

The Idea of Fellowship in 1 Corinthians 10.14–22*

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In 1 Cor 10.14–22 Paul warns his readers to refrain from idolatry. In order to convince his readers he calls attention to the unity and solidarity which exist between worshippers of the same religion. In this context he uses the terms *κοινωνία* and *κοινωνός* (vv. 16, 18, and 20). In v. 17 Paul tells his readers that at their joint meals they are ‘partners’, this time expressed by the term *μετέχειν*. In the light of ancient parallels, it is concluded that the references to *κοινωνία* in v. 16 (cf. vv. 18 and 20) should be understood ecclesiologically, denoting ‘partnership’ rather than ‘participation’.

Keywords: The Lord’s Supper, the body of Christ, fellowship, idolatry, *κοινωνία*, *μετέχειν*

In ch. 10 of his first letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul brings to a conclusion the argument about eating food sacrificed to idols that began in 8.1.¹ After a reference to the people of Israel’s idolatry in the desert during the Exodus as a negative example in vv. 1–13 he warns his addressees in Corinth to ‘flee from idolatry’ (v. 14). It would provoke the Lord and ‘arouse his jealousy’ and they would consequently lose eternal salvation (v. 22). *In concreto*,

* For Henk Jan de Jonge, on the occasion of his 65th birthday (28 September 2008).

1 The exact structure of Paul’s argument in these three chapters and the relation between 8.1–13, 9.1–27, 10.1–22, and 10.23–11.1 need not bother us here. On this theme, see the commentaries, *ad loc.*, and esp. W. L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS 68; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985), and J. F. M. Smit, ‘About the Idol Offerings’: *Rhetoric, Social Context and Theology of Paul’s Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1–11:1* (CBET 27; Leuven/Paris/Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2000). On these chapters, see further in particular D. Newton, *Deity and Diet: The Dilemma of Sacrificial Food at Corinth* (JSNTSup 169; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) and J. Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Social-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1* (WUNT 2/151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), esp. 179–263. A review of past research is found in Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*, 4–37.

Corinthian Christians should not participate in cultic meals celebrated for the glory of pagan deities.

The basis for the prohibition of idolatry is Paul's understanding of Christian fellowship: Christians share in the worship of God and cannot share with pagans in the worship of pagan deities as well. The key in this passage seems to be the *κοινωνία/κοινωνός* word group.² For it is mentioned explicitly in all three examples of cultic associations used by Paul to convince the Corinthian Christians of the dangers of idolatry, i.e., the associations of Christians (vv. 16–17), of Jews (v. 18), and of pagans (vv. 19–21, esp. v. 20). However, the exact meaning of *κοινωνία* is not clear at first sight. Is it to be interpreted to mean 'participation', that is, having a part of Christ, God, or a pagan deity, or does it mean 'partnership' or 'association', that is, having fellowship with other worshippers of the same God?³ In other words, is the unity with Christ at stake here or the believers' unity with one another? Or is there perhaps a shift between vv. 16 and 17 and does Paul proceed from a 'vertical' *κοινωνία* (i.e. the Christians' fellowship with their Lord) in v. 16 to its 'horizontal' implications (i.e. a *κοινωνία* with the Christian believers) in v. 17? A careful analysis of the Greek terms *κοινωνία* and its cognates with a genitive as found in vv. 16, 18, and 20 may help to answer these questions. In the next paragraphs it will be argued that it is the unity of the Corinthian Christians with each other that Paul wants to emphasize in these verses, and not so much the 'fellowship-establishing event between Christ and the believers'.⁴ A new interpretation of v. 17, and in particular of the use of the verb *μετέχειν*, will support this argument.

2 So also, e.g., G. G. Findlay, 'St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians', *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 2 (ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979) 727–953, esp. 863; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987) 463 n. 6; and esp. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 165–212.

3 Cf. J. Y. Campbell, 'Κοινωνία and its Cognates in the New Testament', *JBL* 51 (1932) 352–80 (repr. in Campbell, *Three New Testament Studies* [Leiden: Brill, 1965] 1–28), esp. 356, 'The ideas of participation and of association are both present, and the main emphasis may fall upon either of them, sometimes to the practical exclusion of the other'. On the history of interpretation of the use of *κοινωνία* in these verses, see esp. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 167–212. Important contributions to the interpretation of *κοινωνία* and its cognates in NT are esp. Campbell, 'Κοινωνία'; H. Seesemann, *Der Begriff Κοινωνία im Neuen Testament* (BZNW 14; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933); G. V. Jourdan, 'KOINONIA in 1 Corinthians 10:16', *JBL* 67 (1948) 111–24; J. M. McDermott, 'The Biblical Doctrine of KOINONIA', *BZ NF* 19 (1975) 64–77, 219–33; G. Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life* (AnBib 85; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979).

4 So D. G. Powers, *Salvation through Participation: An Examination of the Notion of the Believers' Corporate Unity with Christ in Early Christian Soteriology* (CBET 29; Leuven/Paris/Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001) 170–8, esp. 171.

1. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 10.14–22

In 1 Cor 10.14–22 the apostle Paul warns the Corinthian Christians against the dangers of idolatry (v. 14). He admonishes them not to participate in cultic meals for the glory of a pagan deity. As Christians, as people who 'drink the cup of the Lord' and people who 'have a part in the Lord's table', they cannot and should not 'drink the cup of demons' nor 'have a part in the table of demons' (v. 21). Taking part in a pagan cultic meal is idolatrous and is incompatible with a true Christian life. A similar line of thought is found in *Jos. Asen.* 8.5,

And Joseph said, 'It is not fitting for a man who worships God, who will bless with his mouth the living God and eat blessed bread of life and drink a blessed cup of immortality (έσθίει ἄρτον εὐλογημένον ζωῆς καὶ πίνει ποτήριον εὐλογημένον ἀθανασίας)...to kiss a strange woman who will bless with her mouth dead and dumb idols and eat from their table bread of strangulation and drink from their libation a cup of insidiousness (έσθίει ἐκ τῆς τραπέζης αὐτῶν ἄρτον ἀγχόνης καὶ πίνει ἐκ τῆς σπονδῆς αὐτῶν ποτήριον ἐνέδρας)...'⁵

According to *Joseph and Aseneth* Jews are people who 'eat blessed bread' and 'drink a blessed cup' as opposed to pagans who 'eat from their (= the idols') table bread of strangulation' and 'drink a cup of insidiousness'. On these grounds a 'mixture' of both parties is impossible. Paul's reasoning seems to be similar: Christians who 'drink the cup of the Lord' and 'have a part in the Lord's table', cannot mix with impunity in the company of people who 'drink the cup of demons' and 'have a part in the table of demons'. For the food eaten by pagans at their cultic meals is 'offered to demons' and not 'to God' (v. 20),⁶ that is, it is dedicated to pagan deities and it is eaten for their glory.

The 'Lord's table' refers to the food on the tables which was eaten by the Christians in remembrance of (the death of) Jesus Christ, just as the 'table of demons' refers to the food eaten by pagans for the glory of their gods. According to the OT/LXX there was a 'table' in the tabernacle and—later on—in the temple, the so-called 'table for the bread of the Presence', from which the priests were allowed to eat.⁷ The altar itself was also called the 'table (of the

5 Text: C. Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth* (PVTG 5; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003); trans. in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985) 202–47, esp. 211–12. See also *Jos. Asen.* 8.11, '...let her eat your bread of life, and drink your cup of blessing (φαγάτω ἄρτον ζωῆς σου καὶ πιέτω ποτήριον εὐλογίας σου)'; 12.5, 'I have sinned... My mouth is defiled from the sacrifices of the idols and from the tables of the gods of the Egyptians (μεμιάται τὸ στόμα μου ἀπὸ τῶν θυσίων τῶν εἰδώλων καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς τραπέζης τῶν θεῶν τῶν Αἰγυπτίων)'.

6 Cf. the expression 'bread of strangulation' (and 'cup of insidiousness') in *Jos. Asen.* 8.5.

7 See, e.g., Exod 25.23–30; Lev 24.5–9; 1 Kgs 7.48; 1 Macc 1.22; 4.49, 51; cf. also 1 *Clem.* 43.2; *T. Judah* 21.5.

Lord)'.⁸ Pagan deities had 'tables' in their temples as well.⁹ It is quite plausible that in using the term 'table (of the Lord/of demons)' in this passage Paul has been influenced by the use of tables in Jewish and pagan temples. He does not seem to consider the 'table of the Lord' and the 'table of demons' as altars on which sacrifices were offered in honour of God or demons but rather as tables at which people were eating together, either as Christians in remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ or as pagans for the glory of pagan deities.¹⁰

As the 'table' refers to the food eaten by Christians or pagans during their meetings, so the 'cup (of the Lord/of demons)' refers to the wine drunk at the meals of both Christians and pagans. For these meetings are to be characterized as *convivia* or *symposia*; social gatherings at which food and wine were offered to the gods and at which like-minded people ate and drank together. After the meal there was usually some time for drinking wine, singing songs, playing music, and discussion.¹¹

Thus, Paul's argument in vv. 19–22 is quite clear: although idols and food offered to idols are 'nothing' (v. 19; cf. 8.4–6) Christians should not share food with pagans at their *symposia*. For their food is sacrificed in honour of demons and not of God, and Christians should not 'provoke the Lord' (v. 22) by eating idol food in a cultic context. Paul considers demons, represented by idols, obviously existent; in his view, participating in such a cultic act is to be avoided, because this cult is addressed to existences, which are opposed to God.¹² So, the Corinthian Christians should not become 'partners in demons (κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαμονίων)' (v. 20), the associates of members of a cult devoted to idols.¹³

8 See, e.g., Ezek 44.16; Mal 1.7, 12; cf. *T. Levi* 8.16.

9 See, e.g., Herodotus *Hist.* 1.181.5; 1.183.1; Diodorus Siculus 5.46.7.

10 Cf. also the formulation 'to have a part in (or "to eat from", "to share") the table' (μετέχειν τραπέζης) used by Paul in v. 21 and in, e.g., Philo *De Jos.* 196; Plutarch *Life of Brutus* 13.7 (*Vitae Par.* 989F); Lucian *Cynicus* 7. Cf. also Plutarch *Mor.* 158C, 'a table...is an altar of the gods of friendship and hospitality (φιλίων θεῶν βωμὸν καὶ ξενίων)' (trans. F. C. Babbitt in LCL). On the expression 'table of the God', see also Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 15–17.

11 See, e.g., Plato *Symp.* 176A; Xenophon *Symp.* 2.1; Plutarch *Mor.* 150D; Lucian *Toxaris* 25. It is plausible that 1 Cor 11–14, too, should be understood against the background of such *symposia*; see esp. H. J. de Jonge, 'The Early History of the Lord's Supper', *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition* (ed. J. W. van Henten and A. Houtepen; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001) 209–37; de Jonge, *Avondmaal en symposium. Oorsprong en eerste ontwikkeling van de vroege-christelijke samenkomst* (Leiden: Universiteit Leiden, 2007); V. A. Alkin, 'The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries' (diss., Leiden University, 2009).

