

In the thinking of Paul in I Corinthians 11, the Eucharist may be described as a process of identification. As Christians participate in the Eucharist, differences of time and space between Christ's crucifixion and the sacramental act disappear. In the latter, Christians identify with Christ and perceive themselves as dying with him on the cross.

The Eucharist

*Identifying with Christ on the Cross**

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IT MAY BE DISAPPOINTING to say so, but the sacraments are of no central theological interest in Paul's thought. During his first mission in Corinth, Paul did not consider baptizing to be his main task: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel" (I Cor. 1:16-17). In the Pauline writings, neither of the two sacraments rises to a level where it is treated as a theological topic that is interesting for its own sake—not even here in I Corinthians 11, where Paul does not set forth a "theology of the Eucharist" but instead presupposes a certain theological concept about the Lord's Supper that he does not develop. The main focus in I Corinthians 11 is Corinthian conduct that called for correction. Often, Paul talks about the sacraments only when urged to correct misconduct in his congregations. He deals with Baptism and the Eucharist predominantly in ethical contexts (I Cor. 6:8-11; 12:13; 20-26; 10:1-22; Rom. 6:1-6, 11-13). Let us look closely at I Corinthians 11:17-34.

*This essay is in honor of Professor Hans-Friedrich Weiss of Rostock, Germany, who will celebrate his sixty-fifth birthday this year.

The Corinthian Eucharist—What Took Place?

The Corinthian Christians came together on Sunday (or Saturday) evenings to celebrate the Eucharist *and* to have a nourishing dinner (*deipnon*).¹ Until the middle of the second century,² the churches celebrated the Lord's Supper in combination with a meal. What went wrong in Corinth? Some Corinthians ate a great deal and even got drunk; others, however, remained hungry.

The pre-Pauline eucharistic tradition in 11:23–25 describes a three-step sequence of events. First, the eucharistic bread is blessed and broken. Then, a nourishing dinner takes place. Finally, the dinner ends with the blessing of the cup and the drinking from it. As has been shown by Gerd Theissen and others, there is no reason to assume that the Corinthians' eucharistic praxis differed from this sequence.³ What went wrong in Corinth is that the dinner between the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the cup did not satisfy everybody. Why was this?

By our standards, it is easy to condemn the Corinthians for being inconsiderate. Only if we understand their gentile cultural context will we avoid premature judgments and comprehend what took place during the Corinthian dinner parties. How was a pagan Greco-Roman dinner party of the first century C.E. celebrated (see left side of table below)?

| TABLE | |
|---|--|
| The Greco-Roman Dinner Party (Dinner + Symposium/Eranos) | The Corinthian Eucharistic "Potluck Dinner" (Eranos) |
| Dinner at "First Tables" | The richer Corinthians eat "early" (v. 21) |
| Break | |
| Start of the "Second Tables": 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, perhaps the worship activities of I Cor. 12, 14 (esp. 14:26–32): singing, teach- ing, prophesying, glossolalia (with trans- lations), no orderly sequence |

After a bath in the afternoon at the eighth hour of the day,⁴ guests met for dinner in the host's house, usually at the ninth hour.⁵ During the dinner they

reclined at the so-called “First Tables,” and several courses were served. Afterwards a symposium at “Second Tables” might take place.⁶

Religious ceremonies accompanied even the regular, noncultic dinner party. The dinner at “First Tables” began with an invocation of the gods.⁷ After the dinner there was a pause, and new guests could arrive. The house gods and the geniuses of the host and the emperor were invoked and a sacrifice was given.⁸ Guests reclined again and ate and drank at the “Second Tables”; often, not only sweet desserts and fruit but also spicy dishes, seafood, and bread were served.⁹ The Second Tables ended with a toast for the good spirit of the house. The tables were removed and the floor swept. In a jug, wine and water were mixed, and a libation to a god was poured out while a religious song was sung.¹⁰ Slaves poured the wine from the jug into the participants’ cups.¹¹ Whenever the jug was empty, a new one was mixed, another libation to a god was offered, and people continued drinking, conversing, and entertaining themselves. This could continue till dawn.

