

Eucharist as the Binding Force of Unity in the Context of Paul's Campaign for Harmony in Corinth

Fr. S. J. Anthonysamy

Introduction: The World Today

Hostility and division have been the hallmarks of human society from time immemorial. The Yahwistic narration of the story of Cain and Abel gives ample expression to the spirit of alienation and aggression among human beings even in the pre-historic times. In spite of an immense progress in science and technology, human life is still under the dominance of the evil of disunity and suspicion among nations and individuals. The latest offspring of inhumanity in the world is none other than terrorism which has brought death to thousands and a dangerous polarization among peoples and cultures. The world has become a horrible place to live.

Humanity has witnessed much hatred and bloodshed in the name of dissensions due to religion, even more than due to ethnic and political conflicts. Christian Crusades and Islamic Jihads have brought about immense havoc to peoples and nations. It is a well known fact that the sacred *varnasrama dharma* of Hinduism had been the source of much of our caste divisions here in India causing discrimination and distress to millions in this land since many centuries. And tragically these division still persist safeguarded by religious ethos. While a fundamentalist perspective of religion has the potential for a dangerous fanaticism, yet religion in itself is an enormous force for solidarity, love, unity and peace. Christianity which is being professed by nearly one-third of human beings in the world today does contain such inherent values and Christians do have a great obligation to promote unity and peace in the world today.

Paul the Earliest Promoter of Christianity

One of the earliest proponents of Christianity was none other than Paul himself. He was an ardent follower of Jesus, having first been his bitterest critique. In his mission as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul spent much time in travelling through the length and breadth of Asia Minor and proclaiming him. He wrote several letters to the Christian communities whom he had evangelized. But he wrote no systematic account of his mentor and master Jesus Christ. That was left to the four Evangelists. Paul was basically a missionary and his presentation of Jesus was pastoral. With his erudite Jewish background Paul was able to understand Jesus Christ quite intensely. And it was Paul who was able to give a religious as well as a pastoral dimension to the words and deeds of Jesus. And hence most doctrines of Christianity have come down to us from the reflections of Paul on the various events in the life of Jesus.¹

Paul's Concerns in the Light of his Jewish Background

Paul had been extremely proud of his Israelite, and Pharisaic background (Phil 3:5-6). But he was also filled with "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" over his "kindred according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2-3). Paul's distress was due to the failure of Israel in responding to God in spite of their having been his greatest beneficiaries. One such failure of Israel was their lack of response to the promises made by God to them through the patriarchs. And the first promise which God made to Abraham concluded in these significant words: "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). This pertained to the relationship between Israel and the rest of humanity. This promise of God carried with it a blessing to the whole of humanity through the mediation of Israel. Hence it involved a great obligation to the chosen people.

The primary motive in the call of Israel as a people chosen by God was with an obligation, namely to bring about unity in the wide world of humanity. The call of Abraham and hence the origin of Israel as God's own people, is narrated immediately after the story of Babel,

the sad dispersion of humanity (Gen 11:1-9). The words of Yahweh to Abraham do contain an unique proposal. The scattered humanity needs to be blessed. A blessing offered to a humanity in total dispersion can only be with a view of uniting them. Israel is given the task of playing the role of a mediator between God and the families of the earth. It is the blessings of God through Israel that will make the nations of the world a community.

Paul was not able to accept such a failure in the salvation history. He consoles himself saying, "It is not as though the word of God has failed" (Rom 9:6). He has to make the word of God effective. The fire of zeal for his future mission is thus already lit. It is with the precise purpose of bringing the blessings of God, namely of faith in his Son Jesus Christ in the Gentile world and thus create one humanity. The Word of the Lord spoken at the conversion of Paul is in a way similar to the one spoken to Abraham: "... he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15; Gal 1:15-16; cf Gen 12:3) Hence his later exclamation, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all..." (Rom 10:12).