12 Cf. esp. Newton, *Deity and Diet*, 277–90, 349–57; Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*, 212.

13 For the Jewish-Christian characterization of pagans as people who worship 'demons', see, e.g., Ps 96(95).5 (LXX), 'all the gods of the nations are demons (πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἔθνῶν δαμόνια)'; Deut 32.17; Ps 106.37; Bar 4.7; 1 *Enoch* 19.1; 99.7; *Jub.* 1.11; *T. Job* 3.3; Philo *De vita Mosis* 1.276; Acts 17.18; Rev 9.20; *Barn.* 16.7; Justin *Dialogue with Trypho* 30.3; 55.2; 73.2.

According to Paul the case of the people of Israel is somewhat similar: people who together eat food offered to the God of Israel are ‘partners in the altar (κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου)’ (v. 18). Not only the priests used to eat food offered to God, but also the people of Israel were allowed to eat food that was offered by the priests to God on some occasions. So we read in Philo *De specialibus legibus* 1.221,

that the sacrificial meals should not be hoarded, but be free and open to all who have need (πάσιν...τοῖς δεομένοις), for they are now the property not of him by whom but of Him to Whom the victim has been sacrificed, He the benefactor, the bountiful, Who has made the convivial company of those who carry out the sacrifices partners of the altar whose board they share (κοινωνὸν ἀπέφηνε τοῦ βωμοῦ καὶ ὁμοτράπεζον τὸ συμπόσιον τῶν τὴν θυσίαν ἐπιτελούντων).¹⁴

What Paul wants to underline here is that when Israelites or Jews eat together for the glory of God they are a close-knit community, or in his words, ‘partners in the altar’, that is, partners who share in the food on the altar and who consequently share the same cult. Just as pagans are ‘partners in demons’, that is, associates in a cult devoted to demons, Israelites or Jews are ‘partners in the altar’, that is, participants in the worship of the God of Israel. In both cases Paul uses the term κοινωνοὶ followed by a genitive (τῶν δαμιονίων and τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου). This certainly takes up the word κοινωνία which is used in v. 16. There Paul argues that ‘the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks’ implies ‘being partners in the blood of Christ (κοινωνία τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’ and that ‘the bread that we break’ implies ‘being partners in the body of Christ (κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’. Without any doubt Paul refers to the meals served when the Christian believers met weekly in remembrance of their Lord Jesus Christ and his last supper ‘on the night he was betrayed’.¹⁵ Whereas Paul follows the usual order (bread-cup) in 11.23–6, he now names the cup first and the bread last, probably because he wants to speak about the bread at more length in the next verse.¹⁶ ‘The blood of Christ (τὸ αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’ and ‘the body of Christ (τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’ refer to the death of Jesus Christ and its beneficial effects on the Christian believers.¹⁷ For elsewhere in his letters Paul also uses the words ‘the blood of Christ’ and ‘the body of Christ’ as metaphors to refer to Jesus Christ’s death.¹⁸ But what

14 Text and trans. F. H. Colson in LCL. See already Lev 7.11–15; Deut 14.22–7.

15 Cf. 1 Cor 11.17–34, esp. vv. 23–26. For a survey of the literature on the Eucharist tradition in the letters of Paul, see esp. Fee, *Corinthians*, 465 n. 17, and A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000) 752–4, 853–5.

16 So also, among many others, Fee, *Corinthians*, 466; Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 764; A. Lindemann, *Der Erste Korintherbrief* (HNT 9/I; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 224.

17 Cf. Fee, *Corinthians*, 468.

18 See, e.g., Rom 5.9, ‘justified by his blood (ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ)’; 7.4, ‘you have died to the law through the body of Christ (διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ)’; 3.25; 1 Cor 11.24, 25, 27.

exactly does he mean by ‘being partners in the blood of Christ’ and ‘being partners in the body of Christ’? In order to answer this question an analysis of the term *κοινωνία* and its cognates with a genitive seems to be appropriate.

2. An Analysis of *κοινωνία* and its Cognates with a Genitive

In the Greco-Roman world *κοινωνία/κοινωνός/κοινωνεῖν* are favourite terms to describe all kinds of business partnerships, joint enterprises, social and sexual relationships, and other sorts of associations.¹⁹ They are also frequently used to characterize the close relationship between people having a meal together. A communal meal offered an opportunity to converse and to build friendships.²⁰ Eating together implies, or should imply, a close-knit community, a group of associates who are bound together by a joint interest. So we read, for instance, in Plutarch *Mor.* 643A:

For in my opinion, said Hagias, we invite each other not for the sake of eating and drinking, but for drinking together and eating together, and this division of meat into shares kills sociability (*τὴν κοινωνίαν ἀναιρούσα*) and makes many dinners and many diners with nobody anybody’s dinner-companion when each takes his share by weight as from a butcher’s counter and puts it before himself.²¹

Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Paul uses the terms *κοινωνία* and *κοινωνός* a couple of times when he speaks about Christian, Jewish, and pagan meals.

But other kinds of relationships can also be described in these terms of partnership. The thing (or, occasionally, the person) in which people have a joint interest is usually expressed by a genitive.²² Thus, in most instances,

19 See esp. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 167–81. Cf. already Seesemann, *Κοινωνία*, 100, ‘Das Wort *κοινωνία* spielt in der griechischen Literatur eine recht große Rolle. Abgesehen von einer Reihe von Spezialbedeutungen...ist es der ständige Ausdruck für die Gemeinschaft der Menschen untereinander...’