For these gentiles, religious features at a dinner party were normal. Therefore, gentile Christians had opportunity to compare their eucharistic dinner with aspects of the pagan dinner party. Both the First and Second Tables began with a short religious ceremony; so did the eucharistic dinner, which commenced with the blessing and the breaking of the bread. The eucharistic cup after dinner could have been construed as parallel to the mixing of the first jug of wine. Both indicated eating was now over, and both were accompanied by a religious ritual, either by a blessing (I Cor. 10:16) or a libation.

Why did some remain hungry in Corinth while others were well fed and even got drunk (v. 21)? We need to interpret especially 11:21, where Paul reproaches the well-to-do¹² Corinthians for eating their “own dinner” beforehand, before the others of lower social strata arrived (cf. also v. 33), that is, before the eucharistic meal with the bread blessing and the cup took place. What did Paul mean when he says that the richer Corinthians “began prematurely” (*prolambanein*) their “own dinner” (*idion deipnon*)?¹³

In the past, one custom parallel to the Corinthians’ “own dinner” (*idion deipnon*) has been overlooked, the Greco-Roman *eranos*. In line with this, each Corinthian Christian brought his or her own food basket to the communal meal of the Eucharist. *Eranos* can be roughly translated as “potluck dinner,” although “potluck” is more narrowly defined as a meal where all the food brought by the participants is shared on a common table. The *eranos* has a broader definition. Like a picnic, it could be practiced in two ways. Either each participant ate his or her own food, brought along in a basket, or all of the provisions were put on a common table, as is done at a potluck dinner.

The *eranos* custom can be traced all the way back to Homer’s time; in the second century C.E. it still existed (Athenaios, Aelius Aristides, Lucian).¹⁴ The

guests either brought their contributions as money or as meals in baskets. Aristophanes nicely describes this custom: “Come at once to dinner,” invites a messenger, “and bring your pitcher and your supper chest” (*Acharnenses* 1085–1149). The hosts provided wreaths, perfumes, and sweets, while the guests brought their own food, which was cooked in the host’s house. The guests packed fish, several kinds of meat, and baked goods in their food baskets before they left home. Xenophon, for example, describes how the participants at a dinner party brought *opson* (e.g., fish and meat).

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 (*Memorabilia* 3.14.1).

Here we have a close parallel to the Corinthian situation. Both Socrates and Paul tried to protect the *eranos* custom from abuse: It was not to lead some to gorge themselves while others remained hungry.

Not only could everyday dinner parties be organized as an *eranos* but also cultic meals, such as the sacrificial meal of the Sarapis cult in the second century C.E. (Aelius Aristides, *Sarapis* 54.20–28, ed. Dindorf). Sarapis was considered present at the table both as guest and host. The participants at the sacrificial meal contributed food. Sarapis received these contributions and served them out to all who were present—a close parallel to the Eucharist.

In the light of the Greco-Roman potluck custom, I suggest that the Christian situation at Corinth be construed in the following manner. Each Corinthian celebrating the eucharistic dinner party according to the *eranos* custom brought his or her own food, but some came early and began eating before the others arrived. Some of the latecomers either had no time or no money to prepare sufficient food baskets for themselves. Because of this, they remained hungry, for when *they* arrived, those who had brought enough for themselves had already eaten most of their own food and thus could no longer share it.

For Paul, the Corinthian *eranos* had become a social problem for three reasons. First, the self-prepared food portions apparently were of different sizes and qualities, as at Socrates’s dinner party. Second, there was no common starting point. Some began *before* everybody had gathered and the eucharistic ritual could take place. And third, as J. Murphy O’Connor points out, for the latecomers there was probably no room anymore in the *triclinium*, which was the dining room where usually no more than twelve could recline.¹⁵ The latecomers had to sit in the atrium or in the peristyle, which was another disadvantage.

One point needs to be analyzed further if we are to understand the behav-

ior of the richer Corinthians. So far they seem inconsiderate to us for not waiting, eating before the others arrive. Can their "premature beginning" (*prolambanein*) be interpreted in light of Greco-Roman meal customs? In the letter with questions addressed to Paul (cf. I Cor. 7; 8—10; 12—14; 16:1—4), no mention is made of eucharistic praxis. Apparently, the richer Corinthians did not perceive their behavior as a problem and had no guilty consciences when they began eating before the others. How was this possible?

