



PAUL AND THE LITURGY

The year of St Paul gives us pause to think through his contribution to our worship. He was deeply influenced by the rites and worship of the emerging church, and in turn has had far reaching significance in the development of our liturgy.

Paul on baptism

Let me offer some examples. The obvious place to start is baptism, the foundation of the first generations of believers. Baptised as adults, this rite signaled a complete reorientation of their lives. Paul writes of a baptismal formula and experience that set out the total newness of this way of life, with emphasis on social equality and the end of divisions that had no currency in the eyes of God: *As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise* (Gal 3:27-28). This remarkable teaching, aspired to in the earliest communities but to soon diluted, still challenges us. For Paul and indeed for the scriptures, social and gender differences are meaningless when it comes to being a full and complete member of the Church.

Paul on reconciliation

The early Christians had a realistic understanding of sin, especially after Paul had pointed it out to them! In one of his letters, again that to the Galatians, he advocates one of the primary strategies of the early church for bringing about reconciliation, an approach that remains firmly within our tradition though a bit neglected at present. The strategy was for a member of the community to speak with the offender, not necessarily with the knowledge or agreement of other members of the community. This presumes some discretion, and does not give tacit permission for sin to be trumpeted about the place. Paul urges a gentle approach: *My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness* (Gal 6:1). As well, his use of the term 'transgression' reminds the community that the offence must be serious. At the same time he is aware that the ministry of reconciliation can provide an opening for the community itself to fall into sin: *Take care that you yourselves are not tempted* (Gal 6:2). Paul then outlines three features of an act of reconciliation: serious transgression, admonition in the spirit of gentleness, and recognition that the community has the potential, unfortunately, to abuse the sinner. The same admonition to gentleness is found in the Second Letter to Timothy: *And the Lord's*

servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness (2 Tim 2:25).

Paul on Eucharist

Perhaps Paul the liturgist is best known for his references to the Eucharist and its place in the community. In his first letter to the Corinthians he describes what has been handed down to him: *The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor 11: 23-26).* His recollection is remarkably similar to the description of the Lord's supper in Luke's Gospel (Lk 22:19-20). We are only just beginning to retrieve the remarkably rich theology of 'remembrance' that Paul and Luke are advocating.

Yet Paul does not stop with describing the rite and offering a theological understanding. He has framed the description of the ritual within the relationship of the Eucharist to ethics. In Corinth the table of the Lord had become a place of scandal, where the rich exploited the poor, took a share of their food, did not share their own, and so had the powerful becoming drunk and the weak becoming ever more famished. Paul could not separate the Eucharist from ethics: the reign of God had ushered in a new way of living, and was not to be abused to prop up the former ways of greed and violence.

And if Paul the liturgical theologian were to visit us today, what connection between Eucharist and ethics would he draw to our attention?

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