Chapter 2

Fellowship Meals

Their Roles and Functions in the Ancient World

INTRODUCTION

We have seen in the earlier chapter that fellowship meals appear prominently in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish traditions. In this chapter we will look at the specific roles and functions of fellowship meals in the different cultures of the ancient world that made them indispensable for the functioning of societies. Then we will consider how a judgment motif is associated with the fellowship meal traditions. In the process we will also compare the different traditions and see how they can contribute to the study of the Lord's Supper in Corinth.

COMMUNAL BONDING

One of the salient features of fellowship meals is their ability to create bonding among the participants. This communal aspect of the meal is observed wherever people gathered for fellowship meals. Thus one chief aim of meal cultures in the ancient world was to form new affiliations and further strengthen this communal bonding among the participants. To be invited or to join together for a meal denotes that a person was accepted and was an integral part of the group.

In the Greco-Roman context, Plutarch refers to this as "the friend-making character of the table" in his works.[1] Implying that, one function of the fellowship meal was its cohesive character as it brought about κοινωνία (*koinonia*) and the strengthening of social ties or kinship.[2] The very act of coming together to eat and the sharing of food at a table were symbolic of the bonding that was being created among the participants.[3] Thus, Plutarch reproved certain behavior that might upset the whole process: "But where each guest has his own private portion, companionship perishes."[4] The reason is that when individual portions/shares are distributed it "kills sociability and makes many dinners and many diners with nobody anybody's dinner-companion . . ."[5] Thus no one is a "fellow-diner" (σύνδειπνος) with "anyone," i.e., when equitable and proper sharing is not followed the whole purpose of the fellowship meal is defeated.

Keeping this concern in mind the number of participants was usually ideal and according to the size of the banquet room so that it would not hinder proper conversation and bonding among the participants.[6] Plutarch again writes on this matter:

> If both space and the provisions are ample, we must still avoid great number, because they in themselves interfere with sociability and conversation. It is worse to take away the pleasure of conversation at table than to run out of wine. . . . People who bring together too many guests to one place do prevent general conversation; they allow only a few to enjoy each other's society, for the guests separate into groups of two or three in order to meet and converse, completely unconscious of those whose place on the couches is remote and not looking their way because they are separated from them by showy dining rooms . . . that hold thirty couches or more. Such magnificence makes for un-sociable and unfriendly banquets where the manager of a fair is needed more than a toastmaster.[7]

1. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 614 A–B; *Cat. Maj.* 25.4.

2. Cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 660A-B; 643B–E.

3. Cf. Diogenes Laertius 8.35, where the "friends" in Pythagoreanism had as the symbol of their unity the sharing of "one bread." "Not to break bread; for once friends used to meet over one loaf, as the barbarians do even to this day; and you should not divide bread which brings them together."

4. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 644C.

5. Ibid.,. 643A.

6. Cf. Ibid. 5.5; 678E–F.

7. Ibid., 679B–C.

Anything that would hinder bonding and development of friendship at the table was to be avoided. With this in mind the seating arrangement usually consisted of three couches laid out in a "C" shape so that everyone could see each other.[8] The name of a dining hall *triclinium* was derived from this practice of having three couches τρίκλινον. Plutarch again suggested that along with the sharing of wine from the same cup, even the topic for discussion should be properly chosen so that everyone present will be able to participate in it, and thus further enhance the amiability of the fellowship meal.[9] The main activities of the clubs and associations were also centered on fellowship meals, as they were effective means of bringing cohesion among the members.

Meals eaten in funerary banquets in honor of dead family members indicate the notion of continuing the communal bonding even in the afterlife. The Greeks believed that the deceased was not only present at the funerary banquet held at the deceased's house after the funeral but he/she was actually hosting it.[10] This expression shows how fellowship meals were a strong symbol for the belief system in the Greco-Roman world. We have already noted this character in the Jewish communities that the fellowship meal was a principal way of developing and nurturing personal and social relations.

Communion with the Gods

Fellowship meals were an integral part of religious practices. In fact they occupied a central place in the worship of most of the religious groups in the ancient world. Basically they were extensions and part of the worship and sacrifices in the temples, and food sacrificed to the gods was part of the meals.[11] They were considered to create bonding among members and with

8. This can be seen in an archaeological excavation of a *triclinium* at Ostia. Instone-Brewer and Harland, "Jewish Associations," 10.

9. "Indeed, just as the wine must be common to all, so too the conversation must be one in which all will share." Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 614D–E.

10. Artemidorus *Onir.* 5.82.7.

11. Rowley mentions similar examples in the OT, Deut 14:22–26 and other references where such sacrificial meals before God were enjoyed. This common practice was also found among the Canaanites (Judg 9:27), Babylonians (Dan 5:1–4), and Egyptians, including their several rituals (Exod. 32:6). Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 125–26.

the gods/goddesses; this is especially the case in meals that were considered as sacramental.[12]

In the fellowship meals where sacrifices were part of it, the gods were thought to be present as guest or host in the meals held in their honor.[13] So bonding happened in two levels, by eating the food from the altar a solemn bond of union was formed firstly among themselves, and then secondly with the deities. Through the sacrificial banquets people believed that a connection was made with the deity; the offering of the sacrificial food at the altar and the burnt offering symbolized the consumption of the food by the god. This type of offering was called the τραπεζώματα (*trapezomata*.)[14] In this type of fellowship meal there was a belief that the food that had come in contact with the altar was affected by the "spirit of divinity" and it became sacred food. This idea is seen in the legend that describes the origin of the Bouphonia at Athens. Farnell suggests that people taking part in such meals "might be conscious of a real sacramental communion" with the deity.[15] Nock comments that Romans perhaps had a deeper understanding of this sacred rite.[16] The communion between the participants and the gods was thought to be achieved by partaking in the same flesh of the offered animal and thus created a bond between them.[17] The significance of these sacrificial meals was due to the belief that the participants ate of the god's table in his presence or because of their partaking of the food set before the god, at the altar or before an image or statue. A good example is seen in Aristides's hymn to Serapis (26–28):

> What Homer said of all the gods, that they may be turned and appeased, is confirmed most strikingly by Sarapis: so many turns does he turn for the well being of those who at any times need him. Wherefore men have the true partnership in sacrifices with this god alone above all others: they invite him to their hearths and set

12. The term sacramental is used here in a broader sense referring to the meal events where the gods were believed to be present and were involved in the fellowship meals. For the kind of fellowship or bonding that was achieved see the discussion in Angus, *Mystery Religions*, 131–33.

