

**Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Community:
Further Remarks on J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival***

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Abstract

It is disputed whether the conflicts in the Corinthian congregation were influenced by social factors or not. This article begins by discussing the social status of Paul, which may have shaped his outlook, and Paul's statements on the congregation as a whole. The main part analyses two conflicts concerning Christian and pagan cultic meals. Taking seriously the criticism of J.J. Meggitt in his book *Paul, Poverty, and Survival* (1998) it makes a case for the sociological explanation of the group conflicts visible at the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11.17-34) and the controversy about idol meat (1 Cor 8.1-10.33), reworking old arguments concerning meal habits and adding some new arguments based, for example, on the social function of the *macellum*.

For a while there seemed to be a consensus among New Testament scholars with a socio-historical approach that conflicts in the Corinthian congregation were influenced by social factors. The degree of these influencing factors has been subject to discussion, yet their existence has never been disputed. This sociological explanation of the Corinthian conflicts was based on sophisticated conclusions drawn from texts that were not, however, written with the intent of conveying sociological information to modern readers. This fact may have been occasionally forgotten, and so it is understandable that J.J. Meggitt has contested these conclusions in his penetrating book on Paul.¹ His arguments are even more significant since

1. J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). Meggitt is not the only one who doubts that we can interpret the conflicts at Corinth in sociological terms. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Lindemann also prefers explanations that do not take into account the social stratification of this congregation. See

he accepts the socio-historical approach. Therefore the discussion of his arguments, which started in this periodical,² shall be continued by a further article.

In order to avoid an uncritical sociological interpretation of a text we must first take into consideration the social position of its author. That which an individual writes about other people, especially regarding social position and status, is influenced by the writer's own social position. Therefore I will start with a short discussion of the social status we attribute to Paul, the main source for our reconstruction of the social conflicts in the Corinthian congregation.³ In the second part I will analyse statements about the Corinthian congregation as a whole. Parts three and four deal with two conflicts concerning special groups within this congregation, which are most likely rooted in social factors: the conflict around the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11) and the conflict between the strong and the weak (1 Cor. 8–10).

The Status of Paul

According to Acts, Paul was a citizen of Rome and of Tarsus.⁴ We obtain additional information on the social status of Paul from Dio Chrysostom (40–c. 120 CE), who deals with citizenship in Tarsus in one of his speeches (*Or.* 34). Writing within a generation of Paul's time, Dio Chrysostom encounters two classes of citizens at Tarsus: a broader circle including all those who were admitted to the public assembly of the people (to the ἐκκλησίᾳ) and a narrower circle, which included those who fulfilled at least one of the following two criteria: either (1) they had to be enrolled in the register of citizenship by the responsible official, or (2) they had to pay a sum of 500 drachmas.⁵ The broader circle included rather poor

A. Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (HNT, 9/I; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000).

2. Cf. G. Theissen, 'The Social Structure of Pauline Communities. Some Critical remarks on J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *JSNT* 84 (2001), pp. 65–84.

3. Cf. R.F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

4. Whereas the tradition concerning his citizenship of Tarsus is widely accepted, the tradition concerning his Roman citizenship is disputed. Cf. W. Stegemann, 'War der Apostel Paulus ein römischer Bürger?', *ZNW* 78 (1987), pp. 200–29. The forthcoming book of M. Graffam-Minkus, *Der soziale Status des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002), was not yet available to me.

5. A sum of 500 drachmas corresponds to approximately 2000 *sesterces*—the wages of a legionary for about two years.

people called 'weavers of linen' (λινουργοί). The narrower circle, who were granted the privileges of full citizenship, included other craftsmen such as dyers, shoemakers and carpenters. Paul was a tentmaker (σκηνοποιός) and would have worked with either leather or linen.⁶ In either case he would have belonged to the circle of privileged craftsmen because he processed linen, like the dyers, or worked with other materials such as leather.⁷ In spite of the fact that Meggitt calls for a more careful reading of Dio Chrysostom, he does not discuss the crucial question of whether Paul belonged to the narrower privileged circle or broader non-privileged circle of craftsmen in Tarsus.⁸

The question is, however, whether the debate on citizenship at the time of Dio Chrysostom reflects the state of citizenship rights during the time of Paul. Dio himself says that the city owes its country, its constitution and its reputation to Augustus (*Or.* 34.8). This emperor had sent his teacher Athenodorus, a Stoic philosopher from Tarsus, to his hometown (Strabo, *Geogr.* 14.5.13-15). Athenodorus changed the constitution, which had been drafted in favour of the people by a certain Boethus. It was probably during this reform that the influence of the common people was reduced in order to establish a timocratic constitution. This also corresponded to the general Roman policy.⁹ The ambiguity of the Tarsian situation, that is

6. It is less probable that he worked with *cilicium*, a specific product of Cilicia. *Cilicium* was a material made from goatskin hair, which sheltered against coldness and wetness, but it was rarely used for tents. Therefore, thought T. Zahn, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas* (KNT, 5; Leipzig: Deichert, 21921), pp. 632-34, Paul made tents from leather. P. Lampe, 'Paulus – Zeltmacher', *BZ* 31 (1987), pp. 256-61, argued convincingly that he used linen to make tents.

7. That the difference between linen weavers and other craftsmen in Tarsus was not insuperable in the eyes of an outsider can be deduced from the fact that Dio Chrysostom pleads for equal treatment of all craftsmen (as Lampe, 'Paulus', p. 259, emphasizes). But that the difference was significant within Tarsus can be concluded from the internal conflict in this city.

8. Meggitt, *Paul*, p. 83, is right in saying that the word πολίτης as such tells us 'nothing about Paul's economic history'. The unprivileged craftsmen (the linen weavers) also claimed to be citizens, but the fact that Paul probably did belong to the more privileged craftsmen tells us even more about his status in Tarsus than the fact that he was a citizen of this city.

9. Cf. F. Vittinghoff, 'Europäische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in der Römischen Kaiserzeit', §3 'Gesellschaft', in F. Vittinghoff, *Handbuch der Europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte*, I (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), pp. 161-369. See p. 200 where he writes, 'In griechisch-hellenistischen Poleis mit demokratischer Tradition war die römische Politik von Anfang an bemüht, zumindest auf lange

the existence of citizens with full and limited rights, was the combined effect of an older democratic constitution before the reform and a younger timocratic constitution introduced by this reform.¹⁰ At any rate, Dio Chrysostom dates the change of the constitution to the time before Paul. Thus the conditions that Dio Chrysostom met in Tarsus probably existed already during the time of Paul.

