

Reader's Guide to Meals, Food and Table Fellowship in the New Testament

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Nor do we take our food from the same table as Gentiles, inasmuch as we cannot eat along with them, because they live impurely. But when we have persuaded them to have true thoughts, and to follow a right course of action, and have baptized them with a thrice blessed invocation, then we dwell with them. For not even if it were our father, or mother, or wife, or child, or brother, or any other one having a claim by nature on our affection, can we venture to take our meals with him; for our religion compels us to make a distinction. Do not, therefore, regard it as an insult if your son does not take his food along with you, until you come to have the same opinions and adopt the same course of conduct as he follows (Clementine Homilies 13.4).

1.0 The Importance of Meals, Food, Fellowship and Commensality

Meals, food, table etiquette and commensality remained a constant problem in the traditions ascribed to Jesus and in the history of the early Church. The remark above from the Clementine Homilies indicates the potential of commensality to symbolize group boundaries as well as social conflict. In regard to foods, one of the three customs which characterize Judeans, a kosher diet, was abrogated first by Jesus (Mark 7:19) and then by the early Church (Acts 10:14-16; 1 Cor 10:23-27). In Acts, Peter's vision of unclean foods descending from heaven (10:9-15) functions as a cipher for a further discussion of impartial membership in the church (10:28-29, 34). The change from a restricted to an open diet, then, symbolizes for the disciples of Jesus a change in membership, from an exclusively Jewish group to one which included Gentiles as well (Acts 10:28; 15:23-29). The longest piece of exhortation in Paul's first letter to Corinth deals with diet, namely, the eating of meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8 & 10); this issue and the foods of participants at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34) have major social repercussions in the community. Diet, or what one eats, can serve as an identify mark (e.g., pasta, egg rolls, goulash, etc.), and so functions as an important social clue.

As regards Jesus' own eating customs, his choice of table companions, his disregard for washing rites preceding meals, and his unconcern for tithed bread all provoke controversy with alternate religious reformers. According to Luke 14, Jesus gives instructions for table etiquette and fellowship which fly in the face of custom. Paul, too, had much to say about the eating habits of the Corinthian community (1 Cor 8:7-13; 10:14-11:1; 11:17-34). He speaks to a different kind of problem in Rom 14-15, but one that also has to do with food, commensality, and group identity and unity. Paul criticized Peter's eating practices in the celebrated confrontation at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14). Conflicts between Paul and Judaizers over kosher food play a major role in the struggles noted in Phil 3:19. The issue of commensality was formally addressed in the instruction to Gentiles that they observe the Noachic dietary regulations (Acts 15:20, 29). Thus meals, table etiquette and commensality were major social concerns for Jesus, Paul, and the early churches.

How can readers understand the particular ceremony of meals and table fellowship? Why are meals so important as symbols of broader social relationships? How can we peer below the surface and grasp the social dynamics encoded in meals and commensality, what anthropologists call "the language of meals"? This readers guide will present a survey of writings on the various ways in which meals, diet, etiquette and commensality may be profitably understood. Although strictly historical studies of Jewish and Greco-Roman meals are vital to our understanding, cultural and social analysis of the function and dynamics of meals will be our focus.

2.0 Historical Studies of Meals: Symposia, Passover, and Funerary Meals

Even if we focus on a cultural understanding of meals, we must also discuss cultural insights in terms of specific meals eaten at specific times. General books on the daily life of Greeks and Romans regularly provide a detailed report of when they ate, what they consumed, and how they partook of it. Judeans typically ate two meals a day, whereas Greeks and Romans ate three meals a day. The thesis of Dennis Smith (1980) may be the most thorough and convenient source of this material in English. It contains, moreover, a splendid collection of ancient documents pertaining to meals, which give depth and life to the generalizations made about eating habits. Unfortunately, this thesis has not been published and so remains inaccessible to most readers; but Smith has excerpted and digested parts of it in a series of articles (1981, 1987, 1989).

The main daily meal for Greeks and Romans (deipnon, cena) was eaten in the evening and was generally more formally structured with rules of etiquette and tradition. From Roman satire we have the description of a famous meal presented by a former slave to his nouveau riche acquaintances, Petronius' Satyricon (see also Philo, On the Contemplative Life 48-60). This document is a repository of cultural facts which greatly inform us about Greco-Roman meals and offer a suggestive comparison with Christian meals. In particular, the article of Richard Pervo (1985:307-28) presents the reader not only with a clever analysis of Trimalchio's banquet, but with an incipient social analysis of meals in general. He begins his analysis with a noteworthy observation:

Food is a social substance and currency. What one is able (and chooses) to serve expresses one's own position and helps define one's relationship to others. What you, the guest, are offered is a measure of your standing in the eyes of society and your host (1985:311).

Although Pervo's title suggests that he will do a social analysis of meals, his approach is that of history of religions, which is not to denigrate his fine descriptive eye. He is beginning to ask important social questions about who eats what and with whom, gluttony, decorum, places at table, social status and the symposium form. But there is no conceptual model to organize his insights or to lead him to ask questions about the meaning of food and what commensality communicates.

The literature on meals in antiquity has attended to several specific forms of eating, which we will briefly describe here: the symposium, the Passover meal, and funerary meals. As we shall see, all meals tend to have a regular structure.

2.1 Symposium. This meal was distinguished not so much for its banquet as for the extended colloquium and drinking which followed. Plutarch dedicates his Table Talk to Senecio with a plea that he not forget the great tradition of the symposium in antiquity:

Since you too, Senecio, believe that forgetfulness of folly is in truth "wise," yet to consign to utter oblivion all that occurs at a drinking-party is not only opposed to what we call the friend-making character of the dining-table, but also has the most famous of the philosophers to bear witness against it,-- Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Speusippus, Epicurus, Prytanis, Hieronymus, and Dio of the Academy, who all considered the recording of conversations held at table a task worth some effort (1.pref. 612D-E).

As regards the form of a symposium, it was a formal banquet which was highly structured both in terms of specific roles for the participants (a host, chief guest, other guests) and specific courses of foods (hors d'oeuvres, main course and dessert; post-prandial conversation and drinking). The procedure was punctuated by periodic washing of the hands (see Plato, Symposium 175A). Its form and function have been defined as:

The symposium is an organization of all-male groups, aristocratic and egalitarian at the same time, which affirm their identity through ceremonialized drinking. Prolonged drinking is separate from the meal proper; there is wine mixed in a krater for equal distribution; the participants, adorned with wreaths, lie on couches. The symposium has private, political, and cultural dimensions: it is the place of euphrosyne, of music, poetry and other forms of entertainment; it is bound up with sexuality, especially homosexuality; it guarantees the social control of the polis by the aristocrats. It is a dominating social form in Greek civilization from Homer onward, and well beyond the Hellenistic period (Burkert 1991:7).

Two recent books, both the results of symposia on the "symposium," contain highly informative studies of various aspects of the classical meal. Slater's volume (1991) contains articles on the betrothal symposium, foreigners at this meal, the age at which persons were allowed to recline, the Roman triclinium, and other studies dealing with Roman aspects of the symposium. The second collection by O. Murray (1991) is more systematic in its topics: space, furniture, social forms, entertainment, and discussion materials in relationship to the symposium. Both of these books are advanced reading material on the symposium and presume more basic knowledge of the topic.