13. Homer terms a sacrifice a "meal of the gods" (*Od*. III 336; see *Od*. VII 201–3 where the gods could be seen dining with the Phaeacians. Cf. Ovid *Fast*. IV 743ff.; for more examples see Nock, "The Cult of Heroes," 153–54.

14. Gill, "Trapezomata," 117–18.

15. Farnell, "Sacrificial Communion," 312–13.

16. Nock, "Cult of the Heroes," 153–54. Cf. Tac. *Ann*. 13.17.

17. Nock, "Cult of the Heroes," 148–49.

> him in the chair as guest and entertainer (*hestiator*): so that where some make up one party and some another, Sarapis alone makes up all parties and is lord of the feast for those who at any time come together under his auspices. . . . He is at the same time participant in libations and the receiver of libations . . . there is a similar partnership—as of equals in honor with an equal in honor,—of men with him in other matters: so merchants and sea captains do not just give him tithes, but they share with him equally as a fellow merchant and partner in all their undertakings.[18]

The characteristic feature of the sacrificial meal was the strong association with the gods who acted as the host of these meals and were supposed to be present with the participants.[19] For example, the Oxyrhynchus Papyri reveals the invitation sent by the gods to the inhabitants of the town: "The exegetes requests (sic) you to dine in the (temple of) Demeter today, which is the 9th, beginning at the 7th hour (1 p.m.)"[20] A comparable invitation to dine "at the table of Lord Serapis" is found in at least three other papyri—Oxyrhynchus Papyri 110, 523, 1484.[21] This is also seen from stone inscriptions of the cult banquets of Zeus at Panamara in the region of Caria in Asia Minor; in this inscription the god invites various cities of the region to attend his festive celebration:

> Since the god invites all the people to the feast and provides a table shared in common and offering equal privilege to those who come from whatever place they may come . . . I [priest] invite you [the Rhodians] to the (house of the) god to share in the festivity which he [the god] provides.[22]

It further states "because there exists between our cities a kinship to one another and a commonality of sacred rites."[23] Thus through this kind of association social and political ties were also forged and the meals functioned

18. Cited from Nock, ibid. 150.

19. Cf. M. H. Jameson who states: "in a larger sense the gods were the hosts in their sanctuary and the meal came from the animals given to the gods," "Sacrifice and Ritual: Greece," 972. More examples of gods depicted as hosts and guest at the table are presented in Nock, "Cult of Heroes," 152, 154–55; Angus, *Mystery Religions*, 128.

20. Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1485 in Grenfell, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* XII, 243–44.

21. Grenfell *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* I, 177; III, 260; XII, 244; XIV, 180. Also see Youtie, "Kline of Sarapis," 13–14.

22. Hatzfeld, "Inscriptions de Panamara," 74; translation from Smith, *From Symposium*, 81.

23. Hatzfeld, "Inscriptions de Panamara," 73–74.

to further define and strengthen these relationships between individuals and communities. A general view is seen in the writings of Xenophon: "The goddess provided for the worshippers barley, bread, wine, and dried fruit, and a portion of the sacrificial victims from the sacred land and a portion of the animals captured in the hunt."[24] This explains why these meals are referred to as the "table of the god" with the priest acting as the representative of the god.[25]

In other cases the gods were guests at the banquet.[26] This is seen in the sacrificial meal θεοξένια (*theoxenia*), which literally means "hosting the gods." In these meals the presence of the god was probably represented by his cult image and by assigning a place and food at the table.[27] In the *lovis Epulum* the worshippers participated in serving the god at the banquet.[28] All these data indicate the important role the cultic meals played in the mystery religions and cults.[29] The meals were connecting links between the deities and the worshippers and a platform to express their devotion and experience the divine reality.

In the mystery religions, initiates underwent secret ceremonies to attain membership into the cult and it was believed that through these ceremonies they became recipients of "salvation." Here also the essential element of the mystery was a fellowship meal which was considered as sacred in nature.[30] By participating in the meal the initiate got a new status and identity and the sacred meal acted to enhance the bond between the initiate with the deities, in whose fate the partaker receives a share.[31] A

24. Xen. *Anab.* 5.3.7–13.

25. Xen. *Symp*, IX

26. Aristides comments that at the banquet table, the god was at once host and guest, *Aristides* 45.27.

27. Youtie, "Kline of Sarapis" 13–14. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium*, 78.

28. Angus, *Mystery Religions*, 128; Also see Nock, "Cult of Heroes," 152–53. He states that: "A god could be host or guest. He is guest in various rituals of Theoxenia and Theodaisia, as again in ordinary sacrifice to which he was invited; the dead also were invited to meals."

29. "The frequent observance of sacred meals maintained the communion among the *mystics* of Cybele, Mithras, or the Baals." Cumont, *Oriental Religions*, 41.

30. Cf. *Metam*. 11.24 Apuleius himself calls it a sacred or religious dinner by which Lucius' initiation was "duly consummated."

31. Apuleius *Metam.* 11.21–24, the initiation takes place by partaking in a sacred meal. There is a preparatory abstinence from "unhallowed and unlawful foods" and after the initiate undergoes a number of different procedures like purification and ablution, finally the initiation is consummated on the third day by participating in a celebratory meal.

good example of this kind can be seen in the cult of Serapis. The union was achieved through the means of the fellowship meals and thus the meals came to be denoted as "couch of Serapis."[32]

This sacramental feature associated with the fellowship meals was common to many of the religious groups. One of the popular cults in the Greco-Roman world, the Eleusinian mysteries, held their annual festival which consisted of rites and a festive meal that were considered sacramental in nature.[33] The cult of Dionysus and the Mithraic mysteries which were widespread in the ancient world also show that there were feastings which involved being intoxicated and the partaking in the raw flesh of a bull slaughtered for the purpose in which the god was thought to be incarnated.[34] By drinking and feasting on the flesh they were seen as "incorporating the god and his power within."[35] This was a sacred meal in which the worshippers by consuming the flesh sought to become one with the god.[36] Only those initiates who had attained certain requirements were admitted to the meal.[37]

The description of the cult meals in the form of liturgy and hymn in the Mystery Cult of Isis and Serapis by Lucius[38] and by Aelius Aristides[39] along with the Oxyrhynchus Papyri that talk about meal invitation of these cults involving Serapis, indicate that the meals were regarded as sacramental. Bultmann argues further that the idea of communion brought about by the sacramental meal was not unique to the mystery religions alone; but it was wide spread in primitive and classic cults.[40]

Though the issue of sacramentality of these cult meals is still debated, it is clear that they played significant religious as well as social roles in the community. One can agree with Horsley who concludes that: "although it

32. Aristides *Sarapis*, 26–28.

33. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries,* 224–26.

