

Joachim Kügler

Politics of Feeding: Reading John 6 (and 1 Cor 11) as Documents of Socio-political conflicts

Introduction

The Gospel of John is traditionally seen as the most “spiritual” gospel without any political dimension. In antiquity, however, there is no kind of religion without political dimension and I even dare to doubt that a non-political religion exists today. In some of my former publications, I have already tried to show the political dimension of Johannine Christology which, by claiming that Jesus is the real and only king, disenfranchises the political religious basis of the Roman Empire. Jesus, of course, is not competing with the emperor’s power as Christ’s divine kingship is far beyond any earthly power. By stressing the exclusivity of Jesus’ kingship, the Gospel of John, however, excludes any religious interpretation of the ruler as “son of god” (*Divi filius*) and vice-regent of the gods (*Deorum vice*).¹ Therefore it should be quite clear that reading the gospel of John from a political perspective in the context of Africa, i.e. in the context of harsh socio-political conflicts, does not mean putting the gospel into a context into which it does not belong. On the contrary, a political interpretation of John leads the gospel back to its original context and lets John be John. When it comes to the question of poverty and hunger, the Gospel of John is not foreign to that field of political and social conflict, but actually belongs to it.

1. Early Christians’ Celebrating Eucharist

1.1 They really did eat at the Lord’s Supper!

Today’s Christianities are used to NOT eating at the “table of the Lord.” When the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, it is usually done in an extremely

¹ See my studies in: J. KÜGLER, *Der andere König. Religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Christologie des Johannesevangeliums* (Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 178), Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk 1999; M. LABAHN, ‘Heiland der Welt’. Der gesandte Gottessohn und der römische Kaiser – ein Thema johanneischer Christologie?, in: id./ J. Zangenberg (Eds.), *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft* (TANZ 36), Tübingen: Francke 2002, 147-173; and now also: T.D. TROST, *Who should be king in Israel? A study on Roman imperial politics, the Dead Sea scrolls, and the Fourth Gospel*, New York [u.a.]: Lang 2010.

reduced and merely symbolic form which has nothing to do with filling one's stomach. We have to imagine that this was perfectly different in Ancient Christianity. Early Christians really did eat when they came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. This is clearly documented by the problems Paul is dealing with in 1.Cor 11. Obviously, the Christians in Corinth had a big problem with the Eucharist as some members of the community did not want to share. They enjoyed food and wine and left nothing for others. This meant that some participants had nothing to eat while others were not only filled up with food but even already drunk. This conflict could not have arisen if the Christians in Corinth would have celebrated Eucharist in the reduced way we are used to today. We have to imagine that in the early times of our Church, the Lord's Supper was a real banquet where not only bread and wine but also other food like fish was consumed. Celebrating the sacrament really meant eating, and filling one's stomach, although not the main purpose of this meeting, it was an absolutely normal part of it.

Even in the middle of the 2nd century CE, the Eucharist was still a real meal which was both spiritually and physically satisfying. This is made clear by the *Didache*, a ritual book which dates around 150 CE.² Among the texts referring to the Eucharist, one can find a recommended prayer after repletion, the first part of which is cited here:

¹ But after being filled, give thanks thus: ² 'We thank you, Holy Father, for your holy name, which you made dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made known to us through Jesus, your son; yours (be) the glory into eternity. ³ You, Allruling Master, created all things on behalf of your name, and you give food and drink to humans to enjoy that they may give thanks to you but to us you give spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your son. (*Didache* 10:1-3)

As can be seen from this text of the 2nd century CE, it took quite a long time until the Eucharist was transformed into merely symbolic eating which only satisfies spiritually.³ The fact that the Eucharist was origi-

² The *Διδαχή* or "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" is an early Christian text, dated by most scholars to the late first or early 2nd century CE. For first introductory information cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didache>. My translation is based on the edition of K. WENGST (Ed.), *Didache (Apostellehre) – Barnabasbrief – Zweiter Klemensbrief – Schrift an Diognet (Schriften des Urchristentums, Bd. 2)*, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges. 1984, 1-100: 80. It can be compared with quite a lot of English versions accessible online: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html>.

³ Cf. J. KÜGLER, *Hungrig bleiben!? Warum das Mahlsakrament trennt und wie man die Trennung überwinden könnte*, Würzburg: Echter 2010, 44;64-66.

nally a meeting which, besides its spiritual effects, was also meant to fill the stomach of the participants, automatically adds a socio-political dimension.

1.2 Beyond hunger: The Eucharist as New Creation happening

As ancient societies must be described as societies in which the food supply was always a precarious topic for the majority of the population, feeding was always a political topic as well. That is why giving bread and entertainment (*panem et circenses*) to the masses is one of the most important political acts of the ruler.⁴ Not only in Roman time, but already in Hellenistic monarchies and in the ancient Near East in general, feeding his people was a basic function of the king; we will revisit this topic when we speak about John 6:15. The background of this was the fact that most people experienced conditions of life characterised by a shortage of food. Filling one's stomach was not something that could be taken for granted. In this regard, the situation of the majority in antiquity was the same as that of the global majority today. Taking into account the precarious situation of the food supply, it is not very surprising that in the younger texts of the Old Testament, the opulent banquet is a very convincing rendering of the perfect life in the Kingdom of God as can be seen from Isa 25:6:

On this mountain, Yahweh Sabaoth for all peoples is preparing a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of succulent food, of well-strained wines.

This topic was taken up a lot by Jesus and the early Christian tradition, as can be seen from many texts in the synoptic gospels. Jesus was called “a glutton and drunkard” (Mat 11:19) by his opponents and we can imagine that his love for food and wine was not only a personal weakness, but an important part of Jesus' prophetic behaviour. As the kingdom of God is already about to begin here and now, fasting no longer makes sense. This aspect of Jesus' mission is carried on by post-Easter tradition through many texts, for example the narratives of the Lord feeding thousands (Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-10; Mat 14:13-21; 15,32-39; Luke 9:11-17; John 6,1-15). These miracle stories may be mere fiction, but in any case they document an important aspect of Jesus' understanding of God's kingdom: There will no longer be any more hunger. All people are able to

⁴ Cf. P. VEYNE, *Bread and circuses. Historical sociology and political pluralism*, London: Lane 1990 [= *Le pain et le cirque : sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique*, Paris : Éd. du Seuil 1976].

not only fill their stomachs but furthermore enjoy best food and best wine in abundance. Those who are tortured by hunger can be called happy as God himself is about to change their situation: “Happy are they/you who hunger, for they/you shall be satisfied!” (Q 6:21)⁵.

