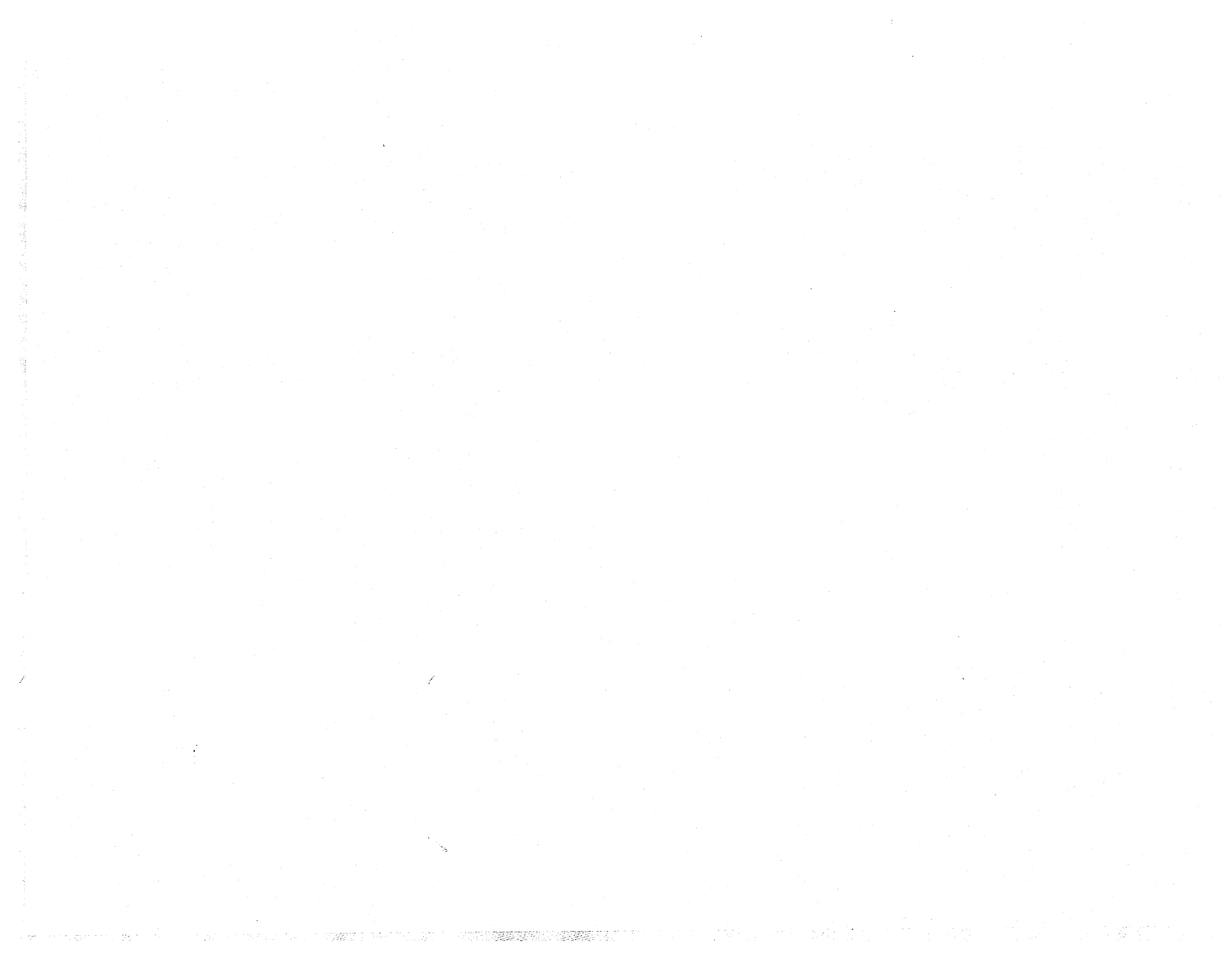


5  
Eucharist at Corinth:  
You Are the Christ

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I would like in this essay to make several claims about the significance of the Eucharist for our study of Jesus as Lord of social systems. The first claim is that the behavior of Christian communities at their eucharistic assemblies can exemplify Jesus' lordship over social systems. Depending on several factors to be discussed in this essay, these assemblies can begin the process of bringing his lordship to realization and can also be indicative of the manner in which this realization comes about.

This claim assumes that besides being looked at as a sacrament, the eucharistic action of the Christian community can also be examined as a social system. The eucharistic assembly qualifies as a social system in all the senses in which we use that term in this volume. For starters, it is a social projection of commonly internalized values of the participants. This projection does not take place *de novo* each time but takes place in view of and in terms of the "givens" or objectivities that have accrued and become traditional: the ritual, in a word. It is composed of many things such as customs, formal prayers and creeds, material elements, role specifications and doctrinal positions. The assembly's behavior, in other words, has to be to some extent routinized and systematized. But it is also the action of free people, not automatons. The "givens" are not alien to the worshipers but have been created by the value projection of previous generations of believers. If the ritual is congenial to the worshipers, it will continue to have a kind of existence of its own insofar as it aptly ex-



presses the beliefs of contemporary believers. It will undergo modifications insofar as their values or beliefs come to be modified or internalized differently. In brief, the eucharistic celebrations of Christian communities correspond to all the prerequisites of the meaning of social system as we are using that term in this volume. Any inquiry, therefore, into the particulars of the lordship of Jesus over social systems, should be enlightened by his lordship over this particular social system.

