



East Asian Pastoral Institute



The Eucharist and Table Fellowship in the New Testament

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The life and ministry of Jesus was profoundly rooted in his experience of God as a merciful *Abba*, compassionate towards marginalized humankind, and a God of wounded people on this mother earth (Durken 1997:372-75). The mutual interaction between his life and the particular contexts of his time birthed the revolutionary process of table fellowship, especially with the sinners, poor, tax collectors, etc., who were condemned to live in the backyards of the society (Ashworth 1997:301). It was a practice unheard of in the past. Therefore, the table fellowship of Jesus must be understood from the cultural, religious, and political world of Jesus (Park 1993:60-79). This fellowship was not only an expression of his solidarity with the sinners, outcasts, and poor, but also a proclamation of his protest against the socio-religious structures that supported the discrimination. All-inclusiveness at the table was the characteristic of the meal practice of Jesus, in contrast to the exclusive meal customs of the prominent religious figures of the Jewish society (Soares-Prabhu 1985:322-46).

"Meals played a very important role in the life and teachings of our Lord. Jesus frequently appears at table and his table-fellowship became a central feature of his ministry, and the occasion and background of much of his teaching" (Lussier 1977:38). There is a whole theology involved in the meals taken by Jesus in the New Testament. "Jesus often sat at table, fraternized with disreputable people, the outcasts of society" (*ibid.*). Gradually such a revolutionary practice led him to the final confrontation with the religious-political figures and finally, it led him to the cross. According to Norman Perrin "regular table fellowship in the name of the kingdom of God between Jesus and the marginalized was a decisive factor that led to his last supper and his violent death" (Perrin 1967:102-105). For Christ, the Last Supper was the climax of his redemptive love; it was the sign of the gift of himself that culminated on the cross. For Christians, the celebration of the Eucharist is the distinguishing mark of a true Christian community where members are united in love—a love that is committed to service to our fellow humans.

The Meal as an Expression of Fellowship

"A meal together cements friendship, expresses care and consideration, and produces *koinonia* (communion, sharing, togetherness)" [Knox 2003:240]. The *koinonia* established around the table of the Lord should be *koinonia* of our lives as Christians. The theological vision implicit in the table fellowship of Jesus is intelligible only if we locate this table fellowship in the social world in which he lived. In this world the sharing of a meal was a sign of intimacy, communion, and fellowship. "Sharing a table, meant sharing life" (Jeremias 1971:115). This is true of most traditional societies, but it was especially true of Judaism, where table fellowship was always a religious affirmation of belonging. A Jewish meal was normally preceded by a blessing, in which the host blessed, broke, and shared a loaf of bread, to show that all those taking part in the meal shared in the blessing which had been pronounced over the unbroken bread. Table fellowship in Judaism meant, as Joachim Jeremias puts it, "fellowship before God" (*ibid.*).

The Meal as a Pattern for Community

According to Jewish customs, two meals were eaten daily. Being an agrarian and pastoral community, the Jews ate the morning meal later in the day after finishing the household chores and the pending works on the farm. The ordinary people ate their evening meal at the end of the day. It enabled them to finish their work before nightfall. The meals were prepared in earthen wares. Flat-shaped barley bread was their staple food. The poor ate using their fingers from a common meal bowl. Usually, they sat on mats or stools around a low table or a fire. Only the rich could afford to have dining rooms where they would eat in a recumbent posture, leaning on their left elbows. They employed slaves to serve them. They arranged three low tables in banquet form with the upper table faced out to the

open and the other two tables joined on either side for three people each. The host occupied the middle of the upper table with the chief guest on his right. The festive meals were celebrated on the occasions of marriage, circumcision, and harvest festivals. Sober meals took place during funerals. The religious meals were celebrated on the Sabbath and the Passover (Osborne 1978:163-65, Turpin 2002:132-34, McBride 1993:72).

