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The Eucharist and Community Building in 1 Corinthians 11: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract: George Kudilil first situates the teaching of St Paul in 1 Cor 11:17-34 within the *Sitz im Leben* of the Church in Corinth and shows the unbreakable link between the Eucharistic celebration and community building. Kudilil then compares the socio-religious context of the Indian Church with that of Corinth and applies some of the implications of 1 Cor 11:17-34 to the Church in India. The author challenges the Church to celebrate the Lord's Supper more meaningfully by following the Table Fellowship of Jesus as well as the teaching of St Paul.

Keywords: Eucharist, Lord's supper, church, Pauline Eucharistic theology, casteism, community, Indian Church, community building.

Introduction

During Paul's time, Corinth had grown as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. The boom city of Corinth had its wealth from trade and commerce, which thrived due to its strategic location on the isthmus, between the Saronic Gulf and the Gulf of Corinth, that enabled it to control the ports of Lechaum and Cenchreae. These ports had been gateways of Greece to Asia. A commercial and bureaucratic city, Corinth had attracted people from all walks of life, belonging to diverse confessions and beliefs, as well as races and nations. It offered chances of survival to all

those who tried to seek their luck in the city. Romans, Greeks and Orientals as well as slaves, seafarers, hand workers and many other groups settled in the city. Gradually Corinth developed into a pluralistic city in its fullest sense.

Corinth was the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia at the time of Paul's preaching there. The cultural diversity of the city was remarkable. Gods and goddesses like Poseidon, Artemis, Dionysus, Asclepius, Isis and Serapis had groups of devotees who performed rituals in the temple complexes dedicated to the respective godheads. Mystery cults were popular in Corinth. There were followers of Cynics too because Diogenes and Demetrius, the leading figures of Cynicism, were citizens of Corinth. It had a considerable number of Jews who formed a Jewish colony there and gathered in their own synagogue (Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 281; cf. Acts 18:4). Theatre, sports arena and sacred places dotted the city of Paul's time.

Paul founded one of his beloved communities in Corinth. Most probably Paul came to Corinth in 50 CE after having preached in Greek cities like Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea and Athens. He preached and founded a Christian community there between 50 and 52 CE. Because of his long stay of some eighteen months there, Corinth became a centre of Pauline missionary activity in the Greek world as Ephesus was in Asia Minor. The constitution of the community reflected the social and cultural milieu of Corinth. It had converts from both the Jewish religion and the Gentile population. It might have been first of all proselytes and God-fearers from the Gentiles who embraced the new way preached by Paul (Acts 18:7). The majority of the Pauline community was

Gentile. They had not fully abandoned their former practices. They continued to indulge in idolatry (1 Cor 6:10-11; 8:7; 12:2), enjoyed cultic festival meals in pagan temples (8:1-11:1) and approached pagan judges with their grievances (6:1-6), which a faithful Jew was forbidden to do. Corinthian laxity concerning prostitution and marriage is proverbial and seemingly the Christians also shared this view (6:12-20; 7). There was a strong Jewish minority in the Christian community in Corinth (1:22-24; 7:18; 9:20; 10:32). Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, who was baptized by Paul (1:14; Acts 18:8), was a prominent member of the church. The Corinthian community had members from various economic strata of society too. There were poor and rich members alike. It is possible that some members like Crispus, Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom 16:23) and Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15) were from the upper layer of society.¹ The Corinthian church participated in the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:7-15; 9; Rom 15:31).

The community in Corinth was made up of many house churches. One reason must be the lack of a public building for Christians for worship. The Church was only an emerging phenomenon. Paul mentions the names of the house churches in the household of Stephanas (1 Cor 1:16; 1,15), Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor 16,19), Gaius (Rom 16:23) and Crispus (Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Cor 1:14). The church in Corinth had only fifty to one hundred members.² It is possible that the house churches were formed on the basis of an inner dynamics of allegiance to the four leaders named in 1:11-13 (Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ). Each group had its own identity and the members clung to it to the extent of endangering the unity of the Christian community. A defining factor of adherence to a particular

group was baptism by the respective leader of the group.

