PANTA KOINA: THE FEEDING STORIES IN THE LIGHT OF ECONOMIC DATA AND SOCIAL PRACTICE

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Dieter Georgi has continually raised provocative questions about the interface between ideological formulations and their social and economic contexts. The following, essentially descriptive, essay would honor him by probing aspects of the miraculous feeding stories of the gospel tradition.

FOOD FIGHTS

I begin, however, not with feeding miracles of the usual sort but with food fights. In the bourgeois tradition (with the general support of Greco-Roman antiquity) it is presumed that fighting at and about meals is indecorous. On this point the New Testament is ambiguous.

1. Corinth according to Paul (1 Cor 11:17-34)

In 1 Cor 11:20-21 Paul, who here, as often, aligns himself with that aspect of conventional morality that treasures decorum, writes: “When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper (κυριακόν δείπνου). For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper (ιδίουν δείπνου), and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.”

1 For those who worked with him at Harvard, Dieter Georgi was a difficult and extraordinary teacher: extraordinary because of his respect for his students, difficult for the same reason. With his fertile, creative, and informed intelligence he always kept us off balance by leaping across apparently unfathomable chasms and pointing to dimensions we never had seen. This essay appeared in preliminary form in a paper read at the Midwest Regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Evanston, Illinois, 11 January 1989. I am most grateful to Robert Jewett for his assistance.


3 Note the frequency of συνέχουσα in 1 Cor 11-14: 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34, and 14:23.

4 Unless otherwise indicated, English translations follow the New Revised Standard Version.
This presents a conflict, as modern scholarship has recognized, particularly since the work of J. Weiss and H. von Soden, between two spheres, the sacramental and the social. The conflict is one of the earliest known instances of that enduring tension between the eschatological/utopian/sacramental realm and the life of believers in human societies. Among its many dimensions are the questions of whether the Christian community is to find its model in an ideal (or conventional) polis or an ideal (or conventional) oikos, or in some manifestation that rejects both. The first two positions find support in the pauline (and deuto-pauline) literature; the third underlies at least some strands of the Gospel tradition, especially "Q." Since the ancient intellectual tradition tended to envision the oikos as a microcosm of the polis, and the latter as a microcosm of the cosmos, confusion was inevitable.

1 Cor 11-14 illustrates this confusion profusely. If 1 Cor 12:12-27 is the most famous pauline example of the polis-model, with its image of the church as a body, 1 Cor 11 treats the boundaries between (private) home and house-church. Is the eucharist a "community meal" with (naturally for antiquity) religious elements, a family gathering with equally natural

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6 Plato (*Republica*) is an early representative, but see Aristotle *Pol. 1*, 125A 7.9, for another view. A relevant example is the discussion by Plutarch’s Seven Sages of the governance of states, households, and the universe (*Sept. Sap. Conv. 6-21 = Plutarch Moralia* 150F-164D).


8 1 Cor 11:2-16 evidences a similar clash of boundaries. From one perspective the assembly could be described as an intimate domestic situation in which people could “let their hair down.” Paul appeals to public standards regarding the hair-styles of women (and men). Note also his appeal to impressions upon “outsiders” in 14:23-24. Chs. 5-8 deal with other boundary difficulties, in particular those between church and world, summarized sarcastically in 5:10.