In the Jewish social world, sharing a meal with others was a sign of intimacy, love, communion, and fellowship. It also meant fellowship before God. It was also considered an anticipation of the messianic banquet. The Essenes modeled their meals on the messianic banquet. They lived away from everything that could defile them as prescribed by the Levitical Laws (Painadath 1987:9-20). The Pharisees strictly observed the priestly code, summed up as "You are to be holy to me, because I am the Lord, am holy and have set you apart from the nations to be my own" (Lev 20: 26). Therefore, they engaged themselves only in exclusive meals to observe strict cultic purity. Cultic purity was keenly observed by excluding the general category of sinners, persons of dubious moral character, and those who were employed in ritually impure occupations, such as the industry of tanners, blacksmiths, nurses, shepherds, caravan riders, herdsmen, weavers, tailors, butchers, tax gatherers, and barbers (Kappen 2002:84-87).

The bread of the Samaritans was considered worse than the flesh of swine (Turpi, 133). Holiness was considered a total separation from the profane in order to enter the realm of the sacred. It was part of Jewish religious zeal to prefigure the true Israel. The guests were welcomed with a kiss by the host. Their feet were washed either by a slave or a servant. Their heads were anointed with perfumed oil as a sign of respect. Except for poor peasant homes, all houses had a foot washing basin placed at their entrance. At the table, hands were washed again. Women did not dine with men when guests were present. During festive meals such as the Passover, women and children dined with the men folk. Two invitations were sent out to the guests for a banquet. The first invitation was sent in advance and the second one was delivered on the day of the feast. The guests wore white for the meals. They were seated according to age and rank at the table which was arranged in an open-ended rectangle (Turpin, 132-34).

The Last Supper as a Passover Meal

There is a close affinity between the Eucharist, the Last Supper, and the Passover meal. The synoptic gospels present the Last Supper of Jesus as a Passover meal. The Passover feast was an occasion to remember the liberation of Israelites from the Egyptian slavery. It was initially two separate feasts: the *Pesach* and the feast of Unleavened Bread. The *Pesach* was a spring festival celebrated by the nomads. A goat or sheep was sacrificed to mark the occasion. The feast of the Unleavened Bread was an agrarian celebration that inaugurated the barley harvest. Both were combined into one single eight-day festival. Later, this festival was reinterpreted to recall the memory of Israelites fleeing Egypt and entering the Promised Land. The Passover feast was a great national gathering of Jews from all over the land. The Roman soldiers stationed in the Antonia Fortress kept a close watch on the people and events to avoid any rebellion (Turpin, 136-39; Osborne, 165-68).

The Last Supper of Jesus celebrated on the feast of Passover must be understood against the background of the many fellowship meals he shared in the Jewish community. His experience of God as a compassionate parent reinterpreted the Law of Holiness in the light of compassion and mercy. The table fellowship and the foot washing praxis birthed a counter-community and a counter-culture.¹ Mark has the final meal scene with his disciples (14:22-25) within the framework of two narratives such as the prediction of Jesus' betrayal (vv. 17-21) and the abandonment of Jesus (vv. 26-31) by his disciples. He presents his last meal scene for a community that tended to exclude the Gentiles from their community celebrations. Central to the Markan message is the "never failing presence of Jesus to his ever failing disciples" (Maloney 1996:49). Matthew (26:3-75) presents the Last Supper as the presence of Christ empowering the broken disciples, both Jews and Gentiles. The Lukan version (22:14-38) is part of a long series of meals in which Jesus participated with sinners and outcasts. Luke's meal narratives shift the concept of inclusiveness to a broader category of outcasts and sinners—including self-righteous Pharisees—disciples of weak faith, and the friends who betrayed Jesus. The post-resurrection meals of Jesus with his disciples on the road to Emmaus and the Twelve are instances of Jesus' presence to the broken. John (13:1-38) speaks to constantly failing disciples about a new praxis of love and service. The message of the Johannine meal narrative is Jesus' love for the failing, denying, and betraying disciples. Though he has no words of Eucharistic institution, his gospel has a very profound Eucharistic teaching (ch.6). The Eucharist at Corinth (1 Cor 11:17-34) is the earliest written evidence that speaks of an early Christian community's practice of Eucharist. Paul intervenes in a divided community that lives a contradictory life of excluding the poor and the abandoned. He brings the concept of prayerful discernment into the ritualistic celebration of the Eucharist.

Therefore, the Last Supper must be approached from the perspective of the other fellowship meals Jesus shared. But the Last Supper alone is inadequate to explain the Eucharist which is a post-resurrectional development and is irrelevant without a sound Christology (Jesus) and ecclesiology (Church) [Pecklers 2003:163-70].

