

YEAR OF SAINT PAUL

JUNE, 2008 - JUNE, 2009

ESSAYS BY THE FACULTY OF

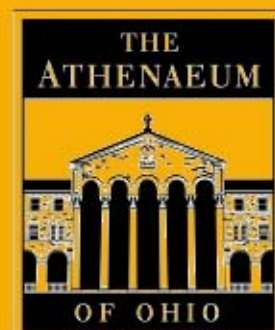
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Year of Saint Paul:

June, 2008 - June, 2009

Essays by the Faculty of The Athenaeum of Ohio

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Foreword

Most Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk

Every year I meet with the faculty members of the Athenaeum of Ohio for an afternoon of theological discourse. We find it pleasant to spend a couple of hours together sharing ideas on some aspect of a discipline that is dear to us all. Over the years we have spoken about the Eucharist, about gratitude, about the meaning of the Jubilee Year. This time, in view of the upcoming year of St. Paul recently announced by our Holy Father, we decided that we would spend our time together discussing the Apostle of the Gentiles.

In order to promote the discussion, those in charge of the colloquium sent out a series of questions to the members of the faculty. This present brief essay is intended to give an account of the questions and how they were answered, and to lead into our collection of somewhat more extended reflections on St. Paul and his ministry.

The first question we discussed was, “When was the last time you heard a homily on the second Sunday reading,” or, for the priests and deacons present, “When was the last time you preached a homily on the second Sunday reading?”

The responses were not surprising. The Pauline readings do not seem to be very appealing for Sunday homilies. A couple of the preachers said they used some sound bites from the second readings in their treatment of the gospel, but that they offered full homilies on the second reading seldom, if ever. They said that they thought a preacher ought to preach from the second readings at least six or eight times a year, but they acknowledged that they themselves did not do so. The non-preachers in the group naturally said that they seldom hear Pauline preaching, giving the rarity of its presentation by the preachers.

This led into the second question: what are the main themes of Paul’s writing and what significance do those themes have for the 21st century? We agreed that several recurrent themes occur in Paul’s letters: eschatology, the relationship between the Christian church and Israel, salvation, idolatry. None of these are the kind of subjects that get the Christian faithful jumping out of bed on Sunday morning to get to church for the homily! And yet these are important elements in the Christian revelation. They each have fundamental implications for the life of faith to which we are called.

The problem seems to be translating these seemingly arcane and abstract matters into concepts that our people (who are used to brief and concrete modes of exposition) can get their teeth into. The challenge to the homilist is to make it all mean something to the twenty-first century women and men sitting before him in church on Sunday. This seems to require more work than does the explanation of one of Jesus’ parables found in the gospel reading. But how impoverished our faith life would be without these fundamental teachings! Maybe we preachers need to find better ways to explain the significance of eschatology and salvation. Maybe we have to highlight the uniqueness of Christ’s revelation, a uniqueness that carries his followers beyond being a subspecies of Judaism. Maybe we have to point out to our hearers that idolatry can consist in the pursuit of success and money as well as in offering burnt offerings to Jupiter and Juno. Maybe we have to explain what Paul means by flesh and spirit.

Foreword

This led us into a further question. Was it a good idea for the liturgical reform to schedule a reading from St. Paul for almost every Sunday of the year? We all agreed that there seemed to be a message here and that the message was that the Pauline teachings are so important that they ought to be presented regularly and in a manner that would help the faithful understand them. It's not up to us to say that St. Paul is too difficult for people to understand. It's the job of preachers to make Paul's teaching digestible by our people. It's the job of listeners to make the effort that is required to assimilate material that is somewhat different from what we are used to in our everyday life.

Our final question was, "What would happen if our faithful never heard any readings from St. Paul? What would they be missing?" Clearly they would be missing some basic and very important elements of Christian instruction. But they would also be missing contact with one of the most thoughtful and fascinating figures in the early church. A Christianity without generous infusions of St. Paul would be a much blander thing than we are used to.