The symposium form, it has been argued, influenced the Lukan presentation of certain meals of Jesus (Luke 14 and 22:14-38; see Smith 1987). It has, moreover, influenced the shape of the passover meal as well. Stein (1957:13-44) has shown that the shape of seder depends as much upon the Hellenistic symposium as it does on the biblical traditions in Exodus. He notes this in regard to certain technical terms describing aspects of the ritual, foods eaten, reclining posture, but especially talk at the meal. In a general article, which presents many of the insights of his thesis, Smith (1981:319-39) examines the symposium form under two rubrics: (a) in terms of its history, its importance for philosophical groups, and the social expectations of behavior at such gatherings, and (b) in regard to the disputes at the meal described in 1 Cor 11:17-34. The article informs us quickly of the social implications of deviant behavior at meals. The importance of the symposium for us lies in the formal sense that there were prescribed courses of food as well as of talk. Thus the mouth was regulated as to what and when certain things were eaten and drunk as well as to what was said. The symposium communicated "order," not chaos (Plutarch, Table Talk 1.2 616 A-B), and so involved explicit and implicit rules of decorum.

2.2 Passover. This was most certainly an influential type of meal, which colored the way Judeans and Christians perceived and structured other eating and liturgical events. One of the most important studies of the Passover is the classic work of Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus. The title indicates that he examines the rich traditions of Passover with a specific eye to historical questions concerning whether Jesus' Last Supper was a passover meal and what was the shape of that meal in the first century. From a careful reading of the first half of this book, readers gain a clear sense of the formal shape of that famous ceremony and how various items in the gospel accounts of the Last Supper parallel the structure of the passover meal.

1. Preliminary Course:

Word of dedication (blessing of the feast day [kiddus]

and of cup) spoken by the paterfamilias over the first cup (the kiddus cup).

Preliminary dish, consisting among other things of green herbs, bitter herbs and a sauce made of fruit puree.

The meal proper is served but not yet eaten; the second cup is mixed, put in its place but not yet drunk.

2. Passover Liturgy:

Passover haggadah by the paterfamilias (in Aramaic).

First part of the passover hallel (in Hebrew).

Drinking of the second cup (haggadah cup).

3. Main Meal:

Grace spoken by the paterfamilias over the unleavened bread.

Meal: passover lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs

(Exod 12.8), with fruit puree and wine.

Grace (birkat hammason) over the third cup (cup of blessing).

4. Conclusion:

Second part of the passover hallel (in Hebrew).

Praise over the fourth cup (hallel cup) (1968:85-86)

Indeed the thrust of Jeremias' book is another quest for the historical Jesus and his original words, but it also supplies the reader with a wealth of information on specific details about the passover meal.

The most complete text describing the sequence of events at the passover is found in t. Ber. 4:8-9, which we quote here in full.

What is the order of the meal? The guests enter [the house] and sit on benches, and on chairs until all have entered. They all enter and they [servants] give them water for their hands. Each one washes one hand. They [servants] mix for them the cup; each one says the benediction for himself. They [servants] bring them the appetizers; each one said the benediction for himself. They [guests] go up [to the dining room] and they recline, for they [servants] give them [water] for their hands; although they have washed one hand, they now wash both hands. They [servants] mix for them the cup; although they have said the benediction over the first cup, they say a benediction also over the second. They [servants] bring them the dessert; although they said a benediction over the first one, they now says benediction over the second, and one says the benediction for all of them (t. Ber. 4.8; Bahr 1970:182); see also Philo, Spec. Leg. 2.145-75 and Qu. Exod. 1.1-23).

A text like this is very important for the clear sense we gain of a fixed sequence of courses and events, a characteristic of most ancient meals. Although nothing is said here about the prescribed conversation at the passover (i.e., the passover haggadah), we know that the mouth was regulated both as to what was eaten and what was said. M. Pes. 10:1-9 indicates that at least three cups were drunk, that the specific foods consumed were unleavened bread, lamb and bitter herbs, and that the youngest son asked four specific questions of his father. We may presume that seating at this meal was also a matter of formal arrangement.

2.3 Funerary Meals. Meals accompanying a funeral and meals commemorating the dead are another important type that historians and interpreters of biblical texts should attend to. At the burial rites for Patroclus, Achilles slaughtered a host of bulls, lambs, goats, and pigs, which were then roasted and eaten by those participating in the funeral rites (Iliad 23.111; see b. Ket. 8b). Even in the Hebrew scriptures, we read of controversy over food offerings left on the tombs of the dead (Isa 65:4). In Amos 6:1-7 and Jer 16:1-9, as well as Ugaritic and Phoenician texts, we know of a funeral meal called the marzeah, at which guests reclined to eat a banquet. We have only fragmentary information about this meal, but two articles can quickly inform a reader on the state of research. On a popular level, King (1988:34-44) examines the reference in Amos 6:4-7 and offers a detailed description of the various elements mentioned there. His interpretation of the term "banquet" contains a summary of what scholars argue constitutes a marzeah meal: it was a meal at which (a) one reclined, (b) anointed with oil, (c) and consumed a meat meal; (d) it was accompanied by singing or other music, (e) and climaxed in excessive drinking of wine. Pope's study (1981:159-79) leads a reader through Ugaritic texts relative to this meal, which he deftly interprets in terms of their relationship to elements of the cult of the dead, which is one of the major occasions for a marzeah. We gather tid-bits of information about the funerary meal, rather than a full description, simply because the data are so fragmentary. But it is important for student to appreciate that from ancient down to Roman times, Israelites and Judeans engaged in funerary meals.

Of significance to us, however, is the specific study by Charles A. Kennedy of commemorative meals consumed at funeral sites, "The Cult of the Dead at Corinth" (1987:227-36). Investigating the term

eidôlothyton, "food offered to idols," Kennedy argues that eidôlon may be correctly translated as image or likeness, especially that of a person who has died. And thyton, while it contains the notion of sacrifice, equally applies to dinner parties (Herodotus 8.99), since all animals cooked and consumed at a meal would have first been ritually slaughtered and offered to the gods. His translation is then made plausible by a study of commemorative meals consumed at the site of burial. Kennedy cites a key text describing these funeral meals, which because of its importance and its typicality, we record here:

I desire that the memorial chapel (cella) which I have built be completed precisely according to the pattern which I have given, to wit: there is to be a parlor (exedra) in that place, in which is to be placed a seated marble statue [of myself]...or else a bronze one...not less than five feet high. Under the parlor there is to be a couch and two benches of imported stone at the two sides. Let there be a coverlet which is to be spread on those days on which the chapel is opened, and two blankets and pillows, two pairs of dinner clothes and woolen robes and two tunics...

All my freedmen and freedwomen whom I manumitted either while alive or by this testament are to get together a donation of a sesterce apiece annually. And Aquila my grandson and his heir shall appoint annually money from which each is to prepare food and drink for himself, which is to be consecrated before the memorial chapel...and there they are to consume it. And they are to remain there until they consume it all.

After my death these named curators are to perform the sacred rites on the aforementioned altar on the kalends of April, May, June, July, August and October (Julius Frontinus, d. 103 C.E., C.I.L. XIII, 5708; Kennedy: 231).

Thus a meal was eaten at a tomb by family and freedpersons at specified days in the mild months of the year. Even if Kennedy is not correct in offering this as the appropriate scenario for the prohibition of eating idol meat in 1 Cor 8 and 10, he has called attention to this type of meal, which surely played a large part in the funeral rituals of the ancients and so deserves our attention.

3.0 Foods and Diet

3.1 Foods Available/Cultivated for Consumption. What did people eat? what did they not eat? and what does this tell us? John Pilch (1993:231) organizes his study of diet around a citation from Sirach: "The basic necessities of human life are water, fire, iron, and salt, flour, honey, and milk, the juice of the grape, oil, and clothing" (Sir 39:26). He then describes what people drank (water, goat's milk, honey, wine, oil) and what they ate (various types of grain). His description is crisp, filled with historical and cultural pieces of information, readable and quite accessible.