20 Cf. Newton, *Deity and Diet*, 246–9.

21 Text and trans. P. A. Clement and H. B. Hoffleit in LCL. See the entire passage 642F–644D, and further, e.g., Plutarch *Mor.* 158C, ‘For when the table is done away with, there go with it all these other things: the altar fire on the hearth, the hearth itself, wine-bowls, all entertainment and hospitality,—the most humane and the first acts of communion between man and man (*φιλανθρωπότατα καὶ πρώτα κοινωνήματα πρὸς ἀλλήλους*)’ (text and trans. Babbitt in LCL); 149F; 660B; 707C; 708D (‘A dinner party is a sharing of earnest and jest, of words and deeds [*κοινωνία γάρ ἐστι καὶ σπουδῆς καὶ παιδιᾶς καὶ λόγων καὶ πράξεων τὸ συμπόσιον*]’; text and trans. E. L. Minar, F. H. Sandbach, and W. C. Helmbold in LCL); Plutarch *Life of Lucullus* 16.3 (*Vitae Par.* 501E); Sir 6.10; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 1.221.

22 Cf. also Campbell, ‘*Κοινωνία*’, 357, ‘Theoretically, *κοινωνία* might be used with three dependent genitives, of three different kinds... Commonly there is only one genitive, and in the large majority of instances this is, as might be expected, the genitive of the thing shared. More than five out of every six genitives used with *κοινωνία* are of this kind’; McDermott, ‘*KOINONIA*’, 70, ‘The normal usage of *κοινωνία* and its cognates is with a genitive of the thing participated in...’

κοινωνία/κοινωνός with a genitive basically means ‘partnership’, ‘fellowship’, or ‘sharing with one or more individuals who have a common interest in something (or someone)’.²³ A number of examples from the literature of the Greco-Roman period may illustrate this:

This Herakleides was a Syracusan exile, a military man...but of an unsettled disposition, fickle and least of all to be relied upon when associated with a colleague in any command of dignity and honour (ἤκιστα δὲ βέβαιος ἐν κοινωνία πραγμάτων ἀρχὴν ἐχόντων καὶ δόξαν).²⁴

And yet even a well-bred guest at dinner has a function to perform, much more a hearer; for he is a participant in the discourse (κοινωνός γὰρ ἐστὶ τοῦ λόγου) and a fellow-worker with the speaker.²⁵

...that she dared to do such wickedness as to murder the lawful wife of her king, who was the mother of the heirs to the throne (lit.: ‘[the king’s] partner in her relationship with the children who were brought up for kingship’) (ἀνελεῖν τολμήσασα τὴν γνησίαν βασιλέως γυναῖκα καὶ τέκνων κοινωνὸν ἐπὶ βασιλείᾳ τρεφομένων).²⁶

But where will you find me a Cynic’s friend? For such a person must be another Cynic, in order to be worthy of being counted his friend. He must share with him his sceptre and kingdom (κοινωνὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι δεῖ τοῦ σκῆπτρου καὶ τῆς βασιλείας)...²⁷

Friendship, they declare, exists only between the wise and good, by reason of their likeness to one another. And by friendship they mean a common use of all that has to do with life (φασὶ δ’ αὐτὴν κοινωνίαν τινὰ εἶναι τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον), wherein we treat our friends as we should ourselves.²⁸

For it is good that they should not be ignorant of one another, being members of the same race and partners in the same institutions (ὁμοφύλους τε ὄντας καὶ τῶν αὐτῶν κοινωνοῦντας ἐπιτηδευμάτων).²⁹

23 Cf. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 168.

24 Plutarch *Life of Dion* 32.3 (*Vitae Par.* 972D). Text: K. Ziegler in *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana*; trans. A. Stewart and G. Long, *Plutarch’s Lives* (4 vols.; London: George Bell & Sons, 1883–9).

25 Plutarch *Mor.* 45E. Text and trans. Babbitt in LCL.

26 Plutarch *Life of Artaxerxes* 18.6 (*Vitae Par.* 1020C). Text: Ziegler; trans. Stewart and Long.

27 Epictetus *Diss.* 3.22.63. Text and trans. W. A. Oldfather in LCL.

28 Diogenes Laertius *Vitae Phil.* 7.124. Text and trans. R. D. Hicks in LCL.

29 Josephus *Ant.* 4.204. Text and trans. H. St. J. Thackeray in LCL. For more examples of such a use of κοινωνία or κοινωνός with a genitive, see Xenophon *Mem.* 2.1.32 (φιλίας κοινωνός); Thucydides *Hist.* 7.63.4 (κοινωνοί...τῆς ἀρχῆς); Plutarch *Mor.* 752A (ἀφροδισίων παιδικῶν κοινωνία); *Life of Brutus* 13.7 (*Vitae Par.* 989F) (κοινωνός μὲν ἀγαθῶν...κοινωνός δ’ ἀνιαρῶν). The apostle Paul also seems to use κοινωνία this way throughout his letters:

Just as *κοινωνία* and its cognates are favourite terms to characterize the close relationship between people having a meal together, there are also quite a number of passages in Hellenistic literature where the genitive explicitly refers to the event of having a meal. Let me give just a few examples:

And there is a friend who is a table mate (*κοινωνὸς τραπέζῳ*)...³⁰

...to invite acquaintances and associates of one's own, to share in the libations and the food and the talk over the wine and the conviviality (*ἐπὶ κοινωνίαν σπονδῆς καὶ τραπέζης καὶ λόγων ἐν οἴνῳ γινομένων καὶ φιλοφροσύνης*)
...³¹

and Lucullus, after some acquaintance with him (=Olthakus), was soon pleased with his acuteness and his zeal, and at last admitted him to his table and made him a member of his council (*ὥστε τραπέζης καὶ συνεδρίου ποτὲ ποιεῖσθαι κοινωνόν*).³²

These examples make clear that in 1 Cor 10.14–22 *κοινωνία* and *κοινωνός* refer to the close relationship between the people who are having a cultic meal

apart from 1 Cor 10.16, 18, and 20 (see below), see 2 Cor 1.7 ('knowing that if you share with me the sufferings, you share also with me the consolation' or 'knowing that if you are my partners in the sufferings, you are also my partners in the consolation' [*εἰδότες ὅτι ὡς κοινωνοὶ ἐστε τῶν παθημάτων, οὕτως καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως*]); Phil 2.1 ('If then there is...any consolation from love, any kind of fellowship from the Spirit [*εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος*]'); 3.10 ('and to share with him the sufferings' or 'and to be his partner in the sufferings' [(τὴν) κοινωνίαν (τῶν) παθημάτων αὐτοῦ]); Phlm 6 ('the faith you share with us [*ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως σου*]'). Many interpreters and translators may argue that in these instances Paul uses the terms *κοινωνία* and *κοινωνός* in the sense of 'participation in something' rather than 'partnership' or 'sharing with someone in something', but in that case Paul would use the terms contrary to the standard sense in Hellenistic Greek. Finally, also 1 Cor 1.9 (...*ἐκλήθητε εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν*) may be interpreted this way: the Corinthians are called into 'a fellowship of believers based on their relationship with his (=God's) son Jesus Christ our Lord'. In this text Paul may not refer to a fellowship of the Corinthians with Christ (through the Spirit), an interpretation that cannot be totally excluded (cf., e.g., Isa 1.23 LXX, 'companions of thieves [*κοινωνοὶ κλεπτῶν*]' and that is supported by almost all commentators, but to a society of Christian believers established on (their faith in) Christ (cf. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 209–11).

³⁰ Sir 6.10.

³¹ Plutarch *Mor.* 707C. Text and trans. Minar, Sandbach, and Helmbold in LCL.

³² Plutarch *Life of Lucullus* 16.3 (*Vitae Par.* 501E). Text: Ziegler; trans. Stewart and Long. Cf. further Philo *Spec. leg.* 4.119, '...because a man ought not to be table mate with savage brutes (*ὡς οὐ δέον κοινωνεῖν τραπέζης ἄνθρωπον ἀτιθάσοις θηρίοις*)' (text and trans. F. H. Colson in LCL); Plutarch *Mor.* 149F, 'to share the same table with Ardalus ('*Ἀρδάλῳ κοινωνεῖν μῶς τραπέζης*)' (text and trans. Babbitt in LCL); Ps-Clem. *Hom.* 8.20.1; 8.23.2. For Philo *Spec. leg.* 1.221 (*κοινωνόν...τοῦ βωμοῦ καὶ ὁμοτράπεζον*), see above.

together: in v. 16, Christians who eat together in remembrance of the death of their Lord Jesus Christ; in v. 18, Israelites or Jews, who have a meal together as worshippers of the God of Israel; and in v. 20, pagans who are together and eat their meals for the glory of their gods. In all three cases the meals are described as apt occasions for social association and as expressions of partnership between the participants. Eating together in remembrance of Jesus Christ, Christians are ‘partners in his body and his blood’; that is, they are partners in their belief in Jesus Christ and the beneficial effects of his violent death. Likewise, Israelites or Jews who have a cultic meal are ‘partners in the altar’; that is, they are united as participants in the worship of the God of Israel, and pagans who eat together are ‘partners in demons’; that is, they are associates with other people in a cult devoted to idols.³³

Since Paul considers the cultic meals of the local Christian communities to be expressions of partnership between people who share a common belief in their Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot imagine that on other occasions there are Christians in Corinth who share a sacrifice and a common meal with pagans and are ‘partners (with one another and with [their] heathen fellow-worshippers) in demons’.³⁴ In his view, such behaviour is identical to idolatry and is, consequently, to be condemned. For ‘the Christian and pagan meals represent differing communities of allegiance’.³⁵ Fully to convince his readers in Corinth Paul feels obliged to add a few phrases about the ‘unity’ and ‘solidarity’ of the Christian community in v. 17.³⁶ A detailed analysis of this verse seems appropriate in order fully to understand Paul’s argument in this passage.

3. A New Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10.17

Having said that the Christian meals imply a partnership between the Christian believers, Paul adds another two phrases meant to underline the close and solid relationship of the Christians to one another. He starts by saying that ‘since there is one bread, we who are many are one body (ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν)’. Elsewhere in his letters the apostle also compares the Christian community to a (human) ‘body’ in order to make clear to his

33 Cf. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 184–212. Willis’s assumption that in vv. 18 and 20 *κοινωνία/κοινωνός* refers to ‘partnership’ or a ‘communal relationship’ (among Israelites or Jews in v. 18, and among pagans in v. 20) but that in v. 16 it means ‘the relationship established among members of a covenant and the obligations ensuing from it’ (209) seems to lack any conclusive evidence. Also in the case of the Christian cultic community described in v. 16 *κοινωνία* stands for ‘partnership’. Of course, in Paul’s view Christians are also members of a (new) covenant, but that idea is not implied by the word *κοινωνία* itself.