Possessing Tarsian and Roman citizenship proves that Paul had a privileged juridical status compared to other people, who, like Paul, did not belong to the power elite of the Roman empire. It is true that the privileged juridical status of a person does not automatically coincide with economic prosperity, but the possession of such status speaks more in favour of a moderate prosperity than its absence. Pliny confirms that there were Roman citizens among the Christians (*Ep.* 10.96.4). It is not surprising that Paul does not mention his Roman citizenship. We know that many Jews in Rome were (as previous freedmen) Roman citizens, though we cannot infer this from their burial inscriptions. Whether or not a person was a Roman citizen did not increase their reputation in Jewish circles, but it was obviously important in the circle of the most excellent Theophilus, whom Luke addresses in his works. Last but not least we should add that Paul must have had an education that was beyond the elementary school level and at least comparable to that of grammar school.¹¹ His letters demonstrate that he even mastered some rhetorical skills (despite 1 Cor. 2.1-5).

Sicht die Volksversammlung zu schwächen, ökonomisch Leistungsfähige durch Zensusqualifikation in die politisch-kommunale Verantwortung zu setzen und die politisch-administrative Kontinuität durch langfristige, möglichst lebenslängliche Mitgliedschaft im Rat sicherzustellen'.

10. Perhaps this graduated citizenship was deliberately introduced in Tarsus. In Rome there were also some who had full Roman citizenship, and others, like many freedmen, who had the minor citizenship of Latin law. Cf. 'Latini Iuniani', PW, VI, cols. 1170-71.

11. I do not mean to say that Paul attended a pagan grammar school. The Jewish synagogue probably had an education system of its own. But his writings presuppose that he knew much more than the average man needed in everyday life. Schools beyond the elementary school level were 'monopolized' by the upper classes, as Vittinghoff states, 'Gesellschaft', pp. 243-49. Paul must not be seen as isolated. His disciples successfully created letters in his name, which presupposes exercises called 'Progymnasmata', in which the pupils in the grammar school had to imitate exemplary texts (cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9; 10.5).

Statements about the Corinthian Congregation as a Whole

General statements of Paul concerning the Corinthian congregation or parts of it are always shaped by his rhetorical intention. We must never forget that Paul's intention is not to deliver sociological information, but to direct the thoughts and attitudes of his audience. Paul's filtered vision is not an obstacle for our analysis. We often encounter some statements that contradict his own perspective. It is in these contradictory moments of Pauline rhetoric that we can grasp some fragments of reality.

The statement pertaining to the whole congregation in 1 Cor. 1.26-29 is embedded in a passage that is concerned with the basic theological event of the early Christian religion, that of the cross and election. Immediately preceding this text Paul has stressed the contrast between the cross and that which is deemed wisdom and power in the world. If he now stresses that there are not many wise according to worldly standards, not many powerful and not many of noble birth (εὐγενεῖς) in the Corinthian congregation, the last element of this enumeration surpasses the previous context, which spoke only of wisdom and power and not of nobility.¹² This last category (people of noble birth) does not imply that the εὐγενεῖς in 1 Cor. 1.26 belonged to people of low birth who attributed to themselves a fictive high birth. It is correct that even slaves were called 'Eugenes' in those times, but this does not elucidate our text. In 1 Cor. 1.26 the three groups of wise, powerful and εὐγενεῖς are opposed to those who are 'nothing' in the world, that is in society. The nobodies are not labelled as 'being of noble birth'. They are rather contrasted with these people.¹³ Above all we should consider the theological intention of Pauline thought. Paul radicalizes in 1 Cor. 1.26-29 the biblical motif of the God who exalts the low and who chooses those who are nothing. It is not in keeping with this biblical thought pattern to mention people of elevated social rank. It

12. Other triadic traditions in the background of 1 Cor. 1.26 do not contain this third element either. Jer. 9.22 (LXX) speaks of the wise, powerful (ἰσχυρός) and rich. The citation of Jer. 9.22 in 1 Cor. 1.30, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord', shows that Paul may have had this triad in mind. If so, he has changed the third element. Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.5.2 is not evidence for the triad of 1 Cor. 1.26, but for *bona honesta, potentia* and *nobilitas* as the objectives of a teacher of wisdom (*sapientiae*). Here wisdom is not placed on the same level as the other moral goods. Cicero, *Pro Plancio* 51 speaks of a person who is *sapiens, nobilis* and *potens*.

13. Therefore the good observations in Meggitt, *Paul*, pp. 104-105 n. 145, do not fit his interpretation of 1 Cor. 1.26-29.

would have been more consistent if only the non-educated, the powerless and the ‘nobodies’ had been named as members of the Corinthian congregation. If Paul nevertheless hints at exceptions to his picture, it is due to the fact that in these exceptions reality breaks through the Pauline rhetoric and we must assume that these exceptions had a great significance in the social reality of the Corinthian congregation.¹⁴

In 2 Cor. 8 Paul promotes his collection for Jerusalem and makes some statements about the economic status of the whole congregation. We must not take them at face value. Anybody who promotes a collection has to develop a rhetoric of ethical exaggeration in order to win offerings from his addressees. We may therefore guess that the ‘extreme poverty’ of the Macedonian congregations (2 Cor. 8.2) is as much exaggerated rhetoric as the alleged prosperity of the Corinthians or the ‘equality’ that he wants to produce between all congregations (2 Cor. 8.14). Yet for two reasons it is impossible to say that all of Paul’s words are mere rhetoric. First, Paul expects that representatives of the Macedonian congregations will come to Corinth, so that the Corinthians could immediately hear and see whether the Macedonians really were as poor as Paul had said they were. Paul would become untrustworthy if their appearance at Corinth disclaimed his own statements on their poverty. Second, the same is true for the congregation at Jerusalem. Paul wanted a delegation with some individuals from Corinth to deliver the collection to Jerusalem. If the delegates did not meet real poverty there, Paul would be compromised as the initiator of the collection. Consequently we have to assume that the Corinthian congregation was actually slightly more affluent than the Macedonian ones and that both were better off than the Jerusalem congregation.¹⁵

If we now combine both statements—the first statement concerning a minority of well-to-do people in the Corinthian congregation (according to 1 Cor. 1.26-29) and the second concerning the material superiority of the Corinthians as compared with the Macedonians—we will arrive at the

14. Meggitt does not support the thesis that 1 Cor. 1.26 is irony. Cf. W. Wuellner, ‘Traditions and Interpretation of the “Wise–Powerful–Noble” Triad in 1 Cor. 1.26’, in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Evangelica*, VII (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1973), pp. 557-62. Irony would say: As is generally known there are many wise, powerful, and noble by birth among you—presupposing at the same time that this contradicts the social reality at Corinth.