Their behavior becomes more intelligible if we recall the Greco-Roman distinction between First Tables and Second Tables. In all likelihood, the richer Corinthians understood their eating early after the analogy of a dinner at First Tables. In the break between the First and Second Tables, other Corinthian Christians of lower social strata would arrive. This was nothing extraordinary for gentile Christians. In their pagan context, new guests could be expected to arrive for the Second Tables. It was common custom to drop by a friend's house part of the evening for the symposium.¹⁶ And nobody at a Greco-Roman dinner party was concerned about whether or not the newcomers had had enough to eat earlier.

Here is a Greco-Roman cultural setting that explains the Corinthians' behavior. The richer Corinthians seem to have interpreted the beginning of the sacramental, eucharistic meal by analogy to the beginning of the pagan Second Tables. This was easy to do because the pagan Second Tables also began with religious acclamations and sacrificial rites. For example, a libation for the emperor was poured out;¹⁷ the Christian breaking and blessing of the bread replaced this aspect of the imperial cult.

The Second Tables could also have been viewed as analogies by the richer Corinthians because they ended with a toast to the good spirit of the house and with the mixing of the first jug of wine; similarly, the eucharistic meal ended with the eucharistic cup. The blessing of the eucharistic cup was analogous to the singing and the libation that accompanied the mixing of the first jug.

It was furthermore easy to interpret the sacramental, eucharistic meal analogously to the Second Tables of a Greco-Roman dinner party because, as we noted earlier, more than just sweet desserts and fruit were often served at the Second Tables. Spicy dishes, seafood, meat, vegetables, and bread were eaten as well.¹⁸

Looking back at the Corinthian scenario, one can see that the inconsiderate behavior of the richer Corinthians was the result of their unreflected prolongation of their prebaptismal behavior. They continued a Greco-Roman meal custom by dividing the evening into First and Second Tables, which led to problems in their church.

At other places in the first letter to the Corinthians, too, we encounter the more or less unreflected prolongation of prebaptismal behavior. Not only did

the Greeks love to go to trial and to sue one another (cf. I Cor. 6:1–11), but they also culturally accepted visiting a courtesan (cf. I Cor. 6:12–20). In an environment where the women had free choice in this matter, the Corinthian Christian ladies did not veil themselves (I Cor. 11).¹⁹ Paul, who was accustomed to seeing veiled women in Tarsus, Syria, and Arabia, may have sustained a cultural shock when he came to Greece. Eating idol meat (I Cor. 8–10) was culturally accepted everywhere in the Greco-Roman world; only the Jews objected. The Corinthians' orientation toward not the crucified but the risen and victoriously reigning Lord may have been rooted in the Greco-Roman veneration of heroes. Just as Hercules and other heroes had victoriously overcome difficult challenges, so Christ, in the eyes of the Corinthians, had overcome the cross and left it behind; for present Christian existence, the cross was of little relevance (4:8). These examples show that not all the characteristics of the Corinthian Christians need to be interpreted in terms of a particular *theological* background, as has been done in the past. Often, the Corinthian Christians simply continued to be a part of the Greco-Roman culture to which they belonged before their baptism. Only slowly did they realize that the church was a new cultural setting where new customs and habits needed to be developed in some areas.

The Corinthian Praxis Needed to be Corrected

Paul criticizes the “premature beginning” (*prolambanein*) of any dinner. As a Jewish Christian used to the Jewish festive meal²⁰ and to the pre-Pauline eucharistic tradition (11:23–25), he adheres to the three steps: the blessing of the bread, a nourishing meal, and the blessing of the cup. No dinner activities should take place *before* the eucharistic meal (11:21), which begins with the blessing of the bread. Before they unpack their food baskets, the richer Corinthians are to wait for the others (11:33). As “Christian culture” on Sunday (or Saturday) evenings, Paul suggests the following:

Waiting for one another.

Blessing of the bread.

Eucharistic potluck dinner that nourishes everybody (*eranos*).

Blessing of the cup.

Drinking, and maybe the worship activities of I Corinthians 14:26–32.

Verses 22 and 34 are disputed: “Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” “If anyone is hungry, let this one eat at home.” Some commentators conclude from these verses that Paul wanted only bread and wine to be served at the eucharistic meal and did not want the Corinthians to have a complete meal between the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the cup.²¹ If we accept this interpretation, Paul could be accused of being cynical: While the richer

Corinthian Christians could have been expected to gormandize at home but not to share with the hungry ones, the latter would have been given only bread and wine during the congregational meeting. If this were Paul's advice, then he himself would have "humiliated the have-nots" (11:22), contradicting himself.