According to some theologians, the indicators to interpret the Last Supper as a Passover meal in a historical way are as follows: The synoptic gospels mention Jerusalem as the place of the Last Supper and it fits well with the Passover customs. The Jerusalem inhabitants offered their rooms to strangers to celebrate the Passover without any rental fee. In accordance with the Passover customs, Jesus might have celebrated the Passover after sunset with his disciples. The ritual washing to preserve Levitical purity, breaking bread, serving red wine, and singing the Passover *hallel* were part of the meal. For the early Christian community, Passover was not the basis for the Eucharist but the table fellowship movement of solidarity and sharing held in the light of resurrection (Osborne, 165-68). It is not the Passover character of the Last Supper that is central to our Liturgy of the Eucharist, but the paschal mystery of the birth, the life, the persecution, the murder, and the resurrection of Jesus.

The "Table Fellowship" of Jesus in the Gospels

Jesus entered a hostile world proclaiming the reign of God (Mk 1:15). The Palestine of Jesus' time was subjected to

three kinds of hostile authorities: Roman, royal, and religious. The residents of Jerusalem paid taxes to the Roman Emperor. Herod collected taxes in Galilee and all the Jews paid temple taxes and tithes. The major fertile land holdings were occupied by the rich and the powerful, namely: the Roman power, the Herodian family, and the Temple priests. The tribal bonding and community relations in the Jewish community began to decline under the newly enslaved forms of a money economy and foreign monitored state power. In such a social scenario the issues affecting the poor were hunger, sickness, and oppression.²

The kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus was a collective, communal movement that responded to the collective pains of the poor who were hungry, sick, and oppressed. The kingdom vision of Jesus took the praxis model of table fellowship to actualize it. This approach of sharing bread heralded equality and restored human dignity.

Table Fellowship with the Sinners and the Outcasts

In biblical literature, the sinners and the outcasts are often identified with the poor. George Soares-Prabhu categorizes the biblical poor into three categories:

1. They are a sociological group, whose identity is defined by their sociological situation.
2. They are a dialectical group whose status is determined by antagonistic groups.
3. They are a dynamic group through whom God shapes history.

The poor of the Bible are all those who are in any way, and not just economically, deprived of the means or the dignity they need to lead a fully human existence; or who are in a situation of powerlessness which exposes them to such deprivation. The poor of the Bible are thus the "wretched of the earth," the marginalized, the exploited, all those who are actually or potentially oppressed (1985:332).

For pious Jews, the sinners were those people who lived outside the covenantal Law and those who fell outside the defined boundaries of the "people of God." Therefore, the sinners were identified as the Gentiles and the Jews who did not keep the law. The worst sinners were the outcasts. They included prostitutes, bandits, murderers, and the like, and people of certain occupational groups such as the herdsmen, shepherds, tax collectors, tanners... etc. They had no civil or religious rights. They were deprived of their identity as the children of Abraham in the life to come. Theory and practice of ritual purity laws dominated the daily interactions of life. "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Lk 7:34). Jesus often sat at table, fraternized with disreputable people, the outcasts of society. The publican Levi's first "apostolic" activity was to entertain Jesus in his house. A number of tax collectors and sinners were also sitting at table with Jesus (Mk 2:15). One special manner by which Jesus expresses kindness to sinners and outcasts is his table-fellowship. He is often accused of eating with tax-collectors and sinners (Mt 11:19). Jesus defends himself saying: "Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do" (Mk 2:16; Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34) and "I did not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Mk 2:17). We must understand the words of Jesus against such a socio-religious and political background.

The ritually pure and holiness-oriented Pharisees criticized Jesus for dining with the outcasts of Jewish society. He was called a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners (Mt 11:18ff). The social and religious outcasts were the subjects of his healing mission (Mk 2:17). Dining with the alienated poor was an expression of his solidarity with them and at the same time a protest against the triple authorities of the Romans, of Herod, and of the temple-based priestly class. The table fellowship of Jesus is "the expression of a radically new (therefore thoroughly disturbing) theological vision, rooted in a new experience of God, and calling for a new kind of society" (Soares-Prabhu 1992:144).

