth. Further, scholars have long recognised the presence of more than one group (“weak” and “strong”) and the social problem between the rich (strong) and the poor (weak) in the Christian Church at Corinth.

²³Hurd, 147. He argues that, first, “the Corinthians were primarily voicing an objection to the subject to Paul, and were not asking for guidance from him;” second, “The Corinthian’s objections stem from a single point of view at Corinth opposed in some degree to Paul’s. There was not a ‘weak’ or ‘scandalized’ second party.”

1.5 Other Texts Relevant to This Thesis

One might wonder whether other passages in the *Corpus Paulinum* should also be included in this group. Certainly, other Pauline texts are seldom mentioned in the same frequency as the three we have looked at. One important passage which deserves comment is 1 Cor. 5:6-8. This text contains a very relevant allusion to the Eucharist. As the Jews before the Passover feast remove all traces of leaven from their homes, Paul tells the believers of the Corinthian Church to remove from among them the leaven of evil. Like the Israelites, the Corinthians are to clear away all the impurities of their former pagan life. It has been suggested that the use of Passover terminology in this text is due to the nearness of the Passover.²⁴

Other texts which deal with the subject of sacrificial meat (such as Acts 15, 21 and Rev. 2) will not be studied, but will occasionally be mentioned. The Christian breaking of bread in Acts will also be marginally studied. Passages such as Romans 14 and 15, however, will be considered whenever that discussion helps us to clarify 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and 11. We will not deal with Jewish food regulations *per se*. Indeed, not even all the issues raised in 1 Corinthians itself can be studied, although these will be taken into consideration insofar as they impinge on the study of chapters 8, 10 and 11.

²⁴Higgins, 68-70.

CHAPTER 2

SACRED MEALS IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD AND THEIR POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON THE PAULINE LORD'S SUPPER

Many claims have been made by scholars early this century that the Hellenistic pagan religions influenced the primitive Christian Church's practice of the Lord's Supper. Besides introducing those claims, this chapter overviews the four main mystery religions¹ and the influence of mystery religions in Paul's background, and gives a brief introduction on Jewish meals, the Christian sacred meal, and the alleged similarities between the Lord's Supper and pagan meals.

2.1 Introduction

The investigation of sacred meals in the mystery religions has occupied a significant place in Graeco-Roman and early Christianity studies. Other than Judaism and Christianity, the most persuasive religions in the Graeco-Roman world were the "mystery religions." The relationship between Christianity and the mysteries is a highly controversial issue. There are two sides to the investigation: (1) the point of contention, and (2) a description of the evidence to be considered.

It is the general view that Christianity borrowed religious terminology and concepts from the Hellenistic world. A dominant movement in advancing such presuppositions was the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*.² This theory was deduced

¹These pagan religions are named mystery religions because of their use of secret ceremonies that were thought to bring their initiates such benefits as "salvation."

²Ronald H. Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks* (Richardson: Probe Books, 1992), 115-199. Allegations like these were often encountered in scholarly publications from around 1890 to 1930

from noting the use of Hellenistic Jewish terms such as εὐαγγέλιον, σωτήρ, and ἐπιφάνεια, and others such as, πλήρωμα (a neutral term until Pauline literature), μυστήριον (used simply as "secret"), ἐπόπτης, παλιγγενεσία, and ἔμβατεύω.³ Furthermore, some authors have defended the idea that Paul, thus Christianity, was deeply affected by mystery religions. Even G. H. C. MacGregor and A. C. Purdy, strong defenders of an early Christian syncretism, find little substance in this line of argument. They point out that,

They are in vocabulary and outward form rather than essential thought and content. The Mysteries and Christianity, being products of the same age, were almost certain to use the same forms of expression. But there is no greater fallacy than to assume that because Christianity took over, or developed independently, a number of terms and rites familiar also to the Mysteries, the thought and experience symbolized in them are equally comparable to, and do not entirely transcend, the pagan analogy.⁴

Martin Hengel, a critic of syncretism, argues that the language of the mystery religions were used independently of the practice of the religions. Hengel concludes that the influence of the mystery religions in the New Testament does not mean direct dependence on their terminology.⁵ Expressing his uncertainty about presumed linguistic parallelism between Paul and the mystery cults, A. D. Nock wrote, "It is not clear that Paul's linguistic practice points to first-hand knowledge of the mysteries, still less to the reading of theological literature about them."⁶ It may appear that Paul used words common to the followers of mystery religions, but as

and the 1940s onward. "The two most influential members of this school were German New Testament scholar Wilhelm Bousset and German classicist and historian Richard Reitzenstein."

³A. D. Nock, "The Vocabulary of the New Testament," *JBL* 52 (1933): 131-139.

⁴G. H. C. MacGregor and A. C. Purdy, *Jew and Greek: Tutors Unto Christ* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1937), 236.

⁵Martin Hengel, *The Son of God*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), 28.

⁶A. D. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 183.

Ralph P. Martin points out, "he gave this language a content of his own."⁷ It is clear that nothing about the vocabulary of the New Testament in general, or the writings of Paul in particular, focuses us to conclude that any signs of a mystery influence appear in the language of the New Testament. In view of the scarce and frequently ambiguous evidence, scholars have arrived at divergent conclusions. These evidences were already raised earlier by Albert Schweitzer, and he argued that it was only from the early second century onwards that we find mysteries in wide currency in the Roman Empire; therefore, only then was the Greek influence felt transforming a universal cult into what is known as mystery religions.⁸

There are some scholars who believe that outside influence came to bear upon primitive Christianity only minimally. Bruce M. Metzger, however, observes that some "are disposed to believe not only that the amount of influence was relatively large but also that it made itself felt in the formulation of central and crucial doctrines and rites of the church."⁹ Besides, it would be a mistake to think that the mystery religions were the only demonstration of the religious spirit in the orient or the eastern part of the Roman Empire.¹⁰ The wide divergence of views is due,

⁷Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, 2 vols. (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978), II, 39. He further adds that, "At decisive points the Christian gospel stands diametrically opposed to the claims and procedures of the Hellenistic mysteries."

⁸Albert Schweitzer, *Paul and His Interpreters*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 191f. This much, however, is certain: "Paul cannot have known the mystery-religions in the form in which they are known to us, because in this fully developed form they did not yet exist."

⁹Bruce M. Metzger, "Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," *HTR* 48 (1955): 1-20.

¹⁰Nash, 115. "Each region of the Mediterranean world seems to have produced its own mystery religion. Out of Greece came the cults of Demeter and Dionysus, as well as their later developments, the Eleusinian and Orphic mystery religions. Asia Minor (more specifically, the region known as Phrygia) gave birth to the cult of Cybele and Attis. The cult of Isis and Osiris (later Serapis) originated in Egypt, while Syria and Palestine saw the rise of the cult of Adonis. Finally, Persia (Iran) was a leading early locale for the cult of Mithras."

perhaps in part, to differences in scholars' methods of interpreting the data and the way scholars interpret it.¹¹

In ancient times, especially during the Hellenistic period, mystery religions held cultic meals. Regardless of the difficulty of resolving the meaning of these mystery meals, some scholars (Heitmüller, Reitzenstein, Bousset, Bultmann, and others) believe that these meals are very important. They enlighten our understanding of the meals that appear in the New Testament. For instance, it has been suggested that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 draws a parallel between the Lord's Supper, which he says unites Christians to Christ, and these meals. However, we need to dig below the surface evidence and ask the most elementary questions. First, what did the pagan customs mean? And second, what did sacred meals in the different mystery cults mean?

It is likely that early Christians understood the Lord's Supper as a perpetuation of an ancient cultic idea rather than a mystery-religion rite. However, it has been argued that the facts about the sacramental meals in the mystery religions are both meagre and hard to explain.¹² It is not an eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 11; he always speaks only of eating and drinking the bread and the cup. The apostle assumes that this eating and drinking, somehow or other, maintains a communion with the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 10:16, 17). Indeed, neither Paul nor the early Christian communities

¹¹I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 27. Pagan meals are unlikely to have influenced the practice of Jesus himself. Although we must never forget that the Jews were a minority group in their own land and were surrounded by pagan religions, there is nothing that would suggest that Jesus himself was influenced by anything other than Judaism. But the situation could well have been different once the church moved out into the pagan world and its members began to include former pagans.

¹²H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 256ff.

under his influence, held that the body and blood of the Lord was partaken of at the Supper.

In this chapter, we will consider the possible influence of the sacred meals on the Lord's Supper. The single question is how influential the mystery religions really were upon the cultic forms of the early Christian church at Corinth. The dialogue between the apostle Paul and his Corinthian inquirers involves normal practices of Hellenistic social life (especially the Greek *eranos* and meals which usually followed a sacrifice). In ancient times these meals were customarily part of a sacrifice in the temple to the gods. Before one can understand the Corinthians' dialogue with Paul, it is necessary to understand the practices in the social and cultural circumstances echoed in 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and 11 regarding the relationship of sacrifice and dining, to the Lord's meal.

A. The Sacrificial Meal

The Hellenistic-Roman world practised bloodless and animal sacrifices over a period of many years. David Gill observes that bloodless offerings of various kinds of food are a common feature of Greek sacrifice at all periods. The Greeks thought of them as gifts for the gods.¹³ The act of deposition of food also had an important role in the majority of bloody sacrifices (such as the *thusia*). In contrast, the god and the worshippers both participated in the food offered on the altar. The Greeks called this kind of offering to the god *trapezomata*.¹⁴ The sacrifice and the

¹³David Gill, "Trapezomata: A Neglected Aspect of Greek Sacrifice," *HTR* 67 (1974): 117-137. "The gift was delivered by simply putting it in a place, usually a shrine, where the god was present to receive it. This form of consecration has been given the appropriate technical name of 'deposition,' to distinguish it from other methods of consecrating food-offerings to the gods such as burning them or simply throwing them away."

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 118-117.

banquet are complementary parts of one ceremony. An animal was slaughtered, the god's portion was burned on the altar, and the worshippers ate the rest. Portions were also set apart for the deity and for the priest or priestess. The rest of the meat was distributed to those participating in the festival, being cooked and eaten in the temple's precincts.¹⁵ A portion was also assigned to the god and set aside (not burnt) on a special table.

The practice of such meals in the Graeco-Roman world raises the difficult question of the meaning of both the sacrifice and the meal itself. The fact is that in the Homeric poems, sacrifice was essentially for propitiation of the deity; furthermore, primitive sacrificial objects were believed to be charged with the deity.¹⁶ From this viewpoint, the idea of the cultic meal would surely become very significant. To eat together with the deity was taken as a kind of communion, and if the god was thought to be present at the meal, this meal was considered a sacred meal.¹⁷

The Dionysus cult tradition held that in eating the sacred meal the worshipper was participating with the gods. The Thracian version of this cult held the same view.¹⁸ Attempts have been made to discover a sacramental importance in the Dionysiac-Orphic cults, but Albrecht Dieterich suggests that our understanding of the evidence is altogether deficient. There are occasional hints of the idea that the victim

¹⁵J. P. Kane, "The Mithraic Cult Meal and Its Greek and Roman Environment," ed. J. R. Hinnells (*Mithraic Studies II*: Manchester 1975), 327.

¹⁶Lewis R. Farnell, "Sacrificial Communion in Greek Religion," *The Hibbert Journal*, 2 (1904): 308, 312-313.

¹⁷Herbert J. Rose, "Sacred Meals," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. M. Cay, et al. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1949), 546.

¹⁸Farnell, 313.

was identified with the god himself.¹⁹ Some believe that by the period of the later Roman Empire this primitive idea was giving way to a higher concept. Whether this magical understanding was held in the time of Paul is questionable. Kennedy and Cumont favour the view that the worshippers just shared the meal with the god. The old worshipper did not question the difference between the magical and the spiritual significance of the sacrificial meal.²⁰

It was therefore quite natural that the common meal, in which union with the powers was sought, should develop into a banquet at which the powers were honoured guests, or into a sumptuous meal given entirely to them and not even shared by the devotees. Thus would easily arise the concept of sending food to them; the only known method was to sublimate it into smoke which would obviously go up to the deities and satisfy their wants. Thus can we understand the very name given by ancient Greeks to these powers, *theoi*, which by many scholars is derived from the root *thu* (smoke); *thuein* would mean to make smoke and *theoi* would be receivers of smoke.²¹

Despite the fact that the Graeco-Roman sacrificial ritual is often difficult to interpret, most of the time a meal was not part of the ceremony. There are several ways in which sharing food with the deity was accomplished in the sacrificial rite, each of which presents its own problem of interpretation. D. E. Smith keenly points out that "the banquet is such an inherent part of Greek sacrificial ritual that many of the terms for sacrifice also imply a feast as well."²² The relationship of the term *θυσία* with a meal can be seen in this phrase from Plato: *θυσίαν ποιουμένου καὶ ἐστιῶντος* "when offering a sacrifice and feasting." Although there are some

¹⁹Albrecht Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, reimprinted ed., (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1966), 105. See also Kennedy, 257.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 201.

²¹Royden K. Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1953), 24.

²²Smith, "Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals, 74-100. For instance, "the term *θύειν*, which originally designated a sacrifice by fire, came to stand in a general sense for the sacrificial rite as a whole, thus including, besides the burning, the libation (*σπένδειν*), the slaughter (*σφάζειν*), and the feast (*ἐστία*). *θύειν*, however, could not be substituted for any of these terms except *ἐστία*."

modifications noted, the sacrifices had a fairly standard form from pre-Homeric times.²³

According to R. K. Yerkes in the Greek *thusia*, three things took place:

1. The preparation (lustration, barley grains ceremony, prayers, casting the hair from the animal in the fire, slaying and flaying the victim, procession).
2. The *thusia* proper (burning of the god's portion, libation, eating of the *splagchna*).
3. The feast (roasting the victim, the banquet libation, music and dancing).²⁴

From the description given by Yerkes, it is clear that the communal meals were a major aspect of Greek sacrifice. In Homer's time and even before, the meal seems to have been at least as important as the offering upon the altar.²⁵ The sacrifice made to the gods was good for both the worshipper and the god, since the worshipper received the flesh from the sacrifice. Before turning to a more detailed study of the pagan sacramental cultic meals, we will consider briefly the significance of pagan and Christian cultic meals.

²³Plato *Symp* 174c. In the context, a sacrifice ritual in the Homeric period is being described, but the terminology is clearly appropriate to Plato's own time.

²⁴Yerkes, 99-102.

²⁵Homer *Odyssey* 24:212ff. See also W. L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 9. For instance, the returning Odysseus tells his servant: "Do you now go within the well-built house, and straightway slay for dinner the best of the swine." In the present study, when classical sources are quoted, the texts and translations are taken from the Loeb series unless otherwise indicated.

B. The Significance of the Cultic Meals

The exact meaning of the pagan cultic meals for those who participated is very important and yet very difficult to determine. In the mystery religion cults there were sacred meals, but our curiosity as to their significance receives no satisfaction.²⁶ A great deal of what is known of cultic meals comes from archaeological remains and although these do witness to the existence of such sacred meals, they give limited information on the significance of the meals. The widespread references in literary remains also give information that can only be understood by implication. The result is that major contentions exist among scholars about the proper way of interpreting the data. According to G. H. R. Horsley, in spite of the fact of disagreement earlier in the century, there is now a feeling of agreement that these feasts had a basically religious character.²⁷

One common element between these cults and the Lord's Supper is the fellowship meal, which is thought to bring unity among the participants. The existence of cultic meals in ancient times and in the times extending beyond those of the New Testament is undeniable. On some occasions the gods were considered to be the hosts, as it is shown in several of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. "The exegete requests you to dine in the (temple of) Demeter today, which is the 9th, beginning at the 7th hour (1 p.m.)."²⁸ A comparable invitation to dine "at the table of lord Serapis" is found in at least three other papyri.²⁹

²⁶Nock, *Early Gentile*, 74.

²⁷G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, vol. 5 (Macquarie: Macquarie University, 1981), 6.

²⁸Oxyrhynchus Papyri 1485 in Bernard P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898-1916), 12.

²⁹Oxyrhynchus Papyri 110, 523, 1484, and 1755. *Ibid.*, I, 177; III, 260; XII, 244; XIV, 180. It is not clear in papyrus 1755 whether Apion is inviting the person to his own home or to the temple itself. These papyri date from the second or third century A.D.

The Jewish historian Josephus also mentions a cunning plot by the priests of Isis to entice Pauline to attend the temple and dine with the god Anubis and share his bed.³⁰ There are references in other texts to the idea that the deity was considered the guest at the meal. The *Iovis Epulum* became a big meal in which the worshippers were serving the god with food and invited the Capitoline Trinity to participate in it.³¹ These texts show the importance of the cultic meal in pagan worship. Every sacrifice was followed by a meal.³² The New Testament mentions not only wedding feasts and social gatherings for dinner, but pagan cultic meals as well.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian congregation, obviously mentions a cultic meal when he offers some ethical advice in regard to the foods eaten “at the table in an idol’s temple” (1 Cor 8:10-13; cf. 1 Cor 10:21, 27-30). In these instances, of course, the cultic meals were not used as a metaphor, but the meal was a crucial problem which the Corinthian church members had to consider.³³ From the context (1 Cor. 10:27) it seems clear that some of the Corinthian church members often were invited to such social meals by the pagans who were used to eating meat sacrificed to idols as a custom in their banquets.

In the beginning both of the Christian sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) were considered to be primarily *dona data*, namely blessings conveyed to

³⁰Josephus *Ant* XVIII.iii. 4 (65-80).

³¹Samuel Angus, *The Mystery Religions and Christianity: A Study in the Religious Background of Early Christianity* (London: John Murray, 1925), 128.

³²H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther*, enl. ed. W. G. Kümmel (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1949), 49.

³³Chan-Hie Kim, “The Papyrus Invitation,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 391ff.

those who by nature were unfit to participate in the new order inaugurated by the person and work of Jesus Christ.³⁴ By contrast, pagan rites conveyed their benefits *ex opere operato* by "the liberating or creating of an immortal element in the individual with a view to the hereafter, but with no effective change of the moral self for the purposes of living."³⁵ In early Christianity, the Lord's Supper, like the rite of baptism, was understood as a sacrament in the sense of the mystery religions.³⁶

Nevertheless, in the search for parallels between the pagan meals and the Christian meal, various scholars (even before Bultmann), notably Dieterich and Heitmüller,³⁷ have gathered evidence from the most primitive phases of religion to portray the idea of communion with the god through feeding upon him. They went so far as to claim that they found parallels between the Aztecs of Mexico and the old Egyptians whose rites were preserved in the texts from the pyramids.

In contrast, to establish the efficacy of their theories it would be necessary to show first, that this view survived in the Hellenistic world of early Christianity and, second, that it is a part of Paul's concept of the Lord's Supper. It is certainly far more plausible to say that any influence which these cults exerted on the early Christian church came not from their hidden ceremonies and beliefs but from their public rites and affirmations and from those aspects of their ideology which had

³⁴Metzger, 13ff.

³⁵A. D. Nock, "Mystery," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* XI, (1937): 174.

³⁶R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1978), 148f. He points out that "the idea of communion brought about by the sacramental meal is in itself not a specific idea of the mysteries, but is widespread in primitive and classic cults. But in the mysteries it plays a special role; in them it is communion with a once dead and risen deity, in whose fate the partaker receives a share through the sacramental meal, as we know from the mysteries of Attis and Mithra. Paul himself shows that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper stands in this context in the history of religions."

³⁷W. Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1917), 40. See also Kennedy, 257-259.

become part of the common practice of the Graeco-Roman world.³⁸ It seems so easy to find common conceptions here, in view of the fact that in both cases cultic meals and ceremonial cleansing had a sacramental value. But, on a closer examination, the similarity is of a very general character.

C. The "Table of the Lord" or "Table of Demons"

The expressions *τραπέζης Κυρίου* and *τραπέζης δαιμονίων* are used in 1 Cor 10:21. The issue of eating food sacrificed to idols is the basic dilemma to which Paul is responding throughout 1 Cor. 8:10 and 10:1-22. The common explanation is that Paul is responding to an internal conflict in Corinth between the "weak" and the "strong" over the issue of food sold in the marketplace.³⁹ One of the problems is Paul's inconsistency in discussing the subject of *ειδωλόθυτα*. Also C. K. Barrett wonders about the way Paul approached the topic of food offered to idols and food sold in the marketplace.⁴⁰

Attending the pagan temples is the real issue, and this is supported by the fact that the eating of cultic-meals was a customary part of the worship of idols in ancient

³⁸A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1987), 158-160.

³⁹Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 358. Gk. *ειδωλόθυτα* (lit. "things sacrificed to the idols"). "This word comes from Hellenistic Judaism; in 10:28 Paul uses the expression *ιερόθυτα* ('sacred food'). What was sacrificed became part of the meal in the pagan temples and shrines; what was left over from the 'god's table' was often sold in the market place. Jews were absolutely forbidden to eat such food. See m. Abod. Zar. 2.3: "Flesh that is entering in into an idol is permitted, but what comes forth is forbidden."

⁴⁰C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 40. The discussion raises a number of problems: "in addition to linguistic and exegetical cruces there are the questions, first, why chapter 9 should intrude between the two treatments of the subject in chapters 8 and 10, and, secondly, whether Paul is consistent in what he says in the various places where the eating of *ειδωλόθυτα* is discussed. The subject is one that raises several of the most pressing problems in the literary study of 1 Corinthians and the historical study of the life of Paul, to say nothing of important theological issues."

times. This was true not only for the nations adjacent to Israel,⁴¹ but for Israel itself.⁴² In Paul's time at Corinth, such cultic meals were still the usual practice at several kinds of state festivals and private meals.⁴³

Paul presumably uses those terms to denote the table of the god found in pagan temples. The use of the term *table* was a standard phrase for Greek sacrifice, but has not received adequate attention in studies of Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians.⁴⁴ In the Graeco-Roman sacrificial system, the meat for the sacrifice was divided into three parts: The preparation, the sacrifice proper, and the feast.⁴⁵ The meat of the sacrifices supposedly was divided into three main portions: The one burned before the god, one apportioned to the worshippers, and one placed on the "table of the god," which was tended by cultic ministrants, but also eaten by the worshippers.⁴⁶

The importance of these meals has been debated, but they most likely included a combination of sacred and social factors. The deities were thought to be present since the meals were dedicated and sacrificed to their honour; nevertheless, the meals were also social events for the participants.⁴⁷ The majority of the Gentiles

⁴¹For instance, the Canaanites, see Judg. 9:27; for the Egyptian idolatry and other practices, see Exod. 32:6; for Moab, see Num. 25:1-2; and for Babylon, Dan. 5:1-5.

⁴²Loci classici are: Deut. 14:22-26; Exod. 24:11; 1 Sam. 9:13; 1 Kgs. 1:25; and Hos. 8:13.

⁴³Fee, *The First Epistle*, 360-362.

⁴⁴Willis, *Idol Meat*, 15.

⁴⁵Yerkes, 99-100.

⁴⁶Gill, 117-119.

⁴⁷Horsley, *New Documents*, 8.

who became Christians at Corinth had attended such meals all their lives; this was like a restaurant in ancient times.⁴⁸

As mentioned before, the portion of the sacrifice which was placed on the "table of the god" was different from what was put on the altar. It is possible to draw a much fuller portrait of these tables and their operation from sacred laws and cult inscriptions. The food on the table of the god was treated in the same manner as the portions offered for the sacrifices. The table was cared for by some of the cultic personnel such as the *epinoletai*, the priests, the *archon*, and the *mesogeioi*.⁴⁹ In many circumstances the priests in charge obtained this portion dedicated to the god in addition to their own share. The origin of the concept of the table of the god is not clear. This idea came from an awareness that the deity actually received a meagre portion of the *thusia*, and so was granted an additional portion at the following sacred meal.⁵⁰

The cult table would have been a probable source for meat sold in the marketplace.⁵¹ Like the pagans, some Gentile Christians saw nothing wrong in buying and eating meat at the pagan market place or by an invitation of a pagan neighbour. But we cannot think that Paul had changed his habits of a lifetime, nor is

⁴⁸Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), 279. He also mentions the case when a Christian was invited to participate in such a meal, which was the common practice in those days. "The Christian guest was encouraged to eat it without any fear of defilement; but how was he to return the hospitality received? He could not, of course, purchase sacrificial meat; but was there any other than sacrificial meat on offer in ancient Greek and Roman towns? Were there any secular butchers? H. Lietzmann answered it quite unconditionally, 'that the slaughtering of all animals was seen as a sacrifice' in New Testament times. By and large this answer is correct."

⁴⁹Gill, 126.

⁵⁰Ibid., 135.

⁵¹A. D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 597.

there reason to assume that, as a Christian, he thought in a completely new way about idolatry. If Paul no longer lived in harmony with the "strictest sect of our religion as a Pharisee," this does not mean that he gave up all his Jewish beliefs.⁵² The dilemmas between the apostle Paul and the Corinthian Church members involved "sacrificial meat" (εἰδωλόθυτον) and "eating at the table of demons" (τραπέζαι δαιμονίων). But Paul does not merely want them to avoid being partakers of the τραπέζη δαιμονίων: He says, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demons; you cannot share at the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:21). This echoes the language of vv. 16b-17 where the "focus is on the straight dimension of the table."⁵³

Some of the Corinthians may have considered the pagan cultic meals as social celebrations, nonworshipful occasions, but Paul insists that their choice is very distinct between the Lord's table or the demon's table. Furthermore, such eating is simply incompatible with Christianity. The main concept in the mystery religion meal and especially the sacrificial meal, is more than an occasion of table-fellowship over which the deity leads or to which the god is summoned. Apparently Paul's view is that the Lord's Supper involves more than mere symbols. There seems to be some sort of real spiritual communion with Christ. To participate at the table for the Christian meal was to have fellowship with Christ and his body (10:16-17).⁵⁴ Cultic meal participants, on the contrary, became partners with demons, an intolerable matter for Paul.

⁵²Barrett, *Essay on Paul*, 51.

⁵³Fee, *The First Epistle*, 472-474.

⁵⁴Gordon Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10," *Bib* 61 (1980): 172-197.

2.2 Pagan Sacred Meals in the Graeco-Roman World

In imperial times there were many mystery cults. Some scholars have suggested that the view of a sacramental meal was advanced in these mystery cults. A. D. Nock, who is quite suspicious of the sacramental interpretation, seems to accept the idea of a sacramental conception in the mystery cults.⁵⁵ This study will only consider the four most important mystery cults to ascertain any influence they may have had on the Lord's Meal: The mystery cults at Eleusis, Dionysus, Mithras, and Isis-Serapis.

A. The Mystery Cult At Eleusis

Eleusis is near Corinth and Athens. Eleusinian worship is mostly agricultural. The Eleusian mysteries involve two goddesses, Demeter the grain goddess and her daughter Persephone. According to Euripides, the followers celebrated the autumn festival because Kore came back from the netherworld of Demeter. *Telesterion*, the Hall of Initiation was the site where the hierophant revealed holy secrets. Demeter gave grain and Kore gave happiness after life to their followers. Euripides shows also how identical Cybele and Kore Dionysus were to Demeter and Kore in dance and ecstasy.⁵⁶ Even Plato, who was not generally in favour of such cults, had only words of respect for the Eleusinian mysteries (Demeter, Kore-Persephone) which were among the most highly regarded cults of ancient times. Their influence extended far beyond Eleusis and Athens. E. Ferguson observes that "Eleusinian mysteries are central to this unit because they were the most famous of the Greek mysteries and appear to have exercised a

⁵⁵Nock, *Early Gentile*, 74-75.

⁵⁶Euripides *Bacc.* 58.

formative influence on the mysteries of the eastern cults. The rites had originally been the property of one family at Eleusis and then became open to the town's citizens."⁵⁷ The countersign which the initiate at Eleusis had to say was, according to Clement, "I have fasted, I have drunk the *Kykeon* (a kind of porridge made with milk), I have taken (the secret object) from the box, I performed the act, I put the thing in the basket and out of the basket into the box."⁵⁸ The meaning of the drinking of the *Kykeon* is unknown. It seems it was an acquisition of the fruits of the earth in honour of the deity who provided them.

George Mylonas objects to the rendition of the translation of Hesiod's Homeric Hymn to Zeus (δεξαμένη δ' ὀσίης ἔνεκεν πολυπότνια Δῆω) such as Evelyn White's, "so the great queen Deo received it to observe the sacrament" or Allen and Sikes', "to observe the rite."⁵⁹ Every year the Eleusinian mysteries celebrated a festival which included a meal as well as other rites often considered to be sacramental in character. Finally, after an entire year of probation, the initiate gained admission to the highest level, which included the right to view the secret contents of a sacred ark.

There are many interpretations of these events, and the exact answers to questions raised are impossible to give because of the scant evidence.⁶⁰ There were several sacrifices in the worship of Demeter, Kore, and other gods. The sacrifices were not secret, but were public acts in Athens on behalf of the city and its

⁵⁷E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 200.

⁵⁸Clement *Protr* ii.16, 18.

⁵⁹George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: University Press, 1961), 224-226. He believes that the drinking of the *Kykeon* was an act of religious memory, but implied no sacramental or mystical significance.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 238-241.

residents.⁶¹ From what is known, the rites at Eleusis were essentially something observed. There is no stress on either sacrifices or meals, although surely both events occurred. Furthermore, in the Eleusinian mysteries there was no “table-fellowship”⁶² nor was the rite continually repeated. We may observe that there is not enough proof to use the Eleusinian cultic meal as the pattern of the Lord’s meal.

B. The Mystery Cult of Dionysus

Dionysus was the god of wine and of animal life. The Dionysiac cults were entirely new mysteries of Greek origin that extended widely in the Hellenistic-Roman world. In general, the state controlled their practice and their associations. The feast was not restricted to any specific locality. The cults were widespread in Asia Minor and the Greek islands, but also were found in Egypt and Italy. In order to have communion with their god the worshippers of Dionysus (called Bacchants) drank wine until they became completely intoxicated. Another aspect of their rites was the feast of raw flesh. By eating their god, who was apparently embodied in the animal they had torn apart, they thought they reached a state of divine possession that made them divine as well. G. E. Mylonas clearly observes that:

The divine union, the contact with the divinity, marked the beginning of a new life for the initiate. He became a superior human being. God's own, who, thereafter, lived a dynamic, a Dionysian life. And since Dionysus was not only the Lord of Life but also of Death, the devotee believed that his union with God would continue even after death, that even immortality was within his grasp, since his patron God had attained it, that the joy and exaltation he experienced during his initiation was but a foretaste of the bliss to be experienced both in his life and after death.⁶³

⁶¹Willis, *Idol Meat*, 32.

⁶²Metzger, 14.

⁶³G. E. Mylonas, "Mystery Religions of Greece," in *Ancient Religions*, ed. Vergilius T. A Fern (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 176.

This evidence has been used to prove that there was a meal in which the god himself, incarnated in a wild animal (normally a bull), was eaten. Willis rightly observes that "even here, one must remain cautious and not assume what has been hypothesized is thereby proven."⁶⁴ The primitive allusions to the Dionysiac cults are different. The classic account of Dionysiac religion however is Euripides' tragedy, the *Bacchae* ("Bacchant Women"). Euripides' play conveys the abhorrence with which much of respectable society viewed these seemingly barbaric practices, but it also conveys the compelling appeal of this religion, especially for women--its promise of blessed happiness, of contact with elemental forces, of ecstasy, of possession by the gods.⁶⁵

The unique characteristic and meaning of the so-called *omophagia* (the meal of raw flesh) of the primitive Dionysiac rite is hotly debated, especially the significance of the term *omophagia*. The orgiastic worship of Dionysus viewed in the *Bacchae* has a basis in genuine cultic practices.⁶⁶ In the worship of Dionysus, the so-called *omophagia* was a rite in which live, wild animals were torn to pieces and eaten raw--doubtlessly a sacramental meal in which one sought to become one with the god who was believed to appear as a wild animal.⁶⁷ It is known that because of its savagery and its ecstatic rites, this form of the cult of Dionysus was rejected in Greece, but was nevertheless successful in some circles. L. R. Farnell concludes about the *omophagia* :

⁶⁴Willis, *Idol Meat*, 23f.

⁶⁵Euripides *Bacchae* 64-168. See also David G. Rice and J. E. Stambaugh, *Sources for the Study of Greek Religion* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1979), 195-197. "It portrays the power of the secret rites in which the devout danced in Dionysus' honour, often in winter or mountain heights, and tore animals apart in order to consume the raw flesh and blood."

⁶⁶E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Boston: Bacon Press, 1957), 271.

⁶⁷Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 181.

The inward significance of this strange religious act is still a matter of controversy. The explanation here adopted, that in its primary meaning it is an ecstatic sacramental act of communion, seems incontrovertible, but may not be a complete account of it.⁶⁸

The fundamental assumption behind the sacramental interpretations of the *omophagia* is that in the feast the devotees ingest their gods. W. K. Guthrie explains this assumption about the *omophagia* well:

This primitive communion (which rests “on the possibility of obliterating the line between the human and the divine, whether for a long period or for a brief moment of ecstasy, blending the two natures in one”) was achieved by consuming the flesh and blood of the god in his animal form, a culmination which we have seen referred to by Euripides.⁶⁹

Clearly in the sacramental interpretation of the Dionysiac *omophagia*, Guthrie also argues that the devotees believed themselves to consumed the gods. However, others have interpreted the data from Euripides and the Dionysiac rite quite differently. G. S. Kirk, commenting on Dodds’ views says, “I wonder whether he has not gone too far in implying that, because many of the details of Dionysus’ worship seem to be based on observation, the general picture (in Euripides) is accurate not necessarily for the late fifth century but for the archaic past.”⁷⁰ Kirk rightly disputes Dodds’ translation of line 75 in the *Bacchae*: “Blessed is he who, by happy favour knowing the sacraments of the gods, leads the life of holy service and is inwardly a member of God’s company.”⁷¹

⁶⁸L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), vol. 5, 177.

⁶⁹W. K. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston: Beacon House, 1950), 49.

⁷⁰G. S. Kirk, *The Bacchae of Euripides* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 7.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 34. It seems that we find an agreement between Dodds and Kirk. They assume the “sacramental” nature of the Christian cultic meal. However, this is not necessarily present in 1 Corinthians 10. Kirk also mentions that “Taking part in the devouring of raw flesh... among a band of ecstatic women on Mount Cithaeron was really very unlike a Christian communion or mass.... The very word “sacrament” is surely incorrect, unless it can be clearly shown that in

There is agreement between Kirk and Dodds (and other scholars) that, in some manner, the Dionysiac religion, seen in the *Bacchae* included the eating of the raw flesh of a wild animal. What is debatable is the alleged sacramental meaning of that eating. However, according to Willis, Dodds holds the view that the Dionysiac cult is sacramental in character, and Kirk's argument is along the same lines.⁷² Furthermore, nowhere in all the sources does the conception appear that the devout partook of the flesh of the god for their own benefit.⁷³

Arguments can be made both for and against a sacramental interpretation of the *omophagia*, especially if one counts on explanations taken from plausible or alleged similarities in other cultures. According to Kane, however, Inscriptions of Dionysiac societies in more than 150 cities of Asia Minor, the Aegean islands, etc., in the Graeco-Roman period, never mention the *omophagia*.⁷⁴ Even if a sacramental eating of the raw flesh of an animal formed part of the Dionysiac religion before Euripides, it was uncommon and declined until it was only a memory in Paul's time. One problem with interpreting most cults in the Hellenistic period, and especially the Dionysiac cult, is that the data comes from various places and times, and allowance must be made for these divergences.⁷⁵ The following examples will illustrate the variety of ways in which the cult of Dionysus worked.

eating a piece of goat the bacchantes thought they were eating the god himself, or a symbol of him, rather than assimilating a bit of raw Nature."

⁷²Willis, *Idol Meat*, 23-33.

⁷³W. F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 132-134.

⁷⁴Kane, 336.

⁷⁵Willis, *Idol Meat*, 30.

Plutarch's description of an example of the worship of Dionysus includes the similar processions of Osiris and Dionysus, featuring wearing skins, carrying wands, and giving ecstatic shouts.⁷⁶ Pausanias mentions that at Pellene, Dionysus was called "torch" and worshipped in a festival called the Feast (ἑορτή) of Torches, celebrated with a torch-light parade and bowls of wine set throughout the town.⁷⁷ Besides the discussion against a sacramental meal behind the Dionysiac *omophagia*, it is significant to see some implications of the domestication of Dionysism which expose its social nature, at least in the Graeco and Roman Imperial times.⁷⁸

Athenaeus describes the Dionysus guild as having meetings that essentially involved eating barley cakes and broth. On special occasions, when cattle were sacrificed, children shared a meal with their fathers and the family slaves.⁷⁹ Based on the data, it seems prudent to conclude that for several centuries before Paul's time, the Dionysus cult did not involve sacramental meals. Attempts have been made to find sacramental importance in the Dionysiac cult, but even our knowledge of the hard evidence (based on art monuments in Italy and inscriptions from Asia Minor and the Aegean isles)⁸⁰ is for the most part inadequate for constructing such a theory.

⁷⁶Plutarch *Is. et Os* 364E.

⁷⁷Pausanias 7.27.3.

⁷⁸Willis, *Idol Meat*, 31. Another description of Athenaeus quotes Eratosthenes's Arsinoe which describes a Dionysiac cult in Alexandria. "Arsinoe stopped a man carrying a flagon and olive branches and asked what the holiday celebrated. She was told it was called "Flagon-Bearing" which included a common meal at which each man brought his own flagon from home."

⁷⁹Athenaeus 4.149c.

⁸⁰Kane, 337ff.

C. The Mystery Cult of Mithras

Mithraism was easily the most important of all the mystery religions.⁸¹ Presumably the strongest competitor of Christianity in the first and second centuries was the mystery cult of Mithras. Franz Cumont, the pioneer of Mithraic studies, associated Roman Mithraism in liturgy and theology primarily to an Iranian context.⁸² Mithraism found its way in to Roman civilization in the first century B.C.E. during the Mithradatic wars in Asia Minor (88-63 B.C.E.). In the early second century, when the armies of Trajan invaded Mesopotamia, they came in contact with Mithraism in Parthia.⁸³ Roman soldiers learned of the worship of Mithras during military expeditions to what are today Iraq and Iran. The conversion of some of the soldiers to Mithraism helped spread the religion throughout the Roman empire.⁸⁴

⁸¹On Mithraism, see Hans D. Betz, "The Mithras Inscriptions of Santa Prisca and the New Testament," *NT* 10 (1968): 52-80; U. Bianchi, *Mysteria Mithrae* (Leiden: Brill, 1979); S. Brandon, "Mithraism and Its Challenge to Christianity," *Hibbert Journal* 53 (1955): 107-114; L. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); J. Ferguson, "More about Mithras," *Hibbert Journal* 53 (1955): 319-326; R. L. Gordon, "Mithraism and Roman Society," *Religion* 2 (1972): 92-121; G. Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); A. C. Nock, "The Genius of Mithraism," *Journal of Religious Studies* 27 (1937): 108-113; M. Meyer, *The Mithras Liturgy* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976); Michael P. Speidel, *Mithras: Orion, Greek Hero and Roman Army God* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); J. Toynbee, "Still More About Mithras," *Hibbert Journal* 54 (1956): 109-114.

⁸² Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1903), 129.

⁸³Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1965), 120. Through the returning veterans and the Oriental travelers and businessmen who visited the West it became a popular faith, particularly in the army.

⁸⁴Nash, 144. Attempts to reconstruct the beliefs and practices of Mithraism face enormous challenges. Nash observes that the information available about Mithra's religion is scanty. He also adds that "we do know that Mithraism, like its mystery competitors, had a basic myth. Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race."

Mithraism, along with the other mystery religions, appears to have involved religious meal similar to the Lord's Supper. Metzger says that "before the initiate there were set a piece of bread and a cup of water, over which the priest uttered a ritual formula. Here where the resemblance existed the Church Fathers took note of it, ascribing it to the ingenuity of demons."⁸⁵ The devotees of the Mithraic cult believed the power of the deity was obtained by the act of his worshippers eating his embodiment in a sacred meal. Cumont believes that the relief (Konjica, 4th cent.) which he mentions shows a re-enacting of Mithras slaying the bull. From this slaying meat was obtained and used in the communal meal and the sacred communion of the *mystae*.⁸⁶

Vermaseren, another scholar writing on Mithraic studies, agrees with Cumont's sacramentalist explanation of a meal following a ritual slaying of a bull. He says,

They firmly believed that by eating the bull's flesh and drinking its blood they would be born again just as life itself had once been created anew from the bull's blood. This food and drink were supposed... to bring salvation to the soul which would in time achieve rebirth and eternal light.⁸⁷

He admits that the meal can be considered an event which occurs merely on a divine level between the deities, Sol and Mithras. However the faithful, according to certain texts, copied the examples of their god during the ceremony.⁸⁸ Clearly, meals

⁸⁵Metzger, 15. It is fair to urge that if other parallels exist between the Christian sacraments and pagan rites, Christian writers would notice them and give the same explanation.

⁸⁶Cumont, 155-160. He assigns to the Mithraic ceremony the virtues attributed to the *haoma* juice by the Avestian texts.

⁸⁷J. M. Vermaseren, *Mithras, The Secret God* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 103.

⁸⁸*ibid.*, 99.

were a standard feature of the cult of Mithras; what is questionable, however, is their meaning.

Laeuchli and Kane argue that there was no real *taurobolium* in Mithraic worship during the Christian era. Kane points out that three kinds of meals took place in Mithraism. One was an initiation meal; the second was a cultic re-enactment of the myth without a religious eating of the deity; the third was similar to those common in the Greek and Roman religions and social life.⁸⁹ An artistic description of a sacrificial act of animals in the Aventine Mithraeum represents the latter form of meal.⁹⁰

Besides the problem of interpreting the archaeological and artistic evidence of Mithraism, the main difficulty is the internal development in the Mithraic cults. We can find three different consecutive forms of Mithraism: (1) the pre-Hellenic Mazdean religion before it went to the west; (2) the development of Mithraism in Asia Minor and under the influence of the cult of Cybele; and (3) Mithraism in the Roman Empire.⁹¹ Possibly the most significant argument against an early Christian dependence on Mithraism is the fact that the timing is all wrong. The beginning of Mithraism occurred after the close of the New Testament canon, too late for it to have any influenced in the development of the early Christian church.⁹² However, G. Widengren claimed that from an excavation at Dura (Europos) is a Mithraeum that points to the possible existence of a Mithraic cult before the end of the first century

⁸⁹Willis, *Idol Meat*, 36.

⁹⁰Kane, 350.

⁹¹Samuel Laeuchli, "Urban Mithraism," *BA* 33 (1968): 76.

⁹²Cumont, 87ff.; Schweitzer, 192.

A. D. Widengren suggested A. D. 80-85 as the dates.⁹³ But Widengren's suggested dating has been rejected. According to other scholars, including Vermaseren, excavation reports suggest that the Dura Mithraeum that Widengren dated so early should be dated much later, in A.D. 168.⁹⁴ Even Widengren himself admitted that the evidence is unclear.⁹⁵

While it seems true that all mystery religions, and especially Mithraism, appear to have had something that looked like the Christian meal, such approximation establishes sacramentalism⁹⁶ in neither Mithraism nor Christianity. In addition, Mithraism was mainly a military cult. Therefore, one must be doubtful about suggestions that it attracted nonmilitary people like the primitive Christians. It seems likely that Mithraic cultic meals cannot be assumed as a model for the Lord's Supper.

D. The Mystery Cult of Isis and Serapis

The three most significant mystery religions of the Graeco-Roman era were the cults of Isis, Cybele, and Mithra. Egyptian gods and cults were the most important oriental religions in the Greek world, and during the first and second centuries of the Christian era they were the most common and widespread of the non-Greek gods. Isis and Osiris were ancient Egyptian deities. In the Hellenistic

⁹³George Widengren, "Mithraic Mysteries in the Graeco-Roman World With Special Regard to Their Iranian Background," *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (1966), 452.

⁹⁴M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (1956), 57. In his book on the cult of Mithra, Vermaseren observes that "no Mithraic monument can be dated earlier than the end of the first century A. D., and even the more extensive investigations at Pompeii, buried beneath the ashes of Vesuvius in A. D. 79, have not so far produced a single image of the god."

⁹⁵Widengren, 452ff.

⁹⁶Willis, *Idol Meat*, 37.

period, under the Ptolemies, the name of the god Osiris was changed to Serapis, to make an identity between this Egyptian name and the supreme god who was worshipped by the Egyptians as well as the Greeks.⁹⁷

Serapis (Lat. Sarapis) replaced Osiris in the Greek world. Ferguson points out that Osorapis' name derived from, a combination of Osiris with Apis, the bull god worshipped at Memphis. Ptolemy I instituted the cult at Alexandria and added Hellenistic characteristics.⁹⁸ Recent scholars see the Egyptian cult, which spread from its known temple (the Serapeum in Alexandria), as a focal point of Ptolemy's Hellenistic-Egyptian Empire.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, the influence of the cult from Egypt on the environment of primitive Christianity should not be overestimated. As Günther Wagner says, there is no guarantee for supposing that the Isis-Serapis cult spread out so extensively as to have exert such a powerful influence on the Gentile Christian communities that Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper would indispensably have been understood by the Greeks and Romans in the same way as the mystery religion.¹⁰⁰ However, remarkable archeological discoveries have established that this Egyptian cult strongly

⁹⁷Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), 236-239. The deity Serapis was equated with Zeus, the father of gods and of men, and was venerated as a saviour and deliverer, who gives aid to all men. "Isis stands beside him as the divine mother, who came to be so highly regarded that she gradually surpassed the importance of the god, was glorified as the noble essence of all deities, and was worshipped as the one goddess, who encompasses all."

⁹⁸Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 211-213.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 211. "Timotheus, an official of Eleusis, played a major role in the introduction of the Serapis cult. Serapis was portrayed with the features of Zeus, only with a milder and more kindly appearance (similar to Asclepius), and is often acclaimed on inscriptions as one Zeus Serapis."

¹⁰⁰Günther Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries*, trans. J. P. Smith (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 89-135.

influenced the city of Corinth. The Egyptian gods in this period were transformed into mysteries.¹⁰¹

The cults of Isis and Serapis are uniquely pictured among the Hellenistic mystery religions. Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, especially in the case of Isis, reveals an account of liturgy from a mystery cult in which two meals were mentioned to be regarded as sacramental meals.¹⁰² Also connected with the Serapis cult is the hymn by Aelius Aristides which appears to explain the special importance of his cult meals.¹⁰³

In addition to the report by Aristides and the account from Apuleius, there have been found in Egypt some original invitations to meals involving Serapis. In the Greek invitations, on papyri found in Egypt, the majority are from the Oxyrhynchus papyri.¹⁰⁴

A close look at these invitations shows that they begin with the verb ἐρωτᾶ or καλεῖ followed by the name of the host, the occasion and place of the meal, and its time (normally "tomorrow, the 9th hour"). The invitations are composed of eight structural elements: "(1) an invitation-verb, ἐρωτᾶν or καλεῖν, in the 3rd pers. indic. act.; (2) the invited guest in the acc. of the pers. pron. σέ; (3) the identity of

¹⁰¹S. Smith, "The Egyptian Cults at Corinth," *HTR* 70 (1977): 201-231.

¹⁰²Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.

¹⁰³W. Dindorf, ed., "Hymn to Serapis," 27 *Aristides* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), 93-97.

¹⁰⁴Chan-Hie Kim, 392-395, points out that as the chronological list shows, the twenty-five invitations were all written some time between the late first and the fourth centuries A.D. The earliest instance, POxy 2592, was written, according to the editors, in the late first or the second century. And the latest one, POxy 1487, is from the fourth century. These invitations were clearly sent out to invite people to banquets that celebrated common human affairs such as weddings, religious festivities, and birthdays. The occasion of the feast is always clearly stated in the letters of invitation.

the host; (4) the purpose of the invitation in the aor. infin. δειπνήσαι; (5) the occasion of the feast; (6) the place; (7) the date; and (8) the time.”¹⁰⁵ All the twenty-five invitations mentioned by Kim (excluding five of them) are built on this clearly structured pattern.

The persons who were invited to any particular *kline* would not have comprised a large group. N. Bookidis points out that in the archaeological excavations of the sanctuary of Demeter-Kore at Acrocorinth in Greece, some 40 dining-rooms were discovered by the end of the 1973 season.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, the notion of a *kline* in a banquet meal comes from Greek practices rather than Egyptian ones. In the Greek world it was always the norm to recline at banquets, although perhaps not at common family meals (as several vase paintings show). It seems to be beyond question that the Greek practice gave rise to the *kline* associated with the cult of Serapis.¹⁰⁷

The particular cases involving invitations to the *kline* of Serapis are worthy of study, especially because of the relationship to 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and 11. They

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 393. The complete text of a typical invitation is as follows:

1) Invitation-verb:	Ἐρωτᾶ
2) The invited guest:	σε
3) The host:	Χαιρήμων
4) The purpose:	δειπνήσαι
5) The occasion:	εἰς κλείνην τοῦ Κυρίου Σαράπιδος
6) The place:	ἐν τῷ Σαραπέῳ
7) The date:	αὔριον, ἥτις ἐστὶν ιϛ
8) The time:	ἀπὸ ὥρας θ

¹⁰⁶N. Bookidis, "Demeter-Kore at Acrocorinth," *Hesperia* 43 (1974): 267. She reports that "several are 5x4.5m.square, could accommodate seven diners, and that cooking facilities in the rooms themselves were lacking." In a report (*Hesperia* 38 [1969]: 297-310), Bookidis mentions several of these dining-rooms in more detail. For instance, room 13 could accommodate nine or ten banqueters at one time on a continuous couch (.80 - .90m. wide, .55 m. high); while room 6 had identical remains around two walls (pl.78b).

¹⁰⁷Horsley, *New Documents*, 8-10. "This is not a matter to occasion surprise. For despite the name of the god, it was a thinly-veiled Greek cult which Ptolemy I introduced in his Hellenistic-Egyptian Empire."

are reproduced here; the texts plus translations of the "Oxyrhynchus Papyri" are from Grenfell and Hunt:¹⁰⁸

P. Oxy. 110 Ἐρωτᾶ σε Χαιρήμων δειπνήσαι εἰς κλείνην κυρίου Σαράπιδος ἐν τῷ Σαράπειῳ αὔριον, ἥτις ἐστὶν ιε, ἀπὸ ὥρας θ

Chaeremon requests your company at dinner at the table of the lord Sarapis in the Sarapeum tomorrow, the 15th, at 9 o'clock.

P. Oxy. 523 Ἐρωτᾶ σε Ἀντώνιο(ς) Πτολεμ(αίου) δειπνήσ(αι) παρ' αὐτῷ εἰς κλείνην τοῦ κυρίου Σαράπιδος ἐν τοῖς Κλαυδίου Σαραπίωνος) τῇ ις ἀπὸ ὥρας θ

Antonius, son of Ptolemaeus, invites you to dine with him at the table of the lord Sarapis in the house of Claudius Sarapion on the 16th at 9 o'clock.

P. Oxy. 1484 Ἐρωτᾶ σε Ἀπολώνιος δειπνήσαι εἰς (κ)λείνην τοῦ κυρίου Σαράπιδος ὑπὲρ μελοκουρίων τῶν [ἀδελφῶν] ἐν τῷ Θεοηρίῳ

Apollonius requests you to dine at the table of the lord Sarapis on the occasion of the coming of age of his brothers in the temple of Thoeris.

P. Oxy. 1755 Ἐρωτᾶ σε Ἀπίῳ δειπνήσαι ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τοῦ Σαραπίου εἰς κλείνην τοῦ κυρίου Σαράπιδος τῇ ιγ ἀπὸ ὥρας θ

Apion invites you to dine in the house of Sarapis at the table of the lord Sarapis on the 13th at 9 o'clock.

P. Oxy. 2791 Ἐρωτᾶ σε Διογενῆς δειπνήσαι εἰς πρωτογενεί-σιου τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Σαραπίῳ αὔριον ἥτις παχῶν ἀπὸ ὥρας η

Diogenes invites you to dinner for the first birthday of his daughter in the Sarapeum tomorrow which is Pachon (? or 16) from the eighth hour onward.

¹⁰⁸Grenfell and Hunt. Those papyri which mention Serapis clearly are: P. Oxy. 110, 523, 1484, 1775, 2791.

Several important characteristics are apparent in these invitations. Obviously, the κλείνην τοῦ κυρίου Σαράπιδος is not a place, but an event, for the locations differ.¹⁰⁹ In the majority of cases the place is the temple of Serapis (see for instance P. Oxy. 110, 1755, 2721). But in other cases the house of the host is mentioned (see P. Oslo. 157 and P. Oxy. 523), or the father of the host (P. Yale 85), or even, Willis says, the temple of another god (Thoeris, P. Oxy 1484; P. Colon 2525). In similar cases, the occasions mentioned for the meals are different, but do not specify the time of the dinner. In two instances the occasion is given: A coming of age celebration (see P. Oxy. 1484) and especially the occasion of a birthday party (P. Oxy. 2791).¹¹⁰ These appear to be personal invitations from the wealthy Sarapiasts to their friends. It is obvious that the occasion is not an initiation but to a social event. It is probable that these dinners were familiar celebrations, and to assume that they refer to a sacramental cultic meal is questionable.

The significant question of this study of sacramentalism (in relationship to these Hellenized Egyptian cults) is what value these meals had for those who offered them and to those who were present. Some scholars have regarded these invitations as examples of a cult worship, and not infrequently a sacramental meal.¹¹¹ The comments by outsiders on the meals of the devotees of Serapis, while clearly pejorative, describe them as pre-eminently social matters. Juvenal says that the Egyptian religious celebrations were characterized by continual feasting for a

¹⁰⁹J. G. Milne, "The Kline of Serapis," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 11 (1925): 6-9.

¹¹⁰Willis, *Idol Meat*, 42.

¹¹¹Helmut Engelman, *The Delian Aretalogy of Serapis* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 43. He adds: "All ancient mystic religions have provisions for such feasts, cf. the Dionysiac σιβαδες, the communion of the Mithraic devotees, the agape (love feasts) of the early Christians."

week.¹¹² Likewise Philo observes that the sacrificing associations (θείασοι) of Egypt, even though called σύνοδοι and κλίνας, were in actuality based only on strong drink, carousing, and wantonness.¹¹³

Tertullian also contrasts the humble decorum of meals by Christians with the lavishness of the devotees of Serapis. He says that the clouds of smoke from their celebrations drew the fire department.¹¹⁴ The evidence from Aristides and Apuleius is that the meals (invitations) mentioned in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri most likely were mainly social occasions and not sacramental.¹¹⁵ But, Horsley stresses the fact that "although it was a matter of some disagreement earlier in the century, there is now a clear consensus that these banquets had a fundamental religious character."¹¹⁶ However, according to the evidence of the invitations it is evident they were not merely for religious banquets, but also occasions that celebrated such important occasions as weddings, birthdays, and any other kind of social gatherings.

¹¹²Juvenal *Satires* 15.40. He accuses the Egyptians of practicing cannibalism. However, conversely, "one might say that if Juvenal had known of a sacramental eating of Serapis or Isis as a doctrine of the cult, he might well have turned this to propaganda advantage."

¹¹³Philo *Flacc* 17 (136).

¹¹⁴Tertullian *Praescr Haer.* 40.

¹¹⁵Milne, *JEA* 8. Milne says that we regard the "κλίνα of Serapis" as a dining club. He concludes: "There is nothing strange in a dining-club meeting alternatively in public institutions or in private houses: it would be natural for a member to use it for the purpose of celebrating family events; and... guests might be invited to it by members." He uses the term "secular" in order to explain these meals.

¹¹⁶Horsley, *New Documents*, 6. He says: "Serapis was considered as being present for the dinner. The most clear cut evidence for this is provided by Koenen's text, republished as P. Köln 57-LC. This invitation is unique to the set: only here is the god himself the host who bids the guests attend. We know almost nothing about what occurred at these banquets, in addition to the meal." Willis' recent findings cannot be ignored: "cult meals... were generally regarded fundamentally as occasions for social association and conviviality." See W. L. Willis, *Idol Meal*, 17-64. He concludes that idol meat was neither a sacramental act designed to establish unity with the god contained in the meal, nor a communal act viewed as a meal shared between worshipper and deity. Rather, the meal was a social act which, although acknowledging the presence and importance of the deity, focused on the horizontal, social relationship between the participants.