That Paul wanted the Corinthians to have a nourishing meal not only at home but also during the congregational meeting is suggested by 11:33. In fact, the Greek term for "dinner" (*deipnon*, 11:20, 25) that Paul uses to refer to the eucharistic meal never means just dry bread; it always includes several foods that were eaten *with* the bread. The blessing of the bread implied the blessing of all foods on the table.²² For this reason, the eucharistic tradition in 11:23–25 speaks only of the blessing of bread and nothing else. These verses do not prove that only bread was served during the eucharistic meal.

Verse 34, "If anyone is hungry, let this one eat at home," must be interpreted in terms of its context, verse 33. Here Paul exhorts the Corinthians to wait for one another. For some, this waiting may have been difficult, especially if they had visited the thermal baths, as was frequently done before a Greco-Roman dinner party. In verses 34 and 22 Paul advises: If you have difficulty waiting because you are hungry, then eat something at home before you go to the congregational meeting. But once you are there, wait before unpacking your food basket until all fellow Christians have arrived.

If everyone was to wait before unpacking his or her own food basket, it stands to reason that the contents of these would have been shared on common platters. Otherwise the waiting, which is supposed to prevent some from remaining hungry, would be senseless.

Paul's practical advice thus aims in the same direction as Socrates's actions described by Xenophon: An *eranos* only becomes a truly communal meal once the foods brought by the participants are shared. And only that can be shared which has not been eaten beforehand.

The Theological Concept Behind the Suggested Eucharistic Praxis

Paul's exhortations advocate a socially oriented behavior that builds up the community. How does Paul endorse the exhortations theologically? The starting point of Paul's theological argumentation is the eucharistic tradition he quotes in 11:23–25. In verse 26 he sums up this tradition in his own words: "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

The Eucharistic Tradition of 11:23–25 Compared with 10:16; 11:27

There is no doubt that, for Paul and the Corinthians, the risen Lord Jesus

Christ, with his saving power, was personally present at the Eucharist as the host of the ritual. Looking at the example of the Sarapis cult, we have already seen that similar concepts existed in the cultural environment. Paul himself does not shrink from drawing a parallel between the Lord's Supper and pagan cultic sacrificial meals (I Cor. 10:18–22). The risen Lord is present; his saving power is inherent in the sacramental act (I Cor. 15:29; 10:1–13).²³ In this sense, the early Pauline Christians were “sacramentalists.”

This sacramentalism, however, does not imply an automatism, as the apostle must convince the Corinthians. The sacraments do not exclude the possibility that those who participate in them, but do not exhibit a corresponding behavior, can “fall” again (10:2–5, 12). The sacramental ritual does not safeguard *ex opere operato*. Because of his death on the cross, the Lord himself, not the ritual, saves. Later, we shall elaborate on the Pauline idea that in the Eucharist the risen Lord is present not only with his saving power but also as judge (11:27–32), a concept that excludes up front any safeguarding automatism that might be construed in connection with the sacraments (10:1–13).

Whether Paul and the Corinthians also believed in a real presence of the Lord *in the elements* of bread and wine (cf. John 6:52–58) is another and exegetically controversial question. In any case, such an assumption cannot be based on I Corinthians 11:23–25. The cup or the wine is *not* equated with Christ's blood. The cup signifies the new *covenant* that was established *because* of Christ's blood on the cross. In a similar way, the expression “This is my body for you” does not necessarily refer to the bread. It is also possible that the demonstrative pronoun “this” picks up on the liturgical act of blessing and breaking the bread (11:24): This act signifies “my body (broken) for you”;²⁴ this act points to Jesus' body on the cross and to his death on the cross. The formulation “do this in remembrance of me” (11:24) supports the reading that, not the element of the bread, but the liturgical *act* of blessing and breaking the bread is what is interpreted in 11:24.

Is the idea of a real presence of the Lord *in the elements* implied in I Corinthians 10:16 (cf. 11:27), where cup/blood and bread/body are made parallel? Does this parallelism mean that Christ's body was considered to be consumed in the eucharistic elements? The texts are open for alternative readings, and the ambiguity of the texts should alert us to the fact that *our* dogmatic questions about the Eucharist are not the ones the New Testament Christians considered important. For Paul, the ethical implications of the Eucharist were far more vital than the later intricate theological discussions of *how* Christ might be present in the Lord's Supper. The fact *that* Christ is present matters for Paul; and the *function* in which Christ is present (saving *and* judging) is of importance, as we shall see later.