Our discussion came to a close because we ran out of time, not because we ran out of material about St. Paul. I suspect that each one of us who was there had more to say about the role of St. Paul's teaching and preaching in the life of the church, ancient and contemporary. Maybe, if we had gone on a while longer, the preachers in the group might have resolved to use St. Paul more frequently in their homiletic endeavors. Maybe the listeners would have resolved to try to make more sense out of what the church offers them most Sundays in the second reading.

I am convinced that, at very least, our gathering that afternoon will attune all of us to participate more attentively in Pope Benedict's year of St. Paul.

Paul: The Arresting Newness of the Old

Rev. Kenneth G. Morman

A number of years ago one of my uncles realized that his mother, my grandmother, was the last living member of her family, and that her death would be the severing of the last connection we of the subsequent generations had to her generation and those that preceded it. So he got a video camera and “interviewed” his mother on camera, for several hours over several days, asking her every question he could think of about every aspect of her life and just allowing her to reminisce freely. Now that she indeed has died, the resulting videotape is a precious document of oral history for our family.

It is also, occasionally, startling – as when Grandma matter of factly mentioned while describing her wedding that she and Grandpa were married in a nuptial Mass at 7:00 AM on a Tuesday. My sisters almost fell out of their chairs at this revelation – a wedding on a Tuesday *at 7:00 in the morning?!!* When my uncle registered his surprise on camera, Grandma seemed surprised at his surprise – why 7:00 AM? Because that’s what time Mass was, she said simply. Our assuming that weddings were celebrated in northwest Ohio farming communities in the early 1900’s in a manner similar to the way they are today came as a rather clear reminder of a basic tendency we all have, namely, to assume, until something comes up that reveals the slip, that apart perhaps from clothes, hair styles, and technology, things in the past were essentially pretty much the way they are now. And so it’s easy to read into Biblical materials, such as the letters of St. Paul, which are separated from us not by one but twenty centuries, all kinds of assumptions that in fact are the mark of our experience today rather than that of the original parties to the correspondence.

The “Conversion” of Paul

Lutheran Bishop Krister Stendahl drew attention to several examples of this dynamic in his 1963 Thomas White Currie Lectures at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (later collected in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* by Fortress Press); his seminal insights and observations proved to be one of the roots of the so-called “New Perspective” on Paul. For example, because today Judaism and Christianity are two independent religions, many good Christians spontaneously envision the event that has been traditionally referred to as “the Conversion of St. Paul” as Paul’s change of religions, from Jewish to Christian, and simultaneously from sinner to saint. Stendahl pointed out that if one actually reads what Paul wrote instead of viewing this signal event from today’s perspective, ineluctably refracted through the distorting controversies of the Reformation, it becomes apparent that this construct is very anachronistic.

In the first place, Paul’s was not a conversion in the sense of an Augustine, from great sinner to great saint. As a matter of fact, he tells the Philippians, far from being a miscreant, before meeting the risen Christ on the road, “in righteousness based on the law I was blameless” (3:6). As that same verse attests, he freely admits that he persecuted the Church, but Stendahl drew attention to the fact that when Paul mentions that fact, he uses it as a mark of what a *good* person he was, not how evil – so zealous for God that he even persecuted the Church. When Paul speaks of the past that now he considers as so much rubbish compared to the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil 3:8), it’s not his sins and failings that he is referring to, but his achievements, the good that he thought he was doing in his former life.

Nor was Paul's a conversion in the sense of a change of religion. Paul from beginning to end never stops being a fervent Jew. He never thought he had left Judaism; he found his belief in Jesus Messiah to be part and parcel, indeed the fulfillment, of his Judaism. Thus it is not surprising that in Gal 1:15 he himself does not think of his experience in terms of a conversion to a new religion but rather considers it to be equivalent to the calls of Second Isaiah (49:1,6) and Jeremiah – “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I consecrated you; a prophet to the Gentiles I appointed you” (Jer 1:5) –, passages to which he alludes with respect to his own call (Gal 1:15). In a manner analogous to what took place in the calls of such earlier prophets, what happened on the road to Damascus is that the risen Christ, God's Messiah, commissioned Paul, a Jew, to bring God's great good news to the Gentiles that they were being invited to *become part of* the chosen people: the emphasis in Paul's mind is always on the mission he was given in this event. Although he thus thought of himself as a missionary for Gentiles (Rom 15:15f), it was always as a missionary from within Judaism that he worked. It is this frame of reference that accounts for the (to us) surprising climax in Gal 3:29 – “If you belong to Christ, then you are descendants of Abraham!” It's such a telling statement – for Paul, the good thing about belonging to Christ is that that allows one who is not Jewish to be a descendant of Abraham! For Paul as a good Jew, that's the real value – Jesus Christ allows us Gentiles, in Stendahl's celebrated phrase, to be, only by adoption, honorary Jews!