1. Conflicts in the Corinthian Community

Now it is unanimously accepted that the church in Corinth was beset with various problems. These problems had not only religious or theological reasons but also cultural and sociological causes. Questions of ethical and history of religions nature also are to be asked in relation to the tensions within the Corinthian community.³ Most probably the problems can be best understood against the Hellenistic background of the Corinthians and in their effort to integrate the newly introduced Christian teachings in their day-to-day life which had been already defined by the cultural and socio-ethical status of the city. Their understanding of the gospel as preached by Paul had to be reconciled with their convictions, practices and traditions, and this process led to tensions, rivalries and conflicts which were both sociological and ideological.

The first problem addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians is factionalism in Corinth (chapters 1-4). One cannot be sure how these four groups arose. The patrons of these groups were not personally involved in strengthening them. We are also not sure whether these groups had adopted the ideas criticized by Paul. It is a matter of conjecture that in the house churches not all the members gathered together but only groups which declared allegiance to a particular leader. As Brown rightly points out, 1 Cor 14:23 envisions the possibility of the whole church coming together.⁴ Undoubtedly, the church in Corinth was embroiled in factional feuds that threatened the unity of the church.

History of religions approach to the ideological problems offers three solutions. 1. The problems are related to an early Jewish wisdom tradition, brought there

and popularized by Apollos. Understanding of 'wisdom' was a matter of contention among the Corinthians. The frequent use of the term '*sophia*' and '*sophos*' in the first three chapters point this out. 2. Gnosticism also could have been behind the Corinthian issue. The Hellenistic idea of 'higher knowledge', which considered 'spiritual existence' to be more desirable, had permeated the Corinthian community and occasioned a discussion on 'what is spiritual'.⁵ It led to an intellectual pride on the part of those possessing 'knowledge' who looked down upon the 'non-spiritual.' Paul's use of the term *pneumatikos*, some 14 times in this letter, and his criticism of their claims argue for it. Was some kind of Gnostic influence at work in Corinth? Paul's reference to 'knowledge' (8:1,7-11; 13:2,8; 14:6) may bear that out, but scholars are not unanimous in acknowledging it in Corinth.⁶ The implications of Gnostic ideology are to be evaluated properly. The so-called Corinthian slogans have a direct reference to Gnosticism. They actually stand for a conviction that whatever is done in the physical body has no absolute value. Such a philosophy may lead to libertinism and disrespect for the others and their values. 3. An influence of Graeco-Roman Philosophy/Rhetoric was behind the fascination for wisdom in Corinth. This is more evident in the four groups in chapters 1-4. Christianity was conceived by them as a philosophical school taught differently by various teachers and hence the various slogans and groups.⁷

The context of 1 Cor is strictly related to the problems that plagued the Corinthian community. In Ephesus Paul received a letter from Corinth (16:8) to which he wanted to write a reply (7:1; 8:1; 11:18; 12:1; 15:12; 16:1,12). From the reply of Paul one can learn that there were

problems in the Corinthian community concerning sexual behaviour, attitude to pagan festive meals, unity of the community, gifts of the Spirit and the destiny of the dead. Among them the crucial problem was that of endangered unity.⁸ Corinthians had not understood the meaning of freedom inherent in the gospel of Jesus (Gal 5:1,13). This freedom liberates one from the fetters of the past and encourages one to live out one's faith in love (Gal 5:6,13). A person who is free is independent of certain things like sin, law, death and alien powers and feels free to certain things like righteousness, conformity to Jesus and suffering. Above all, faith in Christ results in a personal and life-giving experience of liberty.⁹ Lack of this freedom accounted for their factionalism and other problems which Paul wanted to address. Another important reason for the letter was Paul's apostleship and authority as understood by the Corinthians which demanded clarification.