In 10:16 the expression *koinonia tinos* can be rendered as either “community with” or “sharing in” the Lord's body and blood. Can the context help us choose? In

10:20 *koinonoi tinos* denotes “people who are *in community with* the demons” as their partners, because they participate in the sacrifices offered to the demons. Analogously, 10:16 seems to suggest that the participants in the Eucharist are put into a close “community with” Christ’s body and blood, that is, with the dying Christ on the cross: In the sacrament, they die with him (Rom. 6:3–8). Christ’s presence *in the elements* is not indicated by this understanding. Also, it cannot be insinuated by the expression “partaking of” (*meteicho*, 10:17, 21): Paul speaks of “partaking of the one bread” and “of the table of the Lord”; he does not signal that Christ’s body is eaten in the eucharistic elements. Note that 10:16 does *not* read: “The cup, is it not the blood of Christ? The bread, is it not the body of Christ?”

Paul’s Summary of the Eucharistic Tradition (11:26) and Its Application

In 11:26 the apostle sums up the pre-Pauline eucharistic tradition in his own interpretive words: Whenever the Christians perform the liturgical acts of eating and drinking, they “proclaim” Christ’s death. Both of these sacramental acts represent Christ’s death for us. They make this death *present* for Christians. During the Eucharist, accompanying words may fulfill the same function; verse 26, however, focuses on the liturgical acts themselves, through which Christ’s death is proclaimed.

Here is where the puzzling theological problem of the text presents itself. What does the proclamation of Christ’s death have to do with the exhortations Paul has given? The eucharistic sacrament represents Christ’s saving death and makes it present among us. But how does Paul conclude from this that the participants in the Eucharist have to behave in a thoughtful and loving way? What is the connection that Paul makes between the sacramental proclamation of Christ’s death and ethics? This is not only the central theological question of the text; it is also the most difficult one, because Paul does not describe this bridge between sacrament and ethics. For an answer, we have to look at parallel Pauline texts.

The first possible connection is based on I Corinthians 8:11. Christ died also for the weak ones; therefore, the strong Christians in Corinth are not allowed to look down on or to offend the weak fellow Christians. This is the message of chapter 8. Accordingly, we may formulate the message of chapter 11 as follows: In the Eucharist, the salvation of Christ’s death on the cross is made present, and this salvation is not only for the richer Christians in Corinth but also for the poorer ones. Therefore the richer ones should not humiliate the poorer ones (11:22). In this way, 8:11 helps to link sacrament to ethics.

Two other connections are possible. The second one is based on Philippians 2. In the Eucharist, Christ’s death is made present among us. This death, however, stands for Christ’s self-denial (Phil. 2:7–8). “Christ *emptied* himself, taking

the form of a servant . . . and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." In other words, in the Eucharist, Christ's self-denial for the benefit of others is made present among us. How, then, can the richer Christians ignore the hunger of the poorer ones in an egocentric way? In view of Christ's cross, where Christ "emptied himself" for others, and in view of this death made *present* in the sacrament, Paul exhorts: Let each of you look not only to his or her own interests but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4).

A third possible connection between the sacramental representation of Christ's death and ethics is based on Romans 6:2–8. The sacramental representation of Christ's death means that Christians *die* with Christ in the sacrament. Romans 6 formulates this in view of Baptism, but it also holds true for the Eucharist (cf. I Cor. 10:16). In the Eucharist a close relationship is established between us and Christ's body on the cross, that is, a close relationship between us and Christ's suffering on the cross. In the sacrament we die *with* Christ. For Paul, this close relationship, this communion with the crucified Christ, means that he represents Christ's death and cross in his own life, carrying in his own body the death of Jesus (II Cor. 4:10). Such a cross-existence includes self-denial and active love for others (II Cor. 4:15; 4:12; I Cor. 4:11–13, etc.), which completes the third connection between the sacramental representation of Christ's death and our Christian behavior.