This realization likewise explains his candor in Rom 11:13f in which he admits that the reason *why* he exercises his vaunted ministry to the Gentiles is ultimately not for them at all, at least not exclusively, but rather he is working so indefatigably to bring the Gentiles to Christ so that his own people, Israel, may be saved. Conceding some hyperbole on his part, this surprising statement is nevertheless a needed corrective to that common view of Paul that upon finding Christ he turned away from his own people and his previous faith to embrace another. To the contrary, in Paul's missionary activity he was not drawing people out of Judaism or paganism to form some third entity that was neither Jewish nor pagan, a new religion; rather his Jewish converts remained within Judaism and his Gentile converts were drawn into Judaism – eschatological Judaism to be sure, but nonetheless the people of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. Others have noted as well that none of the people we meet in his letters – Paul himself, his Gentile converts, Peter and the other Jerusalem apostles, the “false brethren” within the Christian community, the non-Christian Jews – none of these looked upon the Christian movement as outside the bounds of Judaism. Indeed the reason Paul was punished by the synagogue (2Cor 11:24) was precisely because he was bringing converts into Judaism without demanding that they be circumcised and obey the laws binding on Jews – no religion permits such flouting of its most fundamental theology and practice! The image that sums up Paul's understanding is not the cutting down and replacement of a fruitless tree (the image of the fig trees we find in the gospels – Mark 11:13-14, 21; Luke 13:6-9), but the *grafting* of Gentile believers into the flourishing cultivated olive tree that is Israel, supported by the rich root of Abraham and the patriarchs; the result in this image is not two trees but only one, the one that stems organically from the patriarchs. And in his mind those of his people who refuse to accept the Messiah God has sent, are like cut-off branches, separated not from some new entity called Christianity, but precisely from *Judaism*.

The Culture that He's Counter

Sometimes our assumptions based on today's experience cause us to miss the full impact of what Paul teaches. Some years ago a speaker at a meeting of the Eastern Great Lakes Bible Society

used the example of Paul's condemnation in 1 Cor 6:15-20 of Christian men who consorted with prostitutes. Today, Paul's injunction against such behavior may strike readers as banal, almost a platitude, because twenty centuries after the Christian leaven has been at work in western society, it's accepted as a truism that prostitution represents the objectification and exploitation of women, a misuse of one's sexuality, completely incompatible with good morals. Today if a politician or public figure is caught using the services of prostitutes, his career is in jeopardy; prostitution is socially unacceptable. But at the time Paul wrote to the Corinthians, his words were decidedly counter-cultural; prostitution was simply accepted as a fact of life in the Greco-roman world – *hetairai* were common companions of the rich and powerful at symposia – marriage was for procreation; sex with slaves and prostitutes was for the relief of sexual needs.

As with my grandmother's 7:00 AM wedding, it's often only when one is surprised by an unexpected revelation that it becomes clear that one has been envisioning the past in terms of the present. An example from the Pauline corpus might be the surprising things Paul says about political authority in Rom 13:1-7. At the beginning of this passage Paul says:

Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves.

As others have noted, this is one of those pericopes which are difficult not because they are *not* clear but because they *are*. Luke Timothy Johnson has drawn attention to the fact that these seven verses make it manifest that Paul and his contemporaries viewed secular government and the power of the State in a very different way from the way we do today. Since the Enlightenment, we moderns have just taken as self-evident the principle that governments exist by the consent of the *governed*, that in other words, civil/political power inheres in the *individual*, and, banding together, the people freely bestow that power on those whom they choose in elections, to serve them, for as long a time as they do so to the satisfaction of the *governed*; this is the essence of democracy.