15. Cf. J.M.G. Barclay, ‘Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity’, *JSNT* 47 (1992), pp. 49-74. Barclay is right in supposing a social difference between the congregations in Thessalonica and Corinth.

conclusion that this small minority of rather well-to-do people must have been of great significance for the whole congregation. In Corinth there were many more people above the subsistence minimum than in Macedonia.

Group Conflicts Visible at the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11.17-34)

The Corinthian congregation comprises many groups: adherents of different missionaries (1 Cor. 1-4), ascetics (ch. 7), pneumatics (ch. 12) and sceptics with regard to the resurrection of the dead (15.12-19). These different groups are not equivalent to different social classes. There may be such an observable distinction, however, between groups that form on the basis of either different behaviour at the Christian cultic meal, the Lord's Supper (11.17-34), or conflicting attitudes toward pagan cultic meals (8.1-10). Common meals always enact status and social communality. That is why, from the Lord's Supper, it is perhaps possible to draw conclusions about the social status of the participants and the social function of the meals. But such conclusions are nevertheless difficult to reach. The difficulty arises not from theological patterns of thought or a rhetoric of ethical exaggeration, but from the fact that the language of rites is condensed and leaves many things unexpressed that the participants take for granted. It is therefore disputed whether the controversies around these meals (the Lord's Supper and pagan meals) were conditioned by social factors.

Meggitt assumes that the Corinthian congregation did not celebrate the Lord's Supper as a 'normal meal'. According to him they did not drink and eat more than the sacred elements, that is the one bread and the one cup.¹⁶ This, however, is very improbable. The analogy between pagan offering meals and the Lord's Supper (in 1 Cor. 10.21) presupposes that the Christian meals were no less filling than the pagan meals. And the order to drink the cup 'after eating' (μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι, 11.25) refers not exclusively to the eating of the sacred elements but to the κυριακὸν δεῖπνον as a whole (11.20), consisting of eating and drinking according to 11.21. Paul speaks even of 'drunkenness' during this meal.¹⁷ The cup

16. Cf. Meggitt, *Paul*, p. 190 n. 2 regarding 'the one bread (1 Cor. 10.17) and the one cup (10.21)'.

17. Meggitt, *Paul*, p. 191, understands 'hunger' and 'drunkenness' in 1 Cor. 11.21 as metaphors for misguided behaviour. But these terms refer to the ἴδιον δεῖπνον, the 'own meal'. Paul may exaggerate when he speaks of being drunk, but he would make a

'after the supper' is only the ceremonial end of the meal, which had already involved drinking. This last cup also corresponds to Jewish meal customs. If some have only little to eat and others nothing at all, this refers not only to the sacred elements but also to eating and drinking in general. Probably some began eating their meal earlier than others. προλαμβάνειν must be understood in a temporal sense.¹⁸ The most controversial point of Meggitt's argument, however, is his rejection of the interpretation that those who have something to eat, and a meal of their own, are socially more elevated Christians than those who do not.¹⁹ Yet there are a number of observations and arguments that support this traditional interpretation:

1. It is true that Paul's question, 'Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?' (1 Cor. 11.22) does not necessarily imply the possession of houses but may refer to rented apartments. Yet Paul does not say, 'Why do you not eat at home (ἐν οἴκῳ)?',²⁰ as he does in 11.34. On the contrary, he creates an opposition between those 'who have (ἔχειν) houses' and those 'who have not (μὴ ἔχοντες)'. In this way there is a strong emphasis on 'having' that may imply possession. If so, this leads us to the next point.

2. Those who 'have nothing' have nothing to eat. But does this exclude the possibility that they also have nothing in a more general sense? The expressions οἱ τι ἔχοντες and οἱ οὐκ ἔχοντες are often used to refer to the rich and the poor.²¹ ἔχειν may be used by Paul without an object in which

fool of himself if he warned the Corinthians against drunkenness that comes from only one cup for the whole congregation. Even as a metaphor this would be very odd.

18. Cf. P. Lampe, 'Das Korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis', *ZNW* 82 (1991), pp. 183-213. At p. 191 n. 28 he checks the evidence that speaks in favour of a non-temporal meaning of προλαμβάνειν, with the result that we always find a temporal element; and in an inscription of Epidauros the non-temporal meaning seems to be due to a mistake of the stonecutter, who intended to write προσλαμβάνειν (SIG³ 1170.7.9.15).

19. This criticism is shared also by Lindemann, *Erste Korintherbrief*, pp. 247-61, but with different arguments.

20. Or he might have said οἴκοι, which we do not find anywhere else in the New Testament.

21. Cf. the following pieces of evidence: οἱ τι ἔχοντες, in Herodotus 6.22, refers to the rich people who prefer emigrating to Samos to living an unfree life under the Persians; ὁ ἔχων is in Sophocles, *Ajax* 157 the rich; οἱ οὐκ ἔχοντες are in Euripides, *Suppl.* 238-44 the poor in opposition to the rich and the middle class: 'There are three divisions in society: first there are the wealthy, who are harmful and endlessly grasping; then come the poor and needy (οἱ δ' οὐκ ἔχοντες καὶ σπανίζοντες βίου), who are

case it refers to possessing material goods. This is the case when he admonishes the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 8.11-12 to offer towards the collection 'out of what you have' (ἐκ τοῦ ἔχειν). This expression reminds us of the standard expression in benefactor inscriptions referring to donations from one's own means (ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων). Paul emphasizes that all offerings are welcome 'according to what a man has, not according to what he has not' (καθὸ ἐὰν ἔχη...οὐ καθὸ οὐκ ἔχει) (2 Cor. 8.12).²² When he says paradoxically about himself ὡς μηδὲν ἔχοντες καὶ πάντα κατέχοντες (2 Cor. 6.10), he does not exclude the literal meaning of 'possessing nothing'.