2. The Social Set-up of the Corinthian Church

Deissmann had suggested that Pauline Christianity was more popular among the lower strata of society. In the 20th century, researches showed that the Pauline communities presented a cross-section of society itself. Unlike organizations such as sports clubs or other voluntary unions, Pauline communities welcomed members from all social classes. Perhaps members from the highest and lowest ranks were absent in them.¹⁰ The majority were not rich. They were slaves, daily wage earners, workers at the port and the like. They had to work hard for their living. For them the message of the cross preached by Paul must have been a fascinating invitation to a God in whose presence no human being can boast (1:29). In his presence no one is superior or inferior on the basis of what one

possesses. In the Corinthian community there was also a minority group who were rich and well-to-do (11:21, 34), who had hoarded things or like Gaius who had possessed a house (Rom 16:23).

3. What Does Paul Say in 1 Cor 11:17-34?

Commentators agree that the reconstruction of the practice of Lord's Supper in Corinth is difficult. One can only say that there were divisions in the community. How such divisions arose and why they persisted in the community are not clear. The exact procedure of the meals also is unknown to us. For the church today, the Lord's Supper/Eucharist has a fixed frame of sacramental celebration, and therefore it differs very much from the practice in Corinth. During the time of Paul's writing the Lord's Supper included a festive meal and a celebration of the memorial of Jesus' salvific act, revealed in his passion, death and resurrection, and as commanded in and modelled after the Last Supper. For them it was a cultic ritual as well as an affair of their daily life. This togetherness of faith and life is absent in today's practice and it makes an exact evaluation of the Corinthian practice difficult.

3.1 Abuses at the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)

At the very beginning of the instruction regarding the Lord's Supper, Paul mentions what he has heard about the Corinthian community: When they assemble as a church (*ekklesia*) there are divisions (*schismata*) and factions (*haireseis*) among them. One may doubt whether these divisions were formed because of the four leaders mentioned in 1:10-12. Here what is meant is the formation of groups on the basis of social and economic status.

Paul's intention is to remind the community to serve the unity of the community and thereby be acceptable to God in the judgment. So the behaviour at the Lord's Supper acquires an eschatological quality.¹¹

The issue in Corinth is mentioned in vv. 20-22: "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, 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? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not" (RSV). Here we have the nature of the celebration in Corinth. It comprised both a meal and breaking of bread and wine i.e., a community meal and the sacramental celebration of the memorial of the Lord. The meal was followed with the bread word and ended with cup word. Many exegetes consider this to be the procedure.¹²

The understanding of the verb *prolambanei* is not unanimous. Should it be taken in a temporal sense or not? If temporal, it means that the rich members, who were the hosts of the common meals, have come earlier than the others and begun to eat, thus leaving the late comers hungry and thirsty during the Lord's Supper which followed. Besides, as the houses were not large enough for all the members, the latecomers had to sit in the *atrium* (courtyard) and not in the *triclinium* (dining hall).¹³ Class consciousness must have played a certain role in this practice. That is why the early comers could eat the meal they have brought without any prick of conscience. This behaviour brings drastically to light the cleavage between the rich and the poor in the one and the same community, which is the body of Christ. The celebration itself loses its

harmony, and the division in the community is perpetuated.¹⁴ With sharp sarcasm Paul says that the rich eat their own supper (*to idion deipnon*) and it is not the Lord's Supper (*kyriakon deipnon*) that they have thought to have practised.

It will be an injustice to Paul to conclude on the basis of the questions in v. 22 that he wanted a separation of the meal from the sacrament. The integration of the community will be endangered if the meal had to be conducted in private houses and the sacramental meal in the 'church.' Such a separation is against the spirit of Paul which has been vehemently expressed in 1 Corinthians.