34. Euripides *Bacch.* 64–168.

35 See Cumont, *Mysteries of Mithra*, 115–60; Vermaseren, *Mithras*, 103; Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 243.

36. Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion*, 181.

37. Cumont, *Mysteries of Mithra,* 158.

38. Apul. *Metam.* 11.

39. Aristides, *Aristides*.

40. Bultmann, *Theology*, 1.148–49.

was a matter of some disagreement earlier in the century, there is now a clear consensus that these banquets had a fundamental religious character."[41]

In the Jewish context we have noted that they played an important part in cementing their relationship with God, among themselves and with the other nations. Thus bonding through covenants, treaties, friendships and settlements between people were frequently formalized and celebrated through fellowship meals.[42] Likewise they were the mainstay in the religious expression of the people.[43]

Therefore, meal practices had an important role in the functioning of the community as it created community ties and further strengthened their bonds. Some have raised reservation in regard to the extent of creating new communal bonding during the meals, but there are evidences suggesting that communal bonding can take place even among strangers, as seen in some of the tribal communities in the Near East.[44] In the NT also the narratives show that fellowship meals were an integral part of Jesus' ministry and of the newfound community in reaching out to people in the periphery. The fellowship meal in the form of the Lord's Supper emphasized the social bonding in the community and we can conclude that it was a means of incorporating new members into the community. Thus, the fellowship meal was an indispensable institution in the ancient world to foster and maintain community ties and their relation with the deities. This feature of the fellowship meal practices formed one of the bases of their association with the judgment motif in ancient cultures.

SOCIAL DIVISION AND STATUS

The stratification of society based on social, economic, and political status was a driving force in Greco-Roman society. One principal way of achieving this was through the practice of fellowship meals, which were used to create and maintain social divisions and status. In ancient cultures, to dine

41. Horsley, *New Documents*, 6.

42. Gen 26:30–31; 27:33; 31:54.

43. Exod 24:9–12; 1 Kgs 8:62–66.

44. Smith is of this view: "however, that while meals were effective and widely used for celebrating community solidarity, they were not capable of creating a community *in themselves*. Rather communal bonds of some sort would need already to exist before a group would gather for a meal. The meal may help to enhance those bonds but it would not create bonds that do not exist originally." "Historical Jesus at the Table," 470.

at the table of the kings and emperors represented the highest honor and status.[45] This feature was practised even at the fellowship meals in many of the clubs and societies. In the Greco-Roman society the symposium was initially dominated and controlled by the aristocratic class, and it was a means of displaying one's wealth.[46] Thus it was also called an "aristocratic banquet" or "reclining banquet" to describe this same custom.[47] Maintaining the status and position of patrons at the fellowship meal was seen as a necessity to maintain the social system and to keep control over society.[48]

Originally the banquet seems to have been an exclusive affair reserved for men only (who were free citizens), as women, children, and slaves were excluded from it.[49] In late antiquity, women were allowed to take part in the pagan Roman banquets and slaves were also included on special occasions.[50] Even when they were present the women were seated separately from the men or in the lowest couch.[51] This was also the case with the youth

45. See Fisher, "Roman Associations," 1214–1215 for Roman emperors and their banquets. We can see a number of examples of this kind even in the OT. 2 Sam 9; 1 Kgs 2:7; 2 Kgs 25:27–30; and Jer 52:31–34.

46. Ath. *Deipn* 128–30d.

47. Schmitt-Pantel, "Sacrificial meal," 15. This was no surprise as organizing a banquet involved a lot of expenditure and usually slaves would be involved.

48. For example, as was the case in Greek society, aristocracy over the city. Schmit-Pantelt, "Sacrificial Meal," 15. Suetonius, *The Deified Augustus* 2.74: reports how Augustus paid strict attention to rank and status at a dinner party as it contributed to the stability of the state by reminding all persons that they should know their place and be content with it. D'Arms, "Roman Convivium," 308–20.

49. In family occasions women were part of the table fellowship (Plut. *Quaest. conv*. 612F) or else the other reason for their presence would be for entertainment at the symposium and usually they turn up to be prostitutes (PW, 4:1203). Though an incident is mentioned by Plutarch where Melissa and Eumetis attended the symposium, but they remained silent through out and leave well before its conclusion (*Sept. sap. conv.* 150D–155E). Likewise there is no mention of women involved at the table talk in the symposium of Plato, Xenophon, and others.

Aune also observed that women holding positions in religious societies would in fact be part of the cult symposia (e.g., Poseidippos as summarized in Ath. *Deipn.* 9.377). He concludes that "the inclusion of women in some cultic activities constituted a considerable innovation;" Aune, "Septem Sapientium," 71–72.

See K. E. Corley who suggests that by the first century CE the scenario was changing in the Greco-Roman society. Women from wealthy families are seen to be reclining at the meals indicating a shift in the status of women. So ". . .the inclusion of women in Christian meals would have been noteworthy but not unique." *Private Women*, 24–79.

50. Cf. Lucian *Sat*. 13. Fisher, "Roman Associations," 2.1201.

51. E.g., Lucian *Symp*. 8; Ath. *Deipn* 14.644d. In the Homeric accounts, Queens like

Autolycus who was seated next to his father who reclined, even though the banquet was given in his honor.[52] Even at a later time when reclining was more inclusive and included women in its fold, there was still a debate and stigma attached to sitting at the table.[53] For example, Lucian writes about a certain man who states that it is "womanish and weak" to sit at a table, when he was invited to sit rather than recline as there was no more room on the couches when he came late.[54]

Status was also associated with the type of fellowship meals organized by the various clubs and associations. Some trade guilds were formed by members having lowly profession, and people attending fellowship meals organized by such groups were frowned upon. This is noticeable in a comment made by Plutarch:

> . . . if ignorance and lack of culture keep company with wine, not even that famous golden lamp of Athena could make the party refined and orderly. . . The outcome of undisciplined chatter and frivolity, when it reaches the extreme of intemperance, is violence and drunken behaviour—an outcome wholly inconsistent with culture and refinement.[55]

Fellowship meals were organized by the patrons and in return they expected the participants to reciprocate through honoring or acknowledging the status of the patrons, which also included meals. For example, an inscription from Delos reveals that an association of merchants, shippers, and warehousemen on Delos called the Berytian Poseidoniastai, honored their benefactor, a Roman banker named Marcus Minatos son of Sextus, who provided funds for their welfare and banquets.[56]

Arete among the Phaeacians, Helen at Sparta and Penelope at Ithacan were present during the symposia, but they do not seem to participate fully in the eating and drinking (*Od.* 1.225–226; 9.5–10). In the beginning women probably had to sit but by the late republic, they were able to recline in equality (Cicero *Fam.* (9.26). Fisher, "Roman Associations," 1201. Cf. Stein, "Symposia Literature," 31–32.