When early Christians gathered for the Lord’s Supper, they remembered Jesus’ salvific death and looked forward to a new world, God’s new creation. This future world was already present in their community. As Paul puts it in 2.Cor 5:17, “anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order is gone and a new being is there to see” (cf. Gal 6:15). As this new order is represented by the Christian community as body of Christ, the structure of the Church must be an adequate expression of the new world. The common hierarchies and frictions of the old, sinful world are overcome. Therefore Jews “in Christ” no longer rank higher than pagans, slaves are not less than their masters, and male prevalence over females cannot be tolerated any longer (Gal 3:26-28).⁶

1.3 The Lord’s Supper needs sharing (1.Cor 11)

The egalitarian structure of early Christian communities is an indispensable expression of God’s new world order, and therefore early Christians celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a different way from the banquets of the old world. The hierarchical order of the pagan banquets shows the free rich man as the highest top of the pyramid of honor⁷, while the poor enslaved woman marks the lowest end of the societal hierarchy. In the same way, the Christian community banquet should express the faith

⁵ For the reconstruction of the Sayings Source’s text of the beatitude of the hungry cf. J.M. ROBINSON/ P. HOFFMANN/ J.S. KLOPPENBORG (Eds.). *The critical edition of Q. Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French translations of Q and Thomas*. Leuven: Peeters 2000, 48.

⁶ Cf. J. KÜGLER, Gal 3,26-28 und die vielen Geschlechter der Glaubenden. Impuls für eine christliche Geschlechtsrollenpastoral jenseits von „Sex and Gender“, in: M. E. Aigner/ J. Pock (Eds.), *Geschlecht quer gedacht. Widerstandspotenziale und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in kirchlicher Praxis (Werkstatt Theologie 13)*, Münster: Lit 2009, 53-70.

⁷ Cf. R.M. MCRAE, Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord’s Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices, in: *Journal for Biblical Literature* 130 (2011) 165-181. I would, however, insist that for Paul the main contrast was between the meal practices at home and the community meal. That is why he mentions houses (οικίαις) in 1.Cor 11:22, which also is a clear indication that the problem focused on the behavior of wealthy Christians, who would be the only Christians to actually own houses.

based structure of this special community. If all are “one in Christ,” (Gal 3:28) there cannot be any hierarchy at the Lord’s Supper. We do not know who, for example, served the meal, who washed the feet of the participants, and who headed the ceremony as symposiarch. As presiding the Lord’s Supper is never connected in the New Testament texts with the official church structure coming up in the second half of the 1st century, it is highly probable that the Christian communities did not know the office of a symposiarch, but celebrated the meal as a community of “brothers”.⁸ As female Christians were also labeled as “sons of God” (Gal 3,26)⁹ and the difference between male and female was seen as having lost any significance, it is highly probable that there was no longer any female-specific work which the “sisters” were automatically obliged to do. A female slave was certainly no longer obligated to wash the feet of all other Christians, but could instead be called by the Spirit to manage community affairs as Tryphaena and Tryphosa did in Rome (Rom 16:12)¹⁰ For rich free men, becoming Christians and taking part in the Lord’s Supper meant quite a big challenge: They had to accept women as equal members of the banquet community as well as enslaved persons and poor ones. The social order that privileged them outside the Christian community was part of the old sinful world and lost its power when they entered the new creation which the Spirit constituted in the midst of the old one. The privileged were challenged to renounce their social status when they became members of the body of Christ. This challenge was especially clear and concrete when Christians came together to the Lord’s Supper, which has to be understood as the manifes-

⁸ Cf. H.J. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern. Ihre Gestalt und Bedeutung nach der neutestamentlichen Briefliteratur und der Johannesoffenbarung* (WUNT 2/255), Tübingen: Mohr 2008, 133 f.

⁹ In the patriarchal context of his time, Paul had to call female Christians “sons of God”. “Daughters of God” would have meant something inferior. Sisters usually were expected to be submissive to their brothers; female equality in Christ therefore had to be expressed by the metaphor of sonship. Cf. J. KÜGLER, Gal 3,26-28 und die vielen Geschlechter der Glaubenden. Impuls für eine christliche Geschlechtsrollenpastoral jenseits von „Sex and Gender“, in: M. E. Aigner/ J. Pock (Eds.), *Geschlecht quer gedacht. Widerstandspotenziale und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten in kirchlicher Praxis* (Werkstatt Theologie 13), Münster: Lit 2009, 53-70: 56-62.

¹⁰ Cf. S. SCHREIBER [Arbeit mit der Gemeinde (Röm 16:6,12)]. Zur versunkenen Möglichkeit der Gemeindeleitung durch Frauen, in: *New Testament Studies* 46 (2000) 204-226], who convincingly points out that the four women mentioned by Paul in Rom 16:12 held leading functions in the Roman community.

tation of the Christian community's identity as united body of Christ.¹¹ Not all of the community members were up to this challenge.

We can see this quite clearly from 1.Cor 11:18-21 in which Paul criticises Corinthian Christians for not celebrating the Lord's Supper properly.¹² Obviously, Christians used to bring food from home to eat it in community. Of course, wealthy members could bring more and better food with them than those who were poor, and perhaps some poor and enslaved members could not bring any food at all. Influenced by their pre-Christian customs, Corinthian Christians tended to take their meals separately, i.e. according to the societal hierarchies and the honor codes they lived by and which separated them. Those who could bring more consumed their own food, perhaps even in a special place at the assembly.¹³ They could even enjoy wine while poor members could not even eat anything but were left hungry. Paul, however, criticises this practice heavily and tells the Corinthians that eating in separation does not constitute celebrating the Lord's Supper. Those who eat in such a way disregard the "body of Christ" (i.e. the community of believers eating together). If they wanted to continue in this manner, they had better eat at home. Paul does not eliminate filling the stomach from the Lord's Supper,¹⁴ but tells the wealthy Christians who have houses that eating in separation is celebrating the order of the old sinful world whereas eating the Lord's Supper means celebrating the divine order of the new world of redemption, i.e. the unity of Christ's body. That explains why Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of Jesus' words at his last supper. The Lord's Supper celebrates the new status with which the believers were endowed by the salvific death of Jesus Christ. They all are one in Jesus Christ because he died for them all and redeemed all of them from sin. Being baptized on the salvific death of Christ, they are integrated into his sonship and are equal in the Holy Spirit. This new status of the believers does not allow separation at the Lord's Supper, but urges the organization of an egalitarian banquet which is a true representation of the new world order in Christ, in which the primary value is love and the basic

¹¹ Cf. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 105-110.