Unity as the Core of Christianity

If we may pinpoint a single doctrine of Paul which he earnestly promoted as a principle as well as praxis in the name of Jesus was the one on unity – unity between the Jew and the Gentile, as well as among the believers themselves. An ardent apostle of the Gentiles that he was, in one of his earliest letters, namely to the Galatians, Paul enthusiastically proclaims that the whole humanity needs to be united through Jesus Christ. He says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). The Jews and Gentiles had been totally alienated from each other for a long period of time, the former having suffered much from the latter, and the latter bitterly discriminated by the former. But Paul seems to think that the primary purpose of the mission of Jesus leading to his death was none other than to bring about peace and unity among these two races at odds

with each other for ages. Hence his clarion call projecting the very death of Jesus as the unifying bond. He states, "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both the groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us (Eph 2:14).

Paul waxes even more eloquent with this theme when he speaks of unity required in the Christian community, which consisted of Jewish as well as Gentile Christians. They are to be bonded together, and be the *ekklesia*, the Church. He identifies the Church as the very Body of Christ in which all believers are members knit together just as the human body is well-knit with its various organs. Paul asserts, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12: 12-13; Eph 4:4-6).

Paul' Severest Challenge: Corinth

Corinth, a port city, was part of the Roman empire. It had all the socio-political evils of the mighty empire. A small elite minority enjoyed the luxuries of wealth while a vast majority were poor with a considerable slave population.² It was the latter group which became Christians, and yet continued to bear the brunt of social degradation. Drunkenness, immorality and idol worship were common practices of the city (1 Cor 6: 9, 10; 10:14ff). And if we are to go by Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, a situation of discord among people continued to haunt the Christian community. And this was the most disturbing concern of Paul. Having been gripped by the vital message of Christian faith towards unity Paul launches a strenuous appeal to the community for unity and solidarity. His letter contains a few areas of discord which had surfaced among the Corinthians:

1. There were differences among them on the basis of their emotional affinities with their religious leaders and teachers. Sloganeering was part of their Christian faith! (1 Cor 1:10-11; 3:1-9).

This abnormal trend of the community destroyed their efficiency as a Church body.

2. There were also serious differences in Corinth in the name of a certain cultural outlook on life. There were some who were in proud pursuit of human wisdom and knowledge. A Greek orientation to life and culture brought them a status. They wished to be considered as wise, powerful and noble in birth; but in contrast there were those whose faith in Jesus and the cross apparently kept them as foolish, weak and despised (1 Cor 1:18-27).

3. There was a spirit of disgust in the community on the basis of the lawsuits, one against the other. Seeking justice from a secular law court was forbidden to the Jews. It was quite possible that the Greek converts did not adhere to such a tradition, but rather had regularly approached the law courts of Corinth.

4. The most repugnant division came about in the fellowship meals known as *agape*. They were the love feasts where Christians gathered together, sharing among themselves whatever food they could bring from their homes. A meal of this type nourished fellowship among Christians whatever their social and economic status. But the Christian community of Corinth totally disregarded the ethic of fellowship in the community meals. Paul became rather agitated when the *agape* meals were violated.

Paul's Decisive Response to Corinthians

Paul seems to have taken the Corinthian situation of discord and division as of crucial concern. In his consideration the issue had affected the very essence of Christian life. He was determined to find a solution to the problem in the larger interest of the Church community. It was the greatest challenge for his own mission. He should have reflected for long, in order to find a solution for this nagging problem of disunity in Corinth. He was eager to find a solution that would stimulate the reflections of the community. It was the very person of Christ who provided him solution for all his pastoral problems. In his well thought-out argument it is Jesus Christ celebrated, remembered and alive in

the Eucharist who would be the real antidote in the situation of a divided community. And he goes ahead to show the vital dimension of the Eucharist and the role it should play in Christian life.