A second claim I would like to make is that a profound insight into the theology of the question addressed by this volume has already been sketched out in a very schematic way in several of Paul's comments on the Corinthians' behavior at their eucharistic assemblies, especially 1 Cor 11:17-34. This text is a cameo of the Pauline insight into the relationship between Jesus and the particular social system that was generated by the community of those who believed in his presence in the Eucharist. In the language of this volume we can see that Paul faulted the Corinthians on all three levels of social system: the externalization of their belief, their understanding of the "givens," and their internalization of those "givens." Defective perception of the mystery of the Lord's presence in the community led to defective internalization, and, in turn, to deficient projection or social behavior. It matters little which level we focus on, the liturgy, the beliefs and ritual or the interiority—the success of the Christian enterprise was in jeopardy in Corinth. While the social system of the eucharistic assemblies was generated out of belief, that belief was defective. Once defective belief was projected, it became deficient behavior which weakened the possibilities of any local, social realization of the lordship of Jesus. The consequences of this were grave in Paul's mind. As author of the most venturesome claims about the lordship of Jesus in the New Testament, Paul clearly felt the absurdity of those claims when he saw that this lordship was not coming into realization in the local assemblies of believers. Were he to use contemporary slang, he would have lamented: "if it hasn't got it there it hasn't got it."

I would like to make a third large claim for the subject matter of this chapter. The age old problematic of Christology, a problematic that continues in the modern era, has been concerned largely with the question of how Jesus can be both divine and human. Paul's

question was slightly different or an important variation: how can Jesus be both risen and here or himself and us, so to speak? While the Christian community has always confessed its belief that head and members are somehow one, the theological treatment of this question has ordinarily been peripheral to Christology and central instead to ecclesiology. For Paul, however, the many and the one were central to his Christology. By contrast, the favorite object of inquiry of traditional Christology has been the metaphysical constitution of the individual Christ.

This individuation has had happy and unhappy results. It has forced the Christian community in the course of its history especially in its doctrinal and theological developments, to look deeply into the riches of the person of Christ. The uniqueness of this mystery, however, is not fully treated until the social component which is an intrinsic and constitutive aspect of Christology is included in the treatment. So many '-ologies' have been developed in Christian tradition that pressure has been off Christology to do so. Valuable specializations such as eschatology, soteriology, missiology, etc., have profoundly developed the Christian community's understanding of the many aspects of the faith life which it lives. But theological specialization has also produced a negative yield insofar as it fails to capture the unitary insight which so captivated Paul the apostle. The texts I will deal with in this article recall the unitary insight into the Christ mystery and hence give a pristine view of the question asked by this volume.

But there is a corollary to my claim that Christology has spent too much of its time and energy on an individuated Christ. Could the relative inattention given to the question of how he is many and we are he, be due to a poverty of experience? If there is little or no experience of being members of one another in a whole which is his sacred presence, there will be little interest in formulating this experience theologically. Such experience would produce a burning desire to understand and articulate theological treatises and doctrinal formulations. One conclusion that could be drawn, if one agrees that the social aspect of the mystery of Christ has not been well articulated in the Church, is that this experience has been and still is quite meager within its communities. This suggestion does not originate with me, but goes all the way back to Corinth and Paul.

## THE CORINTHIAN ASSEMBLIES

These are three rather large claims. In the rest of this essay I would like to give some of the reasons why I make them. For the most part, I will argue to their validity from Paul's ideas about the Eucharist, the Body of the Lord and the community's mission in the Lord.

Two things are worth noting about the Pauline letters before getting to the specific matter of the essay. One is that Paul never undertakes to articulate a formal Christology. His incredibly profound insights into the person of Jesus come out almost as asides as he addresses the pastoral situations with which he is confronted. He articulates an understanding of the Christ mystery only insofar as he is forced to find "answers" to the problems that arise as that mystery takes hold in the believing communities of the Mediterranean world.

Secondly, Paul's way of approaching the problematic of our volume would not have been first to define what a social system is and then try to see how Jesus' lordship relates to it. Paul's imagination worked the other way around. The lordship defined the reality in question. It was already accomplished for Paul. This Lord "was in all, working through all and over all" (1 Cor 8:6). But for those who were in conscious union with their Lord a new creation was only slowly dawning. They were a part of it, conspirators in its realization. What was not of this creation belonged to what was passing away. Death throes, therefore, mixed with birth pangs. The social systems being born in the new creation were so new that they were redefining what had been. Paul busied himself naming this newness.

At the heart of Paul's contribution to first century Christianity's Christology is his understanding, already implicit in his Damascus experience, that the person of Christ is inextricable from the present community. Paul's introduction to this collective person and personality was as abrupt as it was harsh, but once he stopped persecuting that Jesus, he became a primary instrument in the edification of this Jesus-presence in the many cities to which his mission brought him. Paul believed that Jesus would live and move and have his being as Lord locally if the community that was being drawn into the Christ mystery lived out the baptism by which each of its members was transformed. These communities were the only empirical and tangi-

ble evidence that the Christ still existed and was drawing all things to himself. But the mission would fail if the whole reality of the Christ presence was not being lived. And it was not being lived because only part of the mystery was believed. *He* was believed in but not according to the manner in which he was present, namely as head conjoined to members.

Corinth is a case in point. When informed of the pattern of behavior that had developed at Corinthian eucharistic celebrations, the Apostle to the Gentiles was appalled. He was appalled because what God had joined together, namely his Son and those who believed in him, "man had pulled asunder" (Mt 19:6). Paul's admonition in 1 Cor 11 addresses the indissolubility of the union between head and members. Their behavior toward one another indicated that the participants had not grasped the fact, the intimacy or the import of this union. Corinthian Christians were giving evidence that they had not been fully converted to the kind of behavior that baptism had called them to and empowered them for. The superficiality of their conversion was evident, not so much in their belief in Christ, which was unmistakable, as in their behavior toward one another. They did not believe that each of them was a member, an instance of the Christ reality. If they had, they would have seen that their behavior toward one another was sacrilegious.

Paul looked upon eucharistic assemblies with an imagination permeated with the power of faith. Those whose imaginations were not so fired either because they were non-believers or because they were unaware of the radical nature of the Christian calling, saw in these eucharistic assemblies only acts of worship of God in Christ. Paul went much further and saw these moments as times when many individuals were being further fused into a single reality, a "new man." In the process, individuals were becoming truly members of one another. To see people, to see oneself, as a member of a whole or as members of one another meant a surrendering of the individualistic self-understandings previously held.