3.2 The Institution of the Lord's Supper (11: 23-26)

It is in this context that Paul narrates the tradition of the institution of Lord's Supper. He has received this tradition and he will deliver this to his audience in Corinth. It is a treasure that must be handed on faithfully (the verbs *paralambano* and *paradidomi* are technical terms for transferring a *paradosis* (tradition)).¹⁵

The tradition makes it clear that Jesus gives himself to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. "It is for you." Likewise the new covenant is ratified in his blood. Body and blood stand for the whole person. That means, Jesus' total sacrifice for his people, of which the last consequence is his death, becomes present in the Lord's Supper.¹⁶ Jesus gives himself to his disciples. Jesus was delivered on a particular night, and it shows that his sacrifice is a historical event and not a fictional narrative.

The Eucharist is also the sign of the new covenant between God and his people; a covenant that is unique, ratified in the death of Jesus, and irreversible. It will be

celebrated by and in the community “until he comes.” It is the only sign of the eternal covenant and is valid till the end of times. As Paul says, it has also a forensic value and hence it acquires an eschatological significance. Besides, it suggests a parousaic experience of Jesus in the community. Therefore factional behaviour of the members in the community is detrimental to the unity of the community and destroys the spirit of Jesus. The questions of Paul in v. 22 acquire their full import in the context of the covenant. In order to add stress to the point Paul introduces his theology of the cross (11:26).

3.3 Partaking of the Supper unworthily (11:27-34)

After having questioned the behaviour of the Corinthians and making them conscious of the principle of Lord’s Supper by narrating its historical nature Paul now focuses on the consequences of such a shameful attitude to the poor members of the community. It is not only a sin towards the body of Christ but also towards the Lord who is present in the community. They do not understand the sacramental nature of the Eucharist and its realization in the community. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). So they are guilty towards the Lord (11:29). That is why he said in the introduction that they come together not for the better but for the worse (v.17). Many have become sick and some have died due to their faulty conduct. What should have been a blessing becomes a curse due to the character of the rich partakers. So Paul invites them to judge their behaviour lest the eschatological judgment be harsh.

In the final verses Paul gives some practical instructions. When they come together for the Eucharist,

they must wait for those who are late (v. 33). The verb *ekdechesthai* is here understood temporally as in the case of *prolambanei*. The non-temporal sense of accepting one another does not refer to the precise character of the conflict in Corinth. The communal celebration of the Eucharist is more than eating sumptuously and getting satisfied with food. Waiting for the other expresses the solidarity of the community which has come together to celebrate the solidarity of Jesus with humanity. Paul uses the word *koinonia* to denote the participation of the faithful in the bread and cup (10:16), and it reminds one of the communion one experiences in the Eucharist. Consumption of the same bread (Body of Christ) realizes the communion of the members among themselves and with Christ. Those who violate one of these aspects violate the other too. Paul calls such uncharitable handling of the fellow Christians as ‘unworthy participation’ which has caused sickness and death among the members of the community.

4. The Eucharist and Community Building in Corinth – a Failed Experiment?

Corinth had become a centre of Paul’s missionary activity. In spite of his personal involvement in the building up of the church in Corinth he was aware of the shortcomings of the members. They were still groping in darkness, not understanding the meaning of freedom that Jesus has promised them. Barriers created by a human way of thinking controlled their conduct; not only that they did adhere slavishly to the habits learned in their former religion, rituals or ideology. Paul had to use sharp criticism to remind them of their serious failures in the process of becoming a Eucharistic community. Divisions

and factions (11:18-19), egoistic and uncharitable behaviour in the church gathered for the Lord's Supper (11:20-22) and unworthy reception of the body and blood of Christ are a few such offences that Paul names in this section.

The Eucharist builds up the community and unites the members into the body of Christ. According to Paul the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). But he has heard that there are divisions when they come together as the church (11:18). They considered faith as a personal matter having no social overtones. But it has a social dimension. Faith is a communal affair. According to Banks, to embrace the gospel is to enter into a community.¹⁷ They were only physically hungry and had no hunger for unity and communion.¹⁸ That is why Paul says that their coming together is for the worse; the divisions increase because of uncharitable behaviour. Paul applies the term *ekklesia* to this community most insightfully. It is a voluntary union, come together as a household community, as part of a larger, universal congregation. It resembles a family bond. Paul's imagery of the 'body' is most apt to bring out all the nuances of this community. One becomes a member of this body through baptism. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Gal 3:27-28; Rom 6:3-4).

