



**Jin Hwan Lee**

***The Lord's Supper in Corinth in the Context of Greco-Roman Private Associations***

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This book is a revision of a dissertation written under the supervision of John S. Kloppenborg at the University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. As the title suggests, the book examines banqueting practices of the early Christ group in Corinth, described in 1 Cor 11:17–34, in the context of banqueting practices in Greco-Roman private associations. The aim is to expose the nature of the conflicts that occurred at the Corinthian Lord's Supper and to (re)imagine the social practices of the Corinthian Christ group.

The book comprises three chapters plus an introduction and a conclusion. In the introduction, Lee offers the current readings of the Corinthian Lord's Supper in which he highlights two provisional models that have been influential in the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:17–34: the continuing peer-benefaction model and the *eranistic* practice. The former refers to group members, usually the wealthier members, making continuing provisions for the whole group; the latter refers to group members bringing their food and sharing with others at table fellowship. Also in the introduction Lee raises the research questions, outlines the scope of his study, and lays out the methodology of research. In the concluding section, Lee helpfully provides a summary of his research and implications for further study. Readers will find a short and helpful appendix on the readings of 1 Cor 11:17–34 from the patristic period to current times.

In chapter 1, Lee analyzes the evolution or adaptation of banquet customs from the Homeric period to the Greco-Roman period (~336 BCE–4 CE). Particular attention is paid to factors such as memberships, attendees, dining-space layout, provision, food allotment and consumption, and communal rules and etiquettes. Lee then highlights the many characteristic features of the Greco-Roman banquet. First, an invitation was necessary and was sent in either verbal or written form or both. Second, the banquet was usually held at the ninth hour of the day, the time when many other groups had their banquets. Third, most everyday banquets were provided either by nonpermanent benefaction or contribution from membership dues. Fourth, the host was expected to assign seats to guests correctly and provide food generously and equally; guests were expected to behave orderly and appropriately to ensure group solidarity. Lee asserts that coming late to the banquet had no connection to the honor and shame code or the working hours of the poor. He elaborates on this in chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 2 continues Lee's discussion on banquetting practices, but in the context of the Greco-Roman private association banquet practices. Three possible meeting places are analyzed: a private house, which would be suitable for small groups; a dining facility in the temple, which would be ideal for cultic associations; and a rented *hestiatorion*, a semipublic "banquet hall" attached to or detached from temple complexes. This would be suitable for associations that did not own temples and had a sizeable membership. Against the continuing peer-benefaction model and the *eranistic* practice of provision, Lee suggests that the meals were provisioned from communal funds, which came primarily from membership dues, supplemented by members' benefactions and fines levied on those violating association rules. The meal was quite simple. In a cultic-association meal, the menu consisted of meat, bread, wine, cakes, and fruit. In a noncultic-association meal, wine and bread were the main items. The meal was not for nutritional purposes but performative functions. Since the meal was meant to foster group solidarity and to demonstrate to outsiders the group's reputation, communal rules and fines were strictly enforced. Although arriving late for communal table fellowship was considered undesirable and dishonorable, the behavior was not regulated with fines. There are two plausible reasons for this: it was not perceived as a severe problem that could break up group solidarity, and there were no difficulties with food distribution and consumption. Lee emphasizes that private associations had a system of temporary, rotating leadership. Men and women from heterogeneous social strata could gain honorable status within the association through leadership roles.

Chapter 3, the heart of Lee's thesis, is the reconstruction of the nature of the conflicts at the Lord's Supper in Corinth. Lee's analyses of banquetting practices in the ancient world (ch. 1) and banquetting practices in Greco-Roman private associations (ch. 2) serve as the background for his argument in chapter 3. Before conjecturing on the nature of the conflicts at the Lord's Supper, Lee discusses where the Christ group in Corinth gathered, who prepared their communal meal, how they distributed food, and what they ate. Like the private-association meals, the Corinthian Lord's Supper was provisioned by their collective funds, not by the continuing peer benefaction and the

*eranistic* modes of provisioning. Like the private-association meals, the Lord's Supper plausibly took place in a rented *hestiatorion*, not in the domestic spaces of wealthy members. Like the private-association meals, the menu was light, consisting primarily of bread and wine, not as fancy and luxurious as conventionally interpreted. What, then, is the nature of the conflicts? Against the temporal reading of *προλαμβάνω* ("take") in 11:21 and *ἐκδέχομαι* ("receive") in 11:33, Lee contends that the conflicts might have something to do with the change of leadership, seating position, and food allotment. The wealthy members did not accept the election results and were reluctant "to let poorer members, especially those elected as new leaders or serving in a leadership role, take honorable seats where more and a better quality of food was allotted" (127). Thus, socially insignificant, newly elected leaders were neglected and humiliated.

Lee's expositions of biblical texts and ancient literature are clear and engaging, fresh and illuminating, provocative and persuasive. He is a careful exegete who thoroughly analyzes the biblical texts. He knows how to draw on current scholarly works and sifts through ancient literature and epigraphical data to cast light on the biblical texts and to engage the arguments of other scholars. Lee is passionate about the subject matter and is not hesitant to articulate his argument or disagreement with titans in biblical scholarship such as Gerd Theissen, Peter Lampe, and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. He methodically argues against the conventional notions about the Corinthian Lord's Supper and meticulously walks readers through his disputation about the nature of the conflicts with epigraphic and literary documents to bolster his argument. Readers will find hundreds of endnotes valuable. They contain references to and translation of the Greek texts and detailed discussion or elaboration on the analyzed subjects.

Lee states in the introductory section: "This book, then, attempts to *correct* current scholarly portrayals of the Corinthian communal meal practices in general" (xxv). The language in the study, however, is one of "plausibility" and "reconsideration." If correction is Lee's general goal, he is too ambitious, no matter how abundant or persuasive the secondary data are. If the biblical text is not clear about the nature of the conflicts, nothing is definite; everything is speculative. Moreover, I do not see the book as a correction but rather a contribution to the ongoing discussion about the nature of the conflicts at the Corinthian Lord's Supper. Three other observations are worth mentioning. First, the introduction needs some revision, specifically references to the chapters (xxxv–xxxvi). For instance, Lee mentions "chapter four" in the introduction (xxxvi), but there is no chapter 4 in the corpus of the study. Second, as evidenced in some association inscriptions, people used wealth to manipulate and achieve desirable and respected positions (e.g., *IG II<sup>2</sup>*, 1327; *IG X<sup>2</sup>* 88, 289; *SIG* 3.1009; *IPriene* 174). Might this also have happened in the Corinthian community? Third, Lee asserts that "private associations generally promoted an egalitarian atmosphere by rotating their leadership" (61). This leaves me to wonder: Some temporary leaders might be ineffective and weak. If the Corinthian community was concerned about fostering group solidarity and demonstrating to outsiders the group's reputation for recruitment purposes, would its members take the risk of placing an ineffective and weak leader at the helm, even for a short term?

Would the temporary, rotating leadership ideal be efficient for the group's long-term growth and development?

This book contains a wealth of illuminating and stimulating material. It adds a new voice and has the potential to spark further exploration and considerable discussion on the conflicts at the Lord's Supper in Corinth. Undoubtedly, Lee's meticulous monograph is an impressive contribution to the academic conversation on the Lord's Supper, early Christian groups, and ancient private association meal practices. I strongly recommend this well-written, richly textured book to scholars, graduate students, and people with interest in the study of 1 Cor 11:17–34. Those studying early Christian groups and ancient private association meal practices will find the book an indispensable resource. Lee's book merits a place on library shelves.