3. Paul criticizes those who are eating their own meal along with the Lord's Supper for putting the others to shame. This may refer to the superior status they demonstrate by the inequality of meals. The moral duty not to put someone to shame is a prevailing topic in Jewish texts. I will cite only one anecdote of Rabbi Jannai as an illustration: 'He [once] saw a man give a *zuz* to a poor person publicly, so he said to him: It had been better that you had not given him, than now that you have given him publicly and put him to shame' (*b. Hag.* 5a).²³

4. If the privileged started earlier with their meal, we may suppose that they enjoyed 'time sovereignty', which speaks more in favour than against their elevated social status.²⁴

dangerous as they are ruled by envy and cajoled by the words of corrupt leaders into malicious attacks upon the rich; it is the third group, the moderates, who are a city's lifeline; they are the ones who maintain whatever government the citizen-body establishes' (trans. J. Davie; London: Penguin, 1998).

22. Meggitt, *Paul*, p. 119, says that 'in the great majority of relevant parallel uses of οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες, the substantive participle possesses a specified "object"'. But this is not true if we think not only of the participle of ἔχειν. ἔχειν is used absolutely and may so far mean 'possess'. This is proved by LXX Prov. 13.7: εἰσὶν οἱ πλουτίζοντες ἑαυτοὺς μηδὲν ἔχοντες; Sir. 13.5; 14.11. The gnome in Mk 4.25 takes ἔχειν absolutely. In Lk. 19.26 the same gnome is inserted into the similitude of the talents and refers to material goods. Therefore we may say that 1 Cor. 11.22 and 2 Cor. 8.12 are not isolated cases, when we interpret 'have' as 'possess'. Lindemann, *Erste Korintherbrief*, p. 252, argues similarly to Meggitt: The μὴ ἔχοντες are not the poor but those who do not have something in a concrete situation. But even if this is the primary meaning in our context, we can never exclude that those who have nothing in a concrete situation are not those who generally do not have much.

23. H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, I (Munich: Beck, 1926), p. 391.

24. It would be an anachronism to think of today's stressed managers with a full-time schedule and compare them with ordinary people of today who enjoy their free time. In antiquity the slaves and servants did not have regulated free time.

Let us sum up all these observations and arguments. In my opinion it is possible to give a coherent interpretation of 1 Cor. 11.17-34: At the Lord's Supper two groups with differing social status appear. Their conflict is conditioned by social stratification within the congregation. The following comparative material from antiquity will support this interpretation.

In antiquity it was generally agreed that participants in common meals should have equal status. There existed different views on how to achieve this equality. The aristocrat Pliny tried to realize equality by eating and drinking the same as his freedmen who ranked below him (*Ep.* 2.6). The client Martial required his patron to give him the same meal as himself (*Epigr.* 3.60). Both examples show that equality was not at all a matter of course, but an ideal. This is confirmed by Lucian of Samosata. In his 'sarturnalian negotiations' he polemicized against the widespread practice of providing unequal portions at common meals for participants of different social status and thus developed a utopia of real equality.

Two texts with fundamental statements on meal fellowship are of special interest, because they share the idea of equality with Paul, but realize it in an entirely different way. According to Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.14.1, Socrates educated participants of common meals to practise equality. He gave orders to distribute only the meat of those people who brought small pieces. Those who brought many large pieces of meat felt ashamed, because they did not contribute to the common feast. Plutarch tells of a tradition regarding Lycurgus, who instituted common meals in order that 'there may be for all an equal portion of food and drink and so that...the rich man may have no advantage at all over the poor man' (Plutarch, *Mor.* 226E). He gave orders that the rich should not eat beforehand at home and so come already satiated to the common meals (*Mor.* 226F-227A). In the *Life of Lycurgus* Plutarch tells that the rich people therefore were upset and even tried to stone Lycurgus (*Lycurgus* 11). If Plutarch says that this outcome was sponsored by the rich, we may conclude *per analogiam* that also in the Corinthian congregation tensions between rich and poor were at stake. The problem faced by Paul was the same as that demonstrated by the rich in Plutarch's tradition.

If we combine these historical analogies with my interpretation of 1 Cor. 11.17-22 we can say that the sociological explanation of the conflict at the Lord's Supper is more satisfying in historical aspects than a mere theological interpretation. The well-to-do people in the Corinthian congregation adopted from their environment a pattern of behaviour that some criticized already at that time, namely that the rich ate more and better

food than the poor at the Lord's Supper. It is this against which Paul protests.²⁵ Generally, we can say that Paul uses the symbolism of the Lord's Supper as a means on the one hand to promote integration within the congregation (in 1 Cor. 11.17-39) and on the other hand, to promote separation from the pagan environment (in 1 Cor. 10.14-33). This leads to my next point.

Groups at Corinth and the Controversy about Idol Meat

Meggitt completely refutes my thesis that the conflict between the strong and the weak at Corinth can be explained by class-specific tensions caused by social stratification.²⁶ There are two significant questions in this controversy:

1. Are there class-specific habits regarding the consumption of meat? Since the poor were not accustomed to eating meat outside of cultic feasts, they would have been more inclined to associate meat with idolatry than would the rich, who bought meat at the *macellum* for everyday use, that is

25. The arguments of Lindemann, *Erste Korintherbrief*, pp. 252-53, against a sociological interpretation of 1 Cor. 11.17-34 are not convincing either: (1) If there were social factors in the background, Paul would have spoken openly of them as he did in 1.26-29 (p. 253). But I think that Paul can simply hint at these factors because the topic of equality and inequality was familiar to everyone at that time. In my view, these hints are very clear (see above). (2) The sociological explanation presupposes that Paul addresses 1 Cor. 11.20-22 exclusively to the rich. Nowhere does he mark a change of his addressees. Therefore the whole passage (11.17-34) would be addressed to the rich in the Corinthian congregation (p. 253). However, I think that Paul as a matter of course always speaks to the whole congregation and this is also the case in those passages where he criticizes the well-to-do Christians. The poor should hear how he admonishes them!