Another Jewish text, a certain mishnaic passage (Ket. 5:8-9), has served as the organizing principle for several studies of the diet in Roman Palestine (Broshi 1986; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:339-40).

He who maintains his wife by a third party may not provide for her less than two qabs of wheat or four qabs of barley [per week]. . . And one pays over to her a half qab of pulse, a half log of oil, and a qab of dried figs or a maneh of fig cake. And if he does not have it, he provides instead fruit of some other type (m. Ket. 5.8).

Malina and Rohrbaugh fill out these terse remarks in the Mishnah which concern the support a man owes to his divorced wife. They observe that the amounts specified suggest an intake of about 1800 calories per day, slightly above what the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization recommends.

Grain, oil and wine were the most important commodities, especially grain and the products made from it. One-half of the caloric intake of much of the ancient Mediterranean region came from bread. Since wheat was much superior to barley, the husband who provided an estranged wife with barley bread was required to provide her twice the ration of wheat. Vegetables (lentils, beans, peas, chickpeas, lupines, cabbage and turnips) were common, but of much inferior status. Olive oil and fruit, principally the dried fig, were also a required part of the provisions an estranged husband must provide. Another quarter of the caloric intake came from wine, usually for males and wealthy women. It is estimated that an adult male in ancient Rome consumed a liter of wine daily.

Meat and poultry were expensive and rarely eaten by peasants. Most people ate it only on feast days or holidays, though temple priests ate it in abundance. Livestock kept solely to provide meat was unknown in Roman Palestine and was later prohibited by the Talmudic sages. Fish was a typical Sabbath dish. Milk products were usually consumed as cheese and butter. Eggs, especially chicken eggs, were also an important food. Honey was the primary sweetener (figs met some needs) and was widely used in the Roman period. Salt served not only as a spice but also as a preservative of meat and fish; pepper, ginger and other spices were imported and expensive.

Examining the "bread basket" of Palestine, Broshi takes the reader through the same food groups mentioned above, but with a more scientific concern for the caloric value of each item and a comparison of their consumption patterns in contemporary nations. He also cites valuable comparative materials from ethnoarchaeological research and from mishnaic and talmudic texts. In this study we learn in detail about various qualities of bread and how they were made. Besides information on olive oil, we learn about other oils made from seeds and nuts. The full array of fruits and vegetables (30 kinds each) available is also noted. We are introduced to the cattle economy of the Roman period, when the raising of animals for meat was actually prohibited. Fish, especially in fish sauces, formed a regular part of the diet. Mention is also made of the raising and consumption of non-kosher items such as boars and rabbits. The article is valuable also for its excellent bibliography.

A third convenient study of this material was done by Gildas Hamel. In a chapter called "Daily Bread" (1990:8-56), Hamel documents in considerable detail from ancient authors the various food groups consumed in Roman Palestine (fruits, grains, legumes, vegetables, meat and animal products, spices and drinks). His recounting includes important information on the amount of a given item from a typical tree or field, food preparation of various items, popularity of certain foods, and accessibility of certain foods to rich and poor. His treatment of bread is especially worthwhile. He borrows from other classicists the judgment that "roughly speaking, classical diet consisted mainly of bread and porridge made from wheat or barley supplemented by vegetables, fish and spices and not much else" (21).

There are, of course, descriptions of the luxurious banquets of aristocrats. These delight in enumerating all the exotic and rare foods found in the Roman empire, almost in the sense of "can you top this?" Among the many texts available, readers will find profit in Philo's brief description in his Contemplative Life 48-57 and Petronius' elaborate satire of such meals in his Satyricon. Other classical authors mention in great detail the variety of foods available for consumption, in particular Pliny, Natural History, books 17-19 and Athenaeus, Deipnosophists, books 1-2.

3.2 Dietary Restrictions. Of particular interest to bible readers is the diet of Judeans in the second-temple period. It was a kosher diet, from which "unclean" foods were prohibited. Anthropologist Mary Douglas refocused critical analysis of the biblical diet by offering valuable clues on the cultural significance of the classification of foods, in particular "the abominations of Leviticus" (1966:41-57). After discussing the ancient tradition of allegorizing the distinction between clean and unclean foods in terms of virtue and vice, Douglas interprets the abominations of Leviticus in terms of symbolic anthropology, specifically in terms of God's holiness and separateness. Holiness is related to wholeness; Leviticus focusses attention the necessary physical perfection of things that may be offered in sacrifice and eaten. Correspondingly, hybrids and imperfect things are an abomination because they do not conform to the class to which they presumably belong. She points to a cultural understanding of what constitutes a "clean" sky, land and sea animal, an understanding which is not fully spelled out in the Bible, but which can be teased out with

careful reading. Foods are clean which completely fulfil their definition in terms of diet, locomotion and place. Perfect sky animals (birds) should not dive into the sea, nor should they eat fish in place of grain, nor should hop on the ground. Complete land animals should walk on legs, eat grass or grain (i.e., chew the cud). Likewise clean sea animals should not crawl out the sea; they must swim as fish do, and thus have scales.

Douglas' taxonomy of clean and unclean animals enjoyed a healthy scholarly conversation and issued in a richer version of her analysis of the diet of the Israelites (1975:261-73). In examining the classification of birds, fish and animals, she now adds that concern must be had for the multiple dimensions of Hebrew thought and culture. She notes three rules for meat: (a) rejection of certain animal kinds as unfit for table (Lev 11; Deut 14), (b) of those admitted as edible, the separation of the meat from blood before cooking (Lev 17:10; Deut 12:23-27), and (c) the total separation of milk from meat, which involves the minute specialization of utensils (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21). Analyzing dietary restrictions, Douglas then can identify what makes an animal an abomination, a classification which now includes notions of suitability for temple sacrifice and consumption as food.

Douglas then argues that the three rules noted above have close social and cultural correlations with other aspects of the world of the Hebrews. Animals fit for temple sacrifice (and so consumption) must be bodily whole or unblemished. This accords with the rule that Levites, who are selected for sacred temple duties, must be of pure descent and unblemished (Lev 21:18-23). In regard to the second rule, certain birds, for example, may neither be offered or eaten (m. Hul. 3.6), because they eat carrion and do not separate the meat from blood before eating. And the third rule, which prohibits meat cooked in milk, replicates procreative functions, thus reflecting sexual rules concerning who may marry whom. Thus dietary restrictions replicate values, structures and patterns found in other areas of Hebrew culture. In examining dietary concerns, then, readers of ancient documents should be aware how these rules replicate other aspects of the social world of the peoples they represent.

Douglas' insights are refined in Jean Soler's excellent article (1979). He brings an anthropologist's eye not only to Leviticus, but to the priestly material in the early parts of Genesis, which serve as the appropriate lens for reading Lev 11 and Deut 14. He offers confirmation and expansion of Douglas' observations, especially the replication of the cultural understanding of wholeness and purity in relation to the physical body. The importance of his contribution lies in the careful analysis of the creation story (Gen 1) and its symbolic replication in the ideology of the Israelite and Judean peoples.