To analyse these specific arguments critically is beyond the scope of this study, so we shall restrict ourselves to a few general remarks in the hope that some day the question of Paul and the pagan mystery religions will be treated comprehensively.¹¹⁷ Although the early Christians understood the Lord's Supper as a sacramental rite (pagans celebrated their cultic meals as a guarantee of immortality for each of the partakers), others understood the common meal as a messianic feast in expectation of the coming of the Lord. One must take note of such differences to understand the Hellenistic pagan religions "as a history-of-religion phenomenon."¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is well known that pagan mystery religions (as a history-of-religion phenomenon) were not elaborated in Paul's time. But the elaborated form, which scholars have been able to trace, comes from the second and third centuries A. D.¹¹⁹

It requires a fertile imagination to discover any important parallels between either version of the Isis cult and the Christian understanding of the Lord's Supper. We may say that the parallelisms found are mere coincidental. In any case, we have to treat this evidence with caution. Indeed, it is most likely that even in the mystery religions, cultic meals (sacred), especially in the mystery cult of Isis and Serapis, were not considered as sacramental occasions.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷To our knowledge, still the most complete studies in English which treated Paul and pagan mystery religions are by H. A. A. Kennedy, *Paul and the Mystery-Religions*, 1913; J. G. Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 1921; T. Wilson, *St. Paul and Paganism*, 1927; and S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions and Christianity*, 1925.

¹¹⁸Koester, 199.

¹¹⁹Kennedy, *St. Paul*, 70. Furthermore, there appear to be good arguments for finding an early date in tracing "Gnosticism", but "there is the almost complete silence of Christian writers to the end of the second century on the question of the mysteries." See also W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 90.

¹²⁰Willis, *Idol Meat*, 47.

E. Mystery-Religions as Part of Paul's Environment

In the previous sections we have sought to analyse the assumption that Christianity was for Paul a mystery religion and that many of his religious views were part of or allied to the mystery cults of paganism. The relation of the mystery-religions to Paul's environment requires further consideration. Throughout the sphere where Paul moved in his missionary operations he was in contact with many converts to Christianity who had been initiated into pagan religions. This is one reason for Paul's choice of Corinth as the base for his missionary work in Greece. Oscar Broneer further adds that "he would have come to the Isthmus for the occasion, and this gave him the opportunity to become familiar at first hand with the pagan rites that formed an integral part of the festival."¹²¹ Nevertheless, assuming also that Paul from his youth had been in contact with pagan religions,¹²² he could most likely have known the cults as they were in their *status nascendi*. In other words, Paul did not know the Hellenistic mystery religions in the form in which they are known to us, because in this fully developed form they did not yet exist.¹²³ Martin Hengel points out that,

More recent investigations of the most important oriental mystery religions in the Greek-speaking East, the Isis cult, by F. Dunand... and L. Vidman..., say what has long been known, making it more precise by an abundance of evidence, with all the clarity that could be desired, and one can only hope that in the end it will also come to the notice of New Testament exegesis, so that the worn-out clichés which suppose crude dependence of earliest Christianity between AD 30 and AD 50 on the "mysteries" may give way to a more pertinent and informed verdict: The great wave of the oriental mystery religions only begins in the time of the empire, above all in the second century, as we have stressed many times already. The struggle and at the same

¹²¹Oscar Broneer, "Paul and the Pagan Cults at Isthmia," *HTR* 64 (1971): 169-187.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 187.

¹²³Schweitzer, *Paul*, 192.

time the first beginnings of a synthesis of the most powerful oriental cults also begin in this century.¹²⁴

Cumont insists again and again that Paul somehow was in contact with mystery cults, and he gives special emphasis to the view that Paul had had some point of contact with Mithra religion.¹²⁵ However, Mithraism, like the cult of Attis, was not popular in the Greek world; it did not seem to have made much impact in any part of the Roman Empire until well after Paul's death.¹²⁶

It seemed inevitable that Paul should become familiar, at least from the outside, with religious ideas and terminology which were current in these influential cults. Certain important terms like τέλειος, πνευματικός, σωτηρία, and others, were in the air. However, these words meant one thing, no doubt, for a Christian and quite a different thing for a pagan. These are not strange words; they belonged to the common language of religion and to the normal stock of metaphors. It seems that there was a deliberate avoidance of them as having associations which were deprecated.¹²⁷ Surely, there is no indication of an appropriation of mystery

¹²⁴Hengel, *The Son of God*, 27. "In the second century AD, Christianity was already widespread and established; it was a strong competitor, but hardly the object of syncretistic alienation any longer. At this period syncretistic gnosticism was engaged in bitter struggles with Christianity. We can hardly draw conclusions about the early period from it, and cannot therefore simply transpose the conditions depicted by Apuleius or even by the Christian fathers from the second century, like Justin, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian, to the time between AD 30 and AD 50 which is of particular interest to us. Moreover, we know virtually nothing about the extent of the mystery cults in Syria in the first half of the first century BC. There is no indication that they were particularly widespread there at this early period or that they had a strong religious influence. On the contrary, we should reckon rather that there is strong Christian influence on the later evidence of mysteries from the third and fourth centuries AD."

¹²⁵Cumont, 10.

¹²⁶John F. McConnell, "The Eucharist and the Mystery Religions," *CBQ* 10 (1948): 29-41. "Both literary and archaeological evidence is said to be forthcoming to prove that there was a Mithraic sacramental banquet." But on the contrary, he says: "No source as much as hints that the banquet commemorates a passion of Mithra; there is not the smallest indication that the bread and water were believed either to contain or to convey the substance of the god."

¹²⁷Nock, *Vocabulary of the New Testament*, 133.

religions terminology. Indeed, Paul does contrast the God of the Christians and the Christian *kyrios* with rival claimants to the hearts of his contemporaries, but he contrasts them as totally different.

Paul's literary style is the key to understanding his attitude to the world. He was surrounded with the terms of the LXX and Jewish apologetics, and memories of the sermons which he listened to at Tarsus as a boy.¹²⁸ When Paul speaks of pagan sacrifices in 1 Corinthians he is clearly interpreting them purely in the light of his own religious views. Furthermore, with regard to the apostle himself, scholars are coming to recognise once again that Paul's prevailing mind set was influenced by rabbinical customs and that his newly found Christian religion ran in patterns previously formed at Gamaliel's feet.¹²⁹

On the other hand, K. Lake went so far as to claim that under Paul's influence Christianity was transformed into a mystery religion.¹³⁰ W. Bousset strongly argues that Paul was converted to Christianity from a Gentile Church, and that his religion is the cult of the risen Lord whom he sees modeled after the deities of contemporary mysteries.¹³¹ Richard Reitzenstein believes that the clue to the understanding of Paul is found in the latter view.¹³² But these theories imply that Paul had turned his back upon his Jewish background and virtually accepted the tenets of the Hellenistic mystery religions. These theories are unconvincing for three main reasons: (1) The roots to which appeal has been made are of a late date, and

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 347.

¹²⁹Metzger, 7. A good example of this change of emphasis in Pauline studies is found in W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S.P.K., 1962).

¹³⁰K. Lake, *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul* (London: Livington, 1914), 215.

¹³¹W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921), 92-96.

¹³²R. Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions* (Pittsburgh Theological Monographs, No. 15, Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), 113.

our lack of knowledge of the actual nature of the ceremonies performed in the mysteries makes any comparison with Christian practice precarious. (2) There is the almost complete silence of Christian writers up to the end of the second century on the question of the mysteries. (3) Certain elements are lacking in the mysteries that are fundamental to Paul's view of dying and rising with Christ.¹³³

At any rate, the current argument among scholars has turned in favour of a Jewish-oriented Paul, due to a number of factors: (1) the unconvincing nature of the lists of terms coincident between Paul and the mysteries; (2) the lack of demonstrated contacts between Paul and Hellenistic paganism; (3) the obvious and correlative implication that the determinative concepts in Pauline thought can be better explained on the basis of his Jewish background.¹³⁴ Thus, while not denying all Hellenistic influence, it seems most likely that his theology was mainly derived from his Jewish heritage.¹³⁵

2.3 Other Backgrounds from Hellenistic Jewish Sources

A. Introduction: A Note on Jewish Meals

The Christian meals are usually related, in the first place, to the Jewish meals. However, in fact, Jewish meal practices were by and large like those in the rest of the Hellenistic-Jewish world. When Jews partook of a meal in relationship to

¹³³W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 89-91.

¹³⁴Devon H. Wiens, "Mystery Concepts in Primitive Christianity and in Its Environment." In *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.23.2. Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 1263.

¹³⁵Davies, 91.

a sacred celebration, their meal was almost identical in its form to that of the Jewish formal meal.¹³⁶ Bahr describes the Passover meal liturgy:

What is the order of the meal? The guests enter [the house] and sit on benches, and on chairs until all have entered. They all enter and they [servants] give them water for their hands. Each one washes one hand. They [servants] mix for them the cup; each one says the benediction himself. They [servants] bring them the appetizers; each one says the benediction for himself. They [guests] go up (to the dining room) for their hands; although they have [already] washed one hand, they [now] wash both hands. They [servants] mix for them the cup; although they have said a benediction over the first [cup] they say a benediction [also] over the second. They [servants] bring them the dessert; although they said a benediction over the first one, they [now] say a benediction over the second, and one says the benediction for all of them. He who comes after the third course has no right to enter.¹³⁷

Obviously the usual order of a Jewish meal (like Passover) has become a standard in liturgy, with the order of events, the washing of hands, prayers, cups of wine, and courses, derived from the meal in Judaism.¹³⁸

Indeed, even the literary form in which the Passover liturgy is stated can be seen to derive in large part from literary models in Judaism.¹³⁹ There was a rule for the Passover celebration. Even a poor man in Israel does not eat until he reclines. And they do not give him less than four cups of wine, even if it must come from the charity plate.¹⁴⁰ This rule makes clear social equity at the meal, so that the wealthy cannot lord it over the poor, in the words of Timon.¹⁴¹ This is strikingly like the

¹³⁶Smith, *Social Obligation*, 178.

¹³⁷Gordon J. Bahr, "The Seder of Passover and the Eucharistic Words," *Nov Test* 12 (1970): 182.

¹³⁸S. Stein, "The Influence of Symposia Literature on the Literary Form of the Pesah Haggadah," *JJS* 8 (1957): 13-44.

¹³⁹Smith, *Social Obligation*, 179.

¹⁴⁰Bahr, 183.

¹⁴¹Plut *Quaest. conv* 616 E-F.

social ethics related to a meal in other contexts. It shows that in Judaism, as in paganism, the meal can have a symbolic sense.

The debate regarding whether the Lord's Supper is a *haburah* or *kiddush* meal is not yet settled. At the beginning of this century, Lietzmann made popular the view that the Lord's Supper was a *haburah* meal. This was a special kind of meal among Pharisaic friends and it had a religious overtone. Furthermore, some groups of friends got together to obtain ritual holiness, to do some charities, and to partake in common meals.¹⁴² Even though it seems that this kind of meal gives a good pattern for the Last Supper, it must be said concerning this suggestion that here again we have an *ad hoc* conjecture for which there is absolutely no evidence.¹⁴³ It thus appears that there is not enough proof to suggest that the Jewish *haburah*¹⁴⁴ meal had some characteristic features like the Lord's Supper.

Another suggestion has been made by G. H. Box. He proposed that the Lord's Supper practices are not identical to the Paschal Meal itself, but to the *kiddush* meal or Sabbath-*kiddush* to sanctify the holy day before the Passover. He argued that there is a striking similarity between the real, customary action of the *kiddush* meal and the Lord's recorded deeds with the bread and wine.¹⁴⁵ However, even if we accept Box's theory, the problem has not been solved, for *kiddush* comes

¹⁴²Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper* (Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1979), 165-171.

¹⁴³J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. N. Perrin (London: SCM Press, 1966), 30. He further comments that "every meal had religious solemnity because of the grace that was always said, irrespective of whether it was taken alone or in company, or of whether it was a mere snack or a formal meal with which wine was taken."

¹⁴⁴I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 20.

¹⁴⁵G. H. Box, "The Jewish Antecedents of the Eucharist," *JTS* 3 (1901-2): 358-360. He said, "I venture to suggest, then, that the real Jewish antecedent of the Lord's Supper was the weekly Kiddush."

directly before the real celebration of the day. Burkitt says that "*Kiddush* for Sabbath is done on what we call Friday evening, not twenty-four hours earlier."¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, Mark's explicit wording on the matter has to be considered. Mark says: "...καὶ ἠτοίμασαν τὸ πάσχα. Καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα. Καὶ ἀνακειμένων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσθιόντων ... Καὶ ὑμνήσαντες ἐξῆλθον...." It seems that the narrator is giving the details of τὸ πάσχα (Mk 14:16-18, 26).

Some scholars have maintained that the Lord's Supper, and especially the Last Supper, can be identified with the Sabbath-*kiddush* ceremony. The Sabbath-*kiddush* ceremony arose in the late Tannaitic period or perhaps early Amoraic. Consequently, it does belong to Jesus' time.¹⁴⁷

The assumption, however, that the Lord's Supper was a *kiddush* meal is improbable because the *kiddush* meal did not exist as anything other than the common Jewish meal before the Sabbath on Friday evening; whereas, as mentioned above, the Lord's Supper took place on Thursday evening (except in Jaubert's theory of a Tuesday evening meal)¹⁴⁸ as a commemoration of the Jewish Passover.

¹⁴⁶F. C. Burkitt, "The Last Supper and the Paschal Meal," *JTS* 17 (1916-1917): 294.

¹⁴⁷Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 28-30, says that "There has been a strong tendency to accept this identification because today at the Sabbath-*kiddush* the blessing of the wine is followed by the breaking of bread which begins the meal. But this combination of blessing the wine and breaking of bread arose only in the late Tannaitic, or perhaps early Amoraic period as we saw, as a consequence of the development of a Friday evening service in Babylon. It does not go back to the time of Jesus. Above all, however, the sanctification of the Sabbath took place on Friday after sunset, whereas the Last Supper, according to the unanimous testimony of all four gospels, was held on Thursday evening." He also mentions the name of scholars such as F. Spitta, P. Drews, J. Foxley, G. H. Box, P. Batiffol, and R. Otto who are the ones who identified the Last Supper as a *kiddush* meal.

¹⁴⁸A. Jaubert, *La date de la Cène (Calendrier biblique et liturgie chrétienne)* (EtB), Paris, 1957), 188ff.

B. Story of Joseph and Asenath

In the story of Joseph and Asenath (also called "Aseneth"), some writers have seen a hint of the origins of the Lord's Supper, or at least a possible influence on the Christian practice in it.¹⁴⁹ The story comes to us in a Greek version, yet it is normally considered to be Jewish in origin. Joseph and Asenath is a love story in which the author has put a midrashic interpretation of Gen. 41:45, 50-52 and 46:20 into the form of a Hellenistic romance.¹⁵⁰ It describes how Joseph meets Asenath in Egypt. She is the daughter of the Egyptian priest Pentephres (Potiphar). We are told about her conversion from paganism to Judaism and her marriage to Joseph.

According to J. H. Charlesworth, "This haggadic midrash on Genesis 41:45 consists of twenty-nine chapters that contain *inter alia* polemics against retribution for wrong doers and idol worshippers, and propaganda for the Jewish religion."¹⁵¹ The story, in all probability, is Jewish and stems from sources in the Egyptian Jewish community. It has even been argued that the original text was in Hebrew, the Greek text being a translation. But it is quite certain that Joseph and Asenath was written in Greek. The presupposed text of the Old Testament is that of the Septuagint, and the language and style are also Septuagintal throughout. There are no grounds at all for regarding the Greek as a translation of either a Hebrew or an Aramaic original.¹⁵² However, the consensus of the majority of scholars (such as

¹⁴⁹Marshall, 26-28.

¹⁵⁰E. Schürer, revs. & eds. G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 546.

¹⁵¹J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 137.

¹⁵²H. F. D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 470. Marshall rightly observes that "This is the story of Joseph and Asenath, which has been handed down in a Greek version and is usually thought to be of Jewish origin."

E. Schürer, J. H. Charlesworth, M. Black, M. Philonenko, and others) is that Joseph and Asenath probably come from a Jewish background.

It is difficult to say anything definite regarding the time of its origin. There is no clear evidence of a Christian interpolation, and revisions of the text are few when considering the composition and nature of this writing. The structure of the story of Joseph and Asenath falls into two main parts:

Part I (chs. 1-21) is suspended between two allusions to the Story of Joseph (Gen. 37-50). Chapter 1:1 echoes Genesis 41:46 to tell that Pharaoh sent Joseph around Egypt to gather up the corn of the seven years of plenty, followed in 1:2 by a remark about Joseph's arrival in Heliopolis. Chapter 21:9 notes the birth of Ephraim and Manasseh in accordance with Genesis 41:50-52. The narrative proper opens with an exposition in 1:3-2:12; it corresponds to the page announcing the cast of characters and the scene of action that we usually see prefixed today to a play or detective story. Part I is rounded off by a hymn in 21:10-21 in which Asenath recounts what happened to her. This consists of a combination of two different plots: the love story engaging Asenath and Joseph, in chapters 3-9 and 19-21, and the conversion story, which involves Asenath and the heavenly man in chapters 10-18, overlapping the love theme in 8f and 19. Part II (chs. 22-29) opens in 22:1f. with a summary of Genesis 41:53f. and 45:26-46:7; 47:27: Jacob and his kin come to Egypt and settle in Goshen. Joseph and Asenath go to visit them (ch. 22 is an exposition).¹⁵³

The most important topic is the conversion of Asenath to the Jewish religion. The original nature of the romance may be understood allegorically. Asenath is the representation of the community of the believers, not just of the proselytes, but perhaps of those who have been converted from within Judaism to become members of the true community (or mystery community) of God. Joseph represents the celestial messenger.¹⁵⁴ Bread, cup, and oil (ointment) are symbols of the

¹⁵³J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1985), 180-182.

¹⁵⁴Koester, 265.

sacraments of the genuine community which understands its sacramental food as the bread from heaven (manna).

Many of the studies that draw on the story of Joseph and Asenath to explain New Testament theology are concerned with conversion. It seems likely that this is where the story is most informative to N.T. studies. However, our main concern is how terms like ἄρτος, εὐλογημένος, ζωῆς, ποτήριον, εὐλογημένον, ἀθανασίας, and χρίσμα εὐλογημένον ἀφθαρσίας in JA 8.5 and elsewhere could help us to understand the origins of the Lord's Supper. G. D. Kilpatrick observed that the cultic meal which he had discovered in Joseph and Asenath was not connected to the Lord's Supper, although these two meals show a characteristic model: The blessing and the partaking of bread and wine as a sacred meal.¹⁵⁵ The Lord's Supper and the meal of Joseph and Asenath developed separately from an ancient Jewish meal practice which is unfortunately not elsewhere affirmed. C. Burchard observes that although Kilpatrick thought that "the meal of JosAs has undergone mystery influence, its Christian parallel bears the stamp of our Lord himself. This older Jewish meal ought to be considered as a real alternative to the background of Jesus' Last Supper."¹⁵⁶ Perhaps this is why few scholars, if any, have subscribed to Kilpatrick's views even if they approved of his ideas about JA.

¹⁵⁵G. D. Kilpatrick, "The Last Supper," *Exp. T.* 64 (1952-3): 4-8. He calls attention to a most important, but almost wholly neglected apocryphon, the Prayer of Asenath (Joseph and Asenath = JA).

¹⁵⁶C. Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Asenath for the Study of the New Testament," *NTS* 33 (1987): 102-134. On the contrary, Jeremias had advocated that the Last Supper of Jesus comes from the Jewish Passover meal. He further says that "Kilpatrick's suggestion is void if JosAs does not attest a cultic meal. Furthermore, it might be argued that if an alternative background for Jesus' Last Supper is needed, we have analogies which are closer both geographically and conceptually than the hypothetical model of the meal of an Egyptian Jewish mystery group."

Among the few who have adopted Kilpatrick's ideas, Karl G. Kuhn says that Kilpatrick ignores the relationship between the passages in JA and the Essenes' meal, especially as these meals are portrayed in the Qumran texts. In his opinion, JA refers to the cultic meal of the Therapeutae. Since the Therapeutae were linked to the Essenes, the meal of the Essenes (known from Qumran texts and Josephus), clearly had a deep religious significance, although the passages do not say what it was.¹⁵⁷

Kilpatrick stresses the text of JA where it is said that the Jews were separated from the pagans by eating ἄρτον εὐλογεμένον ζωῆς and drinking ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας and being anointed χρίσματι εὐλογημένω ἀφθαρσίας. In his prayer Joseph asks God that Asenath φαγέτω ἄρτον ζωῆς σου καὶ πινέτω ποτήριον εὐλογίας σου. At that time, the angel, the archistrategos, visits Asenath and promises that by accepting the Jewish beliefs she would be allowed to participate in the blessed bread, wine, and anointing. Finally, Asenath is called μακαρία because ἔφαγες ἄρτον ζωῆς καὶ ποτήριον ἔπιες ἀθανασίας καὶ χρίσματι κέχρισαι ἀφθαρσίας. Jeremias concurs with Kilpatrick when he says that JA is a piece of Hellenistic Jewish religious propaganda from a mystery community in Egypt.¹⁵⁸ There is uncertainty, however, about whether the sentences quoted are an immediate help for the understanding of the Last Supper. He thinks that JA is speaking of the benedictions at the beginning and at the end of the ordinary daily meal and of the anointing of the guest before the meal (Lk. 7:46). All of this is part

¹⁵⁷Karl G. Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," ed. Krister Stendahl (London: SCM Press, 1952), 74-76.

¹⁵⁸J. Jeremias, "The Last Supper," *Exp. T.* 1952-3: 91-93.

of the propaganda used with solemn phrases borrowed from Hellenistic syncretism.¹⁵⁹

The five passages from Joseph and Asenath mentioned are: ". . . a good bearing man who . . . eats the blessed bread of life and drinks the blessed cup of immortality" (85). Joseph prays to God for Asenath that she may be blessed, ". . . and let her eat your bread of life and drink of your cup of blessing. . . ." (8a). The Archangel Michael says to Asenath: "From today on you will be created anew, and you shall eat the blessed bread of life and drink the cup filled with immortality. . . ." (155). The Archangel Michael blesses Asenath after her miraculous partaking of a heavenly honeycomb: "Behold, you have eaten the bread of life and drunk the cup of immortality. . . ." (156). Asenath says to Joseph, "Today the angel came to me and gave me the bread of life and I ate and I drank the blessed cup" (195).¹⁶⁰

These five texts demonstrate that the expression "to eat the blessed bread of life and to drink the blessed cup of immortality" is a technical formula, especially since the passage itself does not require such terminology. The meal in JA shows its deeper importance by the use of the interpreting genitive constructions "the bread of life" and "the cup of immortality."¹⁶¹

Furthermore, the differences between the Last Supper (especially in 1 Cor. 11) and the meal in JA are too great for either to be the source of the other. However, these two meals exhibit a common model: The blessing and the partaking

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 91. "Kilpatrick is inclined to assume that JA gives us evidence for the existence of a Jewish religious meal (not mentioned elsewhere) similar to the Last Supper; but it is difficult to imagine that such a religious rite existed without having left a trace anywhere else."

¹⁶⁰Sparks, 480-482.

¹⁶¹Kuhn, *The Lord's Supper*, 76.

of bread and wine as a sacramental meal. For instance, the common meal of the Essenes at Qumran and the feast of the Therapeutae had a religious character, but Rabbinic Judaism gives no account of them. Similarly, the bread and wine is preceded by a blessing in JA, and the Lord's Supper, and the meal of the Essenes.¹⁶²

If the story of JA is of Jewish background and reflects Jewish customs, then one might conclude that it has a common pattern with the Lord's Supper (the blessing and the partaking of bread and wine as a religious meal). However, Burchard tried to demonstrate that there are more than just common patterns between JA and 1 Cor 10-11.¹⁶³

We can compare the way JA 16 relates the blessed bread, cup, and ointment with Asenath's manna-eating; it must not be overlooked that the Supper was established as an institution (1 Cor. 10:11), whereas in the case of JA, bread, cup, and ointment represent the manna.¹⁶⁴ On the other hand, it must not be ignored that Paul's style is "typological" interpretation. The nature of Paul's argument suggests

¹⁶²Kilpatrick, 6.

¹⁶³Burchard, 121-122. For instance he says that "If one reads 1 Cor. 10-11 with JosAs in mind, what strikes one first is πνευματικὸν βρῶμα and πνευματικὸν πόμα in 10. 3 f., meaning the manna and the water. Πνευματικὸν points to their supernatural origin, but above all to their effect. They imparted spiritual gifts, perhaps not so much the Spirit as supernatural qualities which had spirit for their substratum. This is reminiscent of JosAs 16:14: the manna which Aseneth ate (just once to be sure) was πνεῦμα ζωῆς. Moreover Paul regards the manna and the water as the prototype of what in his day is the Lord's Supper ("for the rock was Christ," v.4)." He mentions another example where he sees a similar view in JA with 1 Cor 10:1-5: "It seems to me that the characteristics of the Exodus generation in 1 Cor. 10:1-5 are not too far from the characteristics of the θεσσαβῆς in JosAs 8:-7: faith and pneumatic nourishment as opposed to idolatry and the consumption of idol food. Furthermore, the apostle employs them to present our fathers as converts much as JosAs does to illustrate the conversion of Asenath, mother of Proselytes; and both are concerned to tell their respective readers what they have got and ought to preserve, albeit with a different emphasis. Paul warns against apostasy, JosAs extols the benefits of true religion." See his article for further details and other parallels.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 122.

that the Corinthians were aware of the evidence of the OT passages: Ex. 13:21, the pillar of cloud and fire; Ex. 14:21f., the sea; Ex. 16:4, 14-18, the manna; Ex. 32:6, the apostasy. Paul says in 1 Cor 10:6 that "These things", the ones described in 10:1-5, took place as examples [τύποι] for the followers of Christ. Paul describes Israel's miraculous experience, the bread and drinking of water from the rock, as a form of spiritual eating; without doubt it is a type of the Lord's Supper¹⁶⁵ which is not clear in JA. Before we conclude this section of our investigation, it must be mentioned that the specific period of time and origin of the story of JA remain unclear;¹⁶⁶ there is not enough information to merit its use as an explanation of the Lord's Supper.

The result of this study suggests that JA is irrelevant to the origin of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, it is going too far to assume that these examples from JA refer to the Christian Eucharist (especially the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11) and that they are Christian interpolations.¹⁶⁷ As far as can be known, almost all past and recent scholars¹⁶⁸ who have studied JA from this standpoint have come to a similar conclusion.

C. Philo and the Therapeutae

The Therapeutae are differentiated from the Essenes in that the latter are an active community, but the Therapeutae represent the contemplative life. Philo

¹⁶⁵Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 446.

¹⁶⁶Marshall, 27.

¹⁶⁷Kuhn, *The Lord's Supper*, 74.

¹⁶⁸Jeremias, 91 and *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. N. Perrin (London: SCM Press, 1966), 33; M. Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), 105f. See also I. Howard Marshall, 27.

observed that they did not have any profession or any practice of sharing houses or clothes, nor did they get together except on very special occasions. A very distinctive characteristic was that while the Essenes were an exclusive male community (brotherhood) the Therapeutae admitted women into their communities.¹⁶⁹ M. Delcor also observes that,

Les Thérapeutes sont apparentés par leur genre de vie même aux Esséniens. Cela est habituellement reconnu par les spécialistes. Mais certains, non sans quelque exagération, vont plus loin. Vermes, entre autres, estime que les Esséniens représentaient la branche active, tandis que les Thérapeutes étaient la branche contemplative du même mouvement religieux (43). Quoi qu'il en soit du lien qui unissait exactement les Esséniens aux Thérapeutes, nous trouvons dans le *De vita contemplativa* la preuve qu'ils concevaient leurs repas sacrés en quelque sorte comme des sacrifices.¹⁷⁰

According to Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa*, these Egyptian Therapeutae had their settlement at the Mareotic Lake.¹⁷¹ Although they did not belong to the Essene community proper, and were an order by themselves, they surely had a close connection to the Essenes. They were an Egyptian offshoot of the Palestinian Order

¹⁶⁹Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* IX , 104-168.

¹⁷⁰M. Delcor, "Repas Cultuels Esséniens et Thérapeutes. Thiases et Haburoth," *RQ* 23 (1968): 409. "En voici quelques indices: 1.- Ils se réunissent pour leurs repas sacrés vêtus de blanc, c'est-à-dire, comme nous l'avons déjà dit, dans des vêtements qui les faisaient ressembler à des prêtres en train d'officier (66). Leur repas, comme tous les repas juifs, était précédé d'une prière (67). 2.- Lors du banquet commun qui les rassemble toutes les sept semaines, ils s'abstiennent de vin et ne boivent ce jour-là que de l'eau très limpide. Philon rapproche cet usage de celui pratiqué par les prêtres en train de sacrifier: "La droite raison, écrit-il, comme aux prêtre dans leurs sacrifices, commande à eux aussi de vivre sans boire de vin" (73-74) (44). Massebiau a bien saisi la portée de ce rite quand il écrit que "le banquet des Thérapeutes était considéré par eux comme des sacrifices" (45). 3.- Un autre indice non moins significatif est le fait que les Thérapeutes mangeaient du pain levé assaisonné d'un sel mêlé d'hyssope, par respect pour la table sacrée qui se trouve au Temple. Celle-ci en effet porte des pains et du sel sans autres assaisonnements (46), mais le pain est *sans levain* et le sel est pur. "Il convenait, poursuit Philon, que les mets les plus simples et les plus purs fussent attribués à la classe supérieure des prêtres, en récompense de leur ministère, et que, si d'autres partageaient leur zèle, ils s'abstinsent de ces mets, afin que ceux qui leur sont supérieurs aient ce privilège" (82-83).

¹⁷¹Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 125.

of the Essenes; in this way their cultic meal, and thereby also the meal in Joseph and Asenath, is related to that of the Essenes.¹⁷²

The names Therapeutae and Therapeutrides are derived from θεραπεύω, in the sense of either cure or healing. Philo said that they believed the soul can be cured. The sickness of the soul consists of those problems which are inflicted by the passions and vices. The name, as derivable from a root meaning "to worship," means that the Therapeutae were taught by nature and sacred laws to worship the self-existent God.¹⁷³

The Sabbath was the one day on which members of the community assembled for worship. The πρεσβύτατος among the Therapeutae gave a discourse on the Sabbath. The sermon was not a rhetorical or philosophical one, but it was a careful and exact expression of the meaning of the πρεσβύτατος' thoughts. Every seventh Sabbath was specially honoured; on Friday at sunset, the community wore white garments to both the common worship service and the fellowship meal.¹⁷⁴ Besides the Qumran cultic meal, this is "the only other description we possess of a sectarian meal of the period.... and in this case, there is no doubt that it is a Jewish sacred meal."¹⁷⁵

They sat in order of seniority at their sacred meal, which concurs with the report in 1 QSa. This meal, however, was one of leavened bread and water only. The menu did not include meat. Philo related that,

¹⁷²Kuhn, *The Lord's Supper*, 76.

¹⁷³Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 115.

¹⁷⁴Lohse, 88.

¹⁷⁵Black, *The Scrolls*, 106.

The table too is kept pure from the flesh of animals; the food laid on is loaves of bread with salt as a seasoning, sometimes also flavoured with hyssop as a relish for the daintier appetites. Abstinence from wine is enjoined by right reason as for the priest when sacrificing, so to these for their lifetime (IX. 74).

. . .The young men bring in the tables mentioned a little above on which is set the truly purified meal of leavened bread seasoned with salt mixed with hyssop, out of reverence for the holy table enshrined in the sacred vestibule of the temple on which lie loaves and salt without condiments, the loaves unleavened and the salt unmixed. For it was meant that the simplest and purest food should be assigned to the highest caste, namely the priests . . .(IX.82).¹⁷⁶

The ascetic life of the Therapeutae appears to be similar to that of the old Rechabite ascetics, especially in their abstention from drinking wine and in their abstention from eating meat. The similarity which Philo draws between the "tables" of the Therapeutae and the table of the show-bread in the Temple reveals that though the Therapeutae were a lay community, their sacred meal had the same cultic character as the offering of the show-bread by the priests in Jerusalem's Temple. The bread was consecrated bread, the table was considered a sacred table, but, since the Therapeutae were laymen and belonged to a low rank, their bread was leavened bread.¹⁷⁷ In describing the meal in this manner, Philo reveals its origin and character in his comparison. The close similarity between the sacred meal of the Therapeutae, consisting of leavened bread and plain water only, and the priests' participation in the Bread of the Presence or show-bread, supports such an interpretation of the origins of the sacred meal.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 159-165.

¹⁷⁷Black, *The Scrolls*, 108.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 169. "It is highly significant that of the three passages which have survived and which describe such a meal, one portrays it as a Messianic Banquet, another as participation in the meal of the Shew-bread. It may be that such a meal was eaten in anticipation of the coming of the Prince of David's line (or Nasi'), and of his participation in the sacred meal of Ezekiel XLIV: 3. The meals of the Therapeutae may have had a similar messianic significance." He further adds, "It seems more probable that a sacred meal of this type lies behind the daily 'breaking of bread' in the Primitive Christian community in Acts than a meal such as that of the Passover." Likewise, the parallel that one can see with such a meal to the Lord's Supper is not clear, though the Messianic element in the Therapeutae sacred meal may be compared with Paul's view of the eschatological banquet in 1 Cor. 11:26.

Another point worth mentioning concerns the striking parallel, as well as differences, between *De Vita Contemplativa* and the information on the Essenes in Philo and Josephus. These three primary sources agree that both groups had communal meals (although the Therapeutae meal may have been held on the Sabbath and special days). They rejected slavery, practised restriction in eating, abstained from marriage, chose to develop high virtues, and showed respect and reverence for the Law of Moses.¹⁷⁹

There are further similarities in Philo's respective descriptions. The Therapeutae and Essenes did not live in cities, detested doing business, got together in a community centre for worship and meals, celebrated the Sabbath, and interpreted the Bible in an allegorical way. Each member of the community had a summer and a winter robe, and the younger members were respectful and devoted to their elders.¹⁸⁰ Other characteristics of Philo's Therapeutae were attributed to the Essenes by Josephus. He claimed that in both communities young people were present at the meetings. They used a white robe when entering the sacred refectory to participate in the sacred meal consisting of bread and one other course. Both groups recited their usual morning prayers facing the rising sun, they possessed sacred writings other than the Bible, and practised bodily and spiritual healing. Furthermore, complete silence was peculiar to both groups while attending their worship. Both Therapeutae and Essenes defended themselves against robbers.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹Schürer, 593-595.

¹⁸⁰Philo *De Vita Contemplativa* 153-155.

¹⁸¹Josephus *Ant* XV 10, 4 (371); XVii 13, 3 (346); B. J. 13,5 (78).

On the other hand, there are several peculiarities of the Therapeutae that are without parallel in the descriptions of the Essenes; these include abstention from eating meat and drinking wine at their main feast and the vigil connected with it. The Essenes were Palestinians while the Therapeutae lived in Egypt; the latter's common life was on a smaller scale than that of the Essenes. They did not allow women, but the Therapeutae did allow old or virgin women. The Therapeutae did not own property, and there is no hint regarding any source of subsistence.¹⁸² This is where some scholars consider Philo's portrait of the Therapeutae inaccurate.

If the Therapeutae did not have possessions, money, nor slaves, and did not work, how did they subsist? The limitations of this study do not allow us to consider this question; however, the evidence of the ancient sources (Philo, Josephus) and from the Dead Sea discoveries supports the assumption that the Therapeutae were members of an Egyptian community branch of the Palestinian Essene movement and that they participated in communal sacred meals.

2.4 The Christian Sacred Meal

A. Alleged Similarities Between Paul's Lord's Supper and Pagan Meals

In the previous section it has been discussed that the Lord's Supper, as taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians, is alleged to have been borrowed consciously, or more probably, unconsciously from one of the mysteries or sacramental ideas common to some Pagan religions. The most primitive account of a Christian communal meal is found in the Epistle to the Corinthians where issues of theological and social ethics within the community also appear important in the discussion. That

¹⁸²Schürer, 596.

there are parallels between the mysteries and the Christian rites (sacramental rites such as baptism and the Lord's Supper) has been observed since the early centuries of the Church when both Christians and non-Christians commented upon some similarities.

Smith observes, however, that almost all the popular information falls into this kind of error. They build out of the various fragments of information a kind of universal mystery religion which never truly existed, least of all in Paul's epoch.¹⁸³ 1 Cor. 11:17-34 is the most illuminating passage regarding communal meals. The Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον 11:20) is celebrated in the Christian assembly ("When you come together in an assembly;" συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ 11:18). Paul quotes the tradition of the eucharistic words of Jesus in 11:23-25; the "Lord's Supper" includes the Eucharist.¹⁸⁴

Since the problem addresses the fact that some are not getting enough food to eat, while others are clearly getting plenty to eat and drink (11:21), the meal partaken of by the Corinthians must have been intended to be the social evening meal of the congregation. Indeed, the tradition Paul mentions in 11:23-25 gives us important information about the form of the meal. It began with a consecration of bread to the Lord by means of the opening blessing. The bread ritual also marked the beginning of the δεῖπνον proper, which of course is the term for a formal evening meal. The cup ceremony took place after the δεῖπνον (μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι 11:25).

The drinking of the *Kykeon* in the rites at Eleusis, which most of the time has been considered to be the prototype of Paul's teaching about the Lord's Supper,

¹⁸³Smith, *Social Obligation*, 192-194.

¹⁸⁴Ibid, 180.

is as opposite as possible from the Christian Communion.¹⁸⁵ The common cup ceremony has been adapted and reinterpreted according to the self-identity of the Christian community.¹⁸⁶ But the question arises, is there a *sumposion* following this ceremony? The *sumposion* would usually be the time for entertainment and/or conversation as well as eating and drinking. Smith suggests that the subject of 1 Cor. 12 and 14 is proper "conversation" or oral instruction at the Christian congregation.¹⁸⁷ The location of chapters 12-14 in 1 Corinthians is immediately after the narration of the δέιπνον proper, which could draw a logical connection of the activities described in the two sections.¹⁸⁸

The passages seem to describe events taking place at the same assembly. A comparison of verses 11:20, "when you come together for a meeting" . . . to eat (συνερχομένων . . . ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ . . . φαγεῖν) with 14:23, "if then the whole church comes together for a meeting and all speak in tongues . . . (Ἐὰν οὖν συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν γλώσσαις . . .) suggests that the entire meeting takes place at the table and the portion next to the meal proper corresponds to the *sumposion* part of a formal banquet.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵Metzger, 14. "The latter was the privilege of the τέλειοι, or fully initiated, but the drinking of the *Kykeon* was a preliminary ceremony, prescribed for the candidate prior to his initiation. Furthermore, in the Eleusinian rite there was no table-fellowship, nor was the ceremony continually repeated."

¹⁸⁶J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (London: SCM Press, 1966), 8. This cup is identified with the "cup of blessing (τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας)" in 1 Cor. 10:16. If this term is to be connected with a traditional Jewish ceremony at the conclusion of a meal as claimed by Jeremias, it seems that the adaptation of the δέιπνον/συνπόσιον format had already begun with Judaism.

¹⁸⁷Smith, *Social Obligation*, 181.

¹⁸⁸Günther Bornkamm, "On the Understanding of Worship," *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper, 1969), 2.

¹⁸⁹Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 48-49. The physical setting at Corinth is difficult to define. On the one hand, the participants during the worship portion were sitting rather than reclining (καθῆσθαι, 14:30) whereas the posture at the pagan meals in the temple was reclining (κατακεῖσθαι, 8:10) and the posture at virtually all the meals of Jesus with his disciples mentioned in the gospels was reclining." The Corinthian Christians evidently met in a home and

Paul also discusses in 11:17-34 "schisms" (σχίσματα, 11:18) at the meal gatherings. Although J. Munck describes Corinth as "Die Gemeinde ohne Parteien,"¹⁹⁰ it is clear that the church at Corinth was split. The problem is in each member taking a private dinner (ἴδιον δείπνον 11:21). The result is that "some are hungry while others are drunk" (ὅς μὲν πεινᾷ, ὅς δὲ μεθύει 11:21)," implying that there is an inequity in the distribution of the food. Paul addressed this problem with an argument that begins by quoting the original tradition of the meal (11:23-25). He provides an interpretation of the tradition (11:26-32) that leads to his concluding advice: "Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another" (ὥστε, ἀσέλφοί μου, συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε, 11:33).

Since the instructions by Paul in 11:33 specified eating together, then the issue was the ἴδιον δείπνον as a meal separated from the Lord's meal. One traditional way of interpreting the term ἴδιον δείπνον has derived from the translation of προλαμβάνειν to mean "to eat beforehand." This connects well with 11:33, and it seems to suggest that some were simply starting to eat before the others arrived for the meal. Consequently, Paul's instructions at 11:33 simply specified that everyone eat together, the broader implication is the concern for the status system in effect in the Christian community at Corinth.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, Gerd Theissen's view of the wealthy meeting before the others in order to enjoy a fine meal, and then

ate together all in one place. In Lucian's symposium, when an uninvited guest arrived late for whom there was no room on the couches, he was offered a place to sit. He refused, however, on the grounds that such a posture was womanish and weak, instead he reclined on the floor (13).

¹⁹⁰J. Munck, *Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte* (Aarhus: Copenhagen, 1954). English translation, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. F. Clarke (London: SCM Press, 1959), 162-166.

¹⁹¹Smith, *Social Obligation*, 193.

continuing to enjoy their own separate menu after the others arrive, does not seem appropriate to the context.¹⁹²

Yet it appears that the private meal was connected with a question of status. Paul has identified the question of status as a problem at the communal meal because, in effect, it makes two meals and creates divisions (schisms). Such schisms strike at the very nature of the communal meal. Hence, the apostle builds an argument on the basis of the sacred tradition, and comes to what may appear to be a rather simple conclusion (11:33-34). However, it is not mundane to Paul; it is essential to the meal.¹⁹³ In addition, such a selfish attitude is against the nature of the meal and the fellowship (brotherhood) that should exist among the Christian believers at Corinth.

It has been pointed out that there were such associations of initiates, which formed an integral part of Paul's environment as he worked in great centres of population like Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. It is meaningful that in the Imperial era Dionysus was constantly associated with cult-guilds, either as chief deity or in combination with others. Isiac guilds were already notorious in first century Rome.¹⁹⁴ However, Heinrici has tried to establish specified similarities between pagan religious guilds (brotherhoods) and early Christian communities, such as those at Corinth. He draws several remarkable parallels and some genuine points of contact, but we do not have enough information regarding the organisation of either pagan or primitive Christian societies to be able to conclude that the

¹⁹²Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, trans. J. H. Schütz (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 155-172.

¹⁹³Hans von Soden, "Sakrament und Ethik bei Paulus," *Marburger Theologische Studien*, vol. 1 (1931): 31-40.

¹⁹⁴Kennedy, *St. Paul*, 74-78.

Christian congregation at Corinth was nothing more than a transformed pagan religious association (guild).¹⁹⁵

On the contrary, the case may be different when we turn to the sacrificial meals of paganism, meals which had their counterpart in the practice of mystery brotherhoods. Perhaps the main goal of these was, as F. Cumont suggests, the keeping of communion among the brethren.¹⁹⁶ This would, of course, rest on the evidence of their common fellowship with their god. Yet the single question still remains: How was that fellowship (brotherhood) supposed to be established? It is not easy to answer this question with certainty. It is probable, but by no means certain, that in an early stage of society the participants of the sacrificial animal thought they were thereby sharing the very life of their god, either as incarnated in the sacrifice or somehow united with it.¹⁹⁷ It seems impossible, therefore, to bring forward any convincing proof of the conception of eating the deity from Graeco-Roman religions contemporary with Paul.

2.5 Summary

This short study has sought to consider the most important and widespread of the Hellenistic-Roman mystery religions and the Hellenistic Jewish meals. In the previous chapter, we tried to assess the assumption that Christianity was for Paul a mystery religion, and that many of Paul's ideas were closely related to the mystery cults of paganism. Evidence has been adduced to demonstrate that throughout Paul's

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 80.

¹⁹⁶F. Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1911), 64.

¹⁹⁷Kennedy, *St. Paul*, 258-259. He adds: "But as least as probable an explanation is the notion that the god himself is present and shares with his worshippers in the sacrificial meal."

missionary journeys he probably was in touch with many who were formerly initiated into pagan mysteries and became Christians later on. The data related to sacramental meals in the Hellenistic mystery religions are scant and usually difficult to explain¹⁹⁸ (although Horsley recently argued that there is now a clear consensus that these banquets had a fundamentally religious character).¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, it has been observed that the meal of Serapis was held in the temple of Serapis and in private homes as well. Therefore, we cannot discount the possibility that Paul's advice, especially in 1 Cor. 10:27-30, has to do with a cultic meal and not simply a social meal.²⁰⁰ Despite the wide acceptance which this hypothesis has received, many critical sources warn against such assumptions.

These pagan meals can be divided into three types. First, some members of a cult society ate together for fellowship. The meal, perhaps, commemorated the dead founder in whose honour they gathered.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, as mentioned before, Hans Lietzmann has argued that the Christian view of participating in the Lord's Supper in memory of Jesus came from this pagan custom.²⁰² Jeremias criticized Lietzmann's view and said that the terminology used in the Hellenistic pagan meal is different.²⁰³ The pagan meals were held not to celebrate the death but the birthday of the person honoured. Pagan meals were becoming more secular than

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 257-279.

¹⁹⁹Horsley, *New Documents*, 6.

²⁰⁰Kim, 396.

²⁰¹Nock, *Early Gentile*, 72.

²⁰²Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and the Lord's Supper* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 182. He formulated his view more precisely and said: "'This do in remembrance of me.' The Lord's Supper assumes the character of a 'meal of remembrance' for one departed, and thereby ranks distinctly as a type of the religious meals that were customary everywhere in the Graeco-Roman world."

²⁰³Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 238-243.

religious around the first century. Consequently, it is unlikely that the Hellenistic pagan meals give the origin of the notion of remembering Jesus.

Secondly, there were meals at which a god or goddess was thought to preside over the meal.²⁰⁴ The language used may be similar to that of Paul when he talks of participating in the table of the Lord or in the table of demons (1 Cor. 10:21). It seems probable that the common Greek usage, which mentioned the "table of God," has influenced the Pauline wording,²⁰⁵ especially if the phrase had already been used in the Septuagint for the Jewish worship place. It is most likely that Paul's reference to Exodus 32:6 in 1 Cor. 10:7 is a parallel between the idol worship of Israel in the desert and the pagan idol worship.²⁰⁶

The main difference between the Jewish and pagan meals is that in the Jewish meal the worshippers believed they ate in the presence of God, but in the pagan meal the worshippers believed they were sharing the meal with the deity or even consuming the god, depending on how the evidence is interpreted.

The last type of meal mentioned by Nock is the eating of the raw flesh of a bull by devotees of Dionysus. The bull was considered a representation of the deity, so that the partakers were eating the god himself.²⁰⁷ Attempts have been made to find a sacramental importance in the Dionysus cult, but even scholars like Dieterich

²⁰⁴Nock, *Early Gentile*, 73.

²⁰⁵L. Goppelt, *TDNT*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 213-215.

²⁰⁶Marshall, 28. He points out that "What we are dealing with here is a type of pagan meal which is also attested in the Old Testament, the holding of a meal after a sacrifice in which the worshippers eat the animal previously offered on the altar and thus have fellowship with the god. Paul's citation of Exodus 32:6 in 1 Corinthians 10:7 shows that he recognized the parallel between the idolatrous worship of the golden calf and pagan cults."

²⁰⁷Nock, *Early Gentile*, 73-74.

acknowledge that the evidence is altogether unsatisfactory.²⁰⁸ It is probable that the idea of eating and drinking in some other cults had the same meaning, but there is so little information regarding these cults that it is difficult to draw any solid conclusion about the presence of these ideas.

In any case, we have not found in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 anything to suggest that this notion played a special part in the Lord's Supper. According to John 6:53-56, when Jesus talks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, the idea is obviously expressed in a metaphorical and spiritual language rather than in a literal sense.²⁰⁹

Therefore, it appears that the sharing of meals was a normal religious practice in the pagan mystery religions, Judaism and Christianity, and there are some parallels in all these meals. Yet the similarities are not as close as they appear at first to be. Although the Lord's Supper was not derived from the meals of the Hellenistic cults and mysteries, it would not have grown in the manner it did without Hellenistic influence.²¹⁰ It seems that Klauck's view has to be taken affirmatively to a certain degree. But, at the same time, Paul did not depend purely on one or another mystery religion in order to develop his own thoughts on the Lord's Supper. Even among the Hellenistic Jewish meals (apart from the Jewish Passover) the similarities are too superficial to draw a solid conclusion on the matter. However, Wedderburn insists that the matter regarding the mystery religions deserves more careful treatment than it has received.²¹¹

²⁰⁸Dieterich, 250-256, and Kennedy, 257-259.

²⁰⁹Marshall, 29.

²¹⁰Klauck, 163-165.

²¹¹Wedderburn, 158-163

So, it appears that the scholarly disputes over Paul and his relationship to Hellenistic mystery religions and their influence on the Lord's Meal are destined to continue indefinitely. The importance of the communion motif differed in the Christian and pagan meals. The weekly memorial meal of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the special note of thanksgiving (Eucharist) in the prayer of consecration of the bread and the wine provide no counterparts to pagan practices.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL MEALS IN THE GRAECO-ROMAN WORLD

After considering each of the four major pagan mystery religion meals in the Graeco-Roman world, it seems clear that the ceremonies of the sacred meals in the pagan religions are not the same as in the *eranos* meal at Corinth. The practices, structures, and the motif of the pagan meals had some differences from the practices of the early Christian Church at Corinth. The next step is to study the social meal and its different customs in the Graeco-Roman world.

3.1 Introduction

We have mentioned some aspects of the social Graeco-Roman meal custom which throw light on parts of Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper.¹ The practices of the meals in the entire Mediterranean world seem to have become standardised in some details during the Graeco-Roman times and beyond (ca. 200 B.C.E. to 200 C. E.).² Although some differences occurred, all these meals essentially adapted the same standard practices to suit specific functions. Certainly, the influence of these cultures had an impact on the practices of the meal at Corinth.

¹In this chapter and the previous one, several particular objectives which correspond to the various aspects of the problem have been set forth. The first objective was to understand the influence of the sacred meals (especially the mystery religion meals discussed already in chapter two) in the Graeco-Roman world. Another objective of the study is to consider the social meals in order to understand the social-cultural context of the Gentile Christian meal at Corinth. Thus, it is necessary to know what happened in a typical Graeco-Roman dinner party.

²D. E. Smith, "Meal Custom," *ABD* vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 648-655.

Generally, in the Graeco-Roman society a formal meal indicated an assembly of a group of friends and family for a celebration that meant more than to satisfy the appetite. It was a social occasion, and the social meal was understood in the Graeco-Roman period as “Communal meal.”³

Four types of communal or formal meals in the Graeco-Roman society are particularly significant to this study: (1) the Greek meal: *Deipnon/symposium*; (2) the Roman meal: *Cena/Convivium*; (3) the Graeco-Roman *Eranos* meal, and (4) the Christian *Eranos* meal. Also important is the social stratification and rank in the Graeco-Roman society.

3.2 The Greek Meal: *Deipnon Symposium*

The symposion custom became very popular and was considered in classical times a social event, particularly in the Graeco-Roman time. The fundamental structure of the symposion appears to be unchanged from the time of Homer. The symposion was both a private and public celebration. Generally, the symposion was set in the context of the big meal of the day, the Greek δείπνον (or as we will discuss later, the Roman *cena*), which normally began around the ninth or tenth hour of the day.⁴ It is interesting to notice that in Homer’s time, it was often eaten about the middle of the day. The other two meals of the day would be the ἄριστον, morning meal (probably breakfast), and the δόππος, or the meal of the night.⁵

³D. E. Smith, “Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in I Corinthians in Comparison with Graeco-Roman Meals,” (Th.D. diss., Harvard, 1980), 3.

⁴D. E. Aune, “Septem Sapientium Convivium,” ed. Hans Dieter Betz *SCHNT* 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 71.

⁵Homer, *Ody.* 9.311, 15. 76, 19. 321. In some instances, the δείπνον meal was considered as the morning meal.

These and other changes in the structure of the meal in the classical time showed a fundamental change in the total aspect of the different meals. If a man reclined at a meal, he took the posture of the social high class, a posture commonly taken by the aristocratic class.⁶ The Greek δειπνον normally took place shortly before sundown, or sometimes even after sundown. In the Greek symposion (δειπνον), 36 or more guests attended the meal, while in the Roman *convivium* 6, 9, or sometimes 12 guests participated in the meal. Plutarch also mentioned that couches were shared, and some rich people built large dinning-rooms that had the capacity to hold thirty couches or probably even more.⁷ It was a common practice not to serve wine with the meal, but to save it for the πότος after the δειπνον proper.⁸ Clearly, in both the tradition and the practice, the symposion was considered as a social expression of Greek religion. It was the normal custom to issue invitations to the banquets. To get together with friends or business or religious associates, one would invite them to his home for a meal.⁹ Banquets were also held on significant family occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, and funerals. Invitations to the banquet usually specified the hour, but the most probable time was a little before sunset. The host expected the guests to arrive on time, but latecomers were quite common. Similar situations happened at Corinth, where some

⁶Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 8.6. See also the discussion of reclining below in part 3.3 of this chapter.

⁷Ibid, 5.6.

⁸Lucian, *Symp.* 14f.

⁹D. E. Smith and Hal E. Taussing, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 28. "Various kinds of organized clubs also met for communal meals, and sometimes seem to have been organized almost exclusively for the purpose of providing banquets for their members from a common purse. We know of various kinds of such clubs, especially from inscriptions which provide records of their official business and often define the rules for their banquets. One type of club could be called a trade guild, since it was made up of individuals who had the same occupation. Their purpose, however, was to provide a social outlet rather than a political lobby."

members came earlier and others arrived late for the Lord's Supper. Plato commented that Agathon, the host of the banquet, started the banquet without one of his guests, who arrived late, though the latecomer was warmly welcomed when the meal was almost finished.¹⁰

As the guests arrived, certain customs often were observed before the banquet started. A servant met the participant at the door and led him to the dining room. Then, other servants would remove his shoes and wash his feet, after which he would be ready to take his place on the couch.¹¹ Normally, the guest took his place according to his social status. "These positions became especially well defined in the Roman period."¹²

Thus, the use of this practice, promoted a consciousness of the social rank of the guest invited into the banquet. Lucian describes a banquet at which women were invited, and a latecomer guest was welcomed to sit, since all the reclining positions were taken by the other guests. He refused, on the ground that sitting at a banquet was 'womanish and weak' (γυναικείον καί μαλθακόν). Rather he decided to recline on the floor as a sign of his high social status.¹³

However, for the classical Greek era, the correlation of positions and status is more difficult. The position most honoured was the first place (πρῶτος), apparently to the right of the host. The positions around the room to the right were given to the guests according to their rank, with the last position being the lowest.

¹⁰Plato, *Symp.* 175C-D.

¹¹Ibid, 175A.

¹²Smith, *Social Obligation*, 8.

¹³Lucian, *Symp.* 13.

These places were commonly assigned by the owner of the house to the guests according to their social status.¹⁴ There were some instances where two or three people shared the same couch.¹⁵ While the social status of the guests was assumed, there was also a sense of social equality among the participants. Smith points out that it is not always clear what is meant by the term “equal,” since it did not indispensably rule out the traditional pre-requisites of one’s status.¹⁶

Plutarch's observation is especially instructive. He pointed out that, “in the accompanying conversation, such equality at the meal is argued for as an inherent aspect of banquet 'friendship'.” According to this line of argument, the diners should leave behind the divisive social rankings of outer society and in effect form a new society with new social rules when they entered the door of the dining chamber.”¹⁷ Plutarch suggested that when the members participated in the meal, they should agree to sit wherever they wished, without worrying about their social rank.

In addition to differences in food, location, and posture, Smith observes that another division is mentioned in 1 Corinthians: Distinctions in the length of time one had to eat. The well-to-do were the main offenders in eating a private meal, because they could begin earlier than the others. They had more time in the evening,

¹⁴Plato, *Symp.* 177D-E. Generally, the host assigned the places. Phaedrus occupied first place at the table (πρώτος κατακείσθαι), others followed to the right (ἐπί δεξιά), and Socrates spoke as one who occupied the lower position at the end of the table (ὁ ἕσχατος κατακείσθαι).