It is important to keep in mind that the very first account of the Last Supper of Jesus with the Institution of the Eucharist is provided by Paul. We may be sure that Paul did inherit this account as a hallowed tradition (1 Cor 11:23). And he records it precisely in a situation of agonizing division of the community, as if, it is the Eucharist which is the eventual and definitive answer to the problem of human disharmony. Paul's essential argument is that the Eucharist as a food unites the participant with the body of the Lord. And hence it has to bring about unity among the participants who form the 'body' of the Lord, the Church.³

Eucharist and Religious Meals in Corinth (1 Cor 10:14-22)

The only letter of Paul to contain two calculated references to the Eucharist is his first letter to the Corinthians. After discussing the various factors of divisions in the community, he begins to pinpoint two specific occasions where the Christian community had certainly exceeded all sense of propriety. And in this context he brings in the theme of the Eucharist.

The first occasion was when he became aware that some Christians participated in the religious meals of a non-Christian character (1 Cor 10:14-21). In any culture the meal was not meant just to satisfy hunger. It had a larger meaning. When eaten in company it brought about fellowship among the participants. When it was eaten in a religious worship it brought about partnership with the deity.⁴ Paul forbids the Christians from taking part in such religious meals. What constituted a religious meal in Corinth was first of all a sacrifice made to the pagan deity and secondly eating before the deity what had been sacrificed. Paul calls those who eat such meals "partners with demons" (vs 20). It was possible that some Christians who participated in such meals also went over to participate in the Eucharist. Paul's accusation against such unprincipled Corinthians was over their hypocrisy of seeking

union with two deities. Paul reprimands them saying, "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of the demons" (vs 21).

Participation in the Eucharistic meal was not complete merely with the "sharing" in the Body and Blood of Christ. There was another constituent in this meal which Paul would like to underline. And this was the truth which the Corinthians badly needed to understand. What is it? It pertains to the unity that the Eucharist brings about among the members of the community divided as they were. Paul affirms, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16). Participation in the body of Christ should necessarily bring about unity in the participating community. It is in this sense the community becomes the body of Christ. Paul's insistence on "we who are many are one body" seems to be his pressing concern considering the life context of Corinth. They were not 'many' merely in a numerical and conflict-ridden sense. Their ideological and emotional differences needed a vital remedy. And in the interpretation of Paul it is the Eucharist which can be the real force and strength of unity. And a little later Paul would bring in the same theme of unity with the Church as the source of enforcement (1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph 4:1-16). While the unity of believers derived from the Eucharist belongs to its very essence, the one derived of the Church is on an ideological basis.

Eucharist and the Corinthian Agape Meals (1 Cor 11: 17-22)

The second time when Paul reprimanded the Corinthians was for their abuses in their fellowship meals, known as *agape* (1 Cor 11:17-26). In the early Church, the believers provided meals for fellowship and for charity to the poor. Just as Jesus instituted the Eucharist in the context of a meal namely the Last Supper, so also the early Christians celebrated the Eucharist in the context of a meal. Considering the nature of the Eucharist as the Body of Christ, the meal surrounding it became sacred not only for the divine presence surrounding it but also for a community participation. It generated among the participants some exceptional Christian characteristics like love, fellowship, association, communion, participation and generosity.

Hence the Eucharist itself became known sometimes as the *agape* or the love meal. Compassion towards the poor became one of the important sentiments of the *agape*. It is possible that these love feasts associated with the Eucharist could have gradually deteriorated as merely social celebrations and hence they were suppressed around the 5th century.⁵

The *agape* meals of Corinth became notorious for their total lack of association with the poor. The Christian community of Corinth which went through the problem of disunity among themselves did seem to have completely disregarded the spirit of love in such meal practices (1 Cor 11:17-22). Hence Paul's legitimate anger. It is here that he brings in the institution of the Eucharist by Jesus at the Last supper (1 Cor 11:23-26).