The symbolic meaning of dietary restrictions for Judeans and Christians is based on the old adage, "You are what you eat." Hence holy people eat holy (or whole) foods. Hence Peter objects to God concerning the unclean foods he is commanded to eat; as a "holy" person, he has kept a holy diet (Acts 10:13-14). Part of the conflict with Jesus' disciples over eating grain plucked on the Sabbath lies in the issue of whether the grain was properly tithed; untithed food is not clean and so those who ate it could be considered unclean themselves. The social importance of the abolition of the Judean kosher diet for Christians is noted in the actions of Jesus and Paul, who declare all foods clean (Mark 7:19; 1 Cor 10:25-15; see Acts 10:15). The residual problem of dietary restrictions is surely behind the crisis over eating at Antioch; Peter, who should keep kosher diet, because he is the "apostle to the circumcised," started to eat with the uncircumcised; Paul accused him of hypocrisy when he returned to his kosher diet (Gal 2:11-14). Thus analysis of the symbolic importance of dietary restrictions has much to say about who belongs to the group and who is welcome. After all, "you are what you eat" (i.e., group identity confirmed by specific diet); but then "likes eat with likes" (i.e., group identity confirmed by commensality).

We have concentrated on the diet and dietary customs of Judeans because these impinge directly on biblical texts. But a reader might profitably consult the fine survey article of Brothwell (1988:247-61) for materials on the Greco-Roman world. He relies heavily on Pliny the Elder for his information, and favors the Roman over the Greek world, which makes this article of particular importance to students of second-temple Judaism and early Christianity. Nevertheless, Brothwell describes in great detail the various foods eaten and their percentage and importance in the diet of the ancients. He focuses on the basic elements of diet,

but includes the more unusual foods available and their sources of origin. The article includes an excellent, if brief, bibliography.

4.0 Social and Anthropological Interpretations of Meals

What the cross is to Jesus, the meal is to the early church, its primary symbol. Yet meals are never easy to read, for much more communication is put forth than the passing of plates and the eating of foods.

4.1 Social Aspects of Meals. In recent years there has been increasing interest in the "social" dimensions of meals. For example, Gerd Theissen (1982:145-74) analyzed the conflict described in 1 Cor 11:17-34 in terms of the social strata of the persons described at the group's meal. His study is "social" in that it asks questions about groups, such as: what were the different groupings at the meal? what were the various points at which the meal began? what different quantities of food consumed and by whom? were the meals consumed qualitatively different? This valuable study greatly advances our understanding of the conflict Paul describes, for Theissen shows that there were at least two groups at the meal, one of which was wealthy enough to eat meat and drank well and another poor and deprived of abundant food and beverage. His study, however, is hardly "sociological" in that he relies exclusively on Greco-Roman parallels to interpret the text and advances no abstract or scientific model of meals.

Also recommended is the study by Philip Esler (1987:71-109) of table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles as this reflects social relations in Luke-Acts. Taking a clue from Mary Douglas, Esler situates his interpretation of meals in terms of anthropological notions of external threat and purity laws, and so focusses directly on meals and group identity and group boundaries. He then presents a wealth of primary data from antiquity on the unlikelihood of Jews eating with Gentiles. Turning then to other New Testament documents, he examines the importance commensality plays in group identity in Galatians, Mark and Matthew. Finally Esler deals with the new social practice of Jesus' Jewish disciples in eating with Gentile converts, first in the case of Cornelius (Acts 10-11), then in regard to the Apostolic Council (Acts 15), and then the meal described in Acts 27:33-38. This substantial study contains more history of eating traditions than social analysis, and in that fills a reader's need to know what the prevailing customs were for Jews dining with Gentiles. It employs but one aspect of anthropology in its analysis, but a major one nonetheless and one which touches on the very theme that Luke is arguing.

4.2 Anthropological Aspects of Meals. Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1981) offered a more anthropological interpretation of Jewish and Christian meals, as she drew upon formal cultural studies of diet, commensality, and cultural values. Dealing first with Jewish sectarianism in the Greco-Roman period, she indicates that commensality or its absence should be interpreted in terms of group membership. "Likes eat with likes." Hence the meals of Judeans indicate either their distinctive group affiliation, if eaten with other Judeans, or their separation, if commensality was refused. Food, moreover, functioned as a metaphor for the word of God. Hence concern for doctrinal and ethnic purity are replicated in the dietary and commensality practices of the Judeans. Her basic thesis can be succinctly summarized:

[F]ood, articulated in terms of who eats what with whom under which circumstances, had long been one of the most important languages in which Jews conceived and conducted social relations among human beings and between human beings and God. Food was a way of talking about the law and lawlessness (1981:72).

She then states her hypotheses about the symbolic nature of food and eating in the Hebrew scriptures:

1. The power of the Lord is manifested in his ability to control food: to feed is to bless, to confer life; to feed bad food or to starve is to judge or punish, to confer death.
2. Acceptance of the power and authority of the Lord is symbolized by acceptance of his food.

3. Rejection of the power and authority of the Lord is symbolized by seeking after food he has forbidden.
4. People "limit" or "tempt" the Lord--that is, question the extent of his power or authority--by questioning his ability to feed them.
5. The Lord's word is equated with food.
6. Eating joins people with the Lord or separates them (1981:72).

After this, she studies the Christian custom of eating Christ's body and blood. Examining how Jesus' last supper differed from the passover meal, she offers the summary conclusion:

The eucharist . . . is a symbolic representation of salvation in food patterned exactly after the passover. The difference is that in this case, as in Jesus' interpretation of the heavenly marriage feast and other traditional statements about politico-religious and social relations, the significance of the meal--the food, the host, the guests, the circumstances--is absolutely reversed. Temple and sacrifice, family, priesthood, and nation are radically redefined (1981:130).

Put more simply, "in contrast to the passover that brings the family together, Jesus' sacrifice breaks it apart to create new bonds" (1981:144).

For a reader looking for an succinct entrance into the "language of food," Feeley-Harnik's fourth chapter will serve as a most useful tool ("Food Symbolism in the Judaic Tradition," 71-106). The approach is that of cultural anthropology, which aims to offer a model which can be applied to a cross-cultural analysis of meals in various geographical regions and at different times. The chapter is deftly organized around the key question of "who eats what with whom under which circumstances," which links food consumption with group identity and values.

Highly recommended is a brief study of meals and their social dynamics in Luke by the Norwegian scholar, Halvor Moxnes (1987:158-67). While focussing on Luke's gospel, Moxnes reads the document through the lens of a multi-dimensional model of meals drawn from cultural anthropology. The delight of this piece lies in its easy, but solid presentation of a series of critical perspectives on meals. They function as boundary markers between groups (i.e., Jesus and the Pharisees), as starting mechanisms for new groups (i.e., Jesus' feedings), as indicators of hierarchy and internal social stratification (i.e., seating), and as occasions for reciprocity. When applicable, Moxnes contrasts the tradition social expectations encoded in meals with the strategy of Jesus and the new portrait of God developed by Luke. Because of its brevity, depth and application to a text, Moxnes' article is an excellent place to start a critical study of meals.

Mary Douglas (1982b:82-124) analyzed British meals as "a system of communications." Although her focus was on specific issues such as the introduction of new foods into the British diet, she argued that food preparation and consumption are more than issues of nutrition, for they are social events and constitute a medium of social relationships. This allowed her to ask questions about the implicit rules concerning time, place and sequence of actions and objects which structure the preparation and consumption of foods. This important insight alerts readers of ancient texts to ask questions about the typical times for eating, the amount and quality of the food consumed, the sequence of foods served, and particular customs regulating what, where and how it is eaten. This should alert us that meals and foods are not merely material objects to be studied in terms of nutrition, but social events which occur in regular patterns rich in meaning and communication.

In an earlier article (1975:249-60), Mary Douglas examined food as a code. Typical of most anthropological investigations, she discusses their theory of meals and commensality as "communication" or "language" or "code":

If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries. Like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one. Food categories therefore encode social events (1975:249).