¹² For a convincing reconstruction of the Corinthian conflict cf. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 134-136.

¹³ Cf. MCRAE, *Eating with Honor*, 175-177.

¹⁴ Unfortunately STEIN [*Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 146-150] tends to misunderstand Paul in that point.

structure is sharing. Only if those who are dispossessed and without honor in the world are honored and fed well by sharing, the “body of Christ” really is respected. Eating in separation, i.e. eating according to the old world order, means disregarding the “body of Christ” and eating and drinking in “judgment”.¹⁵

2. *Johannine Eucharistic Theology and its socio-political background*

Although my reading of John 6 developed here is very much a synchronic reading on the level of the final redactional text, before starting I should give a brief overview on how I see this chapter’s redaction history, which is one of the most debated problems in Johannine exegesis. The model on which I base my reading is in the tradition of modern Literarkritik, which understands the exploration of the different layers of a text as an exploration of the repertoire of the text, i.e. of the tradition a text is working with. Here, John 6 is understood as the work of the final redactor of John, who is not only responsible for chapter 21, but for the final state of the Fourth Gospel in general. For the bread of life discourse, the redaction used material coming from the Johannine community tradition. This material can be found mostly in John 6:28-30-32.35.37-38.40-44.47.59. For other parts of chapter 6, the Johannine redaction rather freely used the gospel of Mark as source: John 6:1-21 and 6:60-71 are based on Mark 6:30-52 and 8:27-33.¹⁶ John 6:22-25 and 6:48-58 are redactional products, which means that the final redaction displays a specific interest in the topic of the Eucharist.¹⁷

¹⁵ Older interpretation often understood Paul’s critique of “not distinguishing the body” (1.Cor 11:29), as a warning about the proper treatment of the consecrated Eucharistic bread. But Paul is not dealing with sacred food here. The “body” of Christ is the Christian community celebrating Lord’s Supper. Not making a difference between this body as presence of new creation with a new divine order, therefore means eating in the fashion of the old world and by that falling back into the state of unredeemed sinners who deserve God’s wrath and condemnation. Whoever eats in the fashion of the old world eats “judgment”. Those, however, who eat in the proper Christian way, respecting the others and sharing with them, transcend the rules of the old world and eat a spiritual food, which is “a sharing in the body of Christ” (1.Cor 10:16).

¹⁶ Cf. I. DUNDERBERG, *Johannes und die Synoptiker. Studien zu Joh 1-9*, Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica 1994, 127-174.

¹⁷ Detailed arguments for this literarkritische model cannot be given here, but are to be found in: J. KÜGLER, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte. Literarische, theologische und*

2.1 *The Johannine feeding narrative:*

Why Christ does not want to be king in this world

If the final redaction of the Fourth Gospel knew the synoptic Gospels and used them as sources in a rather free manner, then the completion of the Gospel of John quite probably must be dated towards the end of the 1st century CE or even later.¹⁸ There are some details that might indicate that the gospel was written in the time of the Roman emperor Domitian.¹⁹ In that case, the Fourth Gospel originated in a time of intensified imperial ideology and cult, which included the ruler's being hailed as breadwinner. For Domitian, this special aspect of his divine authority can be found in the inscription of an obelisque which he erected to celebrate the divinity of his family. Domitian is hailed as "visible god" (ntr nfr) and "the heir of the father of gods, sitting on the throne of Horus". Of course, the emperor is also said to be the supreme breadwinner who provides food in abundance for the people:

He filled the land with his food;
And the being and not-being [= this life and hereafter?]
Is flooded with his nourishment

This kind of royal propaganda is part of a broad stream of ruler's ideology which can be traced back to old Egyptian times and is also documented in almost all royal traditions of the ancient Near East. Feeding his people is one of the most important functions of the king and if he plays the role of breadwinner successfully, he displays the divine legitimation of his rule in a most convincing way. In some cases, for example when the royal administration in early Egypt organised an intelligent system of watering the fields so that more and better harvesting was possible, the image of the king as breadwinner was not merely ideological. In other cases, "feeding the masses" was pure ideology, especially when the royal tax system was a brutal method of exploitation which first

historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte (SBB 16), Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk 1988, 186-196.

¹⁸ Cf. my introduction to the Fourth Gospel: J. KÜGLER, *Das Johannesevangelium*, in: M. Ebner/ S. Schreiber (Eds.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2008, 208-228: 218-219.

¹⁹ In John 20:28 e.g. Thomas confesses Jesus as "my Lord and my God", which could be a kind of Christian counter-gospel to the imperial ideology of Domitian (Roman Emperor from 81 to 96 CE) who is reported to have introduced the same title (*Dominus et deus noster*; cf. Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13:2) as the proper way of addressing himself. Cf. KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 156-164.

generated the very poverty which it later claimed to “heal,” more or less symbolically, by acts of royal charity. In Roman imperialism, the latter case was the norm. Exploitation of the masses through a harsh system of direct and indirect taxes allowed a small upper class to get rich. At the same time, the majority of the population became increasingly impoverished. If the emperors propagated themselves as breadwinners by public acts of feeding the masses,²⁰ they only gave back a small portion of what they had stolen before.

Thus it is not at all surprising that local rebellious movements against the Roman Empire tried to satisfy the needs of the people in a more effective way than the emperor and his local representatives did. More often than not, the anti-imperial movements, however, also failed to improve the living conditions of the majority and feeding people remained mere ideology. The anti-imperial prophetic movements during the time of the Second Temple never stood the slightest chance of politically organising an improvement of the food supply for Jewish people, but most likely²¹ also claimed to be breadwinners according to biblical traditions, heirs of David (2.Sam 6:19; Psa 72:16), Elisha (2.Kings 4:42-44) and especially Moses, the prototype of a prophet-king²² whom God elected as agent to nourish his beloved people (Exo 16).