These three connections are not mutually exclusive. They illuminate different aspects of the same thing, that is, Christ's loving and self-denying death on the cross, made present in the Eucharist, leads directly to corresponding behavior of those who participate in the Eucharist. This close connection between sacraments and ethics is typical of Paul and clearly evident here in I Corinthians 11, the primary eucharistic text in Paul.²⁵

What, then, does it mean to "proclaim" Christ's death in the Eucharist? In the Eucharist, the death of Jesus Christ is not made present and "proclaimed" (11:26) only by the *sacramental acts* of breaking bread and of drinking wine from one cup. In the Eucharist, Christ's death is not proclaimed only by the liturgical *words* that accompany the sacramental acts. No, in the Eucharist, Christ's death is also proclaimed and made present by means of our giving ourselves up to others. Our love for others represents Christ's death to other human beings. Only by actively loving and caring for others does the participant in the Eucharist "proclaim" Christ's death as something that happened for others.

The Corinthians, forgetting care for others, were interested solely in the vertical communion with the risen Lord. Paul, however, says that one can only have a close relationship with the risen Lord by realizing that this Lord is at the same time the *crucified* Lord (I Cor. 2:2). As long as the Eschaton has not yet come (11:26), the communion with the risen Lord is feasible only as a close contact with the *crucified* Christ and with his abounding love for others made manifest in

his sufferings on the cross. By sharing in this cross-existence and in this love, Christians are led to care for others, proclaiming Christ's death in their existence.

Those whose behavior does not correspond to Christ's death for others eat the sacrament in an unworthy way (I Cor. 11:27), and the Lord judges and punishes them by making them physically weak and sick and by letting them die early (11:30). These Christians, having been punished already, escape the eschatological damnation in the final judgment (11:32; cf. 5:5; 3:15).

As strange as this little speech in 11:29–32 about the judging Lord may seem to us, it is theologically important. The Lord who is present at the Eucharist with his saving power is at the same time a *judging* Lord. That means that Christ's presence in the Eucharist is not at our disposal. Paul destroys the Corinthians' false sacramental security (cf. also I Cor. 10:1–13). Christ remains the sovereign Lord of the Eucharist whose freedom is not curtailed by any sacramental *ex opere operato* automatism. The Lord is not domesticated in human sacramental acts. On the contrary, not the Lord but the human being and human behavior are seized and impounded in the Eucharist and are thus under Christ's reign—and judgment. While the sovereign Lord commits himself to the Eucharist, he also commits *us*, engages *us*, and obliges *our* behavior.

To sum up, the presence of the risen Lord in the Eucharist is specified by Paul in two ways: One only develops close contact with the risen Christ if one enters into communion with his death on the cross; and the risen Christ, with his saving power, is also a judging Lord to whose reign the eucharistic participant is subjected. Both specifications engage the Christians in their moral responsibilities, and this explains why Paul establishes such a close connection between sacraments and ethics in his epistles.

Sacrament as Identification

If it is legitimate to interpret the baptismal text of Romans 6 and the eucharistic text of I Corinthians 11 in the same light, as we did when illustrating our third connection, then both sacraments can be described as identification processes. The time and space differences between Christ's crucifixion and the sacramental act become irrelevant, and the past event of the crucifixion is made synchronous with the sacrament. It is made "present." The Christian participants in the sacraments identify with the dying Christ on the cross: They perceive themselves as dying with Christ on the cross.

To perceive oneself synchronous with Christ on the cross in the sacrament may seem less strange for a Hebrew mind than for ours. The past event of rescuing the Israelites from Egypt has always been present in such a way that each generation of Israelites could identify with the exodus generation. Cer-

tainly, the past event of Christ's death is not *repeated* in the sacramental act; Christ died "once for all" (Rom. 6:10). But in the sacraments Christians are drawn into the past event of Christ's death.

On the one hand, this death "with Christ" might be understood in the framework of "corporate representation." The context of Romans 6 talks about the Adam-Christ-typology. Both Adam and Christ embody whole groups; each one of them represents many people, and the act of each determines the destiny of the many (Rom. 5:12–19). The death of Christ, thus, is the Christians' death. "One has died for all; therefore all have died" (II Cor. 5:14).