Douglas examines the various patterns that occur in meals: (a) temporal schemes of meals: meals which climax the week (i.e., the Sunday midday meal), seasonal meals occurring on regular holidays, and meals related to the life cycle (birth, wedding and funeral meals); and (b) the patterned activity of meals (from soup to nuts). This leads her to appreciate how the meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies. "Each meal carries something of the meaning of the other meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image." This is a most useful insight for our study; for we have observed earlier how the symposium influenced the shape of the passover as well as the presentation of many of Jesus' meals, including the last supper. Solemn meals such as Passover for Judeans and Christians or symposia for Greeks and Romans might be expected to encode values and structures of the general culture. And the patterns of these meals can be expected to embody social categories such as "hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries."

These two articles of Mary Douglas are quite abstract and are not recommended for beginning readers. Their value lies in the theoretical underpinnings for a more detailed analysis of meals vis-a-vis social behavior. Douglas' key insight that food consumption is a "code" or "communication" has served as a charter for other scholars who have absorbed this perspective and who examine how "the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. . . Food categories encode social events (1975:249)." Foremost among those who have adapted materials of Douglas and other anthropologists for biblical interpretation is Jerome Neyrey, who developed a complex series of social science models and perspectives to describe as fully as possible all of the social interactions that occur in a meal.

Of particular importance to readers is the recent work of Jack Goody (1982). The opening chapter of this book should be required reading, because Goody takes us through the history of sociological and anthropological analysis of cooking, meals and food consumption. Through a crisp survey of the major works on the topic, he explains the ideology encoded in functionalist and structuralist approaches to meals. He presents Levi-Strauss' classic distinction between the raw and the cooked is critical perspective, as well as that of Mary Douglas. Finally, he lays out his own agenda for studying the topic (1982:37-38), which is most valuable for us.

Processes Phases Locus

Growing Production Farm

Allocating/storing Distribution Granary/market

Cooking Preparation Kitchen

Eating Consumption Table

Clearing up Disposal Scullery

Economic issues dominate the production phase, which has to do with organization of resources and the technology of producing and storing food. Political issues are central to the distribution phase, where rents, tributes and taxes must be paid. With the preparation phase, attention is shifted from fields and granaries to the kitchen. Her women rather than men and servants rather than mistresses take over the process; systems of division and stratification of labor are made explicit. Finally, in the consumption phase, attention must be paid to the identity and differentiation of those of eat, the practice of eating together or separately, the importance of feasts and fasts, food prohibitions and preferences, table manners and modes of serving.

Goody, therefore, has laid out a practical agenda of the kinds of questions a careful researcher should have in mind when meals are considered. The remainder of his book fleshes out these basic approaches and provides data and modeling for students. Beginning readers are well served especially by the first chapter, the survey of anthropological approaches, of Goody's book.

4.3 Practical Models for Interpreting Meals. How should a reader of the Bible think about meals? Neyrey offered a practical, multilayered model for interpreting meals first in a study of Mark 7 and then in an investigation of meals in Luke-Acts. He begins his analysis of Mark 7 (1988a:63-92) by noting two textual emphases in that part of the gospel: (a) frequent mention of bread (6:38-44, 52; 7:2-5, 27-28; 8:4-10, 16-21) and (b) association of Pharisees with hands, lips and bodily surfaces and Jesus with heart and bodily interior (7:1-23). The evangelist framed the controversy in Mark 7 around the custom of washing hands before eating, which can of course be analyzed in a strictly historical manner concerning the existence of rules for washing of hands and vessels. But when we ask an anthropological question about the meaning of washing before eating or the significance of hands vs heart, we need more than mere historical data or more accurate social description.

Neyrey employs two practical models to examine the symbolic issues of bread/kosher diet and hands/lips vs heart in Mark 7: (a) a model of purity advanced by Mary Douglas (1966:41-57) and developed by Bruce Malina (1981:122-52) and (b) a model of body symbolism, also derived from Mary Douglas (1966:114-28; 1982a:65-81) and developed further by Neyrey himself (1986b:129-170).

In regards to "purity systems," Neyrey notes how people tend to order their worlds and classify all objects; this order is called "purity" and is structured in a cultural "purity system." Purity thus means social system or pattern of classification. When this general and abstract model of social perception is combined with specific Judean articulation of purity rules and labelling, observers gain a offer a rich framework for interpreting the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees over eating breads with unwashed hands and observing kosher diet.

The elaborate purity system of the first-century Judeans served to classify as much of the world and its objects as possible in terms consonant with the dominant value of "holiness" or "separateness" which was central to their culture. As a chosen people, the Judeans separated themselves from Gentiles; and as a temple-oriented people, they extended the classifications of things suitable for temple purity to other aspects of daily living. Thus a consonant system of replicated classifications told them what could be eaten, whom they could marry, where objects and persons should be positioned, and the like. In short, explicit and implicit "maps" of persons, places, things and times guided Judeans to evaluate or structure all things in their world. What fit this system was holy; what violated it was unclean.

This cultural tendency, moreover, implies a constant observation of boundaries to make sure that clean things only are in clean places. This tendency to build a fence around the Torah in all aspects (m. Aboth 3.14) helps us understand the Pharisaic custom of washing hands (and vessels) before eating. The holy interior must be guarded from anything unclean; and so washing rituals serve as "fences" to separate clean from unclean (the same applies to tithes on food, which transform them into "holy" foods fit for consumption). These rules for foods and eating replicate, then, the more dominant cultural norm of a "holy" people, separate from the Gentiles, and consecrated to God.

Yet to understand more fully the issues of foods and eating in Mark 7, some notion of how the body is socially perceived and regulated is also necessary. Mary Douglas has argued that "the body is a model which can stand for any social system" (1966:115). That is, the body is perceived to have structure just as the social body is orderly arranged. And as the social body admits of control and classification, this tendency is replicated in the way the physical body is perceived and controlled. Strong social control repeats itself in strong bodily control, and vice versa. Just as the social body is concerned with its

boundaries (see "fences" above), so the physical body attends carefully to its entrances and exits, namely the bodily orifices (mouth, ears, anus, genitals). This key idea helps us to appreciate how people, who perceive the world in terms of purity and pollution and who attend carefully to separation from Gentiles and all uncleanness, would tend to guard the mouth against eating untithed or unkosher foods.

Neyrey explains how Mark presents Jesus as challenging both the macrocosmic view of a world classified by purity and pollution (1986b:105-24) and the microcosmic replication of this in terms of how he ate, with whom he ate, and what he ate. In Mark 7, Jesus criticizes concern for bodily exterior (washing of hands and vessels, lip observance of God) and focuses on interior purity (an obedient heart, a virtuous soul). The view of the physical body attributed to Jesus, then, is less controlled than that credited to the Pharisees; and each view of the physical body is replicated in the relatively open or closed social relations which each practiced. Thus Jesus' reforming stance concerning eating customs and diet, which are reported in Mark 7, criticizes specific Judean food rules and eating customs, thus attacking also the Judean social values of ethnic and religious separateness.

In a subsequent study, Neyrey set forth a more complete social science model for understanding the meals and table fellowship of Luke-Acts (1991:361-87). This study builds on his previous efforts to crack the code of food as communication, and contains five distinct perspectives:

- a) meals as ceremony,
- b) meals and purity system/symbolic universe,
- c) meals and body symbolism,
- d) meals and economic reciprocity,
- e) meals and social relations.

4.3.1 Meals as Ceremonies. Meals are not rituals of status transformation or change, but ceremonies. The following diagram summarizes the important differences between "ritual" and "ceremony," without which we labor to understand the structure and function of a meal.