Factionalism destroys the unity of the community that has been united in the same baptism and now come together to celebrate the Eucharist, the source of Christian unity. The table of the Lord is the prime venue to affirm

the 'equality in practice' as expressed by Paul in Gal 2:15.¹⁹ As a result of factionalism they behave uncharitably. Paul calls it contempt for the church (*kataphroneo*) and humiliation for the poor (1 Cor 11:22). Such a celebration "is not the Lord's Supper" (11:20). This contemptuous behaviour is painful for the victims and for Jesus in whose name the community has gathered and who has offered himself fully for them with a view to gathering the people of God. A community cannot be built up when some members behave in such a manner. Besides, such people can be sure of an unfavourable judgment because they have not discerned the body. They behave in open contradiction of the intention of Christ. According to Meeks, "the *communitas* experienced in baptism, in which divisions of role and status are replaced by the unity of brothers and sisters in the new humanity, ought to be visible, in Paul's intention, in the Supper."²⁰

Paul's intention of building up a community of the saved in Corinth has seemingly failed, according to 11:17-34. One can perceive the agony of the apostle that runs through the letter. Conzelmann thinks that Paul wanted to interpret the unity of the community by means of the Lord's Supper.²¹ Therefore he introduces here a relation between the church and the Eucharist. "Since the Lord is identified with such food, those who partake of it may not violate its sacred character and his presence by abuses of individualism, of disregard of the poor, or of idol-worship."²² How foolishly have the Corinthians misunderstood the meaning of the community as the Body of Christ! How adamantly have they persisted in the idolatry of their class consciousness which is incompatible with the Eucharist! How stubbornly have they continued in their class distinctions even in their assembly for the

Eucharistic celebration! In fact 1 Corinthians may be seen as a desperate attempt by their apostle to help them to mend their ways so that the Body of Christ be restored. Paul teaches them as their apostle, admonishes them as their father and nourishes them as their mother. Meditating upon their misbehavior Paul proposes the only solution in ch. 13. It is none other than love, the more excellent way.

5. The Eucharist and the Challenge of Community Building in India

The Eucharist is the most eminent symbol of Jesus' salvific act for humanity. In the last supper he made it clear that the kenotic self-gift has to continue till everything consummates in God. In the Eucharistic celebration he breaks himself for his brothers and sisters in order to be with them and to save them. The Eucharist becomes the principle of the unity of his community. This is my body... this is my blood. By consuming his body and blood the community is transformed into the body of Christ. It has to represent him in its daily life and live out the freedom which he lived and to which his community is called. Therefore the Eucharist challenges the church to realize the freedom of the children of God.

The Church in India, as the Indian society itself, is a complex reality. The gospel of Christ reached India in the first decades of our era, after Jesus' resurrection, through one of his apostles. There were Christian migrations to this land. The spread and missionary activity of the ancient Indian church is yet to be explored. With the arrival of the European missionaries the church began to grow by breaking the barriers of culture, language and caste. With the Dutch and English missionaries Protestantism also began to spread to the expanses of India. During the past

200 years the church has taken roots in all the remote areas of the land. Therefore we do not see a homogenous Indian church. Each mainline church has members from various castes and classes. Theoretically speaking what unites them is faith in Jesus Christ, baptism in his name and participation in his body and blood. Practically, the Indian church, either Catholic or non-Catholic, is a divided church. Caste distinctions and class consciousness are still rampant in the church.