The Table Fellowship with the Rich

The parables of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19ff), the story of a rich young man (Mk 10:17ff), and the life story of Zacheus (Lk 19:1ff) are Jesus' invitations of table fellowship to the rich. The message of Jesus was "Good news for the poor." There were three types of responses given by the rich towards the invitation of Jesus. First, there was a total rejection of the invitation in the Parable of the Great Banquet (Lk 14:15-24) and in the story of a rich young man. Zacheus (Lk 19:1-10) made partial sharing of his riches in his participation in the table fellowship. Later, Levi renounced everything to follow Jesus (Lk 5:27-28). While dining with Simon the Pharisee, Jesus invited the ritually pure guests to observe the feelings of a repentant woman rather than the defiling caresses of a whore (Jn 7:36-50) [Park, 71-72].

Pauline Theology of the Eucharist

Paul understood the Eucharist from three particular aspects namely,

1. The Eucharist is the means for uniting the Christian community.
2. The Eucharist is the ritual act where Christ is present to his people. It is that which concretizes their faith.
3. Christ's body and blood are identified with the bread and the wine consumed by the community (Brown et al. 1993:1410-11).

For Paul, the Eucharist is above all, the "Lord's Supper." The Lord's Supper was supposed to be a common meal (1 Cor 11:20), the meal at which the new people of God eat their "spiritual food" and consume "spiritual drink" (1 Cor 10:3-4). In this meal the community manifests itself as the community of the "new covenant" (1 Cor 11:25; cf. Jer 31:31; Exod 24:8), as it shares in "the table of the Lord" to all equally (1 Cor 10:21; Mal 1:7, 12) [Moloney 1990:112]. The communion of this people denotes not only its union with Christ and with one another, but also proclaims the Christ-event itself and its eschatological character. This character was misunderstood in the Corinthian community (Brown et al., 1411). According to the observations of some exegetes, Paul was concentrating fully on Jesus, especially on "the Risen Lord who assembled a church." The Eucharist was thus seen as an ecclesial

action that brings the assembly (through faith, grace, and the Spirit) into participation with Christ's death, with the risen life he now lives in God's presence. Jesus' presence is not only on the table of the Eucharist, but at, and around the table (1 Cor 11:29). The meal not only brings believers into the domain of Christ's death; it also implicates them in each other's lives. Paul has heard that the common meal practices have become impossible at Corinth because there were divisions among the wealthy and the poor. Some of the wealthy people were not concerned about the poor. The wealthier people were not sharing, nor waiting for the less privileged people of the Christian community. The poor were therefore disadvantaged (Barret 1973:262-76).

Paul indicates that there are some people who simply do not have enough food to eat (1 Cor 11:22), while at the same time there are others who have their own private homes where they can enjoy their wealth without creating divisions at the table of the Lord (1 Cor 11:22, 34) [Conzelmann 1975:195-97]. In the Corinthian community, the wealthy eat a lavish meal at home rather than with the community because in the community they reject the poor (O'Connor 1979:110-11; Leon-Dufour 1987:112-13). This is the *unworthy manner* of participating in the Eucharistic celebration (v.27). "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor 11: 27-28). The wider context of these questions shows Paul's attack on the Corinthians. Paul expresses his displeasure over the divisions between "those who have" and "those who do not have." "I heard that there are divisions among you" (v.18). "...When the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!" (1 Cor 11:21-22). "This passage has been read in the traditional moral and dogmatic theology manuals as a biblical word against the presence of the broken at the Eucharistic table" (Moloney 2001:227). It is good to know that we get the traditional phrases of Holy Communion, the Lord's Table, and the Lord's Supper from Pauline passages (1 Cor 11:25) [Lussier, 55].

Paul regards the Eucharist as a means of communion with Christ as well as with fellow humans (1 Cor. 10:16-17). The Eucharist is a sign of brotherhood and sisterhood by which all Christians are united as one family (1 Cor 10:17). This is the memorial of Christ's death for women and men (1 Cor 11:24-26). However, the Eucharist commemorates the liberation of the society; it liberates us from sin and slavery.

The Eucharist is a living sermon, a perpetual proclamation of the death of Christ, not as an act of mourning, but as an occasion of living hope. The announcement is contained in the Eucharistic celebration, the meaning of which is known to the Christians; by their partaking of the Eucharist, they show their faith and proclaim its objects, namely, the meaning of our Lord's salvific death and his resurrection (Lussier, 52).