Damascus was the moment at which this experience of the whole Christ began. For Paul, it never ended. He only slowly began to feel like a member among members. We can trace the gradual development of the vision of the relationship between Jesus and his followers in the Pauline epistles. It is not until the captivity epistles, for

instance (Colossians and Ephesians), that the headship of Christ becomes an explicit theme. The body theme also does not begin in his writings until he addressed the Corinthians. Paul's imagination, fueled by his faith and his love for Christ Jesus, gradually submitted all issues to this slowly growing vision. The social vision began to absorb the usual ways of seeing people's relationships to one another and God. The vision developed with the practice and experience of communality in his ministry.

Without doing violence to the process at work in Paul, one could say that all social systems were being reconceived by him in terms of the vision consuming him. According to information received by Paul from Corinth, however, the social systems which operated there before the advent of the Christ mystery were having great effect in shaping the features of the social systems being generated by those who supposedly had Christ as their inspiration. The old creation was determining the new creation. In the old systems there were divisions—"Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free." This was not to be so in the new creation, "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27).

More specifically, Corinth was notorious throughout the entire Mediterranean world for its ethnic antipathies, its exploitation of women, its rapaciousness, its catastrophic economic inequalities. It was a symbol of what Paul called the works of the flesh. From the flesh, according to Paul, proceed "hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like" (Gal 5:19-20). But to his dismay these were the qualities that were beginning to appear in the social behavior of the Corinthian eucharistic assemblies. "... When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. When you assemble as a church there are divisions among you ... each one goes ahead with his own meal and one is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Cor 11:17-21).

#### ON DISCERNING THE BODY

Traditionally there have been two ways of focusing on the passage in question (1 Cor 11:17-34), which have tended to distract the

minds of the readers from its import. One of the usual ways of missing the point has been to hear Paul chastising the Corinthians for being selfish and self-indulgent in their conduct toward one another. Doubtless this point is in the text. But when accompanied with the other traditional tendency, namely focusing on the question of the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist, the depth of Paul's insight is lost. This insight: the Corinthians' behavior made it obvious that they were "not discerning the body" (v 29). Does the body referred to here by Paul mean the eucharistic species in isolation from the body of head and members which was being built up through the Eucharist? Paul could hardly have been upset about the believers not discerning the Eucharist, since their very getting together was unmistakable evidence of their reverence for and intention to be nourished by the sacrament. A deeper probing of the text is necessary.

One way of answering the question about what "discerning the body" means is to look at the whole text as a unit. The whole is broken into three parts—the problem (vv 17-22); the normative tradition (vv 23-25); then (vv 26-34) Paul's warning and recommendations. By so doing, one can immediately see that the context is Paul's concern about the divisions, factions and selfishness of the members of the Church. But his concern was with something far more serious than selfishness. A speculative position had been developed within the Corinthian communities that he was anxious to eradicate. A nascent gnosticism<sup>1</sup> was developing in Corinth which had some portion of the community of believers verticalizing and spiritualizing their faith in Christ. This had as a consequence a certain despising of the fleshy, tangible corporateness of the sacred presence which made them a people. More specifically, Paul finds evidence of this incipient gnosticism in the way many of the Corinthian Christians esteemed "knowledge." What he had preached, by contrast, was love. "Knowledge puffs up but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1).

There had developed in the Corinthian communities many who reveled in the fact that they were "free to do anything" (1 Cor 6:12). Hence they would take meats sacrificed to idols and eat those meats with a good conscience. While Paul concurs with their perception he does not agree with their conclusion that they could proceed as if the meat's purity were the whole issue since they were scandalizing those whose consciences had not attained to this degree of knowledge and

freedom. He severely reprimanded those who chose to live according to their perceptions and consciences notwithstanding the scandal they were causing to their brethren. In acting individualistically, they failed not only in love, but also showed themselves lacking in the key knowledge that they were to be conscious of, namely that they were members of one another in Christ. "Let no one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor" (1 Cor 10:24).

While Paul and the whole subsequent moral tradition of Christianity would contend that the only legitimate actions one can undertake are those which are in harmony with one's conscience, he is quick to point out that this does not mean that every action which one's conscience can justify should be undertaken. He introduces the notion of the community and that which upbuilds the community because for him the individual in the deepest part of himself or herself has become a member of that community. Member-behavior goes beyond individual integrity. Paul instructs: "Take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (1 Cor 8:9-12).

The speculative position which when full blown could be identified as gnostic also bred an attitude in Christians about their bodies or the physical aspects of their being. Paul goes right to the core of this tendency when he cites the case of intercourse with prostitutes and the false attitudes some entertained about this. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? . . . But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor 6:14-17).

The speculative error provoking this exhortation was the assumption that whatever involved the bodily could be counted of no importance because Gnosticism believed it was part of that which was passing away. If the physical constitution of human beings would not endure in eternity, the functions and actions relating to

the body such as eating and intercourse had no spiritual significance to the gnostic. Hence, if one were to undertake an act of fornication with a harlot, there would be no negative spiritual consequence of that. Paul, by contrast, indicates that by such activity the whole being of the individual is defiled. For Paul, the body signified the whole person. The body is the whole self fully choosing its direction.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on the resurrection "of the body" in Paul and early Christianity stood foursquare against this error.

There was another dimension to this gnostic tendency that was peculiarly tempting to the Christian. The doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit was easily twisted into a way of spiritualizing the meaning of the Christian religion. Hence, if one were open to the Spirit, one became spiritual. Being one with the Spirit began to mean to some Corinthians not only that a special kind of knowledge accrued to particular individuals but also that they were free of relationship to the flesh. Paul himself could have been one of the sources of this misconception since his doctrine about the flesh (*sarx*) is complex and polyvalent. In some instances the flesh, in Paul, is part of the human constitution. In others, flesh is a law, a dominion which many are under and which leads to death.<sup>3</sup>

But what is germane here is that being free of their own flesh, these "spiritual" Christians could also be free from the social flesh or from real incorporation into the body of Christ which Paul preached to them. There was no real corporeality to their membership in Christ. They had been incorporated, in effect, into a metaphorical body, or into a spiritualized realm which they had to have proper knowledge of but did not need to serve in any real way.