¹⁵W. S. Ferguson, “The Attic Orgeones,” *HTR* 37 (1944): 80. Especially the reference to cases of 3, 4, or even 5 sharing a couch on some vase paintings.

¹⁶Smith and Taussing, 34.

¹⁷Plutarch, *Table Talk* 616C-F.

whereas the working class would arrive late to the meeting.¹⁸ Paul admonished the Corinthians to wait for one another (1 Cor. 11:33). It is interesting to notice that in one matter Pliny's suggested solution can be compared with Paul's: In the communal meal, one of the social high class should adjust his eating habits to those appropriate to one of a lower social class. Martial's criticism is with the idea to elevate those of the lower class to the same level as the ones in the high social class:

Since I am asked to dinner, no longer, as before, a purchased guest, why is not the same dinner served to me as to you? You take oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake, I suck a mussel through a hole in the shell; you get mushrooms, I take hog funguses; you tackle turbot, but I brill. Golden with fat, a turtledove gorges you with bloated rump; there is set before me a magpie that has died in its cage. Why do I dine without you although, Ponticus, I am dining with you? The dole has gone: let us have the benefit of that; let us eat the same fare.¹⁹

In another passage, Martial expressed himself more bitterly, even cursing his host who flaunted before all the other guests his social superiority. Differences in honor according to the place the person should sit naturally caused further social offenses.²⁰

It was customary for the household slaves to serve the food on the table. Trays were also placed on the tables. Tables were arranged one to a couch or group of couches, so as Lucian mentioned in many cases, diners might partake from the same table. A characteristic arrangement is the one provided by the dining room of

¹⁸Smith, *Social Obligation*, 189. Smith describes the typical afternoon schedule for a member of the upper class: Exercise, bathing, perfuming, and attiring oneself for dinner. In the summer, the Romans preceded this regimen with a siesta.

¹⁹Martial, *Epigrammata*, III, 60.

²⁰*ibid*, I, 20. See also Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, trans. J. H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 162.

the Asklepeion at Corinth, which dates from the 4th century B. C. E.²¹ For instance, there were nine couches of stone arranged along the wall with an opening for the doorway. It seems that the couches were of a size to accommodate one person at a time. Obviously the portable tables were more practical for cleaning the floor between the courses and after the completion of the meal.²²

Another characteristic element was the menu of the meals. It consisted of bread, a variety of vegetables, and fish or meat if the meal was especially luxurious. There was a variety of bread since it was considered part of the main course. The vegetables might be lettuce, beans, onions, leeks, herbs, or olives. Fish might be prepared in a variety of ways. Meat was generally available to the public only at special celebrations whenever sacrifices were made.²³ In fact, all the meat for the Greek table came from the temple where meat was sacrificed to the idols. Frequently, according to Athenaeus, meat from sacrificial animals seems to have been preferred for the δείπνον proper.²⁴

An elaborate series of events marked the end of the main meal (the δείπνον) and the beginning of the second part of the meal (the symposion). The tables were removed (αἶρειν τὰς τράπεζας) and one of the servant swept the floor. Hand Washing before and after the meals was a common part of Graeco-Roman meal customs. This is an allusion that Athenaeus also mentioned, “water over the hand,

²¹Carl Roebuck, *Corinth XIV: The Asklepieion and Lerna* (Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1951), 51-57.

²²*Ibid.*, 54.

²³Athenaeus 7. 281-330. On the different kinds of fish, it was generally considered the ὄφρον (relish) *par excellence*.

²⁴Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 4. 140, 173; II. 459; 12.534.

tables brought in.”²⁵ The bringing of the tables to the meals refers to the serving of the food. After the meal was finished the tables were removed, and the πότος or symposion itself began. There was a libation of unmixed wine offered to “the good demon” (ἀγαθοῦ δαίμονος) and a paean was sung (παιανίζειν).²⁶ According to Smith, the order of these events probably were different.²⁷ It is understandable that the libation and the removal of the tables usually distinguished the transition from the eating to the drinking part of the meal.

The wine ceremonies were different from place to place. However, the first libation was given with unmixed wine and was dedicated to the “Good gods.” But most of the time this libation took place immediately after the main meal rather than during the meal.²⁸ The symposion was begun with three libations to: (1) the Olympian gods generally, (2) the heroes, and (3) Zeus Soter; after the first libation a song was sung in honor of Dionysos (the god of wine and intoxication).²⁹

Furthermore, the main cup from the bowl of mixed wine was offered to Zeus- Saviour. Another common practice called for three bowls to be mixed at once. The first cup from each of these bowls was then offered to the Olympians, the

²⁵Ibid, 14. 641d.

²⁶H. Blümmer, *The Home Life of the Ancient Greeks* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 212-213. While the basic structure of the symposion remained the same through Plutarch’s time, the many specific gods invoked and honoured exhibits wide variety in the sources. Dionysos, however, was commonly honoured at symposia because of the intimate association with wine, intoxication, and ecstasy. See also W. F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* (Bloomington, 1965), 143ff.

²⁷Smith, *Social Obligation*, 13.

²⁸Karl Kircher, *Die sacrale Bedeutung des Weines* (RVV 9.2; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1910), 16-17. He mentioned two different customs, the cup to Hygieia was not considered a libation.

²⁹Blümmer, *The Home Life*, 213ff.

second to the Heroes, and the last one to Zeus-Saviour.³⁰ When the wine was poured into the cup, the name of the god was mentioned (ἀγαθοῦ δαίμονος, Διὸς σωτήρος). The symposiarch would then pronounce the name of the god once again and pour a portion of wine into the fire or onto the floor. He would drink from it and pass the cup around for each participant to drink from the cup, mentioning the name of the god in the genitive as all of them did likewise.³¹

Next, a song of victory was sung. The specific nature of the hymn at the end of the meal is not known, but the religious element is clear. Plato also pointed out that the guests sang a hymn of victory to the god: “after this, it seems, when Socrates had taken his place and had dined with the rest, they made libation and sang a chant to the god and so forth, as custom bids, till they betook them to drinking”³² It is interesting to see here a close parallel with the Jewish and Christian benediction. In its basic nature, the custom is quite similar to the Graeco-Roman custom which, of course, involved a different god and a different motive.

The second or final event of the meal was the serving of the dessert (τραγήματα). A variety of fruits and salty nuts were served, which made the people thirsty and prepared them for the enjoyment of the drinking section. This part of the meal was known as the *symposion* or *potos* (the drinking party). It was the time left aside for serious consumption of wine.³³

³⁰Schol. Pind, *Isthm* 6.10. Τὸν μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον κρατῆρα Διὸς Ὀλυμπίου ἐκίρνασαν, τὸν δὲ δεύτερον ἠρώων, τὸν δὲ τρίτον Διὸς σωτήρος.

³¹W. W. Tarn, “The Hellenistic Ruler-Cult and the Daemon,” *JHS* 48 (1928): 210-213.

³²Plato, *Symposium* 176A.

³³W. A. Becker, *Charicles: Illustrating of the Private Life of the Ancient Greeks*, 8th ed. (London: Longman Press, 1889), 333-347.

The entertainment might include music, art, dance, and philosophical conversation. In the classical Greek period it was difficult to imagine a meal without drinking. Normally, the Greeks finished their meal with some drinking and conversation which was the basic element of a symposium. The philosophical tradition of the symposium was contained in a motif in which one of the main diversions of the meal was the philosophical conversation appropriate to an assembly of philosophers. The meals in the philosophical schools often were accompanied by philosophical conversation.³⁴

In the symposia a philosopher was considered a poor guest if he did not speak in a rhetorical way.³⁵ Those who thought themselves as sophists were normally invited to banquets. Athenaeus called this kind of person a “dinner-chasing sophist.”³⁶ This philosophical tradition was developed on the precedent constituted in Plato’s Symposium:

Since it has been resolved, then, said Eryximachus, that we are to drink only so as each desires, with no constraint on any, I next propose that the flute-girl who came in just now be dismissed: let her pipe to herself or, if she likes, to the women-folk within, but let us seek our entertainment today in conversation.³⁷

³⁴Dennis E. Smith, “Meals and Morality in Paul and His World,” *SBLSP* (1981), 321. “Plato mentioned the story that the deipnon portion is passed over briefly, while the philosophical dialogue which takes place during the symposium is described in detail. This discussion takes place, as noted above, as the substitute for the scheduled entertainment. The subject discussed is ἔρως or ‘Love,’ and the discussion proceeds jovially, with asides and other references to the setting interspersed within. Thus Plato provided a literary form in which a certain type of topic and a certain type of discussion were considered more appropriate to the symposium setting.”

³⁵Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 267ff.

³⁶Athenaeus, *Deipnon* 1.4.

³⁷Plato, *Symp* 176E.

This philosophical tradition became one of the most important elements of the symposium and was also used in Jewish and Christian communities. Early Christianity took in the conversation form fairly quickly, but was very slow in adopting the symposium as a literary genre.³⁸ In fact, in the Early Christian literature, there are no examples of the literary genre of the symposium. This made Early Christianity independent of such influence.

Besides the philosophical conversation, party games and dramatic presentation became also part of the banquet. However, the overstatement of the vase painters and satirists should not be taken as the norm for the symposium.³⁹ Plato and other writers emphasised that the purpose of a symposium was not just for eating and drinking without control, but where decency and refinement was the ideal norm.⁴⁰

3.3 The Roman Meal: *Cena or Convivium*

In general, the meal practices of the Romans were quite similar to those of the Greeks. Both commonly ate three times a day. Normally, however, the majority of the people would eat their main meal of the day in the evening.⁴¹ The first meal of the morning was called *ientaculum* which was regularly taken at the

³⁸Aune, "Septem Sapientium," 69.

³⁹Smith, *Social Obligation*, 22.

⁴⁰Athenacus, *Deipnon* 5. 186a.

⁴¹Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (New Haven: Yale University, 1940), 263-276; J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 19-54.

early hours of the morning or the third or fourth hour of the day. It was considered a very light meal, but not as light than the Greek meal called ἀκράπισμα.⁴²

A characteristic morning breakfast might have bread with salt and a variety of dried fruit, olives, cheese, or eggs.⁴³ The common drink of the morning meal could be a glass of milk or *mulsum*, a drink which was made of wine mixed with pure honey.⁴⁴

The meal of the middle of the day was called *prandium* which was eaten around the sixth hour. Like the Greeks, the Roman considered this midday meal the most important meal of the day and it was called the *cena*. The custom was changed and this meal became the evening meal, taking the place of the *vesperna*, and the meal at the middle of the day was called the *prandium*.⁴⁵ Subsequently, the *cena* followed this midday meal just three hours later, so the *prandium* meal was considered a light meal. This meal normally consisted of what they called *reliquies* or leftovers from the meal eaten the day before.⁴⁶

The example from Seneca could be considered illustrative of one of the most sober meals, and might be characterized by: "dry bread," and no "need of a table, no need to wash my hands afterwards."⁴⁷ Guests might be invited too, but this was not the common practice. It was a familiar type of meal.

⁴²Pliny, *Ep.* 3.5.10.

⁴³Seneca, *Ep.* 82.

⁴⁴W. A. Becker, *Gallus* (London: Longman's, Green, 1915), 451-504.

⁴⁵Martial, *Epig.* 4. 8. 4.

⁴⁶Becker, *Gallus*, 454-455.

⁴⁷Seneca, *Ep.* 83.6.

During the summer time, the *prandium* was succeeded by the siesta or *meridiatio* which was taken around the seventh hour of the day. In winter the days were cooler, and shorter, so no siesta was taken after the *prandium* meal.⁴⁸ The *merenda* was a less common term; it seems synonymous with the *prandium* meal. Isidorus commented that there was not time for the *merenda* between the *prandium* meal and the *cena*.⁴⁹

It was very common for the Roman aristocrats to exercise and take a bath after the siesta. This was to stimulate the appetite for the *cena*, the main meal of the day. Regularly, it started around the ninth hour and finished at dark, lasting two or three hours. In the summertime, the ninth hour began around 2:31 to 3:46 and the sunset was not until about 7:30. The ninth hour in winter was around 1:20 to 2:13, since the days were shorter, and a meal could also last until dark at about 4:30.⁵⁰ A typical meal in the evening would commonly finish with a time of relaxation, including a drink and conversation.

As with the Greeks, according to Pliny, a distinction must be made between the familiar meal at home and the formal meal taken with a friend or one's club or special celebration. When the family ate together, they might use a special family room for the meal at home. However, a formal supper would be taken in the dining room of the house. On this special occasion the host invited the guests for the

⁴⁸J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 25-26. Exceptionally busy men may have not taken the siesta after the *prandium* meal; for instance, Cicero claimed never to have taken a siesta as long as he was actively engaged in politics or at the bar with the friends.

⁴⁹Isidorus, *Orig.* XX. 2, 12.

⁵⁰Balsdon, *Life and Leisure*, 19, 33-34.

enjoyment of fine food and good wine. The invitations to such meal would usually be extended in advance because the host family paid a *quota* for the participants and bought enough food for everybody.⁵¹

The banquet size varied from three to nine guests according to the occasion. The ideal size of the room was large enough in order to accommodate all the guests comfortably. Plutarch's opinion was the same.⁵² If the available space was too small for the guests, it was considered an insult to the participants of the banquet. The proper custom was that even if the host had plenty of space, the meeting should be kept to the smallest size possible.⁵³ Plutarch commented on the matter and concluded:

If both space and the provisions are ample, we must still avoid great number, because they in themselves interfere with sociability and conversation. It is worse to take away the pleasure of conversation at table than to run out of wine. . . . People who bring together too many guests to one place do prevent general conversation; they allow only a few to enjoy each other's society, for the guests separate into groups of two or three in order to meet and converse, completely unconscious of those whose place on the couches is remote and not looking their way because they are separated from them by practically the length of a race course. . . . So it is a mistake for the wealthy to build showy dining rooms that hold thirty couches or more. Such magnificence makes for unsociable and unfriendly banquets (ἄμικτον καὶ ἄφιλον δεῖπνον) where the manager of a fair is needed more than a toastmaster.⁵⁴

⁵¹Pliny, *Ep.* 1. 15.1., see also Martial, *Epig.* 11.52.2. This is an example of Martial's informal invitation: "If you have no better appointment, come."

⁵²Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 5.5.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 678E-F. Plutarch pointed out that: "For the size of a party also is right, so long as it easily remains one party. If it gets too large, so that the guests can no longer talk to each other or enjoy the hospitality together or even know one another, then it ceases to be a party at all (καὶ γὰρ συμποσίου μέγεθος ἰκανόν ἐστίν, ἄχρι οὐ συμπόσιον ἐθέλει μένειν. ἐάν δ' ὑπερβάλη διὰ πλῆτος, ὡς μηκετι προσήγορον ἑαυτῶ μηδὲ συμπάθεσ εἶναι ταῖς φιλοφροσύναις μηδέ γνώριμον οὐδὲ συμπόσιόν ἐστι)."

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 679BOC. A piece of advice was also given by him: "the rest of us can protect ourselves against the risk of gathering too large a crowd by entertaining frequently in small groups. . . of three or four guests at a time."

Obviously, the solution was to entertain regularly a small company of guests, so the banquet would not lose its ideal purpose. Thus, it was preferable to invite a group of three or four guests to the meal.

Martial observed that the Roman *cena* consisted of three different main meals. The *gustatio* or *promulsis* consisted of dishes that were intended to whet the appetite. This meal normally included eggs as well as certain vegetables which were thought to help the digestion.⁵⁵ The drink used on this occasion was what they called *mulsum*, a wine mixed with honey. The main Roman meal was called the *fercula* or courses. It was divided in three parts: The *prima*, *altera*, and *tertia cena*. Specifically, the *altera cena* was customarily the main meal or what they called the *caput cenae*.⁵⁶

The third meal was the dessert or *mensae secundae* (second tables). It consisted of different kinds of nuts, fruits, and sweet cakes or *bellaria* which had become popular during the Roman time. Similar to the Greek symposion, this part of the meal was named the *comissatio* or *convivium*, which was considered as the time for drinking and amusement. Moreover, the Roman meal might have drinking and entertainment during the banquet, while the *convivium* was reserved especially for the dialogue.⁵⁷ The Roman aristocrats became notorious for their intemperance. There were laws against drunkenness and gluttony.⁵⁸ Though these excesses were

⁵⁵Martial, *Epig.* 13.14.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 10.31.

⁵⁷Becker, *Gallus*, 485-504.

⁵⁸Pliny, *Ep.* 3.5.13. He mentioned that "in summer he rose from dinner while it was still light, in winter as soon as darkness fell, as if some law compelled him." In winter the meal could last until dark, up to 2 to 3 hours. See the further discussion by J. P. Balsdon, 19.

common in the Roman period, they were not considered proper behaviour at the table.

3.4 The Graeco-Roman *Eranos* Meal

The fundamental pattern of the fellowship meal in ancient times was widely followed in different settings and cultural backgrounds. Thus Greeks, Romans, Jews, and probably Christians, followed the same pattern for a formal meal whether it was a family meal, philosophical gathering, club meeting or a sacred meal.⁵⁹

Private meals were of two major kinds, those for which the cost was shared among the participants (*eranos*), and those free to the guests.⁶⁰ The family and invitational meals belong to the latter group while the religious meals of different clubs or association belong to the former group. The symposion as well as the *eranos* meal were very popular social customs in classical times, especially among the Greeks, and Romans.⁶¹ The main practices and rules of etiquette in the Corinthian Church appear to be similar to the customs of the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture. However, there is one important aspect of the meal at Corinth that has not adequately been treated, the Graeco-Roman *eranos* meal.⁶² Therefore, a study of the *eranos* meal is in order. It will provide the proper background for the interpretation of the social meal in the church at Corinth.

⁵⁹Smith, "Meals and Morality," 319.

⁶⁰Aune, "Septem Sapientium," 72.

⁶¹Plutarch *Sept. sap. conv* 150 D.

⁶²Peter Lampe, "Das Korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und Paulinischer Theologia (1 Kor 11:17-34)," *ZNW* 82 (1991): 192. See also Lampe, "The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross," *Int* 48 (1994): 36-49.

The Greek term *eranos* can be translated as "potluck dinner" or "picnic," although the meaning of the term can be understood in a more ample sense. H. G. Liddell's Greek English Lexicon defined the term as: "meal to which each contributed his share, picnic."⁶³ The *eranos* practice can be traced back to Homer's days. The visitors either contributed with money or food in baskets.⁶⁴ According to Aristophanes, the invitation was to "Come at once to dinner, and bring your pitcher and your supper chest."⁶⁵ The entertainer normally provided wreaths, perfumes, and sweets, while the visitors, especially the wealthy, sometimes contributed their own meal, which was prepared in the home of the host. Packed fish, several kinds of meat, and cooked goods were prepared for the *eranos* meal. For instance, Xenophon describes how the partakers at a potluck dinner brought *opson*:

Whenever some of those who came together for dinner brought more meat and fish (*opson*) than others, Socrates would tell the waiter either to put the small contributions into the common stock or to portion them out equally among the diners. So the ones who brought a lot felt obliged not only to take their share of the pool, but to pool their own supplies in return; and so they put their own food also into the common stock. Thus they got no more than those who brought little with them.⁶⁶

Xenophon's description of the *eranos* ("potluck dinner") shows a problem similar to the problem in the Corinthian Church. Paul as well as Socrates tried to protect the *eranos* meal from such abuses, it was not allowed that some should eat a lot while others remained hungry. Graeco-Roman clubs of all types often had

⁶³H. G. Liddell and R. S. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th edition, revised by H.S. Jones (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1940), 680.

⁶⁴Homer, *Odyssey* 1. 226-27. See also Lampe, "Das Korinthische Herrenmahl," 192-203.

⁶⁵Aristophanes, *Acharnenses* 1085-1149.

⁶⁶Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.14.1.

potluck dinners, and sometimes seem to have been organized almost specially with the idea of providing banquets for their members from a common purpose. Literary and archeological sources contain the records of their official business and often describe rules for their *eranos* meals.⁶⁷

In order to understand the social-cultural context of the Gentile Christian meal at Corinth, it is necessary to know what happened in a typical Graeco-Roman *eranos*. Habitually, a bath was taken in the afternoon at the eighth hour of the day.⁶⁸ Commonly, at the ninth hour the participants met for the meal in the host's house.⁶⁹ Participants reclined at the so-called "First Tables" and various servings were given. Next was the *symposium* at the "Second Tables."⁷⁰ The following chart outlines a typical Graeco-Roman *eranos* meal.

The Graeco-Roman Dinner Party (Dinner + Symposium/*Eranos*)

- Dinner at "First Tables"

Break

Start of the "**Second Tables**"

- a sacrifice, invocation of the house gods and of the geniuses of the host and of the emperor

-Second Tables

(often with guests who had newly arrived)

⁶⁷Franz Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909), 156-166.

⁶⁸Martial *Epigrammata* 11.52, 10.48; Plato *Symposium* 174 A.

⁶⁹Cicero *Ad Familiares* 9.26.1. The eighth or ninth hour is mentioned also in: *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 110, 2678 (3rd century C.E.), 2791 (2nd century C.E.).

⁷⁰For more details on Graeco-Roman dinner party (*eranos*), see D. E. Smith, *Social Obligation* 5-32; Peter Lampe, *Affirmation* 4 (1991): 1-15; S. M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia* 237ff; D. E. Aune, "Septem sapientium convivium," in *Plutarch's Ethical Writings And Early Christian Literature*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz, *SCHNT* 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 51-105.

- a toast for the good spirit of the house, the tables are removed
- the first wine jug is mixed, libation, singing

- drinking, conversation
music, singing, entertainment
in a loose sequence

The significance of the *eranos* meal is described by Athenaeus. Together with the dinners (δείπνα), in private and social associations such as the *orgeones* and *thiasoi*, the participants gather together and share the food basket brought by the diners:

καλεῖται δ' ὁ αὐτός καὶ ἔρανος καὶ θίασος καὶ οἱ συνίοντες ἔραμισταὶ καὶ θιασῶται (and the same dinner may be called *eranos* or *thiasos*, and the members who come together *eranistai* or *thiasotai*).⁷¹

Graeco-Roman clubs normally provided or assigned their members to bring food to the *eranos* meals. Similar to the symposion, the *eranos* meal was a drinking party and often resulted in intoxication.⁷² According to Aune, this was the reason *eranos* was prohibited in Sparta and Crete; elsewhere the person in charge tried to stop the meal on time in order to avoid such behaviour.⁷³ To an educated person such as Plutarch, the danger of disorder (ἀταξία) was a constant threat to the *eranos* meal (*qu. conv.* 615E, 618C). Gluttony (as it happened in many symposia) was also another form of self-gratification peculiar to the *eranos* meal.⁷⁴

⁷¹Athenaeus, *Attic Orgeones* 362E. The standard article on the subject is W. S. Ferguson, "The Attic Orgeones", *HTR* (1944): 62-146.

⁷²Lucian *Symp.* 17 and Athenaeus *Deipn.* 2. 36.

⁷³Aune, "Septem Sapientium," 73.

⁷⁴Lucian *Par.* 5 and Athenaeus *Deipn.* 5. 178; 12. 527.

Plutarch also described a meal at which guests brought food for themselves and complains that this resulted in a disorganised *eranos* meal and the destruction of the real fellowship. He adds that "where each guest has his own private portion, fellowship perishes."⁷⁵ It seems clear that according to this data, some of the participants brought their own meal and ate it on their own schedule. Another common practice in the Graeco-Roman meals was to serve different types of food to different guests according to their social status. This difference in food was not so much intended to save money, but to reinforce the social distinction.⁷⁶ Juvenal describes an *eranos* meal where a patron practices such unfair serving:

You're given a wine that even a poultice would not take. . . but your host drinks vintage wine, bottled when consuls wore long hair and beards. You're served bread you can scarley break, a hard lump of dough already spread with mold, impervious to teeth and sure to crack your jaws. But a loaf made out of fine flour, snow-white and soft as gauze, is served your host.

Look at that mammoth lobster, with garnish of asparagus, being served your host . . . For you a shrimp is served in state--one shrimp afloat on one half of one egg on a tiny plate.

Look, that half-eaten hare he'll give us now, or from the haunch of boar some bits; we'll get what's left of the capon soon. So all of you sit in silence, ready, with bread held tight, untasted, and wait.⁷⁷

Given such practice, it would have been common behaviour for the wealthier to have for themselves the best food without considering the welfare of the poor. Regardless of the arrangement, there was a ranking assigned to the position and social status of the guests.⁷⁸ Often Plutarch stresses the point that there should be

⁷⁵Plutarch *Table Talk* 644C.

⁷⁶Juvenal *Satires* 5. 156-170. "You may perhaps suppose that Virro grudges the expense; not a bit of it! His object is to give you pain. For what comedy, what mime, is so amusing as a disappointed belly? His one object, let me tell you, is to compel you to pour out your wrath in tears, and to keep gnashing your molars against each other. . . . In treating you thus, the great man shows his wisdom."

⁷⁷Juvenal *Satires* 5.152-155, and *Epigrams* 3.60; 4.85.

⁷⁸Lucian *Symp.* 9.

equality among the visitors: "ἡ ἰσότης τοῖς ἀνδράσι."⁷⁹ Some thought that the participants at an *eranos* meal should change in age and outlook. Exclusiveness should not exist when the idea of real fellowship is in mind. There was a time when both slaves and masters found themselves at the same *eranos* meal.

Plutarch's ethical meal discussions are relevant to the study of the *eranos* meal, for he follows second century C. E. philosophical and popular ethics, and also he gives a rich discussion of meals. He shows people from different social status sharing a meal in a friendly atmosphere. The friendship terminology is common in the language of social ethics among the Greek. He mentions that when a guest comes to a meal "ὁ γὰρ σύνδειπνος οὐκ ὄψου καί οἴνου καί τραγημάτων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καί λόγων κοινωνὸς ἦκει καί παιδίας καί φιλοφροσύνης εἰ εὐνοίαν τελευτώσης."⁸⁰ When a guest just eats his meal and does not share it in a friendly manner, he just eats the meal with his stomach, not with the mind. If the meal is conducted according to the principle of friendship, the real concept of the *eranos* meal (to make of the participants friends rather than enemies)⁸¹ is demonstrated. The *eranos* meal is understood to create a special relationship among meal participants.

The Greek *eranos* meals of the Graeco-Roman era, while having a basic formal structure, were characterised by a numerous of elements that were the same or standard in most of the cultures and groups in the Mediterranean world. The symposia of religious θίασοι and especially the ἔρανοι meal appear to be the closest one to the practice of the early Christian cultic associations which held religious and

⁷⁹Plutarch *qu. conv.* 613F.

⁸⁰Ibid, 660B.

⁸¹Plato *Leg* 2.671C-72A.

social meals as part of their worship. This same model lies behind Paul's ethical instruction in 1 Cor. 8-11

3.5 The Christian *Eranos* Meal at Corinth

The Christian assemblies of the Corinthians were not different from the other social groups in their world. They got together to eat an *eranos meal* and when they held their meals, they normally followed the examples and rules of the Graeco-Roman society. These meals were mostly celebrated in private houses,⁸² and this was the case of the *eranos* meal at Corinth. Furthermore, in the ancient world, the custom was that a person would host a meal in his house for friends, associates, and also the family. On a special occasion the banquets were celebrated in public buildings which were connected to the temple complexes.⁸³ For this reason, Paul advised the Corinthians to be careful about the way they exercised their freedom while eating in an idol's temple or any public building related to a pagan temple (1 Corinthian 8: 9, 10).

Another serious situation the Christians at Corinth confronted was that eating idol meat was socially and culturally accepted in the Graeco-Roman world. So, it was common that in any gathering such as in the Greek *eranos* meal, the meat sacrificed to an idol was the main course of the banquet.⁸⁴ The participants to the banquets also attended social events (such as weddings, birthdays, and funerals) in

⁸²Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), 153ff. "Christianity in the 1st cent. A.D., and long afterwards, did not have the status of a recognized religion, so there was no question of a public meeting-place, such as the Jewish synagogue. Hence, use had to be made of the only facilities available, namely, the dwellings of families that had become Christian."

⁸³Smith and Taussig, 23.

⁸⁴Peter Lampe, "The Corinthian Eucharistic Dinner Party: Exegesis of a Cultural Context (1 Cor. 11: 17-34)," *Affirmation* 4 (1991): 6.

the temple. Paul's reference is in regard to an invitation from an unbeliever (1 Cor. 10: 27-28). But, some of them did participate in public banquets and private social meals with their friends and associates. Some of them held membership in pagan clubs, probably because still had some business with their previous partners (1 Cor. 8-10).

Their behaviour is understandable once we remember the Graeco-Roman social distinction and what happened in the *eranos* meal. Some clubs had specific rules of behaviour at the meals:

(1) injunctions against quarreling and fighting, (2) injunctions against taking the assigned place of another, (3) injunctions against speaking out of turn or without permission, (4) injunctions against fomenting factions, (5) injunctions against accusing a fellow member before a public court, (6) specifications for trials within the club for inter-club disputes, (7) specifications for worship activities.⁸⁵

Also remarkable in these rules is that they refer to secular (social) conduct in the meals, although the last point is related to worship services, possibly at the temple. All the above factors, plus the ones mentioned in the other sections, such as quality and portion of food, leisurely versus late dining, and seating positions, worked together to reflect and reinforce social status. Consequently, people with ambition were constantly competing to be perceived as *asteios*, *urbanus*, or *sophos*, and the main environment for such competition was the *eranos* meal or *symposion*. Pogoloff points out that "this is strongly reflected in *symposia* literature, prolifically produced after the model provided by Plato's and Xenophon's *Symposia*."⁸⁶ It is highly probable that the social problems Paul confronted in the *eranos* meal at

⁸⁵Smith, *Meals and Morality*, 323.

⁸⁶Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 257.

Corinth were a distinctive sign of a community with typical problems found in the Graeco-Roman society.

It is clear that rivalries, quarrels, and abusive behaviour were not allowed at any club meeting or banquet. However, many conflicts arose because of the individualist behaviour of some of the hosts and the guests as well. It is possible that rich Christians did not suffer from a guilty conscience in this whole matter. It is highly probable also that some Gentile Christians thought of themselves as helping the poorer members by providing food for the banquet.⁸⁷ As it was normal in the Greek *eranos* meal, the host provided most of the food and the house for the meal, while wealthy guests contributed to the potluck dinners. For this reason some of the hosts felt justified in their behaviour.

Consequently, Paul's goal in 1 Cor. 11: 17ff was to settle the problem of the "private meal" by restricting the eating to private homes. At their own homes they could eat and behave the way they wanted. At the Lord's Supper they should behave according to the rules of the congregation. Paul also criticised the "early beginning" (προλαμβάνει) of any *eranos* meal. No "potluck dinner" should take place before the Eucharist meal (1 Cor. 11:21), which began with the blessing of the bread. The wealthy Corinthian had to wait for the other (1 Cor. 11:33) before participating in their *eranos* meal. Thus Paul suggested that the *eranos* meal should follow this order:

- Waiting for one another
- Blessing of the bread
- A Eucharist potluck dinner that nourishes everybody (*Eranos*)
- Drinking, followed by the worship activities of 1 Cor. 14:26-32.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 162ff.

⁸⁸Lampe, "The Corinthian," 7ff.

It seems logical that the earliest celebrations of the Christian meal consisted of a complete *eranos* meal or one which normally started with the breaking of bread and finished with the sharing of the cup. However, some scholars such as Schweizer and Conzelmann argue that by Paul's time the act of breaking the bread may have been moved to the end of the meal and linked with the sharing of the cup.⁸⁹ In other words, the Christian meal had two parts: A fellowship *eranos* meal followed by the sacramental actions. It is highly probable also that such a change had already been in effect.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Theissen and Fee argue that there is not enough proof to demonstrate whether the breaking of the bread had been moved to the end of the Christian meal, and that the only thing we can be sure of is that commemorative acts were practised in accordance with the *eranos* communal meal.⁹¹ According to v. 17 Paul did not criticise the sequence of the *eranos* meal, but he is very critical of the manner in which they celebrated it.

On the one hand, G. Theissen and H. J. Klauck⁹² commented that Paul wanted just bread and wine to be served at the Lord's Supper. Further the apostle did not want the Christians at Corinth to have an *eranos* complete meal, a

⁸⁹E. Schweizer, *The Lord's Supper according to the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 5. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1875), 194 n.18.

⁹⁰Nigel Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth Press, 1992), 116. "One can imagine such a change being made to enable those members of the community who could not count on getting to its gathering on time, the slaves and poor freedmen and women, to participate in the most significant part of the occasion. Something that favours this reconstruction is the fact that when he describes the way in which latecomers are being deprived (if that is indeed the problem...)" mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:21.

⁹¹Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 152f and Fee, 541 n.52.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 145-168 and Hans-Josef Klauck, *Herrenmahl und Hellenistischer kult* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH & Co., 1986), 294, 371.

nourishing dinner between the breaking of bread and the blessing of the cup. On the other hand, Paul would be antisocial if he just wanted the hungry to have bread and wine during the *eranos* meal; meanwhile the wealthy Christian at Corinth would have their own meal at home, and not share with the hungry ones.⁹³ But Paul wanted (according to 1 Cor. 11: 33) the Corinthians to have an *eranos* meal. He just did not want them to eat at home, but also during the Eucharist meal at the church. It is interesting to notice that the Greek term “dinner” (δεῖπνον, 1 Cor. 11:20, 25) that Paul used to identify the Eucharist meal not only means a piece of dry bread, but it also included several kinds of food eaten along with the bread: “fish or meat, sometimes also vegetables (opson).”⁹⁴ Obviously, Paul in verse 33 exhorted the Christians at Corinth to wait for one another, in order to partake in the *eranos* meal.

Therefore, if all the Christians members waited before they participated in the *eranos* meal, then this means that all their food for the potluck would be shared in a common plate. Otherwise, the waiting for the *eranos* meal would be meaningless for those who remained hungry. Paul’s pastoral and practical advice aimed to solve the selfish behaviour of the *eranos* meal at Corinth. According to Xenophon: An *eranos* meal only is a communal meal once the food brought by the participants is shared with all in the community of believers.⁹⁵ Consequently, only when they shared the food did they enter into real fellowship with one another.

⁹³Lampe, "The Corinthian," 8.

⁹⁴Ibid, 9.

⁹⁵Xenophon, *Symposium* 2.1.

3.6 Social Stratification and Rank in Graeco-Roman Society

In the Graeco-Roman world, those who partook in a meal were conscious of their differing social position. For instance, in a formal meal, as it has been discussed before, the act of reclining indicated the social status. It was a common tradition to recline at a meal attended by free citizens with no women, children, and slaves.⁹⁶ The beginning of the practice of reclining, which was not original from the Greeks or the Romans, has been ascribed mainly with the posture as the common rule in any banquet of ancient times.⁹⁷ The reclining custom was adopted as a symbol of high social class among the Greeks and the Romans as well.

The use of the reclining custom was promoted as an awareness of social ranking, although some of the aspects of this practice changed in the first century C.E. Women were not permitted to recline, the disgrace of social position was still linked with the reclining custom. We have mentioned the incident of Lucian's explanation of a banquet, when a guest arrived late and did not find a place to recline, he refused to sit, because he considered sitting as "womanish and weak." (*Symposion*, 13). The symbol found in early Greek iconography⁹⁸ showed that whenever an aristocrat was with his wife or children the whole family were shown sitting rather than reclining.

According to Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, it was essential for the host to distribute his guests into two groups: The first group was invited into the *triclinium* while the others stayed outside in the *atrium*. Obviously, the ones who went to the

⁹⁶Smith and Taussig, 32f.

⁹⁷Jean-Marie Dentzer, "Aux origines de l'iconographie du banquet couché," *RA* (1971): 215-258.

⁹⁸*Ibid*, 246.

triclinium were his closest friends, and probably were members of the same social class. The other group took their places in the *atrium* where conditions were inferior.⁹⁹ So, those in the first group went to the *triclinium* where they were able to recline according to the social custom. In the last period of the Roman republic, the custom of reclining for a meal appears to have changed. The early practice was for wealthy women to be seated at a formal meal; by the first century C.E., they seemed to have been reclining. In a significant book, K. E. Corley explains the evidences as follows:

Just as women were moving into public roles and gaining rights previously denied them under a more restrictive Greek social code, Roman women were attending public meals. From Hellenistic sources of the second century BCE through second century CE we can conveniently chart these fluctuations in Greco-Roman society by analyzing changes in the meal etiquette of the Greco-Roman women. The presence of women in public meals during the Roman period has been identified as a sign of the shift in the status of women during the Roman period.¹⁰⁰

Petronius also described the Roman cultural superiority over the Greek custom regarding the admission of women to a dinner party:

On the other hand, many actions are seemly according to our code which the Greeks look upon as shameful. For instance, what Roman would hesitate to take his wife to a dinner party? What matron does not frequent the front rooms of her dwelling and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for there a woman is not admitted to a dinner party, unless relatives only are present, and she keeps to the more retired part of the house called "the woman's apartment."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul*, 158-159.

¹⁰⁰Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women Public Meals* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 24-79. "As Roman matrons would have been free to accompany their husbands to public banquets, and in particular would have been allowed in religious meal settings, the inclusion of women in Christian meals would have been noteworthy but not unique."

¹⁰¹Petronius, *Satyricon* 67-69.

At the turn of the second century C.E. the incorporation of women into the banquets had been more acceptable at Greek dinner parties. The question of whether women were allowed to recline is not clear.¹⁰² However, Lucian comments that women were present at both a wedding feast and in the philosophical meal, though seated in the lowest couch at the table.¹⁰³ Whenever this fundamental Graeco-Roman social custom was adopted in a different context, the normal ethical ideas accompanied it.¹⁰⁴

The guest invited for a meal was expected to be served. The host was supposed to provide good service. The wealthy people normally had servants who did all the work for them. This was a sign of high social status. Plato mentioned that in Agathon's banquet whenever a guest arrived for the meal, he ordered his servants to take care of his needs.¹⁰⁵ Commonly the host provided all of the servants for the banquet. Even among the high class who reclined, there were distinctions of rank. It was seen by the seating order, that the rich were seated in different couches around the tables. The Greeks and Romans¹⁰⁶ assigned the guests to their couches according to their high social status.

¹⁰²Corley, *Private Women*, 25ff. She rightly points out that, "Women, if matrons, were expected to be present for certain portions of the meal, such as the δεῖπνον, but they were also to be somewhat circumscribed by those with more idealistic views. Such social criticism attempted to limit women's practice and restrict their dining companions. Therefore, women dining or reclining with those outside of their immediate family would still elicit a degree of social criticism even during the Roman period." See also K. E. Corley, "Were the Women around Jesus Really Prostitutes? Women in the Context of Greco-Roman Meals," *SBL* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 487-521.

¹⁰³Lucian, *Symp.* 8. "On the right as you enter, the women occupied the whole couch, as there were a good many of them, with the bride among them, very scrupulously veiled and hedged in by the women. Toward the back door come the rest of the company according to the esteem in which each was held. Opposite the women, the first was Eucritus. . . ."

¹⁰⁴Smith, *Meals and Morality*, 323.

¹⁰⁵Plato, *Symp* 175A, 213B.

¹⁰⁶Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 1.3.

In addition, the issue of social status became a problem that had to be resolved at almost every banquet by the host assigning the positions on the table according to the social rank in order to avoid jealousies and inconvenience.¹⁰⁷ The subsequent problem was that some would be insulted if they did not receive the recognition they felt they deserved. Similarly, the church at Corinth confronted almost the same predicament and this was why the apostle asked, "Who distinguished you?" (τίς σε διάκρινει;). He may have been responding to their demands to "regularly distinguish in this way."¹⁰⁸ In 1 Cor. 11:29 Paul used the same Corinthian claims and language to stress the fact that it is the whole body, the body of Jesus Christ, not the social exaltation of the person. Paul's main concern here as elsewhere in the letter is to remove obstacles to unity among the members of the Corinthian congregation.

Besides the assignment of a good place at the table, there were other means to indicate the social position of a guest. It was customary that a special guest would receive the best food. For instance, a big portion was assigned to an honoured guest of the community. So, Smith and Taussig's observation is relevant when they say that, "to honor a person's social rank was considered appropriate and was defended according to the ethical argument that it was a sign of the 'good order' that should characterise a banquet."¹⁰⁹ But when a guest received a lower portion of food by the host, this was a sign that the host considered that guest to be of a lower social

¹⁰⁷Ibid, 1. 2.

¹⁰⁸Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 246ff.

¹⁰⁹Smith and Taussig, 33. "Various clubs and social organizations utilized this custom to designate rank within the group. Thus club officers would be designated places at table and special portions in the distribution of the meal."

status. This practice seems to have been commonly accepted in the Roman society; but it was also condemned by many of the conscientious people of the time.¹¹⁰

Paul also condemned such practice too. Take for example what happened in the early Christian community, especially the Gentile Christian Church at Corinth. Some of the Corinthian Christians were eating without taking cognizance of their brothers and sisters.¹¹¹ Many of the problems faced by the Graeco-Roman people had parallels in the Corinthian community.

3.7 Summary

The study of the different social settings in which the Graeco-Roman meal occurred demonstrates a consistent model of the social context connected with it. This same model lies behind Paul's social-ethical instruction to the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor. 10-14). Some complex banquet and social traditions in the Graeco-Roman society explain why different early Christian groups, especially the Christian community at Corinth got together for the *eranos* or *symposia* meal. The similarity of some customs in this pagan society influenced early Christianity through the new converts. As it has been discussed, they usually ate a meal together. The basic models were present whether the meal was considered "sacred" or "social."

¹¹⁰Pliny, *Ep.* 2.6.

¹¹¹R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B. C. to A. D. 248* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), 73. "Probably some people saw Christian gatherings as meetings of some sort of association or *collegium*, especially in view of the fact that early Christianity had no temples, no priests, and no sacrifices. Furthermore, just like a Christian meeting, an association meeting could involve a variety of people from up and down the social strata. It could involve a wealthy patron, male or female, a group of artisans both freeborn and freed, and even some slaves, who perhaps had taken up a trade or started a business using their *peculium*, money of their own."

The Greek *deipnon* or *symposium* was a communal meal which had religious and social meaning as well. As we pointed out before, it started with the offering of food to a god and finished with libations and the singing of a hymn. In this Greek meal, sacrificial meat was preferred for the δέϊπνον. The κυριακὸν δέϊπνον mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:20; 10:14-22, in all probability had the same characteristics as that of the Greeks but to a different god.¹¹² However, we believe that according to the information presented in this study (see further details in chapter six of this thesis), in many aspects the Christian meal is closer to the Greek *eranos* meal than to the Greek *deipnon* or *symposium*.

Like the Greek host and some guests in the *symposia*, the Roman aristocrats were quite individualistic and anxious to be recognised at the banquets. The Romans' attitude to the meal was common practice in the society of the time. They usually ate their meals first without waiting for the latecomers. They got drunk and made the host and guests sometimes feel embarrassed because of their uncontrolled behaviour. A similar situation happened at Corinth. Paul was offended by the excessive individualism and lack of decorum in the *eranos* meal. There was no respect for the sacred meaning of the Lord's meal. Aune rightly observes that "the disorder at Corinth seems fairly representative of the real nature of such occasions."¹¹³ However, for this reason Paul advised them to go home and forbade them to continue humiliating people (1 Cor. 11:20-22).

The whole structure of the Christian gathering appears to have been influenced by the Greek *eranos* meal. The wealthy Corinthians ate early; the same happened in the Greek *eranos* meal. The dinner at the first table (see chart in

¹¹²Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 238.

¹¹³Aune, "Septum Sapientium," 75-78.

chapter six of this study) concluded with the blessing of the cup; they finished with a ceremony involving wine. In essence we cannot deny the close resemblance of the Greek *eranos* meal to the Christian *eranos* meal, though the Greeks made sacrifice to a different god.

The Christian *eranos* meal was not just a nourishing meal but its main purpose was to unite the whole body of the believers. Paul's social and ethical concern was to lead them to understand the eschatological purpose of the meal. But for some of the Corinthians the social aspect of the meal was more important to them than caring and sharing for others. This practice was common in the Graeco-Roman society. But by sharing the meal with one another, Christians are led to care for others, and in this way they proclaimed Christ's death.

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL SETTING IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

After looking into the social meals in the Graeco-Roman world, the study of the social setting of the city and the early Christian church at Corinth is in order. To set the context for our examination of 1 Cor. 8, 10, and 11, we must begin with several matters of prolegomena. To be specific, we must answer two questions: (1) Why is the social setting of the Corinthian church so important? (2) How does the social setting of the church at Corinth contribute to our understanding of the complex social issues in the Lord's Supper?

4.1 Introduction to Sociology and the Study of Early Christianity

Interest in the social stratification of ancient societies, especially in early Christianity is not new. The topic was widely considered at the beginning of the twentieth century but abandoned in the period between the first and second World Wars. Lohmeyer and the so-called Chicago school were the exceptions, because they kept working with the topic. In 1921, Lohmeyer published a little book in German (*Soziale Fragen im Urchristentum*) that surveys the economic and social conditions of the Graeco-Roman world and the early church. S. Jackson Case and S. Matthews, both of Chicago, were the main exponents of the socio-historical approach that became the mark of distinction of the Chicago School.¹ Case

¹ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 1-28. See also further details in W. G. Kümmel's article. He says that "Interesse in der sozialen Wirklichkeit des frühen Christentums ist natürlich nichts Neues, stellt R. Scroggs zu Beginn eines Berichts über die gegenwärtige Lage der soziologischen Erforschung des Neuen Testaments mit Recht fest und verweist auf die Arbeiten von A. Deissmann, E. Lohmeyer, C. J. Cadoux und der sog. Chicago-Schule; aber ebenso kann G. Theissen mit Recht die Feststellung, dass man in meinem Forschungsbericht über die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft im 20. Jh. von 1970, vergeblich nach dem Stichwort Soziologie oder Sozialgeschichte suchen wird, als zweifellos zutreffend bezeichnen." W. G. Kümmel, "Das Urchristentum," *TRu* 50 (1985), 327. D. J.

clarified the ideas, values, and common practises of the early Christians simply as responses to "needs" that were manifest in the society of those days.

In contrast, not everyone welcomes the renewed attempts to describe the social history of early Christianity. Most scholars, especially theologians, have warned that the sociological explanation of religious phenomena is inevitably reductionist.² Sociology of early Christianity is not interested in reductionistically confining the true being of Christianity to a social dynamic. Instead, it should be seen as an attempt to protect against a reductionism from the other extreme, a limitation of the true being of Christianity to an "inner spiritual" or "objective-cognitive" logical order.³

W. A. Meeks takes up the challenge and argues that those who limit legitimate interpretation of theological readings of the canonical text are practising an example of another kind of reductionism. The assertion that all texts are really about theological ideals hides much confusion, including the following: (1) It fails to distinguish the differences among distinct contexts of meaning and among different uses of the text in question. (2) Theological reductionism hides what religion is, prohibiting clarity and preventing criticism. (3) The theological critics seem frequently to refer to a reduction of language's meaning to its "ostensive, locutionary force, its manifest intention."⁴

Harrington, "Sociological Concepts and the Early Church: A Decade of Research," *TS* 41 (1980), 181.

²W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 2.

³Robin Scroggs, "The Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament: The Present State of Research," *NTS* 26 (1980): 164.

⁴Meeks, *The first Urban*, 4-5. The truth of the matter is that there are tensions on both sides, and both claim that they have the right methods to interpret the text. Tidball rightly comments that "the root of the tensions which exist between a sociological interpretation of behaviour and a theological interpretation of the same behaviour usually lies in the imperialist

However, as with any other scholarly field and method of interpretation of the text, there are benefits to be obtained and pitfalls to be avoided.⁵ The use of these sociological principles and methodologies in the interpretation of the early Christian church will help us to distinguish their social environment. Consequently, contrary to the worries of many, one may use sociological methods today without endorsing the scientism which typified, for instance, the early psychologist who reduced the apostle Paul to the completion of his own incompetence often on the

claims which each discipline makes. That is, a sociologist is being imperial when he claims that his explanation of behaviour is the total explanation of that behaviour. Or to put it another way, he is a reductionist in that he says that his version of reality is the only valid explanation and ultimately all explanations are reduced or boil down to nothing but his own. Similarly Christians may claim that the problems in society are caused by sin and that is all there is to it. Such a claim, however, would be equally imperialist or reductionist." Derek Tidball, *An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 17.

⁵David A. Black & David S. Dockery, *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991). "Sociological Criticism," by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., 304-306. There are several weaknesses and strengths in the field of Sociological Criticism: (1) One of the primary weaknesses of any behavioral methodology applied to the Scriptures is the almost overpowering tendency to view the realities of spiritual experience from within a human-centered frame of reference. (2) Another potential weakness in Sociological Criticism is to apply to the world of the New Testament sociological paradigms developed in the present world whose social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics are radically, if not totally alien to the Roman world of the first century. (3) Another weakness, as noted above in reference to the work of Malina, is to employ sociological models and/or methods in a Procrustian manner that trims the evidence to fit the parameters of the model/method, often casting aside evidence whose presence is crucial for an accurate understanding of the text. (4) Perhaps the most subtle weakness in Sociological Criticism, implicit in all that has been said, is the tendency toward sociological reductionism." However, there are several good points that can be considered as strengths of Sociological Criticism: (1) "One strength of Sociological Criticism is its ability to help us distinguish between our own sociological matrix and that of the New Testament. (2) Another important strength is Sociological Criticism's insights into the essentially sociological dimension of language. (3) Perhaps the greatest strength of Sociological Criticism is its focus upon the incarnational reality of human life. (4) Sociological Criticism can be an effective means of radical encounter with God by enabling us to enter into the life-matrix of the community of faith, understand the reality of God's incarnation in that particular sociological milieu, and open ourselves and our community of faith to the same kind of relationship with God in our own life-matrix."

basis of virtually fundamentalist interpretation of the NT texts.⁶ Sociology, then, helps to explain certain typical features and not particular examples.⁷

Furthermore, today the interest in studying the social reality of early Christianity is alive again. This is not to say that all is easy for sociologists of the New Testament. There are serious problems that they must deal with: the problem of methodology, the problem of the data, and the problem of reductionism.⁸ This study does not address these issues, but considers the common life of the ordinary Christians of the first century (especially the Corinthian congregation). To establish the social level of any community there are some measurable criteria: economic class, status, and power.⁹

4.2 Social Status of the Early Christians

The Apostle Paul sent several letters to the church at Corinth in the early 50s of the first century C.E. In one epistle he provided a general view of what constituted the social background of the Corinthian congregation. Paul says; "Now remember what you were, my brothers, when God called you. From the human point of view few of you were wise or powerful or of high social standing. God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise, and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful. He chose

⁶Thomas F. Best, "The Sociological Study of the New Testament: Promise and Peril of a New Discipline," *SJT* 36 (1983): 190.

⁷Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 97. He says that "we can explain why there was widespread social rootlessness in Palestine at that time, but not why one man became a criminal, another a holy man, the third an emigrant and the fourth an ascetic. Sociological explanations only apply to typical features and not to individual instances."

⁸Scroggs, 166.

⁹P. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 172.

what the world looks down on and despises and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important " (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

Some scholars interpret Paul's statement to the Corinthians as a description of the social constituency of earliest Christianity and, therefore, some use it to support their argument that Christians in the early church belonged to a lower social class. This questionable assumption has not been accepted by the majority of scholars.

A century later the Christian writer and apologist Minucius Felix said: "That many of us are called poor is not our disgrace, but our glory."¹⁰ Contemporary with Minucius was the pagan Celsus who described Christians as follows: "Their injunctions are like this: Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable, and stupid, and only slaves, women and little children."¹¹ Even in Celsus's remarks and exaggerated tone, he is recognizing that the apostle Paul implies that there were at least some Christians of wisdom, power, and high social standing in the early Christian church. This issue will be considered further in the next main section.

¹⁰*Octavius* 36. See also J. G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 94.

¹¹Origen, *Contra Celsum* trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge: The University Press, 1965), 158.

A. The Older Viewpoint Regarding the Christian Social Status

Several opinions have been expressed on the problem of the social level of primitive Christianity. According to Deissmann, early Christians belonged to a movement within the lower class. Meeks reminds us that Deissmann found that hundreds of newly discovered documents written on papyrus or ostraca letters, contracts, school lessons, bills of sale, magical spells had revolutionary implications for understanding not only the vocabulary and grammar but also the social setting of the New Testament.¹² The language of the New Testament and the *Koine* language found in the papyri from Egypt have some similarities. In other words, the two groups of texts appeared to him to belong to the same vulgar literary level, and in consequence this is what constitutes evidence for the "folk" (*volkstümlich*) character of the early Christians' lower social status.¹³ So, his justification for this view lies in the vulgar level of literary culture and the language the writers used (*Koine*). But Bengt Holmberg says that this feeling of agreement was general, but not homogeneous.¹⁴

¹²Meeks, *The First Urban*, 51-73. He adds, "He had a genius for popularizing the results of his own and others' research, and two extended trips through the Middle East enabled him to reconstruct 'the world of St. Paul' in terms of a vivid, thoroughly romantic travelogue. In general his identification of the language of the New Testament with the vulgar Koine of the nonliterary papyri supported the view that the writers had belonged to the lower classes, but Deissmann had some difficulty in situating Paul himself."

¹³"Ohne sie [die Volkstümlichkeit des Urchristentums] zu kennen und stark zu unterstreichen, können wir den Erfolg der Werbekraft des Evangeliums historisch nicht verstehen. Die Mission des Paulus war Handwerkermission, nicht Mission eines Studierenden." "Was Kautsky instinktiv gesehen hat, ist richtig: der enge Zusammenhang des Urchristentums mit den volkstümlichen Schichten." A. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten. Das Neue Testament und die neu entdeckten Texte der Hellenistisch-Römischen Welt* (4. Aufl., Tübingen, 1923), 329, 405. English version, A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927).

¹⁴Bengt Holmberg, *Sociology and The New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 29. He further adds: "At one extreme one could find a Marxist like Karl Kautsky, describing the first Christians as originally a proletarian and revolutionary movement among the lower classes, characterized by wild class hate, intense egalitarianism, contempt for work, and destruction of family life. The leading elite were radically poor, spirit filled 'apostles and prophets.' Only gradually and as a consequence of spreading into a non-Jewish environment, the new movement received a few educated and socially higher placed converts."

At the other end we have Ernst Troeltsch's description of the social class of the early Christians.¹⁵ Using Harnack's argument, Troeltsch considers the social standing of the early Christians to have been fairly low. Most of them belonged to the urban areas, but from the lowest class of society. Part of these groups would have been artisans, house slaves, freedmen and free workers, but not belonging to any real social class.¹⁶ J. G. Gager rightly points out that even such classicists as A. D. Nock, A. H. M. Jones and E. R. Dodds agree that the social subdivision of early Christianity has again come into focus. Among this limited circle, something approaching a consensus has emerged on two aspects of the social question: (1) that for more than two hundred years Christianity was fundamentally a movement among the poor groups in the Empire; and (2), that its appeal among these groups depended on social as much as ideological considerations.¹⁷

A contemporary variant of the old consensus is presented by Gager in his pioneering book on sociological interpretation of the New Testament, *Kingdom and Community* (1975). Gager posits that the early Christians did not actually exist at the absolute bottom level of the social class, nor did they come exclusively from the aristocratic group or the middle classes. Inside these social stratifications the early Christians belonged to a group that fell far from their relative expectations.¹⁸

¹⁵Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der Christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (in *Gesammelte Schriften I*, Tübingen, 1912), 15-17. E.T., *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* trans. O. Wyon (2 vols.; 1931; New York, 1960), says that "For the understanding of the whole fundamental direction of Christianity in relation to the social problem it is decisive to realize that the preaching of Jesus and the creation of the new religious community was not the creation of a social movement, which means that it did not evolve from or adapt to any class struggle, and actually never relates directly to the social upheavals of ancient society."

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 22-25.

¹⁷Gager, 96.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 106-108.

Holmberg criticizes Gager's use of terms like "disinherited, deprived, disadvantaged, outsiders, disprivileged, dispossessed" as if they were all exchangeable terms. They are not. Being an "outsider" and being "dispossessed" refer to two different kinds of alienation, one social and the other economic. According to Holmberg through this lack of precision in his analytical language Gager is able to mix two sets of ideas when describing the first Christians, although they need not have anything to do with each other.¹⁹

It seems that Gager places the early believers in sociological world outside the normal standards of society. They were not at the bottom of the social level nor high nor middle class but deprived of their expectations. This criterion used by Gager is useless because it does not measure the social level of the individual or group in the early church. The next section will deal with a more up-to-date view that has shown that the social class of early Christians may be higher than some scholars, especially Deissmann, had supposed.