52. "Autolycus took a seat by his father's side; the others, of course, reclined." Xen. *Symp*. 1.8.

53. Jesus is also depicted as reclining in most of his meals. Cf. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words,* 48–49.

54. Lucian *Symp*. 13.

55. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 716D–E.

56. *IDelos* 1520 (153/2 BC); more examples are seen in *IDelos* 1521 and other inscriptions. Cf. Ascough, "Forms of Commensality," 19–21.

Invitations to fellowship meals would also denote a person's importance or rise in society; at the same time refusal of an invitation would mean the host's inferior social status.[57] The disparities based on class were displayed during the meals, as guests had to be entertained and served by the servants/slaves of the host.[58] Social ranking was seen prominently at the arrangement of assigned places for reclining at the table where people would be seated according to their social status. Plato describes the position and status at the table which were assigned by the owner of the house.[59] There were also instances where two or more of the same status would share the same couch.[60] In general the seating arrangement at the table was done clockwise from the highest to the lowest position.[61] There were also the "lesser" guests—often known as "shadows" (*umbrae*)—"hangers-on" of important guests, or "those used as reserves if the more distinguished guests failed to turn up."[62]

It was considered offensive to deprive someone of his accustomed honor at the table. Therefore, guests had to be seated at the table according to their relative position in society.[63] The theme "each man according to his worth" seemed to have been followed at the tables.[64] So certain places at the table were considered to be most honored, and others would be arranged accordingly, though the location varied from the practice of one people group to another.[65] These honored places at the table seemed to be taken seriously. Plutarch talks about an occasion where many guests had assembled and had reclined in places they wished. A guest (probably a per-

57. Cicero showed his disregard when asked to dinner by a municipal gentleman of whom he has never heard (*Fam.* 7.9; 7.16).

58. Plato *Symp*. 175A, 213B.

59. Ibid., 177D–E.

60. It is indicated both in the literature and in vase paintings of Greek banquets. Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 24–25.

61. Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 24.

62. Fisher, "Roman Associations," 2.1205–6.

63. Lucian *Symp.* 9.

64. E.g., "Timon will say that one ought not to rob the other guests of the honour due to position by granting the position of honour to one of them . . . . for the man who turns an individual's prerogative property is committing a theft, and the recognition due to virtue, kinship, public service, and such things he is giving to the foot-race and to speed. Though he thinks that he avoids being offensive to his guests, he draws it down all the more upon himself to be so, for he offends each one of them by depriving him of his accustomed honour." Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 617C.

65. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium*, 10.

son of high order) came and refused to enter saying "he saw no place left worthy of him."[66] He also indicates that for the Romans there was also a place for guest of honor, which was the highest position and was designated to be that of the "consul." The name would suggest that its position was associated with political power and reputation.[67] All this data reflects a consciousness for social status and division in society in relation to the custom of reclining. Lucius Apuleius even comments that the ability to drink while reclining was what distinguished man from animals.[68]

Plutarch continues to give a description of how different people hold different places in honor:

> the Persians the most central place, occupied by the king; the Greeks the first place; the Romans the last place on the middle couch, called the consul's place; and some of the Greeks who dwell around the Pontus . . . contrariwise the first place of the middle couch.[69]

Status at the meals was a potent issue and there were discussions on whether they needed to follow the conventional custom of assigning places or do away with the ranking.[70] Perhaps this issue is addressed in the Mishnah, when it indicates that even the poor are to "recline" at the meal.[71]

In some instances the host would divide the guests into two groups. While the first group which consists of his closest friends and those with higher standing in the society were invited into the *triclinium*, the rest would then be accommodated outside at the *atrium* where treatment was less than equal.[72] Fellowship meals thus were a good indicator of a person's status in society.

Ranking at the meal thus became the norm for most of the Greco-Roman meals and it was considered a sign of "good order" that should characterize a banquet.[73] Plutarch comments that failure to do so would

66. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 615D.

67. See the discussion in Plutarch's *Quaest. conv.* 619B: "Why the place at banquets called the consul's acquired honour."

68. Apuleius *Metam.* bk. 10.

69. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 619B.

70. Cf. ibid., 615–17.

71. *m. Pes.* 10:1.

72. Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 158–59.

73. Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 33.

lead to "disorderliness."[74] Along with the honored position, a person of high status could also be entertained with a better quality or quantity of food he was given.[75] So guests with higher status would receive better quality and quantity of food, likewise lesser quantity and quality for people of lower status indicating their position. This was a usual practice in the *collegia* where officers were assigned larger quantities of food than other ordinary members.[76] Pliny for instance writes about his experience at a banquet with disfavor:

> . . . I happened to be dining with a man-though no particular friend of his-whose elegant economy, as he called it, seemed to me a sort of stingy extravagance. The best dishes were set in front of himself and a select few, and cheap scraps of food before the rest of the company. He had even put the wine into tiny little flasks, divided into three categories, not with the idea of giving his guests the opportunity of choosing, but to make it impossible for them to refuse what they were given. One lot was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all of his friends are graded) and the third for his own freedmen. My neighbour at table noticed this and asked me if I approved. I said I did not. "So what do you do?" he asked. "I serve the same to everyone, for when I invite guests it is for a meal, not to make class distinctions; I have brought them as equals to the same table, so I give them the same treatment in everything." "Even the freedmen?" "Of course, for then they are my fellow-diners, not freedmen." "That must cost you a lot." "On the contrary." "How is that?" "Because my freedmen do not drink the sort of wine I do, but I drink theirs."[77]

Timon the brother of Plutarch vents his displeasure against such abuses as "the rich lording it over the poor."[78] This practice of serving different types of food to different guests according to their social status at the fellowship meals was another custom that reinforced the social distinction in the society. This practice was widespread in the clubs and guilds.[79] Usually

74. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 615E.