The Indian church is a cross-section of the Indian society. The hallmarks of India and Indian society are abject poverty, casteism, illiteracy of the masses, gender discrimination and violence, institutionalized injustices, all-prevalent corruption, total disregard for the rights of the poor, destruction of life and nature in the name of development, vanity in public life, etc. The majority of the Indians are poor, and they are at the mercy of the immoral alliance of the powerful – the rich, the police, the underground mafia, the landlords, the political parties. These enjoy the land, its resources, bureaucracy, rights and opportunities. It is thus a great challenge for the church to free herself from the fetters of slavery expressed in so many ways.

Being a cross-section of society, the Indian church too has all those characteristics that mark the Indian society. In spite of the gospel of freedom, the church is not free from the bondage of casteism which accord superiority to a few on account of their birth. “A caste is an endogamous group or groups, with a common name, whose members follow a single or many cognate occupations, claim a common origin, and form a homogenous unit, more closely allied to one another than to any other section of the society in which they live”.²³ The Dalits constitute

16.48% or about one fifth of India's population.²⁴ But they are the majority among the Indian Christians, forming almost two thirds of all the Indian Christians together.²⁵ They have abandoned their traditional religions and embraced Christianity in order to lead a life of dignity, because no caste distinctions exist in that religion. This is analogous to the spread of the Jesus movement in the Mediterranean world mainly attracting the downtrodden and the depressed classes. The gospel offered them a ray of light in the hopeless and dark tunnel of their otherwise colourless lives. But it is a matter of shame that the church has not yet grown to understand the full implications of Jesus' gospel of freedom.

Another important aspect is the petty provincialism and narrow-minded linguistic affiliation of some of the Christian groups which discard the universal character of the gospel and its liberative dynamic. These factors, however, hinder joint efforts of the Christians to eradicate social evils and spread gospel values. Caste, colour, place of origin, etc., still play a role in the church. For example, in promoting vocations, in admission and appointment in the institutions run by the church, in elections to the various offices, boards and councils, etc. The beneficiaries of this inhuman system try to perpetuate it at any cost. In spite of being a minority community in India, the church fails to mobilise its resources to fulfil its task of witnessing to the gospel in India. The Indian church has to face the challenge of becoming the light of the world and salt of the earth. A church which is united at the table of the Lord and nourished by the Eucharist has a witness value. In fact, the Eucharist challenges Christians in India to build a community on the foundation of its Eucharistic experience.

How is the church in India going to face the reality of poverty in this land and in the world? The church has to be broken for the life of the world. The church has to see Jesus not only in the broken bread and but in the sufferings of a broken humankind. A Eucharistic community has no choice other than to embrace the world and its sufferings because it is Jesus who was broken for the community and who is present in the broken bodies of our needy brethren. In fact it is a pivotal missionary challenge for the church in India where the gospel is being preached. Since disregard for the poor is the norm in society, the church must whet its dedication to form a community that witnesses and practises the brokenness of the bread that is Jesus. Casteism exacerbates poverty, and in order to break this vicious circle one needs the courage of Jesus. He offered himself on the cross for healing the wounds of a broken world. The sufferings and afflictions of humanity cannot be left unheeded by a Eucharistic community. Jesus' brokenness should lead the community that celebrates the breaking of the bread to break themselves to heal the intolerable wounds and vulnerability of our world. Only thus can a Eucharistic community be called by that name.

One of the means will be the collection of alms for the saints (1 Cor 16:1-3), as encouraged by the pillar apostles (Gal 2:10). It is a reminder of the Christian obligation to love one another.²⁶ The fundamental reality of poverty in all its dimensions should penetrate the thought and action of the church so that it initiates programmes that would solidify the unity of the church and demolish the walls of separation. Caste is against the will of God, and the church must dare to take bold steps leading to the formation of a community of worshippers who adore God with the

freedom of his children. Concrete ways that foster solidarity has to be explored with a view to practicing the will of God as expressed by Jesus in his table-fellowships. Because discrimination in the name of caste is not only an obstacle to social progress but also contrary to Christian ethical principles.²⁷