26. Meggitt, *Paul*, pp. 197-98, states correctly that there is only evidence for the term 'the weak' in 1 Cor. 8.9 (deduced from 'weak conscience' in 8.7-12). The corresponding term 'the strong' is missing in 1 Cor. 8-10, but appears in the opposition between ἰσχυροί and δυνάτοί in Rom. 15.1. But in Rom. 14 Paul also speaks first of those who are 'weak in their faith' only (14.1). He continues with more general references to those who have 'faith' (14.2) and who are 'weak' (14.2). He does not speak of 'the strong' before 15.1, though he undoubtedly presupposes their existence in Rom. 14. The same may be true for 1 Corinthians. In 1 Cor. 10.22 he may allude to the 'strong ones' when he asks, 'Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger (ἰσχυρότεροι) than he?' There is another allusion in 1 Cor. 4.10 where he addresses the whole congregation as 'strong' (ἰσχυροί). In this passage Paul applies an attribute to the whole congregation that previously (in 1.26-29) referred to a minority.

outside a cultic context. Meggitt has shown that the poor did have the opportunity to eat meat in their *popinae* (public houses). Consequently, eating meat was not an exclusive characteristic of those with high status.

2. Are there class-specific patterns of sociability? Did the rich invite only their companions with the consequence that the 'strong' met other 'strong' or pagans? Meggitt and other exegetes assume that Paul presupposes the presence of weak Christians at these gatherings (10.23-33). If the strong and weak shared the same social life, they cannot belong to different social classes.

Meat consumption increased in the course of ancient history.²⁷ The everyday food of the common people, however, continued to be vegetarian. Seneca recommended that Lucilius experimentally live a simple life in order to cope with the fear of social descent. He should do with hard bread (*panis durus et sordidus*) (Seneca, *Ep.* 2.18.7). Water and pearl barley should be his pleasure (2.18.10). And he should not be proud of it: 'You are doing what many thousand slaves, many thousand poor are doing (*quod multa milia servorum, multa milia pauperum faciunt*)' (2.18.8). Here we can perceive some reality: the everyday food of the common people was vegetarian. If it was non-vegetarian in the Corinthian congregation, we must assume the presence of a high percentage of rather affluent people.

It is true that the *popinae* belonged to the life of the common people. Many poor people in the cities did not even have their own kitchen stove in their rented apartments and could not prepare warm meals.²⁸ They had to buy them in the *popinae*. But generally they bought vegetarian food. Meat was only affordable to a few people and it was reserved for special occasions.²⁹ Nero restricted the sale of food in the *popinae* to vegetarian

27. Cf. 'Fleischspeisen', PW, IV, cols. 555-56: 'Das Angebot verbesserte sich und in der röm. Kaiserzeit schließlich wurde in allen Schichten Schlachtviehfleisch gegessen (Juvenal XI.78-85). Dabei hielt sich der Verbrauch vor allem in den städtischen Unterschichten weiterhin in engen Grenzen, während F(leischspeisen) in vornehmen Kreisen ein alltägliches Genußmittel waren' (col. 556). Cf. 'Fleischkonsum', PW, IV, cols. 553-55: 'Grundsätzlich waren im Imperium Romanum viele Fleischsorten verfügbar, aber ein großer Teil der Bevölkerung hat allenfalls sporadisch Fleisch gegessen'.

28. Cf. 'Imbißstube', in K.W. Weeber, *Alltag im Alten Rom* (Zürich: Artemis, 1995), pp. 187-88. The houses with many floors did not have chimneys.

29. Cf. 'Gaststätte', in Weeber, *Alltag*, pp. 128-33. See pp. 130-31, 'Auch in den *popinae* (Speise-G.) war die Speisekarte recht übersichtlich. Es gibt vegetarische Kost wie Erbsen, Bohnen, Zwiebeln, Gurken, Eier und Käse, daneben Früchte der Jahreszeit

food.³⁰ His policy was aimed at the 'banquets' of the common people. Nero's measures are recorded by Suetonius as laws against luxury!³¹ And Juvenal when dreaming of meat in the *popinae* mentions previous birthday celebrations (11.81-82). Even though this is more of an associative connection, the meat dishes of the *popinae* are probably in reference to small banquets at personal feasts. They are not a part of everyday life.

I should add that Nero was not the only emperor who restricted meat consumption in the *popinae*. Since Tiberius, several emperors tried to prohibit meat in the *popinae*. Similar measures were introduced by Claudius, Nero and Vespasian.³² They show indirectly that people ate

wie Äpfel, Pflaumen, Trauben, Beeren und Kastanien (Ps.-Verg. *Copa* 17ff.; Macrob., *Sat.* VII 14.1), ein paar Fleischgerichte für die etwas wohlhabenderen Gäste (Juvenal XI.81; Horace, *Ep.* I 14.21) sowie Süßigkeiten in Form von Kuchen und anderem Backwerk (Plautus, *Poen.* 41ff.). Meals containing meat are mentioned by Juvenal and Horace when they contrast the poor life in the countryside with the rich life in the city, i.e. when they are describing with some irony the luxury of the cities. Horace speaks in *Ep.* I.14.21 of the 'fornix...et uncta popinae' of the tavern and the delicacies of the *popinae*, which evokes a longing for the life in the city. (*Uncta popinae* does not necessarily imply meat.) Juvenal (c. 67–c. 150 CE) speaks of 'pork in the warm inn'. But he contrasts this food immediately with previous eating habits: 'For feast days, in olden times, they would keep a side of dried pork, hanging from an open rack, or put before the relations a flitch of birthday bacon, with the addition of some fresh meat (*nova...carne*), if there happened to be a sacrifice (*hostia*) to supply it' (Juvenal 11.82-85). He knows that meat, above all fresh meat from sacrificed animals, was reserved for the great feasts of life. It was in his days, i.e. towards the end of the first and the beginning of the second century, that meat started to become a 'luxury' in everyday life as well. We may conclude from this that the common people did not eat meat in their *popinae* regularly but only on special occasions such as birthdays. Meat was an exception. This is also confirmed by the restrictive policy of the emperors who outlawed meat consumption in the *popinae* (see notes below).

30. Cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2: 'The public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale'.

31. Perhaps these laws were also promulgated against clubs among the people, which often were suspected to be the stronghold of political opposition. The life of clubs consisted in banquets and it was probably the clubs that were most affected by the prohibition of banquets.

32. Cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 34.1. At the beginning of his reign Claudius liberalized the sale of meat in the *popinae* and encountered resistance (according to Suetonius, *Claudius* 38.2). According to Dio Cassius 60.6.7, he changed his policy later on: 'He abolished the taverns where they were wont to gather and drink, and commanded that

meat in the *popinae* but also that the *popinae* did not depend entirely on meat sales.