The Eucharist as Food

One of our most basic physical needs as human beings is food. It is nourishment for our bodies. The Eucharist is nourishment for our spiritual life. As Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (Jn 6:54-56). Eating the Eucharistic bread will bring us into close union with him who is our Lord and savior.³ Food is a very important symbol in our life as well as in the scriptures. In many non-Christian religions, food is offered as sacrifice and is shared among the people. In the early church, the Eucharist was linked to an agape or love feast in which people shared a meal together (Amaladoss 1994:135-37). Food is necessary for life, that is why it becomes the symbol of life. It is therefore significant and natural that when Jesus chose a symbol to represent and to celebrate his paschal mystery, he chose the symbol of eating and drinking together. Therefore, he has humanized the symbol of life in a common meal, while integrating into it the theme of love and sacrifice in the very act of sharing. The drinking aspect of the meal makes it possible for him even to integrate the symbolism of blood.

The Eucharist is therefore the affirmation and celebration of life and community. Sharing food is a common symbol in most human communities to indicate fellowship. Eating alone is an animal act that meets a biological need. Eating together is a human act that shows that we never live alone, that we are dependant on others. The Eucharist shows that we cannot have a community of human beings without God being present there. Real communion is at the same time with God and with fellow human beings. The life that God shares with us is not simply divine as different from and apart from human. The life of God makes us more fully human (Amaladoss 1990:312).

The Eucharist will be an empty gesture if it is not celebrated in a community with fellowship and equality. "As the body of Christ, the Eucharistic food roots the community in the life of the living Christ and of God" (Amaladoss 1994:314). The Eucharist is God's invitation to be in communion with him and his beloved creation. It creates an atmosphere of sharing and service to our neighbors. "The Eucharist is an encounter with the Lord to which not only those whom we consider worthy are invited" (Moloney 2001:212). Jesus only called the weak and ordinary people to his meal. He was aware that "the glory of God is the human being fully alive" so he built his Eucharistic celebration in the human world. The Eucharistic meal satisfies our spiritual hunger. In the sacred meal, everyone receives equally. There is no discrimination between race, gender, or caste status. Christ draws everyone to himself, and loves each one equally, yet uniquely. At every Eucharist, our president is the servant washing our feet and speaking ironically of the powerful, who lord it over others and then claim the title of benefactor, in giving us his body and blood. "It shall not be so among you," he says, "The Eucharist, the sacrament of our salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross, is also a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation. In the Eucharistic sacrifice the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and Resurrection of Christ. Through Christ, the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity."⁴ The Eucharist is an unambiguous reminder that the Church is called to build itself on relationships of love and mutuality, not power and domination—not for its own self-satisfaction, but as a political witness, as a harbinger of the Kingdom of God.

When we offer bread and wine as the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands, we acknowledge that the earth too contributes its part. Bread and wine are the products of human labor, which Christ takes, blesses and shares out equally. Therefore, all human beings naturally participate in the Eucharistic meal. People do not live just to eat. Life is not just eating. Living is growing, creating, building community. It is making a new heaven and a new earth. That is why the Eucharist, not only refers to the present relationships among people. It gives us a vision of a new world to come and demands a commitment" (Amalados 1990:312). The Eucharist is a challenge to create community and not perpetuate the differences. A community may not be a true community without sharing food. This may be one of the reasons why Jesus created the Eucharist as food. It is sharing a community meal. From the beginning, celebrating the Eucharist involved sharing goods and possessions. It used to be fashionable to decry the early Church's "primitive communism" as naïve and unsustainable. Yet the unity of breaking the bread and sharing the goods is a continuing strand of thought and practice throughout the Church's first four centuries (Rosario 1994: 83-95). Beyond all these explanations Jesus himself is food for us.

St. Thomas Aquinas says, "*O Sacrum Convivium*" (O sacred banquet), in which Christ becomes our food, the memory of his passion is celebrated, the soul is filled with grace and the pledge of future glory is given to us" (Irwin 2005:195). "Jesus Christ is the food for our journey; he calls us to the heavenly table" (Irwin, 2006). In the early Church, people came together in the name of Christ and "broke bread in his memory." "Day after day they met as one community in the temple. They had their meals in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God" (Acts 2:46-47). "Great virtues like sharing, love, and sacrifice were connected with the Eucharist" (Rosario, 92).