75. Cf. Lucian *Sat*. 17; Mart. *Epig.* 60; Juvenal *Sat.* 5.156–70.

76. Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 68.

77. Pliny the younger *Ep.* 2.6. Also Mart. *Epig.* 3.60; 1.20; 4.85; 6.11; 10.49; Juvenal complains of such a practice during a banquet where the rich were served with better wine and food and where the poor were mistreated. Juvenal *Sat.* 3.81, 152–56; 5.152–55.

78. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 1.2.

79. For example, hierarchy was very much a part of the Iobacchoi association. Cf. Crossan, "Who and What Controls your Banquet?" 304–5.

the symposiarch or the host would be expected to assign the place to the participants and also to oversee the distribution of food and drinks to these special guests.[80] Many of the satirists also write about how guests from a lower social class were humiliated during meals through insults and nasty games, reinforcing the ranking system.[81]

Feasts given in honor of gods or in celebration of victories and other occasions also fuelled the system. On these occasions the rich would give lavish banquets for the community as an indicator of their wealth and power. Fellowship meals thus were an expression of the social division in the community on the basis of socio-economic criteria, and they provided a means to maintain the patron-client system of the ancient society.

In the Jewish context, ranking at these meals can be noticed among the sectarian groups like the Essenes and the Therapeutae, though not on the same level as the Greco-Roman practices.[82] Among the other groups like the Pharisees, stratification was on the basis of the purity laws within the group, as well as in relation to outsiders.[83] Thus in Judaism the practices were different to that of the Greco-Roman culture. The stratifications were rather based on the interpretation of the Law applied to the fellowship meals.

Fellowship meals thus functioned as a means of creating social rankings and status as well as maintaining that classification or division of status. This is so because the fellowship meal was an important social institution, and for many of the groups the fellowship meal was the chief and sometimes the only common activity for them. This is evident in many writings, including the Gospels, where fellowship meals provided a platform to display and assert a person's social status and ranking and for enforcing those rankings and other cultural norms in the society.[84] Thus, it was a prestige

80. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 615C–D.

81. Mart. *Epig.*; Juvenal *Sat.*; Petron. *Sat.* 59; Lucian in *De mercede conductis* (*Salaried Posts in Great Houses*) reports that Greek philosophers and rhetoricians were humiliated by their Roman employers and hosts during banquets. For an explanation on honor and shame, patronage and reciprocity, that prevailed in the Greco-Roman world of the first century see, deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity*, 23–42.

82. Philo, *Contempl.* 67.

83. In the Qumran community the placement of individuals at the communal meal was specified according to their rank in the community, *Rule of the Congregation* [1QSa] 2:11–22.

84. Cf. Luke 14:1–24.

issue for many to get their proper place at the fellowship meals in recognition of one's social status in the society.

There was lot of symbolism and meaning associated with the practice of fellowship meals. They were in fact a reflection of societal norms and values. Therefore the participation in the meals conveyed a deeper reality and this insight should assist us in interpreting the meal practices in Corinth.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

In ancient cultures fellowship meals were one of the principal ways of marking the differences among social groups. Since meals represented societal values and norms, they were used as boundary markers between various groups, and therefore they became a means of defining a community. Thus even the symposium in the Greco-Roman context was 'a social institution' whereby through association people asserted their own identity.[85] Fellowship meals had manifold functions in society out of which bestowing shared social identity to the participants was one of the most important.

Partaking at a table defined the person in relation to the group and also his place in the larger society. In the Greco-Roman world, fellowship meals developed into a more formal institution and functioned in similar manner among the various clubs and religious associations. Fisher asserts that:

> . . . most, if not all, of these groups defined themselves, at least in part, in cult terms, reinforcing their identities through shared sacrifices to particular deities; and third, such gatherings regularly involved shared feasting on the sacrificed meats and shared drinking of wine.[86]

Meals defined the group by functioning as the arena in setting prescribed norms according to their belief system. This is seen in the various laws of etiquette and other procedures set for the meals. The Guild of Zeus Hypsistos[87] is a good example of how the fellowship meal functioned to define a

85. Schmitt-Pantel, "Sacrificial meal and *Symposion,*" 15.

86. Fisher, "Greek Associations," 2.1168.

87. The Guild of Zeus Hypsistos was an Egyptian form of organization that shared the characteristics of both Greek and Egyptian religious associations. Its statutes are preserved in a papyrus copy that dates from the latter Ptolemaic period, or circa 69 to 58 BC. Roberts et al., "Gild of Zeus Hypsistos," 59; Pausanias 2.2.8 tells of three images of Zeus at Corinth: one without epithet, one of him as Chthonios, one of him as Hypsistos.

group's identity and activity. They described themselves as "the association (*synod*) of Zeus Hypsistos." Though the term *synod* (σύνοδος) was especially used in Egypt as a generic term for religious and other types of associations, it was also used to describe associations in relation to a private dinner or an annual dinner established by a bequest.[88] The term was also used by Philo, to refer to the dining clubs in Alexandria: they "are called synods and couches by the natives."[89]

The statutes of the Guild of Zeus Hypsistos contain statements that define the groups in relation to the fellowship meals:

> May it be well. The law which those of the association of Zeus the highest made in common, that it should be authoritative . . . he should make for all the contributors one banquet a month in the sanctuary of Zeus, at which they should in a common room pouring libations, pray, and perform the other customary rites on behalf of the god and lord, the king.[90]

These associations or groups were frequently coupled with the name of the god worshipped by the group and in whose honor the meals were eaten.[91] In these fellowship meals the procedures were also in keeping with their political and religious ideology.[92] Hence the libations were directed to the patron deity and the civic rulers in whose honor the meals were celebrated. They were made to conform to their political aspiration and their religiosity. In this manner the meals facilitated and preserved their political and religious identity, providing them with a tangible content and meaning to their belief system.

The partaking in the fellowship table of the cults and religious associations was synonymous with identifying with its beliefs and likewise similar to acquiring one's identity in relation to the group. The different customs practised at the table, like ranking, and distribution of food also reinforced their individual identity and distinction even within the same group. In some cults, through the eating of sacred food, the believers were thought to be fusing themselves with the deity to create a new deified identity.[93]

88. Roberts et al., "Gild of Zeus Hypsistos," 72; Smith, *From Symposium*, 107.

89. Philo, *Flacc.* 136. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium*, 107.

90. Quoted from Roberts et al., "Gild of Zeus Hypsistos," 41–42.

91. Roberts et al., "Gild of Zeus Hypsistos," 72–73.

92. Smith, *From Symposium*, 108.

93. E.g., the eating of a raw flesh in the cult of Dionysus was considered as partaking in the nature of the deity by which the person gets a new identity.