B. The Newer Viewpoint Regarding the Christian Social Status

More than thirty years ago E. A. Judge, in his small book *The Social Pattern of the Christian Group in the First Century*, challenged the consensus. Judge observes that the common notion is that the Christian groups were constituted from the lower orders of society; if this meant to imply that they did not draw upon the upper orders of the Roman ranking system, the observation is correct, and pointless. Although the original Christians came from the Aramaic community in Palestine,

¹⁹Holmberg, *Sociology*, 35. "One refers to economic level ("class," "dispossessed"), the other refers to interior feelings of alienation from established society. He aligns himself with and quotes from scholars who have only the first set of criteria in mind, but guards himself by constant reference to a 'relative deprivation,' which is experienced especially by people of some means. Relative deprivation can actually be experienced by any person, at whatever level of society. Consequently it is useless as a criterion for indicating any social level."

they flourished and their writings spread among Jewish and Gentile believers living under the influence of the urban Graeco-Roman society and institutions.²⁰

Judge's studies not only represent a new interpretation of the evidence, but also show an improvement in methodology. Judge differentiated between separate times and milieus of early Christianity. The Aramaic-speaking, rural movement around Jesus is not simply the same thing as Jewish Christianity in Jerusalem, not to mention the groups we encounter ten years later in Syria or twenty-five years later in Corinth or Rome.²¹ The impact of Judge's reinterpretation has hardly been noticed among New Testament scholars, although his book was translated and published in Germany in 1964.

His view about the socially combined character of the early Christian church has received some support from scholars, such as Heinz Kreissig, Clarence L. Lee and especially Martin Hengel, who points out that

What Pliny the Younger, as governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, wrote to the emperor Trajan, also applied to the communities founded during the mission of the apostle to the Gentiles: "many . . . of every class . . . are endangered now and will be endangered in the future" (by the new "superstition": *multi enim . . . omnis ordinis . . . vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur*). That is, there were members of Christian communities in all strata of the populace, from slaves and freedmen to the local aristocracy, the decurions, and in some circumstances even to the local nobility of the Senate. . . . "The majority of early Christians will have belonged to the 'middle class' of

²⁰E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960), 52-54.

²¹Holmberg, *Sociology*, 39-42. He also comments: "Judge relates the data concerning social level to social structures of the surrounding society, Palestinian, Greek, and Roman (class system, patrons, and their clientele). He also evidences a clearer grasp of the complexity of the issue as such: data are generally scarce, there exists no statistical material, and some of our information only permits of indirect, vague conclusions. Furthermore, he points out that the data that are more directly relevant, namely prosopographical information, may not have any high degree of representation."

antiquity from which the 'godfearers' of the Jewish mission were recruited (cf. Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7)."²²

Evidence for this expansion is abundant in the second half of the second century, especially as more educated people became members of the early church. Hengel stresses the fact that new members of the "upper class" frequently came into contact with the church. Luke in Acts mentioned a list of prominent people who joined the early Christian church. The list of people included Joanna the wife of Chusa, who was the financial administrator of Herod Antipas; the centurion Cornelius; the Athenian assessor, Dionysius; Menahem, the friend of Herod Antipas; Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus. To this list can be added the group of "God-fearers" on whom the Gentile-Christian mission concentrated its attention; maybe Luke himself came from this high-class society. According to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5, 21,1), in the time of Commodus (180-192), "Large numbers even of those at Rome, highly distinguished for wealth and birth, were advancing towards their own salvation with all their households and kindred."²³ Christianity moved rapidly in all segments of society, and even some senators were persuaded to become Christians. The church's move toward social universalism in fact had already been initiated by Paul.

The negative opinion given by a critic like Celsus that Christians belonged to the lower and uneducated segment of society should not be taken at face value. Obviously, this is a part of Celsus' anti-Christian propaganda to set people of high

²²Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church* trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 36-39. The old dispute concerning whether the nephew of the emperor Domitian, "Flavius Clemens and his wife, Flavia Domitilla, because of their Judaizing tendencies--thus Dio Cassius 67, 14. Flavius Clemens' niece of the same name, because of her conversion to Christianity--thus Eusebius, HE 3, 18, 4--were executed or exiled by the emperor, is still unresolved. It shows that we must at least reckon with the possibility that in individual cases the new faith quickly penetrated to the heights of society. Evidence for this increases greatly in the second half of the second century."

²³*Ibid.*, 64-65.

social rank against the new religion from the East. Celsus alleged that the church "deliberately excluded educated people because the religion was attractive only to the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children."²⁴ However, during the past twenty years, several scholars have looked at the data afresh and some of them have come to very different conclusions than Celsus and Deissmann about the social stratification of the early Christianity. The diverse viewpoints have led Malherbe to suggest that "a new consensus may be emerging."²⁵ A similar view was expressed more than forty years ago by Floyd V. Filson when he said: "The apostolic church was more nearly a cross section of society than we emphasized."²⁶ The evidence from the second through the fourth centuries is clear, and the triumph of Christianity in a hierarchically organized society necessarily took place from the top down.²⁷ Early Christianity should be viewed not as a proletarian group movement, but as a relatively small community, largely composed of people of middle-class origin.

R. M. Grant's explanation is not far from Heinz Kreissig's conclusion that the early Christian church spread in the first century of our era not so much among "proletarians" or solitary handworkers of the smallest scale or small peasants, but rather in the urban circles of well-situated artisans, merchants, and members of the liberal professions.²⁸

²⁴Holmberg, *Sociology*, 41.

²⁵Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 31.

²⁶Floyd V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *JBL* 39 (1939): 105-107.

²⁷Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society* (London: W. Collins, 1978), 11.

²⁸Heinz Kreissig, "Zur Sozialen Zusammensetzung der frühchristlichen Gemeinden im ersten Jahrhundert U.Z.," *Eirene. Studia Graeca et Latina* 6 (1967): 91-100.

Malherbe's contribution to the new consensus in his book *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* is contrary to Deissmann's presuppositions, especially in what he believes was the relationship between social rank and literary culture.²⁹

Of course there are differences regarding the New Testament Greek language literature level. The fact is that even at its simple level it is not as vulgar as many of the nonliterary papyri were on which Deissmann based his argument. Holmberg says that another point to be considered is that the association between the literary level of a document and the social level of its author (not to speak of its readers) is not straight forward.³⁰

If the high educational level in ancient times is somehow connected with wealth and social rank, one could surmise that a very high literary level of a document is an indirect proof of a higher social rank of the social community in which it belonged.³¹ It is obvious that Paul's own literary style very well indicates that his personal educational level is higher than the one found, for instance, in the Gospel of John and others. In summarizing the new viewpoint, we cannot measure social level along an individual scale. A person has to be located along several different variables like power, wealth, occupation, ethnic background, education, and family connections.³²

²⁹Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 13. Furthermore, we must be aware of the different relationships that "were possible between the literature and the communities to which it was addressed. We must, for instance, resist the temptation to see so much of early Christian literature either as a community product or as reflecting the actual circumstances of the communities with which the writings are associated. We too frequently read of communities that virtually produced one or another of the Gospels or for which they were produced. It is at least possible that some documents were rescued from obscurity, not because they represented the viewpoint of communities, but precisely because they challenged them."

³⁰Holmberg, *Sociology*, 55.

³¹Loveday Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," *NT* 18 (1986): 49.

³²Meeks, *The First Urban*, 55.

Gager's criticism of the new consensus is found in a couple of articles in which he reviewed the work of several scholars like Robert Grant, A. J. Malherbe, and Gerd Theissen. Gager disagrees with the picture drawn by Malherbe's focus on the letter and the person of the apostle Paul alone, and believes that no weighty conclusions could be taken from this as to the social stratification of early Christianity as a whole. Gager distances himself a little bit from his own position and the old viewpoint. He pointed out of the "presentations of early Christianity as exclusively proletarian, a movement of slaves, labourers, and outcasts of various sorts . . . that it may be seriously doubted that such a view ever existed apart from a few romantics and early Marxists. . . ." ³³ It is fair to say that the new consensus has not really been shaken by Gager's own criticism, although he reluctantly has to acknowledge the evidence presented by the scholars.

Besides Gager, Georg Schöllgen has expressed a sharp critique of Meeks' book. Schöllgen's basic argument is that we know almost nothing about the social realities of the ancient cities and of the Christian church on which to base any strong conclusions. He concludes that

So berechtigt die Frage nach der Sozialstruktur der frühchristlichen Gemeinden exegetisch wie theologisch ist, so notwendig scheint mir das Eingeständnis, dass sie angesichts der Unergiebigkeit des Materials nach dem gegenwärtigen Stand der Exegese nicht zureichend beantwortet werden kann. Dies gilt im übrigen für die gesamte vorkonstantinische Zeit. Selbst die Gemeinden von

³³John G. Gager, "Social Description and Sociological Explanation," *Religious Study Review* 5, (1979): 174-180. Holmberg comments, "In his 1982 article, however, Gager seems to draw nearer to his original position again. The early Christians may not have been poverty-stricken slaves, but they were among the disinherited of the Roman social order." Holmberg, p. 61. "Recent times have seen a rather lively debate about the social status of the early Christians and about what it meant to be among the disinherited in the Roman world. One side of the debate, represented by Theissen and myself, holds that most of the members of Christian communities came from the lower classes. The other side, represented by E. A. Judge, Abraham Malherbe, Robert Grant, holds that 'the triumph of Christianity took place from the top down.'"

Karthago, Rom und Alexandrien in der ersten Hälfte des 3. Jh., die für die wesentlich ergiebigere Quellen zur Verfügung stehen, bleiben, was ihre soziale Schichtung angeht, weitgehend im Dunkeln.³⁴

Schöllgen also finds fault with Meeks' conclusion that it is very unlikely that all church members of Paul's time had the same social status.³⁵ This criticism is untenable, and the available data indicate that there existed socio-economic differences among Paul's churches. For instance, there was a difference between the poor church members of Macedonia and some well-to-do Christians at Corinth. Furthermore Corinth (perhaps Philippi, too) is the only Pauline congregation about which we know enough details to draw any conclusions regarding its social stratification.³⁶

In an article published in 1982, Meeks clearly states his view and says that when we look at single members and groups who joined the Pauline churches, then we should not right away classify them to some general level. To put them into "the middle class," for example, would be both vague and misleading--vague, because it ignores the multi-dimensionality of stratification, and misleading, because it assumes that there was something in the ancient Greek city corresponding to the middle class in modern industrial society.³⁷

³⁴Georg Schöllgen, "Was wissen wir über die Sozialstruktur der paulinischen Gemeinden?" *NTS* 34 (1988): 78.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 72-74.

³⁶Holmberg, *Sociology*, 67-69.

³⁷W. A. Meeks, "The Social Context of Pauline Theology," *Int* 37 (1982): 266-277. He adds, "we should ask rather what clues we have that would indicate ranking in the several hierarchies that were relevant in that time and place. We would want to know about ethnic origins, citizenship, personal liberty, wealth, occupation, age, sex, and public offices or honours. We must ask, too, about the context within which each of these rankings is valid; for example, to be a freedman in the early years of Roman Corinth, a colony whose first settlers were mostly freedmen, would be less of a social liability than in Rome or in Antioch."

In conclusion, it could be said that neither the older consensus nor the new consensus has produced sufficient evidence to prove that the early Christians were poor, middle-class, or high-class. The evidence is too inadequate to allow a full description of the social history or full description of the social level of the first Christians. The romantic picture of the proletarian origins has been rejected because early Christianity is seen to be spread throughout more social levels than are classifiable into a single social rank. Each Christian congregation has to be studied in the context of its contemporary society. Both groups of scholars attempt to show how the New Testament social world and its message related to the reality of everyday social life of the early Christian church and its community.³⁸

4.3. Social Stratification of the Corinthian Community and Church

The knowledge of the social level of the first Christians is interesting not only in itself, but it usually holds the clue to understanding problems in the primitive church. It appears that no other church in the early days of Christianity experiences as many difficulties, both moral and social, as the church at Corinth. This is evident because the sources focus on the Corinthian church to the exclusion of other Christian groups. In order to understand some of these problems we will deal with the social structure of the city of Corinth, the evidence of the social status of the Corinthian congregation, and finally the mission and social status of Paul.

A. Social Structure of the City of Corinth

The city of Corinth was one of the more important cities of Greece from the eighth to the second centuries B.C.E. Its strategic location at the isthmus connecting

³⁸Ibid, 269-271.

the Peloponnesus to mainland Greece gave it tremendous political and commercial power. After its total destruction in 146 B.C.E., Julius Caesar refounded Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 B.C.E. It was the capital of Achaia which included all of southern Greece. Paul visited Corinth around 50 C.E. and by that time it was a major city once again.³⁹ Caesar settled mostly freedmen but not exclusively ἐποίχους πέμψαντος τοῦ ἀπελευθερικοῦ γένους πλείστους, "sending people for the most part who belonged to the freedmen class." Veterans were probably also among the colonists. In any event the settlers were Roman citizens, from any of the Roman colonies.⁴⁰

The style of government was that of a typical Roman colony, with annually elected *duoviri* and *aediles*. The depth of this "romanization," however, should not be exaggerated.⁴¹ It is especially important to notice that the refounded city of Corinth--its constitution, buildings, families or cults--was not an old city. During this time many families were moving up socially; it may be that their grandfathers and great-grandfathers were slaves. Such a city was very receptive to new ideas. Paul's choice of Corinth as a testing ground for the new religion proved to be a happy one. Being a relatively new city it could be expected to be more receptive to novel religious beliefs than a place like Athens with her unbroken cultural history of many hundreds of years. Perhaps even more important are the many visitors who came to this great cosmopolitan city on the isthmus. Some of Paul's most faithful

³⁹Stambaugh and Balch, 157.

⁴⁰Strabo, VIII, 6, 23. See also Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, trans. J. H. Schütz (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 99. Under these circumstances the Roman element was powerful, even if we can find there some Greek slaves, for instance, among the freedmen. He says: "Thus it is certainly no accident that eight of the seventeen surviving names of Corinthian Christians are Latin: Aquila, Fortunatus, Gaius, Lucius, Priscilla, Quartus, Titius Justus, and Tertius," even though some of them have Jewish background (Aquila and Priscilla, for instance).

⁴¹Meeks, *The First Urban*, 47.

followers in missionary work were, like the apostle himself, foreigners in the city.⁴² Therefore, it is not by chance that he had little success in the tradition-conscious Athens; but according to Acts 18, he won many people to the Christian faith in Corinth. In a relatively new city the desire for a new cultural and social identity is more likely to be expected than in an already established cultural centre.

Among the archaeological records of gods worshipped at Corinth, the goddess Aphrodite was worshipped with great devotion. There are also indications that members of many religious groups, here as elsewhere, met to eat a common cultic meal. Note Paul's argument with the local Christians (1 Corinthians 8 -11). Devotees of Dionysus met in subterranean dining rooms, with six couches cut into the rock around a rock-hewn table. Comparable dining rooms, found in the rock at the sanctuary of Asclepius, could accommodate eleven persons with small tables in front of them. Outdoor meals served in tents were major elements of the ritual at the sanctuary offering to Demeter and Core.⁴³

Not only were the citizens of Corinth on the rise socially, but also the city had experienced a rapid economic revival. The resumption by Corinth of the Isthmian games was an indicator of this economic upturn. The games involved the participation of many people. Dio Chrysostom says that the θεωρόν is the pilgrim festival second to the merchant celebration, signifying the close association between the games and commercial activity.⁴⁴

⁴²Oscar Broneer, "Corinth: Centre of St. Paul's Missionary Work," *Biblical Archaeologist* 14 (1951): 78-96.

⁴³Stambaugh and Balch, 158-159.

⁴⁴Dio *Orationes* 37, 8.

There are four basic factors in Corinth's prosperity: (1) Corinth had the reputation of being a great wealthy city and its wealth was based mainly on trade; Strabo writes: ὁ δὲ Κόρινθος ἀφνειὸς μὲν λέγεται διὰ τὸ ἐμπόριον (Corinth is said to be "wealthy" on account of its commerce) (VIII, 6, 20). (2) A second factor is its banking system. (3) A third factor is the production of the artisans. Strabo calls special attention to Corinthian τέχνας τὰς δημιουργικὰς (arts of the craftsman). Metalwork production had declined in several cities but Corinthian bronze, a special bronze alloy, was coveted. (4) Finally, governmental administration must be mentioned.⁴⁵ The senatorial province of Achaia had its capital at Corinth.⁴⁶ This was a factor that brought many people to the city. It is understandable that in such an aspiring city as Corinth there were more opportunities to become wealthy. It thus appears that the Christian believers in Corinth came from several social classes, and in all probability faced special difficulties of integration because of the church's inner social structure.

B. Evidence of the Social Status of the Corinthian Church

The conversion to Christianity made an important impact on many individuals both in terms of the individual's self-perception and the social context of the new religion. The Christian movement experienced certain transitions in the generation following Jesus' death and resurrection. The most important transition was from a Jewish community of believers to a Gentile one, and from a rural setting to an urban context. The record of Acts shows the transition from a Jewish community to a Gentile movement. We can see also the early opposition between the Greek-speaking Jews and more traditional ones (Acts 6:1). In general, the gospel

⁴⁵Strabo, VIII, 6, 20. See also G. Theissen, 101.

⁴⁶Meeks, *The First Urban*, 47.

made a notable advance in the urban cities, a fact that included a great change in the cultural social status of Christianity from a reform movement inside Palestinian Judaism to becoming a Hellenistic movement based in the urban cities of the Graeco-Roman world.⁴⁷

According to Acts 18:17, some Jewish leaders were receptive to the Christian message, as were such wealthy people as Priscilla and Aquila. The most influential church members, especially the missionaries like Paul and his companions and main patrons, came from a high social class of Hellenistic Judaism. Gentile Christians also came from the high levels of their societies. Wealthy men and women served as partners, and in many instances the whole household followed its master and mistress into Christianity. Christianity was a multicultural and socio-economic phenomenon which indeed attracted also the slaves and poor people of the first-century society (Acts 11:14ff; 16:15; 18:18).

C. S. Hill comments that the Christian church at Corinth gave Paul more problems than any other group or community with which he was closely associated. Hill further adds that in spite of the scant record in Acts 18:1-7, we possibly know more about the social composition of the Christian community in Corinth than in any other city of this period.⁴⁸ This information is based on the two epistles from the Apostle Paul to Corinth. Paul described the social status of the Corinthian congregation when he wrote that there were not "many" of the wise, the noble, or the powerful in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:26), suggesting that there were not many Corinthian Church members who belonged to high socio-economic levels.

⁴⁷Stambaugh and Balch, 52-55.

⁴⁸C. S. Hill, "The Sociology of the New Testament Church to A.D. 62: An Examination of the Early New Testament Church in Relation to Its Contemporary Social Setting." (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Nottingham University, 1972), 175.

Yet the congregation included the city treasurer of Corinth and a certain person by the name of Gaius whose wealth and house were sufficient to provide hospitality for Paul and the whole church.⁴⁹

Paul's assertion has been taken at face value by many, who refuse to permit any qualification of his rhetorical debate at the beginning of his epistle to the Corinthians, and who hold to the general presupposition that early Christianity was a lower-class movement. Derek Tidball mentions two well-known classic Marxists like Frederick Engels and Karl Kautsky.⁵⁰

The expressions "wise" and "powerful" are linked to previously stated ideas about wisdom and foolishness, power and weakness. But noble birth (εὐγενείας) brings into play something entirely new, a specific sociological category which Paul especially emphasizes. When repeating the idea in vv. 27-28 he not only contrasts "noble birth" with "lower born," but sharpens the contrast between εὐγενείας and ἀγενῆ by two further designations: τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ("despised") and τὰ μὴ ὄντα ("things that are not")⁵¹ It may be that Paul has a social factor in mind and probably wants the first two categories to be understood sociologically as well. The term δυνατός makes clear the political aspect, but εὐγενής emphasizes the social. In the group are the educated, the influential, and people of distinguished family

⁴⁹Howard C. Kee, *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 97.

⁵⁰Derek Tidball, *An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 91. This position was further developed by other influential Marxist writers, most notably Karl Kautsky. "He cites as evidence for his views both 1 Cor. 1:26 and Jerome who said that Christianity recruited not from the Lyceum or the Academy but from the lowest rabble. In fact, Kautsky claims, it was a common joke in the Roman Empire that Christians could convert only the simple minded" and also adds that "the history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people; it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of people subjugated or dispersed by Rome."

⁵¹Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 70, 71.

social background. Indeed, it is interesting that the apostle did not support an ideal of poverty. The wealthy are not exempted as such.⁵²

Along the same line, Philo mentions references to the strong, powerful, and understanding in a similar way when he writes:

Are not private citizens continually becoming officials, and officials private citizens, rich men becoming poor men and poor men, men of ample means, nobodies becoming celebrated, obscure people becoming distinguished, weak men (ἀσθενείς) strong (ισχυροί), insignificant men powerful (δυνατοί), foolish men wise men of understanding (συνετοί), witless men sound reasoners?⁵³

It is the contention that this statement by Philo, especially the language in 1 Cor. 1:26-29 is sociologically significant. The causes for the sociological interpretation associated with 1 Cor. 1:26 since Patristic times are now apparent. In addition, W. Wuellner argues that the grammatical considerations are presented in two further arguments which confirmed the grammatical revision and the elimination of any sociological implications of 1 Cor. 1:26-29. But in verses 26-28 there not even a trace of any indication that the Corinthian Christians form part of the proletarian circles.⁵⁴

The evidence from the New Testament and the Patristic sources is the basic source of information about the social level of early Christianity. If Wuellner's argument is correct, why did Paul devote a substantial part of this epistle to an exchange with the wisdom group? For instance, in 1 Cor. 4:10, Paul says that "for Christ's sake we are fools; but you are wise in union with Christ! We are weak, but

⁵²Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* trans. J. W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 50.

⁵³ Philo, *De somniis* 155.

⁵⁴W. Wuellner, "The Sociological Implications of 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 Reconsidered," *Studia Evangelica* 43 (1973): 666-672.

you are strong! We are despised, but you are honoured!" In a modified way, we once again find the three groups: the wise, the powerful, and the honoured. Once again we have terms of sociological importance. In 1 Cor. 1:26ff., Paul does not seek to diminish the social level of some of his church members but simply objects to their wealthy self-perception. Perhaps those wealthy members represented a minority within the congregation but they apparently were a dominant minority.⁵⁵

Another point worthy of mention is the four criteria used by some of the scholars to identify the social status of the early church: (1) to have a civil or religious office in the city, (2) to have a "house." (3) to have been of service to the church or Paul, and (4) to travel (for the church). The last two criteria are not sufficient in themselves to indicate high status.⁵⁶ This prosopographical description shows that a large section of the most active and influential members of the Corinthian congregation, which we consider typical of the Hellenistic churches in general, most likely belonged to the small portion of Christians at Corinth with high social standing. In addition, a closer analysis of the problem of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11) and the relationship between the "strong" and the "weak" clarifies the picture.

The issue of the social divisions is evident when Paul comments on the Corinthians' behaviour. An examination of divisions within the membership of the Corinthian church confirms the supposition of an internal problem between social classes. It is obvious that the Lord's Supper revealed social differences, a split between the "haves" and the "have-nots."⁵⁷ The exact situation of the meal is not

⁵⁵Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 73.

⁵⁶Holmberg, *Sociology*, 45. See also Gerd Theissen's detailed study of his four criteria on pages 73-96.

⁵⁷Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 96.

entirely clear, but it may be that the owner of the house would invite all the Christian church members of whatever social strata to share in a simple meal of bread and wine. The main difficulty came when, in addition to that, the hosts would invite their own social equals to a superior meal before the poorer class members came to participate in the meal. Paul's objection is directed to those groups whose members were presumably of the high social strata.⁵⁸

The Corinthian church was not homogeneous, but included a fairly wealthy and high-class minority in its membership. The wealthy and more educated of the members were perhaps the leaders and hosts for their fellow believers. As part of the different factions within the church, they were clearly a dominant minority.⁵⁹

In spite of being a dominant minority they represent the high social class in the church who appear to be very active. For this reason we need not cast doubt on Paul's statement that "not many" at the Corinthian church belonged to a high social level. We may conclude that it is probable that the most active and important members of the church belonged to the οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοί, δυνατοί and εὐγενείς.

C. Social Context of Paul's Ministry and Mission

The social status of the apostle Paul, like that of the early Christian church, has been more recently under review. Deissmann is especially interested in "the

⁵⁸Tidball, 101. Meeks also observes that "there is a good reason to suspect that the 'strong' in Corinth belong to the wealthier and socially better placed minority of the Christian group (compare 1 Cor. 1:26). Perhaps, as many modern scholars have argued, 'the strong' Christians had developed some complex ideology, an early form of Gnosticism, for example, or some mystical interpretation of baptism and spirit-possession, but we do not have to imagine anything so elaborate in order to understand the argument of these three chapters." Wayne Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (London: SPCK, 1987), 133.

⁵⁹Holmberg, *Sociology*, 45-47.

traces which hint at the social class to which Paul belonged." Deissmann identifies three: Paul's trade, his citizenship, and his education or cultural background. On the basis of Paul's citizenship and language one would have to assign Paul to the high social class. Deissmann's viewpoint is not new. Many centuries earlier, church fathers like John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Theodoret had expressed an identical view concerning Paul's social class.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Deissmann's argument has influenced few scholars; many of them still hold different views.

For instance, W. Ramsay did not look to Paul's trade but to his Roman citizenship (cf. Acts 16:37; 22:25-29). He said that Paul's citizenship would have "placed Paul amid the aristocracy of any provincial town. Paul's Roman citizenship, Ramsay explained, was proof that his family was one of distinction and at least moderate wealth."⁶¹ Paul's *civitas Romana* has been challenged by W. Stegemann who says that this was a Lucan fiction or misunderstanding.⁶² But on the contrary, it is quite clear that Paul was by birth a Roman citizen. On the available data, this was still an unusual distinction in the 30s-50s C.E.⁶³ Paul's citizenship was like a passport in the Roman Empire which gave him the entrance to almost all the segments of social elites of his time.⁶⁴

The subject of Paul's Roman citizenship is troublesome, though not quite such an inaccessible as Stegemann suggests. The topic is discussed at some length

⁶⁰Ronald F. Hock, "Paul's Tent Making and the Problem of His Social Class," *JBL* 97 (1978): 555-564.

⁶¹W. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (New York: Putman's Sons, 1896), 31.

⁶²Wolfgang Stegemann, "War der Apostel Paulus ein römischer Bürger?" *ZNW* 78 (1987): 200.

⁶³Gillian Clark, "The Social Status of Paul," *Expository Times* 96 (1984-85): 110-111.

⁶⁴Tidball, 92.

by Sherwin-White, who comments that the dilemma of establishing citizenship was probably not nearly so hard for the first-century Roman as we think since the majority of the people stayed in the same place from one generation to the next and family origins would be public knowledge. The exceptions were soldiers, who were issued with a small metal certificate, a diploma, and merchants who probably carried a small wooden diptych. The general belief is that most Romans citizens carried some kind of document showing the registration of their place of birth.⁶⁵

Among the fundamental evidences about Paul's life belongs his own testimony. Paul's own remark: " Ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ γεγέννημαι" (*civis Romanus*) is probably no more than a straightforward answer to Claudius Lysias' statement " Ἐγὼ πολλοῦ κεφαλαίου τὴν πολιτείαν ταύτην ἐκτησάμην" (Acts 16:37; 22:25-28)." So, according to Acts 22:3, Paul is reported to have said that he was born in Tarsus. The city of Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. It is most likely that his birth in Tarsus and his Roman citizenship (*civitas Romana*), which presupposes a relatively high social level, may have given him an appreciation of the Roman Empire.⁶⁶ The question of the origin and social status of Paul's relatives is closely linked with his. The assumption for Paul's father's being granted Roman citizenship is not very clear. It may be that his father or grandfather had performed some special service for the emperor or other high official, perhaps in relationship with their tent-making business.

There are some apparent difficulties in assuming that the apostle was a citizen of the city in which he was born. Paul describes himself as a Jew and "from Tarsus in Cilicia. . . a citizen of no ordinary city" (Acts 21:37-39). The question is how we

⁶⁵Hill, 195.

⁶⁶Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 38.

are to understand the terms *Tarseus* and *polites*. It was very difficult for foreigners to obtain Roman citizenship. It seems most likely that from his birth Paul was a member of the Jewish community in Tarsus, which as in other places had certain privileges, but not full citizenship,⁶⁷ and that in this case as in the Septuagint, *polites* and *Tarseus* refer only to Paul's place of birth; but of course, it is difficult to obtain real clarity in this inquiry.

Therefore such views could be mere speculation. What is clear is that Paul's status as a *civis Romanus* gives him certain rights and privileges that the common citizens of the empire might expect. Primarily, the social status had been granted to only free-born citizens of the city of Rome but its privileges were made more widely available as the borders of the empire extended.⁶⁸ It seems quite logical that Paul would appeal to people whose social status was similar to his. It gives him the privilege of being among the higher classes of the empire. Perhaps this is the reason why Paul gave a proud answer to his opponents, the arrogant aristocrats in the Christian community at Corinth, when he said: "Ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα" (1 Cor. 9:19). This testimony from Paul's lips is one of the most clear evidences we have concerning his personal social status.

⁶⁷Martin Hengel, "The Pre-Christian Paul" in *The Jews Among Pagans and Christians*, edited by Judith Lieu, John North, and Tessa Rajak, (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992), 30. He further comments that "there is no reason for doubting Luke's information that the apostle had Roman citizenship. The reasons brought forward against this are not convincing. Thus Paul may have been flogged three times (2 Corinthians 11:25) because he deliberately kept quiet about his citizenship in order to follow Christ in his suffering. We must also take into account the possibility that the city magistrates may not have felt themselves constrained by his claim to privilege. That Paul never mentions it does not mean anything, since he keeps quiet about almost all private matters. Had he been a mere *peregrinus* Paul would have been condemned in Judaea without much fuss and would not have been sent to the imperial court in Rome." Nor does the statement that Paul never mentions his full three-part Roman name mean anything, "since this usage was not always customary in Greek-speaking circles and went against the custom of Judaism and of early Christianity."

⁶⁸Tidball, 93.

The argument among scholars regarding the nature of Paul's trade has usually also raised the related question of when Paul learned the skills of tent-making. Scholars answer this question by saying that the apostle Paul learned it as part of his Jewish background and some say that Paul learned the trade from his father. Some scholars, however, say that Paul did not learn a trade until later, until he was a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), providing as their warrant the later rabbinic ideal of combining study and teaching of Torah with the practice of a trade: "Excellent is the study of Torah together with worldly occupation."⁶⁹ This is the *communis opinio* of several scholars. G. Bornkamm says that "with Paul, theological training in Judaism was combined with the learning and practice of an occupation."⁷⁰ F. F. Bruce states that "many rabbis practised a trade. . . . Paul scrupulously maintained this tradition as a Christian preacher."⁷¹ On the other hand, the idea that Paul's father trained him, thereby following Jewish practice, should not be taken to mean that the practice was followed only in Jewish tradition. In the Graeco-Roman society the custom was also that the father taught his son a manual trade, as can be seen from the generalizations of Plato and other writers.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 22. He adds that "however widely and confidently expressed this view, it is open to question at three points. First, the history of Paul being educated by Gamaliel, known only from Acts 22:3, is open to question for a variety of reasons, chief among them the incongruity of a persecuting Paul having been the student of so tolerant a teacher as Gamaliel (cf. 5:34). Second, even if we grant Paul's education under Gamaliel, this fact does not require that Paul's education was done with a professional goal in mind, which the rabbinic ideal of combining trade and Torah has in view. Third, even if Paul were a professional student, the ideal of combining Torah and trade is difficult to establish much earlier than the middle of the second century A.D., that is, long after Paul."

⁷⁰ G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 12.

⁷¹ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 108.

⁷² Plato *Protag* 328 A. For the early empire: Dio *Orat* 4.47; 7.111; 71.4, and Lucian *Abd* 22. See also R. F. Hock, 23. Among the latter we may note the well-known case of Socrates learning the trade from his father Sophroniscus and the lesser-known case of Tryphon, a weaver from Oxyrhynchus and a contemporary of Paul, who also learned the trade from his father and in turn taught one of his sons.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that Paul's mission started with the Jews and then the Gentiles. More exactly, he went to the "God-fearers." They were Gentiles (the σεβόμενοι or φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν) who sympathized with Jewish beliefs and the moral practices of Judaism. They did not fully convert to Judaism or become circumcised. Luke says that, during Paul's mission at Corinth, he was rejected by the local synagogue rulers and members and declared, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). Between Paul's first and second missionary journeys he consciously changed his strategy. On the first trip he used the Jewish synagogue as a platform for his mission, and as a result, he encountered opposition. On his second and third journeys he created an alternative platform for his preaching ministry. He used his social status as a *civis Romanus* and often got sufficient help from wealthy patrons to support his mission.⁷³

Paul's ministries (preaching and teaching) took place in the Graeco-Roman society where itinerant preachers were many, including the Cynic "beggar philosophers" and their close relatives, the sophisticated Stoic rhetoricians. These professional speakers, for whom rhetorical abilities were often an art, strongly promoted religious ideas and values, particularly in the realm of moral and social ethics.⁷⁴ Paul's method of teaching and form of disputation were or seem to be very similar to those of the philosophers of the Graeco-Roman philosophical schools of the time.⁷⁵

⁷³ E. A. Judge, "Early Christians as a Scholastic Community," *Journal of Religious History* 1 (1960-61): 127. In this article Judge tries to compare Paul with other contemporaries. Although the detailed research is helpful, the attempt to present the early Christians as a scholastic community is not altogether convincing.

⁷⁴ E. E. Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 147.

⁷⁵ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 68. During the last hundred years, New Testament scholars have shown that many aspects of Paul's life and letters are illuminated when they are examined in the light of Graeco-Roman

These similarities between Paul and the popular philosophers of his day have been stressed to the point that some see him as a type of Hellenistic philosopher. Stowers has challenged Judge's categorizing of Paul as a professional "sophist," who belonged to the social class of touring lecturers. He stresses the fact that Judge went so far in comparing Paul with the Cynics as to compare him with the eminent ones as Aelius Aristides and Dio Chrysostom. However, he points out that even if there are some similarities between a Cynic outlook and Paul's preaching and teaching, the Cynic marketplace approach was not well suited to someone who has in mind the formation of permanent community.⁷⁶

On the other hand, Malherbe agrees with the view that there are some similarities, but he wants to stress the function in which Paul adapted what he had learned from the moral philosophers. That function, he says, is mainly pastoral, and Paul's adoption and adaptation of the philosophical tradition show his awareness and understanding of the philosophical pastoral system of his day.⁷⁷

A further indication of Paul's high-class status is the way he moved freely in the highest social circles in the provinces of the empire. His ability to speak Aramaic and Greek enabled him to be an effective evangelist in both the Jewish and the Graeco-Roman worlds. His fluency with the Hebrew language sometimes

culture. "There can no longer be any doubt that Paul was familiar with the teaching, methods of operation, and style of argumentation of the philosophers of the period, all of which he adopted and adapted to his own purposes. This is not to argue that he was a technical philosopher; neither were his philosophical contemporaries. The philosophers with whom Paul should be compared were not metaphysicians who specialized in systematizing abstractions, but, like Paul, were preachers and teachers who saw their main goal to be the reformation of the lives of people encountered in a variety of contexts, ranging from the imperial court and the salons of the rich to the street corners."

⁷⁶ Stanley K. Stowers, "Social Status, Public Speaking and Private Teaching: The Circumstances of Paul's Preaching Activity," *NT* 24 (1984): 69.

⁷⁷Malherbe, *Paul* 68.

caused the hostility of the leaders in Jerusalem, according to Acts. At the same time his knowledge of Greek helped him to gain a hearing among the philosophers of Athens as in Acts 17. Paul would hardly have been invited to speak in the council of the Areopagus if he had been ignorant of the Greek language and its culture. A final aspect of Paul's life and social status is to be found by looking at his social attitudes. Paul's position regarding secular authority and the powers vested in the state and other established institutions is highly conservative but very common of a typical member of the social high class. He believed that all existing authorities, whether good or bad, were instituted by God (Rom. 13:1-7).⁷⁸

Paul did not make any attempt to change the existing social structure of his society (1 Cor. 7:17-23). For Paul, the slaves were to give complete obedience to their earthly masters (Col. 3:22), while the masters had to do their own duty and be just and fair to their slaves (Col. 4:1). Therefore, Paul took a typical attitude of a high-class person but also was willing to condescend to the lower social classes for the sake of the gospel. Having examined the social context of Paul's ministry, we can now examine the social significance of the house churches where some of these houses served as the base of his ministry.

4.4 Social Significance of the House Churches

The study of the significance of the household concept in the New Testament is a relevant one. A misunderstanding of this concept would mean that a good deal of the New Testament socio-historical and theological problems would remain obscured, and especially the household issue in the Corinthian church. Filson is among the first to give attention to the subject. The New Testament church would be

⁷⁸Hill, 198.

better understood if more attention were paid to the actual physical environment under which the first Christians lived, in particular, the significance and function of the house church.⁷⁹ Most of the early Christians met in Graeco-Roman households. The record of the book of Acts gives the house church a prominent place in the narrative of early Christianity. Voluntary and apologetic sermons were preached in public, but the life of the church was in houses.⁸⁰

Since the beginning of the church, Christian gatherings in homes served as the base of the movement. The first centres of Christian worship were houses owned by church members. In the first century C.E. and for a long time afterwards, Christianity was not recognized as a religion, so there was no such thing as a public meeting place, like the synagogue. Therefore, the early Christians had to use the only facilities available, namely, the houses of some of the believers.⁸¹ The gathering of Christians in homes goes back to the very beginning of the church. Luke's record in Acts mentions such gatherings in the early church (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 5:42; 12:12; etc.). As the church moved outside Palestine, the same pattern is found in other cities.⁸²

⁷⁹Filson, "Early House Churches," 105-106.

⁸⁰Stambaugh and Balch, 139.

⁸¹J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), 153-155. The archaeological excavation at Corinth has brought to light relevant information regarding the size and style of some houses of the Roman period. One of the mosaic floors discovered is dated to the late 1st century C.E. Some of the houses discovered reveal that their owners were upper-class wealthy people.

⁸²Filson, 106. finds that "outside of Jerusalem, no temple served as a partial centre of attention for the Christians. Whenever the synagogue was closed to Christian propaganda--and this seems to have occurred early in the development of Paul's work in the cities he visited--the house church dominated the situation. Only rarely could a public assembly hall be obtained (Acts 19:9). With the exception of such limited use as could be made of the market place and other public areas of the city, the regular setting for both Christian meetings and evangelistic preaching was found in the homes of believers."

Other passages refer to the conversion of complete households (Acts 11:14; 16:15, 31-34; 18:8). In the majority of the cases the entire households were converted, including the husband, wives, and the slaves; in some instances, the conversion of the head of the family did not mean the conversion of the slaves (cf. Onesimus in Philemon 10), although it could usually be assumed that when the head of the household became a Christian, the slaves were converted as well.⁸³ It is not chance that slaves and servants are named οἰκέται (Rom 14:4; 1 Peter 2:18; Luke 16:13). Nor is it accidental that they are referred to beside wives and children in the so-called *Haustafeln*, while other relatives play no role in such lists.⁸⁴ Wives, children, and slaves are clearly mentioned in passages such as Col. 3:18ff; Eph. 5:22ff. It also appears that in 1 Tim. 3:12 the mention of the households could include the slaves as part of the entire *Haustafeln*.

The Lucan and Pauline terms are especially significant in this study. Luke mentions the word "houses" five times. In these references are mentioned the houses of the centurion (Acts 10:2; 11:14) of Lydia the merchant of purple in Philippi (Acts 16:15); of the jailer in Philippi (Acts 16:31); and of Crispus the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth (1 Cor. 18:18). A special connection exist with Paul and the household. He mentions in 1 Cor. 1:16 that ἐβάπτισα δὲ καὶ τὸν Στεφανᾶ οἶκον . . . as the firstfruits of Achaia, who have dedicated themselves to the service of the church.⁸⁵ Some of these people mentioned had slaves, operated businesses, or were normally well-traveled, and in all likelihood were of high social

⁸³Stambaugh and Balch, 139.

⁸⁴Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 86. He mentions also that "the centurion is εὐσεβής. . . σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ (Acts 10:2). He relates his vision to "two of his slaves and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him" (Acts 10:7). Luke surely doesn't want to say that the slaves were not themselves devout, although the soldier belongs to the God-fearers--as if the centurion would entrust his vision to slaves who were unbelievers. Rather, the predicate εὐσεβής is needed only for the soldier, since the slaves were already characterized in 10:2 as God-fearing."

⁸⁵Meeks, *The First Urban*, 75.

background and lived in the genteel surroundings exemplified by the homes in Pompeii and Ephesus. They were the ones who provided the congregation with a place for worship but also, like the patrons of the clubs (brotherhoods), became the benefactors (προστάται) and leaders (συνεργοί, διάκονοι, οἱ ἀδελφοί) in the local house churches.⁸⁶

According to Paul, Priscilla and Aquila made their home a centre of Christian fellowship and teaching (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:5). Romans 16 indicates that each Christian congregation or group had its own place of worship. Paul's comment in Romans 16 indicates that there were various Christian congregations in the capital city. Banks says that there is no reference, (probably due to the size of the city), that Christians ever met as a whole in one place.⁸⁷ The church at Rome met in private residences, assuming that chapter 16 was part of the letter to that city.⁸⁸ However, some scholars (such as P. Lampe, K. P. Donfried, C. E. B. Cranfield) argue that Romans 16 was added to a copy of the letter that was addressed to Ephesus.

Furthermore, there were some congregations or groups formed in households where their leaders were not Christians, such as the ones mentioned in Rom. 16:10, 11, 14, 15, not to mention the *familia Caesaris*.⁸⁹ It seems that Paul knew of at least three such house churches in Rome (Rom. 16:5, 14, 15), and there

⁸⁶Ellis, *Pauline Theology* 142.

⁸⁷Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 39.

⁸⁸Ibid., 146. "In that chapter four or five Christian congregations may be distinguished. The assembly in the home of Priscilla and Aquila and 'the saints' with Philologus and Julia were probably congregations meeting in those residences. The 'brothers' with Hermas may refer to a house used both for Christian workers and for congregational meetings. Those from Aristobulus and from Narcissus were, like the believers from Caesar's house (Phil. 4:22) and the Roman synagogues of the Augustesians and the Agrippesians, probably congregations centering on the freedmen and slaves of those two households and meeting there."

⁸⁹Meeks, *The First Urban*, 76.

may have been more than one congregation in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:27) and also in Laodicea (Col. 4:15). Despite the fact that they may have formed separate house churches, such congregations were not viewed as being separate churches.⁹⁰ As was mentioned previously, in 1 Corinthians 11 they do not have separate communion services.

The house churches as places of worship helped the congregation to a certain extent to have some privacy, a degree of intimacy and stability of place. However, it also created the potential environment for factions among the members. The house church context also set the stage for some conflicts in the allocation of authority among the church members. It is not surprising, then, that in many instances ethical and moral exhortation is addressed to households. This especially applied in the Corinthian congregation where many problems arose because of the internal socio-theological tensions and divisions among the members. Christians of a certain doctrinal tendency clustered together. Christians from the same social background would also tend to group together. In each of these groups were found feelings of pride and prestige. Such a divided church inevitably became an open setting for any kind of doctrinal and social differences.⁹¹ It is probable that here we could discover the sources of the tensions that are found in Paul's account of the eucharistic liturgy in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

Paul censures the wealthy members for not eating the Lord's Supper in reality. He says that "when you meet together, it is not the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν

⁹⁰Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 70.

⁹¹Filson, 110. Another situation which probably had developed in the house church is the problem of the four-sided party strife at Corinth. "The only reasonable supposition is that the Apollos partisans, for example, found each other's company and ideas congenial, and therefore met together, and that the other groups likewise had not only their own party slogans, but also their separate places of assembly."

δείπνον) that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal (ἴδιον δείπνον), and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" (1Cor. 11:20ff). It thus appears that an excessive gluttony and other social problems caused the divisions (σιχίσματα, 1Cor. 11:18) and factions (αἵρέσεις, 1Cor. 11:19) mentioned by Paul. Furthermore, it is in this a context that we could find the dilemma among the "strong" and the "weak" arguing over the question of eating meat offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8, 10).

4.5 The Social Dilemma of the "Strong" and the "Weak" in the Church at Corinth

Several of the social difficulties within the Corinthian church can be understood in the light of evidence that people from different social backgrounds had difficulty relating to each other even after they became Christians. They realized that as far as God was concerned, such differences were not important (1 Cor. 7:22; Col. 3:4), but in practice their mutual acceptance still had to be learned the hard way. A closer look at 1 Corinthians shows how these social differences exhibited themselves in the church in Corinth. The problems and divisions in the First Epistle may well have been due to an interpretation of socio-cultural distinctions among the Corinthian congregation.⁹²

⁹²Derek Tidball, *An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1983), 99-100. "Paul was not arguing that the social distinctions should be completely abandoned by Christians any more than the biological differences between the sexes disappeared when people became Christians. But he was arguing that the church was an alternative society which operated on different principles from the normal society and enjoyed entirely new relationships. Within the church there must be acceptance and respect for people whatever their class background and the acknowledgement that God may use some prominently within the church who would not normally have risen to positions of leadership. In a word, the prominent members of the Church at Corinth needed to repent of their snobbery and treat the ordinary members with more seriousness."

The different social ranks of the church members in Corinth, were partly responsible for the conflicts between the "strong" and the "weak" Christians over the question of εἰδωλόθυτα, food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:10).⁹³ To question the legitimacy of seeking for the theological grounds of the conflict does not exclude the sociological analysis. Furthermore, such an analysis does not reduce a theological conflict to social factors.⁹⁴ In his analysis of the strong and the weak in Corinth, Theissen does not identify the weak as either Jews or Gentiles. Paul saw the dilemma as a general one, and the socio-economic factors help us to grasp the whole picture of the conflict. Paul makes a contrast between the strong and the weak in 1 Cor. 1:26ff and relates that contrast to the social stratification of the Christian church at Corinth.⁹⁵

It seems probable, therefore, that the weak Christians could be found on the lower social level rather than in a particular national group, and the apostle appears to identify himself with them in his dialogue over their difficulties. It is noteworthy to mention that the diet of the majority of the people (including the church members in Corinth) did not include meat. It is likely, then, that the problem of eating meat sold in the market place (1 Cor. 10:25ff) "was to them purely theoretical" because they did not have enough money to afford what the wealthy members of the community and church could afford on an almost daily basis. Nevertheless, that is not the main problem, for Paul's concern was mostly with the eating of meat sacrificed to idols in the pagan temples.⁹⁶ It has been argued that all, or very nearly

⁹³Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 121.

⁹⁴Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 78. He insists, however, that as a rule, "theological convictions become operative only when social groups bestow on them the power to govern their conduct."

⁹⁵Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 122-124.

⁹⁶Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 79.

all, of the meat sold in the *macellum* was εἰδωλόθυτον, meat offered presumably in nearby temples.⁹⁷

On the contrary, it seems that the argument that the meat sold in the *macellum* was εἰδωλόθυτον is not wholly convincing, but the observation that the *macella* and temples "most of the time have been contiguous is not on account of any religious connection but because public buildings are almost inevitably grouped together in the middle of a city."⁹⁸ The presence also in one shop [in Pompeii] of entire skeletons of sheep suggests that the meat may have been sold on the hoof or slaughtered in the *macellum* as well as sold already butchered or sacrificed in a temple.⁹⁹ Thus, it appears that the contention that in Paul's day practically all meat came from the *macellum* cannot be accepted *in toto* because the data show the contrary.¹⁰⁰ However, as a matter of fact the data show that there was in pagan ceremony an open immolation. The animal was again divided into three parts: a token part to be burned, a share for the priest, and a substantial amount left to the magistrates. What they did not use, they sold to the shops and markets for resale to the public. Such meat was eagerly bought by pagans. Aesop bought tongues of sacrificial pigs in the butcher shop. Pliny indicates the purchaser knew what she or he was buying.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷Ehrhardt, 280-282.

⁹⁸Barrett, 47-48. "That meat was to be had that was not ἱερόθυτον is confirmed by Plutarch, *Sympos.* VIII 8, 3, where it is said that the Pythagoreans ὡς μάλιστα μὲν ἐγεύοντο τῶν ἱεροθύτων ἀπαρχόμενοι τοῖς θεοῖς, which seems to mean that the Pythagoreans, who took flesh very sparingly, ate it only in the form of ἱερόθυσια. It is implied that others, who did not share the vegetarian principles of the Pythagoreans, would eat it when it had not been sacrificed—that is, that non-sacrificed meat was available."

⁹⁹H. J. Cadbury, "The Macellum in Corinth," *JBL* 53 (1934): 134-141.

¹⁰⁰Conzelmann, *1 Corinthian*, 176.

¹⁰¹Aesop, *Life of Aesop* 51 and Pliny, *Letter to Trajan* 10.96.10. See also Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 56-58. This food was prohibited to Jews because it was connected with idolatry, it was not slaughtered in the proper way, and tithe had not been paid on it. "So,

In addition, it is also known that the only time that meat came on the market was after pagan festivals where it had been part of the victims sacrificed to the gods.¹⁰² Nevertheless, some members of the Corinthian church (the “strong”) argued that eating meat sacrificed in the pagan temples did not pose a social-ethical problem, whereas for others (the “weak”) it certainly did cause some problems.

It was the custom that in public festivals all citizens, regardless of their social status, could eat meat. However, Theissen questions whether the citizens from the low social class were able to attend those meals that contained meat offered to idols. But the main questions of some of the new converts from the lower class were whether to eat meat sacrificed in pagan temples and how to deal with their consciences (1 Cor. 8:7). For the Jews converted to Christianity, it was also difficult to deal with the public distribution of such meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:10).¹⁰³ However, the strong from the upper social level were used to eating meat almost every day and therefore did not associate it with a cult because they did not believe in the existence of idols (1 Corinthians 8). On the other hand, we find the weak Christians (1 Cor. 8:10f; 9:22) described as having “weak συνείδησις” (1 Cor. 8:7, 12), lacking this γνῶσις, and because of their former pagan customs regarding εἰδωλόθυτα as a dangerous matter. Many scholars have attempted to define these positions in terms of their theological views or beliefs.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Theissen does not at all reject these positions, but tries to show that

instead of calling this meat ‘sacrificed for sacred purposes’ (λεροθυτόν), Jews termed it ‘sacrificed to idols’ (εἰδωλοθυτόν).” Could a Christian buy or eat such meat? This is the issue in 1 Cor. 8, 10-11:1.

¹⁰²Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul*, 161.

¹⁰³Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 125-127.

¹⁰⁴Meeks, *The First Urban*, 69.

there is also a social dimension to the problem, to which the ideological factors would have to be connected.¹⁰⁵ In his interpretation of 1 Cor. 1:26ff, the strong are the socially powerful, who accept invitations to dinner where εἰδωλόθυτα would be served (1 Cor. 10:27) in a pagan temple, and have had some social or business responsibilities with the community and the church.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, an invitation to a social gathering presented a dilemma to the weak, who didn't want to appear impolite to the host family and his own family as well.¹⁰⁷

The strong justified their behaviour by appealing to their “γνώσις,” because idols do not exist, as Paul states. Some have found parallels between the “strong” Christians and later Christians Gnostics, who also had a liberal attitude toward eating meat sacrificed to idols.¹⁰⁸ However Pétrement makes this observation: “Gnosticism does not consist merely of the use of the word ‘gnosis’; it is a teaching that is concerned with the relations of God, man, and the world, and this teaching is nowhere found, it seems, before Christianity.”¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, Wilson points out that “the problem remains that for the earliest stages we have no clear knowledge

¹⁰⁵Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 131.

¹⁰⁶Meeks, *The First Urban*, 69.

¹⁰⁷Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul*, 164. He comments that “it is easy to perceive the dilemma that one of the weak would face if he received such an invitation to celebrate the marriage of his pagan brother. He could not decline on the grounds that his new faith did not permit it, because the strong were known to participate in such banquets. No matter how deeply rooted his conviction that Christians could not share in such meals there was no way he could make it either comprehensible or palatable to his family. To refuse could only appear as a gratuitous insult to a family he still loved. If he ceded to the legitimate desires of his family, he would be going against his conscience, and all because the strong participated in such occasions.”

¹⁰⁸Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* trans. by J. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 230-232. See also U. Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit* BHTh, 26 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1959).

¹⁰⁹S. Pétrement, “Le Colloque de Messine et le problème du gnosticisme,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 72 (1967): 371. *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 1-27. See also E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Gnosticism* (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 16.

of it, no documentation that would allow us to trace its development. In regard to the beginnings of this movement we are still in the main reduced to hypothesis."¹¹⁰ Furthermore, there is not a sequence between the Corinthian "γνώσις" and the Christian Gnosticism of the second century, but neither can some similarities between the two be ignored. In conclusion, the connections between the "gnosis" problem in Corinth and Christian Gnosticism of the second century are a matter of debate, and with good reason. There is scarcely a direct association.¹¹¹ However, among the "strong" Christians who did not see anything wrong in eating meat sacrificed to idols, the only analogies within Christianity come from Gnostic groups, as may be seen in the following examples:¹¹²

Justin on Gnostics in general: "But know that there are many who profess their faith in Jesus and are considered Christians, yet claim there is no harm in their eating meat sacrificed to idols" (*Dialogus cum Tryphone* 35, 1). ". . .Of these some are called Marcionites, some Valentinians, some Basilidians and some Saturnilians" (*Dial.* 35,6).

Irenaeus on the Valentinians: " For this reason the most perfect among them freely practice everything which is forbidden. . . . For they eat food that was offered to idols with indifference, and they are the first to arrive at any festival party of the gentiles that takes place in honor of the idols, while some of them do not even avoid the murderous spectacle of fights with beasts and single combats, which are hateful to God and man. And some, who immoderately indulge the desires of the flesh, say that they are repaying to the flesh what belongs to the flesh and to the spirit what belongs to the spirit" (*Adversus haereses* I,6,3).

Irenaeus on the followers of Basilides: "They despise things sacrificed to idols and think nothing of them, but enjoy them without any anxiety at all. They also enjoy the other (pagan) festivals and all that can be called appetite" (*Adv.haer.*I,24,5; cf. Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV,7,7).

¹¹⁰R. Mcl. Wilson, "Gnosis at Corinth," in *Paul and Paulinism* by M. D. Hooker and S. G. Wilson, eds. (London: SPCK, 1982), 108. He says that E. M. Yamauchi distinguishes two divergent views of Gnosticism, and writes: "Those who will accept only a 'narrow' definition of Gnosticism do not find any conclusive evidence of pre-Christian Gnosticism, whereas those scholars who operate with a 'broad' definition of Gnosticism find it not only in the New Testament but in many other early documents as well."

¹¹¹Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 132. "Yet that simply underlines the problem of how to interpret the obvious analogies. The opinion that in Corinth we are dealing with an incipient Gnosticism is of itself unsatisfactory. Gnosticism's beginnings can be dated much earlier if by that is meant the initial appearance of concepts which play a role in the later Gnostic systems."

¹¹²Schmithals, 224-229.

Origen on the Simonians: “Nowhere in the world are Simonians now to be found, although Simon, in order to win a larger following, freed his disciples from the peril of death, which the Christians are taught to prefer, by instructing them to regard pagan worship as a matter of indifference” (*Contra Celsum* VI,11).

Epiphanius on libertine Gnostics of a much later period: “And whatever we eat, be it meat, vegetables, bread or anything else, we are doing a kindness to created things by collecting the soul from all things and transmitting it with ourselves to the heavenly world. For this reason they eat every kind of meat and say they do so that we may show mercy to our kind” (*Panarion* XXXVI,9,2).

It cannot be argued on the assumption of these examples that eating meat offered to idols was the normal custom in all the Gnostic groups. There were some of these Gnostics who practised asceticism. To eat meat sacrificed to idols was not the typical habit, but one of the customs of the Gnostics.¹¹³ It seems most likely that there was a Gnostic element in the Corinthian church which appealed to and believed in the intellectual level, soteriology based on knowledge and self-consciousness and social power within the church and the community and their openness to the pagan world.¹¹⁴ However, these examples do not prove that some of the Corinthians practised what the Gnostics of the second or even third century practised.