In front of this background, it can easily be understood why the masses wanted Jesus to be their prophet-king (John 6:14-15). They had just experienced someone feeding them in a miraculous and abundant way

²⁰ Cf. KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 76-86.

²¹ Unfortunately Josephus Flavius, our main source for political messianism in early Jewish times, is most skeptical about these movements and therefore does not give much detail on what they did to improve the situation of the population. We can, however, conclude from Josephus's depiction that at least some prophets tried to repeat Israel's exodus from Egypt. If that is true, the “signs of liberation” (σημεῖα ἐλευθερίας, bell. 2:259) they expected from God, would definitely have included manna as bread from heaven. That breadwinning still is a royal topic in early Judaism can, however, more clearly be learned from the Jewish conversion novel “Joseph and Aseneth”. Cf. KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 80 f. – For the popular messianic movements in early Judaism cf. K.E. POMYKALA, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism. Its History and Significance for Messianism*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995, 258-264; and also J.J. COLLINS, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature*, New York: Doubleday 1995, 195-200.

²² For the combination of king and prophet cf. Philo, who writes about Moses, that “in accordance with the providential will of God he was both a king and a lawgiver, and a high priest and a prophet”, who in each of his offices “displayed the most eminent wisdom and virtue” (Mos 2:3).

(6:13) and thus fulfilling the expectations connected with a royal prophet like Moses (Dtn 18:15.18). They understood the feeding as a sign: This man really is the one who can feed us. He is sent by God to deliver us from hunger. He is the one given by God to his people. Jesus, however, reacts in a negative way to this interpretation of his sign. He withdraws from the masses in order to prevent them from making him their king. Obviously, the Johannine Christ does not want to play the role of a popular Jewish counter-king in opposition to the pagan emperor. Jesus truly is a king in the Gospel of John (1:49), but his kingship lies far beyond the categories of earthly rulers. Understanding him as one of the political leaders who claim to feed people but only try to stabilise their own power by symbolic acts of charity clearly is a misunderstanding. Jesus is king in a most different way. His feeding transcends royal charity which always meant a legitimization of the Status quo of power. Christ's reign is completed by sacrificing himself and thereby reversing the common hierarchy of ruler and powerless subjects. While an ordinary king makes people die for him, King Jesus himself dies for his people. Rising over others in his case means being lifted up in crucifixion; therefore, his throne is the cross.²³ His salvific death is the perfection of his royal glory and powerful reign (John 10:18), the utmost expression of his love (13:1) to his friends – no longer slaves/ δούλοι (John 15:15)!²⁴

2.2 Eating the bread of life means believing in Christ

As John 6:14-15 has it made clear that Christ is a perfectly different king who cannot be understood in the categories of ordinary kings, it is now time for the Johannine narrative to define Jesus' kingship more precisely. This is done first by the short text 6:16-21, which links the bread

²³ That is why the title "King" is mostly used in the Johannine passion narrative. The lemma βασιλεύς accumulates in John 18-19 (12 out of 16 occurrences).

²⁴ This revolution of power structure is already indicated in John 1, in which the supreme status of the believers is stressed. They share in the sonship of Christ (1:12) and even the concept of divine origin is transferred to them (1:13). The relation between Christ and his community is not modeled by the line of a king who dominates subjugated masses, but by the line of a court society in which the king lives with his friends as the first among equals. Cf. J. KÜGLER, „Denen aber, die ihn aufnahmen, ...“(Joh 1,12). Die Würde der Gotteskinder in der johanneischen Theologie, in: Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie 17 (2002) 163-179.

miracle (6:1-15) with the following Bread of Life Discourse (6:22-59) and reveals Jesus as a cosmic king who dominates the elements.²⁵

The next step in explaining the alternative character of Christ's feeding kingship is then taken by 6:22-47, the first part of the bread of life discourse. While the masses only felt that there was someone who filled their stomach for a moment, Jesus now tells them (and the reader) that his mission is about a kind of nourishment that satisfies forever and changes their situation completely by giving them "eternal life." This alternative nourishment is the bread of life given by the Father. And Jesus, being the incarnation of the divine Logos himself, is the bread of life (6:35). Here, Christ is understood very much in the line of divine wisdom- logos which in Hellenistic Judaism (e.g. in the writings of Philo Alexandrinus) was often understood to mean "bread from heaven," a spiritual nourishment of the soul.²⁶ The way to "eat" this bread of life is to believe in Christ. Believing in Christ is very much defined as acknowledging his divine origin (6:41-42) and his status as representative of the Father (6:37-39). "Coming" to Jesus is also an important metaphor for believing (6:35.44). Believing in Jesus is tantamount to "eating" heavenly bread which offers eternal life here and now. Those who believe in Jesus have eternal life and are not lacking anything. This realized eschatology which is clearly expressed by 6:35 and 6:47 is a clear alternative to all royal feeding ideology, be it Roman or Jewish. The bread of life, which is consumed by believing in Christ, clearly transcends all earthly food which can only fill one's stomach for a while but cannot prevent the consumer from getting hungry again. The bread of life,

²⁵ The cosmological dimension of Christ's kingship can be understood in the light of the Johannine prologue: Jesus is the incarnation of the divine λόγος, by whom the cosmos was created (John 1:3.10). Thus the whole world is his property (1:11). The Jewish theologian Philo says similar things about Moses: As friend of God he shared in his rule over all elements (Mos 1:156: "therefore, every one of the elements obeyed him as its master, changing the power which it had by nature and submitting to his commands. And perhaps there was nothing wonderful in this; for if it be true according to the proverb,- 'That all the property of friends is common;' and if the prophet was truly called the friend of God, then it follows that he would naturally partake of God himself and of all his possessions as far as he had need"). If already the greatest prophet is master over the elements, than the Son will be so even more – this might be the Johannine message in this context.