Paul's world looked at it very differently: they viewed civic power as a reflection of the natural order in which power flows from the top down rather than from the bottom up. As they saw it, the basic unit of society is the *oikos*, the household (not the nuclear family); the authority flowed from the *paterfamilias*, the father of the family, down, and correlatively, respect and submission were then owed to all in the hierarchy up – from clients to patrons, slaves to masters, children to parents, wives to husbands. The *oikomenê*, the Empire, was envisioned in the same terms, as one great big household presided over by the Emperor as *paterfamilias*; as the ultimate patron, all goods flowed down from him, and to him was accordingly owed, as completely natural, respect and submission by all. No one denied that officials could be corrupt and injustices perpetrated; but they viewed these things the way we view parents who are abusive or popes/priests who are corrupt and/or make terrible mistakes – we lament the abuse and in no way condone it, but view it as a failing of the *individual*; it does not change the way we look at the *institution* as such. In the same way, revolutions and resistance to government officials were certainly well enough known in the ancient world, but pagan ethicists viewed these as equivalent to children disobeying parents – even if justified in certain circumstances, one would never counsel disobedience as a *good*; the situation that would require it in a given instance would in itself not be the way things *ought* to be, an anomaly, *unnatural*, against the natural order.

Thus the (to us) surprisingly positive things Paul says about the deference due to the Evil Empire that had killed Jesus, expelled Jews and Jewish Christians from Rome a few years before this (under Claudius, in 49 AD), and was, ironically, soon to martyr him and a huge number of his fellow Christians with stunning cruelty, is actually not surprising to the historians of the era. It also is not surprising in view of the difference in time-consciousness that separates us from Paul and his community. While we never deny that the Parousia could occur at any time, in fact we make our plans, preparing for our retirement and our legacy, under the practical assumption that if it hasn't happened in twenty centuries, it probably won't happen in our lifetime either. By contrast, for Paul and his converts, the apocalyptic world-view in which they were steeped caused the probabilities to be exactly reversed; the End could occur at any moment. In this perspective it made eminent sense to encourage the house churches in Rome not to make waves that could hamper the mission of getting the word out in these final weeks or months, maybe a few years at most. (Some have speculated that by speaking in Rom 15:19 of having worked in a "circle" from Jerusalem to what is now Croatia and his intent to next proceed from Rome to Spain, Paul may have been trying to get around the Mediterranean before the Lord returned.)

Why It Matters

Why does it matter whether our understanding of the way things were back when Paul wrote matches the way they really were as contrasted with the way we know them to be now? Because of the basic hermeneutical principles governing the interpretation of letters – that letters are situational and contingent, their vocabulary is time-bound, and God speaks to us today indirectly *through* what he inspired Paul to write directly to the Romans, Galatians, Corinthians *et al.*

In other words, every letter presupposes things that the writer knew and the addressees know, but which we who read the letter now have to read between the lines to deduce; letters contain lines like "Too bad about the picnic" or "Sorry to hear about Uncle Fred": the sender and the receiver knew what happened; we have to try to read between the lines to figure the reference out. If we envision that things were then as they are now, the odds are high that we will misinfer what the letter writer is saying and the situation he is addressing. There is a very significant danger that we will interpret the specific things he says according to what the words and concepts mean to us today in our cultural context rather than what they meant in theirs.

And the reason all that matters is that still more basic hermeneutical principle that God speaks to the Church today *through* what Paul was inspired by God to write to his addressees some two millennia ago. Everyone recognizes the difference between a clipping from a newspaper that a friend sends us and the cover note he puts with it: every word of the cover note is written directly to us; the article by contrast was written directly for other people, the readership of the newspaper. We read the clipping through the lens of determining what it was in the clipping that our friend thought we would benefit from seeing.