One of the principal ways in which the Jews in general maintained their identity was through the various food laws associated with purity and holiness (Deut 13–14), so that they would become "a people holy to the Lord your God . . . out of all the peoples on earth" (Deut 14:2).[94] The dietary laws defined the way the people could interact with others and within their own group. Thus they played the role of a boundary marker, and functioned to define and reinforce the identity of the people in the midst of diverse practices. As Feeley-Harnik explains: "their observance hallows the individual and sets him and the group to which he belongs apart from others."[95]

So mixing with Gentiles in a fellowship meal was seen as an abomination in some circles.[96] This has to do with the understanding that eating was synonymous with one's beliefs and values. Food and drink were thought to be especially prone to cultic contamination in primitive religions, and since meat from sacrifices, offerings and prayers to the pagan deities were the normal practice of the meal customs, the Jews were restricted from freely mingling with the Gentiles. The prophets thus made a connection between food and idolatry and warned time after time against eating with the Gentiles (Ezek 33:25; Hos 9:3).[97] Daniel's story and his refusal to eat the king's food portray the general attitude and beliefs related with the food laws (Dan 1:8). Eating the king's food was in effect accepting the culture and norms of a foreign ruler.[98] By abstaining from the court's food Daniel and his friends maintained their identity and expressed their fidelity to God.[99]

Many of the communities and religious groups in the Jewish society also had meals as a main point of reference for identification. This is prominently seen among the Essenes at Qumran, the Therapeutae, the Pharisaic

94. Tacitus in his report on the Jews, includes the observation that "in dining and in sleeping, they keep themselves strictly apart . . ." *Hist.* 5.4–5.

95. Feely-Harnik, *The Lord's Table,* 7.

96. Eating with Gentiles was considered polluting, for they ate "unclean" food that was furthermore likely to have been offered to idols. They ate "swine's flesh and broth of abominable things is in their vessels" (Isa 65:4; see also 66:3, 17). See explanations on the dietary laws in Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 39.

97. But even other nations had their own dietary laws. In Gen 43:32, the Egyptians would not eat with the Hebrews for it was considered as an abomination to the Egyptians.

98. Since, "By eastern standards to share a meal was to commit oneself to friendship; it was of covenant significance." Baldwin, *Daniel*, 83.

99. See more on the issue of dietary laws in Daniel in Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 62.

groups and reflected in most of the literatures, e.g., the story of Joseph and Aseneth. Thus there was an elaborate process of purification for a member in order to partake of the "common food."[100] This was because participation in the fellowship meals was regarded as a confirmation of one's membership in the community and the acceptance of its tenets. Thus in a way it was akin to having one's identity through participation in the meals.

In this context, there are arguments regarding the level of interaction between the Jews and Gentiles. We understand that stricter rules were followed among the sectarian groups, but in the Greco-Roman context, the common people would have interaction with others even in terms of dining together.[101] The *Letter of Aristeas* illustrates that if an appropriate menu was provided, then Jews could dine at a Gentile's table.[102] Josephus also describes how the Jews in Antioch mingled with the Gentiles in the period prior to the Jewish revolt: "they grew in numbers . . . and were constantly attracting to their religious ceremonies multitudes of the Greeks, and these they had in some measure incorporated with themselves."[103]

Thus fellowship meals became an integral part of defining and maintaining the identity of the individual and the community by creating and defining boundaries between various groups in the society. In fact they were so synonymous with the identity of the community itself that breaking the rules or social codes associated with them was equivalent to violating the community itself.[104] So even for the new Christian community fellowship meals became a means of defining and expressing the beliefs and values of the community. They served as a boundary marker for the new community.

100. Josephus, *J.W.* 2, 138–39.

101. For the interaction between Jews and others in terms of fellowship meals see Hein, *Eucharist and Excommunication,* 8–10; Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 95; Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the* Law, 142–48. Dunn discusses in detail the provisions in Judaism whereby they could mingle with the Gentiles. He argues that ". . . If such views were consistently and rigorously applied, no devout Jew could even have considered participating in table fellowship with a Gentile. But that is by no means the whole story. For there were Gentiles towards whom even the rabbis could maintain a very positive and welcoming attitude—Gentile converts to Judaism and Gentiles who showed themselves sympathetic to the religion of the Jews." 143.

102. *Let. Aris.* 182. *m. Ber.* 7:1; *m. Abod. Zar.* 5:5, and *b. Abod. Zar.* 8a-b, contains discussion of the conditions on which Jews might accept invitations to and participate in Gentile banquets. Cf. also Acts 15 where provision is made for Jews and Gentiles to intermingle in the same community.

103. *J. W.* 7.3.3 § 45.

104. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium*, 109.

Likewise, Paul builds on that tradition, rectifying some aspects, as the new community was formed on the basis of new laws and requirements. Laws and practices which were part of the fellowship meal tradition but did not conform to the new teachings were done away with; and new laws were added to conform to the teachings of the Risen Lord (Acts 15).

MORALITY AND ETHICS

We have already noted in chapter 1 the attempts to reform some of the features of the meal practices that were deemed detrimental to the society. Here we will discuss further how morality and ethical concerns were an integral part of the meal traditions. By forming and fostering relationships among participants, fellowship meals also involved further commitment and reciprocity. Communal bonding and social ethics were part of the same scheme in the fellowship meals. As the meal created community by bringing in cohesion among the participants, it was further designed to lead to ethical responsibility and obligation. Thus it was also a tradition that once a person was invited to a meal, he should also return the favor, ensuring that there was a reciprocal exchange of hospitality between them.[105] Among ancient Greek cultic associations there was a tradition where honored members were granted the right to carry away portions of a sacrifice.[106] Based on this tradition in the Greco-Roman context, apart from organizing the meals, host and patrons also gave gifts to the guest at dinner according to their status. The term *apophoreton* (*sportula* among the Romans) was used to denote this practice.[107] Though it was partly a demonstration of patronage and hierarchy, at the same time it denoted social dependency and obligation. The early church in Acts 6 exhibits a similar practice.[108]

Plutarch, in one of the discussions, talks about the reason for the custom of the ancient Romans, not to leave a table empty. He quotes Eustrophus:

105. In ancient cultures, reciprocity was a norm; cf. Exod 2:20; D'Arms, "Control, Companionship, and Clientela," 331–34; mentioned in Finger, *Of Widows and Meals*, 173.