This was certainly not Paul's view. Paul understood that the whole person, body and spirit, came under the sway of the Lord's Spirit and the entire person, body and soul, was involved in obeying and serving the Lord. Not involved as an automaton or as a solitary individual but involved as a member of a larger reality, people so intimately related that the image of an organism is not amiss. The Spirit animated this collectivity through every member of the whole. But the only evidence that any part was in fact under the sway of the Spirit was that member-behavior issued from the person rather than the behavior of an individual in isolation from other individuals. "The Body of Christ is the realm into which we are incorporated

with our bodies and to which we are called to render service in the body, i.e., total service, service which embraces all our different relationships to the world."<sup>4</sup>

The effect of being in Christ and under the influence of his Spirit has ramifications even for those who are not formally members. An example of this Pauline thinking: the unbeliever who is married to a believing Christian and who desires to continue in commitment to this spouse, is made holy through this spouse. Their children too. "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy" (1 Cor 7:12-14). How could this be except that in some way the whole being, body and spirit of the one who was in Christ, was the carrier of the holiness of God and could transmit the effects of their redemption to those to whom he or she was bound in love. Paul, of course, did not confine the efficacy of being in Christ to the domestic realm, but saw the political ramifications of this new force operating in Christians as capable of affecting all social systems. But these transformations would have been rendered innocuous if the gnostic tendencies had been allowed to flourish.

The organicity and virtual physicality of Paul's insight about being under the lordship of Christ Jesus through the Spirit is well attested to in the particular passage we are examining. Immediately after warning them that "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself," Paul makes what could be taken as a rather crude allegation: "That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died" (vv 30-31). Paul certainly cannot be criticized for spiritualizing the meaning of the body of Christ! He is alleging that sinful or anti-social or non-member behavior in some members has physical effects on that body. To act non-organically has physical consequences on individuals—weakness, illness and death. Could he mean this? According to his anthropology, he certainly could. In the old creation with its social systems, death reigned. Not to be truly incorporated into the new creation and into this primary instance of a new social system, the eucharistic community, made one prey to all the evils that affected the human condition outside of Christ and before his saving act.

But these dismal consequences to Christians are intended by the

Lord of the Church to issue ultimately in an eternity of well-being for them. Hence Paul goes on: "But when we are judged by the Lord we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world" (v 32). If he did not love them he would not have chastised them. Since he did love them and incorporated them into his own body, he would save them from condemnation by allowing them to taste the effects even in their bodies of their unworthy behavior toward one another.

The judgment theme in this passage and elsewhere in Paul is profound but we will touch on it merely in its connection with the sacraments.<sup>5</sup> By baptism one escapes the ultimate judgment of God. By undergoing baptism one is acquitted of all the sins for which one was guilty. Incorporation into the Christ mystery involves cleansing, propitiation, and atonement. As long as one chooses to live within this mystery, one is not subject to the judgment which can condemn. To be in Christ makes one in this age a participant in the age to come where there is no condemnation. With baptism there is faith, which provides the light to avoid falling back under the reign of sin and judgment. By faith one is capable of making right judgments. Right judgments acted upon keep one from falling back into the condition in which one is judged by God.<sup>6</sup>

It need not have been so. "If we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged" (v 31). Paul is exhorting his colleagues in the faith to self-judgment or reexamination of themselves lest they fall under judgment. Their sin was not a lack of faith in Jesus. It was an erroneous judgment. They were in error about who they were, because they were wrong about who he was now. Their belief was in a disembodied Jesus. They believed in one not bodied the way he said he would be.<sup>7</sup> For the error to be seen the non-organicity of the body had to be felt by its effects.

The content of the self-examination called for by Paul is liturgical and social. In verse 28: "Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." There is no indication in the text that these liturgical actions in and of themselves were being performed unworthily. His concern as the whole passage indicates is with the blindness and poverty of the social interaction. In verses 33-34: "When you come together to eat, wait for another . . . lest you come together to be condemned."

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL

The reason why there are two aspects of this self-examination can be seen more clearly if one recalls the structure of the passage and the nature of these early eucharistic celebrations. There was the communal meal (at least supposedly communal) called the agape. This was sometimes enclosed within the formally sacramental actions of blessing the bread before the agape and the wine after it and then partaking of both. Apparently this was the order in Corinth.<sup>8</sup> Paul specifically castigates the Corinthians for their behavior in the agape part of the "synaxis." He employs the sacred tradition he had received about the Last Supper as the norm for judging their behavior especially at the agape moment of the celebration.<sup>9</sup>

The Apostle to the Gentiles names the meal's two parts with one name, the Lord's Supper, and upbraids the Corinthians for dichotomizing the one celebration. In the agape moment they were eating their own meals as if they were not attending the Lord's Supper. "When you meet together it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. For the eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk" (vv 20-21). At the same time, they conveniently sacramentalized the second part of the evening while allowing their pre-member, unconverted unsociability to be evident in the first part. By so doing, Paul laments, they "despise the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing" (v 22). Those who had nothing, for whom they did not wait (v 33), were probably the slaves whose time was not their own and whose arrival was contingent upon their being freed for the night by their owners.<sup>10</sup>

One of the ways Paul evaluates the Corinthians' behavior is to remind them of the nature of what it is they are doing. He presents to them the tradition, the "givens" that are meant to form the character of their celebration. Verses 23-27 form a unit. By means of this pre-Pauline liturgical tradition, Paul teaches anew the normative moment, the historical Lord's supper, which they ignore or transgress under pain of eating and drinking condemnation unto themselves. At the heart of this supper are the so-called words of institution. Jesus took bread into his hands on this night, gave thanks and broke it saying: "This is my body for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (v 24).