The Eucharist and the Agape

The questions that we may raise here is about the relationship between the *agape* meals of the early Church and the Eucharist. Is the "breaking of bread" that was part of the Eucharist inclusive in the *agape* meals? Jude 1:12 speaks of blemishes in *agape* meals without any reference to Eucharist as such; similarly Paul is mentioned to have taken part in the "breaking of bread" but without any reference to any *agape* meal (Acts 20:11). Hence there did not seem to have been an immediate correlation between the two.

But the believers in the early Church generally celebrated the Eucharist as the Lord's Supper within the framework of a Passover meal.⁶ They seem to have preceded it with another meal earlier, and it was in preparation for the Eucharist. Paul's accusation of the Corinthians that they do not really come together to eat the Lord's Supper, exposes the fact that there existed another meal apart from the Eucharist. That is, the *agape* or the love feasts of the community usually preceded the Eucharist. It is a practice of this kind that Luke describes as 'fellowship' preceding the 'breaking of bread'. He states, "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42). There are

several authors who identify 'fellowship' that is, *koinonia* with the table fellowship realized by the common meal, the "agape" to which the Eucharistic rite of the 'breaking of bread' became associated.⁷

The Agape in Corinth

How did this *agape* fare in Corinth? Given the Corinthian situation of a divided society with discords on various levels, there was a total chaos in such meals. The *agape* meal as one of love and fellowship embracing the poor should have been held all the more respectfully since it prepared the participants for the Eucharist. Paul accused them saying, "When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper" (vs 20). The Corinthians had converted the *agape* into a an ordinary private meal and thus profaned the Lord's Supper.⁸ What could have been the nature of their profanation?

Gerd Theissen gives a few possible ways by which the sacred nature of the meal surrounding the Eucharist could have been violated.⁹ The Corinthian spirit of groupism and immorality reared its head on such occasions.

- The meal could have been an occasion when the various social or ideological groups in the Corinthian Christian community continued and intensified their conflicting attitudes one towards the other.
- Some individuals of the community, possibly the economically superior ones, could have looked down upon the economically lower groups, making the *agape* a private affair.
- The meal could have been served at various points of time and hence did not blend itself to the spirit of a fellowship in the community. It was possible that the community meal lost its importance for the community. In its place there could have been some 'secret' meals favouring the rich. Paul objects to such meals saying, "What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink?" (1 Cor 11:22).¹⁰

- There could have been qualitative and quantitative differences in the meal eaten. Some individuals could have brought their own private meals, *idion deipnon* which they did not set before the community and thus they violated the spirit of the Lord's Supper, *kuriakon deipnon*. Hence Paul's anguish, "one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (1 Cor 11:21).

The Pauline Institution of the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23-26)

We come to the important issue of Paul's narration of the institution of the Eucharist, and that too in the context of the divisions in the Church at Corinth. How does he show the Eucharist as the real answer to the problems of disunity of the community? How should the Pauline way of handling the Eucharist help the Church to appropriate a doctrine that is going to be of paramount importance for ages to come? It appears that in his campaign towards unity in Corinth Paul makes the Eucharist the very force of his movement.

Paul's account is similar to that of Mark (14:22-25), and Matthew (26:26-29) in many ways, but when he differs from them he has some specific points to make. In the first part of the institution, Paul's account reads, 'This is my Body' like the other two, but adds '*which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me*' (vs 24b). In the second part Paul makes another specific reference to the new covenant saying, '*This cup is the new covenant in my blood*' (vs 25). Paul expressly informs the Corinthians about *the new* covenant made in the blood of Jesus, in total contrast to the old which was made at the foot of Sinai. It was ratified by the blood of the animals sprinkled over the altar and the people (Ex 24:3-8). The Pauline institution of the Eucharist concludes with a significant reference to the Eucharistic practice of "*eating this body and drinking the cup*" as the very proclamation of '*the Lord's death until he comes*' (vs 26). There are some important lessons given by Paul from the Last Supper event particularly relevant to the Corinthian context of a discordant society.