"Representation," however, is not enough if we want to understand the Pauline "dying with Christ." The second category we need for understanding is "imitation." Christ's death does not only "count" as ours. There is more to it. Christ's death is actually echoed in the Christian's own afflictions:

I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body (Gal. 6:17). We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Rom. 8:17). As the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ (II Cor. 1:5; cf. 1:8–11). We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed . . . , always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh (II Cor. 4:8–11). I want to know Christ . . . and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death (Phil. 3:10; cf., e.g., II Cor. 13:4; Gal. 2:19).

These formulations help to show that "dying with Christ" includes real existential consequences; and some of these consequences are behavioral in nature:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24; cf. Rom. 13:14). . . . the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal. 6:14). Christ's self-denial and obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8) are supposed to be reproduced in the Christian's behavior (2:5; cf. II Cor. 8:7–9).

Where are the roots for this concept of an identification process between Christ on the cross and Christians? For a long time it was assumed that the mystery religions furnished the categories Paul is using. However, the concept of dying and rising with a god is less well documented for the Hellenistic mystery religions than New Testament exegetes have often thought.²⁶ Apart from the biased accounts of the early church, our knowledge about the mystery religions is very restricted, and the degree of influence that mystery-religion concepts or language might have exercised on early Christian theology is an open question today.

Paul's concept of Christian cross-existence is a variant of the broader early Christian idea of imitating Jesus as his disciple,²⁷ which, without doubt, has some of its roots in the self-understanding of the preresurrection followers of the

historical Jesus. Here, in the early Christian concept of imitating Jesus, we find the most likely background for the identification process, as it is presupposed for the sacraments, between Christ on the cross and Christians.

NOTES

1. *Deipnon* (11:20, 21, 25) is the evening dinner. Cf. also "in the night" in 11:23. For Sunday or Saturday evenings, cf. I Cor. 16:2 with Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10; Ignatius *Magnesian* 9:1; Didache 14:1; Barnabas 15:9.

2. See Peter Lampe, "Das korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellinistisch-romischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1 Kor 11,17-34)," *ZNW* 82 (1991), 184, n. 4.

3. See Gerd Theissen, "Soziale Integration und sakramentales Handeln," *NT* 16 (1974), 187-88, and the discussion of literature by Lampe in note 2, p. 184, n. 4.

4. See, e.g., Martial *Epigrammata* 11.52, 10.48; Plato *Symposium* 174 A.

5. See, e.g., Cicero *Ad Familiares* 9.26.1; Horace *Epistulae* 1.7.71; Martial *Epigrammata* 4.8.6, cf. 10.48, 11.52; eighth or ninth hour: *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 110,2678 (3rd century C.E.), 2791 (2nd century C.E.).

6. For information on the Greco-Roman dinner party, cf., e.g., *Paulys Realencyclopaedie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (hereinafter *RE*) III/2 (1899), 1895-97; IV/1 (1900), 1201-08; IV/1 (1900), 610-19; IV/A,1 (1931), 1266-70; D. E. Smith, *Social Obligation in the Context of Communal Meals: A Study of the Christian Meal in 1 Corinthians in Comparison with Greco-Roman Communal Meals*, Th.D. Diss., Harvard 1980, pp. 5-32.

7. Quintilian *Declamationes* 301, ed. Ritter, p. 187.

8. Horace *Carmina* 4.5.31-32; Servius *Aeneis* 1.730; Petronius *Satyrica* 60; Dio Cassius *Historiae* 51.19.7; *Acta Fratrum Arvalium*, ed. W. Henzen, 15, 42-43.

9. See, e.g., Gellius *Noctes Atticae* 13.11.6-7; Athenaios *Deipnosophistae* 3.109 DE, 4.129, 14.639 B-643 D, esp. 640 B-F, 641 BCF, 642 ADEF, 643 A-D.

10. Cf. *RE* IV/1 (1900), 611. Libation and singing belong together; the song was probably of religious content, Plato *Symposium* 176 A; Xenophon *Symposium* 2.1; Plutarch *Quaestiones convivales* 7.8 (713 A), 1.1 (615 B).

11. Cf. *RE* IV/1 (1900), 612.

12. See Theissen, "Soziale Integration," pp. 182-83, 185-86, and H.-J. Klauck, *Herrenmahl und hellenistischer Kult* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1982), p. 293. The ones who "prematurely begin their own dinner" (v. 21) probably own houses (v. 22); they have enough time in the afternoons, while the others are still busy at work.