The authors of the new Anchor Bible commentary on this epistle make several important textual observations about both uses of the neuter demonstrative *this*. They are surprised that the traditional interest has been with the *is* rather than with the *this*. "It has been almost unanimously agreed that "this" refers to bread; so the sentence is understood to read, "This bread is my body."<sup>11</sup> They go on to observe that it was, therefore, inevitable that verse 29 on "not discerning the body" should have come "to refer to recognizing that the bread is not mere bread but is in some sense the presence and actual body of Christ."<sup>12</sup> They hope to cast doubt on these assumptions. To this end they make several observations. First, it should be admitted that there is no clear referent for either "this." Second, both of these neuter demonstrative pronouns must be taken together in order to understand what they are referring to. Third, their referent can hardly be construed by a single thing like bread. Fourth, neither "this" can refer to bread since the gender of the demonstrative is neuter while bread is masculine in Greek. Fifth, in Paul's writings the neuter demonstrative usually refers to a clause, phrase or an implied idea if not to a neuter noun. So the authors turn to the second "this." They conclude, after analyzing the Old and New Testament usage of "Do (*poieite*) this," that in similar usages "this" is commonly used to refer to a call to the whole action of table fellowship which, of course, included the distribution of bread. This fellowship was to be enjoyed at a special kind of meal, namely, a memorial observance such as Passover or Purim. By putting all of this information together, they conclude that Jesus is saying to his disciples something like: "your fellowship at this meal in remembrance of me is my body for you." The commentators are sure that the particle of food alone is not being called the body of Christ. "If Paul had wanted to convey that idea, his regular usage would have been to write, 'This bread is my body'; note 'this bread' in verse 26, where reference to the body is pointedly missing."<sup>13</sup>

If this line of textual reasoning is followed, the implications are notable. Jesus would be bread for them through their fellowship. The command would be to build fellowship, to be a body, to love one another with the eucharistic celebration as the center of this body-building process. In effect, Jesus would then be saying: "Do this again and again by remembering me at your table fellowship. But



you remember me if you know my presence with you is through one another whom I am fashioning into so many members of my own body. Therefore, each time you come together remembering me, I remember you to me and to one another."

Does this explanation retain its plausibility when we proceed to the cup? It would appear to be the case. Note, first of all, that the cup was blessed and offered after supper (v. 25). In Corinth, it seems the agape meal was enclosed within the two blessings. In the pre-Pauline tradition that Paul is handing on, Jesus says: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (v. 25). There is not a problem of unclear referents here. The "this" in the first part is an adjective modifying the cup. The cup affords the one receiving it the opportunity for participation in the new covenant. This new covenant is a new relationship to salvation made possible by the atoning death of Jesus. What is new about the origins of this covenant is described by the phrase "in my blood." What is new about the effects of this covenant in his blood for those who drink it? Paul himself puts it succinctly: "The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not a participation (*koinonia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17).<sup>14</sup> This participation in the body of Christ is a communion with the whole Christ, the exalted Lord and the body of believers. This new order of salvation is an eschatological order which empowers those who are called into it to taste of the life to come and of the reign in which Jesus is Lord. To partake of the cup of the Lord, then, means that one comes into and under the reign of the exalted Lord. The believer cannot partake of the cup without being drawn into the reign. But believers could not be drawn into the reign and continue to act as they had prior to their incorporation into all that this reign entailed. The sacramental and the social, rather than being two sides of the one reality, stood in contradiction to one another in Corinth. Like the eating of the bread, the drinking of the cup involved something much deeper and broader than the liturgical act of consuming the blessed species. That "something more" is not created by those partaking but it must be "done" by them nonetheless. For their part, they must "do" what they were being made.

It was not being done by the Corinthians. What was being done was the absolutizing of the sacramental communion. They were eating and drinking at the agape meal with one spirit and eating the blessed bread and drinking the cup with another. By their "sacramentalism," they misjudged themselves. "To discern the body, to esteem Christ's body in its peculiarity, means that the body of Christ given for us and received in the sacrament united the recipients in the body of the congregation and makes them responsible for one another in love."<sup>15</sup> Bornkamm continues: "If this is correct it indicates that verse 29 is directed against the profaning of the body of Christ precisely under the mask of an increasing sacralization of the eucharistic food."<sup>16</sup>

After quoting the words of institution, Paul begins his own midrash with verse 26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." His choice of words gives a further proof that Paul was anxious to root out the anti-somatic gnostic tendencies which were having such an effect on the corporate consciousness he had hoped to inculcate in the Corinthian Christians. The important words in this verse are "death" and "until." Paul was anxious to emphasize they were between two moments, one when the Lord gave himself up in death and the other the coming of the Lord in the future. These words are significant because they are contrary to a "fanatical transcending of the boundaries of time in a spiritual-eschatological enthusiasm."<sup>17</sup> The enthusiasts proclaimed the Lord's and their own resurrection with the Lord as something they were now experiencing. In their state of spiritual euphoria, they were inducing a triumphalistic degree of glory that Paul found false. Instead, he roots their celebrations within time and calls them back to the historical realism with which his letters are replete. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15:22-23).

These Corinthians were, of course, being drawn into the realm of the risen Lord but they were immaturely imagining themselves to be in a condition of exaltation which was simply untrue of them. In addition, they were distancing themselves from the bloody sacrifice of the cross. Concretely, they were embracing a faith that cost them little. Paul connects their theology with their individualism, domestic

privatism and the drunken disregard of some for their fellows in Christ.

### RELATIONAL WHOLENESS

There are several social indicators in the Pauline letters that reveal Paul's way of detecting whether groups of Christians were coming under the lordship of Christ. He would not have been satisfied that the simple confession that Jesus was their Lord was sufficient, although that would have to be part of it.<sup>18</sup> One of the key tests, the one we will concentrate on, was whether a relational wholeness was developing among the believers who confessed Jesus as their Lord. If he really was their Lord then individuals would be submitting to what the Lord was doing to them. But that submission would take a very definite direction or shape. Strays became a flock. Individuals became a people. Individual stones, so to speak, became part of a living temple. "I's" became "We's."