Paul was informed of the conflict between the strong and the weak Christians in a letter that appeared obviously written from the viewpoint of the strong (1 Cor. 8:1), but he also received oral information (1 Cor. 1:11; 11:18). The strong and the weak Christians together ate the Lord’s Supper, and at those fellowship meals their different social status was responsible for conflicts. It is interesting to note that Paul addresses his response exclusively to the strong

¹¹³Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 133.

¹¹⁴John W. Drane, *Paul: Libertine or Legalist?* (London: SPCK, 1975), 105.

Christians,¹¹⁵ and appeals to them to be careful to regulate their behaviour by “the obligation of love” (*Liebespflicht*).¹¹⁶

On the whole case, the conflict between the weak and the strong reveals the presence among the church members at Corinth of persons of significantly different social strata.¹¹⁷ It seems also that the conflict appears to be caused by “excessive individualism” on the part of some members (the “strong”), but in view of the divisions (σχίσματα, 1 Cor. 11:18) and factions (αἵρέσεις, 1 Cor. 11:19) noted by Paul, Theissen observes that probably Paul has two groups in mind, those who could provide their own meal and those who had nothing.¹¹⁸

The fellowship meal that the wealthy ate is contrasted with the Lord’s Supper (ἴδιον δεῖπνον vs. κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). The misunderstanding, as Paul sees it, is that the wealthy Christians continued to consider it as their own meal. Therefore, Paul repeats to them once again the words of institution (1 Cor. 11:23ff) to confirm that it should be considered as the Lord’s Supper, to be shared by all the congregation. Although the fellowship meal was not a private meal, the participants were guests in Gaius’s house; and it is understandable that the custom, if not the specific rationale for it, appears to have created the tension within the congregation.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 81.

¹¹⁶Ralph P. Martin, “The Setting of 2 Corinthians,” *TynB* 13 (1986): 8.

¹¹⁷Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 123-125.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹⁹Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 82.

The wealthy members may have acted without any wrong motives. They probably thought that they were doing a social service for the poor members of the church. Malherbe says, however, the conflict was rooted in the fact that the social structure and the attendant behaviour that it brought into the church collided with the traditional Christian concept of the nature of community.¹²⁰ Paul does not, however, adopt a practical approach in addressing himself to these conflicts. He advises the wealthy members to eat at home, but their conduct in the table fellowship, his main concern, is seen from a theological viewpoint. Paul does not consistently agree with the “strong’s” position, even though he is in basic agreement with their ideas about idolatry.¹²¹

Paul’s recommendation, based on *Liebespflicht*, that the members from the high social levels accommodate their conduct to the low classes, is designed to reduce the tension between them and keep the unity of the church. It seems clear that an exclusively mental compromise to unity is not practical.¹²² In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul introduces himself as an example of the necessity to be willing to give up one’s own rights for the sake of others. He has the right to earn his living through the preaching of the good news but he gives up that right for the sake of the church members in Corinth to whom he ministers. Paul’s view is that the gospel is a life-and-death matter, and he is willing to give up his right rather than become an obstacle in the way of a person’s acceptance of the gospel. Paul’s desire is to become all things to all people in order to win them for Christ.¹²³ The behaviour of

¹²⁰Ibid., 83.

¹²¹Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 138.

¹²²J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Becoming Human Together: The Pastoral Anthropology of St. Paul* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1982), 209.

¹²³John C. Brunt, “Rejected, Ignored, or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul’s Approach to the Problem of Food Offered to Idols in Early Christianity,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 114.

the well-to-do is not just offensive to the others' feelings, but it also involves judgment (1 Cor. 11:29-32).¹²⁴ This type of recommendation from Paul is given with the desire that a greater social unity may come about whenever the church members at Corinth celebrate together the Lord's Supper.

4.6 Summary

The social setting of early Christianity, especially the Hellenistic Corinthian church, was neither a proletarian movement among the poorer social classes nor a movement among the aristocrats of the Roman Empire, although some of the latter were converted by Paul to Christianity. Nevertheless, early Christianity was a movement which spread rapidly and grew in all segments of the society of the Graeco-Roman world. Therefore, Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 1: 26-28 cannot be used to support the assumption that early Christianity was a lower-class phenomenon. Though the apostle Paul worked with his hands (1 Cor 4:12); yet this does not put him in a lower social class. The social-status terms that Paul uses to describe his idea about work express the proper language of a person of the upper class.

The similarities between Paul and the philosophers of his day have been stressed. Some see Paul as a type of "sophist" or Hellenistic philosopher. This view has been challenged, since Paul's ministry of preaching and teaching was different from the Cynic's approach in the marketplace, an approach not well suited to someone who had in mind to build and nurture a permanent community. Paul's style befits a pastor more than a moral philosopher. His example reveals that he wanted to show a Christ-like pattern for cultural and religious contact with the

¹²⁴Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 84.

outside society. Paul's apostolic ministry serves as an example, for he instructed the Corinthian Church members that his *modus operandi* was an *imitatio Christi*.¹²⁵

It seems clear that Paul adopted and adapted some traditions of the philosopher and applied them to his pastoral system. One indication of Paul's social status is the way he moved freely in the high circles in the Roman society. His ability to speak Hebrew and Greek enabled him to be an effective preacher in both the Jewish and Graeco-Roman worlds.

Paul's attitude toward the secular society and institutions and power vested in the state was typical of a member of the high social class. Paul was at home in the Greek society and was fluent in several languages, but he was also at home as a *civis Romanus* in the Roman Empire. These aspects of his inheritance and background, combined with his training in Judaism, made him a gifted preacher and teacher to the Gentiles on behalf of Christ's gospel.

The study of the importance of the house churches has become one of the fascinating subjects in the investigation of early Christianity. As mentioned above, to fail to understand the house church in the New Testament times is to close a window through which students may see more clearly how the early church functioned at the beginning (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 5:42; 12:12). The house church has a prominent place in the formation of early Christianity as the life of the church takes place in houses.¹²⁶ It is in this context that we find the apostle Paul exhorting and addressing the house churches, especially the Corinthian congregation where many problems arose because of the social and theological conflicts among the members.

¹²⁵Bruce W. Winter, "In Public and in Private," In *One God, One Lord*, eds. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 125-126.

¹²⁶Stambaugh and Balch, 139-140.

Consequently, it is also in this social setting that the strong and the weak argue over the question of the legitimacy of eating meat sacrificed to idols (1Corinthians 8,10). It has been argued that the main motive which caused the conflicts between the two parties (besides the socio-theological differences) was an “excessive individualism” on the part of the strong Christians who take advantage of their high social status over the poor weak members.¹²⁷

It thus appears that the main problem in the tension between the strong and the weak is not εἰδωλόθυτα *per se* but the problem of the conscience of the weak in a pluralistic society.¹²⁸ It is well known that the meat came from the *macellum*, where it was offered to the pagan gods and afterwards sold in the shop.¹²⁹ It seems quite clear, then, that the weak Christians were worried about participating in the pagan festivals eating such meat .

Paul knows about the conflicts between the strong and the weak through a letter that he received written supposedly from the standpoint of the strong Christians. It seems that the conflicts happened not when they participated together in the Lord’s Supper but during the preceding fellowship meal. Again, the main issue is not that the poor were complaining because they could not eat meat, but because of the way they were treated, because the strong Christians used to bring the best portion of the food, whether it was meat or not, for those who belonged to the same social level; and obviously when the poor Christians arrived almost all the food was gone.

¹²⁷Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 125-127. See also Winter, 143-148.

¹²⁸Murphy-O’Connor, *Becoming Human*, 125-126.

¹²⁹Talbert, 56-60.

Paul addresses his response particularly to the strong, and appeals to them to be considerate of their brothers. Paul's concern is with the behaviour of the strong and he appeals to them for "the obligation of love" (*Liebespflicht*). Paul's desire is that the unity of the church be kept, no matter what the social background of the participants in the Lord's Supper.

CHAPTER 5

THE PROBLEM OF THE MEAT SACRIFICED TO IDOLS

AND PAUL'S TREATMENT OF THE FELLOWSHIP MEAL

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22

Having laid the necessary foundation, we may turn now to examine the impact of these pagan sacred and social meals in the Graeco-Roman world and their influence upon Paul and the Corinthians. To what extent had Paul encountered and adapted this social custom, and what can be known of its effect upon the city of Corinth? In addition, our focus will be the issue of idolatry, eating of idol meat in a pagan temple, and Paul's treatment of the fellowship meal in 1 Cor. 10: 14-22.

5.1 Introduction to the Problem in Corinth

The problem of Christians eating meat sacrificed to idols appears first in 1 Corinthians 8. Scholars generally acknowledge that a sound interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10 must investigate the real social issue and the situation in Corinth to which Paul is responding.¹ Peter Tomson has observed that First Corinthians 8-10 is essential for the right understanding of Paul's concept of the practical teaching on the Law and idolatry.² In addition, Bruce Winter points out that primitive Christianity

¹G. Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυτα Once Again: An Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10," *Biblica* 61 (1980): 179-197. points out that "Paul's answer to the Corinthians' stance on εἰδωλόθυτα, food sacrificed to idols, has long posed difficulties for modern interpreters. The problems basically have to do with 1) the relationship of the various parts of Paul's answer to one another, and 2) the nature of the problem in Corinth and its relationship to the Corinthians' letter to Paul."

²Peter J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 187. We agree with Tomson's interpretation when he says: "We have seen that the prohibition of idolatry is firmly anchored in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. It represented one of the commandments most vital to the existence of the Jews as a religious-ethnic community. The prohibition of food sacrificed to idols was obviously included. This meant that Christ-believing gentiles were forced to take a stand vis-à-vis a cornerstone of the Law of the Jews when confronted with the issue of idol food

interacted with the Hellenistic social world and its religious pluralism in two main spheres, in public and also in private.³ The issues involved are complex and require an understanding of the social situation in Corinth. In answer to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul, in a diatribe manner used in schools, cites "those in the know" (γνώσις)⁴ and then qualifies their proclamation in a running dialogue.

The traditional statement of the problem is in terms of the two parties, the "weak" and the "strong" within the church, usually related to the divisions in 1 Cor. 1:12 and their letter to Paul asking his advice. Recent commentaries (such as Fee, Conzelmann, and Watson) still portray this kind of interpretation. The Corinthians inquired in their letter to Paul whether it was right to eat the flesh of animals that had been sacrificed to the pagan idols.⁵ The traditional interpretation is inadequate. In the

offering. Moreover, inasmuch as for Jews the prohibition against contact with idolatry included communication with those eating sacrificial food, the attitude of non-Jewish believers would directly affect Jewish-gentile relations, both within the Church and outside it." Whether this interpretation is right or not, the issue is at the very least a prominent one. Tomson is also right when he observes that "the modern assumption about Paul and the Law also predominates in scholarship: *halakha* is hardly taken into account as a positive source for Paul. Although far-reaching judgments are pronounced on Paul's practical attitude towards Jewish Law, nowhere is a comparison made with the essential materials: the *halakha* on idolatry." It appears according to Tomson that in First Corinthians *halakha* was of significant value for Paul's practical teaching on the issue of idolatry.

³Bruce W. Winter, "In Public and in Private: Early Christians and Religious Pluralism," eds., B. W. Winter, and Andrew D. Clarke. *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 125-148. "In public evangelistic preaching it was encountered in Lystra and Athens and actually discussed with the listeners (Acts 14 and 17). Some Christians participated in the public cultic activities in Corinth (1 Cor. 8:10). Paul discussed appropriate Christians' interactions in both public and private activities. These were to govern the church's conduct as it lived in the midst of a world which endorsed religious pluralism (1 Cor. 8-10)." See also Winter's article on the subject "Theological and Ethical Responses to Religious Pluralism: 1 Cor. 8-10." *TynB* 41.2 (1990): 209-226.

⁴S. K. Stowers, "Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason," *Greeks, Romans, and Christians*, eds. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, and W. A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 253-286. Stowers observes that the diatribe style is pedagogical in origin, not a form of mass propaganda used by Cynic preachers. See also A. D. Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: An Investigation of 1 Cor. 1-4 in Light of Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 137-146. According to Litfin the significance point is that this style of teaching shows that Paul is working as a educator with pupils and treating these Corinthians as immature students.

⁵R. Kugelman, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1968), 266.

first place, the Corinthian epistle was a letter asking Paul's advice on a series of questions. Paul's answer and defence appears in 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 10:1-23; 11:1 and 9:1-22, where in the response itself, Paul discusses three important issues: (1) In 1 Cor. 8:1-13 Paul is dealing basically with the eating of meat offered at the pagan temples. (2) In 1 Cor. 10:23-11:1 he deals with meat sold in the market place, and says that such meat may be eaten freely without any question of conscience. (3) In 1 Cor. 9:1-22, he offers a strong defence of his apostolic authority, with special emphasis on his apostolic freedom.⁶

Recently, most scholars have taken the view that Paul is concerned here (Chapter 8) with the problem of food sold in the pagan shops, but Fee has argued that this point of view is difficult to accept. For instance, 1 Cor. 8:10 is the only verse in the chapter that refers to participation in a sacred meal in a temple. Furthermore, the manner of approach in chapter 8 is much less tolerant than that of chapter 10:23-11:1. In chapter 8 the apostle discourages the eating of food sacrificed to idols; in chapter 10:23-11:1 Paul seems to encourage it, unless someone points out that it has been sacrificed to the gods. Fee's conclusion is that in both chapters 8:1-13 and 10:1-2 Paul is addressing only one issue, the legitimacy of eating sacrificial meat.⁷

However, Fee's view is open to serious question. It is clear that Paul in chapter 8 does not discourage the Corinthians from eating, unless doing so could cause distress to a weak brother. But, in 1 Cor. 10:18-22, Paul is speaking about a practice that is contrary to tradition given to them and at the same time harmful, the act of partaking at the table of demons, thus bringing the participant into partnership with demons. Since

⁶G. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 359.

⁷Ibid, 363 n.23. Fee is aware of this issue and its difficulty. "The chief objection to this reconstruction lies in the tension some see between this section, where he appeals to love, and 10:14-22, where he forbids such behavior outright. How can he begin in this way if in fact he intends finally to forbid it altogether? It should be noted, however, that because of 8:10 this is a problem for all interpreters."

in chapter 10 Paul is talking about the act of partaking in cultic meals, it would seem logical that in the earlier chapter (chapter 8) he must be talking about something less important, the eating of meat that has been sacrificed to the idols in the pagan temple.⁸ Thus, obviously this practice divided the Christians at Corinth on the morality of eating such meat.

Consequently, to get around the dilemma of the contradiction between 1 Cor. 8:1-13 and 1 Cor. 10:18-22, it is likely that Fee has to take the view in the latter chapter where Paul brings an argument of a different order to bear on the original problem.⁹ But, we still have to deal with the difficulty that Paul begins by explaining the practice as not damaging, if his intention is finally to condemn or prohibit it entirely.

Two questions arise: How do these three important issues relate to each other? What were the Corinthians doing and what did they argue in their letter? It seems that the best solution to all these data is to view 8:10 and 10:1-22 as the basic problem to which Paul is responding throughout. This implies that εἰδωλόθυτα does refer basically to the food sold in the market place, but not necessarily the eating of meat offered at the cultic meals in the pagan temples. Therefore in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 Paul deals with the problem of Christian participation in meals associated with pagan sacrifice in Corinth.

⁸Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *1 Corinthians* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979), 76-82.

⁹Nigel Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth Press, 1992), 82-89. But what about the difficulties which Fee considers to be inherent in the traditional view? He points out that, "as for the alleged marked difference in tone between 8.1-13 and 10.23-11.1, this seems to be rather a matter of emphasis. As Bruce N. Fisk, "Eating Meat to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8-10," *TJ* 10 (1989): 49ff. puts it, in a detailed critique of Fee's position to which my own is indebted, while the emphases of the two passages are different, the basic message is almost identical, Thus: 8.1-13: Eat idol meat unless someone will be scandalized. 10.23-11.1: Eat idol meat unless someone will be scandalized." Fisk's view is also open to objection. The emphasis of the two passages are different of course, but the message is not identical. Whereas in 1 Cor. 8:1-13 Paul discourages the eating of the food in question, in 1 Cor. 10:18-22 the apostle in a sense encourages it, unless someone points out that is sacrificed to the pagan idols. Paul's main concern in 1 Cor. 8:1-13 is the problem of the meat sold in the *macellum*.

Hence, the problem for the gentile Church's member at Corinth and elsewhere was: how to live in a pagan society (pluralistic society) and not participated in idolatry?¹⁰ They would have to think twice if they were to avoid partial union in Jewish society. In Paul's opinion the issue is not what kind of meat one eats. It is rather, the social and ethical effects in certain contexts.¹¹ The present study will investigate the meaning of εἰδωλόθυτα, the social interpretation of the cultic meals offered in the temple, and Paul's reply to the Corinthians' correspondence.

5.2 Idolatry in the Jewish and Christian Context

The term εἶδωλον and the other related terms such as εἰδωλόθυτον (from εἶδωλον and θύω), εἰδωλάτρης, and εἰδωλολατρία are characteristic Pauline expressions which appear especially in 1 Corinthians. Εἰδωλολατρία appears twice in Paul's letters; one of those occurrences is in 1 Corinthians.¹² Concerning the meaning of εἰδωλόθυτον it has been assumed that the term means "idol meat" wherever and whenever it may have been eaten. Ben Witherington has argued that the wrong use of the meaning of this word has caused difficulties in the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8-10 and the so-called Apostolic Decree in Acts 15.¹³ In 1 Cor. 10:19 it seems clear that

¹⁰Tomson, *Paul*, 190. It seems clear that the idolatry issue was a very difficult issue to discuss and to agree upon it.

¹¹After I had nearly completed this thesis, I came across Ben Witherington's assessment of the social situation (*Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 187ff), which is essentially the same as mine. He maintains that the main discussion is regarding the interpersonal behaviour in certain contexts, not in regard to food *per se*. The Corinthians were, Witherington says, behaving like most of the Greek or Roman citizens and other aristocrats by indulging in boasting and preening as part of their status-seeking behaviour. Paul sought to deflate such attitudes and defuse such activities by offering models of accord and self-sacrifice. Paul's example and *modus operandi* was an *imitatio Christi* (1 Cor. 11:1).

¹²H. Hübner, *EDNT* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 386ff.

¹³Ben Witherington, "Not So Idle Thoughts About Eidolothuton" *TynB* 44.2 (1993): 240. "I will argue below that εἰδωλόθυτον in all its 1st century occurrences means an animal in the presence of an idol and *eaten in the temple precincts*. It does not refer to a sacrifice which has come from the temple and is eaten elsewhere, for the Christian sources rather use the term ἱερόθυτον. In fact in all the 1st century AD references the association of εἰδωλόθυτον specifically with temples and

Paul is referring to sacrificial meat that is partaken in the pagan temple precincts. In order to understand the issue of idolatry (idol meat sacrificed in a pagan temple), it is good to remember that until the fourth and fifth centuries pagan worship was still practised in the Hellenistic world. There were temples everywhere; in theatres and circuses the worship element was present, and the emperor's cult was one of them. Both Jews and Christians had difficulty with these practices and avoided being involved in any pagan cult. Certainly this was one of the main issues which Jews and Christians agreed upon.¹⁴ In such a religious setting Paul and the Corinthians discussed the issue of idolatry. In the early development of the concept of sacrifice, the communal meal was held not for the simple intention of satisfying the need for food, but for the desire of entering into union with the mysterious Power of the deities.¹⁵ It is interesting to notice that after they finished the sacrifice in the presence of the god in the temple, the whole ceremony was ended by a cultic meal.

The issue of meat (food) sacrificed to idols in 1 Cor. 8-10, is essential to understanding Paul's practical and theological relationship with the Jewish Law.¹⁶ In the Jewish Tora the prohibition of idolatry was conclusive. We can read it in the beginning of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20: 3-5). In the Old Testament we can find these prohibitions repeated, especially in the covenant sections in Exodus 21-22 and 34 and in the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁷ In addition, Brian Rosner argues that the most powerful and personal reason for having "no other gods" before the Lord is the eating seems very likely and is made clear by the context of these references in one way or another." We will argue that Witherington has the better of this argument about the right meaning of this term.

¹⁴Tomson, *Paul*, 177-186.

¹⁵R. K. Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* (London: Adam & C. Black, 1953), 26.

¹⁶Tomson, *Paul*, 151.

¹⁷See also Lev 19:4, 26:1; Deut 4:15-20; 13:6-18; 17:2-7; 27:15.

fact that idol-worship provokes God's jealousy.¹⁸ The basic explanation given for these prohibitions is that the Lord is "a jealous God" who cannot allow Israel to worship other gods (Exod. 20:5; 34:14). The Torah command that it is necessary to avoid completely the worship of pagan gods: "utterly detest and abhor" the heathen deities (Deut. 7: 25).

The post-exilic Jewish law on idolatry and pagan relations was more severe. The prohibition to marry gentiles also included to all non-Israelites. Further prohibitions were introduced, as mentioned in the book of Jubilees:

Separate yourself from the nations, and eat not with them; and do not perform deeds like theirs; and do not become associates of theirs; because their deeds are defiled, and all their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable; they slaughter their sacrifices to the dead and to the demons they bow down; and they eat in tombs.¹⁹

In this passage *idolatry*, means "sacrifices to the dead," and caused gentiles to be impure in all their ways. It was also prohibited for the Jews to eat idol meat while observing the laws of purity. Tomson mentions also that the *halakha* on the book of Jubilee is considered by many Jewish scholars very restricted on the issue of idolatry.²⁰ The notion of impurity caused by idolatry was a major subject both in the early and,

¹⁸Brian Rosner, "No Other Gods: The Jealousy of God and Religious Pluralism," eds., B. W. Winter, and Andrew D. Clarke. *One God, One Lord: Christianity in a World of Religious Pluralism*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 149. Rosner observes also that "the jealousy of God lies at the heart of the Old Testament's conflictual stance towards other religions (and more to the point, other gods) and has obvious relevance to the subject of religious pluralism. It is therefore surprising that the notion of God's jealousy is conspicuous by its short treatment, if not its absence, from the literature on all sides of the current debate."

¹⁹Jubilees, 22:16f.

²⁰Tomson, *Paul*, 153. For a detailed study of the subject see also the section on *Tannac Halakha*, 154-176. "Correspondingly early post-exilic sources mention Jews, either in Palestine or in the Diaspora, abstaining from wine, oil, bread and other food deriving from or prepared by gentiles. Likewise the idea of the impurity of gentile territory and dwellings must date back to somewhere early in the Second Temple period." The difference between idolatry committed by Jews and the gentiles is basic to Rabbinic *halakha*. There is a reference in the Mishna that defines the exact way of punishment. The majority opinioned that the right punishment for idolatry was stoning. See introduction to *Avoda Zara* in Albeck, *Mishna* 4, 321-3.

through various transformations, in the later *halahka* governing relations with pagans. Since idolatry for the Jews was a serious matter, why Paul sends an urgent warning: Christians who participate in meals alongside gentiles engage in idolatrous act of worshipping demons. Hence, the risk is to provoke God's jealousy.

The idolatry issue presented a challenge not only for Jews but also to primitive Christianity. Consequently it is no surprise that the early Church was unanimous in its basic prohibition of meat sacrificed to idols. P. Gardener points out that the term εἰδωλόθυτον originated at the Apostolic Council, which is summarized in Acts 15.²¹ It appears to me that this assumption is a large mistake. Although, the Apostolic decree in Acts 15 mentions food sacrificed to idols, this is not to say that the view originated in Jerusalem. The issue was brought to Jerusalem from the Diaspora, especially from Paul's churches. 1 Corinthians 8-10 provides further evidence that this issue was a local one. For Paul, the well being of the local community came first. It is no accident that in precisely those areas of action non-Jews were forbidden. The Gentile community at Corinth was not an exception; food sacrificed to the gods was part of the daily ritual.

Another important issue along with the problem of idolatry is the local imperial cult that was established in the founding in the Roman colony of Corinth.²² Winter raises two important questions: Do we have any proof that a local or provincial imperial cult had an impact on the theological beliefs of the Corinthian church? Does Paul's answer to the issue produced by the world of religious pluralism include the imperial cult?²³ These two questions are relevant to this thesis, but the limits of this study permit

²¹P. Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian* (Ph. D. diss., Cambridge University, 1981), 15.

²²D. Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 100.

²³Bruce W. Winter, "The Achaean Federal Imperial Cult II: The Corinthian Church," *TynB* 46.1 (1995), 171ff. For a detailed discussion of the imperial cult see B. W. Winter's article "Acts and Roman Religion," eds. D. W. J. Gill and C. Gempf, *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 93-103.

only a brief discussion of them. According to E. Ferguson, contrary to the accepted view of New Testament scholars, emperor worship was subsequently neither rejected by Tiberius, nor did it lie dormant until the reign of Domitian.²⁴ It also has been suggested that some of the Roman Corinthian wealthy citizen showed devotion to the imperial cult.²⁵ Roman citizens worshipped the 'deified Julius Caesar and Rome. In the province they also worshipped "Augustus and Rome,"²⁶ as was part of the custom required in the whole Roman empire.

Given that this was the case, it appears that Paul initially discusses the eating of meat in the temple in connection to pagan belief in the gods. Paul says that "for even if there are so-called²⁷ gods, whether in heaven or on earth [(as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords")] yet for us there is but one God, the Father. . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ. . ." (1 Cor. 8:5-6). Paul cautions the Corinthians against

²⁴E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 163.

²⁵Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 102.

²⁶Dio Cassius, 51.20.6-7. Dio clearly mentions that "Caesar (Καῖσαρ), meanwhile, besides attending to the general business, gave permission for the dedication of sacred precincts in Ephesus (Ἐφέσῳ), and in Nicaea (Νικαίᾳ) to Rome and to Caesar, his father, whom he named the hero Julius (Ἰούλιον). These cities had at that time attained chief place in Asia (Ἀσίᾳ) and in Bithynia (Βιθυνίᾳ) respectively. He commanded that the Romans resident in these cities should pay honour to these two divinities; but he permitted the aliens, whom he styled Hellenes (Ἕλληνας), to consecrate precincts to himself, the Asians to have theirs in Pergamum (Περγάμῳ) and the Bithynians theirs in Nicomedia (Νικομηδείᾳ). This practice, beginning under him, has been continued under other emperors, not only in the case of the Hellenic nations but also in that of all the others, in so far as they are subject to the Romans."

²⁷Winter, "In Public and in Private," 143-145. "The term 'so-called' referred to gods (οἱ θεοὶ λεγόμενοι) and indicated that the attributing of deity 'in heaven and on earth' which was made by the non-Christians in Corinth was not true--the ascription was popular but erroneous. They had 'no existence in the form their worshippers believe them have.'" Winter observes that "in 1 Cor. 8-10 Paul discussed how Christians should live in the world of religious pluralism. His teaching stood in contrast to that of Rabbinic Judaism and its prime concern with maintaining personal ritual purity for the adherents. Paul's teaching was also in contrast with the response to religious pluralism by some of the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 8:7ff). Their actions, he argues, were not only self-centred but perilous for their spiritual well-being (8:9-13, 10:4). His discussion was not simply a proscription but in it he also set out clear prescriptions for the church on how its members were to conduct themselves in the Christ-like way in their society."

participating in the pagan celebrations, based on his view that God is against the association of his people in idolatry, including the cult to the emperor (1 Cor. 10:1ff).

As we have seen in chapter two, the evidence for the practice of a meal in the temple is found in the following well-known Oxyrhynchus papyrus: "Chaeremon invites you to dinner at the Table of the Lord Serapis the name of the deity in the Serapeum tomorrow the 15th at 9 o'clock." R. P. Martin observes that Lietzmann regards the Serapis meal as "a striking parallel" to the reference in 1 Cor. 10:27.²⁸ Such practice was common and part of the ritual of sharing the food in communion with a deity. There was the notion of eating together when a god or goddess was thought to preside.²⁹

However cautious A. D. Nock is on sacramental meals, he is trying to provide some evidence in the mystery religions for the common practice of these religious meals held in the temple precincts. We found some important implications for some of those religious meals. However, the sacramentalism commonly accepted earlier this century, and still often understood today, is not convincing and certainly cannot be accepted as typical of the mystery religions.³⁰ It seems likely that even in the mystery religions, sacred meals were not considered sacramental occasions; in the earlier stages, the communal understanding may have been prominent. A fact that cannot be overlooked

²⁸R. P. Martin, "Meats Offered to Idols," *The New Bible Dictionary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), 554.

²⁹A. D. Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 57-69. mentions that "The orator Aristides, writing in the second century of our era, says in his speech 'Concerning Serapis' (viii. vol. i, p. 39 sq., Dindorf), 'Men have perfect communion in sacrifices with this god alone in a peculiar degree, inviting him to their hearts and causing him to preside over their feasts:' two invitations to dinner 'at the couch of the Lord Serapis' (one of these adds "in the Serapeum") have been found at Oxyrhynchus. A citizen of Bologna built a dining-room for Jupiter Dolichenus: This implies perhaps the god was supposed to be present at the common meal of a cult society, as Zeus of Panamara may also have been at the communal banquet held in the course of his mysteries."

³⁰W. L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 47.

is that cultic meals were normally considered essentially as occasions for social gathering³¹ and conviviality like the *eranos*. As has been mentioned, converted pagans would have numerous social obligations, many of which might involve celebration and meals within or near a pagan temple or where the food served was sacrificed to the idols.

It has been suggested that the idol temple referred to in 1 Cor. 8:1 is the sanctuary of Demeter, where some small rooms of the Greek era were found.³² However, Winter observes that the archaeological evidence points toward a different conclusion. It is clear that there was a break between activities in the temple during both the Greek time when there were small ceremonial dinners among, segregated groups of followers, and the Roman time.³³ In any case, since 1 Corinthians 8:10 does not give any hint of a possible incident or a feast in the sanctuary of Demeter, this possibility is questionable. In addition, R. S. Stroud points out that "conceivably, there was still some kind of communal dining in the open air, but it seems clear from the excavated remains that in the Roman period small groups of segregated worshippers no longer assembled indoors for ritual dining as they had in Greek times."³⁴ It is not clear what

³¹ Bruce N. Fisk, "Eating Meat Offered to Idols: Corinthian Behavior and Pauline Response in 1 Corinthians 8-10," *TJ* 10 (1989), 62ff. Part of the problem was that lines between religious and civic (social) ceremony were not so clear, if drawn at all. As has been mentioned in chapter two Willis' findings cannot be disregarded. Gill's findings support Willis' argument. He points out that the earlier Greek writings suggest that the god himself participated at the temple meal, but later on, in the early centuries C. E. the focus was more horizontal, on the table-fellowship enjoyed by the human participants. The god is more in the background, more spectator at than a partaker in the sacral banquet. D. Gill, "Trapezomata: A neglected Aspect of Greek Sacrifice," *HTR* 67 (1974): 137. These findings have important implications for this study for they suggest that significant, conscious worship of deities during these meals was at times minimal or non-existent. Indeed, the social aspect was the most significant part of the *eranos* Greek dinner.

³²J. B. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth: A History of the City to 338 B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 403.

³³Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 170.

³⁴R. S. Stroud, "The Sanctuary of Demeter on Acrocorinth in the Roman Period," ed., T. E. Gregory, *The Corinthians in the Roman Period*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology Mono. Supp.* 8 (Ann Arbor: Cushing-Malloy, 1994), 69.

we should make of the seemingly various dining facilities at the Corinth temple of Demeter and Kore. The most recent archaeological evidence cast doubts on the earlier assumption that Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 10 were focused on these buildings.³⁵ Although these banquets were less common in the Roman period, the custom to commemorate them never stopped completely because of their importance and the connection with the local religious celebrations.

This kind of invitation to sacred meals, whether in the temple or in the house of a wealthy member of the Corinthian church, seemed to be a common part of the social life of the city of Corinth. Since meals were an important form of social communication and the practices surrounding them were often socially determined, there is little doubt as to whether one interpret this conflict sociologically.³⁶ It is clear that the Corinthian church had a real social-ethical problem about food offered to idols. For Paul and some of the church members, the idea of communion with an idol meant communion with the demons. This act was understood as idolatry. In the Didache, "food regulations are introduced as follows (6:3): περί δέ τῆς βρώσεως ὃ δύνασαι βάστασον."³⁷ On the matters related to idolatry, no compromise was accepted: ἀπό δὲ τοῦ εἰδωλοθύτου λίαν προσέχε λατρεία γάρ ἐστὶν θεῶν νεκρῶν.³⁸

³⁵Earlier reports by Bookidis among others support the assumption that this is the place Paul had in mind when he wrote 1 Corinthians 10. However, Bookidis' most recent work cast doubt on such an assumption, and so the issue must be approached with caution. N. Bookidis and J. E. Fischer, "The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore," *Hesperia* 41 (1972): 283ff. It looks as if Willis has ignored some of Bookidis' warnings. The dining facilities at the Demeter sanctuary now seem mainly to be under the level of the Roman floor.

³⁶G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* trans. J. H. Schütz (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 122-123.

³⁷Didache, 6.3.

³⁸2 Clement, 1.6; 3:1. and also see Justin Martyr, *Trypho*, 34. According to Justin the issue of idolatry is the touchstone of orthodoxy. He commented that Gentile Christians (and it will apply to Jewish Christians as well) πᾶσαν αἰδικίαν καὶ τιμωρίαν μέχρις ἐσχατοῦ θανάτου ὑπομέουσι περὶ τοῦ μητε εἰδωλόλατρησαι μήτε εἰδωλόθута φαγεῖν. *Trypho* answers (35) that he has found many who profess to be Christians ἐσθίειν τὰ εἰδωλόθута καὶ μηδὲν ἐκ τούτου βλάπτεσθαι λέγειν. Justin commented that these are those false Christians whose coming Jesus himself foretold.

According to Charles H. Talbert the restriction of the idol food was a clear matter to the Jews:

Such food was prohibited to Jews because it was tainted with idolatry, it was not slaughtered in the proper way, and tithe had been not paid on it. So, instead of calling this meat "sacrificed for sacred purposes" (*hierothuton*), Jews termed it "sacrificed to idols" (*eidolothuton*). Could a Christian buy or eat such meat? This was issue (1) in 1 Cor. 8.³⁹

The expression *περὶ τῆς βρώσεως* in the Didache reveals that the author believed that to eat food sacrificed to idols was to fall into the unforgivable sin of idolatry.⁴⁰ The eating of meat sacrificed to idols, in the context of idol-demon food, constitutes the actual *κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων*. In his article, Fee discusses a very crucial issue; he says that since eating the food in the temple surely means communion with the demons, the question is whether *εἰδωλόθυτα* should carry another meaning in chap 8. All who have written articles about idolatry in the N.T. assume that it refers to idol meat sold in the market place.⁴¹ But Paul opposed participation in meals which had been offered to idols, and eating meat which was sold in the market after cultic ceremonies in the service of pagan gods.

N. T. Wright comments that this new Christian *Shema*⁴² is exactly what the apostle needed at this point of his argument to reassert a proper "Christian"

³⁹Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 57.

⁴⁰C. K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London: S. P. C. K., 1982), 43.

⁴¹Fee, *Ἐιδωλόθυτα*, "181.

⁴²N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 129. "Paul, in other words, has glossed 'God' with 'the father', and 'Lord' with 'Jesus Christ', adding in each case an explanatory phrase: 'God' is the Father, 'from whom are all things and we to him', and the 'Lord' is Jesus the Messiah, 'through whom are all things and we through him'. There can be no mistake: just as in Philipians 2 and Colossians 1, Paul has placed Jesus within an explicit statement, drawn from the Old Testament's quarry of emphatically monotheistic texts, of the doctrine that Israel's God is the one and only God, the creator of the world."

monotheism, the primacy of love, and to counter any underestimation of Christ that may have existed in Corinth.⁴³ It is clear that, for Paul, monotheism does not rule out the reality of lesser spiritual beings (demons), because some of them are malevolent.

5.3 Social Interpretation of the Cultic Meals and the "Parties" at Corinth

A. Social Cultic Meals

It is well known that worship among Jews and Pagans in ancient times very often involved eating a meal in the presence of the deity. It is also important for this study to find out what significance pagan-cultic meals had in order to understand why some of the members in the Corinthian Church wanted to relate socially in such cultic meals. These meals had a social character in the majority of the cases; that is why some of the members were willing to participate. We can understand why because in 1 Cor. 8:4 they argue that the pagan deities were not really gods.⁴⁴ Paul, in this instance, has taken up their thesis just as in v:1, and discusses it in the same way. There is evidence that, in general, cultic meals were linked with several social festivities. At the usual season of the festivity or at irregular but important times, like marriage, good fortune, and especially at death, worshippers would invite families or friends to join them at the temples or shrines to participate in worshipping the idols.⁴⁵

For instance, Plutarch and Lucian place the philosophical feasts in the context of birthdays and wedding ceremonies; the references found indicate that such celebrations were very common practices.⁴⁶ There they would offer food to the gods; some of the

⁴³Ibid., 120-131.

⁴⁴Willis, *Idol Meat*, 48.

⁴⁵Fee, "Εἰδωλόθυστα," 184.

⁴⁶Plutarch, *Table Talk* 717B; Lucian, *Symposium* 5. "When an individual wished to get together with his friend or businesses or religious associates, he would generally do so by inviting

sacrifice became the burnt offering for the deity, a portion was for the priest, but the majority of food was prepared for eating as a social event or a festive meal before the god.⁴⁷ In the O.T. there are examples (Deut. 14:22-26 and other references) where such sacrificial meals before God were enjoyed. This common practice was also found among the Canaanites (Judg. 9:27), Babylonians (Dan. 5:1-4), and Egyptians, including their several rituals (Exod. 32:6).⁴⁸ Socio-cultural customs, traditions and attitudes of different ethnic groups presumably would have been significant in influencing the behaviour shown by some of the members of the Corinthian church.

The socio-economic factor in Paul's day affected the relationship between the members who partook in some of the pagan cultic meals and also participated in the Lord's Supper. Paul himself suggests that we look for the weak among the lower strata. It is hardly an accident that the first chapters of the Corinthian letter already give voice to the distinction between strong and weak, connecting this with the social structure of the Corinthian congregation.⁴⁹ Paul says that among the Corinthians are not many who are "wise or powerful or of high social standing" (1 Cor. 1:26ff.). It has been argued that people of differing perspectives and social classes were also involved in another of the conflicts that perturbed Christians at Corinth: the issue of "meat offered to idols," addressed in 1 Corinthians 8-10. One can compare the divisions in the Corinthian Eucharist with two situations familiar to Roman society.⁵⁰ As has been seen

them to his home for a banquet. Banquets were also held on important family occasions, such as birthdays, weddings, and funerals." See also D. E. Smith and E. Taussig, *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 28.

⁴⁷M. H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB: Garden City, 1977), 210-229. See also Talbert, 56-65.

⁴⁸H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning* (London: S.P.C.K., 1978), 125-126.

⁴⁹Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 124.

⁵⁰*Ibid*, 127. See comments on chapter three, 73-77.

in chapter three, the practice of the Graeco-Roman *eranos* setting explains clearly the Christian *eranos* meal and the Corinthians' conduct.

It was common to have some special treatment among members of clubs and guilds. For instance, W. A. Meeks points out that "in collegia,.....officers were sometimes assigned larger quantities of food than ordinary members."⁵¹ It appears that some members in the church at Corinth saw the meetings as some sort of association or *collegium*, especially in view of the fact that the primitive church had no temples, no priests, and no sacrifices. Most clubs and guilds were more socially homogeneous than the Corinthian congregation seems to have been, and therefore conflicting expectations might arise in the latter that would have no occasion in the former. Paul objects on quite different grounds, but Theissen has given good reason for looking for the origin of the wrong behaviour in the social status of such a stratified society. Indeed, in the city of Corinth, social climbing was a major preoccupation.

Meeks does not reject the idea, but undertakes to show that there is a "social dimension of the conflict to which the ideological factor would have to be related."⁵² It seems clear that the whole perception of what it meant to eat meat would have been different for people of different socio-economic levels. According to Theissen, the poor (including members of the church at Corinth) rarely ate meat; the only occasion when they ate and attended a cultic meal associated with the sacrifice made in the temple, was in public celebrations or in private homes.⁵³ Theissen's view has been challenged recently by J. J. Meggitt. Additionally, Meggitt observes that the evidence that the

⁵¹W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 68.

⁵²Ibid, 68-70.

⁵³Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 128. See also J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 145.

lower-class ate meat comes from what it is known about the *popinae* and *ganeae*.⁵⁴ Although the quality of the meat was questionable⁵⁵ the fact is that Theissen overlooked the evidence. Whether or not the quality of the meat was good, it was consumed by the poor.

For some of the converts to Christianity, either Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians, the whole issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols brought similar difficulties, especially to those who belonged to the lower social classes.⁵⁶ Those who had been pagans must have found the issue perfectly natural because they were accustomed to attending those pagan meals and eating meat sacrificed to idols in pagan temples.

The fact is that the Corinthian social pretensions are not unexpected. Far from being a socially downcast community, the Corinthians are typical; they were dominated by a socially arrogant segment of the society of the big cities in the Roman Empire.⁵⁷ The relationship between high social status and idolatry is not ignored by early Christian paraenesis. Invitations to partake in sacrificial meals served basically as a means of communication. Families, associations, and cities came together on such occasions and in so doing expressed ceremonially their common membership in the community.⁵⁸ Further, Lucian pointed out that private symposia could be considered a

⁵⁴J. J. Meggitt, "Meat Consumption and Social conflict in Corinth," *JTS* 45 (1994): 138-39. "The meat from all these outlets tended to be in forms that have historically been associated with the poor: sausages or blood puddings appear to have been common, as was tripe, and various off-cuts that might appear unappetizing to the modern palate."

⁵⁵Ammianus Marcellinus 28.4.34. "*nauseam horridae carnis.*"

⁵⁶Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 128-143.

⁵⁷E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Group in the First Century* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960), 59-60.

⁵⁸Theissen, *The Social setting*, 128. He mentions the example of social aspect such as the case of Aelius Aristides: "Moreover, in sacrifices men maintain an especially close fellowship with this god alone. They call him to the sanctuary and install him as both guest of honor and host, so that while some divinities provide portions of their common meals, he is the sole provider of all common meals, holding the rank of symposiarch for those who at any time are gathered about him."

family affair, such as weddings and funerals. It could be an invitation to a member's home. It could also be an invitation scheduled by a member of a particular club or association commonly designated as ἔρανοι or θίασοι.⁵⁹ Those who expressed common membership automatically became part of that social group and participated with them in the common meals. In summary, the restrictions on meat offered to idols were barriers to communication which increased the problem of the relationship of Christians to the society of the ancient world and especially to the society of which the Corinthian congregation were members.

B. The "Parties" at Corinth

The letter from Corinth put this issue to Paul since there was a division of opinion among the Corinthians themselves. Paul labels the two sides as "the strong" and "the weak." The terms weak and strong used by Paul are often used in literature on factionalism, because they make clear who has the political advantage and who does not.⁶⁰ According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus the whole intention of a concordant political body is to make all members strong.⁶¹ As Plutarch says: "The Greek states which were weak (ἀσθενεῖς) would be preserved by mutual support when once they had been bound as it were by the common interest (τῷ κοινῷ συμφέροντι), and that just as the members of the body (τὰ μέρη τοῦ σώματος) have a common life and breath because they cleave together in a common growth. . . ."⁶² It was the common

⁵⁹Lucian, *Symp.* 8. Private *symposia* were of two major types, those for which the cost was divided among the participants, and those to which the guests were freely invited. The Corinthian *eranos* could be classified as a free common meal.

⁶⁰Aristid. *Or.* 24.14 on Solon: "He was most of all proud of the fact that he brought the people (δῆμος) together (καταμίξαι) with the rich (οἱ δυνατοί), so that they might dwell in harmony (ὅπως ἄν μὲν γνώμη τὴν πόλιν οἰκῶσιν), neither side being stronger (ἰσχυόντες) than was expedient for all in common (κοινῇ συμφέρει)."

⁶¹Dionysius. *Ant Rom.* 4.26.1. ". . . and declaring that concord (ὁμοφροσύνη) is a source of strength to weak states (ταῖς ἀσθενέσιν), while mutual slaughter reduces and weakens even the strongest (ταῖς ἰσχυραῖς)."

⁶²Plutarch. *Arat* 24.5

practice among the politicians and patrons to look out for the interests of the less fortunate (the weak) in the Graeco-Roman world.

The specific counsel Paul gives in answer to the division between strong and weak is to urge a new attention for each other as fellow members of the body of Christ, specifically, not to humiliate one another.⁶³ It seems clear that Paul is dealing with two opinions (the opinions of the weak and the strong) on the problem of food offered to idols in Corinth.⁶⁴

Lake confidently suggests that this matter of two groups is clear from 1 Corinthians. H. D. Wendland says, "So teilt sie sich in zwei Gruppen, die 'Starken' und die 'Schwachen.' Diese Bezeichnungen werden in Korinth entstandene Schlagworte sein."⁶⁵ The way Paul introduces the problem in 8:1, *περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων*, clearly indicates that the issue was one of those referred to the apostle through the congregation (cf. 7:1). As we mentioned before, it is generally agreed that a quarrel or division arose within the Corinthian church and that an appeal for guidance was made to Paul. This point is denied by J. C. Hurd, who maintains that the Corinthians were not divided on this issue, and they were protesting as a unified block Paul's effort to proscribe the eating of idol meat.⁶⁶ It is conceded that Hurd's

⁶³Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 127.

⁶⁴K. Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul: Their Motive and Origin* (London: Rivingtons, 1914), 199-200. He pointed out that "apparently there were two opinions on the matter in Corinth: One party maintained that an idol was nothing, and that therefore things offered to idols had no importance: They thought that the whole matter was indifferent, and that Christian freedom justified them in doing as they wished. Another party held the opposite opinion and thought that, cost what it might, Christians ought to abstain absolutely from the contamination of things offered to idols."

⁶⁵H. D. Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 62.

⁶⁶J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origins of 1 Corinthians* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), 115-149. Hurd exaggerates the importance of 1 Cor. 10:1-22, and puts aside the force of 1 Cor. 8:7, but his hypothesis, as he himself acknowledges, leads to "the somewhat strange conclusion" that "Paul devoted the major part of his reply to vigorous disagreement with them, and only at the close did he give them permission to behave as in fact they had been behaving." It is not strange, therefore, that this

reconstruction of the events has a certain plausibility, but in the final examination it fails to bring conviction. No evidence contradicts the traditional viewpoint that there were two groups within the Corinthian church. As we can see, one group (the strong) had no doubts regarding the legitimacy of eating food offered to idols; the other (the weak) had serious problems in dealing with the subject of idol-meat.

However, it has been argued that it was common practice among the Gnostics to partake in pagan cultic meals from a willing Christian stance.⁶⁷ The above assumption about the Gnostic theory is improbable. In relation to the Gnostics at Corinth the most that one can find out is that there were isolated elements of the genesis of the development of what later was known as "Gnosticism."⁶⁸ However, the observation of the Corinthians' slogan "we all possess knowledge" (1 Cor. 8:1) is no justification for accepting the notion of Gnostic intruders or their followers within the Corinthian congregation. The main issue in 1 Corinthians 8 is not gnosis.⁶⁹ Idol meat⁷⁰ was the

hypothesis has not been accepted. See J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom or the Ghetto," *RB* 85 (1978): 543ff.

⁶⁷W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinthians*, trans. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 223. Conzelmann argues that this so-called gnostic element in the church at Corinth is "Gnosticism *in statu nascendi*. The Corinthians could be described as proto-Gnostics." H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 15.

⁶⁸Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom," 544. "The former possessed 'knowledge' the later (at least in some sense) lacked 'knowledge.' The first group could be termed 'Gnostic,' and many commentators in fact use this designation. Even though it is justified etymologically, I prefer not to use it because it is susceptible of interpretations that are to say the least, misleading."

⁶⁹Heinz O. Guenther, "Gnosticism in Corinth?" in *Origins and Method* ed. B. H. McLean (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 54f. "Gnosis-knowledge was not a bone of contention between Paul and the Corinthians." Both parties took for granted that 'all Christians possess knowledge.' Baird point out that "since the enlighten claimed *γνῶσις*, they have sometimes been identified as Gnostics. The *γνῶσις* of the enlightened, however, demonstrates some few elements of the kind of esoteric knowledge that is characteristic of gnosticism. Instead, according to 1 Corinthians 8:6 the Corinthians *γνῶσις* is based on a very clear understanding of the fundamental Christian confession "of God as creator and Jesus Christ as Lord." Baird, 125.

⁷⁰Sacred meat (idol meat) is also meat offered to pagan deities. Later it was sold in public meat shops across the city. Paul is not concerned with the eating of such meat in private homes. The real issue at question was whether it should be consumed in public, in other words, in front of everybody, at fellowship meetings open to all the church members.

issue which concerned all the parties, and this issue dominates the agenda. Nevertheless, we can see that the libertines in Corinth are in a sense like those (Gnostics)⁷¹ who were indifferent with respect to Paul's establishment of proper moral behaviour, such as complete abstinence from eating εἰδωλόθυτα. It has been pointed out that the whole case with regard to εἰδωλόθυτα was brought up by the Cephas party. Although we cannot specify the religions of the Gentile converts, the fact is that most of the church members at Corinth were Gentile from a pagan background (1Cor. 12:2).

Archaeological evidence has been found in Corinth which attests to the presence of a Jewish community.⁷² Whether this Jewish community was influential in the Christian church at Corinth is questionable. Paul says nothing of the Apostolic Decree, because to his mind it had no validity for purely Gentile-Christian communities.⁷³ This argument is not convincing because when the problem of the buying and eating of food offered to idols entered the debate, he could not have ignored it. The different situation of Paul and the Apostolic Decree, which is raised by 1 Corinthians 8-10, arises from a context known for the apostle, since he was present in the debate.

In other words, the Apostolic Decree was not to be imposed on the Gentile churches, but the agreement was that the Gentiles should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled, and from fornication.⁷⁴ These

⁷¹I use the word here in its general sense of those "who have knowledge," not to allude to the second-century heresy.

⁷²William A. McDonald, "Archeology and St. Paul's Journeys in Greek Lands, III-Corinth," *BA* 5 (1942): 41.

⁷³T. W. Manson, "The Corinthian Correspondence," *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* ed. M. Black (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), 190-209.

⁷⁴Acts 15:28f. "The decision against imposing circumcision on Gentile Christians must have given great satisfaction to the church of Antioch, especially to Paul. He was not likely to change his practice or policy whichever way the verdict went, but his work would have been rendered immeasurably more difficult if Jerusalem had gone on record as insisting on circumcision. No longer would it be possible for "trouble-makers" to visit his churches and claim that the

agreements between the Christians from Jerusalem and from the Gentile churches (Antioch, Corinth, and others) were intended to facilitate a good social relationship between Jewish Christians and Christians who came from a pagan background.

Paul's position concerning the eating of εἰδωλόθυτα put him into an uncomfortable debate with the Cephas group and the Corinthian Gnostics.⁷⁵ This is why many scholars have suggested that the problem in Corinth is in fact to be connected to outside attempts to introduce the Apostolic Decree into the Corinthian Church. Nevertheless Paul is understood by some as being influenced by Hellenistic, Gnostic elements in his thought.⁷⁶ On the contrary, we see Paul reacting to this Corinthian γνῶσις by appealing to the Corinthians' conscience. For the apostle Paul, human thought processes are unreliable and lead us to conclusions that are likely to be groundless. It is easy to assume that a learning experience in the past (perfect infinitive in ἐγνωκέναι) has led us to hold a valid position in the present.⁷⁷ Paul reverses their argument by telling them that a man should order himself, not according to his own γνῶσις and conscience, but according to that of his neighbour. Paul is careful to make clear that the principle of Christian freedom⁷⁸ is not to be jeopardized.

circumcision of Gentile believers was official policy in the church of Jerusalem. That question was now closed. See F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 184.

⁷⁵Barrett, *Essays on Paul*, 54ff. In the notes Barrett clarifies that when he uses the term "Gnostics" he is making reference to the one who uses the word too often and not to the use of the term *per se*.

⁷⁶J. Dupont, *Gnosis: La Connaissance Religieuse dans les Epîtres de S. Paul* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1960), 282-327.

⁷⁷Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 57.

⁷⁸W. F. Orr and J. A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 255-256. Orr states the point clearly that "a free Christian is not to be judged by the conscience of another person; he must not allow his own conscience to think that he is doing something evil by the mere act of eating the food. In order not to damage the other person's conscience, he will refrain from eating; but in his own mind he knows he has the right to eat this food as food nothing has happened to it, it has not been changed, it has no particular power. He must not, however, let anyone think that he believes in idols; nor must he do anything to establish table fellowship with demons nothing to him, but everlastingly fatal to the other person."

Paul's argument appears to be inconsistent. In chapters 8 and 10:23-11:1 he chooses in principle the argument of the "strong" who were inclined to see the food to the idols as harmless and that it could, consequently, be eaten. But, on the other side, the restriction on freedom is imposed not by the meat,⁷⁹ but by the conscience of and the bond with the "weak" brother. It is generally accepted that πάντες γινώσκιν ἔχομεν (8:1) was the slogan used by the "strong."⁸⁰ The strong adopt a weak position; they do not need restriction against idolatry in order to protect their Christian faith, because they know that the idols are not real; they are proud both of their γινώσις and of the power and freedom which this knowledge, the grace they have received as believers in Christ, gives them. Dupont tries to demonstrate that the "weak" in Corinth were Jewish-Christians.⁸¹ We do not agree with Dupont because 1 Cor. 8:7 shows that they were Gentile-Christians and not Jewish-Christian as Dupont suggest. This also means that they had participated in pagan cultic meals.⁸² Although we cannot precisely identify the religions of the Gentile Christians, we can probably detect evidence of their previous social and religious association (In 1 Cor. 12:2 Paul mentions the Corinthians' religious experience and says ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε). According to C. K. Barrett, it is probable that some of Paul's members, prior to becoming Christians, had experienced religious ecstasy within the Hellenistic cults.⁸³

This is precisely why Paul reacted to this Corinthian γινώσις, because they felt free to eat everything, even the meat which came from the *macellum*. Further, those

⁷⁹Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 137.

⁸⁰J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom of the Ghetto," *Revue Biblique* (1978): 543-574.

⁸¹Dupont, *Gnosis*, 282-290.

⁸²Baird, "One Against the Other," 121.

⁸³C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1968), 278.

with γνῶσις claimed the ἐξουσία⁸⁴ (1 Cor. 8:9) to continue their pagan custom, despite their conversion to Christianity. What was this right that the Corinthians were claiming? Some Christians were exercising what Paul terms "this right of yours" (ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὕτη). Apparently, it was the right that enabled them to sit at meat in an idol temple (1 Cor. 8:9). The same right was also possessed by the "weaker" at Corinth though they did not think it was right to exercise it.⁸⁵ While, Paul did not deny that they possessed a degree of γνῶσις, he cautioned them that their γνῶσις (freedom) could easily become (γενέσθαι),⁸⁶ a danger to other Christians.

The idea of this group at Corinth might be summed up as "knowledge is power and power gives freedom and certain rights," but, Paul counters them with his own logan: "Love builds up the *ekklesia* and gives opportunity and power for service to other." As Willis observes, for the apostle Paul freedom is not the first and main cry, which then is crimped or limited by love. Rather, love is the main thing, and it indicates how one's power ought to be used.⁸⁷ Paul does not understand freedom as liberation from obligations or from the controls of interpersonal relationship, which was the common belief in some parts of Graeco-Roman society. For Paul, freedom means being free from sin, fear of death, and the law, in order to serve his Lord and his people.⁸⁸ The Christian's ἐξουσία will sometimes be selfish and destructive to others,

⁸⁴The Corinthian's rights were based on: (1) pagan gods have no spiritual reality (1 Cor. 8:4-6 10:19-20); (2) food does not matter to God (1 Cor. 8:8, 10:23-27, 31); (3) partaking in baptism and the Lord's Supper maintained one safe from lapses into idolatry (1 Cor. 10:2-14, 20-22).

⁸⁵Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City*, 170-171. "It could not be to eat meat in the idol temple of Demeter or Asclepius, since attendance at a meal there was not seen as a 'right'. Access to activities in the temples of Demeter and Asclepius were open to everyone." See also B. W. Winter, "The Achaean Federal Imperial Cult II: The Corinthian Church," *TynB* 46.1 (1995), 169-178.

⁸⁶Fisk, "Eating Meat," 60.

⁸⁷Willis, *Idol Meat*, 98.