My conclusion is that meat consumption among the common people was very limited and restricted to exceptional situations. Above all this is true for good, fresh meat, which was only consumed at cultic feasts where the sacrifices provided meat of better quality. Juvenal strongly emphasizes that in previous days during anniversary celebrations it was unusual to eat fresh meat from a sacrificed animal. Dried pork was more common (Juvenal 11.81-85). The fresh meat was taken from selected animals. Only faultless animals could be sacrificed and only such sacrificed meat conveyed the blessing of the gods.

The meal habits of the affluent and rich people differed in another regard from those of the common people. The rich bought their meat at the *macellum*. According to comprehensive research by Claire de Ruyt (1983) on the *macella* of the Roman empire,³³ which Meggitt does not include in his discussion, the archaeologically preserved *macella* are imposing buildings. Their architecture shows that they belonged to an affluent milieu. The master of the house went there to shop for his guests³⁴ and to meet his equals. So did Lucius, the hero of the novel *The Golden Ass*, who met his old fellow-student Pythias at the meat market. The latter had advanced to the status of an aedile responsible for the *macellum* (Apuleius, *Met.* 1.24.3–1.25.5). The prices were high and rather unaffordable for those on a small budget.³⁵ Those who had enough money could buy either meat

no spoiled meat or hot water should be sold; and he punished some who disobeyed in this matter'. Nero and Vespasian continued this policy of restriction (cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2 and Dio Cassius 65.10.3, who says of Vespasian, 'Therefore even in the taverns he allowed nothing cooked to be sold except pulse').

33. C. de Ruyt, *Macellum: Marché alimentaire des Romains* (Publications d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie de l'université catholique de Louvain, 35; Louvain: Institut supérieur d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art collège Érasme, 1983). Her results were applied to 1 Corinthians for the first time by A. Rakotoharintsifa, *Conflits à Corinthe: Eglise et société selon 1 Corinthiens. Analyse socio-historique* (Le monde de la bible, 36; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1997), pp. 181-84.

34. In Plautus, *Pseud.* 1.2 the master of the house goes shopping in the *macellum* even on his birthday—in spite of his many slaves.

35. Concerning the high prices, cf. Juvenal 4.25-27: 'A price bigger than you need have paid for the fisherman himself, a price for which you might buy a whole estate in some province, or a still larger one in Apulia'. Plautus, *Aul.* 2.8.372-75: Euclio wants to shop for the wedding of his daughter but he returns from the *macellum* with nothing at all: 'Off I go to the market—ask for fish! Very dear! And lamb—dear...and beef—

that was slaughtered in a temple or normal meat.³⁶ From this we can conclude that the fact that Paul presupposes the purchase of meat in the *macellum* as a matter of course in 1 Cor. 10.25³⁷ is an indication of the presence of well-to-do people in the Corinthian congregation.³⁸

Apart from meat purchases from the *macellum* in 10.25, Paul mentions another situation where Christians came into contact with sacrificial meat—the invitations by pagan hosts (10.27-29). For us it is significant to know whether a ‘strong’ Christian who accepted such an invitation was

dear...and veal and tunny and pork...everything—dear, everything! Yes, and all the dearer for my not having any money! It just made me furious, and seeing I couldn’t buy anything, I up and left.’ De Ruyt, *Macellum*, p. 371, states, ‘le macellum n’existait que pour ceux qui pouvaient payer la nourriture riche’. The *macellum* made money above all from sales for banquets. Vespasian knew that he would support the *macellarii* economically by holding banquets: ‘He gave constant dinner-parties, too, usually formally and sumptuously, to help the market men (*macellarios*)’ (Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 19.1).

36. This is stressed by D.A. Koch, “‘Alles, was ἐν μακέλλῳ verkauft wird, eßt...’ Die *macella* von Pompeji, Gerasa und Korinth und ihre Bedeutung für die Auslegung von 1 Cor. 10.25’, *ZNW* 90 (1998), pp. 194-219; likewise, “‘Seid unanstößig für Juden und für Griechen und für die Gemeinde Gottes’ (1 Cor. 10.32). Christliche Identität im μακέλλον in Korinth und bei Privateinladungen’, in M. Trowitzsch (ed.), *Paulus, Apostel Jesu Christi* (Festschrift G. Klein; Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), pp. 35-54. A *macellum* did not necessarily have an altar for sacrifices. The *macellum* at Pompeii was unique in having two altars. It has fostered the erroneous claim that sacrificial cult and meat sales were always spatially connected. Since no other *macellum* besides the one at Pompeii contains a sacrificial altar we must correct this notion.

37. We should note that Paul does not say, ‘If you go shopping at the *macellum*, do not ask after the origin of the meat’, but, ‘Anything sold at the *macellum* you may eat’ (1 Cor. 10.25). He does not necessarily presuppose that the Christians themselves bought meat at the *macellum*, but that they were often presented with meat bought there by other people.

38. De Ruyt’s concluding judgment on the *macellum* is remarkable: ‘Ainsi nous apparaît le macellum, marchés d’alimentation de luxe, bien différent de nos marchés contemporains. On comprendra mieux à présent pourquoi les Romains, dès la République, l’avaient surnommé Forum Cuppedinis, le marché de la gourmandise, ou pire, forum cupidinis, le marché de la tentation!’ (de Ruyt, *Macellum*, p. 372). Apuleius calls the *macellum* ‘Forum cupidinis’, cf. Apuleius, *Met.* 1.24.4. Of course the *macellum* was not exclusively a place for affluent people. De Ruyt, *Macellum*, p. 370, says, ‘Lorsque le petit paysan ou le plébéien se rendait au *macellum*, ce n’était qu’exceptionnellement ou pour acheter quelques petits poissons maigre luxe’. The taxes on the sale of victuals created unrest among the plebs (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 19.4.56; cf. de Ruyt, *Macellum*, p. 358). But the protests originated among the suppliers and the sellers who earned their money at the *macellum* (de Ruyt, *Macellum*, p. 363).

likely to meet a 'weak' fellow Christian there. Therefore we have to ask, Was it a Christian brother who warned him that the meat was sacrificial (1 Cor. 10.28)? If strong and weak Christians met at the same gathering, they must have belonged to the same social milieu. This fact would jeopardize the sociological explanation of the conflict between the strong and the weak. Yet in my opinion there is a different and more satisfying interpretation of 10.23-33.