Paul's favorite expression for describing the relational wholeness he observed in Christian communities and in his experience was to call his wholeness Christ's body. If Jesus was really becoming Lord of individuals, then individuals were really changing their relationship to the other individuals who also confessed Jesus as their Lord. The change was sufficiently different that it had to be named differently. Paul did not see individual Christians simply in relationship to one another, he saw them as members of one another.

Over the years, scholars have expended considerable energy trying to discover the conceptual precedents, or some of the more likely sources, for such an idea. One whole school chooses as its candidate the Stoic philosophy which sees the state as a body with interdependent members as the place where Paul hit upon the idea. Another school is sure that the idea occurred from the corporate personality notion in the Old Testament. Still a third alleges its source to be the gnostic myth of the "redeemed-redeemer's gigantic body."<sup>19</sup> Though any one or all of these in combination could have been the actual source of the idea for Paul, these explanations seem to overlook a much more obvious and immediate explanation, namely, his own experience in relating to his brothers and sisters in Christ plus his own

observation of Christian communities. Either or both of these made the idea of a single body which had, at the same time, endless differences within it while retaining its unity, a very apt description. It can be neither proven nor disproven that Paul was relying on the history of ideas in order to conjure up the language event which referred to the Christian communities as Christ's body. I am not sure such an explanation is necessary. One notices for example in all Paul's letters a degree of emotional (although that does not explain it) bonding with those to whom he writes. From the very first letter of Paul that we have, we find him emoting: "So well disposed were we to you, in fact, that we wanted to share with you not only God's tidings but our very lives, so dear had you become to us" (1 Thess 2:8).

An experiential discovery of the fact that the Lord was knitting together people as intimately as if they were so many members of his Son's own body took several years to mature. It is not until the letter to the Corinthians (probably between 53-55 A.D.) that Paul uses such an expression.<sup>20</sup> By then he sees the aptness of such a bold expression. It should be noted, too, that by then he was aware of the implications for "the body politic" if "the body Christian" were to fail in achieving the relational wholeness it was capable of. Were that to happen, the mission of the communities would grind to a halt.

Let me note in passing that this relational wholeness was not an end in itself. In Paul's mind there were broader social purposes and wider social implications in the quality of the relationships Christians were to experience. In a sense their mission was largely being accomplished insofar as the relations they had with one another became a sign to those in Corinth whom the Lord chose to attract to them. That sign pointed to an alternative way of being and living in Corinth. Individuals knitted together in a bonding so close as to be like a single body with many differences was evidence that a new kind of city was possible, something other than the fragmentation Corinth had known. If this point is true then the relational, the salvational, and the political can be seen as three different optics on the one thing God is doing. The knitting together of individuals would be their redemption and at the same time would be the beginning of the recapitulation of all systems in Christ.

It is good to remember, too, that the Church was not meant to

be a single social system which would elbow its place into the world of social systems. It was rather meant to be Christ's own body which acted as both a sign to and a leaven for all social systems. It was not called to homogenize the social enterprise but to purify it, ridding it of the diversity that came from sin and *sarx*, so that the diversity that came from the spirit could also be the source of its unity.

But rather than treating these factors at the macro level, I will remain within the letter to the Corinthians which deals with the same issue of unity and diversity at a micro level. Some of the particulars of how this phenomenon of relational wholeness is achieved are worth simply pointing out.

Much can be gained from reading through the passage from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. There are a number of references to interaction between people. There is first of all the clear indication that the self-sufficiency and individualism that Paul and the Christians knew before they became the Christ event no longer obtained. On the one hand, there is the experience of incompleteness in oneself because of a discovery of many powers only some of which one finds in oneself. The experiential side of this pluralism of charisms means that one finds a need for others and for the peculiar gifts that others are imbued with. Not the gifts alone, but the gifts plus the gifteds together begin to make a person a part of a whole. One cannot be oneself apart from the body. The need for one another is a key experience for Paul, so that when he finds a Christian community lacking in awareness of this kind of mutuality, he is concerned to point out that deficiency. "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need for you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" (1 Cor 12:21). Relational wholeness, apparently, in the Pauline experience is not achieved by collectivizing a mass but rather by the upbuilding of one another through the uniqueness each has breathed into himself or herself through the Spirit.

In the passage we are examining here, Paul is dealing with the very tangible ways in which human beings relate or fail to relate to one another, but he is not treating these in the usual way. He talks about having such care for one another that one member cannot rejoice without all rejoicing nor can one member suffer without the rest being impacted by that member's suffering. He is concerned that persons be in touch with their unique giftedness, while accepting their

incompleteness without others. In turn he reminds all to identify themselves not with a few but with all, with Christ-himself and the whole body which has so many different functions needed in order for it to be itself and for all in it to be themselves. The doctrine of the body, in other words, is built up from innumerable experiences or concrete acts of interdependence and mutuality. Paul talks about very tangible, simple human actions and, at the same time, he does not think the degree of intimacy that he finds between those performing those actions can be explained by merely human emotion or effort. They are expressing and creating more than a human bonding. He saw them all as so many moments of upbuilding a reality bigger than any one of them. He saw nothing less than Christ's own presence being built up through the richness of what each one received from God. Before it was a doctrine to be assented to it had to be an experience looking for a name. The name Paul found *apros* was body. They were Christ's body.

There is another reason why the doctrine of the body of Christ does not have the impact on us that it had on the first generations of Christianity. It suffers from having been flattened out or ecclesiologized. We have come to believe that we are in some way Christ's body but Paul is saying something much more profound than that. In 1 Corinthians 12:12 he is saying that just as a body is one with many members and all the members of a body, though many, are one body—this is who Christ is now.<sup>21</sup> This must be heard as a Christological statement for it to impact the hearer. Paul meant it to be a Christological statement.<sup>22</sup> What he is saying is not only that the many are one but that the one the many are is Christ. He is saying more than that individuals participate in Christ or that through baptism they are made part of an ecclesial reality. He is saying: together they are Christ. He is saying that in addition to being Lord of the universe, Christ Jesus is now an immanent reality. He is saying something more than that individuals belong to the Church or even that they belong to Christ's body; he is saying that many individuals together are so conjoined to the risen Lord that he and they are the Christ now.<sup>23</sup>