5.1 The Church – the Table Fellowship of Jesus

Paul was aware of the frailty of the Corinthians that they behaved as ordinary human beings (1 Cor 3:3). There were strife, jealousy, caste and class distinctions in the Church at Corinth. The celebration of the Lord's Supper brought the rich and the poor together, but the church was characterised by an inner social stratification that was responsible for much of the tensions in its communal life.²⁸ Therefore Paul was keen to promote attendance in the Eucharist with a sense of solidarity. For the community and its unity the Lord's Supper is indispensable (1 Cor 10:11-17). Since the issue in Corinth was one of social cohesiveness and not theological dispute, acceptance of and waiting for the other is a must in order to overcome divisive tendencies.²⁹ 'Coming together as a church' points to the solidarity that arises out of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. They share the same body of the exalted Lord and must grow into that body (10:17). The verb 'gather together' appears five times in vv. 17-22 and 33-34. By not sharing the food they dishonour the Lord in two ways: by ignoring the have-nots and eating one's own meal and by not properly remembering the Lord and thereby hindering the formation of the community.³⁰

With the gift of the self Jesus enters into a new relationship with the believers. He begins to live in them,

or better, they become members of *a body* with him. Paul underlines it in 1 Cor 10:16-17. According to St. Augustine the principle of unity is nowhere more visible than in the Eucharist. We are received into his body, we become his members, and are what we receive.³¹ Can the rich and forward individuals and communities in the Indian church wait for the poor and backward persons and communities?

When we think of the Eucharist naturally we are reminded of the table fellowship of Jesus. His table fellowship was with the publicans and sinners (Mt 8:31; 21:31; Lk 6:20; 12:12-14; 14:15-24). His contemporaries have been scandalised by his conduct and they questioned him (Mt 9:11; Lk 7:35; 15:2) because it was a revolutionary act. Jesus had a new experience of God and a new understanding of community. Meals were the most effective means for Jesus to express his solidarity with the poor. Therefore, when caste discrimination enters into the celebration of the Eucharist the sin becomes sacrilege.³² The Jesus Movement gathered momentum among the poor because of his oneness with and sympathy for them which was expressed by his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus' meals with the tax-collectors and sinners have been always remembered whenever early Christian fellowship meals were celebrated.³³ The church needs to be afraid of only becoming a "noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1) and of nothing else. Love is capable of everything – also of making a united Eucharistic community out of people of all castes, classes and races.

Conclusion

Conflict in the community in Corinth had many reasons and it showed its ugly head during the celebration of the

Lord's Supper. As the father and founder of the community in Corinth Paul was deeply perturbed and he pointed out their failures in unmistakable terms. It is the Eucharist that nourishes and rejuvenates the church and builds it up. Therefore the egoistic behaviour of the rich members who eat beforehand and do not wait for the weaker members who come late is detrimental to the unity of the community. They come with the good intention of celebrating the Eucharist but the result is worse, i.e., they show no solidarity with the poor, and the disharmony grows whereas Jesus was always a friend of the poor.

In India the situation of the Church resembles that of the Corinthian Church. The diversity of the members of the church, the coldblooded apathy of the rich towards the poor, the still persisting untouchability and the consciousness of caste, class and colour and the feeling of humiliation and unwantedness in the church experienced by the poor – all these are challenges faced by the Indian church as a whole and the local churches in particular. On the face of such glaring injustices how can an authentic Eucharistic community be built up? This challenge has to be boldly faced by the church. In the apostolic exhortation *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (§ 28) Pope John Paul II wrote: "I think for example of the tragedy of hunger which plagues hundreds of millions of human beings, the diseases which afflict developing countries, the loneliness of the elderly, the hardships faced by the unemployed, the struggles of immigrants. These evils are present – albeit to a different degree – even in areas of immense wealth. We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognised as true followers of Christ (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This will be the criterion by which the

authenticity of our Eucharistic celebration is judged.”

¹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987) 73 writes: “The ‘emerging consensus’ that Malherbe reports seems to be valid: A Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society.” See also G. Theissen, “Social Stratification in the Corinthian community” in his *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, ed. and tr. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 69-119 and Helmut Merklein, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (ÖTK 7; Vol. I; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992) 31-42.