1. Invitations to private houses³⁹ may have been per se an indication of modest prosperity. The poor who lived in their *insulae* (storied houses) often had no stove to prepare meals. For this reason they would invite one another to the inns or public buildings such as temples rather than to their houses. Only the more affluent could invite others to their houses and enjoy privacy: 'Common people did not have this possibility of retreating into privacy, and this resulted in a division in Roman society between those who attended inns and those who did not... One further effect was that ambitious restaurants and other places of refined catering could not get established.'⁴⁰ But even if we neglect these general considerations, there are concrete observations, which indicate that there were probably no weak Christians present in 1 Cor. 10.28.

2. The general case where someone invites a Christian for a meal is introduced as a *realis* (εἴ τις καλεῖ ὑμᾶς...), whereas the special case in which someone draws attention to the sacrificial meal is introduced as an *eventualis* (ἐὰν δέ τις ὑμῖν εἴπῃ...): 'Whenever someone says: This is offered in sacrifice...' Paul constructs a possible theoretical case, which he does not expect to be realized at each gathering nor very often.⁴¹ The

39. Some say that these were private invitations into a temple. But in these cases the meat came from the altar, not from the *macellum*. Since Paul mentions immediately before this in 1 Cor. 10.25 shopping at the *macellum* for dinners in private houses, we should assume that these meetings occurred in private homes.

40. 'Gaststätte', in Weeber, *Alltag*, pp. 128-33, at p. 129: 'Einfache Leute hatten diese Rückzugsmöglichkeit nicht, und das führte zu der "Spaltung" der römischen Gesellschaft in G(aststätten)-Besucher und Nichtbesucher... Und es führte auch dazu, daß sich anspruchsvolle Speise-Restaurants und andere Lokale der gehobenen Gastronomie nicht etablieren konnten.'

41. Not everything that Paul says in this passage pretends to be reality in a literal sense. If he depicts the 'strong' person exclaiming that he is enjoying his meal with thanksgiving he surely is not imagining a pagan dinner opened with a Christian thanksgiving. This scene is an artificial construction in order to illustrate a principle, not in order to regulate everyday situations that are probable or real. Therefore W.L. Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10* (SBLDS, 68;

‘speaker’ (τίς) may include anyone present. But it is not to be excluded that the pagan host is speaking. On the contrary, who except the host would have known the origin of the meat? We have seen that the hosts themselves bought meat in the market.⁴² Paul does not have to clarify who the speaker is. The decisive point for his train of thought is this: if a participant at the meal says that he regards the eating of sacrificial meat as a performance of a sacred ritual, then the Christian should not eat this meat so as not to produce the wrong impression, that is, the impression of participating in some kind of pagan ritual.

3. The person who gives the hint uses the word ἱερόθυτον, which has no negative connotation. Would a weak brother call the meat that he refuses to eat ‘sacred’? Would he have said τοῦτο ἱερόθυτόν ἐστιν, imitating words of the institution of the Lord’s Supper? Or would he avoid the denigrating εἰδωλόθυτον because it might offend the host? But this denigration would hardly be recognizable for a pagan because εἰδωλόθυτον was part of a special Jewish (and Christian) language. It is hard to imagine that at a pagan dinner a Christian guest would ask another Christian to refuse the meal, and what is more, a guest who is polite enough to say ἱερόθυτον. Are we to believe that Paul imagines two Christians breaking up the dinner? Indeed, this would be an éclat! It is more obvious to think of a pagan as the speaker, who perhaps meant to say, ‘This is meat of high quality! From faultless animals! The blessing of the gods is with it!’ He praises the meat—perhaps, but not necessarily as the host who is proud of having invited his guests to such a beautiful meal. We should not necessarily assume that he or some other speaker wished to embarrass the Christian participants.

4. Paul calls the conscience of some Christians weak (1 Cor. 8.7, 12), because it falls short of Christian faith and knowledge. A pagan, however, would act in harmony with his value system if he regarded meat offered in sacrifice as sacred. That is why Paul does not call the conscience in 10.29 ‘weak’. This fits a pagan better than a Christian. A transfer of attitudes

Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 240–45, does not regard 1 Cor. 10.28 as an exemplification of the discussed case, but as a general remark that states Paul’s point of view with regard to all situations of eating meat outside of a pagan cult. We should infer before v. 28, ‘In all events it is valid...’ On the one hand, there is no signalling that a new thought begins in v. 28, but on the other hand, μὴ ἐσθίετε in v. 28 does negate ἐσθίετε in v. 27.

42. Cf. Plautus, *Aul.* 2.2.264; *Pseud.* 1.2.169; Apuleius, *Met.* 1.24. Additional evidence has been collected by de Ruyt, *Macellum*, p. 368.

from Christians to pagans is possible for Paul. He summarizes his thoughts in 10.31–11.1 with the admonition to give no offence to Jews *and to Greeks* and to the church of God (10.33).⁴³ It could be offensive for pagans if they knew that Jews and Christians who despised sacrificial meat nevertheless ate it as profane food, thus despising also those who were eating it as a sacred meal. Pagans could also criticize the incoherence of the Christian behaviour that they despised the gods but ate meat sacred to them. Of course the ‘strong’ could additionally offend a weak Christian who was not present but who was told of his acceptance of the invitation to a meal with sacrificial meat.⁴⁴

5. Above all, the ‘strong’ risk offending the pagans. Paul exclaims, ‘If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced (βλασφημοῦμαι) because of that for which I give thanks?’ (1 Cor. 10.30). Blasphemy (βλασφημεῖν) in the New Testament generally means vile gossip by others who do not belong to the group.⁴⁵ A near parallel is Rom. 14.15–16, which also pertains to the problem of the strong and the weak: ‘If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be spoken of as evil.’ Many interpreters, with good reason, relate this passage to slander against Christians by their pagan contemporaries.⁴⁶ Quarrelling about meal regulations could make Christians the object of vile gossip by pagans.⁴⁷ This is supported by the impersonal formulation βλασφημεῖσθω in Rom. 14.16.⁴⁸ The comment in v. 18 that the Christian who does not

43. The Christian maxim of not pursuing one’s own interests was also valid for the behaviour towards pagan fellows.

44. H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II* (HNT, 9; Tübingen: Mohr, 4th edn, 1949), p. 51, thinks that the person who in 1 Cor. 10.28 gives the hint ‘This has been offered in sacrifice’ is a pagan participant, who is not himself offended by the Christian eating meat. The offended is a weak Christian brother who is not present at the dinner but who may hear of it.