- i. In the first place, 'This is my body *which is given for you*' is meant to establish a deep bond between Jesus and the humanity. It is

a bond that has its roots in the ordinary biological principle that every eater becomes one with what he eats. And this unique bond between the community and Jesus in the Eucharist is not just biological, but deeply spiritual. It does not rest with a merely bilateral rapport. It extends to all those who are similarly bound with the Lord. As Paul had stated earlier in the context of the pagan meals, he would once again assert here that "we who are many are one body" (1 Cor 10:17). This extraordinary unity of people, making themselves one body, and precisely the body of Christ has its point of departure in the Eucharist. It is the spiritual force of the person of Christ represented in the Eucharist that makes them one body.

ii. Paul makes a point of reference to the Eucharist as "*the new covenant in my blood*". The ratification of the old covenant with the blood of the animals had this important connotation. The blood was sprinkled on the altar as well as on the people symbolically establishing unity between God and the people, and hence among the people themselves (Ex 24:3-8). Thus Israel became a nation and a community.¹¹ But Paul brings this event of the old covenant to show a contrast with the "*the new covenant in my blood*". It is not any more the blood of the animals but Jesus' own blood. And this covenant is with the community of believers. Israel was made a nation before God by the old covenant. But now the believers are to become a hallowed community of faith in the name of Jesus Christ, irrespective of their race, culture and language. And the Eucharist is to play a strategic role as the conduit of unity in the community.

iii. Paul adds another momentous note to the institution of the Eucharist as to what it is to achieve in the course of history (vs 26). The addition of this note is unique to Paul. Eucharist is to be a proclamation of Jesus' death. What is directly implied by Paul is that the Eucharist is the culmination of the mission of Jesus, namely his death on the cross. Eucharist which was known as 'the breaking of bread' was in reality Jesus, the 'body broken'. This is already recorded in some ancient versions of the Pauline institution formula over the bread: '*This is my body that is broken for you*' (vs 24).¹² Why does

Paul conclude the words of the institution with this idea of proclamation of 'the Lord's death until he comes'?

It is the death of Jesus which brought about his mission to a completion and achieved salvation to the whole of humanity. There is a dramatic presentation of this theme in the Synoptic Gospels. Though Paul does not report it, his theology contains it. It was at the moment of Jesus' death that the temple curtain tore from top to bottom (Mk 15:38). That means something so far hidden has been revealed. It is evident that through Jesus' death some impassable barrier has been removed, making a new age possible (Heb 9:1-2; 10:19-25). We may aptly refer here to the Pauline theme of the gentile community coming closer to Jesus Christ when "the dividing wall of hostility" was broken (Eph 2:13-14). And henceforth God is no more restricted to a chosen few, namely Israel, but he is accessible to the whole of humanity. Added to this symbolic demonstration of bringing the humanity together, the confession of the gentile centurion affirms that unity further: "Truly this man was God's Son" (Mk 15:39). And it should be the foundation for the confession of humanity all over the world. They are to become one community in Jesus. The first proclamation of the death of Jesus was made by the gentile centurion and brought him to Jesus, and all subsequent proclamations have the same purpose, namely to bring the humanity together in Jesus Christ.

Now Paul's assertion is that it is the Eucharist which gives rise to a continued proclamation of the death of Jesus, and hence the real agent of human unity.¹³ Is not the content of the Eucharist, Jesus, the body broken and blood shed? As far as Paul was concerned, his own proclamation in Corinth necessarily had this content, namely Jesus' death on the cross. He asserted, "The Jews demand signs, the Greek desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified..." (1 Cor 1:22). Why was the death of Jesus so important for him in Corinth? It was due to the spirit of discord which reigned there. And referring to their divided community with groupings around Paul or Apollos or Cephas, he asks a ridiculous question, "Was Paul crucified for you? (1 Cor 1:13). It was this *kerygma* giving weight to the redeeming death of Christ

which became the real Gospel in the early Church. And it was to Paul's merit that he associated the *kerygma* with the Eucharist.