CEREMONY RITUAL

a. frequency: a. frequency:

regular irregular

b. calendar: b. calendar:

predictable, planned unpredictable, as needed

c. time focus: c. time focus:

past-to-present present-to-future

d. presided over by: d. presided over by:

officials professionals

e. purpose: e. purpose:

confirmation of status change,

roles and statuses transformation of role/status

in institutions

Meals, unlike transformation rituals such as circumcision, marriage or death, occur regularly; for example, the Shabbat meal is eaten weekly and Passover every spring. They are, moreover, predictable and so planned for; they occur on fixed calendrical dates, such as Passover, a birthday (Mark 6:21), Hanukkah, and the like. Meals such as these look to some event in the past, which still has influence in the present, and so past deeds tend to be rehearsed or memory plays an important role. They are generally presided over by the officials of the institution in which they occur, either the father in the household, the king in his political palace, or the priest in the temple. Significantly, they confirm the roles and statuses of the persons of their respective institutions: the head of the family presides over the family passover (Exod 12:3-4, 26-27) or Jesus at the Last Supper (Luke 22:14-37).

Thus to interpret a given meal correctly, we must know (a) when it occurs (daily, weekly, or annually), (b) who presides over it (the head of the household, a priest, a governor or king), and (c) in which social institution a meal is celebrated (the family or a fictive-family group, the temple, the palace).

4.3.2 Meals and Purity System/Symbolic Universe. This survey has already discussed the contribution of Mary Douglas (1966:41-57, 114-28) toward understanding the general and specific concepts of purity and pollution (see also Neyrey 1986b:91-128; 1988a:63-91). Practically speaking, what this model offers is a way of mapping out the classification system of a given social group so that we can learn who eats with whom, what is eaten, where, when, how, and the like. Hence in examining meals, Neyrey attends to maps of persons, places, times and things.

Maps of Persons Who eats with whom? Likes eat with likes; family eats with family, Pharisees with Pharisees. Second, there are maps of where people sit at a meal (e.g. IQSa ii.11-17; Philo, Contemplative Life 67, 69, 75; Plutarch, Table Talk 1.3 619B; Luke 14:7-11). Seating arrangements signal and replicate one's role and status in a group, its order and hierarchy. We speak of a "head" table at a banquet; the head of the household sits at the "head" place (see Plutarch, Table Talk 1.2 616B). His "right hand" is traditionally the place of honor (Luke 20:42; Acts 2:33).

Graeco-Roman and Jewish meals owe much of their structure to the symposium, at which there were elaborate maps of persons. Roles are clearly specified: a host, a chief guest, and other guests (Steele 1984:382-389). Places taken by the participants reflect their status, with the chief guest closest to the host and the other guests arranged in some declining order of status.

Map of Things Certain foods were proscribed and others prescribed. Jews had an elaborate code of clean and unclean foods. These kosher concerns extended even to the dishes used in the preparation and consumption of foods, e.g. Pharisaic concern for the porosity of vessels and their ritual washing. The talk at table is also mapped. Certain talk is appropriate and even required at meals, for example, at Passover specific benedictions for each of the four cups are pronounced, as well as the recitation of the Exodus haggadah and the Hallel psalms.

Maps of Places The symbolic order of the universe is replicated in the spatial arrangement of persons and things at a meal and in regard to the locale where one sits (e.g. dining room or temple precinct). A Pharisee, for example, would concern himself about the place where he ate to ensure that the proper diet was prepared in the proper way and served on proper utensils.

Maps of Times Although daily meals vary in terms of frequency and time of day, formal meals reflect a serious concern for proper time and sequencing. Considerable attention was paid to the exact time when Shabbat started to determine when to begin the weekly Sabbath meal. Even in the course of a meal, we find elaborate time arrangements according to which dishes are served in a fixed sequence, "from soup to nuts."

The symbolic system, then, indicates maps of persons, things, places and times which structure not only the symbolic world of those who eat, but are specifically replicated in a meal ceremony. In fact, a meal may be an excellent window through which to view the symbolic universe. For this end, the following questions may prove useful:

a. WHO: who eats with whom; who sits where; who performs

what action; who presides over the meal

b. WHAT: what is eaten (or not eaten); how it is tithed or

grown or prepared; what utensils are used; what rites accompany the meal (e.g., washing of hands or full bath); what is said (and silence)

c. WHEN: when one eats (daily, weekly, etc.; time of day);

when one eats which course during the meal

d. WHERE: where one eats (room); where one sits; in which

institution (family, politics)

e. HOW: how one eats, at a table or not; sitting, standing

or reclining

4.3.3 Meals and Body Symbolism. Neyrey repeats here his use of Mary Douglas' anthropological observations on the physical body developed in other places (1986a:129-70; 1988a:63-91), which we exposed above. In essence, he builds on Douglas' observation that the physical body is a microcosm of the social body:

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures (Douglas 1965:115).

The same ordering of the social body is replicated in the control of the physical body.

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society (Douglas 1982a:65).

This means that where we find a strong system of order and classification in the social body, we find rules controlling the body in regard to a) bodily boundaries (skin, hair and clothing), b) bodily structure, and c) bodily margins or orifices.

Just as the social body builds walls, guards its gates, restricts admission, and expels foreign or unclean objects, so this same tendency is replicated in the physical body. Physical bodies tend to be concerned with their boundaries or surfaces (skin, clothing) and with bodily entrances and exits (mouth, eyes, ears, genitals). Just as guards are stationed at borders or city gates, so the physical body tends to guard about what may enter (food) or leave the physical body (spittle, menses, semen, urine). The body is punctuated by certain orifices which are gateways to its interior, and so are subject to great scrutiny.

Neyrey argues that in regard to bodily orifices, meals indicate that we attend to the mouth. Through it food enters the body; we expect that the mouth will be governed so that it admits prescribed (1 Cor 11:23-28), but not proscribed foods (1 Cor 8 & 10). From the mouth comes speech, and so it is doubly scrutinized. Certain speech is prescribed for certain meals (see [Map of Things](#) above).

Other bodily issues, such as posture and clothing, are issues at meals. Exod 12:11 legislated how Israelites should eat Passover "Your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, you staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste." But second-temple Jews began it sitting and ate it reclining; it was eaten in festive attire and leisurely, because, as one mishnah says, "we are no longer slaves."

R. Levi has said: "Because slaves eat standing, here (at the passover meal) people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom" ([j. Pes. 10.37b](#); Jeremias 1968:49).

4.3.4 [Meals and Reciprocity](#). Inviting people to a meal inevitably carried with it the expectation of an invitation in return. Theories of exchange applicable to the first century describe three forms of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative.

(a) Generalized reciprocity refers to interactions which focus on the interests of another party, and so are considered "altruistic" because they are other-directed. Common forms include hospitality, gifts, and various types of assistance given especially to kin, for example the nurture and support parents give children. (b) Balanced reciprocity refers to interactions in which the concerns of both parties are addressed. If generalized reciprocity looks to the benefit of the other, balanced reciprocity describes a symmetrical concern for equivalent benefit for both parties: a balanced exchange, a quid pro quo, a tit for tat. Common forms of balanced reciprocity include buying and selling of goods, payment to professionals for services rendered, trade and barter, especially among neighbors. (c) Negative reciprocity refers to interactions which focus only on the interest of the self and one's extended self, family or group. Negative reciprocity refers to a movement in which one party tries to get something from another without reciprocating at all, and so getting something for nothing or with impunity. Common forms include cheating, theft, overcharging and various forms of appropriation or seizure of another's goods, especially against strangers or enemies.