45. Cf. Acts 13.45; 18.6; Rom. 2.24; 1 Tim. 6.1; Jas 2.7; 1 Pet. 4.4.

46. E. Käsemann, *An die Römer* (HNT, 8a; Tübingen: Mohr, 1973), p. 364; W. Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1988), p. 505; C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), p. 717, thinks that the reference to outsiders is probable, but not certain.

47. We must take into regard that vegetarianism was once a public problem in Rome, as we read in Seneca, *Ep.* 108.17–22: Seneca abandoned his vegetarian lifestyle at his father’s request. Vegetarianism was judged a product of foreign influence and would not have been politically correct.

48. The objective of the vile gossip, ‘your good’, may be the freedom of the strong

quarrel about meal regulations is 'acceptable to God and approved by men' is a further hint at the idea of respect for all human beings and not only for the weak fellow Christian. If Rom. 14.16 deals with criticism by a pagan, it must also be non-Christians in 1 Cor. 10.30 who speak evil—and not the weak among the Christians.⁴⁹

Meggitt discusses two more arguments that I developed in order to support a sociological explanation of the conflict.⁵⁰ These two arguments are not crucial, but they may show that further observations at least fit my thesis.

Class-Specific Traits in the Form of Legitimization

The 'strong' based their liberty to eat sacrificial meat on their 'knowledge' (γνῶσις). Though they were not 'Gnostics' in the narrow sense of the term, the best parallels to them can be found in the Gnosticism of the second century. Both the strong and the later Gnostics formed small elitist groups within the early Christian communities of the first two centuries. Besides, the 'Gnostics' were known for eating idol meat and they also legitimized their behaviour by 'gnosis'. My conclusion is that inasmuch as Gnosticism in the second century was spread among the more educated groups in early Christianity, we may assume a comparable social milieu for the Corinthian 'Gnostics'. Now, the early Gnostics were indeed organized in schools around teachers such as Valentinus or Basilides, who behaved like philosophers and who adopted much of Plato's philosophy. Their systems were rather sophisticated and they attracted educated people, or at least people with a desire for higher wisdom. These schools produced a lot of books and their members belonged to a more elevated milieu than

or the grace of all Christians. Note that the strong is addressed in the singular. The change to the plural includes all Christians. Also the freedom of the strong could be an opportunity for all.

49. What could have offended a non-Christian observer? He might criticize the contradiction between principle and praxis. Such a criticism against Christians is probably handed down on Epictetus, *Dis.* 2.9.20-21: 'Do you not see in what sense men are severally called Jew, Syrian, or Egyptian? For example, whenever we see a man halting between two faiths, we are in the habit of saying, "He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part". But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized and has made his choice, then he both is a Jew in fact and is also called one. So we also are counterfeit "Baptists", ostensibly Jews, but in reality something else, not in sympathy with our own reason, far from applying the principles which we profess, yet priding ourselves upon them as being men who know them.'

50. Meggitt, *Paul*, pp. 113-16.

many of the *simplices* in the Christian congregations. Meggitt argues against this conclusion, saying that Gnostic systems, not requiring a high level of education, later developed into popular religions such as Manichaeism, and that religious elitism is also found among Jehovah's Witnesses and other modern sects. He does not see that I only look for analogies that combine *all* of the following characteristics in a defined historical period that covers the first two centuries:

1. elitist groups within early Christianity,
2. eating meat sacrificed to idols,
3. legitimizing their behaviour by 'gnosis' as a kind of sacral philosophy, and
4. having a modest social status and education.

It is clear that they cannot be compared with salvation cults, mediaeval heretics or modern sects such as Jehovah's Witnesses, which Meggitt does and which I would never have done. Meggitt treats the four characteristics mentioned above in an isolated and unhistorical way. His discussion of my arguments is rather misleading in this section.⁵¹

Class-Specific Traits in Communication Patterns

I also uphold the thesis that Paul, in his letter, above all leads a discussion with the 'strong', who succeeded in forming a letter for the *whole* congregation representing their *particular* views and opinions. In my view it is plausible that a written discussion is more appropriate for educated people. In his answer Paul does not address the 'weak', which is one of the striking differences between 1 Cor. 8–10 and Rom. 14.1–15.13. In the Romans passage Paul addresses both parties, though he also in this letter primarily addresses the 'strong' and sympathizes with them when he says, 'We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak' (Rom. 15.1). The group addressed at Corinth must play an active part in the congregation.

Let me summarize the results concerning 1 Cor. 8–10. It is true that the lower classes were not totally excluded from meat consumption, but good, fresh meat was available to them only in a cultic context or at personal feasts (e.g. at anniversaries).⁵² They considered meat to be much more

51. Meggitt, *Paul*, pp. 114–15. Besides, the Gnostics should not be confused with adherents of salvation cults (though Max Weber combined both in a citation).

52. Some of these rare occasions were probably not without some religious connotations. On birthdays thanks to the gods were appropriate.

charged with numinous energy than did well-to-do people, who ate meat in everyday life, including when they were invited to private houses. Thus the well-to-do people could also afford a more unprejudiced attitude towards meat. The scruples however were more widespread among the poor of Corinth. Therefore I uphold my thesis that the conflict between the strong and the weak was class conditioned. Some of Meggitt's arguments, however, do have to be taken very seriously. For this reason I have reworked some of my arguments.

Though I read Meggitt's book with enthusiasm, I do not agree with all his results. I hope I have succeeded in demonstrating that there are reasons that allow for an alternative interpretation of some of the conflicts in the Corinthian congregation. This involves taking into account the social stratification and the different mentalities of the common people and those who are more well-to-do. Yet I should underline that this interpretation does not explain all aspects of all of the conflicts. The social factors are above all visible in 1 Cor. 11.17-32 and 1 Cor. 8-10. It is possible that these factors are also present in the background of other conflicts. In any event, Paul tries to solve these conflicts by a certain pragmatism, which takes into account not only the real distribution of power and influence, but also the norms of a group with its ethos of equality. His management of these conflicts is not cynical. He tries to privatize the conflicts concerning meals: everybody should eat enough to be filled at home, but within the congregation there should be equality! Anyone may eat in private rooms meat that is sacrificed, but it must not be a part of a ritual to the gods. In public the refutation of idolatry should be unmistakable. Cohesion within the community and demarcation from the outside world are practised in a viable way. The more the basic axioms are accepted, the more flexibly they may be applied.