The point Paul makes by naming the experience of Christian communities in this way is so basic that it is more often than not softened so that it doesn't really say what, in fact, it means. One of

our favorite ways of dulling the impact of calling these Christian communities Christ has already been mentioned, namely by assuming that the meaning of Church is being addressed rather than the question of the Christ as he now exists and reigns. Another way is to begin to distinguish the relationship between Christ and the members of his body in terms like ontological, moral, functional and other such distinctions that Paul would not himself have conceived of. Paul knew as well as anyone that there was not a total identification between the uncreated and the created, between the divine and the human. His letters abound with acknowledgement of that. Hence, the bride is distinguishable from the bridegroom, the field from the planter, the pot from the potter, and so on. But this must not soften the truth of the Incarnation nor the fact that the Word has been made *social* flesh. For us, unfortunately, the body of Christ has somehow or other come to be seen as a kind of appendage trailing on to the risen Lord. But for Paul the meaning of body connotes the whole of the person, the person acting, the person choosing, the living person.

How could a statement like 1 Corinthians 12:12 make sense? As if anticipating the question Paul answers in the very next verse: "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). Paul brings together the four ingredients, so to speak, that are necessary in order to explain the remarkable assertion he has made in the preceding verse. These four theological factors are the Spirit, baptism, body and Eucharist.<sup>24</sup> Once the Holy Spirit is introduced into Christology the transcendent and immanent can be conjoined because the Spirit traverses the depths of each.<sup>25</sup> The Spirit can also knit the divine and human together into a single personality.<sup>26</sup> Here an indissoluble unity between the one and the many is ascribed to the Spirit.

Putting the same matter in a more Christological and chronological form Paul's belief had something of the following shape. When Jesus died, the same thing happened to him as happens in any human death, his body and his spirit underwent some kind of a separation. Unlike any other human death, however, Jesus came into a new relationship with his body. Looked at from his side he was raised; looked at from our side his own body became the created

means through which his Spirit was dispensed to other human beings. Before his death, as is the case with any human being, his spirit touched the world through his body. Now his spirit would touch the universe through his body. Before his death the expressions of his personality were tied to the principle of limitation which is matter. Now his body is not limited by matter, as is true of "a body of death" but the whole of the material universe is "at the service of his manifestation."<sup>27</sup>

The change we're interested in here, however, is the one in which the anthropological and the Christological converge. There was a radically new possibility in the human order, given the death and resurrection of Jesus. Something is possible now that is more than that human beings can be "in Christ" or that Christ can be in individuals. Through baptism, Christ's own death and resurrection can now become more determining of individuals than their own births and deaths. But the opposite has equal truth in it, namely that if they are members of his body he is now these individuals.

By being baptized, furthermore, individuals are baptized into his death and are therefore brought out of a state of sinfulness which, among other things, left them in isolation from one another. Baptism brought them out of the state of pre-membership with which they had come into the world. Now endowed with a capacity to be members of one another in the body of Christ, the Lord who created them would bring about their redemption by bringing this capacity to realization.

#### RELATIONAL WHOLENESS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

What is the relevance for other social systems of this experience of being members of one another in a bonding whose name is the body of Christ? Or—to remain with the letter to the Corinthians—what was the relationship between the ecclesial social system being generated by the lordship of Jesus in Corinth and the other social systems which together composed the economic, political and cultural life of the city? In the course of instructing the Corinthians, Paul provides some insight into this question. Though he would hardly have asked the question our way, he does have some definite atti-

tudes which give a good indication of how he would have dealt with the question.

First of all, there must have been some in Corinth who took this body of Christ kind of membering so seriously that they were pushing to withdraw from every former kind of social system of which they had been part. I say this because Paul formally instructs them in several places to remain exactly as they had been before their conversion. "Let everyone lead a life which the Lord has assigned to him. . . . Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called. . . . In whatever state each was called there let him remain with God" (1 Cor 7:17-24). For example, "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage" (1 Cor 7:27).

This was not an exhortation to passivity or indifference. On the contrary, each believer was to behave in such a unique way as to have a definite impact on all the social forms of life he or she was in. It seems that Paul put great stock in the possibilities of converted persons' witness to the drastic change that Christ made in their lives. Paul does not expect that the person should or needs to leave the systems, but he expects that the systems should and would be redefined by the persons living within them now in a different way. For example, the social system of slavery. "Were you a slave when called? Never mind! . . . He who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord" (1 Cor 7:21-22).

It seems that Paul would have quite a different attitude toward social systems than our modern mentalities have developed. It would be right to conclude that the systems themselves need not be our responsibility or the object of our concern. The object of our concern must rather be: What have I become, what have we been made by God in Christ? If we take that seriously, if one stays *in* but no longer sees himself or herself *of* the same condition as others then one will act quite differently. Hence, Paul exhorts people to be indifferent about the things that everyone else is anxious about and exhorts them to be concerned about things no one else thinks relevant. His Christology, in other words, becomes an all-consuming passion or determinant of all other social influences, factors and systems. The new creation is meant to redefine the old creation, not to accommodate to it.

Paul adopts this position in part because "The appointed time has grown very short . . . for the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:29-31). Paul's immanent-Christ doctrine must be complemented by the imminence-of-full-manifestation of that presence in the midst of believers and non-believers alike. When the things of this world, even the most intimate things such as marriage or the most necessary things such as buying or selling, are juxtaposed to the presence of the Christ and the expectation of the fullness of that presence, the former things must be taken very lightly. Hence, "From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none . . . and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it" (1 Cor 7:30-31).

We have now advanced three different ingredients to answer this final question of the essay, namely, the relevance of the bonding of some believers for other social systems. One of the ingredients is Christological, the other eschatological and the third is Paul's reverence for all of creation. We must keep these three together in order to understand what Paul's approach would be to the question which we are attempting to answer.