⁸⁸Witherington, 196-197.

but it need not involve idolatry.⁸⁹ It is most likely, therefore, that the weak were Gentile-Christians whose mental conviction, that there was only one God, had not been fully grasped emotionally.

In 1 Cor. 10:1-22, on the other hand, Paul seems to be in favour of the weak because it was dangerous to eat food offered to idols. Therefore, the strong were admonished. Paul uses imperative language in v. 14 to admonish all who are against the tradition, especially in the practice of the Lord's Supper. He says: "Διόπερ, ἀγαπητοί μου, φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας." The apostle Paul is very explicit and determined to let the Corinthians know that they should φεύγειν ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας, for the sake of the weak brother and the Christian community.

5.4 Paul's Ethical Response

Paul's response is complex; to understand it one must distinguish between his attitude toward food offered to idols and his treatment of the problem. Paul does not simply conclude that food offered to idols is right or wrong.⁹⁰ Besides this dilemma mentioned above, the main difficulty in understanding Paul's response and the passage itself is that this rather pragmatic rule, which is oriented toward responsibility between persons, stands alongside an imperative prohibition of "idolatry" in 1 Cor. 10:1-22, backed by a biblical example (vss. 1-13) and by an illustration from the Lord's Supper (vss. 16-22).⁹¹ Paul's argument throughout the three chapters (1 Corinthians 8, 10 and

⁸⁹This point has been discussed by H. von Soden, "Sacrament and Ethics in Paul," in *The Writings of St. Paul* ed. W. Meeks (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 264., H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 177, and J. Brunt, "Love," 25. Paul's change from εἰδωλόθυτα (1 Cor. 8:1, 4, 7, 10) to εἰδωλόλατρης (1 Cor. 10:7) and εἰδωλατρία (1 Cor. 10:14) is important. The former is morally neutral; the latter are detestable.

⁹⁰J. C. Brunt, "Rejected, Ignored or Misunderstood? The Fate of Paul's Approach to the Problem of Food Offered to Idols in Early Christianity," *NTS* 31 (1985): 113-124.

⁹¹Meeks, *The First Urban*, 98.

11) seems to reveal some kind of inconsistency about the eating of idol-meat and the participation in the Eucharist meal. The questions arise, Did Paul's argument have influence? Where does Paul stand concerning the issue of "idolatry" in relationship to the divisions of the Corinthian church?

1 Corinthians is in itself a social reality; the evidence of communication between Paul and the church community is obvious.⁹² Paul was informed by the congregation of the socio-ethical issue, about idol-meat, and he begins the discussion making reference to at least two Corinthian slogans that were included in their letter to him: 1 Cor. 8:1, "all of us have knowledge," and 8:3, "an idol has no real existence." From the starting point of the argument, Paul's own concern transcends the particular issue of idol-meat and places the attention on the wider ethical question, the interpersonal relationships that are involved in this situation. The "strong" appeal to their "γνῶσις": There is only one God; there are no idols and, therefore, "no meat offered to idols" is dangerous (1 Cor. 8:4ff.). Paul argues differently. He distinguishes cultic meals in an official setting (8:10) from meals in private houses (10:25ff). To be sure, his opinion about official cultic meals in a temple is not quite uniform, but the intention is clear.⁹³ Paul's reply to the Corinthians implies that they had affirmed that they possessed knowledge which, in a sense, justified the uninhibited consumption of idol-offered meat. Paul insists, however, that the value of such knowledge is limited in that those who possess it have an almost irresistible tendency to become puffed up with pride. The feeling that the knowledge of God is precise and comprehensive may bring to some members of the Corinthian congregation a sense of superiority that is breaking a basic social element of human relationship in the community.

⁹²Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 137.

⁹³Ibid, 122.

On the contrary, the "weak" argue against eating idol food as a matter of conscience.⁹⁴ But, the question arises: Are the church members at Corinth converts from the pagan cults or from the Jewish religion? ⁹⁵ Paul sees the weak as the ones who, lacking γνῶσις, because of their previous customs in paganism, regard the eating of sacrificed meat as a real and dangerous matter (8:7).

Many attempts have been made to define these positions in terms of their theological beliefs or ideologies. Theissen does not dismiss all these efforts, but tries to show that there is also a social dimension of the problem to which the ideological factors would have to be connected. In his interpretation, the "strong" are the socially powerful, also referred to in 1 Cor. 1:16f. It is probable that some, after conversion to Christianity, may still have had reasons to accept invitations to dinner where meat would be served (10:27), perhaps in the shrine of a pagan god [8:10]. Some of the wealthy church members, who would still have had some social or business responsibilities that were more important to their roles in the larger society than to their association among people of the lower class.

The whole perception of what it meant to eat meat would have been different for the members of different economic levels. The poor people in fact rarely ate meat. For the poor, moreover, the Christian community provided a more than adequate substitute for the sort of friendly association, including common meals, that one might otherwise have sought in clubs, guilds, or cultic associations.⁹⁶ On the whole,

⁹⁴Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 359ff.

⁹⁵Murphy-O'Connor, "Freedom," 552. He comments that "The weak, therefore, are those who 'up to now have been accustomed to idols,' and who as a result of this conditioning see such meat as having been really offered to an idol. Are they converts from paganism or from Judaism? It is a question of a habitual attitude toward idols which remains up to the present moment (cf. 4:13; 15:6). The continuance of this attitude is what makes some 'weak.' It is not, therefore, a good thing in itself. It is part of the baggage of one's past which should have been left behind at conversion."

⁹⁶Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 121-140.

Theissen's argument is extremely good in showing the conflict between the two groups as evidence of the social-ethical problem among the Corinthians. He tries to demonstrate that the "strong" are in a higher status than the "weak" and assumes that they are consequently better integrated socially into the larger society in Corinth. The idea of freedom of conscience (or rather "consciousness"), far from being Paul's solution, was the real problem in the ethical difficulties created by the eating of idol-meat in Corinth. Apparently Paul does not have a concept of "conscience" already worked out, as he confronts the conflict in Corinth.⁹⁷

If we analyze the polemical situation, it seems that Paul picks up the terminology of *syneidesis* from the enlightened Corinthians who were eating the idol-meat. *Syneidesis* is a significant word for Paul. Probably, this term comes from the pagan world not from Paul's Jewish background.⁹⁸ It is significant that here the term "conscience" is to some extent considered as attached to an assessment on grounds other than the quality of acts themselves. In some of the cases at Corinth, the knowledge of the source of the meat used has brought pain, but actually, it is not the eating of meat. C. A. Pierce points out that "even in its negative and limited function, conscience does not so much indicate that an act committed is wrong, as that an act 'known' (by other means and rightly or wrongly) to be wrong has been committed."⁹⁹ But on the other hand, the Christian's behaviour is to be controlled by positive considerations toward his neighbour, and not negative actions.

⁹⁷R. A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom Among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8-10," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 574-589.

⁹⁸Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: J. B. Brill, 1971), 421ff.

⁹⁹C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament* (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1955), 77. Vv. 24 and 33 sum up the decisive principle, "The answer, therefore, to the question 'why is my liberty judged of another's conscience?' - a question put into the controversialists' mouth by St. Paul-- is that it is a duty incumbent on love to protect the brother from pain of conscience. Conscience in this question is of course the same here as elsewhere in this passage: it is the pain consequent upon committing the (supposedly) wrong act, into which the little one has been led by the example of his more knowledgeable brother."

Is it harmless to eat of it? or is it beneficial for the edification of the church community? In chapter two we mentioned that some of the Corinthians may have considered participation in pagan cultic meals as social celebrations, not worship occasions. Consequently, these pagan cultic meals do not pose any problem of conscience to them. In any case, some Christians at Corinth were familiar with these meals connected with pagan temples and some of them did not see any problem in participating in those meals.¹⁰⁰ This custom was part of their social background.

Paul argues that the very confidence that one has knowledge demonstrates that one has not made a proper adjustment to knowledge, for one has failed to realize that human knowledge is only partial. Paul's basic criticism is of a position which he was prepared to uphold: ἀγάπη must always take precedence over γνῶσις (1 Cor. 8:1-3; 13:2; 8:9, 12ff.), and my brother's conscience is always more important than my own.¹⁰¹ We can see that Paul builds up the whole community by the principle of love rather than knowledge. In his reply to the dilemma posed by the freedom of conscience, Paul insists on the real ethical question at the interpersonal level. The structure and the substance of Paul's reply makes the effect of one's behaviour on others the criterion of ethics.

¹⁰⁰I. Howard Marshall, "Lord's Supper" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* eds. R. P. Martin, G. Hawthorne and D. Reid (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 2. "Christian converts could well have been familiar with any of these types of meal and also with some of the practices of the different mystery religions. . . . There was a complicated mix of religious practices in Corinth. Some members of the church were familiar with meals associated with pagan temples and some believe that it was right to continue to participate in these. It does not, of course, follow that they viewed what happened at these meals and the Lord's Supper in the same way. Further, it is important to note that the very strong explicit criticisms that Paul makes of the Corinthians church meal do not appear to be connected in any way with pagan beliefs or practices that had been carried over into it. It may be that the Corinthian Christians felt that participation in the meal of itself protected them from divine judgment, but Paul's instruction to them is not about misunderstanding the meal but about refraining from idolatry."

¹⁰¹Barrett, *Essays on Paul*, 56.

Paul's argument in both in 8:7, 13, and in 10:23-24 and 32-33 refers to those who would exercise their new-found spiritual freedom with their fellow members in the community. In chap 9 he speaks from this context, especially since the argument follows the same pattern of thesis and antithesis as in chap 8.¹⁰² In summary, Paul presents himself in chap. 9 as an example of the necessity to be willing to give up one's own rights for the sake of others. Thus, Paul treats the question by changing the focus to the issue of Christian love rather than simply giving an answer to the question. In so doing he presents the principle, that love and respect for others transcends the rightness or wrongness of the eating of the idol-meat, and participating in the communal meals which were part of the common practice of the society in which the Corinthians were living.

5.5 Paul's Treatment of the Fellowship Meal: 1 Cor. 10:14-22

As it has been pointed out in this pericope, idolatry was a constant problem in the centres of Graeco-Roman civilisation where Primitive Christianity came to be found.¹⁰³ The reason for Paul's prohibition can be summarized in one main point: Paul was against eating food offered to idols because he understood that the Lord's meal was a fellowship with the Lord and with the believers.

The purpose of 10:14, 15 in the structure of 10: 14-21 is to introduce a reasoned argument against Christian participation in pagan cultic meals. In 1 Cor. 8 Paul responds to a defense of eating conveyed to him from the Corinthians.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, in 10:1-13 he makes known his own discussion, based on an explanation

¹⁰²Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 228.

¹⁰³ R. P. Martin, *Eucharist Teaching in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians* (M.A. Thesis, University of Manchester, 1956), 32.

¹⁰⁴Willis, *Idol Meat*, 182.

of Israel's history. Then in 1 Cor. 10: 14-21 Paul gives a second argument, this time based upon the significance of sacred meals. These two arguments are grammatically related by *διόπερ*.

Paul uses this very strong inferential conjunction *διόπερ* "therefore" ("for this very reason") to bring the previous argument to its sound conclusion. *Διόπερ* is stronger than *διό* and *γάρ*. "Wherefore" or "therefore" is not enough. Paul urges upon his readers the conclusion that flows from verse 13. An idol cannot rescue the believer from temptation. *Au contraire* idol worship has always been contributory to the grossest of sins. The idol is faithless. God is faithful. Paul shows in vv. 1-13 an example of how Israel's idolatry caused their destruction in the desert, despite their "sacraments."¹⁰⁵ Paul makes spiritual applications of several incidents from the Pentateuch. God's extraordinary action for his people in the Exodus time did not prevent their destruction. Paul maintains that these events had a deeper meaning for the church and their practice. They are types which happened to the Israelites as examples. Thus confirmed, the Christian members at Corinth may confront the danger to which Paul addressed himself. Fee points out that "here the rule is the apodictic *φεύγετε*."¹⁰⁶ Max Zerwick says that the word means "flee, keep away."¹⁰⁷ Similar to Jewish belief, Paul is sure that idolatry is impossible for a Christian believer. No amount of *γνώσις* of the nonexistence of an idol-god justifies participation in idol worship in any form. Paul now concludes the argument with a tender appeal, *ἀγαπητοί μου*, and a straight forward prohibition, *φεύγετε ἀπο τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας*.¹⁰⁸ Paul's admonition is

¹⁰⁵Fee, *The First Epistle*, 464.

¹⁰⁶Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 170.

¹⁰⁷Max Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* vol. 2, trans. M. Grosvenor (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 517. The use with the accusative and with *ἀπὸ* have the same meaning. G. B. Winer in his grammar, mentions that the same verb in the infinitive *φεύγειν* governs the accusative, as in 1 Cor. 6:18, 2 Tim. 2:22 in a figurative sense (to flee, to shun a vice); but is once followed by *ἀπὸ*, in 1 Cor. 10:14. This latter construction is very common in the New Testament.

¹⁰⁸Fee, *The First Epistle*, 464.

clear: "they must not try to see how near they can go, but how far they can fly. *Fugite idolatriam: omnem ubique et totam.*" This might have been hard saying for some of them, especially after expecting a wide measure of liberty, so he softens it with ἀγαπητοί μου.¹⁰⁹

Paul challenges the Corinthians to differentiate and give consideration to his argument. Paul calls them "wise" though their behaviour indicates otherwise. Paul like any good rhetorician knows that he must rely on the power of persuasion. Consequently, the only logical thing he can do is to exhort; the Corinthians must consider the situation and respond. He has warned them about the immorality that may entrap idolaters. He will now consider the contradiction of idol-association and participation in the Lord's Supper.

Paul continues: "ὡς φρονίμοις λέγω." He is turning from an Old Testament parallel; he is now about to show them with a discussion based on their common experience the force of which, as sensible men, they will readily recognise, as this discussion is based on the parallel between the Christian Eucharist and an idol feast.¹¹⁰ Now Paul is trying to show them that a sophisticated understanding of the nature of idols is not enough. They have plenty of intelligence and can see whether an argument is logical or not. It seems that the Corinthians made use of their common sense or γῶσις, so that is why Paul says to them κρίνατε ὑμεῖς ὃ φημι. The use of ὑμεῖς is emphatic. Paul's change from λέγω to φημι should be marked in translation, although

¹⁰⁹Tertullian, *De Cor.* 10., and see also A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 211.

¹¹⁰F. F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1971), 94.

Robertson says it may be made merely for variety: "Judge for yourself what I declare."¹¹¹ Once again Paul appeals to the power of discernment and good judgment.

In presenting the Lord's Supper as the norm, Paul turns to the traditional terminology and the acknowledgment of the Lord's Supper as a communal act. Conzelmann wonders, when Paul mentions the cup first, if he is then linking up with a form of celebration of the Lord's Supper in which the cup was distributed first? Or has he himself reversed the order for particular reasons as in the *Didache*?¹¹² We can say that his form of the celebration of the Lord's Supper depends on the tradition which appears in the expression "ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας." Therefore, Paul is not reversing the order of the celebration, but is following the church's tradition. But it seems quite possible that the expression has some similarities to the one found in *Joseph and Aseneth*. The term for the cup of wine was a technical Jewish expression that came at the end of a meal used as its formal close.¹¹³ H. L. Strack says that the Jewish custom at Passover was to bless the cup of wine three times and he explains:

Becher des Segens. So heisst im Rabbinischen insonderheit der Becher Wein, über dem nach Schluss eines Mahles das Tischdankgebet gesprochen wurde, s. Exkurs: Ein altjüdisches Gastmahl. Bei der Passahfeier war es vermutlich der 'dritte' Becher Wein, über dem als dem 'Segens Becher' jener Danksegens nach Tisch gesprochen worden ist, s. Exkurs: Feier des Passahmahles—Über den 'Segensbecher' beim Mahl der Gerechten in der zukünftigen Welt.¹¹⁴

The Lord's Supper was a meal in which the participants drink from a cup over which a blessing was pronounced. The Jewish cup of blessing (כּוּס שֶׁל בְּרָכָה) corresponded to the cup of the interpretative saying (Mk. 14:23 par. Mt. 26:27; 1 Cor.

¹¹¹Robertson, 211.

¹¹²Conzelmann, *1 Corinthinas*, 171.

¹¹³Barrett, *Essays on Paul*, 94.

¹¹⁴H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* vol. 3 (Munich: D. H. Beck, 1926), 419.

11:25; Lk. 22:20). At every meal when wine was drunk the prayer of thanksgiving was said over this cup after the main meal.¹¹⁵ So, several prayers were offered as part of the ritual of the Jewish Passover.

Paul's use of the sequence of cup–bread is unique in the New Testament¹¹⁶ because the evidence from 11:23-25 makes clear that the normal sequence, bread–cup, is the one which prevailed in the churches founded by Paul. It has been argued that the order presented by Paul should not make us overlook the fact that for Paul “body is not simply the correlate of blood.” In Paul’s mind the “body of Christ” is the church; therefore, Paul makes the reversal of bread and cup.¹¹⁷

Paul’s statement that the cup “οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ” enlarges and describes, as Bruce says, “the dominical words of institution (cf. 11:25) as his description of the bread which we break as a participation in the body of Christ. . .” Bruce adds also that such participation amplifies and interprets the words of institution spoken over the bread (cf. 11:24).¹¹⁸ Neither the blood nor the body has a material sense in this interpretation by Paul. The “cup of blessing,” as we mentioned before, was the technical term for the final benediction at the end of the meal. This was the cup that Jesus Christ himself blessed at the Eucharist meal (cf. 11:25, “after the meal”) and described as “the new covenant in my blood,” (although in Mk-Mt the link with Jeremiah 31 is not so clear). Goppelt observes that this expression can be

¹¹⁵Goppelt, *TDNT* 6, 154.

¹¹⁶Fee, *The First Epistle*, 466ff.

¹¹⁷Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 172ff. He does not consider Lk 22:17f. as evidence (as others do; see Gordon Fee, n.19) to the form of celebration. The sequence there is, cup bread, cup wine, has come from a combination of the common (we should say the normal) course of the supper. He adds that “Paul is aiming at an interpretation of the community by means of the Lord’s Supper cf. the step from v. 16 to v. 17. This is the connection between the Eucharist meal and Paul’s concept of the church which is a new element that he introduces to the Corinthian church to their understanding of the Lord’s Supper as a sacrament.”

¹¹⁸Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 94.

understood as the eschatological saying from Jesus; that it was initially associated with the blessing of a cup (Lk. 22:17a) is implied by the use of the term "fruit of the vine" (Mk. 14:25).¹¹⁹ We must understand that the interpretation of κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ χριστοῦ ἐστὶν and the associated words have a central significance for Paul. A close analysis of the term shows that Paul never used κοινωνία in a secular sense but always in a religious one.¹²⁰ For Paul κοινωνία always refers to the relation of faith to Christ.

In the Lord's Supper Paul's concern is that the drinking of this cup is for the believers a sharing (κοινωνία) in the blood of Christ. The Christian communion service, therefore, is unique in its importance since it sets forth in symbol the unique sacrifice of the unique Son of God in his unique incarnation.

In a similar way, Paul speaks of "τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν," the sharing of the bread. This expression he takes to mean sharing in the body of Christ. It is doubtful that Paul here is talking about the physical aspect of the human body of the Lord.¹²¹ Paul describes the human body of Christ in other terms: in Col. 1:22, he uses the word flesh, whereas for him the term "the Body of Christ" refers to the church. Paul says that in the Christian fellowship this is a communion with the body of Christ. So, we can conclude that κοινωνία means participation in the body and blood of Christ and thus union with the exalted Christ. Paul is leading his readers to understand the real meaning of being in communion with Christ.

ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἓν σωμα οἱ πολλοί ἐσμεν. The use of ὅτι, "because," is to be connected with verse 16. Paul brings together the notions of ἄρτος/σῶμα,

¹¹⁹Goppelt, 153ff.

¹²⁰Schattenmann, *NIDNTT* 1 (1971), 639-644.

¹²¹Barrett, *Essays on Paul*, 233.

"bread/body" because in his mind he has the thought of the body of Christ. Conzelmann says that the sacred participation in Christ's body makes us into the body of Christ.¹²² The eucharistic κοινωνία in the body of Christ is the sacrament of the believers in unity, proclaiming common membership in the one body. Further, George Panikulam points out that "those who ate from the altar became *koinonoi* of the altar; this is an allusion to the cultic unity of Israel."¹²³ It seems that the apostle is making a comparison between vv.17 and 18. However, Paul's argument is from the fact that one loaf was broken and shared and consequently those who participate in the one loaf are, not withstanding their plurality, one body.¹²⁴ Paul's intention is to show that all who participate in the one loaf have communion with Christ. This is what follows next in the other part of v. 17b: οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν. Paul's main idea, therefore, is not the unity of the body that this supper represents, but the loyalty of the redeemed community as one body that makes all be united as one.¹²⁵

The meaning seems to be that all have communion with the body (κοινωνία), but the body is not divided. The emphasis lies on the unity and the sharing of the one loaf. Paul adds οἱ πάντες, "all as one" "all the whole congregation." We agree when Robertson describes Paul's feeling concerning the social viewpoint. Robertson comments that it is remarkable how the apostle Paul insists upon the social aspect of both the sacraments; because Paul says, "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one

¹²²Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 172.

¹²³George Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life. An Bib 85* (Roma: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 28. He also comments that, "the interpretation prevalent so far, which connected v.18 with v.19, can hardly stand with Paul's argumentation in the context. Instead, connecting v.18 to v.17 makes better sense insofar as Paul gets a confirmation for his understanding of the Lord's Supper in the Jewish world." The Lord's Supper in its sacramental meaning has more affinity to the Jewish meal than the mystery religious meals. Though in the social practice, the Lord's Supper (as has been discussed already in chapter six) at Corinth was not significantly different from those in their culture, especially the *eranos* from the social custom of the Graeco-Roman world.

¹²⁴Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 234.

¹²⁵Fee, *The First Epistle*, 469.

body" (12:13).¹²⁶ The Corinthians, in participating in the Lord's Supper, are having a social fellowship with the Lord. They are edifying not just one segment of the church, but the whole congregation becomes united to form the body of Christ.

Having made his main points clear, Paul adds the analogy of the sacred meals in Israel. "βλέπετε τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα." This verse brings a historical proof by citing the practice of Israel, which is unquestioningly recognized as valid.¹²⁷ The illustration used by Paul from the OT is from several sources, but Paul is especially referring to the meals prescribed in Deut. 14:22-27, not to the priest's share of the sacrifice mentioned in 9:13. Lev. 10:12-15 mentions that it was the priest's privilege to use up some part of the offering. The non-priestly worshippers also consumed part.¹²⁸ Paul says they were partners in the altar when they shared the benefit of it. S. Aalen points out that

Der Terminus viel mehr am Opfer bzw am Altar orientiert. Die Letztere Möglichkeit ist die 1 Kor. x:18 vorliegender (κοινωνοί τοῦ θυσιαστήριου). Der Unterschied zwischen Opfer und Altar ist jedoch in diesem Zusammenhang nicht gross. Das Opfer wird besonders dann hervorgehoben, wenn es um die Frage des Unterhaltes der Priester geht (so 1 Kor. ix:13), der Altar dagegen, wenn die religiöse Sicht betont werden soll.¹²⁹

Paul's emphasis when he says "sharers in the altar" is that the ones who participate share together in the food on the altar. In this meal they are bound together in their everyday worship of God. By this analogy Paul is trying to say to the Corinthians that when they partake of the Eucharistic meal they become "partners" of the God of the altar. Thus table fellowship was established with God; the participants were established as his people.

¹²⁶Robertson and Plummer, 215.

¹²⁷Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 172.

¹²⁸Barrett, *The first Epistle*, 235.

¹²⁹S. Aalen, "Das Abendmahl als Opfermahl im Neuen Testament," *NovT* 6 (1963): 137.

According to Conzelmann Paul starts by assuming the reader already knows, as indeed he now wishes to confirm, that the *κοινωνία τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου*, "partnership in the altar," of the "one" God rules out fellowship with evil spirits or demons.¹³⁰ In other words, Paul wished to say to the Corinthian congregation, especially the "Libertine," that he rules out partaking with demons and their table. In doing so Paul has apparently involved himself in a certain inconsistency. Barrett seems not to agree with the other scholars when he says neither of these writers seems to do full justice to the facts in 1 Corinthians. That Paul found himself in some difficulty over the question of sacrificial food is certainly true.¹³¹ Since Paul argues that there is sacred meaning in the Lord's Supper and the sacrificial meals in ancient Israel, he must continue that Christians should neither partake of nor participate in anything related to idolatrous worship.

It seems likely that it was not difficult for Paul as a converted Jew, trained in the Rabbinical school of Jerusalem, to accept the substance of the Jewish-Christian Decree even though he never mentioned it. For Paul the whole issue is not that the food offered to the demons changed into a demonic substance or represented demons. He is arguing that sacrifices to demons are evidence of yielding allegiance to them and entering into an unholy *κοινωνία* with them. Christians at Corinth must renounce this partnership, because they are exclusive partners of God in Christ. The following verses are explicit on the matter.

¹³⁰Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 173. He mentions Weiss's position on v. 19: "The conclusion drawn by the opponents is reflected in the οὖν, 'then' of the question."

¹³¹Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 43ff. He mentions the case of scholars like A. A. T. Ehrhardt, T. W. Manson, and E. Molland. According to Dr. Ehrhardt, Paul changed his attitude on the issue of eating food offered to idols. He goes further and says, "It is remarkable that only a short time afterwards, namely after the visit of St. Peter to Corinth, St. Paul greatly changed his tune." He also says that Paul accepted the Apostolic Decree, in particular the prohibition of the eating of εἰδωλόθυσια. However, most of the scholars do not agree with Barrett's view.

When Paul states, "ἀλλ' ὅτι ἃ θύουσιν [τά ἔθνη], δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ θύουσιν," he alludes to the LXX in Deut. 32:17, "δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ, θεοῖς οἷς οὐκ ᾔδεισαν." Robertson points out that "they sacrificed to demons (Shêdin) and to a no-god, to gods whom they knew not."¹³² Paul's argument does not suggest that idols are real. But rather, the Corinthians have to understand idolatry in terms of OT revelation.¹³³ However, Paul considers them (demons) as real beings (1 Cor. 8:5).¹³⁴ The term demon used by Paul had provided him and other Hellenistic Jews with a helpful way of expressing a truth which otherwise would not have been easy to put into words. Because of the nature of the demons and their relation to pagan idols, Paul's view differs from that of the "intelligent people" of Corinth, who consider that idol-offerings and participation in table fellowship make no difference. But, that is why he goes on and clearly says in v. 20b: οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι. In what sense does Paul regard those who participate in such sacrificial feasts as partners with demons? Paul thinks of feasts to the idols as explicitly under the patronage of a pagan god, involving in some degree the acknowledgment and even worship of that deity.¹³⁵ So, Paul's point is simple: these pagan meals are in fact food sacrificed to idols (demons) and, therefore, the worship of demons is involved.

This is why he says in v. 21: "οὐ δύνασθε ποτήριον κυρίου πίνειν καὶ ποτήριον δαιμονίων." Drinking a cup dedicated to the Lord and at the same time drinking a cup dedicated to demons must be unthinkable for Christians. Note that both κυρίου and δαιμονίων are anarthrous, but the context makes clear what Paul means. The Christian communion table is divine; the pagan idol temple is demonic. It is

¹³²Robertson and Plummer, 217.

¹³³Fee, *The First Epistle*, 471ff.

¹³⁴Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 173.

¹³⁵Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 96.

impossible to relate both to Christ and to demons. Conzelmann clearly points out that "verse 21 expresses with fundamental sharpness the impossibility of participating in the pagan cult, and does so with special reference to participation in meals, drinking and eating."¹³⁶ The eucharistic formula used by Paul and handed down in the community clearly shows us that it is thus impossible to drink both the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. The reference to the cup of demons is Paul's main argument for this prohibition. The Christian should not share lordship with demons because in the Christian observance this is a partnership of the body of Christ. As in the case of the wine, this has been understood to mean some identity with the flesh of Christ, whether actually or symbolically; and so the participant would gain his divine characteristic by a kind of sacred "Christophagy." This partnership with demons Christians must renounce and be sole partners of God in Christ.

Paul is arguing here, not from pagan notions, but from the OT principle that every sacrifice which is not offered to the living God is dedicated to demons.¹³⁷ On the basis of the Lord's Supper Paul warned the Corinthian libertines concerning participating in drinking of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; and he adds what we can call a second warning: "οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δαιμονίων." Μετέχειν is a verb of sharing. At the Lord's table we share with others the symbols of the body and blood of Christ and, in a deeper sense, we share participation in the Body of Christ. To share in the table with the Lord and with demons is also impossible for one who is aware of being united with Christ. How then can the Christians also share with pagans in a service that is dedicated to the worship of Satan? The two unions are absolutely incompatible. No basis for fellowship between

¹³⁶Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*,. 175.

¹³⁷Goppelt, 157. In the light of the Old Testament outcomes Paul appeals to the Corinthians to escape from any kind of contact with the idols. "He sets absolute opposition between the Lord's Supper and idol meals. It is in this background that we are expected to understand Paul's development of the Eucharistic theology." See G. Panikulam, *An Bib* 85 (1979): 29.

them exists (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18), because, Fee says, "those who eat at the Lord's table are proclaiming his death until he comes (11:26), they are thereby also bound to one another through the death of the Lord that is thus celebrated."¹³⁸ What harm could there be in attending these meals? ¹³⁹ Verse 22 represents the turning point of Paul's argument.

Paul adds a final warning--*ἢ παραζηλοῦμεν τὸν κύριον; μή ἰσχυρότεροι αὐτοῦ ἔσμεν*--a rhetorical inquiry which expects an emphatic negative answer. "Are we stronger than he?" The particle *ἢ* introduces the alternative, "Or (if you think that you can't eat of Christ's table and the table of demons) are we going to provoke His jealousy?"¹⁴⁰ Fee is not the only one among the commentators accepting that "the precise intent of this question is 'puzzling.'"¹⁴¹ Several of the commentators take this inquiry as an ironic, if not sarcastic, reference to "the strong" in the Corinthian church, who possessed the "knowledge" (1 Cor. 8:1).

According to Rosner this interpretation is improbable since the apostle Paul does not use the word "strong" in 1 Corinthians as he does in Romans 14.¹⁴² However, it seems clear that Paul labels the two groups of the controversy as "the strong" and also "the weak." In fact Paul's warning mentions more than one group in Corinth; he asks, are we *ἔσμεν* (not "are you," [*ἔστε*]) stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10: 22). The warning is to those Christians in Corinth who think they have *γνώσις* and *ἐξουσία* and become

¹³⁸Fee, *The First Epistle*, 473.

¹³⁹A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 70. He explains that "though communion with Christ in the Eucharist may be secondary chronologically to union with Christ by faith, it is questionable whether Paul recognized any inherent precedence of the latter over the former . . . For he held the Eucharist to be essential to the church as the command from the Lord himself."

¹⁴⁰Robertson and Plummer, 218.

¹⁴¹Fee, *The First Epistle*, 474.

¹⁴²Rosner, "No Other Gods," 149-159.

indifferent to Paul's teaching in following the right way to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Paul uses the word ἰσχυρότεροι ("stronger") not in an ironic way, but to describe a group.¹⁴³

This word also describes the characteristic of the Corinthian attitude toward Paul's counsel. We may conclude by saying that Paul has given them a practical plan for Christian living in a pagan society. In verses 14-22 Paul also expressly condemns the attendance at pagan meals. Some things are constructive and others destructive, but the tradition handed down from the Lord cannot be changed for pagan practices. Paul had in mind the building up of the Body of Christ.

5.6 Summary

All of our difficulties in interpreting 1 Cor. 10: 14-20 seem to disappear when one acknowledges that Paul is not arguing *a fortiori* from the Jewish and pagan viewpoint of κοινωνία to the Eucharist, but rather the contrary. The parallelism with Israel's practice does not intend to build κοινωνία as a doctrine, but to lead us to understand better the example of avoiding idolatry (1 Cor. 10:7). The people of Israel had a similar κοινωνία of the altar because there is Christian κοινωνία (fellowship), just as manna is a "spiritual food" in view of the Lord's Supper (v. 4).¹⁴⁴

The fellowship of the altar saved the faithful ones; those worshipping idols perished. The usage of this pattern from the Old Testament argues against Christian participation in eating meat offered to idols, a frequent subject in 1 Corinthians 10. The real κοινωνία with Christ should avoid any confusion of the weak brothers united

¹⁴³Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 174.

¹⁴⁴John M. McDermott, "The Biblical Doctrine of ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ," *BZ* 19 (1975): 220.

to Christ, if the strong brothers are also willing to recognise that the "little ones"¹⁴⁵ are also members of the body of Christ.

Furthermore, Paul concludes his teaching on the basis of human interaction. Paul is concerned with the well-being of the church's society and its members. We are to consider other people's feelings, sensibilities, and beliefs so as not to cause them to stumble or to offend them unnecessarily. Paul insists that his own life direction (*modus operandi*) is oriented to the advantage of the many. He delineated his principle of adaptability in 1 Cor. 9:22, "all things to all people," which has as its ultimate goal God's salvation of his people through the preaching of the gospel.

¹⁴⁵Pierce, 80ff. He comments that "while it is perhaps not always easy to accept the arguments of Thornton yet there can be little doubt that he is right in his contention that the weak are the same people as *the little ones*, those to whom St. Paul elsewhere refers as babes. These babes are those who have not yet reached full maturity in Christ; so that is not implausible to suggest further that while the *little ones*, the weak, are sometimes those for whom the apostles are responsible, and whom they scandalise at their peril, at other times it is the weakness of the apostles themselves which is stressed."

CHAPTER 6

PAUL'S ACCOUNT OF THE LAST SUPPER IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-26: THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEAL

We begin this chapter with a warning. Drawing a comprehensive picture of the Corinthian situation is beyond the scope of this thesis. The following section is designated instead to highlight only those aspects of the Corinthian situation we must understand if we were to grasp Paul's argument throughout 1 Cor. 8-11, especially the social and moral issues in the Lord's Supper.

We must examine, albeit more briefly now, at least the remainder of our literary unit, 1 Cor. 11: 17-26. If our treatment of 1 Cor. 8:1-13, and 10:14-22 is sound, it may have some bearing upon the interpretation of the remainder of 1 Cor. 11. It will be useful, therefore, to trace the Apostle's view through the end. Our primary goal will be to highlight those aspects of Paul's argument which may gain a deeper meaning in the light of what we have discovered in 1 Cor. 8:1-13 and 10: 14-22 in relationship with the Lord's Supper. We turn now to examine the details of 1 Cor. 11:17-26.

6.1 Introduction and Aim of This Chapter

As we concluded in the previous chapter, Paul was trying to show the Corinthians the correct practice of the Lord's Supper as a united body with one purpose in mind, to build up the body of Christ and to eradicate the divisive elements

in the congregation at the Eucharistic Meal. However, there are those who argue that Paul's tradition was a direct revelation to him; others observed that he was not just correcting a sociological problem at Corinth, but he was concerned with the social causes and consequences of the bad behaviour in the church meal and also with the theological meaning of what was happening at the Lord's Supper. Thus, part of Paul's strategy is to show those wealthy Corinthians the logical consequences of their un-Christian behaviour, rather than just condemning them.

In this section our aim is to continue the discussion of the social abuses and excesses of some of the Christians at Corinth, and the way they celebrated the Lord's Supper. Paul is trying to correct the wrong behaviour of the Corinthians; he does not provide a full exposition of his views of the Lord's Supper. Nonetheless, we learn a great deal in 1 Cor. 8-11 (especially in 1 Cor. 11:17:26) about how the Lord's Supper was celebrated at Corinth and about Paul's socio-ethical beliefs of the Supper.

6.2 The Lord's Supper at Corinth

In 1 Cor. 11:20, Paul calls the meal that was professedly partaken by the Corinthian church members "The Lord's Supper" (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον), but the phrase that became frequently used is "Eucharist" (εὐχαριστία, which means "a giving of thanks"). This term can be found in the Didache. Ignatius and Justin clearly indicate that in the Didache the prayers were spoken at the celebration of the meal and then in the whole sacramental celebration. In addition, Ignatius knows the name 'Agape' (Sm. 8:2, Rom. 7:3? ἀγαπᾶν, Sm. 7:1='hold the Agape') which also occurs in Jd. 12.¹

¹Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8:2; 7:3. See also R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* vol. 1, trans. K. Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1952), 144.

From Paul's comments on the practice of the Lord's Supper in the church of Corinth, we may have an idea that the supper was held continually at possibly weekly intervals, and not merely as an annual recollection of the Lord's death during a Christian Passover. In the church at Corinth there were two sections of the cultic service: a collective meal, taken for the purpose of nourishment (cf. Didache x.1: "after you are filled". . .), followed by a solemn service of the Eucharist meal.² Paul regarded the behaviour of the Corinthians in the Lord's Supper as a disorderly act that led to its being mentioned in his letter. The problem in the church obviously arose from social disagreement within the congregation.³ The Corinthians' behaviour seems to be quite normal with the social standards of the day; although some church members were acting according to the rule of the society, they were not acting according to the rule and the standards of the Christian community at large.⁴

It is also possible to deduce something about the social stratification from several of the conflicts found in the Pauline communities. Paul's rebukes in 1 Cor. 11:17-34 make clear the divisions which appeared when the Corinthian Christians

² Didache X. 1. See also R. Martin, *NBD* 751.

³I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1980), 109.

⁴G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* trans. J. H. Schütz (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), 147. He observes that "analysis of the social conditions surrounding human behaviour presupposes that this behaviour will be described with the greatest precision, but in our case a great deal remains unclear. Four questions require an answer. 1) Were there different groups at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or is it a matter of a conflict between the congregation and some of its individual members? 2) Were there various points at which the meal began, and what is the sequence of the various actions mentioned in 1 Cor. 11:17ff? 3) Were there quantitative differences in the portions served at the meal, or 4) qualitatively different meals for different groups? To answer these questions we must also draw on other contemporary texts to understand better what kinds of behaviour were possible at this time."

gathered for the Lord's Supper.⁵ With their attitude, the Corinthians disdain the sacrament, possibly on grounds of spiritualism, and see it as a mere symbol. They commemorate it as an common meal.⁶ Thus, we can assume that the Lord's Supper was held as a meal where all the members participated and the meal was being celebrated in a selfish way. This is why Paul warned them to go home and eat and later gather together around the Lord's table with reverence and orderly conduct (1 Cor. 11:22, 30-34). Furthermore, in Paul's view, the sacred tradition regarding the Last Supper is recited specifically to encourage social equality, to overcome factionalism created by stratification. In Paul's mind the main purpose of gathering together in the Lord's Supper is to create unity and harmony in the assembly.

6.3 The Church Meal and Its Social Context

The church at Corinth was composed of people from different social strata, the wealthy and the poor, as well as slaves and former slaves. It was customary for participants in the Lord's meal to bring from home their own food and drink. The wealthy brought so much food and drink that they could indulge in gluttony and drunkenness. The poor who came later, however, had little or nothing to bring, with the result that some of them went hungry and could not enjoy a decent meal.⁷ This conflict at the Lord's Supper is seen in Paul's comment: "It is not the Lord's Supper

⁵W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 67. He adds that these divisions about which Paul "hears" (v.18) may be connected in some way with the incipient factions reported by Chloe's people (1:10f.), but nothing that is said here hints that either the jealousy between followers of Apollos and partisans of Paul or the "realized eschatology" of the *pneumatikoi* is involved.

⁶H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 194.

⁷Marshall, *Last Supper*, 109.

that you eat. For in eating each one goes ahead with his own meal" (1 Cor. 11:20-21). The allegation could be taken to signify that a distorted gluttony and drunkenness of the groups is the main cause of the conflict, as if each individual had eaten independently of the others.⁸ The Corinthians' meal *eranos*⁹ had become a social problem for the Christian community: (1) The meal made beforehand apparently differed in quantity and quality. (2) Some members began eating before the others arrived and before the Lord's Supper took place. (3) Murphy-O'Connor¹⁰ observes that the one who arrived late found no room in the *triclinium*, which was the dining room where regularly only twelve could recline for the meal.

⁸Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 147.

⁹Homer, *Odyssey* 1.226-227. See also Aelius Aristides, *Sarapis* 54.20-28., and Lucian *Lexiphanes* 6,9,13. The *eranos* practice existed since the time of Homer and also in the second century C.E. The guests bring either money or meals baskets. "Aristophanes describes this custom nicely (*Acharnenses* 1085-1149): Come at once to dinner," invites a messenger, and bring your pitcher and your supper chest. The hosts provide wreaths, perfumes, and sweets, while the guests bring their own food which will be cooked in the host's house. They pack fish, several kinds of meat, and baked goods in their food baskets before they leave home. Also Xenophon (*Mem* 3.14.1) describes how the participants of a dinner party bring *opson*, e.g., fish and meat, from home. "Whenever some of those who came together for dinner brought more meat and fish (*opson*) than others, Socrates would tell the waiter either to put the small contributions into the common stock or to portion them out equally among the diners. So the ones who brought a lot felt obliged not only to take their share of the pool, but to pool their own supplies in return; and so they put their own food also into the common stock. Thus they got no more than those who brought little with them. . ." Here we have a close parallel to the Corinthian problems. See also Peter Lampe's *Affirmation*, 4. It seems that the apostle Paul and Socrates are protecting the communal meal (*eranos*) practice from such abuse. This practice should not lead some to overeat while others stay hungry.

¹⁰J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 158-159. The ones who arrived late had to sit in the atrium or in the peristyle, which was another inconvenience for them. "The mere fact that all could not be accommodated in the *triclinium* meant that there had to be an overflow into the *atrium*. It became imperative for the host to divide his guests into two categories; the first-class believers were invited into the *triclinium* while the rest stayed outside. Even a slight knowledge of human nature indicates the criterion used. The host must have been a member of the community and so he invited into the *triclinium* his closest friends among the believers, who would have been of the same social class. The rest could take their places in the *atrium*, where conditions were greatly inferior. . . . The space available made such discrimination unavoidable, but this would not diminish the resentment of those provided with second-class facilities."

The problem with the space and discrimination against those provided with second-class facilities prepared the atmosphere for the tensions that appear in Paul's account of the Eucharist meal at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Nevertheless, Paul's statement that "one is hungry while another is drunk" (v.21) tells us that such tensions were presumably provoked by another possible factor, clearly, the type and quality of food offered.¹¹ These private meals have to be eaten at home according to Paul's comments in 1 Cor. 11:22-34. He also reminded them that the Lord's Supper was meant to commemorate the Lord's sacrificial death.¹²

Nevertheless, in trying to be more specific, what behaviour is it that, in Paul's view, disturbed the Lord's Supper? The crux of the dilemma seems to be stated in v. 22 in a list of rhetorical questions. This form, of course, is used when the speaker wants the readers to draw conclusions for themselves; here he seems to want them to acknowledge certain unacceptable inferences from their own behaviour. Their behaviour implies that they reject the congregation of God, because they humiliate those who do have little.¹³ Furthermore, if we add to the scene Paul's warning at the end of chapter 11 ("So then, my brothers, when you gather together to eat the Lord's

¹¹Pliny The Younger, *Letters* 2:6. The practice to serve different types of food to different categories of guests was the popular Roman custom. Pliny tells the following experience: "I happened to be dining with a man, though no particular friend of his, whose elegant economy, as he called it, seemed to me sort of stingy extravagance. The best dishes were set in front of himself and a select few, and cheap scraps of food before the rest of the company. He had even put the wine into tiny little flasks, divided into three categories, not with the idea of giving his guests the opportunity of choosing, but to make it impossible for them to refuse what they were given. One lot was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all his friends are graded), and the third for his and our freedmen. . . ."

¹²I. Howard Marshall, "Lord's Supper" in *DPL* eds., R. P. Martin, G. Hawthorne and D. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1.

¹³ Meeks, *The First Urban*, 68. The *καί* here is epexegetic; that is, the second clause explains the first.

Supper, wait for one another" [v. 33]), then it becomes obvious that the neglected are especially the poor and the slaves. Neither group could easily leave their work to attend the evening meal; especially was this true of the slaves because they were not the masters of their time. However, from the text we may assume still more about the degeneration of this Corinthian celebration. The question arises: What have the Corinthians made of the Lord's Supper? According to the common view point, the Corinthians have abolished the concept of receiving the body of Christ.¹⁴ For them the blessed bread was no longer the body and they ate the Eucharistic meal as an ordinary food.

P. Neuenzeit argues that "Würde die Brothandlung noch am Beginn der Feier gestanden haben, so hatten die später Kommenden nur an der Bechereucharistie teilnehmen können. Einen solchen Ausschluss der Armen von der Broteucharistie würde Paulus scharf tadeln."¹⁵ Neuenzeit's argument is right because this bread, Eucharist, did not come at the beginning of the ceremony, neither did it come after some ordinary meal. It came after the private supper (*eranos* meal) of which Paul did not approve. An attempt to explain the whole social issue has been made by Theissen. He explains that when Paul says, in v. 21, "during the meal each takes his own food," it means that in the process of the actual fellowship meal, the wealthy were supposed to give bread and wine away and keep some for themselves. Social distinctions were reflected in the quantity of food consumed.¹⁶ It is also argued that there was a separation in the kind of food brought and eaten. The rich brought meat, fish, or other

¹⁴G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* trans. P. L. Hammer (London: SCM Press, 1969), 126.

¹⁵P. Neuenzeit, *Das Herrenmahl* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1960), 71.

¹⁶Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 153.

delicacies; ¹⁷ however, Theissen thinks that they did not see the need to share these goods because Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper mentioned only bread and wine as part of the Eucharist meal.¹⁸

Such lack of concern for the needs of the poor seemed to distress Paul.¹⁹ He says that when the members of the church of Corinth come together, they should not start eating, one after another as they arrived, but the members should wait until they all arrived to hold the fellowship meal. In conclusion, Paul condemned drastic abuse because they despise the church of God by making a truly communal meal impossible. This was the crisis that made him appeal to the original tradition of the Lord's meal.

6.4 Two Different Types of Eucharist Meals?

In his famous work *Mass and Lord's Supper* (1926), Hans Lietzmann suggests that there were two different types of meal celebrations in the primitive church. One type was linked with the early church in Jerusalem, which was a sequel to the meal that Jesus and his disciples held together before his resurrection. They blessed the bread, drank from the cup, and the community believed Jesus would come again in the clouds of heaven. Lietzmann linked the other type of meal with the one celebrated in the Pauline churches, which was created at the Last Supper and was a solemn

¹⁷Marshall, "Lord's Supper," 109. Several of Theissen's ideas were already expressed by earlier authors, but he provides very comprehensive material and gives important background to the whole social issue.

¹⁸Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 153-162.

¹⁹Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 74.

remembrance of Jesus death.²⁰ E. Lohmeyer also distinguishes the two types but he believes he found both in the earliest churches. He further says, "Ebenso wenig haftet diesen 'Brotbrechen' etwas von den feierlichen Passabrauchen oder von einer Erinnerung an den Tod Jesu an, wie es dem galiläischen Volksmahle entspricht und dem letzten jerusalemischen Jüngermahle (oder wenigstens dem jetzigen synoptischen Bericht) widerspricht."²¹ He argues, as Lietzmann did, that the Lord's Supper was characteristic of the Jerusalem Lord's meal and he maintains that it was regarded as instituted in Jesus' last meal, and its centre was the "Erinnerung" of Jesus' death.

Furthermore, A. J. B. Higgins comments that Lietzmann exaggerates the difference between the two types of Eucharistic meals: (1) He wanted to trace back to New Testament times the antecedents of the fourth-century Egyptian liturgy of Sarapion and of the third-century Roman liturgy of Hippolytus, from which, in his view, all latter liturgies descend. The result was two distinct types of Eucharists. The Egyptian liturgy, dependent on the Didache, goes back ultimately to "the breaking of bread" in Acts, which has no reference to the death of Christ and is unconnected with the Last Supper. (2) The so-called Jerusalem type is the continuation of the ordinary meals of fellowship which the disciples had shared with the historical Jesus.²²

²⁰Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper* trans. D. H. G. Reeve (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 204-208. Scholars like O. Cullmann, *La Signification de la Sainte-Cène dans le Christianisme Primitif* (1936), and E. Lohmeyer, *JBL* 56 (1937) also deal with the concept of the two forms of the meal, the Palestinian form of the earliest church and the Hellenistic-Pauline form. As we mentioned before, Lohmeyer also distinguishes the two types, but believes that Paul has found both in the earliest church.

²¹E. Lohmeyer, "Das Abendmahl in der Urgemeinde," *JBL* 56 (1937): 217.

²²A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 56-63.

If we consider Paul as the originator of the Pauline type of Eucharist which leads to the Hippolytan liturgy (C.E. 215), he transformed the whole Eucharistic meal to conform to a special revelation received from the risen Jesus who made known to him the fundamental meaning of the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of his death. It was a common assumption that Paul introduced these elements as a surprise addition (1 Cor. 11:23ff). The non-mention of the cup may not be significant.

The phrase "breaking of bread" may be "a sort of technical term for the whole meal, *a pars pro toto*."²³ Even in the accounts of the institution of the Eucharistic meal in 1 Cor. 11:12; Mk. 14:22 and par., the mention of the formula "the breaking of the bread" has no particular significance as an isolated act.²⁴ The technical use of κλάσιν ἄρτου and κλάσις τοῦ ἄρτου for the common meals of the early church is to be construed as the account of a customary meal in terms of the opening action, the act of breaking bread.

The breaking of bread in Acts is also different from Paul's type of the Lord's Supper in being a *communio sub una*, but on this occasion just bread was broken, and no wine was drunk. There is no reference to the Eucharistic cup.²⁵ But the lack of reference to the cup in this Lukan narrative, which probably represents an independent

²³R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 122.

²⁴J. Behm, *TDNT* 3:726-743.

²⁵Lietzmann, 195ff. Water was, on many occasions, substituted for wine and there are some references where bread alone was used in the communion. "Also in the *Acts of Thomas* we find several examples of a communion using bread alone. *The Acts of Peter* also mentions the celebration of the Eucharist with bread and water. The churches of the Marcionites are reported to have the same usage; we hear of it too among the Encratites of Tatian and other sects."

tradition,²⁶ no more indicates a Eucharist without wine than its absence from the other account of the breaking of bread in the book of Acts.

An interpretation was offered by O. Cullmann which is different from Lietzmann's in two aspects. First, Cullmann does not see the direct origin of the "breaking of bread" in Acts in the daily common meal of Jesus with his disciples. Second, although Lietzmann denies that there is any link between the Jerusalem type and the Last Supper, Cullmann regards this as the common origin of the two types of Eucharists, if by implication in the case of the Jerusalem type.²⁷ The tensions in the text which have led to these theories are still felt by some scholars. It is very questionable however, whether the theories are tenable and necessary.²⁸ Several arguments can be mentioned against these theories. First of all, we have observed that in order to maintain Lietzmann's theory, we must show that Paul's understanding of the Eucharistic meal was his own private revelation from God and came to him independent of other Christians.

More recently X. Léon-Dufour has spoken of the double tradition not in terms of the differences of its content but on the basis of its literary form. He believes that there was a "cultic" tradition on the Last Supper and a non-cultic or "testamentary" tradition which belonged to the genre of the farewell discourse.²⁹

²⁶Ibid, 215-217.

²⁷O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* trans. A. S. Todd and J. B. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1952), 17ff.

²⁸Marshall, *Last Supper*, 131. See especially scholars such as A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* 56-63, and E. Schweizer, *The Lord's Supper According to the New Testament* 23-28.

²⁹Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 90ff. He also mentions that there are two tendencies in the cultic tradition: (1) "Paul and Luke mention

The theory of a private revelation to the apostle is quite difficult to accept. It is based on a wrong understanding of 1 Cor. 11:23 and falls short of doing justice to the evidence which has been gathered from the account of Jesus' Last Supper. It is quite inconceivable that Paul was the originator of this tradition, supposedly known only by him. Second, this theory is based on the assumption by Lohmeyer that the Lord's Supper was characteristic of the Jerusalem type and it was instituted in Jesus' Last Supper as "Erinnerung" of his death. This joyful celebration of the Lord's presence and his death as being unknown to Paul is not right; in Paul's account, the joyful coming of Jesus Christ is the *crux* of his tradition and theology. Third, according to Lietzmann, there is a difference between the book of Acts and Paul in that there is no reference to wine in Acts. As was mentioned before, the non-appearance of the cup may not be significant, even though the common practice at Corinth and elsewhere was to partake of bread and wine during the Eucharistic meal and the *agape* (1 Cor. 11:20).³⁰

the command of remembrance; they alone separate the actions with the bread and the cup by the words 'after the supper'. In their presentations of the tradition the statements of Jesus are asymmetrical: for 'body/body' they have 'body/covenant.' Finally, their vocabulary has fewer semitisms and seems to reflect a Hellenistic environment. Because of Paul's connections with Antioch I shall henceforth refer to this tendency as the Antiochene tradition. (2) Mark and Matthew have in common a strict parallelism between the words 'this is my body.' Semitisms abound: in addition to the word 'blessing' (eulogesas), which I mentioned earlier, there is the expression 'for the multitude' (hyper peri pollon, lit. 'for the many'), which would have been unintelligible to a Greek. The tendency which both of these recessions share is clearer in Mark and can therefore be called the Markan tradition; it originated in Jerusalem or Caesarea."

³⁰In the letter of Jude, in v. 12, we become aware of still worse degenerated practices at the table fellowship meals or *agapes*. It seems that some members of the early church, and especially at Corinth, were against Paul's reform in their common practice of selfishness and drunkenness in the Eucharistic meal. Fuller observed that "the tradition Paul received from Antioch was that of the Passover *agape*-Eucharist of the Jerusalem church (note the separation of the bread from the cup by the common meal--*meta deipnesai*) combined with the daily meal and transformed into a weekly rite. But the separation of the bread from the cup was already obsolete at Corinth: throughout his discussion in 1 Cor. 11, Paul clearly implies that at Corinth the common meal preceded the Eucharist proper." See R. H. Fuller, "The Double Origin of the Eucharist." *BR* 8 (1963): 71.

6.5 Paul's Account of the Last Supper in 1 Cor 11:17-26

The Christians at Corinth came together in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper and to have fellowship and a nourishing meal. It is well-known that some ate a lot and even got drunk, while others, however, went hungry. The Eucharistic tradition in 1 Cor. 11:23-25 presents the following sequence of events: (1) The Eucharistic bread was blessed and broken. (2) The meal took place. (3) It finished with the blessing of the cup and the drinking from it. In addition, in order to understand the social-cultural context of the Gentile Christian meal at Corinth, it is necessary to know what happened in a typical Graeco-Roman dinner party (*eranos*). A comparison of the common practice of both the Graeco-Roman and the Corinthian meal would allow us to see some similarities.³¹

The Graeco-Roman Dinner Party (Dinner + Symposium/Eranos)

- Dinner at "First Tables"

The Corinthian Eucharistic "Potluck Dinner" (Eranos)

- The richer Corinthians eat
"early" (1 Cor. 11:21)

Break

Start of the "Second Tables"

common meal--*meta deipnesai*) combined with the daily meal and transformed into a weekly rite. But the separation of the bread from the cup was already obsolete at Corinth: throughout his discussion in 1 Cor. 11, Paul clearly implies that at Corinth the common meal preceded the Eucharist proper." See R. H. Fuller, "The Double Origin of the Eucharist." *BR* 8 (1963): 71.

³¹Lampe, "The Corinthian Eucharistic," 2-3. He observes that "Religious ceremonies accompany even the regular, non-cultic dinner party. The dinner at "First Tables" starts with an invocation of the gods. After the dinner there is a break; new guests can arrive. The house gods and the geniuses of the host and the emperor are invoked and a sacrifice is given. People recline again and eat and drink at the "Second Tables"; often not only sweet desserts and fruit but also spicy dishes, seafood, and bread are served. The "Second Tables" end with a toast for the good spirit of the house. The tables are removed, the floor is swept; in a jug, wine and water are mixed and a libation to a god is poured out while people sing a religious song. Slaves pour the wine from the jug into the participants' cups. Whenever the jug is empty, a new one is mixed, another libation is sacrificed, and people continue drinking, conversing, and entertaining themselves. This can go on until dawn."