In the same way, Paul writes directly to the house churches in Rome, Corinth, Philippi and other communities to address their specific needs. But God, who inspired Paul to do so, has in these words a message for us. Our job is to figure out what the equivalencies are between the situations to which Paul addressed these teachings and what is going on today, because that will allow us to determine in turn how what Paul wrote to them applies to us today. And because these letters are the inspired word of God, we can be confident that that application will represent in turn

God's reliable instruction to us regarding how we are to deal with these contemporary realities. But if we misconstrue what was happening then, we will misjudge how these teachings apply to us. In fact we may even make the fatal error of thinking that what Paul wrote applies only to other people and does not have a message for the Church today at all. Betrayed by our unexamined assumptions, we may fail to be surprised by the arresting newness of Paul's ancient words.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Have you ever had an experience in which you realized that your assumptions about someone else's past were off-base? What were the implications?
2. How has your understanding of the "conversion" of St. Paul compared with that which Bishop Stendahl describes?
3. Do you think most Christians today view themselves the way he says Paul did, as "by adoption only, honorary Jews"?
4. How does what Paul says in Rom 13:1-7 apply to a modern *democracy*, a form of government Paul did not know?
5. Can you think of some examples, historically or even currently, where what Paul wrote to his communities has been interpreted as God speaking directly to us subsequent readers rather than indirectly *through* what Paul wrote to the original addressees?
6. What would be God's directive to the Church today through what Paul teaches in Rom 14?

Sexuality and Marriage in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians

Rev. Earl K. Fernandes

The Pauline doctrine of marriage is found in two principal places: the First Letter to the Corinthians, especially chapters 5-7, and the Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33. While Ephesians presents the “mystery” of marriage in its relationship to Christ and the Church, 1 Corinthians provides rich insights into the Pauline understanding of sexuality and marriage and into the praxis of the early Church. This paper aims to outline some Pauline themes regarding sexuality and marriage found in 1 Corinthians.

Background

The situation of ancient Corinth is well documented: It was a center of commercial activity; corruption and dissoluteness were associated with the city to the point that the word *korinthiazēin* was considered to be offensive when applied to a woman. It was renowned throughout the Mediterranean for its temple, consecrated to the cult of Aphrodite, which was served by 1000 “sacred” prostitutes. This climate, united to heterodox ideas and an unacceptable ethical orientation, spread to the early Christian community, having negative effects on the community, for which Paul found it necessary to intervene decisively and to clarify authentic practice.

Christic dignity of the body

1 Corinthians 1-6 addresses a particularly important theme in the Hellenistic cultural context: that of wisdom. It contrasts worldly wisdom with the true wisdom of Christ. Even though they were a relatively new Christian community, the Corinthian Church, in general, saw themselves as an enlightened community of believers who claimed to possess a profound knowledge of the mystery of God which placed them on a level of greater spiritual perfection. St. Paul rebuked them sternly with the accusation that they did not possess true wisdom, because true wisdom is that of the cross. Paul said that they vainly deluded themselves of being perfect (cf. 1:17-3:4), and in his estimation, the conduct of this community revealed that it was still very immature in the Christian life.

In the heart of the Church of Corinth, there were factions and divisions, clamorous injustices, and cases of scandalous sexual immorality, among which is the unheard of conduct “that is not found even among the pagans, that of a man living with his father’s wife” (1 Cor 5:1). Paul gave orders against this incest (5:3-5) and after having reminded the Corinthians of the newness of life to which they were introduced by accepting redemption in Christ (5:6-8), the Apostle insisted on the requirement of excluding from the Christian community all the sexually immoral (*pornoî*) (5:9). He stated that *pornoî*, along with idolaters, adulterers, *malakoi*,¹ *arsenokoitai*,² thieves, the

¹ This term literally means “soft.” Certain modern translations simply translate this word as “effeminate.” The Revised Standard Version and New American Bible combine *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* and translate them jointly as “sodomites.” The Jerusalem Bible translates this word as “catamites.” Though clearly Paul is speaking about sexual immorality, it is not clear if he is referring to a man’s effeminacy or if he is referring simply to “softness” or cowardliness with respect to resisting vice.

² Literally, this means “men who sleep with other men.”

greedy, drunkards, robbers and revilers will not inherit the kingdom of God (6:9-10). The sexual ethical questions were so important and debated in the community of Corinth that Paul did not limit himself to these general considerations but decisively confronted the various opinions circulating among Christians about these issues.