106. See *SIG* 1025.46; 1026.4.

107. Suetonius *Vesp.* 19; *Dom.* 7; Petron. *Sat.* 56.

108. *Acts of Peter* (19–29) and Hippolytus also mention this practice among Christians. Cf. White, "Regulating Fellowship," 183–85.

> . . . So too the kings of Persia (they say) not only always send portion to their friends and officers and body guards, but even see that the slaves' dinner, and the dogs' dinner, are served on their table, in so far as this is feasible, considering all who serve them sharers in table and hearth. For by passing out food even the most sullen of wild beasts can be tamed.[109]

We also see a political motif here, nonetheless the social obligations at the fellowship meals were to be extended to the less fortunate in society. Fellowship meal practices thus were also a program of economic redistribution whereby people belonging to the lower economic class benefitted.[110]

Plutarch also includes a rationale behind such practices. He cites Lucius who recalled hearing from his grandmother that the table is sacred and that nothing sacred should be empty:

> that the table is in fact copied from the earth. For besides nourishing us, it is both round and stable, and by some it is properly given the name of "hearth." Just as we expect the earth always to have and produce something useful for us, so we do not think a table should be seen, when it is abandoned, bare and carrying no load of luck.[111]

This indeed indicates the table was considered as a sacred arena where one's conduct was important, as it might lead to further implications. Fellowship meals were symbolic of a deeper reality.

There are evidences that the different associations or trade guilds went beyond just sharing meals. Members provided one another with loans, with or without interest, with the meals fostering that kind of relationship for transaction and sharing of goods.[112] In Homer the term *eranos* frequently refers not only to a pot-luck dinner but to a practice where interest-free loans or donations are given to people in difficulties. In a further development it

109. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 703E.

110. Also see Hippolochus's description of Caranus's feast, where a lot of wealth was distributed among the guests, Ath. *Deipn.* 128; cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 194c–195f; 196a–203d; 210c on Ptolemy II and other kings who conducted feasts for their citizens. Thus Fisher comments: ". . . it is nonetheless true that ordinary citizens were heavily dependent on the largesse both of the ruler (monarch or protector) and of the wealthiest citizens." Fisher, "Greek Associations," 2.1191–92; cf. "Roman Associations," 2.1215.

111. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 703B.

112. Ascough, "Forms of Commensality," 22–23. Also see Blomberg, who maintain that social concerns were limited within one's own social group; *Contagious Holiness*, 64.

referred to money collected by the acquaintances of a slave to buy his or her freedom, which would be repaid later.[113]

In Judaism while the dietary laws reinforced the people's identity and acted as a kind of barrier to outside influences, at the same time social and ethical concerns were integrated into the fellowship meals and juxtaposed alongside the attempt to maintain their exclusive ethnic and religious identity. Thus there were laws to incorporate the marginalized, the poor, and the outsiders into the community.[114] This is also seen in the Passover celebration. In *m*. *Pes*.10:1 "the pauper bowl/dish" was the collection for the itinerant poor, which was different from the *basket* collection for the poor in the community.[115] This is perhaps why Josephus mentions the presence of a large number of beggars during Passover in Jerusalem.[116] Normally, non-family members of a Passover association had to pay their share for the expenditure of the sacrifice;[117] so this fund was to enable the poor to pay their contribution to partake in the Passover.[118] In Sirach, the Jewish sage devoted an extensive section to meal etiquette under the rubric, "Judge your neighbour's feelings by your own and in every matter be thoughtful."[119] He writes about one's conduct at the table and proper behavior towards others.

Social ethics were also part of the meal etiquette. Smith and Taussig assert that under the "symposium laws" etiquette was included as an important ethical category,[120] such that a person's manners and behavior at the table should serve for the common good of the members. Hence, there were rules and regulations governing behavior at fellowship meals. For example, the above concerns are included in the statutes of the Guild of Zeus Hypsistos:

113. Cf. Fisher, "Greek Associations," 2.1188.

114. E.g., Lev 23:22; In Num 9:1–14 provision is made to include those who were unable to participate in the first Passover celebration because of ceremonial impurity, and circumcised resident aliens share in the covenant meal of the people. Cf. Josh 8:33, 35.

115. Re. *m*. *Pea* 8:7.

116. Jos. *J.W.* 2.10.

117. *m*. *Pes*. 7:3

118. Cf. Instone-Brewer, "Tractate *Pesachim*," 60–61; he adds "No doubt most householders would have happily welcomed a poor person without charge, but they probably wanted to pay so that they felt they had a real portion in the sacrifice, just as people wanted to pay the Temple Tax in order to share in the Temple sacrifices (*m. Sheq*. 3:3)"

119. Sir 31:15–31.

120. Smith and Taussig, *Many Tables*, 31–32.

> and they shall be present at all command occasions to be prescribed for them and at meetings and assemblies and outings. It shall not be permissible for any one of them to . . . or to make factions or to leave the brotherhood of the president for another, or for men to enter into one another's pedigrees at the banquet or to abuse one another at the banquet or to chatter or to indict or accuse another or to resign for the course of the year or again to bring the drinkings to nought or . . . to hinder the (leader?)[121]

Here the members were required to be present for all the occasions and participate for the full year that the statutes cover. It was considered illegal to join other groups during this period. They were prohibited to cause schisms, accuse or abuse members within the group. More importantly they were not to do anything that could be detrimental to the group or cause dissolution of the convivial occasion. The rules covered numerous aspects of their social-religious life, from proper conduct and behavior within the club, to sincere worship.

Similar rules are seen in the statutes of the College of Diana and Antinous,[122] an Italian funerary society of the second century CE, and in the association of devotees of Dionysus/Bakchos who called themselves *Iobakchoi*—the Athenian society of the second century CE.[123] In these associations the banquet was the main activity, the rules were in regard to one's behavior and conduct at the table, so that the monthly banquet could be celebrated with proper decorum. They provided extensive and significant information about the religious clubs and showed how fellowship meals were an important means for expressing themselves and their identity, and in the process became synonymous with their identity itself. By describing the rules of conduct they defined their identity as distinct or separate from other groups. These meal ethics are good evidence of how fellowship meals defined one's behavior and relationship with others in the community. Again, though these rules were meant for the meal context, nonetheless

121. Text and translation from Roberts et al., "Gild of Zeus Hypsistos," 41–42.

122. The rule states: ". . . If any member desires to make any complaint or bring up any business, he is to bring it up at a business meeting, so that we may banquet in peace and good cheer on festive days" (lines 2.23–24 Statutes of the College of Diana and Antinous: Translation from Lewis and Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*, 2.273–75).