As regards meals in Luke-Acts, Jesus' example of petitioning in prayer (in Luke 11:11-12) illustrates how in a kinship group a parent is expected to show altruistic regard for his children in terms of the food given them: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" The parable of the great banquet offers another example. The host sends his servants with the command, "Go out quickly . . . and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame" (14:21). After that there is still room, so the servant go once more, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled" (14:23). God's messianic banquet, then, would be an apt illustration of divine generalized reciprocity in regard to meals. Perhaps the fault of the "Fool," who planned to hoard his extraordinary good harvest in bigger barns so that he might "take his ease, eat, drink

and be merry," exemplifies his failure to show any reciprocity to his tenants and neighbors by sharing this heaven=sent gift of extra food (12:20-21).

For economic and social reasons, invitations to meals, whether wedding feasts, religious and civic celebrations, or fellowship meals, are normally considered under the rubric of balanced reciprocity. I invite you; you invite me. This would imply that invitations are given to those who can reciprocate. The rule is illustrated when Jesus breaks it by enjoining: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid" (14:12). Even if invited (an unimaginable thing), a poor person would decline an invitation in dread of the enormous financial obligation to reciprocate with a comparable meal. But Jesus abolishes the expected balanced reciprocity when he says, "You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (14:14b-15).

4.3.5 Meals and Patron-Client Relations. People in the New Testament world were constantly seeking patrons and clients in the standard game of securing a safe and steady supply of the limited and scarce goods of life. Especially in peasant societies, a landowner might choose to act as patron to certain people as his tenants; this relationship might be symbolized by the food (or land, tools/ animals to work the land, seed, etc.) which the patron bestows on his tenant-as-client. Or the founder of a faction might start and sustain the group he gathers around himself by meals and distribution of food. Since patron-client relations are a form of reciprocity, if the patron distributes food, then one might ask what he gets in return? what is expected of those who receive?

Like other biblical writers, Luke considers God as patron to Israel, his clients. And so, giving glory, honor and praise to God-the-patron, his clients call on God to feed them: "Give us each day our daily bread" (11:3). The material which follows the giving of the Our Father confirms this relationship of patron and client. First, a parable is told about a person in need of food ("three loaves"), who petitions over and over to a patron to provide this food (11:5-8). The emphasis here is clearly in praise of persistent petitioning of one's heavenly patron: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened" (11:9-10). Not surprisingly, the examples used are petitions for food. The next items in this collection of materials on petitioning one's patron are also requests for food: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a serpent; of if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?" (11:11-12). God, then, is the supreme patron who gives food to his clients in due season.

Patronage describes the relationships among members of God's covenant community. The well-to-do are instructed to act as patrons of the poor when they are told not to invite their "friends, brothers, kinsmen or rich neighbors" to a dinner, but rather to invite "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind," who cannot repay them (14:12-14).

Thus Neyrey offers those who investigate meals two detailed analyses of gospel texts, both Mark and Luke. The models presented for in-depth analysis of the social transactions encoded in meals are clearly presented and can serve as helpful and applicable tools for investigations of other meals in other cultures and at other times. Students who take seriously the anthropological perspective that meals are a "code" or a "communication" or a "language" will find these two articles particularly clear and helpful.

5.0 Fasting and Refusal to Fast

There were five fast days in the liturgical calendar of second-temple Judeans; Pharisees are said to have fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12; Didache 8.1). Along with prayer and almsgiving, fasting was considered the core of piety (Tob 12:8; see Acts 10:30-31), especially after the destruction of the Temple. Fasting, then, denotes religious observance and characterizes holy persons (Philo, Contemplative Life 34; Luke 2:27 and 1 Tim 5:5). But what if one refuses to fast, such as Jesus apparently did according to Mark 2:18-22?

Most investigations of fasting in second-temple Judaism and early Christianity tend to be collections of valuable data on who fasted, from what, and when, with occasional interest in the motivation for fasting. General dictionary articles such as Milgrom-Herr (1971:1189-95) and Muddiman (1992:773-776) offer satisfactory collections of materials from the perspective of history and social description. The monograph of Wimmer (1982) attempts to deal with "the meaning" of fasting (pp 3-6, 111-16); it focusses on Jesus' fasting or his words on it. Although Wimmer situates NT fasting in the context of Judean and Greek traditions, he does not ever consider how fasting is an act of communication; his approach, up-to-date in terms of the prevailing paradigm of biblical research, does not ask about the cultural or social "meaning" of fasting. Particularly rich is the collection of materials gathered by Arbesmann (1949:1-71). It covers fasting in pagan and christian antiquity, indicating in regard to these periods both the origins and practices of fasting, and the specific relationship between fasting and mantic activity and prophecy. Important also is the study of Lowy (1958) on motivations for fasting in ancient Judaism. He list four reasons, which because of the relationship synagogue and church in antiquity, are worth knowing: (a) for the purposes of atonement, (b) in case of mourning, (c) as purification ritual, especially before a sacrificial meal, and (d) as a means of increasing magical powers and causing dreams and visions.

As valuable as these studies are, they do not address the fundamental social question of why people fast and what they communicate to their social group by fasting. It is not enough to say that Judean fasting was for atonement (Lev 16:29), or that it constituted a part of funeral rites (2 Sam 1:12) or that it disposed a person for revelations (2 Esdr 5:13). Moreover, such explanations simply cannot deal with refusal to fast, as is alleged of Jesus. If, as this article has shown, food is a language, then what is being communicated either by fasting or refusal to fast?

Bruce Malina (1986:185-204) offers an anthropological interpretation of fasting (and refusal to fast) that deals precisely with the symbolic messages communicated. He focuses on the culturally specific meaning of fasting, namely, why first-century Mediterraneans fasted and why this behavior would have meaning for their contemporaries. He identifies three perspectives on fasting: (a) a functionalist approach (fasting occurred especially when food supplies were limited), (c) a conflict approach (non-consumption as boundary marking and conflict resolution), and (3) a symbolic approach (meanings of consumption and non-consumption depend upon on the features of a given social system and its core values).

Malina distinguishes abstinence, fasting and avoidance. Abstinence, such as dieting and asceticism, effects the non-consumer; it might be practiced for reasons of purgation, purification, weight loss, causation of visions, and the like. In contrast, fasting is intended to have an effect on someone else than the non-consumer; it is practiced as a form of social interaction or communication. Avoidance of certain foods, such as Jewish prohibitions of non-kosher animals, falls beyond the control of the non-consumer, for it is socially commanded by the group.

As communication, fasting can operate both on a vertical and a horizontal level, depending on whether the non-consumer wishes to have an effect on persons higher in rank than himself (God, the king, etc.) or on persons of his own status (kin and clan). In addition, Malina employs the notion of four symbolic media of communication (power, commitment, influence, and inducement). Fasting is the refusal to interact with others in those media, and so communicates a rejection of the institution in which they are rooted.

He describes the sort of messages conveyed by non-consumption or fasting. It communicates a negation of reciprocities that make up social interaction. And so it puts the person fasting "out of bounds" or apart from the normal patterns of exchange; this new state is called in terms of ritual analysis the "liminal state," that is, a state of transition. Hence one who fasts is essentially seeking to change his or her status and is directed toward those who can effect this transition. Fasting, then, is a form of "self-humiliation" to persuade those in higher status than those fasting to reverse their low status. This goes a long way toward our understanding of fasting in contexts of mourning, national calamity, group sense of impurity, or some estimate of the negative state of the group. Some evil is present and fasting petitions hierarchically superior persons to deal with this evil and so reverse the current status of the petitioners.

Finally Malina addresses the issue of non-fasting, such as is reported of Jesus in Mark 2:18-20. Jesus' refusal to fast communicates two things: he did not concern himself with the boundary maintenance of his contemporary Judeans, that is, he did not perceive either himself or his group as polluted and so in need of status reversal. Second, this implies that he thought that the needed status reversal (repent, believe in the gospel!) had already come with his own mission.