The Eucharist as Sacrament

It is good to have a clear idea of sacraments in general before studying the Eucharist as the crown and center of sacraments. The first and the head of the sacraments is Jesus himself, because he revealed himself "as full of grace" (Jn 1:14). He revealed God. He became part of human history by becoming a poor man (2 Cor 8:9) and a representative of God, who in history took sides with the poor and defended them (Ex 2:23-27). The Eucharist, moreover, is not a union of particular castes or of individual human beings with God, because through the Eucharist Jesus gives himself to the whole society especially the Church, which is "the people of God" (Amalados 1990:312-20).

Christ is the author of the sacraments and the principal agent in their celebration. They are a prolongation of the Incarnation and the source of the gift of all sacramental grace. They are a continuation and a supplement for the presence of the Incarnate Christ, the embodiment of the actual saving action of our risen Lord. Christ himself is the sacrament of our encounter with God, in a transcendent sense of the word sacrament, in an eminent way; the seven sacraments are God-given means of assimilating the mystery of our salvation through Christ and in Christ (Lussier, 6-7).

"At the Last Supper on the night when he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the centuries until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sacrament of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Jesus Christ is eaten, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us."5 It is in the Eucharist that the community experiences itself as the Body of Christ, in communion with God, Father, Son and Spirit and all the living and the dead who share the life of God. It is the realization of the vision of Jesus (Amalados 1990:317). The Eucharist is at the center of Christian life. It is the focal point where Christians come together out of love for the Lord to experience the mystery of his presence, and then to carry his presence out to all those they meet.

Preparation for the reception of the Eucharist is not primarily a teaching about the sacrament. It is rather an initiation of the candidates into a Christian way of living and worshipping in a community. It is leading them to discover the joy of living in communion with God and with others.

When we speak of the Eucharist as symbol or sacrament we tend to explain only how it symbolizes the Paschal mystery. We do not often see how it is also a symbol of the community that is in the process of participating in the Paschal mystery by becoming more of a community.

This is what we mean when we say that the Eucharist is the center of Christian life. The term 'Christian' is not a term of designation, but both a description and a commitment to continuing action.

The Eucharist is a sacrament, therefore, to affirm this dialectic between life and its symbolic celebration. The need of building community is a moral response to our celebration of the Eucharist. If we are not engaged in building community, our celebration of the Eucharist will be without meaning. On the other hand, the Eucharist is the way in which we integrate visibly and as a community our life of sharing and service with the Paschal mystery. Normally, Christian life and the Eucharist are intimately connected. It is life that gives meaning to its symbolic celebration. The Eucharist is the meaningful union of all the mysteries of Jesus: his life, his resurrection, and his return (Lussier, 186-90). Therefore, the Eucharist unites each of us to the Risen Lord who gives to every one the same dignity to be children of God. All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither a low caste nor high caste; there is neither rich nor poor; there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ (Gal 3:28). The Eucharist speaks of the oneness of human society, and therefore dictates equality among all human beings.

It looks forward to a society in God, a city for all the nations, in which the last are first, the humble lifted high, as grace and peace forgive and unite all humanity. While life has primacy over its sacramental celebration, it is necessary to keep both in dynamic tension, rather than emphasize one against the other. They make each other meaningful.

The Eucharist as Memorial

The memory that the Lord left us in the Holy Eucharist, is a memory that is not merely the remembrance of the past, but one that creates in the present—a memory in which Jesus gives himself into our hands and into our hearts, and thereby makes us alive for living as true Christians.

The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice, in the liturgy of the Church which is his Body. In all the Eucharistic Prayers we find after the words of institution a prayer called the anamnesis of memorial.⁶

The Holy Eucharist is the profound memory of Jesus as well as of the Church. It is a profound expression of God's love for his people. In this memory, we have the ultimate expression of the mutual understanding of love between God and the human person. Jesus Christ, by giving us himself in the Eucharist, also gives himself to us in a way which is total, and which places himself completely at our disposal. It is a form of limited consecration to us, and through this he asks us to give ourselves to him completely, to fully consecrate ourselves to him through his memory of the living Eucharist. Jesus gives us his life and has made the Eucharist as his memory "Do this in memory of me." Through this Eucharistic celebration "we are brought together as a caring, sharing, helping community which carries on Jesus' work in the world. The Eucharist is also the source of our growth in personal union with God; it sustains and nourishes our spiritual life" (Knox, 247).