123. See Smith, "Meals and Morality," 324. Though the inscription of this all-male *Iobakchoi* association dates to the second century C.E the association was formed much earlier, with their own meeting hall west of the Acropolis, near the Aereopagus; Crossan, "Who and What Controls your Banquet?" 304.

there was scope for pursuing them further outside the meal settings, as the following discussion indicates.

Social obligation was a topic that was being frequently discussed by the Greco-Roman writers during the fellowship meals. The occasion of a fellowship meal thus became a setting for philosophical discourses for many of the philosophical schools and other associations.[124] They provided a platform for many of the moralists and thinkers to voice their social concern and their call for ethical responsibility towards others. These discussions on social ethics during the symposium following the main course became so popular in the Greco-Roman society that they developed into a literary form of their own.[125] This tradition can be traced to Plato's *Symposium*, who spoke of "symposium laws," which became a standard for others to imitate.[126] Plato's *Symposium* describes a meal at which Socrates was present. During the symposium, the philosophical discussion centered on the ethical concept of ἔρως or "love."[127] Other topics delving into social concerns and obligations for fellow members were discussed, and Plato advocates that this should be the preferred subject for discussion at the fellowship meals. This became a familiar theme in later works of this genre; and was held in high esteem in some circles. Plutarch exhibits a good example of this type when he describes his writing as following the symposium tradition of the famous philosophers: "the most famous of the philosophers . . . Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Speusippus, Epicurus, Prytanis, Hieronymous, and Dio of the Academy, who all considered the recording of conversations held at table a task worth some effort."[128] They were to be emulated, as they were examples for proper conversation at fellowship meals.[129] Plutarch further describes topics of discussion that were suitable for the symposium:

124. A description is given by Aulus Gellius which describes regular dinner meeting at the home of the philosopher Calvisius Taurus: "At the entertainments which it was the custom of us young men to hold at Athens at the beginning of each week, as soon as we had finished eating and an instructive and pleasant conversation had began . . . (*Noctes Atticae* 15.2. 3)." Smith, "Meals and Morality," 321.

125. Cf. Smith, "Meals and Morality," 321–22. Stein, "Influence of Symposia Literature," 13–44; reprinted in Fischel, *Essays*, 198–229.

126. These laws were to safeguard all symposia from disintegrating and to promote "friendship" rather than enmity. *Leg*, 2.671C–672A. Smith, "Meals and Morality," 321–23.

127. Cf. Plato *Symp*. 177E.

128. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 612D.

129. Ibid., 613.

> Some are supplied by history; others it is possible to take from current events; some contain many lessons bearing on philosophy, many on piety; some induce an emulous enthusiasm for courageous and great-hearted deeds, and some for charitable and humane deeds. If one makes unobtrusive use of them to entertain and instruct his companion as they drink, not the least of the evils of intemperance will be taken away.[130]

The reason for choosing such topics, as he suggests, was that they were appropriate and instructive. Moreover, they should be profitable and for the "primary good" of all. Just as they shared out of the same meal, so also the discussion should be communal in nature where everyone could participate in it.[131] Plutarch also underscored "the friend-making character of the table," which was an ethical category in Greek philosophy.[132] According to Plutarch, it is not only about sharing food and wine but engaging with one another in conversation and fun that should ultimately lead to "friendship."[133] Thus behavior and discussion at a meal were to be guided by this principle, as his writings reveal.

The common practice of presenting more and better food to special guests in the Greco-Roman context meant that the wealthier had more for themselves, which also implies that they showed less consideration for the welfare of the poor. This practice was condemned by many of the conscientious people of the time. Thus Juvenal and others gave a critical evaluation of this custom and spoke out against this sign of inequality.[134] Plutarch strongly emphasized that there should be equality and fair treatment among the guests.[135] Failure to do this causes "injustice and strife."[136] Thus he also supported the idea of reinstating the office of symposiarch to maintain order and propriety at the table so that no one was affected.[137] By inference the Moralists were speaking out against the social injustices of society which also manifested at fellowship meals.

130. Ibid., 614A-B.
131. Cf. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 614D-E.
132. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 612D; Smith, "Meals and Morality," 322–23.
133. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 660B.
134. Juvenal, *Sat.* 5.152–55, and Mart. *Epig.* 3.60; 4.85; Pliny the Younger *Ep.* 2.6.
135. Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 642C.
136. Ibid., 644C.
137. Ibid., 620A–622B.

The connection between the ethical aspect and fellowship meals is found in other Greco-Roman literature, especially in the form of satire.[138] In these works the writers were critical of the system in society where injustices were being done. These works use motifs associated with the meal practices and appeal to all for ethical and moral responsibility towards others in society.[139]

The very notion of sharing at a table also brought an awareness of one's obligation towards another in the community. Unlike today's context, there appears to be an intricate connection between fellowship meals and morality and ethics. Social ethics were never divorced from the fellowship meals as these two went hand in hand in order to make the system feasible. Furthermore the fellowship meal settings were the primary or main activity for many of the groups. Hence, we see the inner dynamics of a meal setting and the various ethical or religious teachings of ancient cultures co-existing together.

The social-ethical concerns connected with the fellowship meals were a reflection of the corporate dimension that was characteristic of the ancient world. An individual act was considered as the expression of the whole community, and this applied even to the fellowship meals where actions had to be understood in the context of the wider community. Therefore, even when it comes to dining they had to act according to the laws set or else there were wider repercussions for the individual and the whole community. Thus various food laws and purity laws were enacted and maintained in the communities. This is especially relevant to the Corinthian context and Paul who saw the community as the embodiment of the Body of Christ, which was to be reflected even at fellowship meals. In similar terms we will see that Paul's admonishment and advice to the Corinthians are closely linked with the fellowship meal traditions.

138. On Greek and Roman satire see especially Ramage et al., *Roman Satirists*; Duff, *Roman Satire*.

139. See Smith, "Meals and Morality," 323: "Here the banquet functions as a symbol for the pretensions of cultured living, and thus serves an ethical function, for by ridiculing the society there represented, satire implicitly refers to a standard of conduct that should be present. Thus the banquet carries a symbolic force in itself, functioning as a kind of paradigm for comments on social ethics."