² Cf. Alfred Suhl, *Paulus und seine Briefe: Ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Chronologie* (SNT 11; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1975) 115.

³ William R. Baird, “‘One against the Other’: Intra-church Conflict in 1 Corinthians”, in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 116-136.

⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 526.

⁵ S. Hafemann, “Letters to the Corinthians,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* 174.

⁶ Brown, *Introduction*, 526-28.

⁷ T. Schmeller, *Schulen im Neuen Testament? Zur Stellung des Urchristentums in der Bildungswelt seiner Zeit* (HBS 30; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001) 103-126.

⁸ M.M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993) 1 considers 1 Cor 1:10 as the “thesis statement” of the whole letter.

⁹ R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community. The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 32.

¹⁰ E.W. Stegemann – W. Stegemann, *Urchristliche Sozialgeschichte. Die Anfänge im Judentum und die Christusgemeinden in der mediterranen Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997) 71-74.

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- ¹¹ Juan Peter Miranda, "Solidarität und Feier des Herrnmahls", *Paulus* (Stuttgart: KBW, 2008) 48.
- ¹² Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 610-11; U. Schnelle, *Apostle Paul. His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 196-97; T. Schmeller, "Der erste Korintherbrief" in M. Ebenr – S. Schreiber (ed.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (KST 6; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008) 319-20.
- ¹³ J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth. Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1983) 168-69.
- ¹⁴ A group of exegetes postulates the meal after the bread word and before the cup word. In this case *prolambanei* is not understood temporally but simply to mean 'to consume', suggesting that the rich eat the meal without considering the poor. The poor remain hungry even after the meal. See Schmeller, "Der erste Korintherbrief", 319 and J. Kurianal, "Eating the Lord's Supper and Christian Unity (1 Cor 11:17-34)", *Jeevadhara* 38 (2008) 164-77.
- ¹⁵ A. Kretzer, "Paralambano", *EDT* III, 30.
- ¹⁶ Miranda, "Solidarität", 50.
- ¹⁷ Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 35.
- ¹⁸ F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 277.
- ¹⁹ S.B. Marrow, *Paul. His Letters and His Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1986) 138.
- ²⁰ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 159.
- ²¹ H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 172.
- ²² J. A. Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology", *NJBC*, 1411.
- ²³ M. Dhavamony, "Christianity and Societies Based on a System of Caste" (e.g., India), *Concilium* 130 (10/1979) 87. Cf. S. Painadath, "Church as the Continuation of the Table-Fellowship of Jesus" in Rosario Rocha – Kuruvilla Pandikatt (ed.), *Dreams and Visions. New Horizons for an Indian Church* (Pune: JDV, 2002) 71-91.
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- ²⁴ F. Wilfred, *On the Banks of Ganges. Doing Contextual Theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) 113.
- ²⁵ R. Jabamalai, "The Problem of Caste within the Church" in T. Kadankavil (ed.), *Religion and Politics from Subaltern Perspectives* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1999) 50.
- ²⁶ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 110.
- ²⁷ Dhavamony, "Christianity and Societies", 91.
- ²⁸ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) 71.
- ²⁹ G. Theissen, *Essays on Corinth: The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 3. Cf. Errol D'Lima, "Eucharist in Paul: Table-fellowship with Charity", *Jnanadeepa* 12 (2009) 178-93.
- ³⁰ G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 558-59.
- ³¹ Augustinus, Sermo 57,7: PL 38,389. Cf. also Sermo 227: PL 38, 1099-100.
- ³² Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (New York: Orbis, 1984) 156. Sobrino calls the behaviour of Peter at Antioch casteism and says that Paul had opposed it (Gal 2: 11-16).
- ³³ G. Soares Prabhu, "The Table Fellowship of Jesus. Its Significance for Dalit Christians in India Today", *Jeevadhara* 22 (1992) 140-59.

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