The Eucharist is the focus of the memory of Jesus' death and resurrection. It is our task and mission to remember this in the Eucharistic celebration. We, the Church, are invited to hold on to Jesus' memory. It is the very center of unity in the Church. This desire on Jesus' part for mutual love and self-giving is the essence of the Eucharist, for in giving himself to us he gives us, not just eternal life but a share in his Divine life. It is the Eucharist which is the heart of the memory of Jesus' body and blood. "The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men and women offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit."⁷ The Eucharist is the true memorial of Christ's paschal mystery and it is capable of keeping alive in us the memory of his love. In this memory of Eucharist, Christians are nurtured.

The Eucharist as Covenant

The Scripture presents the relationship between God and humanity as a covenant. Paul sees "the Eucharist as the seal of the New Covenant (1 Cor 11:25)." ⁸ God shows himself to the people to invite them to participate in his life and joy through the covenant. God is not only inviting humans but he has a commitment with us. He sent his only Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to this world. God made his Son become the flesh of humanity. Jesus died and was raised in obedience to his Father's will. From his death and resurrection he made a new covenant with his Father so that he could bring all people into God's Kingdom. "It is in this global context that we have to understand the particular mission of Jesus, who proclaims and realizes the Kingdom of God. His passion, death and resurrection is the definitive event in which God makes a new covenant with humanity" (Amaladoss 1990:312). It will be an empty gesture for people to celebrate the Eucharistic covenant if there is no real collaboration within the community. A community must have an atmosphere of sharing and serving one another. Jesus washed his disciples' feet to symbolically show that the sharing and fellowship is the primary source of building a community (*ibid.*, 311-14). The covenant that Jesus gave us is not just to repeat what he did at his ministry but to continue his work and his mission through sharing and serving our community (*ibid.*, 312-13).

"Jesus is the new covenant; he is its source, its recipient, and its mediator. He is Emmanuel, the covenant presence of God with men; he is the supreme attachment of man to God; and this devotedness to the Father's will finds its full actuation in his sacrificial self-offering at the Last Supper" (Lussier, 172). The Eucharist is the life of Christ given to us so that we may live like Christ. We may experience his covenant through this Eucharist. It is the source where one will find the strength for generous human living. "The Eucharist proclaims to the world and for all time liberation from all slavery, dignity, liberty, justice for all" (*ibid.*, 173). The Eucharistic covenant teaches us to be real disciple of Jesus. His real presence in the Eucharist is not only logical but also gives full meaning and actuality to the new covenant dispensation that is Christianity.

We are all the same in this covenant. Christ does not have any separate Eucharistic celebration for the rich or poor, for the high caste or low caste. We will lose our real Christian identity if we have separation and discrimination in the Eucharistic celebration (*ibid.*, 171-74). Therefore, the Eucharist as presence and as sacrifice, must really send us out into the world to promote and to realize the Kingdom of God through the building up of community with real fellowship.

The community of God is not a given, but a goal to be achieved. One of the sufferings experienced by humans on this earth is in- difference and division. Some of the differences like sex, race, and culture are God-given. There is no way to reject them. We have to accept them in mutual respect and appreciation and see that they are sources of enrichment rather than of division in the community (Amaladoss 1994:114). Other divisions are disparities of wealth and power caused by us—humans. In situations of injustice, oppression, and discrimination, divisions become inevitable for Christians. These situations should be cast out from the Christian communities (*ibid.*).

NOTES

1. These terms are often used by Kappen in his writings. Cf. Kappen 2002.
2. The underlying reason for it was the heavy indebtedness people suffered under various forms of bureaucracies in

their political, social, and religious life, see Osborne, 25-27; Abesamis 1988:170-85.

3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1331, 1416 (Geoffrey Chapman: 1994).

4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1359 (Geoffrey Chapman: 1994), 306.

5. Vatican Council II, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," no. 47.

6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1362 (Geoffrey Chapman: 1994), 298.

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1325 (Geoffrey Chapman: 1994), 306.

8. *Ibid.*, 55.

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