13. Some have tried to translate *prolambanein* simply as "to eat" without any temporal sense. But this understanding is based on a single inscription only (SIG³ 1170) where *prolambanein* may even have been confused by the stonemason with *proslambanein*.

14. See Lampe, "Das korinthische Herrenmahl," pp. 192-203; and cf. Homer *Odyssey* 1.226-27 with (schol.) 11.414-15; Hesiod *Opera et dies* 722-23; Aristophanes *Acharnenses* 1085-1149; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.14.1 and *Symposium* 1.11; Athenaios *Deipnosophistae* 8.365 AB; Aelius Aristides *Sarapis* 54.20-28 (ed. Dindorf); Lucian *Lexiphanes* 6, 9, 13; also *RE* XI/1 (1921), 948, 957; VI/1 (1907), 328; IV/1 (1900), 1201-02; III/A,2 (1929), 1891-92; IV/A,1 (1931), 1090. Often the same people repeated *eranos* dinner parties, i.e., a dinner club came into existence. Cf., e.g., Aristotle *Ethica Nicomachea* 1160a.20 (*eranos* = dinner club) and *RE* VI/1 (1907), 330; *ILS* 7212.

15. *St. Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), pp. 158-59.

16. Cf. Zenobius *Epitome* 2.46, ed. Leutsch-Schneidewin; Plato *Symposium* 212 CD, 223 B; Lucian *Lexiphanes* 9, 13; Athenaios *Deipnosophistae* 5.180 A; and *RE* IV/1 (1900), 618–19.

17. Horace *Carmina* 4.5.31–32; Petronius *Satyrica* 60; Dio Cassius *Historiae* 51.19.7.

18. See note 9 above.

19. Cf. C. L. Thompson, "Hairstyles, Head-coverings, and St. Paul: Portraits from Roman Corinth," *BA* 51 (1988), 99–115.

20. The Jewish daily meal was framed by an introductory prayer (praise while the bread was broken) and a final thanksgiving prayer. To the Jewish festive meal wine was added; each cup, especially the last one, was accompanied by a blessing. In this way, bread and wine framed the Jewish festive meal. Cf. Klauck, *Herrenmahl*, pp. 66–67, 91, 203–04.

21. E.g., Theissen, "Soziale Integration," pp. 191–92; Klauck, *Herrenmahl*, pp. 294, 371.

22. This was also true for the Jewish understanding: *Mishna Berakhot* 6:4 and 6:5 C; cf. T. Zahavy, *The Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers: Tractate Berakhot*, Brown Judaic Studies 88 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 84–85.

23. Cf. also the formulations that in baptism "we were all made to drink of one Spirit" and that "spiritual food" and "spiritual drink" are consumed at the Eucharist (I Cor. 12:13; 10:3–4).

24. "This *is*" can be interpreted as "this means"; see, e.g., the allegorical equations of Gal. 4:24; Mark 4:15–16, 18.

25. In the light of the three connections mentioned, the debated verse 11:29 gains clarity. It needs to be paraphrased like this: For anyone who eats and drinks without "judging correctly" and "understanding correctly" (*me diakrinein*, cf. Matt. 16:3) Christ's body on the cross, eats and drinks judgment upon himself or herself. He or she does not realize (a) that this body was also broken for the poorer fellow Christians whose needs therefore cannot be ignored by the richer ones. This is the first connection. He or she does not realize (b) that this body on the cross stands for Christ's self-denial for the benefit of others, which wants to be imitated by us. This is the second connection. And he or she does not realize (c) that the Eucharist establishes a close relationship between this crucified body of Christ and us: We die *with* Christ in the sacrament. We die to sin (Rom. 6:11), and therefore we are set free to love others actively.

26. See, e.g., G. Wagner, *Das religionsgeschichtliche Problem von Roemer 6.1–11*, *ATHANT* 39 (Zürich-Stuttgart: Zwingli Verlag, 1962), esp. 271–306; M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion II*, *HAW* V/2 (München: Beck, 1961), 2nd ed., 622–701.

27. Cf., e.g., I Thess. 1:6; I Cor. 11:1; Rom. 15:2–3, 5, 7; Matt. 10:24–25, 38–39; Mark 8:31–35; 10:39; 14:31; Luke 14:27; 9:23; 22:33; John 11:16; 15:27. Following Jesus and sharing his life also means sharing his sufferings.