- a sacrifice, invocation of the house gods and of the geniuses of the host and of the emperor

- Blessing and Breaking of the Bread, invocation of Christ

-Second Tables
(often with guests who had newly arrived)

- The sacramental eucharistic meal (some stay hungry)

- a toast for the good spirit of the house, the tables are removed
- the first wine jug is mixed, libation, singing

- Blessing of the Cup

- drinking, conversation
music, singing, entertainment
in a loose sequence

- drinking
- Maybe the worship activities of 1 Cor. 12-14 (espec. 14:26-32):
singing, teaching, prophesying,
glossolalia (with translations);
no orderly sequence

Obviously, the religious factors were present at a dinner party and it was not new for the Gentile Christians at Corinth. It is most likely that they even had the opportunity to compare their Eucharistic meal with elements of the social dinners in the Graeco-Roman dinner parties. Both the First and the Second Tables were started with the blessing and the breaking of the bread. The cup after the meal could be seen in parallel to the mixing of the first jug of wine. A formal shift was marked between the meal and the *eranos* drinking party by the wine ceremony. Smith suggests that the church members at Corinth substituted for this cup of blessing of the Lord's Supper to mark this formal transition.³² Both signal that all eating is finished now. Both were accompanied by religious ceremony, either by a blessing or libation.³³ Hence, it may be possible that these are the first resemblances that the Gentile

³²D. E. Smith, "Meals and Morality in Paul and His World," *Society of Biblical Literature 1981 Seminar Papers*, ed. K. H. Richards (Chico: Scholars, 1981), 323.

³³Ibid, 325.

Church members at Corinth could draw. Looking back at the Corinthian scenario, they continued a Graeco-Roman meal custom by dividing the evening into First and Second Tables, which led to problems in the Corinthian Church. In addition, it seems quite logical to stress the fact that often the Corinthian Christians simply continued being a part of the Graeco-Roman society to which they belonged before their conversion. Gradually, they realized that the church was a new socio-cultural setting where new practices and habits needed to be developed in some areas, especially the issues of status and divisions.

A. The Divisions at Corinth

Paul uses the expression, in verse 17, Τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινῶ, to reprove the congregation regarding the parties or cliques, presumably the same groups as those that the apostle had dealt with earlier in his letter (in chs. 1-3). The participle παραγγέλλων is a temporal adverb. It introduces Paul's next part in which he points to bad practices in the observance of the Lord's Supper. There were groups that had broken the spirit of unity in Christ. Their practice which they had been holding regularly (present progressive retroactive tense in συνέρχεσθε) was doing more harm than good. Apparently Paul had already anticipated this concern in his previous reference to the table in 10:17, where he reminded them that because they all eat of the one loaf, they together constitute the one body of Christ. Their "divisions" at the table denied the unity that their common partaking of the bread was intended to proclaim.³⁴ Indeed, the reading is somewhat doubtful, as also is the meaning of τοῦτο. If τοῦτο

³⁴Fee, *The First Epistle*, 531. See also Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 74. Talbert points out that "such divisions associated with the common meal would be viewed as tragic by Paul, who saw the meal as the catalyst for Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 10:16-17)."

refers to the charge which he gives respecting the love-feasts, then the interval between this preface and the words which it anticipates is awkwardly prolonged.³⁵ Many scholars agree that this reading could be an accidental error.³⁶ Whether an error or not, the most important thing in this verse is that Paul was reminding them that they had to correct some practices, especially the lack of order and the division that attacked the very nature of the Eucharistic meal. Paul's ideas in 1 Cor. 11:17ff. do not simply presuppose certain social relationships within the Corinthian community. Above all, they express social intentions, the desire to improve interpersonal relationships. It is not accidental that Paul's statements issue a very concrete suggestion for the Corinthian congregation's behaviour.³⁷ Social disparity was clearly one of the main problems leading to the lack of order in the Lord's Supper at Corinth.

As in the case of the division in the Corinthian Church, it was typical for ancient *symposia* or *eranos* meals to produce σχίσματα. Paul is not surprised by this (μέρος τι πιστεύω), since the divisions and factions were inevitable (δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἵρεσεις) if those who were esteemed (οἱ δόκιμοι) were also to be considered (φανεροί). It is clear that these divisions were the result of jealousies and rivalries over such honors as place, and portion or quality of food and wine. Consequently,

³⁵A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*. 4th edition. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 238. τοῦτο cannot be precisely defined. Weiss ascribes the section to the older letter, on the ground that ἀκούω, "I hear," shows that Paul is referring to a first report about the σχίσματα, "divisions," whereas in 1:10ff. (ἐδηώθη μοι, "I have been told") he is in possession of further information.

³⁶C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. HNTC. (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 260. Barrett comments that the text translated παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινῶ is read by κ G and the majority of MSS; A C* and the Latin and Syriac have παραγγέλλω οὐκ ἐπαιῶν; B has παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινῶν; D* and a minuscule have παραγγέλλω οὐκ ἐπαινῶ. See also E. B. Allo, *Saint Paul: Première Epître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie., 1934), 269-270.

³⁷Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 163.

those who supplied houses and food were dishonoring (καταισχύνω) the poorer class.³⁸ Timon the brother of Plutarch spoke against these abuses “the rich lording it over the poor,” but the majority who showed up at the banquet were upper class.³⁹ Juvenal also protested of the lot of the *pauper*; he means a lower class person who is at the hand of the richest:

Is a man to sign his name before me, and recline on a couch above mine, who has been wafted to Rome by the wind which brings us our damsons and our figs? . . . Of all the woes of luckless poverty none is harder to endure than this, that it exposes men to ridicule. "Out you go, for very shame," says the marshall; "out of the Knights stalls, all you whose means do not satisfy the law." Here let the sons of panders, born in any brothel, take their seats.⁴⁰

It is more likely that Paul meant that the result of their practising the Communion service as they had been doing was bad rather than good. In the remainder of the chapter he points out the flaws in their observance and what they should do to eliminate the social conflicts.

This social tension led Paul to say to the Corinthians in v. 18: "πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκούω σχίσματα. A. T. Robertson takes μὲν in its original use, as emphasizing πρῶτον. Hence he translates "from the very outset" meaning that this sad situation of division had characterized the Corinthian

³⁸Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 254. He comments that “this last reference to bringing shame or dishonor upon those who “have not” is somewhat puzzling if we imagine them to be poor, since honor and shame were normally much more a concern for the upper class. But οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες need not refer to the poor, since in literature about meals a common *topos* had developed in which the “poor” who suffered at the hands of the rich were not actually poor, but upper class persons who were not as rich as their hosts.”

³⁹Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 1.2

⁴⁰Juvenal. 3.81, 152-156.

church since its beginning.⁴¹ This may indeed be the meaning, but it is difficult to believe that the Corinthians, during the first years of Paul's revival there, were so plagued with division. The σχίσματα that make themselves manifest at the Eucharistic meal are, in part at least, the result of the social or class differences among the wealthy and the poor. It is possible to believe, according to Barrett that some Jewish Christians may have insisted on kosher food, with the result of separating themselves from their Gentile brothers and sisters.⁴² The above statement is difficult to accept because the influence of Jewish Christians at Corinth was not felt. Although this situation introduced some difficult crises into the church, the whole congregation of believers still came together in one assembly.⁴³ The Corinthians still had common meals and participated in the Lord's Supper.

Allo clearly explains that Paul uses the phrase πρῶτον μὲν to emphasise what he calls Paul's "premier reproche." He further says that

Le premier reproche (πρῶτον μὲν) concerne des divisions, contraires à la charité, qui se faisaient dans leurs assemblées, et dont Paul à eu vent (même si rien ne lui à été écrit à; ce sujet). On pense naturellement d'abord à un effet de ces disputes dont il à été parlé au premier chapitre, lequel aurait pu être dénoncé aussi par les gens de Chloé l'effet de ces divisions serait apparu jusque dans le banquet eucharistique (20-22), et, à plus forte raison, dans les rivalités entre "inspirés" (voir ch. xiv). Paul dit, avec quelque ironie peut-être, que "il le croit pour une part"; s'il le croit, c'est qui' l connaît l'état d'agitation des esprits, qu'il a décrit dès le commencement de son épître.⁴⁴

⁴¹Robertson, *A Grammar*, 1152.

⁴²Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 261.

⁴³William Ellis, "Some Problems in the Corinthian Letters." *ABR* 14 (1966): 34.

⁴⁴Allo, *Saint Paul*, 271.

Consequently, the assembly of the church at Corinth (ἐκκλησία) is characterized by σχίσματα. The apparent unity of 1 Cor. 10:17 is not yet worked out and this disunity has shown itself at the Lord's Supper. Paul's main concern is very clear and he describes the real danger in the Eucharistic meal on the fundamental points: First, the earlier divisions were further described as quarrels and jealousy on the part of the members of the church (1 Cor. 1:11; 3:4), which are missing from this chapter, where we find social problems (vv. 21-22; 33-34). Second, Paul notes in 1 Cor. 1:12 the names of four people involved in the dispute which took place; moreover, there is an anti-Paul feeling in that dispute. Third, in the passage that we are studying Paul says, "When you come together as a church, there are divisions among you." This language implies that the divisions are especially related to their gatherings, not simply to false allegiances to their leaders or to wisdom.⁴⁵ The situation in the church at Corinth was a negation of a true Eucharist in a sense. The divisions among the church members jeopardized the unity of the body of Christ, symbolized in the Eucharistic loaf (10:17); the excessive self-indulgence of some of the church members in the Lord's Supper denied the principle from which it took its name and demonstrated that they were entirely oblivious to the deeper significance of the common life in the body of Christ.⁴⁶ Paul's instruction begins with his "premier reproche," not that the Corinthians are profaning a holy rite, but that they are dividing the holy community.

⁴⁵Fee, *The First Epistle*, 537.

⁴⁶Martin, *Eucharist*, 83. He argues that "Paul has already dealt with the dissensions within the church in his teaching on the one bread (10:16, 17). He counters the other defects by recommending that the claims of hunger and thirst should be met at home (vvs. 22, 34) and that the common meal should be true to its name--a *sharing* of the common table, as the whole church gathers at the same time (v. 33.). The recommendation of verses 33-34, while not discrediting the Agape altogether, was the first step in the process which eventually separated the Eucharistic or Cultic service from a fellowship meal."

In the first four chapters of the epistle, Paul demonstrated how seriously he regards schisms. With apparent resignation he accepts the inevitability of the divisions as a means of testing, but in no way does he approve the divisions that result from their practice in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In addition, it seems that the Corinthians were faithfully observing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as Paul had taught them (1 Cor. 11:2), but they were ignoring the need for spiritual preparation before they approached the Lord's table.

In v. 19 Paul states, "γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι." Paul, however, speaks not only of individual Christians, but also of divisions (σχίσματα) and factions (αἰρέσεις). He apparently thinks not in terms of a string of individuals, but of groups. He has already used the same term σχίσμα in 1 Cor. 1:10 to refer to such groups.⁴⁷ The meal serves as a boundary marker in the church gatherings at Corinth. In other words, Paul states that the meal is a locus both for the identification of divisions within the church and for their perpetuation.⁴⁸ So something about the Corinthians' meal created social boundaries and brought αἰρέσεις among the members which Paul did not like. All these elements are considered in Paul's rebuke. The fact is that he raises the issue for discussion and deals critically with it (1 Cor. 11:17, 22).

⁴⁷Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 147.

⁴⁸Stephen C. Barton, "Paul's Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth," *NTS* 32 (1986): 225-246. He says that Paul's comments are punctuated by rhetorical questions and exclamations (11:22), by solemn warnings (11:27-29), and by ominous promises (11:34b). Paul obviously believes that the meals upon which he is commenting are surrounded with danger to the participants: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement (κρίμα) upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (11:29, 30; cf. 32a). He also makes clear that ritual action is the only way both to avoid the danger arising out of contact with the sacred (meal) and to appropriate its power for the community and the world (11:23-32).

Paul introduces an element of judgment and self-examination: "ἵνα (καὶ) οἱ δόκιμοι φανεροὶ γένωνται ἐν ὑμῖν. Paul introduces an eschatological element, combining, the notion of testing by difficult circumstances, so popular with pagan moralists as well, with the eschatological notion that the Day of the Lord alone reveals one's true worth.⁴⁹ Therefore, every member of the Corinthian Church must meet the test (οἱ δόκιμοι). The idea of testing is summarized in verses 28-32. Each one as a single individual, not as a church or group member, must test himself and herself before eating and drinking. Paul was trying to warn them about their own behaviour that they might not fall in God's judgment. Divisions could be unavoidable, not edifying to the church in which they take place. The proper observance of the Communion, if carried on in complete conformity to the social Christians rules that regulate it, will correct this situation of division within the church. That the Corinthians were not observing it properly is apparent from what follows.

B. The Social Private Meal

The struggle at the Lord's Supper is disclosed when in fact Paul says in verse 20: "Συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν." What is happening? They assemble together not to eat the Lord's Supper, but to eat their own meal. The supper, as it was conducted in the church at Corinth, did not bring honour and did not belong to the Lord, but to the church members. The Greek adjective used (κυριακόν) which qualifies the term "supper" means "pertaining to the Lord" (κύριος)⁵⁰ or "belonging to the Lord." Paul is censuring and questioning the

⁴⁹Meeks, *The First Urban*, 67.

⁵⁰Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 262. He comments that "The Lord's Supper" is familiar, but that the possessive case fails to make clear the relation of the supper to the Lord. "In memory of the Lord," "under the authority of the Lord," and "in the presence of the Lord," might all be used to help

kind of celebration of the community meal which they called or described as the "Lord's Supper." The Corinthians violated the nature of the Eucharistic meal by their behaviour. So, for Paul it was no more possible for the Lord's Supper to be eaten in an environment of social unfairness than it was for the same church members to participate in the table of the Lord and the table of demons (10: 21).⁵¹ The Lord's Supper could be unsanctified by divisions as well as by idolatry. Before Paul describes in detail (verses 23-26) what belongs properly in the Lord's meal, he points out in further detail (verses 21-22) their evil practices.

Paul attacked the social discrimination (11: 21, 22) that existed at Corinth because the wealthy began to eat without any consideration of the others; especially, they did not wait for the arrival of the poor brethren, who usually came late from their jobs. Besides, they ate and got drunk while others did not have the chance to eat anything. According to C. H. Talbert "the purpose of the supper forgotten by the Corinthians, customary social convention prevailed and divisions resulted."⁵² Lucian and Athenaeus observe that gluttony was another form of self-indulgence typical of many *symposia*.⁵³ That is why Paul says that instead of the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δέιπνον), "each proceeded with his private supper" (τὸ ἴδιον δέιπνον), and "one

out the rendering chosen here; in fact, the sense in which the Supper is "the Lord's" can only be brought out through the ensuing paragraph as a whole.

⁵¹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 110.

⁵²Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 75. It is well-known that the meals of other religious communities of the periods had similar problems. For instance, "from a bacchic society of the second century B.C., one finds regulations like, disruptive behavior at the meetings is not to be tolerated. If anyone starts a quarrel, he is to be excluded until a fine paid. From the regulations of the guild of Zeus Hypistos of the first century B.C., one hears: 'it shall not be permissible. . . to make factions.'"

⁵³Lucian, *Par.* 5; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5. 178; 12. 527. Basically, a *symposion* was a drinking party and normally tended to finish in intoxication.

goes hungry and another gets drunk" (καὶ ὅς μὲν πεινᾷ ὅς δὲ μεθύει). This statement and the one in v. 20 could be understood to mean that gluttony and drunkenness was the root of the strife, and it seemed that each person had eaten without regard to the others.⁵⁴ Another point we should keep in mind is the problem of the famine in Corinth.⁵⁵ This situation obviously increased the tension in the church. P. Garnsey observes that the market was controlled, and that the "have-nots" had gained advantage from a reduction in the price of the grain. The non-slave workers and artisans who have Corinthian citizenship were most in danger.⁵⁶ These were common citizens who, in time of famine were the most exposed. The slave and freedman citizens connected to a household were, economically speaking, more secure than these citizens whom Paul called οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες.⁵⁷ So, clearly, the richest members of the congregation were the hosts of the meeting and most likely provided the food for everybody. This was in accordance with the practice of various ancient clubs and with the custom followed in the society of those days.

The hosts in many cases provided both large amounts and better quality of food and drinks to the ones who were socially equal to them than to participants of lower

⁵⁴Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 147ff.

⁵⁵Bruce W. Winter, "Secular and Christian Responses to Corinthian Famines," *TynB* 40 (1989): 100. He comments that "the important point to note is that food crises in Corinth were alleviated during the period of the early days of the church in the traditional way of the East by the curator of the grain supply."

⁵⁶P. Garnsey, *Non-Slave Labour in the Graeco Roman World*. (CPS Supp. 6; Cambridge University Press, 1980), 44-45. In times of grain shortage it is clear that the slave had security because of his place in the household. It is appropriate to think in terms of the secure and insecure. The latter was the group exposed to steep rises in the price of the grain, and these were the freedman artisans and workers.

⁵⁷Winter, "Secular and Christian," 101. He also comments that "the mechanism by which Corinth assisted the "have nots" in times of grain shortage must have benefited that class mentioned by Paul in his enigmatic comments of 1 Corinthians 11:21, 33-4."

status. So, the struggle was between "different standards of behaviour," between "status-specific expectations and the norms of a community of love."⁵⁸ Paul's answer, Theissen suggests, is an agreement which asks that the rich brothers have their own private meal at home, so that in the Eucharist meal the norm for equal portions of food to all the members can prevail. Plutarch always emphasized the view that there should be equality among the guests, ἡ ἰσότης τοῖς ἀνδράσι.⁵⁹ Contrary to Plutarch's view, Athenaeus thought that there should be a difference among the guests as there is a difference in age, outlook and social status, calling it "a factor which might add both interest and variety to the proceedings."⁶⁰ However, it is in 1 Cor. 11: 22 that we find two groups against each other: those who have no food, the μὴ ἔχοντες, and those who can bring their own meal, ἴδιον δείπνον.⁶¹ Euripides describes them: the first group were identified as "those who have not" and it is this people which "save the city," σώζει πόλεις, by keeping the order which the state ordains. The second group, the rich, were those whom he describes as useless and "always lusting after more."⁶² In Paul's mind, in these gatherings the sacred element was far more important than the social, but the Corinthians had destroyed both. Κοινωνία is destroyed when a large group of members suffers want and another group is drunk. It is clear that we have here not a sacramental rite, but an ordinary meal taken in the church.

⁵⁸Meeks, *The First Urban*, 158-163.

⁵⁹Plutarch, *qu. conv.* 613F.

⁶⁰Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 5. 177. In some occasions, both the slaves and masters found themselves at the same symposium.

⁶¹Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 148. This does not, however, absolutely exclude a more "individualistic" interpretation which might find support in the words ἕκαστος and ἴδιον.

⁶²Euripides, *The Suppliant Women* 238-244.

Paul's ecclesiological desire is presented in 1 Cor. 10: 16: The transformation of a multiplicity of individuals and different backgrounds into a unity. In other words, the *communitas* experienced in baptism, in which separation of role and rank are replaced by the unity within the congregation as a whole in a new society where love reigns, is Paul's intention in the Supper. For Paul, unity among members is synonymous with unity in the body of Christ. That is why group unity caused strong group boundaries.⁶³ Thus, even if the expression ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον δείπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν leads to the conclusion that Paul is addressing certain individuals' behaviour it is a form of behaviour which in the situation is restricted to a certain group.

Those members of the church at Corinth who ate their own private meal may have had a high social rank, not only because they differed from other Christians, but because they could bring food for themselves. Their social position is also clear in Paul's question: μὴ γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν. Paul poses the question, "Do you not have houses (οἰκίας) to eat and drink in?" He addressed this question to those that probably were the owners of the houses and, therefore, the heads of the households. It seems quite logical to conclude that the divisions were among households or members of households with the dominant part composed of the wealthy household heads.⁶⁴ Thus, we can see that social relations at Corinth would be affected, that the church supper had become a centre of these household rivalries.

⁶³Meeks, *The First Urban*, 159. Consequently, Paul uses traditional language from the Supper ritual, which speaks of the bread as "Communion of the body of Christ" and the "cup of blessing" as "Communion of the blood of Christ" to warn that any participation in pagan cultic meals would be idolatry.

⁶⁴Barton, 237. He explains that the rich distinguished themselves from the poor by timing of their meal--they ate first and without waiting for others to arrive (11:21, 33); by its quantity and quality (11:21); and by their refusal to share, since "each one goes ahead with his own meal" (11:21). By these means also, the rich sought to extend their influence in the church. Their eating practices

But Paul's point, expressing outright condemnation, is that the wealthy should eat and drink their own meal at their homes because if they cannot wait for others (11:33), if they must satisfy their own appetite, they can at least maintain the church's ordinary meal free from such malpractices as can only bring disgrace to the celebration. Their behaviour, makes the church meal lose its character of a love-feast. Paul's condemnation is clear and sound: ἡ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ θεοῦ καταφρονεῖτε, καὶ καταισχύνετε τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας. The attitude of Paul is filled with such indignation that he makes a series of rhetorical questions with the desire to reduce the "sated" to a position of humiliation similar to that which they have been trying to reduce the poor members of the church.⁶⁵ The poor member, who can bring hardly anything for himself, will, of course, feel ashamed when he sees the food brought by his Christian fellows. The wealthy member's attitude is not controlled by love, but rather by selfishness. It is by failure in Christian love that the Corinthians profane the sacramental aspect of the supper, not by liturgical error.

This congregation, which should be a congregation of brothers and sisters, shows clearly that, in their meeting for worship, they portray a shameless view of social cleavage.⁶⁶ What is happening in the church is so notorious a repudiation of some Christian standards of conduct and practice that even the apostle was puzzled about it. He says, Τί εἶπω ὑμῖν; their unbrotherly conduct in this regard could not have any praise, but only obvious disapprobation from the apostle (ἐν τούτῳ οὐκ

were a demonstration of status, both to themselves and to the others, and an attempt to dominate by imposing shame (11:22).

⁶⁵Fee, *The First Epistle*, 543.

⁶⁶Bornkamm, *Early Christian*, 126ff.

ἐπαινῶ). Paul attacks the system indirectly, yet at its very core. To be a genuine Christian in participating in the Lord's table means to be concerned with the needs of others; this goes along with Paul's own principles and is also part of the believer's life. We can see that the apostle's main concern is the significance of the Lord's table *vis à vis* their unity in Christ.⁶⁷

In summary, to dine alone at church means to decline to join with the church in this great expression of common fellowship and Christian social life; and it, therefore, manifests a contempt toward the sacrament. The fellowship meal should unite the members as a joint family who gather together with a common purpose in mind, to build the church in brotherly love, regardless of the social status of the ones who partake of the Lord's Meal. Paul now proceeds to explain to them how the Lord's Supper was introduced by Jesus, a model which they should follow.

6.6 Paul's Tradition of the Last Supper

Paul makes it clear in verse 23 that the tradition of the Lord's Supper involved a historical memory, which immediately distinguishes the Lord's Supper from all pagan memorial meals.⁶⁸ Paul introduces the formula of the Last Supper in this way: Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν. The phrases he uses, παραλαμβάνειν and παραδιδόναι, are considered similar in meaning to two well-known rabbinical terms, מִסֵּר דְנָא קַבְלִי. This is a tradition that Paul has inherited from his predecessors. J. Jeremias argues that this is a notion of an old, established

⁶⁷Fee, *The First Epistle*, 544.

⁶⁸The Corinthians may have seen the Lord's Supper as such a funerary meal. But the tradition as Paul records it demonstrates that what Jesus did at the Last Supper was not to institute a funerary rite.

tradition that Paul was reminding the Corinthians of, seen in 1 Cor. 15:3. Here the apostle uses the same technical terms παραδιδόναι and παραλαμβάνειν (παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἔν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον).⁶⁹ At this point the most important issue to take into consideration is whether the apostle himself is claiming to know about the Lord's Eucharistic word through a personal revelation, or through a tradition handed down to him from some members or leaders of the church at Jerusalem. In our earlier discussion, we found that the difference between Paul and the Synoptic Gospels (especially Mark) focused on the question: In what way is Paul's account linked to that of Mark? Clearly, both accounts have their similarities and differences. Paul's account of the Last Supper in 1 Cor. 11:23-26 is considered the earliest written account by some, although not by Jeremias, who opts for Mark's account. It was, he says, written in the early fifties; however, some scholars⁷⁰ argue that Mark's Gospel, which was written later, has many Aramaic expressions and could be considered an older text than Paul's version. Lietzmann mentions the fact of several independent accounts, but coming from the same original source.⁷¹

Paul begins the words of institution as "tradition" which the apostle has received from the Lord and later communicated to the members of the church at Corinth. "What does *paradosis* mean here?"⁷² It is known that Paul introduces a formula given to him beforehand, but which is common to the Corinthians and which

⁶⁹Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* trans. Norman Perrin (London: SCM Press, 1966), 129.

⁷⁰Higgins, *The Lord's Supper*, 24. See especially the fine discussion of the Semitisms in Mark's narrative by J. Jeremias, 118ff.

⁷¹Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 206-207.

⁷²Bornkamm, *Early Christian*, 130.

later he gave to them. H. Maccoby points out that Loisy and Lietzmann argued that Paul was speaking, especially in this verse (v. 23), of a private or personal revelation which has been too easily dismissed.⁷³ However, Talbert observes that "Paul used the technical terms "to receive" and "to deliver" for learning and teaching the oral traditions (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3). He does not claim that the tradition to follow was given him personally by the earthly or the risen Christ."⁷⁴ Several theories have been proposed but no agreement has been reached among scholars. For instance, one theory sees Paul's declaration, which was rejected by some scholars and more recently reopened by Maccoby (see note 71), to mean that Paul claims to receive his version of the Lord's Supper by direct personal revelation, just as it occurs in Gal. 1: 12: "I did not receive it from any man, nor did anyone teach it to me. It was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to me." This is a reference to Paul's encounter with the resurrected Lord on the Damascus road. The addition of the phrase ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου raises at least two questions: Where did Paul hear about this tradition? And when did he hear about the Lord's tradition? We do not have to take this to mean that Paul received a special divine revelation given in a private way to him.⁷⁵ It seems probable that when Paul says, "For I received from the Lord," he is not claiming a direct personal revelation

⁷³H. Maccoby, "Paul and Eucharist," *NTS* 37 (1991): 247-267. He comments that "the argument, then, turns on the meaning of the two words παρέλαβον ἀπὸ. It has been held by some scholars that if direct revelation had been intended, the preposition παρά would have been more suitable than the preposition ἀπὸ, which allegedly signifies a remote or ultimate source of information. This contention has given rise to a whole literature, for and against. The upshot seems to be that while παρά is more usual in a context of the direct imparting of information, ἀπὸ is also quite frequently found in such a context (e.g. Matt. 11:29; Col. 1:7). The argument from the remote ἀπὸ is thus inconclusive, and one cannot help feeling that it has been pressed so hard for theological, rather than strictly grammatical, reasons."

⁷⁴Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 76.

⁷⁵Bornkamm, *Early Christian*, 130.

"ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου," though this idea is often assumed. It is more likely that a tradition has been given to him, as from the Lord.⁷⁶

A second theory is proposed by Lietzmann: "Paul is the creator of the second type of the Lord's Supper." He explains that Paul received the revelation from the Lord, that is, the prototype of the Eucharist, as a memorial of the death of the Lord. However, it is unnecessary to look for parallels in the Hellenistic memorial meals of the dead when we can find Jewish parallel sources which are available. The Supper must be repeated in remembrance of Jesus. By emphasising Christ's atoning death, the apostle becomes the true originator of a type of the Lord's Supper which is different from the one he calls the Jerusalem type.⁷⁷ Kümmel disagrees with Lietzmann. He believes that Paul considers himself to be handing down the tradition, unmodified by the church, which ultimately goes back to the historical Jesus. Higgins points out that this point of view is accepted by the majority of scholars such as M. Goguel, J. Weiss, A. Schweitzer, M. Dibelius, F. L. Cirlot, E. Gaugler, Théo Preiss, R. Bultmann, and J. Héring.⁷⁸ More recently Marshall agrees with Kümmel's view

⁷⁶Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 150. Another indication that Paul found the liturgical words already in existence is the fact that they speak of a "communion" with the (body and the) blood of the Lord. Then, it cannot have been by direct revelation.

⁷⁷Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 208. He emphasizes that "the liturgical words τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν characteristic of the Pauline text and omitted in Mark, formulate the crucial revelation which exalted this new type of the Lord's Supper above the Jerusalem type." As has been discussed in a previous section in this same chapter, Lietzmann denies that there was any connection between the Jerusalem type and the Last Supper. Furthermore, he considers Paul the creator of the Pauline type of Eucharist. As argued before, we have to show that Paul's explanation of the Lord's Meal was his own private revelation from God and came to him uniquely and independently of other Christians. Recently, Smith also observes that "the proposal that the early Jesus tradition is related to Cynic themes and motifs provides the best explanation for the context in which the table fellowship texts developed. This need not suggest that Jesus was himself a Cynic or identified with Cynic traditions. But it does suggest that certain early Christian communities utilized Cynic traditions to characterize and idealize Jesus as a hero." D. E. Smith, "The Historical Jesus at Table," *SBLSP* (1989), 485ff.

⁷⁸Higgins, *The Lord's Supper*, 26.

and adds that Paul was talking about an existing tradition that he considered a kind of formal account. Paul reflects Rabbinic terminology as in the handing on of Rabbinic tradition.⁷⁹ This notion of Jewish oral tradition, received (παρέλαβον) and handed on (παρέδωκα), has been challenged by Barrett. He says that we have to be careful in emphasising the Jewish usage because both terms were used in the same sense in ancient Greek long before these expressions had been in any way influenced by Jewish custom;⁸⁰ however, it is not correct, without more evidence, to perceive a full rabbinic content in them.

Lohmeyer's viewpoint can be categorized as a third theory. He disagrees with Lietzmann's position in saying that the command, "Do this in remembrance of me," forms the crux of the new emphasis on the essence of the Lord's Supper which Paul received as part of the tradition. But he considers the language of the account as un-Pauline. The phrase "remembrance" (ἀνάμνησις), Lohmeyer says, is not used by Paul in any other place.⁸¹

⁷⁹Marshall, *Last Supper*, 32. The fact that Paul was quoting a tradition in this passage, 1 Cor. 11:23-25, "is further evident from an examination of the wording; analysis has shown that the vocabulary and style are not that of Paul himself, and, since there is not the slightest reason to suppose that the words were added by somebody else after Paul had finished the letter, and indeed everything points in the opposite direction, we can be quite certain that Paul is quoting a statement which he had received from other Christians. This means that Paul's account was in existence within some twenty years of the death of Jesus."

⁸⁰Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 265. It is obvious that accounts of what Jesus had said and done were handed down from one to another in the early church; it is from such accounts that the Gospels developed. "To say this is itself to pass no judgment, whether favourable or unfavourable, on the historical value of the gospels (or of such passages as the present one), for traditions are sometimes accurately, sometimes inaccurately and tendentiously, preserved, and there is little evidence that the elaborated techniques of Jewish tradition were applied to the very different material, handed down in very different circles, by Christians."

⁸¹E. Lohmeyer, "Vom Urchristlichen Abendmahl," *ThR* 9 (1937): 168-227.

Finally, the last view or theory which is worthy of mention is O. Cullmann's. He cites some passages (for example, 1 Cor. 7:10, 25; 9:14; 1 Thess. 4:15) in connection with the idea that "the Lord" takes the place of "tradition." 1 Cor. 11:23, "I received (by tradition) from the Lord." For Cullmann the Lord, in this passage, is not only the historical Jesus as the chronological origin of the tradition, but the glorified Lord who is behind the communication of the tradition, who works in it.⁸² Thus, the term ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, in a sense, can be understood to mean a direct revelation from the exalted Lord, without necessarily connoting of a vision or denying the possibility of its being transmitted through human beings. Paul considers himself a link in a chain of tradition (as he says in 1 Cor. 15:3ff.), yet he breaks this traditional chain by saying that he received the tradition (ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου). Another evidence that Paul found the liturgical words already in existence is the fact that they speak of a "communion" with the body and the blood of the Lord. Therefore, it seems clear that Paul did not receive the Lord's Supper tradition by direct revelation as Maccoby and others claim.

We come back to the question, Where did Paul hear about this tradition? We know Paul received it from the Lord. The manner of revelation is debatable. Scholars like Bornkamm and others express the view that Paul received the tradition when he was in Antioch, before he began his mission.⁸³ On the contrary, when Paul says that he gets it "from the Lord," he is not claiming special divine revelation.

⁸²O. Cullmann, "Kyrios as Designation for the Oral Tradition Concerning Jesus," *SJT* 3 (1950): 180-197.

⁸³Bornkamm, *Early Christian*, 130. He mentions the names of scholars who agree with the hypothesis that Paul received the tradition of the Lord's Supper in Antioch (G. Kittel, A. Schlatter, J. Jeremias, R. Bultmann, E. Käsemann, and W. G. Kümmel). The formulae in 1 Cor. 11 and 15 which he learned there may therefore have been known at the beginning of the forties in the Antioch congregation.

Rather, he is alluding to a tradition that was prevailing in the church. Clearly Paul had heard about it before coming to the Corinthians. We must consider three possible places: Antioch, Damascus, and Jerusalem. Antioch and Damascus were founded by Christians from Jerusalem; therefore, Jerusalem was the place where Paul heard about the tradition.⁸⁴ But, even though the churches in Antioch and Damascus were founded by Christians from Jerusalem, could it be that Paul's formula may go back to Damascus instead⁸⁵ (where he spent according to Acts 9:19-31 several days with the believers)? How long was he there? The Scripture does not say specifically; the fact is that after his encounter with the exalted Lord, he stayed in Damascus before he went to Jerusalem. The probabilities are that the apostle's knowledge of the tradition goes back to Greek-speaking Christians in the Diaspora (so that Damascus seems most likely), rather than in Jerusalem as is proposed by Marshall. They had translated it out of the historical account of the Last Supper used by Hebrew or Aramaic-speaking Christians living in Damascus. Thus, Paul's instruction of how the Eucharist meal was celebrated probably goes back to the practice of the rite of the Lord's Supper in the early church through the believers in Damascus. Jeremias' argument that Paul did not receive the formula of the words of institution is correct, but that Paul used a formula in use at Antioch, where he settled down years later after his conversion (according to Acts 11:26,)⁸⁶ is not quite right.

⁸⁴Marshall, *Last Supper*, 32.

⁸⁵J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: Epworth, 1963), 100ff.

⁸⁶Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 131.

The view of earlier scholarship, that Paul is speaking of a direct revelation about the tradition of the Lord's Supper, has been accepted once again by Maccoby. He also says that the argument for the use of the two words *παρέλαβον* *ἀπό* has been discussed to show that *ἀπό* is not the correct word to use but *παρά*. First of all, Maccoby agrees that the preposition *παρά* is more usual in a context of transmitting information, but *ἀπό* is also very frequently used and found in such contexts (e.g. Matt. 11:29; Col. 1:7). He further adds that Jeremias argues that the preposition *ἀπό* does not indicate the source of Paul's account, rather the use of the verb *παραλαμβάνω*. This verb is similar in meaning to the Hebrew verb *קבל*, which normally refers to transmission as part of a process of tradition. So, he says that when "Paul indicates sufficiently that his account of the institution of the Eucharist is derived from the tradition of the church, not from a personal vision," it is debatable. In order to refute the argument, he quotes the use of the verb *קבל* in the Rabbinic literature and quotes the opening of the Mishnah tractate *Abot*: "Moses received (*קבל*) the Torah from Sinai." For Maccoby this argument is enough to prove that the verb *קבל* refers to the transmission of tradition, but also mentions the first step in that process, the receiving of the tradition from God himself. Thus, he concludes by saying that when Paul says, "I received (*παρέλαβον*) it from the Lord," Paul possibly considers himself as starting a process of tradition, not from other human beings, but rather from the exalted Lord himself.⁸⁷

A second view stressed by Maccoby is that Jesus is the initiator of the tradition instituted by himself; Paul was not present at the Last Supper, so he was not a witness of Jesus' actions and words at the Last Supper. The witnesses did not receive it, they

⁸⁷Maccoby, "Paul and Eucharist," 247-248.

saw and heard it happening. Therefore, "It makes perfect logical sense for Paul, who was not present at the Last Supper, to say that he received an account of it 'from' the heavenly Jesus."⁸⁸ In spite of Maccoby's argument, it makes much more sense to say that even though Paul was not present at the Last Supper and not a witness of the actions and words of Jesus, he may well have attributed the tradition he received to the Lord himself and at the same time interpreted it. As a result he may have even changed some aspects of the tradition which did not affect its practice. Paul was quoting technical terms from his own Jewish heritage. Furthermore we are not to understand from Paul's version of the Last Supper that he is quoting the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, but we are to find there the precipitate of those words percolated through the mind of a Rabbi trained at the feet of Gamaliel.⁸⁹

This explanation of Paul's account of the tradition of the Last Supper makes it possible for us to comprehend why it is, as has usually been pointed out, that the basic meaning of the Markan and Pauline accounts is similar, although the forms are different. The Pauline account (quoting Davies) of Jesus' Last Supper tradition is "a Rabbinization of the tradition."⁹⁰ In summary, Paul can put the revelation received on the Damascus road, and the church tradition,⁹¹ on the same level because in both cases the revelation and the tradition came from the same Lord who is the originator of both.

⁸⁸Ibid., 248.

⁸⁹W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1962), 249.

⁹⁰Higgins, *The Lord's Supper*, 27, especially the saying of the cup.

⁹¹O. Cullmann, *The Early Church* ed. A. J. B. Higgins (London: SCM Press, 1956), 95.

A. The Saying over the Bread

The formula by Paul in v. 24 *μού ἐστὶν τό σῶμα*—with the possessive pronoun at the beginning—is a strong evidence that Paul received the church tradition in the Greek language.⁹² Paul's introduction of the phrase "which is for you" possibly is a secondary Hellenization that cannot be retranslated back to the original Aramaic. It is a "Haggadistic addition" in explanation of the saying of the Lord about his body.⁹³ One of the two words is joined to the saying on the bread and the other to that on the cup; both are alterations of an original tradition.

However, it has been pointed out that neither the Gospel of Mark, Matthew, nor the shorter Lukan text have the adjective clause "which is for you"; the longer Lukan text (22:19) has it in expanded form, "which is given for you" and follows it, as Paul's account does, with the command: *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν*. In the biblical sense memorial (remembrance) is more than a mental exercise; it suggests a realization of what is to be remembered.⁹⁴ There is, therefore, a deep intellectual truth in Paul's communication of the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper. He brings together the words, "Do this in remembrance of me," with Jesus' description of the bread as his "body," and the words, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me," to Jesus' reference to the cup as "the new covenant in my blood." These same words of Paul's account are added in some versions to Luke's

⁹²Martin, *Eucharist*, 87.

⁹³Higgins, *The Lord's Supper*, 28. He ascribes it to the apostle, who is explaining the meaning he himself would attach to the cultic practice of the breaking of the bread in the church. Paul is not conscious, however, of adding anything more to the traditional saying of Jesus, but is making clear what he holds to be its essential meaning.

⁹⁴Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 110.

account of the Last Supper. Paul's use of the words εἰς ἀνάμνησιν is the equivalent of the Hebrew term זָכַר or לִזְכֹּר of the Haggadah, but "there seems to be no unanimity as to who is to do the 'remembering' and what the 'remembering' signifies."⁹⁵

The command to repeat the rite is found (aside from the addition in Luke) only in Paul, especially when he mentions both the bread and the wine. It probably did not belong to the earliest form of the account of the Last Supper. Jeremias considers the command to repeat the rite as a separate tradition which Paul received in Antioch.⁹⁶ As the Passover meal was, in the words of the paschal narrative, "a remembrance of the going out of Egypt" (cf. Ex. 12:12; 13:3,9; Dt. 16:3), so the notion of the breaking of bread was to be an ἀνάμνησις of the Lord after "his departure" which he was going to fulfill at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). This command is unique to the Paul/Luke version of the bread-saying. Because this notion is absent in Mark/Matthew, there has been some question as to its authenticity.⁹⁷

It looks as though the earliest tradition described such a command by the Lord with the saying of the bread and the cup, in which case, no matter what its relative age, the Pauline account is reasonably prior to the Lukan one. We have been concerned with the problem of seeing Paul's εἰς ἀνάμνησιν within the context of the Passover meal. This points to the views of Dalman and Davies, contra Jeremias, that the verb זָכַר

⁹⁵J. J. Petuchowski, "Do This in Remembrance of Me (1 Cor. 11:24)," *JBL* 76 (1957): 293-298. He quotes Davies, who feels that "Christ has been substituted for 'the day thou camest forth out of Egypt' to the haggadah, and would understand the words in the sense in which they have been rendered in the RSV: 'Do this in remembrance of me.'"

⁹⁶Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 160.

⁹⁷Fee, *The First Epistle*, 552. See also the discussions by Jeremias, 168, and Barrett, 267.

(which the Lord instituted) was, according to the apostle, a ΓO by which the disciples were to remember Jesus and his redemptive act rather than a prayer that they may remember him.⁹⁸ The significance of the rite is explained by the words $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\eta\nu\ \epsilon\mu\eta\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\mu\eta\sigma\iota\nu$, "in memorial of me"; the term $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$, "remembrance" (memorial) expresses much more than a mere celebration; it means a sacramental presence in the Lord's rite. It seems that this expression is found in the Greek memorial feast for the dead.⁹⁹ Paul concludes that the way they celebrated the rite, it does not have to do with a rebuilding of the continual table fellowship of Jesus and his disciples, but with a reproduction of the Lord's Supper. Unlike Lietzmann, Jeremias holds that there is no evidence for the words $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\mu\eta\sigma\iota\nu$ in Greek remembrance feasts, but that they are found in the Old Testament and Judaism.

One example given is from the testament of Epicurus, who made preparation for a yearly celebration "in memory ($\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\eta\nu\ \mu\eta\acute{\eta}\mu\eta\nu$) of us (i.e., $\mu\acute{\epsilon}$) and Metrodorus."¹⁰⁰ The earliest tradition of the church did not include this kind of tradition but we owe much to Hellenistic custom even though it is true that the pagan memorial meals seem to have been less frequent than the Christian.

⁹⁸Petuchowski, 295. But J. Jeremias, basing himself on other uses of ΓO in Jewish liturgy as well as on the eucharistic prayers of the Didache, makes the phrase mean "that God may remember me." "That means the Eucharist is an $\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ of the *Kyrios*, not because it reminds the church of the event of the Passion, but because it proclaims the beginning of the time of salvation, and prays for the inception of the consummation."

⁹⁹Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 148.

¹⁰⁰Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 161ff. In particular, it is said of the feast of the Passover that it should be celebrated *lezikkaron* (Ex. 12:14; cf. 13:9; Deut. 16:3; Job. 49:15), and at the festival Kiddush, the one spoken by Jesus at the Passover meal, God is praised as He "who has given to His people Israel festal seasons for joy and *lezikkaron*"--as indeed the entire feast of the Passover is a feast of remembrance, and the Passover meal a meal of remembrance.

Differences among Christians and pagans are not surprising because, for instance, Epicurus was not believed, as Jesus was, to have risen from the dead.¹⁰¹ Therefore, the Christian meal also brought to mind an act of deliverance; it was closely linked with a more significant Person, and the memorial was surely his memorial. Jesus gave himself on behalf of his people; so, when they share in eating a piece of bread in a meal, they eat and drink in his memory.

B. The Saying over the Cup

The saying over the cup, as it appears in Paul's account (ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι), becomes plain, with minor modification, in the longer Lukan account (Lk. 22:20: καὶ τὸ ποτήριον ὡσαύτως μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι). The saying of the cup is placed where not only Paul/Luke differ from the one of Mark/Matthew, but also where, in the second part, Paul and the Gospel of Luke differ from each other. As we see with the saying over the bread, both formulas in the tradition start with the word "this" and, in both cases, Jesus identifies the cup with his blood in a covenantal terminology. However, there is no agreement among the scholars as to which tradition represents the more ancient form.¹⁰²

There is a difference in meaning and terminology between the sayings: "This is my blood of the covenant" (Mk. 14:24), and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." (1 Cor. 11:25). Each of the expressions presupposes that the shedding of the

¹⁰¹Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 267. There is another parallel in Lucian's account (*de Syria Dea* 6) of the feasts in "memory of the passion (μνήμη τοῦ πάθους"; cf. Justin, *Trypho* 41) of Adonis. Pagan memorial feasts, however, may not have contributed the whole content of the clause, or provide a sufficient interpretation of it.

¹⁰²Fee, *The First Epistle*, 554ff.

blood of the Lord Jesus Christ marks the beginning of a new covenant between God and humans. In Paul's account the ascription is made directly to the covenant (διαθήκη), in this case the "new covenant" which is mentioned in Jer. 31:31. Mark's version refers to the old covenant explicitly and the new covenant implicitly.¹⁰³ In both formulas, the idea is almost the same. It is that the wine of the cup means Jesus' blood poured out in death, which ratified the new covenant.

In the Markan version διαθήκη, "covenant" is an explanation of αἷμα, "blood"; but in Paul's it is the contrary: αἷμα is an explanation of διαθήκη.¹⁰⁴ The reference to blood contains the notion of sacrifice. The blood of Jesus Christ plays a very important role in Paul's own soteriology, but a traditional role. The term appears only in Rom. 3:24ff. and in one further passage where the same tradition is mentioned, Rom. 5:9. The cup is the sign and pledge of a share in the new covenant, and so in the kingdom. The formula in the Gospel of Mark is the end of a liturgical tendency to make the saying equal with that about the bread, and to take it up to Exod. 24:8 (LXX: ἰδοὺ τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης).¹⁰⁵ In other words, Jesus said, "This is my blood," but he spoke of the covenant in his own blood. The word "blood" in Mark is the equivalent of the body. Though they are not exact parallels the correlative of blood is supposed to be flesh; and besides, Jesus had already mentioned his blood in speaking of his body.

¹⁰³Ibid., 555. In contrast to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Paul's account of the cup saying has no allusion to Isa. 53 ("which is poured out for many"), which has already appeared in the bread saying. In the Gospels the tie to Isaiah suggests the additional theological motif of the forgiveness of sins, made explicit in Matthew's account. But in Paul that motif is not tied to the blood as such, but to Christ's death, as pointed is in verse 26.

¹⁰⁴Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 199.

¹⁰⁵Behm, *TDNT* 3 (1965), 730.

The question is: How could the wine in Mark's gospel have been called "his blood" by the Lord, and then be mentioned as "the fruit of the vine"? The answer is that the latter comes from historical tradition; the Gospel of Mark is indebted to the former by liturgical custom.¹⁰⁶ Concerning the argument by Leenhardt, that the Pauline form of the word of institution over the cup is more reliable than that in the Gospel of Mark, Behm says that the fact that it is the only occurrence of *καινή διαθήκη* (new covenant) in the teaching of the Lord cannot be taken as an argument against its validity, and that this is the very saying of Jesus which explains the main idea of the covenant in Paul.¹⁰⁷ But perhaps the opposite is true; Paul's concept of the covenant is very important as is reflected in his own thought throughout several of his epistles (see Rom. 9:4; 11:27; 2 Cor. 3:6ff; Gal. 3:15ff; 4:24ff and Eph. 2:12). This has played its part in the formation of his own version of the cup saying.

Second, the thought that the genuine correlative of blood is not body, but flesh, and that Jesus himself did not say "this is my blood," would not be relevant, as presumably "body" stands for "flesh" in this saying. Therefore, the phrase "this is my blood" would have as strong a claim of being authentic as the phrase "this is my body," and the addition to it of the words "of the covenant" is under the influence of Exod. 24:8. The Pauline and the Markan formulas of the words of Jesus about his blood are independent. The third point is related to Leenhardt's reference to the two different descriptions of the wine (Mk. 14:24, 25) as against the validity of "this is my blood." It is possible that the Lukan version is more precise in preserving the Lord's

¹⁰⁶F. J. Leenhardt, *Le Sacrement de la Sainte Cène* (Neuchâtel-Paris, 1948), 51ff.

¹⁰⁷Behm, *TDNT* 2 (1965), 137.

tradition by putting the saying about the fruit of the vine at the outset of the meal, when Luke mentions a cup before the saying of the bread and the cup "after the supper," though the latter is doubtless a harmonizing addition.

When the participants all drink of the cup of blessing in the meal, it becomes part of the covenant through the covenant blood of Jesus. To drink the cup is to enter into the covenant by means of Christ's blood; consequently, the believer becomes a covenant partner with God. The Lord enters at the same time into the covenant, and a covenant with the community is established. The order for repeating the rite is given in an extended form: τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡς ἂν πίνετε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν; here it is clearly formulated as a "command for repetition." The effort is made to show that the word which the apostle Paul understood Jesus to have used to order the repetition of the Lord's Supper does not have just a sacrificial association, but a more exact Jewish origin. In the command "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me," the critical word is ἀνάμνησις; in biblical usage this is a liturgical term with a Godward reference. The word ἀνάμνησις on each occasion of its use in the LXX has a particularly Godward reference. The four instances of the use of the word "memorial" in the Greek Old Testament, together with Heb. 10:3, are said to point to the conclusion that the phrase "ἀνάμνησις," in biblical usage, is unmistakably a ritual and liturgical term.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸D. Jones, "ἀνάμνησις in the LXX and the Interpretation of 1 Cor. 11:25," *JTS* 6 (1955): 183-191. He points out that D. Stone has the same view and uses some examples to explain the use of the word ἀνάμνησις. He mentions five occurrences of the term in the LXX; the first two (Lev. 23:243; Num. 10:10) are said clearly to denote a sacrificial memorial before God. The fifth (Wisd. 16:6) denotes "a memento to man." The third and fourth (Ps. 38:1 [Lxx 37:1] and 70:1 [LXX 69:1]) are obscure, but "the probability is very strong that a memorial before God is denoted." The conclusion is that "on the whole it may be said that the word 'memorial' naturally suggests, without actually necessitating, the sense of a sacrificial memorial before God; and that in the case of the institution of the Eucharist the probability of a sacrificial meaning is greatly strengthened by the use of the word 'covenant' just before and by the sacrificial surroundings when our Lord spoke."

The repeated command after the institution of the saying of the cup, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me," is unique to Paul, being absent from even the longer Lukan text. The longer Lukan version possibly combines an independent short tradition with the tradition reproduced by Paul here.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the double command is absent from the Gospel of Mark. It surely means that this "command for repetition" was unknown to Mark; it is hard to understand why Mark would have omitted it; perhaps it had fallen out from the tradition. Higgins goes further and asks: "Does the injunction to repeat what was done at the Last Supper belong to a tradition utilized by Paul, or is it his own creation?"¹¹⁰ It was Paul who interpreted the Lord's Supper at Corinth as a continuation of the fellowship meal of Jesus and his disciples as a commemoration of his death. Lietzmann points out that in effect the Lord's Supper assumes the character of a meal of memory influenced by the sacred meals in the Graeco-Roman period.¹¹¹ Thus, the passage indicates that the Supper of the Lord involves a body of believers who participate in the meal as his followers and who receive the cup as an indication of conscious participation in the benefits of the new covenant with the Lord. Paul recalls the exact words of the institution to make the emphasis that as often as they eat this meal and drink from the cup, it is in the Lord's remembrance.

¹⁰⁹Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 113. For a fuller discussion, see E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel According to Luke* 1966; and Jeremias, 110ff.

¹¹⁰Higgins, *The Lord's Supper*, 35.

¹¹¹Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 182.

C. The Proclamation and the Parousia

The celebration (in the Primitive Church) was a thanksgiving meal which looked forward to the return of Christ. This partaking of the bread and wine is for Paul a proclaiming of the death and resurrection of the Lord "until he comes." Paul further assumes, in agreement with the early Christian Church's idea, that eating and drinking in the Eucharist Meal in fellowship with Christ is an anticipation of the table fellowship with the Lord at the Messianic banquet. It is along this line that Paul calls the celebration a drinking of the cup of the Lord and eating at the table of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:21).¹¹² As Schweitzer says, "It is the death that is preached at the table, not the dying of Jesus that is re-enacted. And this emphasis has obvious links with the Passover liturgy."¹¹³ Thus, this eschatological motif and proclamation is what Paul has in mind, when the bread is broken and the cup is shared.

Furthermore, the Corinthian church members did not have a "duty" of proclaiming; rather they proclaimed by the very fact that they got together in the name of the Lord.¹¹⁴ The expression of happiness and gratitude in 1 Cor. 11:26 is described by the use of the verb "proclaim." The proclamation is done when the believers gather together, and partake of the elements. According to the Lord's command. Before the birth of Jesus, prophets proclaimed his coming, and angels

¹¹²Schweitzer, *Paul*, 267.

¹¹³Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 127. In that Passover liturgy, "the tale of deliverance is to be retold; and as it is recounted, each individual Israelite relives the experience and makes his nation's history and destiny his very own. At the table, the story of the greater redemption is reported as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup. . . . It confronts us as we sit at the table with all that the death of the Son of God meant then and means now."

¹¹⁴Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 224ff.

proclaimed his glorious advent. Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom, God's βασιλεία. In his ministry he taught his disciples that he would rule by and from the cross. At Jesus' last meal, the disciples were promised that only after the Parousia would they eat together with the exalted Lord.¹¹⁵

Even though Paul did not record exactly the words of Jesus in 1 Cor. 11:26 ("For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes"), they reveal that Paul's tradition of the Last Supper maintained its eschatological character. The use of the word "for" indicates that Paul is now giving the reason why he is repeating the tradition at this point in the argument. It is not because the Corinthians have forgotten the words of the institution, nor because they abandoned the practice of the Lord's Supper; it is because their own practice of the Lord's Supper misrepresents its original character.¹¹⁶ Whether Jesus spoke the words "This do in remembrance of me" (and whether we take the longer text of Luke 22 or Paul as the authority for them), the view was very clear in Jesus' mind; his desire (as well as Paul's) was that the disciples go on doing it.¹¹⁷ Thus, the focus of Paul's concern was that the Corinthians practise what they have received from him as part of the church tradition. The Lord's Supper was supposed to be a proclamation of Christ's death until he comes again, rather than self-gratification of their own bodies.

Paul uses the verb καταγγέλλετε and it could be indicative or imperative. Since Paul uses the word γάρ, it is more likely to be indicative. Is Paul trying to say

¹¹⁵Barth, *Rediscovering*, 47.

¹¹⁶Fee, *The First Epistle*, 556ff.

¹¹⁷A. M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (London: SMC Press, 1961), 63.

that the Eucharistic action is a proclamation of the death of Jesus, or does he mean that the proclamation is an explicit idea in it?¹¹⁸ Because there is no such thing as a liturgical rite without proclamation, we have to consider the latter.¹¹⁹ When the Christians held a common meal, they remembered aloud the event that took place an event upon which their existence was based. The command to repeat the story of Jesus' death is to continue until he comes again. The Greek phrase ἄχρις οὗ, used with the aorist subjunctive and without the particle ἄν, regularly introduces the eschatological idea.¹²⁰

To celebrate the Lord's Supper is also to proclaim together as a community of believers, but Paul says only ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ. The Lord's Supper will find its complete fulfillment when the Lord himself will gather together with his people and will provide the heavenly banquet in the company of God the Father. The expression "until he comes" can mean nothing but the looking forward to the future, to "the real" presence of the Lord himself.¹²¹ Paul cites these traditional words of the institution to urge the Corinthian church members to mend their behaviour and to restore the unity of the church in all aspects of the social community life, not just when they partake of their *eranos* meals. This rite centres on the celebration of Jesus' death "for us." Indeed, the Lord is regarded as living, and the believers look forward to His return. Thus, Paul's conception coincides with that of the tradition (from the early Christian Church); the

¹¹⁸Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 78. Talbert points out that "the stated purpose of the meal made it a public announcement of a certain cause. So a Christian meal held for the purpose of focusing on the sacrifice of Christ as the seal of the new covenant became a public proclamation of his death."

¹¹⁹Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 201.

¹²⁰Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 270.

¹²¹Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 225.

Lord's Meal is not an anticipation of the banquet of the blessed, but an establishment for the age of the church from the resurrection of Christ to his coming.¹²²

As has been said, the final clause in 1 Cor. 11:26 specifies that this proclamation via the Lord's Supper goes on "until he comes" (ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ). However, some commentators see in this merely the point at which observance of the Lord's Supper terminates.¹²³ That is to say that the believers will no longer partake of the Lord's meal when the parousia has occurred. On the other hand, this can be understood as a purpose clause ("in order that he might come"); thus, the supper reminds God of his promise and urges God to send Jesus.¹²⁴

It is difficult to think that Paul would refer to the parousia of the Lord as a simple deadline. Most of the time, when Paul mentions the expectation of the Lord's coming, he does so in connection with the triumph of God (1 Cor. 15:24-28) or the life of believers together with the parousia of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14-18). An event of such magnitude does not readily become a way of marking the end of a present custom. Nevertheless, Paul is clear that the time of the parousia is a matter of God's choosing (1 Thess. 5:1-3), "not an event that can be hurried by means of human action."¹²⁵ B. Gaventa raises the question: How are we to understand the phrase "until he comes" if it is not a deadline or a way of urging God to hasten Jesus' return?