34 So Campbell, ‘*Κοινωνία*’, 378.

35 So Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 207.

36 Cf. Fee, *Corinthians*, 469.

readers that the Christians are (or should be) a community tightly bound together by social and religious beliefs and activities and whose members feel (or should feel) solidarity with one another. In ch. 12 he will refer to this image of the ‘body’ in much more detail; there we find once again the idea that all Christians are members of only ‘one body’, the ‘body of Christ’ (see 12.12–31, esp. vv. 12–13, 27).³⁷

The reason that all the Christians together are ‘one body’, one close-knit community, is—according to Paul in 10.17—that ‘there is one bread’. Of course, the apostle does not mean that there is only one piece of bread which is broken and divided among the participants at all the Christian meals, but that all Christians eat some bread and thus take part in eating the same sort of food.³⁸ For him as for all people of his time, having a meal together at one table and eating the same food implied the unity and solidarity of the participants. Some passages from Jewish, early Christian, and pagan literature are very illustrative in this context:

We have certainly heard of banquets where sudden destruction has fallen upon a great assemblage of guests drawn by comradeship to eat of the same salt and sit at the same board (τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἄλας καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν τράπεζαν)...³⁹

I would have given money to share the same table with Ardalus (Ἄρδάλω κοινωνεῖν μιᾶς τραπέζης).⁴⁰

...when he brought together in one golden-canopied tent an hundred Persian brides and an hundred Macedonian and Greek bridegrooms, united at a common hearth and board (ἐφ’ ἐστίας κοινῆς καὶ τραπέζης).⁴¹

For once friends used to meet over one loaf (ὅτι ἐπὶ ἓνα [ἄρτον] οἱ πάσαι τῶν φίλων ἐφοίτων)...⁴²

Since Christians share the food at their joint meals, in particular the bread which they break in remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ (v. 16), they are to be considered ‘one body’, though they are ‘many’ (v. 17a). Paul seems to be afraid that his readers in Corinth will not understand the metaphor of the (human) body and therefore adds an explanation in v. 17b (οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν) which is usually translated as ‘for we all partake of

37 See further 6.15 and Rom 12.5; cf. also Eph 1.23; 2.16; 4.4, 12, 16; 5.23, 30; Col 1.18; 3.15.

38 Cf. 10.3–4.

39 Philo *Spec. leg.* 3.96. Text and trans. Colson in LCL.

40 Plutarch *Mor.* 149F. Text and trans. Babbitt in LCL.

41 Plutarch *Mor.* 329E. Text and trans. Babbitt in LCL.

42 Diogenes Laertius *Vitae Phil.* 8.35. Text and trans. Hicks in LCL. See further Plutarch *Mor.* 736D; Philo *Spec. leg.* 1.221 (see above); Ignatius *Eph.* 20.2; and see already Dan 11.27, ‘The two kings...shall eat at one table (LXX, ἐπὶ μιᾶς τραπέζης φάγονται)...’

the one bread' (NRSV) or 'for it is one loaf of which we all partake' (REB). That is, 'By common "participation" in the single loaf, the "body of Christ," they affirm that they together make up the "body of Christ"...'⁴³ This translation and interpretation is, however, somewhat problematic. First, understood this way v. 17b does not turn out to be an explanation of v. 17a but a rather futile statement telling the Corinthians what they already knew. The word 'for' (γάρ), however, makes clear that v. 17b is indeed meant to clarify the preceding sentence in v. 17a. Second, the grammatical construction seems to pose an obstacle to this interpretation and translation. Translators and interpreters are keen on connecting the verb 'to partake' (μετέχειν) with the words 'of the one bread (ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου)'.⁴⁴ They are surely aware of the fact that μετέχειν is usually preceded or followed by a noun in the genitive or in the accusative indicating the thing which is shared.⁴⁵ Following the NT grammars and dictionaries they seem to feel justified in interpreting the prepositional phrase (ἐκ...) as another example of a Hellenistic substitute for the (Classical) partitive genitive.⁴⁶ But nobody mentions

43 So Fee, *Corinthians*, 470.

44 So, among many others, J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 9. Aufl. 1977 [1910]) 259; A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2nd ed. 1983 [1914]) 214 ('For we all have our share from the one bread'); Ph. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (KNT 7; Leipzig/Erlangen: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung Dr. Werner Scholl, 3. Aufl. 1921) 338 ('insgesamt ja haben wir Anteil an dem Einen Brote'); C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1968) 229 ('for we all partake of the one loaf'); H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II* (HNT 9; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 5. Aufl. 1969) 46 ('denn alle haben wir an dem einen Brote teil'); H. Conzelmann, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2. Aufl. 1981) 208 ('denn wir alle haben an dem einen Brot teil'); Fee, *Corinthians*, 462 ('for we all partake of the one loaf'); W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther. 2. Teilband 1 Kor 6,12-11,16* (EKK 7/2; Düsseldorf: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995) 430 ('denn wir alle haben teil an dem einen Brot'); Lindemann, *Korintherbrief*, 216 ('denn wir haben alle teil an dem einen Brot'); Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 750 ('for it is the one bread that we all share').