²⁶ For the background of the Johannine logos-bread-christology cf. T.H. TOBIN, *Logos*, in: *Anchor Bible Dictionary* IV, 348-356: 348-351; and also KÜGLER, *Der andere König*, 94-97.

which is Jesus himself (as Logos incarnated), satisfies forever and does not allow hunger to come back. Therefore, it renders the believers independent of the charity of a royal breadwinner who displays his charity from time to time to stabilize his reign, but will not really change the situation of his subjects.

As royal charity has nothing to do with eradication of poverty (as might be done e.g. by implementing economic justice), it keeps the hungry subjects permanently dependent on the king, demonstrating to them that they need him to survive. What the believer in Jesus consumes by his/her faith, however, is not concerned with surviving but with living. The divine Logos is bread from heaven and thus offers eternal life, life in abundance. The wisdom-logos truly is life in itself. Those who consume this nourishment are liberated from earthly needs and earthly breadwinners forever and ever.

When read against the backdrop of permanent colonization of the people by their royal exploiter/ breadwinner, the Johannine theology of heavenly bread really constitutes an ancient version of liberation theology – not post-colonial, but clearly trans-colonial.

There is, however, a severe problem with this kind of theology: its tendency toward extreme spiritualization. One can only claim that those who are redeemed here and now have everything and are not lacking anything if the fruits of redemption are consequently spiritualized. Those who are said to be fed forever and to never thirst again will inevitably fall back into hunger and thirst. And those who are said to have conquered death and to never die, inevitably will die. The solution to this conflict is to declare biological hunger, thirst, and death irrelevant. Eternal spiritual life, spiritual food and drink are the only things that matter. The spiritual world is all, the physical world is nothing. This theological program is well expressed in a slogan which was coined in the Johannine community: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (6:63: τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιῶν, ἡ σὰρξ οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν).

2.3 *Believing in Christ means taking part in the Eucharist*

Following the narrative line of John 6, we find in 6:48-58 the reaction of the Johannine redaction to the risks of the radical spiritualization inherent in the realized eschatology. The redactional part begins with the identical repetition of the central sentence of the first part of the bread of

life discourse: “I am the bread of life!” (6:48: Ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς || 6:35a). By establishing such a close connection to the first part, the redaction makes clear that it wants its message to be seen as a rewriting of Johannine community tradition and not as an abolishment of it. This is also indicated by the redactional amendments in some verses of the first part which bring in the old eschatology of future perfection.²⁷ This corrects the realized eschatology and opens it again to traditional hope, which allows for taking the imperfections of present earthly life a bit more serious. If one can expect the ultimate perfection in God’s world to come, it is not necessary, according to Old Testament tradition, to spiritualize soteriology completely. Old Testament/early Jewish eschatology always allowed earthly things to keep their importance, and the concept of bodily resurrection is the clearest expression of hoping that God, in the end, takes our flesh as seriously as our spiritual dimension. In this way, the final redaction of John takes the chance to return to a more positive meaning of flesh/σὰρξ. This is done in a Eucharistic way, i.e. by referring to the flesh of Christ. As he is the incarnation of God’s wisdom-word, his flesh is also united with the divine logos (John 1:14: Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο). Christ is the personified bread of life; therefore, his flesh can also give life. Jesus’ death signifies giving his flesh for the life of the world (6:51) ,and according to the salvific power of this giving of his flesh, the eating of his flesh in the Eucharistic meal also gives life. That is why the redaction stresses that eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man is necessary for salvation 6:54.56-58. Those who do not eat and drink in the Eucharist cannot have eternal life (6:53).

If we ask for the pragmatic intention of this Eucharistic part of the bread of life discourse, the answer seems quite difficult. Does the author want to invite Jews to the Lord’s Supper? Even after they seem to refuse to believe in the divine origin of Christ? That seems rather improbable to me, although on the level of the text, Jews are the addressees of Christ’s teaching in both parts of the discourse (6:41.52). A more realistic answer can be given if we look to John 6:60-71, in which Jesus’ disciples are debating about his harsh words. The narrative strategy consists of telling the readers that those disciples who do not accept the Eucharistic teaching are equal to the Jews who do not even believe in Christ at all. Some of the disciples even leave Jesus. Thus, they behave like the Jews; more-

²⁷ Cf. 6:40: “and I will raise him up in the last day” (καὶ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν ἐγὼ [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ). See also ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ in 6:39.44.

over, the narrator does not forget to mention Judas so that the reader can understand that those who do not accept the Eucharistic relecture of the bread of life discourse are no better than Judas. Like him, they betray Jesus. Linking those who do not accept eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood in the Eucharist to the Jews who never believed in Christ and to Judas who betrayed him provides a strong incentive to accept the Eucharist. Believing in Christ without taking part in the Eucharistic meal is tantamount to not believing in Christ at all. Those who think that they can consume the bread of life just through faith without actually eating it²⁸ (6:55) are told that this is not possible.

In this manner, the text makes quite clear that its background is a problem with the Eucharist in Johannine Christianity. Apparently, there were some (or many?) who did not want to take part in the Eucharistic meetings. But why was it necessary to put such a great amount of theological pressure on certain members of the community? Are we supposed to imagine that the Johannine community had a major problem with people who have been baptized but do not share in the life of the Christian community? We know this problem from secular western Christianities; but did this problem of tepid Christians (or even baptized non-believers) already exist in New Testament times, when a person did not become a Christian by being baptized as an infant, but by a conscious decision to convert as an adult? Being Christian did not involve any societal benefit but quite on the contrary aroused suspicions and was sometimes even dangerous. Why then would someone become a member of the church without sharing in the life of the community?