Some of the things to remember about the Christological ingredient: if our Christology were as social as Paul's, a Christological answer to the question of social systems would not be the pious cop-out it may otherwise appear. One could also say that Pauline social analysis is radically Christological. It's even possible that Paul would suggest that if Christians came to understand and, in turn, live the degree of change the Lord has worked in them through baptism and his Spirit, then analyses of social systems themselves and Christ's would-be lordship over them might be superfluous. Social systems would be so affected by the Christians living in them that these differences would themselves presage the shape of things to come when he would be Lord of all.<sup>28</sup>

With respect to the eschatological, these things should be noted: once the value of this world and therefore of all the social systems within this world are accurately weighed on a scale the other term of which is the Christ presence within this world, then the former things suffer badly by comparison. So badly, that Paul is anxious to point out that attention to the things of this world will distract one

from what is really important about this world. "I wish you to be free from concern," even with the most personal of social systems, namely marriage, in order to be concerned about the affairs of the Lord" (1 Cor 7:32). "One who is married is concerned about the affairs of the world, how he may please his wife" (1 Cor 7:33). For Paul, in other words, there were two ways of looking at social reality. One was to look at it in terms of itself and become distracted. The second was to look at it in relation to the Christ-presence within the world. If one did so, as Paul did, that would be a full agenda. Or could be.

It is also important to understand the meaning of Paul's judgment that "the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). Barrett's translation is germane. "The outward show of this world is passing away."<sup>9</sup> The Anchor Bible notes: the form which is passing away is "the shape the world is in."<sup>10</sup> The inner reality of the social systems and ultimately of creation itself is another story still being worked out in Paul's mind in the Corinthian letter.<sup>11</sup>

The third ingredient, Pauline secularity, is part of his Jewish reverence for all of created reality. It is not necessary for us to read into Paul a disdain for this world in order to share his awe at the Christ presence within it. One of the reasons why he does not have the Christian communities become enclaves but insists they remain part of the social realities and systems of their fellow citizens, can be traced to this same reverence. One must couple the universality of Christ's reign over all of creation to the Old Testament theme of the salvation of the nations, to see what lies behind Paul's order "to all the Churches" (1 Cor 7:17) that the faithful should remain in the diverse secular callings and systems in which the Lord found them.

Paul does not know and does not purport to know how the present shape of social existence will be transposed into the future shape of social existence, but he knows the difference between the two will be what we would describe as dialectical. "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (1 Cor 15:42-43). He knows finally that the future of social reality will not be one of annihilation but of transformation. As with the individual, so also, "we shall not all

sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor 15:51-52).

One is left to wonder, finally, what the political effect would have been on Corinth and elsewhere if a diluted form of Christology had not been embraced and instead an experience of membering had been taken back to all the social realities of which Corinthian Christians were a part. What would have happened, for example, to the relations between men and women in Corinth, if a growing number of Corinthians came to so reverence one another that their treatment of one another transcended stereotypical gender roles (Gal 3:28)? One is left to wonder what would have happened if the vastly different social conditions and circumstances, as for example, between slaves and freemen, Jews and Greeks, did not impede a bonding with one another more intimate than those which had obtained between even family members.

"You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) was a fact that had to be lived and it would have been lived much more powerfully if the relational wholeness that Paul experienced had been believed in after it was named. If it had been lived, named and exported then the question which this volume asks would have had a ready answer. We are left to speculate about the question because, for the most part, we continue to name and follow a Christ who looks more like the one our Corinthian forebears concocted than the one Paul preached. We take comfort in this diluted form of Christology because the ramifications of the Incarnation are still too preposterous to accept. We continue to name the reality of Christ from the experience of our individualism rather than from the experience of membering. Hence we name a Christ who does not include those who he said he was. We call Paul's venturesome descriptions eschatological vistas pointing to the future and forget they are also political vistas pointing to the present and to possibilities in the Christ mystery we have even stopped imagining.

## NOTES

1. Conzelmann calls the Corinthians "proto-Gnostics." Contrary to many exegetes, he contends that Paul's letter to the Corinthians is attempt-

ing to counter Gnosticism not fully blown but "in statu nascendi." Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 15.

2. C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 149. Also, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Pauline Theology* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967): "Man does not merely have a *soma*, he is a *soma*" (p. 61).

3. *The New World Dictionary-Concordance to the American Bible* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1970), p. 193.

4. E. Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Last Supper," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Studies in Biblical Theology n. 41; Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1964), p. 130.

5. C.F.D. Moule, "The Judgment Theme in the Sacraments," in: W. D. Davies and D. Daube, eds., *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), pp. 464-483.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 467-9. Also 1 Cor 2:15; 6:2. Both verses treat of not being judged while being empowered to judge.

7. E.g., "... that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us..." (Jn 17:21).

8. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

9. The account of the Last Supper is a formulation of sacred law, according to Käsemann. His observation is based on the fact that the rabbinic terms *qibel* and *masar*, "which connote the unbroken legitimate succession of tradition," are the Hebrew equivalents of the Greek words for "received" (Παραλαμβάνειν) and "delivered" (Παραδιδοναι). Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

10. William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *I Corinthians: A New Translation* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 270.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 271-3.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

14. Günther Bornkamm calls these verses the only authentic commentary in the whole New Testament on the words of institution. G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 139.

15. Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

18. "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

19. Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 231, and 201-287 *passim*.

20. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

21. *οὐτως καὶ ὁ χριστός.*

22. All of Paul's anthropology is a Christology. Cf. Jewett, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Fitzmyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

23. After analyzing 1 Corinthians 12:12 thoroughly, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., observes: "The application of the name 'Christ' to the community must be considered to have formed part of Paul's habitual vocabulary" ("Eucharist and Community in First Corinthians," *Worship* 50 [1976] 375).

24. These are constitutive parts of Paul's unitary insight.

25. 1 Cor 2:10.

26. Lk 1:35.

27. X. Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Message of Easter* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p. 271.

28. A number of Pauline texts speak of the abrogation of individual differences that divide. This is both an eschatological vision and a description of the present for Paul.

29. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

30. Orr and Walther, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

31. E.g., by the time of the letter to the Colossians, in Christ "all things were created . . . through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17).