Malina's article is exceptionally fruitful for it asks questions and offers perspectives that are generally not found in standard discussions of fasting, which tend to be more historically oriented. His article, moreover, is positioned as the last chapter of a very rich book which takes readers step-by-step through some basic models which aid in examining the cultural meaning of behavior. Thus the chapter on fasting employs the full resources and offers a reader an exceptionally rich model of the cultural meanings of consumption and non-consumption.

6.0 Jesus' Meals and Table Companions: Current New Testament Issues

New Testament scholarship on the Gospels currently gives considerable attention to the significance of Jesus' eating habits and to the presence or absence of females at the meals portrayed.

6.1 Gospel Accounts of Jesus' Eating. In his book on themes in Luke, Robert Karris (1985) wrote on "The Theme of Food." The approach is basically that of redaction criticism, and so the first part of the study contains a useful listing of all the passages and terms concerned with food and meals in Luke. By way of interpretation, Karris classified his materials into three related themes. First, God's impartial generosity is manifested in the adequate food provided, especially for the needy. Second, Jesus, "glutton and drunkard," ate with tax collectors and sinners, which constitutes an "acted parable" of God's particular care for outcasts. Finally, Jesus' Last Supper is foremost a symposium at which he delivers a Farewell Address which contains major material about new social relationships. This comprehensive and readable survey of the specifically Lukan material will quickly orient readers to the basic issues concerning Jesus' table fellowship and its significance for Christology and Church.

In the same vein, Scott Bartchy's dictionary article (1992) invites the reader to examine the same materials, but from a much richer perspective. Bartchy takes formal cognizance of the symbolic nature of meals, foods and table fellowship; he introduces his materials in terms of relevant and productive concepts from cultural anthropology. Thus he calls attention to (a) the importance of purity rules concerning diet and meals and (b) the breaking of social boundaries by Jesus' deviant table habits. He offers good insights into the way Jesus' praxis in both Mark and Luke functions as social indoctrination, "serving" of others in Mark and "open table fellowship" in Luke. Scott's article is pithy and pregnant, and can serve as an excellent orientation to the issue of the symbolism of meals in the Gospels.

The very title of Smith's article, "The Historical Jesus at Table" (1989) describes the thrust of this study. Although Smith debates whether the portrait of Jesus' eating habits reflects the historical Jesus or a later idealization of him, his article contains a fine survey of the major motifs in the gospels concerned with meals. After a brief review of scholarship, Smith defines meals in antiquity, which comprises a terse historical description of ancient meals and an acknowledgement of anthropological perspectives on the social meaning of meals. He abandons the latter perspective to do more strictly historical reporting, namely, description of Jesus' meals with disciples, his concern with dietary regulations, and his commensality with outcasts. Recognizing that Jesus' table customs should be construed as parabolic actions, Smith's own analysis leads him to the of the historical judgment that the portrait of Jesus at table reflects the "idealized, historic Jesus of the tradition."

6.2 Jesus' Table Companions. The gospel accounts of Jesus' eating habits have sparked studies into the presence or absence of women at the meals described in the New Testament. Nor is it surprising in a period

of the emergence of feminist scholars in the biblical guild that attention is being paid to the presence of women at meals. Kathleen Corley, first in a summary article (1989) and then in a book (1993), examines the topic from the perspective of history and social description.

In her 1989 article, Corley deftly takes a reader through the important historical data from antiquity about the presence and absence of women at meals. She interprets her valuable collection of classical texts in the light of social questions, namely, the status of women. Corley builds on the insight that table fellowship is the most important generative matrix of the social formation of the Jesus movement groups. And acknowledging the classical cultural expectation of a gender divided world (males in public, females in private space), she argues that the presence or absence of women at meals may be shown to conform to this cultural code or engage it.

Corley's own collection of classical texts and her digest of the critical literature allow her to make important historical distinctions. In classical Greece women were generally absent from meals, even within the household; but in Rome during the end of the Republic, women might be present at public meals in the household, if only for the first part of the meal. When women are noted as participating at meals where non-related males are present, these almost always reflect the customs of aristocrats. The "flamboyant behavior" of aristocratic Roman women is balanced by philosophical criticism of this new practice and by the celebration of the more traditional virtues urged for females.

Thus Corley's method is basically an historical description of changing patterns. Her data and interpretation tend to confirm that women who appear in public at meals would be considered a social anomaly, and so bear the stigma of a "public" woman, most likely labelled a courtesan or prostitute. This study will acquaint readers with basic historical and cultural materials pertaining to Greco-Roman meals. It is sensitive to the social implications of eating patterns, although it does not itself engage in anthropological explanations of meals. It is highly recommended for its completeness and balance.

Corley's article seems to be a digest of her dissertation, which was later published as a book (1993). The book has the great advantage of presenting much fuller collections of material about Greco-Roman meal patterns, as well as detailed investigations of the presence of women at meals in the synoptic gospels. Of particular interest for students of meals is Corley's excellent second chapter (1993:24-79), in which she succinctly but persuasively describes the social expectations about women at table and the historical realization of those expectations. She notes, as she did in her article, the changing social patterns in Greece and Rome, namely, how traditional social directives in the Greek cultural world concerning women at meals were modified by Romans at the end of the Republic, and how social criticism of this Roman relaxation of custom led to a reaction which restored and strengthened traditional expectations about women. Corley's book, moreover, takes readers through each of the synoptic meal scenes at which women are said to be or might be present, and how this would be perceived by the ancients and how the evangelists conform to traditional cultural expectations concerning women at meals. This study, moreover, easily puts an inquiring reader in touch with the latest secondary literature on the relevant social, historical and exegetical discussions of women at table in antiquity. Like the earlier article, the focus is historical, but it provides valuable data that might be processed using more formal models of cultural analyses of meals.

7.0 Conclusions: Specific Issues and Specific Readings.

What, then, should a reader read and in which order? The answer lies in the questions readers ask and orientation they bring to this topic. The issues that galvanize readers are generally either historical studies of meals or interpretation of them in the light of anthropological and social models. This dichotomy probably reflects the past training of readers as well as their intellectual aesthetics.

If readers' interests lie in matters historical or literary, then the chapter of Karris is an excellent orientation to the topic in the Jesus materials. This descriptive study should be supplemented with any or all of Smith's articles. There is a certain repetition in them, but they comfortably feed readers with materials from the

Hellenistic world and make understandable certain aspects of meals described in the Christian scriptures, especially their symposiac structure.

This readers guide, however, was oriented from the beginning toward issues of meaning and symbolism in regard to meals. The dominant orientation here is the interpretation of meals as a form of language, a communication, a code or a symbol. In this line of inquiry, the works of formal anthropologists such as Feeley-Harnick and Douglas are highly important, even if difficult to follow. Feeley-Harnick's book should be read; its clear exposition of social questions to ask about meals has greatly influenced the literature of biblical interpreters. It does not spell out in depth a model to use or rationale for its observations, so readers cannot stop there.

The two brief studies by Bartchy and Moxnes are ideal for beginning readers. They are deep and worth digesting, but brief in their exposition. These accessible studies readers will come back to again and again for orientation and insight.

The two studies by Neyrey, precisely because they synthesize various social-science perspectives, are highly recommended for readers who want fulsome and comprehensive interpretations of meals. They not only present in clear form fruitful perspectives for interpreting the "language" of meals, they are also detailed interpretations of biblical texts. Their value for readers lies in the systematic and clear presentation of models for interpretation, which attend to symbolic issues as well as economics and social relations. Thus they both inform readers of the meaning of meals in Mark and Luke-Acts, and guide them with user-friendly models to begin their own interpretation of texts dealing with meals.

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