The text does not give a clear answer to these difficult questions, but it gives some hints that allow for conclusions that are not too speculative. If the problems with the Eucharist have to do with the theological tradition that believes Jesus is the bread of life which is consumed through faith, then perhaps those who did not take part in the Eucharist were mostly upper class Christians. At least, this theology with its realized eschatology is very much linked to Jewish Hellenistic upper class theology documented in the writings of Philo Alexandrinus. Of course, even lowest class people like slaves can develop escapist realized eschatology, but the links to Philo and the wealthy Judaism he belongs to are just too

²⁸ The Johannine redaction lays specific stress on the realism of eating. That's why they use several times the word τρώω = gnaw/crunch (6:54.56.57.58), which is quite unusual in the Eucharistic context.

strong. In any case, it is easier for those who have a lot of material goods to say that they are not lacking anything at all as long as they have found spiritual satisfaction. Eternal life combined with earthly wealth constitutes a mixture that makes the feeling of lacking nothing quite plausible. That is why I think the message that those who believe in Christ will never be hungry or thirsty again (6:35) but have eternal life now and here (6:47) is simply more convincing to people who are well off. It is simply much easier to ignore bodily hunger if you are not feeling it in the first place. If this is true, then not only wealthy Christians in Corinth would have had problems with the Lord's Supper, but also wealthy members of Johannine community. However, we have to be very careful about equating Paul's problem with the Corinthians directly with the problem which the Johannine redaction is dealing with. Perhaps the only similarity is the higher social status of those causing problems. The wealth of those causing the problems the redaction wants to solve can also be seen from 1.John which is closely connected to the final redaction of the Fourth Gospel.²⁹ The letter deals with people who believe they are in a close love relationship with God without showing much love toward their Christian "brothers".³⁰ This problem of merely theoretical love without practical love (1.John 3:18) is clearly linked to the problem of wealth (2:16; 3,17); obviously, the letter addresses people who are well off but do not want to share. These Christians are harshly criticized. The author tells them that they are no children of God. He³¹ can make this claim because God is love. This divine love is not mere theory, but was acted out by giving the Son who died at the cross in perfection of his love. Those who show no love in practice cannot have anything to do with the Father, nor with the Son. They are classified as persons who may think that they are children of God and have divine life (ζωή), but are in reality only children of the old world of sin. Therefore, they are sticking to earthly life

29 I do not think that 1.John was written by the same person who did the final redaction of the gospel, but the pragmatic intention of both texts seems to be very similar. The same can be said about the problem which is addressed and the theological means that are used to solve it. Cf. J. KÜGLER, *Der erste Johannesbrief*, in: M. Ebner / S. Schreiber (Eds.), *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2008, 530-542: 532-534.

30 For the problem 1.John is dealing with cf. J. KÜGLER, *In Tat und Wahrheit. Zur Problemlage des Ersten Johannesbriefes*, in: *Biblische Notizen* 48 (1989) 61-88.

31 I really think that the author of 1.John was male, as well as that the final redactor of the gospel was so. For the gender aspects of the conflict see below.

(βίος τοῦ κόσμου). In a very tricky way, the author in 3:17 uses βίος for wealth/richness and thus indicates that his opponents only say that ζωή is most important, but in fact βίος is much more important to them; otherwise, they would readily give their earthly goods away and help the poor. As clear as the socio-political conflict in 1.John is, it can only help to strengthen the idea that the opponents of the final redactor also belong to the upper class. 1.John does not explain why these people do not participate in the Eucharist; the lack of love is never explicitly linked to the Eucharistic meeting of the community. Perhaps the Johannine narrative of Jesus' last supper may give some hints.

2.4 Why footwashing is the central part of the Johannine Last Supper narrative (John 13)

As it is highly probable that the final redaction knew the synoptic gospels, it is very surprising that the institution of the Eucharist is left out in the narration of the Last Supper in John 13. This is even more surprising if we realize that the redactor has a special interest in the Eucharist, as we can learn from John 6.

One reason for that might be that the Johannine community celebrated the Eucharist without citing the institution words, and perhaps the Johannine tradition did not even know them before entering into contact with the synoptic gospels. While the latter is rather speculative, there is some probability of the former. From the Didache – already mentioned above – we can learn that certain Christian communities in the 2nd century CE still celebrated the Eucharist without quoting the institution narrative. The Lord's Supper was not an imitation of what Jesus did at his Last Supper. Even for Paul's community in Corinth, it is highly probable that the Last Supper tradition which Paul quotes in 1.Cor 11:23-25 was not a part of the community's liturgy. The institution words were a background text which gave a special meaning to what the community celebrated, but they were not cited each time the Lord's Supper was celebrated.³²

This, however, can only explain why the redaction left out the institutional words; it cannot explain why the footwashing became the central part of the Johannine Last Supper narrative. One reason may be that this symbolic act had a strong presence in Johannine tradition – probably in

³² Cf. STEIN, *Frühchristliche Mahlfeiern*, 143-146.

a spiritual interpretation. The other reason most certainly is that footwashing was linked to the Eucharist conflicts the redactor wanted to react to. Footwashing in antiquity was the lowest work a person could be made to do. Usually, slaves were used to perform this act or individuals washed their own feet. Inviting guests to a banquet usually meant having a servant deliver this service to arriving guests. How did Christian communities solve this problem? Did they also use slaves? Did the most humble members of the community serve higher ranking Christians? Or did everybody wash his or her own feet before the meal began? We do not really know, but as the Johannine community is usually seen as an egalitarian association without much hierarchy,³³ they definitely practiced footwashing in a way that did not display or produce any hierarchical order within the community. As already indicated above (see footnote 25), the social model for the Johannine community was obviously the peer group of the Hellenistic king. This elitist group of „friends“ who were at court with the king shared entertainment as well as cultural and political life with him and could talk freely to him. As Philo calls Moses a “friend of God,” (Mos 1:156) the religious use of this topic seems to be quite closely related to upper class theology. It is rather improbable that the Johannine community as a whole was ever socially located in the upper class.³⁴ But perhaps we have to imagine the group, which is criticised by the Johannine redactor as a rather small, elitist group of peers, as belonging more or less to the same social stratum. This group within the community might have had problems integrating fully into a socially mixed community. Perhaps they did not have the slightest problem with accepting their social peers as theologically equal, but the challenge to accept persons of lower social status as equals would have been too great for them.

As the Eucharistic meeting was the most concrete manifestation of Christians' corporate identity, it was also the biggest challenge for the rich, mighty, and noble. As we learned from 1.Cor, they had to share their food with the poor and came into contact with the needs of their poorer fellow Christians in general. These problems may have been aggravated even more by the problem of footwashing. This was certainly

³³ Cf. H.-J. KLAUCK, *Gemeinde ohne Amt? Erfahrungen mit der Kirche in den johanneischen Schriften*, in: BZ 29 (1985) 193-220.