Until He Comes

Paul's interpretation of the Eucharist is complete only with the addition of an eschatological motif, which gives a further dimension to the theme of human solidarity. Paul's idea of the Eucharist as the proclamation of the death of Jesus "*until he comes*" (vs 26), is a clear reference to another pet theme of his, namely the glorious return of Jesus at the end of the world (cf 1 Thes 4:13-17). The Gospel of Mark links the theme of Jesus' return to the mission of proclamation to the whole world. The return of Jesus is the culmination of the mission of the Church. In the context of the various happenings heralding the end of the world, the Gospel states, "And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations" (Mk 13:10). A similar notion is given by Luke in his narration on the Ascension of Jesus in the Acts. He links the mission of the disciples to be witnesses in the world to the glorious return of Jesus (Acts 1:6-11). But this concept of expectation of the return of Jesus does necessarily involve the community as a whole. The fears and uncertainties involved in the last days of time, and the hopes nourished to experience the glory of Jesus should certainly help the community to come together. And Paul seems to suggest that the Eucharist has the intrinsic capacity to help the community's togetherness with such an eschatological frame of mind. It is the liturgy of the Eucharist which will help to nourish the community with an eschatological dimension to Christian life.¹⁴

Eucharist Begets Condemnation (1 Cor 11:27-34)

Paul concludes his comments on the Eucharist with a very serious note of condemnation for any continued unworthy behaviour towards this sacrament. It is of note that he uses the verb *krino* meaning condemnation as many as five times. The Pauline appraisal leads us to the following questions which are relevant to our own times: How does the community become unworthy of the Eucharist?

Where does this unworthiness lead the community? How do we avoid the Lord's condemnation for our failures to the Eucharist?

Paul reiterates that it is the discordant spirit of the community at Corinth which makes them unworthy. This state of unworthiness leads them towards a lack of discernment of the body (vs 29). The 'body' here is to be understood in two ways: it is the Body of the Lord, the Risen Jesus fully alive in the Eucharist; it is equally the body of the Christian community symbolized by the Eucharist. An absence of discernment will lead the community to become weak, ill and even bring about death (vs 30). These evils could have been inherited by the community of Corinth in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. A discordant community is a decaying community. Hence the need for a self-examination as to one's disposition to the Eucharist. There should be love and charity on the human level in order to become worthy of the immense love and charity on the divine level.

The Positive Effects of a Cohesive Community (1 Cor 12-14)

Paul's severe note of warning for unworthy attitudes to Eucharist does not end his reflections on the subject. His negative sentiments of a discordant community are now counterbalanced by some affirmations effected by a community in harmony. Without explicitly mentioning the Eucharist, Paul gives the salutary effects "spiritual gifts" within a community which in accord with one another (vs 1). Paul is absolutely conscious of one factor when he eloquently portrays these varieties of gifts or services in the community, namely that they all proceed from one Spirit and one Lord. This preserves the essential unity of the community. Paul adds once again his vibrant theme namely 'one body with many members' and reiterates his pet notion of the universal solidarity of "Jews and Greeks, slaves and free" (vs 12-13). With such affirmative effects, a cohesive community is capable of a great mission with the individual members as apostles, prophets, teachers, healers, leaders and the like to build the Church, the body of Christ.

Having thus extolled the positive effects of a community in solidarity, Paul now goes ahead with enthusiasm. He speaks of love

as the core of a community. Paul must be still conscious of the confusion that reigned in the dissonant Corinthian community and how he discussed with them the inner dynamics of the Eucharist as an antidote for their unity. Now he extends to them a moving song of love which might help them to refurbish their sentiments. This magnificent song of Christian love reveals its fullest and most challenging meaning only when carefully applied into the community life of a local Church which may be in discord as the one at Corinth. It may not be too farfetched to consider this Pauline message of love, a further elucidation on the subject of the Eucharist, since he has addressed the same community with both the themes.