¹²²Conzelmann, *1 Corinthian*, 202.

¹²³H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* trans. rev. W. P. Dickson, 5th ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnals, 1890), 266.

¹²⁴Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 249-55.

¹²⁵Beverly R. Gaventa, "You Proclaim the Lord's Death: 1 Corinthians 11:26 and Paul's Understanding of Worship," *RevExp* 80 (1983): 383.

Accordingly, to explain that Paul quotes them correctly does not mean that he also understands their views here correctly. C. K. Barrett points out that the Corinthians were acting "as if the age to come were already consummated. . . . For them there is no "not yet" to qualify the "already" of realized eschatology."¹²⁶ However, E. Ellis rightly asks: Would Paul attack an eschatological view which he himself seems to adopt?¹²⁷ Three important questions could be raised here: First, did Paul misunderstand the Corinthians? Second, did the Corinthians deny the resurrection of Christ and the sacraments? And third, did the Corinthians believe they had already been resurrected? From different sources (1 Cor. 1:11; 5:1; 7:1; 16:17) Paul had become aware of serious problems within the church and of major differences of viewpoints between himself and certain factions at Corinth. A very sensitive and vital problem was that of the resurrection. Furthermore, the topic that was discussed by the church in Corinth unquestionably had to do with Paul's manifesto of the resurrection. Obviously some of his readers were inclined to doubt Paul's placing the resurrection at the centre of his message. It is possible to gather from verse 12 that what was in contention was not Christ's resurrection, but the resurrection of believers.¹²⁸ Some

¹²⁶C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 109.

¹²⁷E. Earle Ellis, "Christ Crucified," in *Reconciliation and Hope* ed. Robert Banks (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1974), 73-74. Ellis argues that error in 1 Cor. 15 "offers doubtful support for an eschatological interpretation of 1 Cor. 4:8, and also that it is unlikely that Paul would criticize the Corinthians merely for appropriating an eschatological view that he himself has taught them." It seems to me that not necessarily did Paul teach them such a view, especially concerning the issue of the resurrection of believers. Conzelmann rightly observes that "Paul is not seeking to prove that Christ is risen. He can take this belief for granted. What he intends to elaborate is rather the expression 'from the dead.'" Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 261.

¹²⁸Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation: Studies in 1 Corinthians 12-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 93.

members of the Corinthian church were saying that there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12).

However, as has been observed "implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously, their proponents are saying that Paul misrepresents or misunderstands the Corinthians."¹²⁹ The deniers of the resurrection mentioned in verse 12 were some church members who accepted the Gnostics' view.¹³⁰ They were not unbelievers, since they were church members (1 Cor. 15:12). Who these deniers of the resurrection were it is very difficult to establish with precision. It is difficult to see, however, how Paul misrepresents or misunderstands the Corinthians; it is possible to see the problem the other way around. Moreover, Paul taught at Corinth for some eighteen months, and the members of the church at Corinth would, therefore, be well aware of Paul's own eschatological emphasis.

On the other hand, it seems that "the Corinthians had misunderstood the Christian eschatological message. . . believing that eschatology had been 'realized'."¹³¹ Even after eighteen months in one another's company, it seems possible that either the church members and Paul could not understand one another, so that the

¹²⁹A. J. M. Wedderburn, "The Problem of the Denial of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians VXV," *NovT* 23 (1981): 230.

¹³⁰Martin, *The Spirit*, 94. He comments that these deniers of the resurrection believe that "with the coming of the spirit and their baptism to initiate them to a celestial life here and now they had entered on a new existence. Their 'baptismal resurrection' (referred to in 1 Cor. 4:8) had given them the fullness of God's life; there was no more to come. They denied the 'eschatological proviso' that Paul's teaching set to mark the boundary between the 'already' of being saved and the 'not yet' of final redemption at parousia and resurrection of the dead in a new bodily existence (a theme handled in 15:35ff.)." Martin believes that the Corinthians embraced Gnostic ideas; however, this is not the most accepted view among scholars.

¹³¹R. M. Grant, *An Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 204.

true message about the resurrection was not clear to the Corinthians. Probably, the Corinthians, in emphasizing a realized eschatology, felt that they were truly developing Paul's view on the resurrection.¹³² One might also inquire how well Paul understood their position when he wrote to the church members at Corinth.¹³³ On the other hand, Wedderburn argues that Paul misunderstands the Corinthians on the issue of the resurrection of the body.¹³⁴

One matter is clear, Paul did not waste time in getting to the centre of the problem. It seems probable that some of the church members at Corinth were syncretistic in their beliefs. It is further argued by F. F. Bruce that they "thought that the respectable Greek belief in the immortality of the soul. . . was perfectly adequate, and that the resurrection of the body was an embarrassing Jewish handicap."¹³⁵ However, this is not "realized eschatology" as it was understood among the deniers of the resurrection in the church at Corinth.¹³⁶ It seems clear that some of the deniers of

¹³²Anthony C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *NTS* 24 (1978): 512, further comments that "the question for Paul, however, was not, as Ellis seems to imply, whether realized eschatology contains truth; it certainly does. The question was, rather, whether it represented the whole truth. Even if it can be argued (and it probably can) that the Corinthians were simply underlining and developing Paul's own thought, this is not to say that any one aspect can be pressed and ruthlessly applied to the exclusion of other aspects without causing serious distortion. Paul is not attacking a straightforward falsehood, but a distortion of the wholeness of truth."

¹³³Even if the apostle misunderstood what the Corinthians believed, this misunderstanding would be important as part of the background against which he put forth his own views on the resurrection.

¹³⁴Wedderburn, "The Problem of the Denial," 230. He comments that "this is true, for instance, of the suggestion that although they denied the resurrection of the body or flesh they looked for a survival of the immortal soul beyond the grave. If that is the case then not only does Paul seemingly misrepresent them but this argument really misses the point: he fails to argue that disembodied survival is not an adequate hope. To that extent it is easier to say that he has misunderstood them, but would a Hellenistic Jew like Paul not be all too familiar with this idea?"

¹³⁵F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 144.

¹³⁶Martin, *The Spirit*, 130. He further observes that "they claimed as Greek-thinking individuals, that once their spirits were 'saved,' their bodies were irrelevant, and no evil could touch

the resurrection were arguing against Paul's view about the resurrection issue at Corinth. Evidently, their views of new life and the hereafter are, therefore, a confusion of Christian thought with a Hellenistic view of immortality. The Corinthians were acting as though the triumph over death was a reality now in this present age. Paul does not have anything to do with such eschatological emphasis. He accused these Corinthians of being illogical. How could they affirm the Gospel and deny the reality of the future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12)? Paul did not agree to divide our resurrection (or eschatology) from that of Christ.¹³⁷

Neither did he make an attempt to deny the eschatological reality of the Christian's situation. Furthermore, he brings into play the idea of a future resurrection, just as earlier in the same epistle he called attention to the future judgment and to a future inheritance of the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:2, 3, 9, 14). Barrett points out that "only the future provides the argument that Paul needs."¹³⁸ The complete argument of 1 Cor. 5 and 6 depends not just on the idea of corporate solidarity with Christ, but also on the view of eschatological destiny.¹³⁹ Christians must strive to live now and await the resurrection with judgment for deeds done in the body.

privatized worship involving 'tongues of angels' (1 Cor. 13:1) prevailed. Most characteristically, they seemed to have thought that they would never die but were already enjoying--in Gnostic terms--life in a hidden body. Such a body lay beyond 'death' and simply continued to exist as a 'spiritual body,' a term (in v.44b) that as W. Schmithals and E. Schweizer remark, means for them a body composed of pneuma, 'spirit'--man's original possession. To this 'body' they already laid claim as 'persons of the Spirit' (14:37, *pneumatikoi*)." Thus, this is the background from where Paul addresses his reply to the issues being raised in the church at Corinth.

¹³⁷Gerald L. Borchert, "The Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15," *RevExp* 80 (1983): 406. "Too much is at stake, including the incarnation. Christ is still dead (15:13, 16) and there is no meaning to the Christian's proclamation--it is 'without any foundation' (*kenos*) and 'powerless' (*mataios*)--if there is no such reality as a resurrection from the dead (15:14, 17)." Moreover, if Christ has not been raised, the situation involves more than poor logic.

¹³⁸Barrett, *The First Epistle*, 148.

¹³⁹Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 517.

However, the tendency among some of the members of the Corinthian Church was to regard the prize as already won (1 Cor. 9:24). But the death of believers before the return of Christ constituted a grievous problem for the Corinthians; this is evident from the fact that Paul explains cases of death in the church of Corinth as a punishment by God for the unworthy behaviour and celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:29-32). This is not to say that such deaths before the return were interpreted in the early church (especially in the case of the Corinthians) as meaning that those who died early were refused the Messianic blessedness¹⁴⁰ in spite of their belief in Christ.

The most interesting point, which is generally omitted, is that these groups who denied the resurrection had no doubt at all about the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁴¹ This is why Paul refutes them by the argument that, if there is no resurrection of the dead, Christ himself cannot have risen.

1 Cor. 15:13: "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised (οὐδὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται)." 1 Cor. 15:16: "For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised."

Therefore, these deniers of the resurrection were not *sceptics*,¹⁴² but they have been called representatives of the "ultra-conservative eschatological view"¹⁴³ that said

¹⁴⁰Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* trans. W. Montgomery (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), 92ff.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 93.

¹⁴²Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation*, 93.

¹⁴³Schweitzer, *The Mysticism*, 93. According to them, "only those have anything to hope for who are alive at the return of Jesus. They thus deny not only the resurrection to the Messianic

there was no resurrection. Schweitzer's suggestion has been rejected.¹⁴⁴ What solves the problem of the dying among the believers at Corinth received in general we do not know. However, when death was seen to be the rule, if the Christian hope was not to fail, then Paul's eschatological view and solution was the one to take, that the dead in Christ arise at his return.

With regard to those who feel that they have won the prize already, Paul reminds them that the final victory has not yet been achieved. Indeed, the Lord's Supper has a distinct reminder quality, for it looks forward to the parousia (ἄχρι οὐ ἔλθῃ, 1 Cor. 11:26). The Lord's Supper was instituted even before the death and resurrection of Christ, which was the first of the last events. Paul also suggests not to think of attempting to anticipate the final judgment.¹⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, it is the Lord's death, and the believer's share in it, which is central in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:26; 1 Cor. 1:18-31 and 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:8-12). Furthermore, the intention of Paul's apology is not to argue for an eschatology which achieves a metaphysical unity (such as was debated by the later Gnostics).¹⁴⁶ His main purpose is to provide those "in Christ" with a sense of hope and security in their salvation, a sense of trust in the coming Lord.

Kingdom, but that to eternal blessedness. Their position is the same as that of the Psalms of Solomon and the eschatology of the Prophets."

¹⁴⁴W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1970), 292. It is unlikely in the first place that there should be Christians of such exceptional conservative Jewish views in the Corinthian Church, "which was chiefly, though indeed not entirely, Gentile in character. Secondly, there are other more plausible interpretations of the anti-resurrectionists at Corinth."

¹⁴⁵Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 522.

¹⁴⁶Borchert, "The Resurrection," 409.

Finally, a further question is raised: Who were the Corinthians who denied the resurrection? It is highly probable that they were people who had accepted Paul's original view and proclamation that Jesus had been raised and they believed it. But they had understood this in the sense of an exaltation to heaven, not a bodily resurrection. If Jesus were raised, so also were his followers, through participation in the sacraments.¹⁴⁷ Against this non-somatic idea of the resurrection Paul set forth his own view that the resurrection was both future and bodily, but not fleshly (1 Cor. 15:1-19).

What Paul is trying to say to the believers at Corinth is that when they gather together to partake of the Lord's Supper, they announce the death of the Lord in its eschatological meaning. The celebration itself demonstrates the proclamation of his parousia. The expression "hasta que él vuelva" ("until he comes") does not merely indicate a chronological event which limits a certain time, but also has a sense of finality. For this reason, "ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ" means also "para que él vuelva."¹⁴⁸ This understanding of the eschatological motif in verse 26 is important because it allows us to see more clearly the relationship between what happened the night of the betrayal and the day of the final parousia.

¹⁴⁷Schweitzer, *The Mysticism*, 95.

¹⁴⁸Guillermo J. Garlatti, "La Eucaristía Como Memoria y Proclamación de la Muerte del Señor," *Revista* 47 (1985): 1-25. He further adds: "Lo cual equivale a afirmar que las cosas--con la acción eucarística--han llegado a un punto tal que el Señor debe venir porque, en cierta forma, ya se han consumado las realidades escatológicas del fin de los tiempos. Esto es lo que hace que la eucaristía sea igualmente una verdadera actualización 'en prospectiva' de la parusía de Cristo." Jeremias says also that in the New Testament the use of ἄχρι with subjunctive aorist without ἄν introduces the perspective of the pursuit of the eschatological aim. Therefore, the expression ἔλθῃ is a "prospective subjunctive." See J. Jeremias, 316-317.

The Lord's Supper has value only by reference to future realities which will be accomplished when he comes. We might conclude that Paul's view of worship, then, is consistent with the position he takes throughout the letter.¹⁴⁹ The celebration of the Lord's Supper is not a time for rejoicing in one's salvation. Instead, the celebration of the Lord's Supper proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus and awaits his parousia.

However, Jeremias interpreted the expression εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν as "damit Gott meiner gedenke." His viewpoint is that the Lord Jesus instituted the celebration of the Lord's Supper not in order that Jesus' disciples might remember him, but to remind God that Jesus may bring about the kingdom at the parousia. Jeremias says when Paul mentions the expression "you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," he found an element of purpose in the last clause. So, it means that Paul is saying that "you proclaim the Lord's death until the goal is reached when he comes" ("in order that he may come.") Furthermore, Jeremias relates this hope with the prayer of the early church, "Maranatha."¹⁵⁰ It should be noticed that Jeremias is trying to make a point which is rather different from the older Catholic interpretations. We found nothing in his argument which tells us about a doctrine of the real presence of the Lord or a eucharistic sacrifice. Its emphasis is eschatological. Also, this interpretation can be considered as basically Jewish and Palestinian in background; it is then "very probable that the command goes back to Jesus himself."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹Gaventa, "You Proclaim," 385.

¹⁵⁰Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 115-118.

¹⁵¹K. H. Bartels and C. Brown, *NIDNTT* 3 (1975), 230-247. They say that even though Jeremias' view has not been accepted, he can point to Did. 10:5f, for supporting testimony to prayer in the early church for the eschatological remembrance of God, and to the OT for the idea of God remembering; his view does not rule out other interpretations. Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε ("This do") may be regarded as a summary of the procedure to be followed by participants in the Lord's Supper. They are

Although Jeremias' thesis has not been widely accepted, perhaps the clause "until he comes" contains some element of purpose; but the proclamation which is explained is a proclamation of the good news to humans and there is no mention that it is a proclamation directly to God. The support for Jeremias' argument is thus weak and doubtful, and it is probable that the remembering of the death of Jesus is to be done by Jesus' own disciples.

Therefore, "the action is to remind them of Jesus."¹⁵² This is the interpretation that arises from the context. The next issue will be the problem of how Jesus' disciples were to continue remembering their Master during his absence. The solution to the problem is that by celebrating the Eucharistic meal the disciples remember him by proclaiming his death whenever they partake of the fellowship-table until he comes again. The eschatological hope is always fulfilled when the church fulfills Jesus' command to repeat the rite as a memorial of his death.

6.7 Christological Nature of the Lord's Supper

Paul's Christological concept of the Lord's Supper is based upon the Christology of the early Jewish Christian church. The early church worshipped Jesus as the exalted Messiah and Lord. In the context of the Lord's Supper, the Christological title "Κύριος" appears very often. The present tendency in New Testament Christology is to consider the title Kyrios from a Jewish perspective more

to act as Jesus did, when instituting the Supper on the eve of his passion, according to the Synoptic account. All the words and actions are intended to be εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.

¹⁵²Marshall, *Last Supper*, 90.

than in terms of the Hellenistic Kyrios background. Paul's view of the Lord's Supper is built upon pre-Pauline Christian tradition. So far from being the creator of this sacrament, he has preserved the basic meaning of him who instituted it. However, Marxsen's contention is contrary to this view. We will now proceed to study Marxsen's view and the Christological nature of the Lord's Supper.

A. Willi Marxsen's Theory

In his book, *The Beginning of Christology*, Marxsen argues that the interpretation of the meal then made use of concepts which were available in Judaism and in the Hellenistic mystery cults. Therefore we cannot say that the Lord's Supper is to be derived from the religious environment of primitive Christianity, but it is true that the means of interpreting the Lord's Supper were taken from there. This process of making the meal explicit in meaning through interpreting certain of its features did not take place in a purely Jewish-Christian context, but rather in a Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian environment. For its interpretation of the bread as *soma* the celebrating community took over analogies from the mystery cults. The motif of the *kaine diatheke* originates in Jewish concepts.¹⁵³

Marxsen raises two important questions: Where does the Pauline formula come from? And as we push back, do we get to the institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus? But the answer given by Marxsen is questionable. In order to appreciate better his arguments and later to evaluate them, we should quote him again *in extenso*.

¹⁵³Willi Marxsen, *The Beginnings of Christology* trans. P. J. Achtemeier and Lorenz Niebing (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 69-74.

One must keep this problem very clearly in mind, and then, surely, one will be able to come to terms with its solution. If one speaks about an institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus, if one intends thereby to affirm that Jesus did institute the Lord's Supper, then this affirmation really does not say anything as long as one does not, or cannot, state what it was that was instituted. If one cannot establish the contents of what was instituted, then his affirmation merely remains: "Jesus instituted a rite." Marxsen further comments that "the Pauline formula begins with the phrase 'on the night when the Lord Jesus was betrayed.' That phrase, however, does not really settle the historical question. It fails to do so (even if we take for granted that the institution took place on the night of the betrayal), because we are still not told what was instituted at that time. . . . Even if one wants to speak of an institution by Jesus of a celebration which is to be continued, we are faced with the problem of finding out what content such a celebration might have had."¹⁵⁴

Evidently, Marxsen's main problems are, first, to question the historicity of the Lord's Supper and second, he alleges that it is extremely difficult to refer the contents of the Pauline account of the Lord's Supper back to Jesus. Thus, the idea that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the eve of his death poses so many problems that, we (especially historians) must put a question mark here. As has been indicated Marxsen is not the only one arguing along this line. For instance, Bousset proposed to offer proof that Paul adapted both his ideas of mysticism and the sacramental views of baptism and the Lord's Supper from Hellenistic influence.¹⁵⁵ Bultmann (following Heitmüller and others) designated the account of the Lord's Supper as an *ätiologischer Kultbericht*, in other words the account of the Last Supper is unhistorical, and the words of institution of the Lord's Supper were a creation of the early church.

¹⁵⁴Ibid, 102ff.

¹⁵⁵Bousset, *Kurios*, 29-33. Bousset forgets that the movement from which Christianity grew up did not begin with the preaching of Jesus *per se*, but with the preaching of John the Baptist. And the Baptist preached baptism.

Furthermore, the issue of the historical aspect of the Lord's Supper as considered by Marxsen and the issue of how far we can trace it back to Jesus are matters of debate. The data show us that what Paul cited was not an interpretation of what the church must do, but a description of what Jesus did at a meal where he was governed by the order of proceedings at a Jewish meal. The Lord's Supper was not a Passover meal *per se* (especially in the case of the church at Corinth), and it was not bound by the ritual of the Passover meal; the Christians could well partake of the bread and wine when they gathered together.¹⁵⁶

Not many, if any, nowadays take the line suggested at the beginning of the twentieth century by Johannes Weiss, and others. Weiss believed that Paul's language reflected "the impression received by direct personal acquaintance, that Paul had most probably seen and heard Jesus in Jerusalem during Holy Week and that it is a kind of knowledge that Paul was disparaging by contrast with the new knowledge that he had now received 'according to the spirit.'"¹⁵⁷ Whether Paul ever did see or hear the historical Jesus before his crucifixion is not the issue in question. The issue is whether Paul's language in 1 Cor. 11:23, 1 Cor. 15:3ff and 2 Cor. 5:16 could give us any reference to such seeing or hearing of the historical and the risen Lord. Marxsen's contention is that we cannot go back as far as the historical Jesus.

For Paul the knowledge of Christ the Lord "after the flesh" which he deprecates is much the same thing as an interest in the historical Jesus. But one further question arises: When Paul speaks of his former knowledge of Christ "after the flesh,"

¹⁵⁶Marshall, *Last Supper*, 111.

¹⁵⁷Johannes Weiss, *Paul and Jesus* E. T. (New York: Meridian Books, 1909), 47f.

does he mean his former idea of the Messiah which has been changed now that he has come to recognise the Messiah in Jesus? More probably, he means that his former knowledge of the Messiah was through Pharisaic eyes, worldly and inadequate. But now he has learned to identify the Messiah with the historical Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord.¹⁵⁸ It is this immediate acquaintance of Paul with the risen Lord (his conversion and the Damascus road experience taught him that Jesus was Lord and Messiah) that forms the foundation of Paul's gospel as the gospel tradition.

One example of this "gospel tradition" is the account in 1 Cor. 11: 23-25 of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper "on the night when he was betrayed." However, N. Walter says that the argument is that "the quotation of the words of institution of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11: 23-25 is no evidence that Paul was familiar with the passion narrative in the form known to us from the synoptic or in a recoverable pre-Markan or even pre-Lukan version."¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, the account of the institution of the Eucharist meal did circulate as an independent piece of the tradition, but also it is confirmed by Paul in 1 Cor. 11: 23-25: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you." Thus, 1 Cor. 11: 23 says that the chain of the tradition handed down by Paul is the "tradition" which goes back to Jesus' intention (*vox Jesu*).¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 98ff.

¹⁵⁹Nikolaus Walter, "Paul in the Early Christian Jesus-tradition," in *Paul and Jesus* ed A. J. M. Wedderburn (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 62ff.

¹⁶⁰Jeremias, *The Eucharistic*, 101. "Immediate proof of this is provided by 1 Cor. 15:1ff., where Paul similarly reminds the Corinthians of an old-established tradition, the Kerygma, and in so doing uses the same terms 'to deliver' and 'to receive' (v. 3, 'For I delivered ... what I also received'). For it can be established on linguistic grounds that the Kerygma here quoted (which runs from 1 Cor. 15:3b 'Christ' to v. 5 'twelve' as is shown, e.g. by the syntactical break between vv. 5 and 6) was not formulated by Paul. Un-Pauline is (a) the phrase ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, 1 Cor. 15:3 ('for our sins'). In the Pauline epistles ἁμαρτία ('sin') is to be found sixty-four times, including three occasions in the Pastorals and five times in Old Testament quotations."

In this text, Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth of something he delivered (the gospel tradition) to them when he formed their congregation previously. It seems possible, then, that his account goes back to the same source as the institution narrative of Mk. 14:22-25, although it has come down along a separate line of transmission.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, Paul is a link in the chain of tradition, as is 1 Cor. 15: 13ff., yet he says that he has received the gospel tradition ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου. By this phrase the apostle Paul means he received the account independently of human authority. He does not say that he received the gospel tradition in a vision. Paul was acquainted with it through the mediation of the eye-witnesses.¹⁶² The word παρέλαβον in 1 Cor. 15:3 surely refers to ordinary information obtained from eye-witnesses; therefore, it is natural to find a similar usage of the same word in 1 Cor. 11:23. Thus, it is very natural to interpret one text after the analogy of the other. Paul is obviously appealing in 1 Cor. 15:3ff to the common tradition; possibly, therefore, he is also doing the same in 1 Cor. 11:23ff. The account of the institution of the Eucharistic meal is to be added to those texts which have definite references to words of the historical Jesus.

¹⁶¹Bruce, *Paul*, 100. Paul's version was probably that which was current in the communities where he first enjoyed Christian fellowship. Since it related what "the Lord Jesus did and said, it was a tradition ultimately 'received from the Lord' and accordingly delivered by Paul to his converts. The core of the narrative would have been preserved with but little change because it was constantly repeated in church meetings as often as Christians 'ate this bread and drank the cup,' together with the passion story as a whole: 'You proclaim the Lord's death,' says Paul (verse 26)." He also comments that "Paul's narrative, even in its written form, is about ten years earlier than Mark's; even so, Mark's may preserve some more archaic features. Thus, Jesus' words in Mark 14:25, 'I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God,' may be paraphrased or summarized in Paul's own words 'until he comes' in 1 Corinthians 11:26."

¹⁶²Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 196. "Yet it does not merely derive ultimately from the Lord, but also constantly maintains in being passed from hand to hand, the immediacy of its origin."

The Lord's Supper and the passion story do not acquire firm outlines just from their repetition in the celebration, but also from their repetition in the proclamation of the gospel tradition. Paul, in Gal. 3:1, says that "Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified" when the good news was preached, and similarly on every such occasion Christ was, according to Paul, preached as "raised from the dead" (1 Cor. 15:12).

The proclamation of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ as part of the tradition given by Paul along with the earliest apostles seems obvious from Paul's summary of the resurrection account in 1 Cor. 15:3-11. Besides, the empty tomb of Jesus and the resurrection appearances mark the transition from the historical Jesus to the exalted Lord and Messiah. The tradition, as the gospel handed down by Paul, linked whatever gulf we may find to separate the one from the other.¹⁶³ It seems clear that the gospel tradition preached by Paul was the same gospel tradition preached by the early Christian Church at Jerusalem. In previous pages we discussed how Marxsen saw the problem of Christology in relation to the Lord's Supper. In the following section, we will deal with Marxsen's view about the Christological nature of the Lord's Meal. For him the Eucharistic Meal is based upon what happened at Easter and in the light of it, and he also argues that Jesus never claimed any Christological title.

B. The Lord's Supper and Its Christological Meaning

It has been the aim of the previous section to deal with the problem of Paul's gospel tradition with special emphasis on the tradition of the Lord's Supper. Paul's conception of Jesus was that he is Lord and Messiah. Paul's Christological

¹⁶³Bruce, *Paul*, 101.

understanding is built upon the early Church's Christology. The early Christian Church worshipped Jesus as the glorified Lord and Messiah. Paul draws out the implications of that earliest Christology, and he adds new dimensions and a new understanding from his own personal experience and the debt he owed to predecessors.¹⁶⁴ It seems probable that when Paul says he went to Jerusalem to meet the apostle Peter (Gal. 1:18), the object of his visit was to receive tradition from Cephas.¹⁶⁵ As is well-known, one rabbi could only receive tradition from another equal to him, "so one apostle can only receive traditions of first hand from another apostle."¹⁶⁶ Paul did not go to Jerusalem until three years after his conversion, but it is likely that when he was in Damascus he had already become acquainted with the apostolic traditions that came from Jerusalem as they were passed on in that area. On the contrary, Bruce has argued concerning the tradition that "it was not in Damascus or Antioch or any of the Hellenistic communities; it was in Jerusalem, during his first visit there after his conversion."¹⁶⁷ If Paul did not acquire this information until he went to Jerusalem, what happened in Damascus where he had his first contact with the Christian community? It is difficult to make an exact description of what traditions Paul may have received at Jerusalem, Damascus, or Antioch. But it was in Damascus alongside Ananias and other disciples that Paul spent his first days as a believer and

¹⁶⁴Hunter, *Paul* 79.

¹⁶⁵P. H. Menoud, "Revelation and Tradition: The Influence of Paul's Conversion," *Interp* 7 (1953): 131ff. He argues that since Paul's revelation on the road to Damascus received the Christological affirmation, he was bound to combine this revelation with the tradition about Jesus for which he had to refer to those who alone could give it to him. Menoud's interpretation is correct. However, the connection between revelation and tradition is closer still because both go back to the same author, Jesus the Lord.

¹⁶⁶Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 65.

¹⁶⁷F. F. Bruce, *Paul and Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 50.

first enjoyed Christian fellowship and then, probably, he learned of the Lord's Supper tradition.¹⁶⁸ For Paul the glorified Lord was the Creator of the Lord's Supper tradition which he delivered to the church at Corinth.

Together with the problem mentioned above of the historical aspects of the Lord's Supper, Marxsen is trying to show that the Christological nature of the Eucharistic Meal is based upon what happened at Easter and in light of Easter. Christologically speaking, for Marxsen what happened before Easter does not have any historical value because he argues that Jesus never claimed any Christological title. He adds: "that Jesus' function was namely to call men to faith, to bring men into the eschatological relationship, is expressed, more and more, as time goes on, by qualifying or interpreting his person." It was, therefore, faith which shaped the Christological tradition.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand the unique determination of the reconstructed text just proposed is to ensure a solid basis in past history. But the basis is not the last word; it is rather a point of departure and allows for the further impact of a unique experience "Jesus who was dead is alive." Easter colours the interpretation of all past events.¹⁷⁰

Indeed, Easter gives a new dimension to all past events. It was the historical Jesus who, according to the eucharistic tradition received by Paul from the Lord, broke the bread and passed the cup around on the night he was betrayed. He said to

¹⁶⁸F. F. Bruce, *The Pauline Circle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 15f. further adds: "But the first company of people with whom one enjoys Christian fellowship is liable to leave a distinctive impression. It was with them that Paul first broke the memorial bread and first shared Bible study in the light of the coming of Christ."

¹⁶⁹Marxsen, *The Lord's Supper*, 77.

¹⁷⁰Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 176.

his disciples: “This is my body which is for you,” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Jesus also told them to repeat his actions and his words in remembrance of him; in doing that, the disciples proclaim “the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:23-26). It is not, therefore, the case that Paul drew his Christological conclusions regarding the Christological meaning of the Lord’s Supper from the Hellenistic ideas of meal-fellowship with the gods.¹⁷¹

Paul interprets Jesus’ words at the Last Supper about partaking of the bread and wine as his body and blood as meaning that at the Lord’s Supper the believer who partakes enters into *κοινωνία* (union) with the body and blood of Christ. The idea of the unity of Christians is linked with the Lord’s Supper still more than with baptism. In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper the formula “the body of Christ” has the stamp which made it such a peculiar Christian expression. The words of Jesus our Lord, *τοῦτό μοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα*, go back to the tradition of the early church (1 Cor. 11:23 and the gospel tradition) and these words were laid down for all the churches.¹⁷² The fact is that what happens in the Lord’s Supper is asserted in the Christological doctrine of the being-in-Christ. To partake of the bread and the wine affects union with the body of Christ in the same way that baptism does. According to Paul, this is

¹⁷¹Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. W. Montgomery (New York: The Seaberry Press, 1968), 269. From the fact that in the Lord’s Supper meal-fellowship with the coming Christ is effective, he takes it to be indisputable that the proper sense of the idol-feast must be that by such eating fellowship with the demons, who were assumed to stand behind the idols, was brought about. “And since he thus interprets the sacrificial feast on the analogy of the Lord’s Meal, he cannot regard the feasting at them as innocent, but is compelled to point out to the Corinthians that they thereby come into close association with the demons, even though they may suppose that they are merely taking part in a friendly entertainment.”

¹⁷²L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. G. Webb and A. Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 263.

what Jesus meant when he talked at the meal of eating and drinking his body and blood.

Paul's point of view can only be properly understood when it is recognized that he took as his starting-point the early Christian Church's view of the "Lord's Supper" as an anticipation of the table-fellowship with Christ at the Messianic banquet, and from this conception Paul interpreted the words of Jesus at the meal about the bread and wine as being his body and blood.¹⁷³ In other words, for Paul the bread and wine in no way represent or mean the body and blood of Christ. For Paul no other material than the human body can substitute for the body of Christ. The body is for Paul always and only a group of human bodies: the body of Christ, along with the bodies of the believers who are "in Christ." Paul explains the effect of the Lord's Supper, like that of baptism, not just as *koinonia* (union) fellowship with Christ, but also as the unity of the partakers with one another (1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13).¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, in the early Christian Church's belief, partaking of the Lord's Supper establishes table-fellowship with the Lord in the present and in the Messianic banquet in the future. Paul also believes and teaches the same to the Corinthian Church members, in unity which alone makes possible the future uniting with Christ at the Messianic banquet.¹⁷⁵

Accordingly, it has been mentioned on several occasions that the Lord's Supper modeled from Jesus' Last Supper was current in the early Christian Church since the

¹⁷³Schweitzer, *The Mysticism*, 269ff.

¹⁷⁴Markus Barth, *Rediscovering the Lord's Supper* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 34.

¹⁷⁵Schweitzer, *The Mysticism*, 272.

beginning. Assuming that the Christians were faithful in their practice of the Lord's institution, such a Supper must have had (1) a common meal and end in a eucharistic meal; (2) the eschatological notion of looking forward to his return, and (3) its main significance must have been the presence of the Lord at the table in fellowship with his disciples. If we believe that Paul's view of the Lord's Supper owed much to the pre-Pauline Christian tradition (1 Cor. 11:23ff.), then Paul's version of the Lord's Supper tradition ought to have some of the above-mentioned characteristics. For instance, the Lord's Supper in the church at Corinth was a common meal and it ended as a eucharistic meal; the eschatological note which Jesus sounded at the Last Supper is found unmistakably in 1 Cor. 11:26. The central meaning of the Lord's Meal was, for Paul, the presence of the Lord with his believers. The phrases used by Paul, "Lord's Supper" and "Lord's Table," imply that at the Lord's Supper the unseen Jesus (Lord) is present as host of the meal.¹⁷⁶

On the other hand, Lietzmann attributes to Paul's Hellenistic views of the union with Christ through the eating and drinking of the bread and wine. This means that the believers participated in eating and drinking the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ. Lietzmann further adds, "the believers eat the body of the Lord and thereby become one body and blood with the Lord and with each other. The elements become vehicles of the spirit (pneuma), which is called down upon them in the ceremonial prayer."¹⁷⁷ He overlooks the fact that most of the time Paul associates

¹⁷⁶Hunter, *Paul*, 77. He further comments, "There is much that is dark and difficult in chapters 10 and 11 of 1 Corinthians; but there is enough to show that Paul reproduces with essential fidelity the institution of the Lord. Could he have done so if he not been deeply indebted to the pre-Pauline eucharistic tradition?" Evidently, Paul taught the Corinthians the tradition he received from the early Christian Church about the Lord's Supper tradition.

¹⁷⁷Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, 180ff.

the pneuma with the spirit of man rather than with non-human matter. When Paul speaks in 1 Cor. 10:3-4 of pneumatic food and pneumatic drink, which was granted to the people of Israel in the wilderness, he does not mean food and drink with which the spirit had united, but food and drink which had been provided for them by a miracle from God.¹⁷⁸

Turning to the different meanings of body, we observe that in 1 Cor. 10:16, 17 the term "blood of Christ" combined with the expression "body of Christ" probably means no less than in the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper: Christ sacrificed, the crucified Lord, rather than a transcendent "body."¹⁷⁹ That is to say, believers are ideally united with each other at the Lord's meal in a single, harmonious body by virtue of what the Lord has done in giving his body and blood on the cross. Paul calls Christians who "fail to discern the body" guilty regarding the body and blood of the Lord; he does so in the context of the Eucharist institution which he has quoted in 1 Cor. 11:24; "τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν." It is by partaking of bread and wine in what is thus given that believers become a united "body."¹⁸⁰

In the same line of thought, perhaps, in 1 Corinthians 10, Eduard Schweizer argues that Paul gives his interpretation in v. 17: "this participation occurs in the Church's becoming the body of Christ." Probably Paul thinks of this body in a

¹⁷⁸Schweitzer, *The Mysticism*, 270.

¹⁷⁹Barth, *Rediscovering*, 35.

¹⁸⁰C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

Hellenistic way, "as consisting of spiritual substance."¹⁸¹ On the other hand, not to attach believers to a body of Christ, merely to equate them sacramentally and mystically, would fail to do justice to Paul's statements that the church is the body of Christ and that individual Christians make up the specific organs which form the whole body. However, in a large sense, the ecclesiastical body is metaphorical in that the equation of one member with the eye of the body, and another with other members can be understood only in a figurative way.¹⁸² The same criticisms can be applied to Schweitzer's idea that the elect come into corporeal union with the risen Christ. It is quite difficult to understand this theory of the mystical body and the elect.¹⁸³

Robert Jewett says that Schweitzer's view has been rejected because it seems strange to the mind of modern man. However, he himself criticizes Schweitzer for making believers into supernatural persons and for failure to see that Paul always puts the resurrection of believers' bodies in the future.¹⁸⁴ The difference consists between the risen and ascended body of the Lord and his body which represents the church.

¹⁸¹Eduard Schweizer, *The Lord's Supper According to the New Testament*, trans. J. M. Davis (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 36.

¹⁸²Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 228. Cerfaux acknowledges this in writing that the identification is "mystical" and "spiritual" as well as "real." "The terms 'mystical' and 'spiritual' tend to take back what the term 'real' offers; but they fail to cover up the difficulty in carrying through the 'real' with consistent literalness to the end. We might just as well have the courage to say 'metaphorical.'"

¹⁸³Schweitzer, *The Mysticism*, 127. He says that "The mystical Body of Christ is thus for Paul not a pictorial expression, nor a conception which has arisen out of symbolical and ethical reflections, but an actual entity. Only so can it be explained that not only can Christ suffer for the Elect, but also the Elect for Christ and for one another. This reciprocity of relations is founded on the fact that the existences in question are physically interdependent in the same corporeity, and the one can pass over into the other."

¹⁸⁴Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 215.

This is contrary to Schweitzer's view, which leaves out all the ideas of mysticism.¹⁸⁵ He wants to bring together "what is usually differentiated as the glorified, the mystical and the eucharistic body of Christ, along with the Christian's hope of the resurrection and renewal of his own body."¹⁸⁶

It is insufficient to understand communion (κοινωνία) as a fellowship of believers instituted by Christ, and that by κοινωνία in the body and blood of Christ Paul means an important connection with Christ Himself as the Crucified Saviour.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, there is a partaking of the body and blood of Christ, that is, of Christ crucified for our sake (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). Furthermore, κοινωνία is directed to objective realities outside the believer's experience.¹⁸⁸

On the grounds of all that has been said above we are now able to form a clear conception of the church as the body of Christ. It does not mean in the first place to qualify its mutual unity and diversity, but to show its unity in and with Christ. Christologically speaking, Paul's distinctive contribution to the understanding of the Lord's Supper lies in his emphasis on the meal as an occasion of communion (κοινωνία) and his interpretation of the bread-word, "This is my body," to include Christ's body corporate.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Indiana: Wyndham Hall Press, 1988), 49ff.

¹⁸⁶Gundry, *Soma*, 229.

¹⁸⁷Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (London: S. P. C. K., 1937), 211.

¹⁸⁸Ralph P. Martin, "Communion," in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* J.D. Douglas, ed-at-large (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1980), 307. "The noun is found to denote the corporate Christian life with the thought that believers share together in certain objective realities."

¹⁸⁹Bruce, *Paul*, 284.

Nevertheless, communion with Christ, which some of the believers at Corinth enjoyed at his table, excluded communion with a pagan god at his table, and such communion with a pagan god excluded the real communion with the crucified Lord. Whenever the believers gathered together as a community and partook of the bread and wine, they proclaimed and looked forward to the Messianic banquet in unity with their Lord.

6.8 Summary

The tradition which Paul received from the Lord is recalled to show that the present abuses of the Lord's Supper result from failing to continue the Master's practice. The basic agreement between the Synoptic records is evidence that the Apostle Paul's claims of dominical continuity are well founded, but it does not prejudice the interpretation of the tradition and the practice of the rite. It is not hard to see how Paul's summary statement in verse 26 contributed to the cultic, sacramental understanding of the bread and wine: "as often as" easily becomes a rite. Furthermore, it appears that the gospel tradition preached by Paul, in all probability, was the same gospel tradition preached by the Palestinian *Urgemeinde*.¹⁹⁰

It is likely that the very structure of the Christian gathering at Corinth has been influenced by the *eranos* (symposia) pattern. The δείπνον is clearly set at the

¹⁹⁰Hunter, *Paul*, 80. The question can be raised, Have we any reliable information on how those who were in Christ before Paul saw the master? "The early chapters of Acts purport to give an account of the first Jerusalem Christians, and of the manner which probably existed at first in Aramaic. For the primitive church Jesus is a man of Nazareth approved of God by mighty works (Acts 2:22), who after crucifixion and resurrection has been exalted to God's right hand as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33ff) and has poured forth the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33)."

beginning, and starts with what can easily be understood to be a 'sacrifice' of a portion of the food to be eaten and concludes (μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνον, 1 Cor. 11:25), with a ceremony which contains wine (1 Cor. 11:20-26). Regardless of the Jewish custom, they were obviously adaptable (especially the practice of the communal meal at Corinth) to the structure of the Graeco-Roman *eranos* "potluck dinner" party.

The emphasis on Paul's eschatological message to the Christian Church at Corinth is clear and the eschatological nature is not removed from the Lord's Supper by Paul.¹⁹¹ On the contrary, Paul's emphasis is that he who is present (the Lord) and who gives himself in the Lord's Supper is the crucified, glorified One and as such the One who is to come. When the believers participate in the Lord's Supper, they look backward to the crucifixion and forward to the return. But at the parousia of the Lord, the Lord's Supper will come to an end, for the celebration of the absent Lord ceases when the absent Lord comes back.

Then, instead of their eating and drinking in memory of the Master, he will eat and drink with them in his Kingdom (1 Cor. 11:26). The action for Jesus' remembrance is expanded to announcing (proclaiming) the death of the Lord until he comes again, thus specifying the meaning of the cup and placing the remembrance in the ongoing worship and social life of the church. Paul's emphasis shows how each common meal is to become a recollection and proclamation of the tradition of the Gospel.

Finally, it is altogether likely that the early Christian Church worshipped Jesus as the exalted Lord and Messiah and that in this Christian confession of Jesus as Lord

¹⁹¹Bornkamm, *Early Christian*, 152.

we find the essential elements of all later Christology, including Paul's Christology. "Jesus is Lord" was the message of the early Christian Church and Paul's message as well.

CONCLUSION

The importance of cultic meals and dining occasions has already been mentioned briefly in chapter two. It is obvious that how one understands the common meals in connection with the sacrifice in Paul's time (Hellenistic society) plays a major part in the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and 11. At the beginning of this century, scholars such as Lietzmann explained 1 Corinthians 11, 10 (especially the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor. 11:23-26 and 1 Cor. 10:14-21) by reference to similarities in pagan cultic meals.

Some scholars such as Bornkamm, Käsemann, Schmithals, and Jewett interpret the Christian cultic meals not as coming from the Hellenistic religions, but rather as being influenced by Gnostic ideas. This Gnostic notion is not embraced by the majority of scholars. We believe that there are some Gnostic elements that probably can be called "pre-Gnostic." It is also well-known that what later developed as "Gnosticism" at Corinth was just Gnosticism *in statu nascendi*. Furthermore, it is clear that the gnosis issue was not the contention between Paul and the Christians at Corinth.

Paul's thought and theology is revealed in the way he tackles the different issues and problems in the church at Corinth. That Paul's ideas were closely related to the mystery cults of paganism is difficult to prove. Even if Paul used their views and terminology in order to free the church at Corinth of these ideas, he used various means of argumentation to fight these practices, even using some of their terminology for the sake of argument. Nevertheless, evidence has been adduced to demonstrate that throughout Paul's missionary journeys, he probably was in touch with many who

were formerly initiated into pagan mysteries and became Christians later on. Loisy and Lake went so far as to argue that under Paul's influence the early Christian church was changed into a mystery. These theories clearly imply that Paul had rejected what he learned in Judaism, and accepted the Hellenistic ideas.

On several grounds, the theories mentioned above have failed to convince: (1) The data in relation to sacramental meals in the Hellenistic mystery-religions are both scant and most of the time difficult to explain, and our lack of knowledge of the actual nature of the rituals performed in these cults makes any comparison with Christian practice uncertain. (2) There is no information from Christian writers regarding the mysteries at the end of the second century. (3) That the Christian view of participating in the Lord's Supper in memory of Jesus came from the pagan custom of honouring the dead is questionable. The pagan meals were held not to celebrate the death of the person honoured, but to celebrate his birthday. Furthermore, these meals were becoming more secular than religious around the first century. Consequently, it is unlikely that the Hellenistic pagan meals give the origin of the notion of remembering Jesus. (4) It appears that the sharing of meals was a common religious practice in the pagan mystery religions, Judaism and Christianity, and there are some parallels in all those meals. Yet the similarities are not as close as they at first seem. Although the Lord's Supper was not derived from the meals of the Hellenistic cults and mysteries, it would not have grown in the manner it did without Hellenistic influence.

It seems to me that this view has to be taken affirmatively to a certain degree. However, Paul did not depend purely on one or another particular mystery religion in order to develop his own thoughts on the theology of the Lord's Supper. Even among the Hellenistic Jewish meals (apart from the Jewish Passover) the similarities

are too superficial to draw a solid conclusion on the matter. However, some social customs, such as the way the Corinthian Christians celebrated the Lord's Supper, reflect the common pattern of the *eranos* meal in the Graeco-Roman society.

After studying sacred meals in the Graeco-Roman world, we consider it proper that social meals should be studied as well. When we study ancient meals from the social perspective, it means that we no longer consider each meal as a separate item, but to some extent our purpose is to understand them as indications of a common social tradition. The Graeco-Roman social tradition was very influential in the practice of meals in the early Christian church. Obviously, in some cases such as the Corinthians, churches adopted similar customs in the way they celebrated their meal. The Greek *eranos* meal, for instance, is a classic example of the social practice of the Christian *eranos* at Corinth. Some practical patterns are shown in both meals. Of course, the motives and the main objectives of these meals were different.

The social factors of the customs in the Graeco-Roman world give us sufficient explanation for the phenomenon of communal meals in early Christian communities (especially the Corinthian Church) and help to explain many of the social practices. They, furthermore, provide the foundation for the development of the beliefs and customs connected with their meals. So, it seems quite clear that the very structure of the assemblies of the Christian church at Corinth has been influenced by the *eranos* pattern. The Graeco-Roman social meal provided both the model and the main ideology for the development of the Christian *eranos* meal at Corinth.

Chapter four shows that early Christianity, especially the Graeco-Roman Corinthian Church, was neither a proletarian movement among the lower social

classes nor a movement among the aristocrats of the Roman Empire. However, it is most likely that some of Paul's later converts belonged to the social high class spread through all segments of the society of the Graeco-Roman world. Paul's words in 1 Cor. 1:26-28 cannot be used to argue that early Christianity was a lower-class phenomenon. However, terms like δυνατός make clear the political aspect, and εὐγενής emphasizes the social aspect. In the Corinthian Church, we can see the educated, the influential, and people of distinguished family social background. Philo makes reference to rich citizens at Corinth; it is most likely that some of them became Christians and were members of the Corinthian Church. It is our belief that Philo's statement gives a clear picture of the social status of some of the church members mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:26-29 as socially significant.

Furthermore, four criteria indicate the Christians' social status: (1) holding civil or religious office in the city; (2) owning a "house"; (3) serving the church or Paul; and (4) traveling (for the church). Although the last two criteria are not specifically sufficient in themselves to indicate social status, this prosopographical description shows that a section of the most active and influential church members belonged to the social high class. In spite of being a dominant minority, they represent the high social class in the church who appear to be very active. For this reason we need not cast doubt on Paul's statement that "not many" in the Corinthian Church belonged to a high social level. We may conclude that it is probable that the most active and important members of the church belonged to the "οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ, δυνατοί and εὐγενεῖς." Consequently, a closer analysis of the problem of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11) and the relationship between the "strong" and the "weak" clarifies the whole picture.

The study of the house churches is extremely significant, especially for a correct understanding of some of the issues related to the Lord's Supper. To fail to understand the house church of the New Testament is to close a window through which we may see more clearly how the primitive church functioned (Acts 1:13; 2:46; 5:42; 12:12). The house church has a prominent place in the formation of the early Christian church, and the life of the church takes place in houses. We strongly believe that it is in this context that the apostle Paul was exhorting and addressing the house churches, especially the Christian church at Corinth where many problems arose because of the social and theological conflicts among the members. As a result, it is also in this social setting that the "strong" and the "weak" argue over the question of the legitimacy of eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10 and 8).

The exegetical efforts in chapters five and six have shown that the whole issue in 1 Cor. 10:14-20 is caused by the "gluttony and drunkenness" on the part of the strong Christians who take advantage of their high social status over the poor, weak members. It thus appears that the main problem in the tension between the "strong" and the "weak" is not εἰδωλόθυτα *per se*, but the problem of the conscience of the "weak." It is well known that the meat came from the *macellum* where it was offered to the pagan gods and afterwards sold in the shops. Obviously, then, this is why such practices posed many problems to the weak Christians (eating the meat and participating in the pagan festivals as well). The real κοινωνία with Christ should avoid any disturbance of the weak brother united to Christ if the stronger brothers are willing to recognise that the "little ones" are also members of the body of Christ. Paul also concludes his teaching on the basis of human interaction. He is concerned with the well-being of the church's society and its members. We are to consider other

people's feelings, sensibilities, and beliefs so as not to cause them to stumble or to offend them unnecessarily.

The present exegetical approach has shown that in 1 Cor. 11:17-26 (in chapter six of this thesis) the Lord's Supper is presented as the tradition which Paul received from the Lord. The basic agreement with the Synoptic records is evidence that Paul's claims of dominical continuity are well founded, but it does not prejudice the interpretation of the tradition and the practice of the rite. Furthermore, Paul considered the behaviour of the Corinthians in the Lord's Supper as a disorderly act that led to its being mentioned in his letter. The problem in the church arose from social and theological disagreement within the congregation. Obviously, as it has been discussed, the real problem was the fact that some Christians at Corinth had difficulty with the issue of how they should live in a Christian society and at the same time deal with former pagan customs and invitations. Several points may be made in support of the above contention: (1) Paul compares the Lord's Supper with pagan sacral meals with regard to their mutual implications for the partakers (1 Cor. 10:14-22). The force of the analogy is based on the actual similarities between the Lord's Supper and other socio-religious meals. It may be possible that some Corinthian Christians understood the Lord's meal in terms of the same conceptual framework from their own perspective. (2) The main reason for which the Christians assembled was to have dinner together (1 Cor. 11:33: ὥστε . . . συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν). Although Paul thinks that members ought to satisfy their appetites at home (1 Cor. 11:22, 30), this does not mean the sacred meals were not real meals. The important meaning of the sacred meal is emphasized in 1 Cor. 11:20-21, where Paul stresses the point that when the Christians get together, it is not the Lord's Supper that they eat, it is their own δέϊπνον. The apostle is offended by the behaviour (disorderly

manners) and decorum which marked the Lord's Supper of the Christian community. These were common problems of *symposia*, *convivia* or *eranos* dinner parties. The disorder at Corinth seems fairly common to the real nature of such occasions. (3) Paul's main concern in 1 Cor. 10-14 is the necessity of a better behaviour and decorum in the Christian gatherings. Paul, like Plutarch, is concerned that these gatherings exhibit such qualities as moderation, real Christian fellowship, order and decorum. (4) Paul's comments that some are drunk seems to be a note of realism, normal of Graeco-Roman *symposia* or *eranos* dinners. (5) We have also observed that the δείπνον is clearly set at the beginning, and. . . concludes (μετὰ τὸ δείπνον, 1 Cor. 11:25) with a ceremony involving wine. This was also a common pattern in the Graeco-Roman *symposia* or *eranos* dinner parties.

It could be debated whether in 1 Cor. 11:23 Paul interprets the tradition he handed down to the Corinthians as a direct revelation from the Lord. When Paul says that he gets it "from the Lord," he is not claiming special divine revelation given to him. We believe that Paul is alluding to a tradition that was prevailing in the early church. He had heard about it before coming to the Corinthians. Where did Paul hear about this tradition? The argument is that there are three possible places: Antioch, Damascus, or Jerusalem. It has been argued that the churches at Antioch and Damascus were founded by Christians from Jerusalem; therefore, Jerusalem was the place where Paul heard about the tradition; this is debatable.

Furthermore, it is highly probable that Damascus (although it was founded by Christians from the Jerusalem Church) was the place where the converted Saul (Paul) was received into the Christian community. Since he was baptized there, it is also possible that he first came to know about the Eucharistic meal of the Christian church

there. Thus, in tracing Paul's formula about the Last Supper back to the Primitive Church, one can develop a sense of assurance in the historical value of Paul's Lord's Supper account.

In contrast, the cult banquet was precisely that. The food had been offered to the god. The believer's Supper, on the other hand, celebrates a sacrifice, or more precisely, a death. It is eaten in memory of Jesus' death and in gratitude for its benefits. Paul never uses the word sacrifice (θυσία) to refer to the Supper. It is not eaten in a shrine or a temple before an image, but in a meeting, an ἐκκλησία. It is not eaten by worshippers participating in a cult, but by believers getting together in one another's homes. Therefore, whenever the believers met together as a community and participated in eating and drinking the bread and wine, the Christians proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus and looked forward to the Messianic feast.

Paul's emphasis on eschatology is clear, and the eschatological nature is not removed from the Lord's Supper. In an unmistakably theological argument, Paul, after learning that some church members at Corinth were denying the resurrection as he had taught it to them, deals with the resurrection topic in a very lengthy manner. He reviews the message of the Gospel tradition and shows the Corinthians how necessary the resurrection is to that preaching tradition. He also is reminding them of what they should never have forgotten. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve" (1 Cor. 15:3-5). So, what was in question was not Christ's resurrection, but the resurrection of the believers. Paul's message to

the Corinthians is that "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20f).

Nevertheless, it was in the Church at Corinth that the dilemma of the state of the dead evidently most forcibly appeared as one of the main issues, and the manner in which the apostle dealt with it there shows his theological view on the resurrection. Paul's emphasis is on the one present, the exalted Lord, who is the one to come. When the believers partake of the Lord's Supper, they look backward to the crucifixion and forward to the return. But at the parousia of the Lord, the Lord's Supper will come to an end, for the celebration of the absent Lord ceases when the absent Lord comes back.

Marxsen argues that the Christological explanation of the Lord's Supper by Paul cannot be taken back to the historical Jesus. He further argues that the idea that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the eve of his death poses many problems. Furthermore, Marxsen's contention is that we cannot go back to the historical Jesus in order to trace the Lord's Supper tradition.

However, Paul makes himself clear when he says that the tradition, as in 1 Cor. 15:3f, and 1 Cor. 11:23, is from the gospel tradition ἀπό τοῦ κυρίου. Then, in all probability, Paul's gospel tradition was the same tradition as that of the Palestinian *Urgemeinde*. The early Christian church worshipped Jesus as the exalted Lord and Messiah, and in this Christian confession of Jesus as Lord we find the essential elements of all later Christology, including Paul's own Christological view.

Marxsen's contention is not only with the historical aspect of the Lord's Supper, but also that the Christological nature of the Lord's Supper is based upon what happened at Easter and in the light of Easter. In other words, what happened before Easter does not have any historical value. It now appears that Paul's Christological conception of the Lord's Supper is less ambiguous than it seemed at the beginning.

It should be recognised that Paul takes the early church's idea of the Lord's Supper as an expectation of the table-fellowship with the Lord at the Messianic banquet, and from this conception Paul explains the word of Jesus at the meal about eating and drinking his body and blood. Moreover, Paul speaks of the table (τράπεζα) of the Lord and the table (τράπεζα) of demons. Though the idea of table was an accepted designation for the sacrificial altar, there is a logical sense in which the Supper of the Lord is a sacrificial meal, a memorial of the Lord's sacrificial death.

It may be concluded in this study that, the analysis of the social conflict in 1 Corinthians should not be restricted to a single method of study. The new insights gained from the sociological approach ought to be welcomed with enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the idea that all the issues are socially represented is another way of oversimplification, identical to the earlier theological way of oversimplification of the problem.

As it has been suggested, the conflict at the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian Church is primarily the problem of some of the members' difficulty in adapting themselves to their new social and religious community. They behaved as any normal citizen of the society of the Graeco-Roman World. The socio-economic and cultural issues are involved in the conflict, but the dilemma of the meat offered to the idols in

the pagan temple is religious, and the issue in regard to the resurrection of the dead is essentially theological.

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