³⁴ Under the influence of 1.Cor 1:26 (“not many mighty, not many noble”) early Christianity is conceived as dominantly lower class phenomenon by most scholars.

a big problem for upper class Christians who were neither used to washing their own feet themselves nor to washing the feet of others. They never did this shameful work at home. If they could not accept this loss of honor, the egalitarian structure of Johannine community expressed at the Eucharistic meetings was certainly a good reason to stay away. It was certainly easier to stay at home consuming the bread of life by simply believing in Christ. Why should they bother with the earthly needs of their fellow Christians if the only relevant issue was eternal life? Why should they torture themselves with shameful acts if, by virtue of their faith, they were already children of God, friends of Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit, i.e. already had everything that mattered? That is why the redactor made footwashing the central part of the Last Supper. If Jesus himself washed the feet of his disciples, then nobody has a valid reason to refuse this service to fellow Christians. As no disciple can claim to have a higher rank than his master (John 13:16), all Christians are obliged to wash each others' feet: "If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you owe to each other (*ἀλλήλων*) washing the feet" (John 13:14). This commandment refers quite directly to the footwashing service at the Eucharist, but is also a general symbol for the love Christians owe to each other (13:34).³⁵ This love must be a practical one and cannot be reduced to mere words. Only those who love "in deed and truth" (1.John 3:18) carry God's love in themselves. Jesus not only washed the feet of his friends, but he even gave his life for them; therefore, Christians should at least share their earthly life with their brothers (1.John 3:16-17).

2.5. Gender troubles in John?

It is highly probable that the whole conflict surrounding the Eucharist was a clearly gendered problem. As upper class men were much involved in state religion, it was difficult for them to be members of a religious association which did not tolerate other religious activity – and it is exactly this exclusivity that was claimed by Jews and Christians. This meant that in the first century, most upper class Christians were women

³⁵ John 13:4 tells the reader that Jesus gets up during the meal. That is not the ordinary time for footwashing which should take place before starting the meal. This extraordinary timing calls attention to the extraordinary importance of Jesus' act. It is not only a hygienic service but a sign for his love and for the love the Christians owe to each other.

as they were less involved in state religion duties and therefore had much more freedom to engage in private religious affairs. This sociological effect of patriarchal Roman state religion resulted in a certain gendering of social conflicts in Christian communities: Conflicts between rich and poor were often at the same time conflicts between (mostly) females and (mostly) males. This special gender bias can also be seen in the final Johannine redactor, who is obviously an advocate of the poor, but at the same time promotes a male-centered gender policy. He tries to implement a church structure which gets its bearings from two male prototypes, namely Peter (the pastor-leader) and the Beloved Disciple (the witness-teacher).³⁶ At the same time, the authority of Mary Magdalene as first witness of the resurrection and apostola apostolorum is downplayed.³⁷

If the group which the final redactor criticizes for not taking part in the Eucharist – and thereby showing a lack of love towards their fellow Christians – was female in majority, the problem with footwashing had a special aspect for them as this topic clearly was a gendered one. Feminist scholar Habermann writes on John 13:

In der Fußwaschung spiegelte sich die hierarchische Gliederung der patriarchalen Gesellschaft wider. Am untersten Ende der Hierarchie standen die Sklavinnen; sie mußten ihren Herren und deren männlichen Gästen die Füße waschen. Die nächste Stufe bildeten die Sklaven. In Israel allerdings bildeten die jüdischen Sklaven noch einmal eine Ausnahme: Weil alles persönlich Entehrende von ihnen ferngehalten werden mußte, waren sie zu solchen Diensten nicht verpflichtet. Eine Anspielung auf diesen allerniedrigsten Dienst ist in Psalm 60,10 zu finden, wenn Gott Moab zum Waschbecken für seine Füße machen will. Zu den unerläßlichen Pflichten der Ehefrau gehörte es, ihrem Mann die Füße zu waschen. Diese Pflicht durfte sie nicht - wie andere - an Sklavinnen delegieren. Im Talmud wird argumentiert, diese Verrichtungen seien Ausdruck von besonderer ehelicher Intimität und Liebe. Dennoch handelte es sich um ein Machtgefälle, denn der Ehemann war zu solchen Liebesdiensten nicht verpflichtet. In der Diskussion im Talmud wird deutlich, daß die Fußwaschung durchaus einen erotischen Beigeschmack hatte. Festzuhalten bleibt eine Koppelung von Dienstleistung, Abhängigkeit und Sexualität. Die Fußwaschung in der Antike war ein Akt der Gastfreundschaft, der Verehrung und der Liebe und zugleich ein eindeutiges Signal hierarchischer Machtverhältnisse. Niemaals

³⁶ Cf. KÜGLER, *Das Johannesevangelium*, 224 f.

³⁷ By inserting 20:2-10, the Beloved Disciple is made the first to know about the resurrection. Mary no longer has this privilege although she is still the first to encounter the risen Christ. Cf. KÜGLER, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte*, 314-349.

würde ein freier Mann einem anderen die Füße waschen. Genau dies aber berichtet der Text.³⁸

Footwashing is a mirror of patriarchal society's hierarchical order. The lowest place in this hierarchy was held by female slaves; they had to wash the feet of their masters and those of their masters' male guests. [Male] slaves were on the next level. In Israel, however, Jewish [male] slaves were an exception: Because anything that could cause personal dishonor to them had to be avoided, they were not obligated to perform this service. An allusion to this most humble service can be found in Psalm 60:10 [= 60:8 in most English versions] in which God wants to use Moab as a washbasin for his feet. Washing the feet of her husband is part of the indispensable duties of a married woman. This duty could not be delegated to female slaves. The Talmud explains this by interpreting this service as an expression of special marital intimacy and love. Nevertheless, a hierarchy of power was implied in this act as the husband was not obligated to such services of love. Discussion in the Talmud point out that footwashing also had erotic connotations. To be noted is that footwashing couples service, dependency and sexuality. In antiquity, footwashing was an act of hospitality, respect and love and simultaneously a clear signal of hierarchical power structure. Never would a free man wash the feet of anybody else. But that is exactly what the text reports.³⁹

As footwashing is clearly gendered⁴⁰ and labeled as a typically female service – males who delivered this service were not considered real men –, Christian ladies could interpret footwashing as an attack on their honor in two ways: Firstly, as an attack on their honorable status as a noble female who never washed her own feet, let alone those of anyone else, but used slaves for that purpose. Secondly, they were set back into the status of being “just a woman” which meant an annihilation of the emancipation process they experienced by becoming Christians. It must be clear that taking part in this kind of celebration of the Eucharist was twice the demand, and a quite unacceptable one at that, for Christian ladies. On the other hand, the community could not easily renounce the demand that the egalitarian tradition of early Christianity be applied to

³⁸ R. HABERMANN, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Orte der Frauen*, in: L. Schottroff/M.-Th. Wacker (Hg.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, Gütersloh: Kaiser 1998, 527-541: 536.