45 So also Paul in 1 Cor 9.12 and 10.21.

46 See, among others, F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and F. Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 17. Aufl. 1990) § 169; J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, and N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 231; W. Bauer and K. and B. Aland, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 6. Aufl. 1988) s.v. μετέχω, 'Statt d. Gen. μ. ἐκ τινος: ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μ. von ein und demselben Brot genießen'; between brackets they add a reference to 'Thieme 29f.', that is G. Thieme, *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Mäander und das Neue Testament* (Inaugural-Dissertation; Borna/Leipzig: Robert Noske, 1905) 29–30, but in his book Thieme does not mention any other example of μετέχειν ἐκ but only states that the verbs μετέχειν and κοινωνεῖν are for the greater part synonymous ('Beide Verba sind Synonyma...', 30). Cf. Bachmann, *Korinther*, 338, who assumes that 'ἐκ ist vielmehr als pleonastische Bezeichnung

a parallel passage from Greek literature where we find the verb μετέχειν connected with a prepositional phrase with ἐκ and I am afraid there is none.⁴⁷

What Paul wants to explain to his readers in Corinth in v. 17b seems to be the meaning of the metaphor of ‘one body’. As ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου in v. 17b corresponds with ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος in v. 17a, and οἱ πάντες in v. 17b corresponds with οἱ πολλοί in v. 17a, so the verb μετέχομεν in v. 17b is meant to correspond with ἐν σῶμα...ἐσμεν in v. 17a. In other words: the verb μετέχομεν is not to be connected with the prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου but is used in an absolute sense, and is meant to elucidate the metaphor in the preceding clause. In some passages in Greek literature where the verb μετέχειν is used in an absolute sense, the noun indicating the thing which is shared can and must be supplied from the context.⁴⁸ In other instances, however, there is no such need, particularly not in those clauses where the verb is used in an absolute sense with the meaning ‘to be partners’:⁴⁹

...chief tax-farmers and associates may be partners [...ταις των αρχ]ωνων και [των κοινωνων] με[τοχ]αις εξεσ[τω] μετεχ[ε]ιν...⁵⁰

des schon durch den Genitiv ausgedrückten Partitivverhältnisses zu verstehen’; Schrage, *Korinther*, 440 n. 350, agrees with Bachmann but thinks that it is also possible that it is ‘einfach Indiz der vordringenden präpositionalen Wendungen anstelle des gen. part’.

47 Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians*, 214, who notice that ‘Nowhere else have we μετέχειν with ἐκ’, but they refer to 1 Cor 11.28 (there, however, ἐσθίειν ἐκ and πίνειν ἐκ), and Fee, *Corinthians*, 470, who characterizes the use of ἐκ with ἄρτος as ‘unusual’, but tries to reassure his readers by telling them that ‘Nothing is to be made of the unusual use of ἐκ with ἄρτος; it is a Hebraism: all eat *from* the one loaf’ (470 n. 35).

48 So also in Paul: see 1 Cor 9.10, ‘and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop (καὶ ὁ ἀλοῶν ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι τοῦ μετέχειν)’ (NRSV), and 10.30, ‘If I partake [sc. of food and drink] with thankfulness (εἰ ἐγὼ χάριτι μετέχω), why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?’ (NRSV). See also, e.g., Herodotus *Hist.* 1.143.3, ‘nor indeed did any save the men of Smyrna ask to be admitted (sc. into the temple) (οὐδ’ ἐδεήθησαν δὲ οὐδαμοὶ μετασχεῖν ὅτι μὴ Συμυρναῖοι)’ (text and trans. A. D. Godley in LCL); cf. 1.144.1 and 3 (...ἐξεκλήισαν τῆς μετοχῆς); and P. Oxy. XII. 1408, l. 26, ‘there are many methods of giving them (viz. robbers) shelter: some do so because they are partners in their misdeeds, others without sharing in these yet... (οἱ δὲ οὐ μετέχοντες μὲν κα[...])’ (cited in J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and other Non-literary Sources* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1972 (1930)] s.v. μετέχω). The very formulation (ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν) makes it unlikely that 1 Cor 10.17b also has the object implied (e.g. bread or food); a phrase like ‘For because of the one bread we all partake of bread (or: food)’ does not make sense.

49 See H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 9th ed. 1968 [1940]) s.v. μετέχω 7, who refer to a text in the Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphus (col. 14, ll. 9–11) and to a passage in Herodotus *Hist.* 8.132 (see below).

50 B. P. Grenfell and J. P. Mahaffy, *Revenue Laws of Ptolemy Philadelphus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896) col. 14, ll. 9–11. Translation mine.

These, who at first were seven, made a faction and conspired to slay Strattis, the despot of Chios; but when their conspiracy became known, one of the accomplices (lit.: 'one of those who were partners', ἐνὸς τῶν μετεχόντων) having revealed their enterprise, the six that remained got them privily out of Chios...⁵¹

...so a friend, if need befall for his services that involves expense, danger, or labour, is foremost in insisting, without excuse or hesitation, that he be called upon and that he do his share (or: 'that he be called upon and that he be his partner', καλεῖσθαι καὶ μετέχειν)...⁵²

After she (=Poppaea) became his (=Otho's) wife, he did not like to share her favours (lit.: 'he did not like to be his [=Nero's] associate [with respect to her]', οὐκ ἠγάπα μετέχων)...⁵³

From these examples⁵⁴ it may be concluded that the verb μετέχειν can be used in an absolute sense meaning 'to participate', 'to share', or 'to be associates' or 'partners'. As such the verb is indeed more or less synonymous with κοινωνεῖν⁵⁵ and seems to have been quite appropriate for Paul to explain the metaphor of the 'one body' in v. 17: together, the Corinthian Christians eat the same food, they share the same cult and the same belief in their Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, they 'are partners' (μετέχομεν); they are, in other words, 'one body' (ἓν σῶμα), the body of Christ.