Conclusion: The Eucharist “a Project of Solidarity”

The Eucharist has been aptly described by the II Vatican Council as “the source and summit of the Christian life” (LG 11). But it has however remained simply a sacrament which had generated some essential Christian practices like the celebration of the Holy Mass, the reception of Holy Communion, and the adoration of the real presence of Jesus – all of which however have remained basically devotional. The Eucharist has largely remained restricted to the sacramental life of the Church or the devotional life of the individual Christians. Declaring the Year of the Eucharist in 2004, Pope John Paul II called the Eucharist, “a project of solidarity” thus giving it a dimension of relevance to the wider world of humanity. The Pope’s words on the universal dimension of the Eucharist are plain and simple:

“The Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church’s life; it is also a *project of solidarity* for all of humanity. In the celebration of the Eucharist the Church constantly renews her awareness of being a “sign and instrument” not only of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the whole human race. Each Mass, even when celebrated in obscurity or in isolation, always has a universal character. The Christian who takes part in the Eucharist learns to become a *promoter of communion, peace and solidarity* in every situation. More than ever, our troubled world, which began the new Millennium with the specter of terrorism and the tragedy of war,

demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as *a great school of peace*, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion".¹⁵

Some of the expressions of the Pope in the above passage do give the Eucharist a power and potential that was inherent in the very life and mission of Jesus Christ himself. Hence the presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic species cannot just narrow down to a devotion of adoration and communion, but rather invigorate the community with the power of mission to the world. Jesus Christ has made a great impact in history, particularly in the concluding phase of his life. His passion, death and resurrection were the culmination of his mission of love and service to humanity. And the Eucharist which is none other than the memorial of that paschal mystery, does contain the very essence of Christ in whom "all things are drawn together (cf Eph 1:10; Col 1:15-20). It is this feature of its total identification with Jesus which gives the Eucharist its outstanding legitimacy"¹⁶.

(Endnotes)

¹ Guenther Bornkamm, *Paul*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1971, p. 228ff assesses the general Protestant view that Paul is the real founder of Christianity.

² Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, Trans. John Schutz, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1982, p. 209.

³ M.E. Boismard, "The Eucharist according to St. Paul", in *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, A Symposium, Helicon Press, Baltimore and Dublin, 1964. p. 125-139.

⁴ Dennis E. Smith, "Greco-Roman Sacred Meals" in D.N. Freedman (Ed) *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 4, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p.653-656.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, Agape Meal, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 1, p.90-91.

⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, SCM Press, Great Britain, 1973, p. 84.

⁷ Jacques Dupont, *The Salvation of the Gentiles – Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, Paulist Press, New York, 1967, p. 86.

⁸ Guenther Bornkamm, *Paul*, p. 126 mentions the possibility of the Corinthians having lost faith in the Eucharist as the body of Christ, and hence their indifference about it.

⁹ Gerd Theissen, "Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor 11:17-34" in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity – Essays on Corinth*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975, p 145-174.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 159 thinks that there were three kinds of meals which Paul is referring to: a private meal, a community meal and then a cultic meal.

¹¹ M.E. Boismard, cit., p. 128-9.

¹² Kurt Aland & Others (ed.), *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies, Stuttgart, 1983, p.604.

¹³ M.Kiddle, "The Death of Jesus and the Admission of the Gentiles in Mark", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 35, 1934, p. 45.

¹⁴ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Word of Jesus*, cit., p. 254. He speaks of the community participation at the celebration of the Eucharist as a community praying for the coming of the Lord.

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 27.

¹⁶ Ibidem, no. 16 brings out this Christ dimension of the Eucharist very explicitly: "Faith demands that we approach the Eucharist fully aware that we are approaching Christ himself. It is precisely his presence which gives the other aspects of the Eucharist — as meal, as memorial of the Paschal Mystery, as eschatological anticipation — a significance which goes far beyond mere symbolism. The Eucharist is a mystery of presence, the perfect fulfilment of Jesus' promise to remain with us until the end of the world".