³⁹ The English translation of Ruth Habermann's text is my own.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately the “feminist” commentary of A. Reinhartz [The Gospel of John, in: E. Schüssler Fiorenza (Ed.), *Searching the Scriptures II: A Feminist Commentary*, New York: Crossroad 1994, 561-600: 585] does not even mention the gender aspect of footwashing!

all members of the community. Accepting that female nobles rank higher than e.g. male slaves could not be accepted, especially when there were poor Christians who urgently needed help. In the end, the social argument was stronger than the aspect of gender equality, and that is why the adaptation of Christian community structures to pagan patriarchal structures from the end of the first century on was successful and managed to dominate the history of the Christian Church up to now.

3. Summary:

Johannine theology and recent politics of feeding

In John 6, the final redaction develops in three steps a dialectic teaching to present Jesus as bread of life and breadwinner of his people.

The first step is the story of the feeding miracle, which on the one hand shows that Jesus can actually feed the people, but makes clear in the end that he is not an ordinary king who stabilises his reign through charity.

The second step is the first part of the bread of life discourse which tells the reader that Jesus is far beyond earthly kings. He not only gives bread, but is himself the bread from heaven which gives eternal life. This divine bread is consumed by believing in Jesus. Jesus as personified bread of life offers much more than filling one's stomach. He satisfies all spiritual needs and does so forever.

The third step goes back to earth. Those who believe in Jesus believe in a king who gives his life as the ultimate sign of love. His crucified flesh and the blood he shed for his friends are consumed in the Eucharist. As this is the meal that manifests the love of Christ, it has to be celebrated in a way that means sharing his love with others. Simply believing is not enough. Faith must have consequences: loving in practice, eating together, caring for others, serving each other. Faith without these fruits is no faith at all. Church is not only a community of faith but also a community which practices love, integrates people from different social levels, and invites to share. Especially because the spiritual good of eternal life is the only thing that really matters, sharing all earthly goods should be no problem at all for those who carry the love of God within them.

If we look for perspectives for recent politics of feeding, we have to understand that biblical texts are not manuals for modern life. We experience so many problems ancient Christians could never have imagined.

Biblical texts, however, can give a specific stimulus for a new understanding of our problems today. Some aspects of this impetus are:

1. Do not trust royal breadwinners. Neither a colonial king nor a post-colonial leader will readily die for his people. Leaders usually make people die for them. The leaders' public charity first and foremost stabilises their reign and keeps the poor dependent on the leader. They only offer temporary satisfaction and the price which they exalt for their (only earthly) feeding is too high.
2. Trust the one and selfless King. Jesus gives himself. He does not only fill your stomach. He elevates his people to the dignity of his own level of honor. Slavery comes to an end and friendship begins. To those who believe in him, the Son gives the power to become children of God. Nobody can ever take this dignity away. Even the poorest member of a Christian community is equal to the son of God.
3. The new world will not be brought about by a royal figure, neither by a new David nor by a second Jesus. The care for earthly and eternal life has to be taken by the community of God's children. They have to share and serve each other in a selfless way – ignoring the traditional hierarchies of society. As the status of being Child of God is the only thing that matters, all forms of traditional societal hierarchy should be forgotten and earthly goods are only of value if they are used to help others in need.
4. Do not trust people who only talk about heavenly things and by doing so get richer and richer. Those who really are connected to God are those who do not cling to their property, but rather concentrate on showing in their practice of sharing how much love God has given them.
5. Be sceptical of great leaders in general – also in the realm of religion. One of the most important yet often overseen details in the Johannine version of the Last Supper is the commandment that states that footwashing is a duty Christians owe to each other. There should be no hierarchy, neither in helping nor in love, nor in feeding. The Johannine ideal is a Christian community of mutual respect and solidarity. It may sometimes be necessary for one person to take on the role of Jesus, but in general, Jesus should be represented by all Christians together. In a time in which the religious market is full of

- prophets, in which popes and bishops organise the Church as a one-man-show, this might be a quite important critical message.
6. Social justice and gender equality belong together. The Church should understand itself as a social room which already belongs to the new world of God. In this divine world, death no longer has any power and love “in deed and truth” (1.John 3:18) shows the presence of God. The kind of love appropriate for the new world is much more than the charity kings, emperors, revolution leaders or upper class people usually offer. Real divine love is about justice and accepting the poor as equals. Therefore, the struggle for social justice is a key task for any church which strives to be truly Christian. And social justice should not be separated from gender fairness. The history of social conflicts in early Christianity shows that the cross-conflict (poor men versus wealthy women) only results in a denial of women’s human and Christian dignity for which not only rich women have to pay in the end, but poor women as well, and perhaps even more.
 7. The Eucharist should be rediscovered as an actual meal based on solidarity between men and women, between young and old, between rich and poor. Most churches in Africa tend to avoid actual eating at the Lord’s Supper. This is simply bad colonial heritage from Western churches which should be overcome. The early Christian tradition of the Eucharist as an actual meal in universal solidarity should be joined with old African traditions of common meals. Such a sharing of a meal in real communion could bring the African church into the role of prophetic Christian teacher. It would serve as a prophetic-critical sign to African politicians as well as to global Christianity: It would tell the political sphere that social justice is the best way to enable people to feed each other. To Christianity (especially in the West), it would communicate an invitation to return to Christian origins. This really would bring *post-colonial* Christianity into being: The African church would no longer be in the passive role of victim, but in the active role of evangelising itself as well as re-evangelising the colonial churches in the West.