As said before, the prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου in v. 17b is not to be connected with the verb μετέχομεν but refers back to ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος in v. 17a, and is meant to form the basis for Paul's view that the Corinthian Christians are 'partners' in their belief in Jesus Christ. The preposition ἐκ is used more than once in a causal sense to be interpreted and translated as 'in consequence of', 'because of', 'by reason of', or 'on the basis of'.⁵⁶ This means that ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου can be translated as 'in consequence of the one bread' or 'since there is one bread' (synonymous with ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος in v. 17a), that is 'on the basis of the fact that

51 Herodotus *Hist.* 8.132.2. Text and trans. Godley in LCL.

52 Plutarch *Mor.* 64 D. Text and trans. Babbitt in LCL.

53 Plutarch *Life of Galba* 19.7 (*Vitae Par.* 1061 E). Text: Ziegler; trans. Stewart and Long.

54 Cf. also Otto Kern, *Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander* (Berlin: Spemann, 1900) no. 116, l. 16 (τοῖς μετέχουσιν).

55 Cf., among others, Thieme, *Inschriften*, 29–30 (see above, n. 46); Moulton and Milligan, *Vocabulary*, s.v. μετέχω; Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth*, 196–7.

56 See Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *Lexicon*, s.v. ἐκ III.6; Bauer and Aland, *Wörterbuch*, s.v. ἐκ 3f. Examples of such a use of ἐκ are found in, e.g., Homer *Od.* 15.197, 'Friends from old we declare ourselves to be by reason of our father's friendship (ἐκ πατέρων φιλότητος)' (text and trans. A. T. Murray and G. E. Dimock in LCL); Herodotus *Hist.* 3.29.3, 'When he was dead of the wound (τὸν μὲν τελευτήσαντα ἐκ τοῦ τρώματος) the priests buried him...' (text and trans. Godley in LCL); Xenophon *Anab.* 2.5.5; Philo *De Jos.* 184; Luke 12.15; Acts 19.25; Rom 4.2; Gal 2.16; Rev 16.10.

we Christians share the same bread'. The whole phrase v. 17b should then be translated as 'on the basis of the fact that there is one bread we all are partners (in our belief in Jesus Christ)'. Interpreted this way v. 17b offers a lucid explanation for the meaning of the metaphor of the one 'body' in v. 17a. As a consequence, v. 17 once more underlines the unity and solidarity of the Christian community, a theme so prominent in this passage (esp. vv. 16, 18, and 20–21).

4. Conclusion

In 1 Cor 10.14–22 the apostle Paul warns his readers to refrain from idolatry. That means, according to Paul, *in concreto* that they should not participate in cultic meals for the glory of a pagan deity. Since Christian believers share together in the worship of God, they should not share with pagans at their *symposia*. Taking part in a pagan cultic meal is idolatry and is absolutely incompatible with a true Christian life. In order to convince his addressees in Corinth Paul stresses the unity and solidarity which exist between worshippers of the same religious community. Sharing with pagans at their cultic meals would break the Christian community and would provoke God, for a joint meal is the expression of the unity and solidarity of the participants. In this context Paul uses the terms *κοινωνία* and *κοινωνός*, favourite terms in his time to describe all sorts of associations. When the terms are used with a genitive, as in vv. 16, 18, and 20, the noun in the genitive usually refers to the thing (or, occasionally, the person) in which (or in whom) people have a common interest. Thus, in Paul's view, Israelites or Jews are people who are united as participants in the worship of the God of Israel ('partners in the altar', v. 18), pagans are associates in a cult devoted to idols ('partners in demons', v. 20), and Christians are partners in their belief in Jesus Christ and the beneficial effects of his violent death ('partners in his [=Jesus Christ's] blood and body', v. 18). After having said in v. 16 that Christians are a close-knit community, a group of associates who are bound together by their belief in Jesus Christ, Paul continues in v. 17 by telling his readers that at their meals in remembrance of the death of their Lord Jesus Christ they are together eating the same food, viz. 'one bread', which implies that they are 'one body'; a community whose members feel or should feel solidarity with one another. For they are 'partners', this time expressed by the term *μετέχειν*, which is not to be connected, as all interpreters and translators seem to do, with the prepositional phrase *ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου*, but is used in an absolute sense. Thus, there is no shift between vv. 16 and 18–21 on the one hand and v. 17 on the other; neither is v. 17 to be interpreted as a digression.⁵⁷ Both the references to *κοινωνία* in v. 16 (cf. vv. 18 and 20) and the phrases in v. 17 should be understood ecclesiologically, denoting 'partnership'

⁵⁷ Cf. Fee, *Corinthians*, 469.

rather than 'participation'.⁵⁸ The entire passage vv. 14–22 centres on the idea of the unity and solidarity of the Christian community, a topic Paul discussed so extensively in the rest of his letter.

58 As de Jonge seems to do; see his 'Early History', 209, "'The Lord's Supper"...established the unity of the congregation...' (cf. 210–11, but see p. 213, where de Jonge speaks of the *κοινωνία* 'with Christ and with one another'). However, the unity of the Christian congregation is not 'established' by a Christian meal, neither did it 'come about through the participants' drinking from the cup and eating the bread', as de Jonge assumes (209), but just the other way round: by eating and drinking together the Christians express their solidarity and their unity, a unity brought about by their common belief in the beneficial effects of the death of their Lord Jesus Christ.