Paul knew that some would continue to repeat: “Everything is licit for me” (*panta moi exestin*) (6:12); others would say: “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” (6:13). These ethical slogans were diffuse in the variegated Greco-Roman cultural world. The first seems to be a statement of the anti-nomian Gnostics who proclaimed freedom of the “perfect” from any law. The second slogan, which is of a naturalistic type, asserts the absolute naturalism of sexuality, and, attempting to build an implicit parallelism between food and stomach and sex and the body, insinuates that the satisfaction of sexual desire is comparable to the satisfaction of the need to eat. The implication is that giving in to any sexual instinct does not have a moral contra-indication. “The Christian is free, even from sexual norms,” says one person, while another says, “The sexual urge is a natural fact and there is nothing evil in simply expressing it.”

The response of the Apostle was clear and decisive. In reference to the first slogan, “Everything is licit for me,” he observes that “not all things are helpful,” and again: “I will not allow myself to be enslaved by anything” (6:12). Discernment is necessary, since not every impulse corresponds with the good; to assume as a criterion for action only the force of instinct really means to become a slave. To the second slogan, “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,” Paul reminds them that the body of Christians is not for fornication; rather, it is for the Lord and is destined for the resurrection (6:13b). The body cannot be considered a simple instrument for satisfying sexual instincts, because the body of the faithful Christian is a Temple, inhabited by the Spirit (6: 19); is the possession of the Lord (6:19-20); and, is part of the Lord (6:19-20). The body must be respected in its Christic dignity and not become a “body of prostitution.” The impure person sins gravely because he sins against this great dignity of the body (6:18).

1 Corinthians 6:15-16 articulates an ecclesial theology of marriage. Paul speaks of the bodies of Christians as members of Christ; refers negatively to a man who unites himself to a prostitute; and then recalls Genesis 2:24.³ Christians are members of Christ, in the sense that collectively they form the Church, the body and bride of Christ. Christian marriages, therefore, must respect the holiness of her, to whom Christ has united Himself. Marriage is not only a personal reality, but it is also an ecclesial reality. Having re-established the Christic dignity of the body of the Christian and the corporate body of Christ, Paul confronts, in chapter seven, different questions about marriage and virginity. He does not claim to expound a treatise on marriage, but simply to give his judgment on cases concerning marriage and virginity. In the Pauline lexicon of sexuality, the term sexual immorality includes every prohibited conjugal union. Paul demands that the Church at Corinth show respect for the body. While he is prohibiting the frequenting of prostitutes, the implications of his teaching are much broader. In this context, the subsequent citation of Genesis 2:24 refers to marriage, not just mere sexual union.

³ Genesis 2:24 reads: “Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh.”

Marriage and the sexual urge

According to Paul, marriage is strictly connected with the strength of sexual urges. For him, in continuity with the rest of the rabbinic vision, marriage is the “place” in which man and woman may satisfy their sexual needs in a legitimate way. He affirms that the unmarried and widows who are not able to live in continence should marry, because it is “better to marry than to burn” (7:9). In 1 Cor 7:2, he writes: “But because of the temptation to immorality each man should have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband.”

1 Corinthians 7:5-7 provide the Christian community with a concept that will shape the theology of marriage: the marriage debt. The so-called “marriage debt” can be explained in the following way: With respect to the satisfaction of sexual needs in marriage, man and woman find themselves on a plane of full reciprocity: one has a duty to render physically to the other, a reciprocal duty, a *debitum*, expressed in juridic language (7:4: *opheilen apodidoto*, Vulgata “*debitum reddat*”) and, therefore, each one has a true and proper authority (*exousiazetai*) over the body (person) of the other at the level of sexual response (7:4). The Pauline understanding of the mutual rendering of the “marriage debt” is important for two reasons. First, both the man and the woman have an obligation to render the debt. It is particularly interesting and counter-cultural for Paul to have awarded authority to a woman. The obligation to render the debt is mutual. Given the mutual obligation to render the debt, abstinence must be mutually agreed upon. The mutual belonging of the marriage partners is a striking element of Paul’s teaching on marriage, particularly because male infidelity was routinely tolerated in that historical-cultural context. In the concept of mutuality, Paul, despite the influence of the culture upon him, still manages to highlight the equality between spouses in a marriage in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39). The second reason that the passage regarding the marriage debt is important is that it speaks of mutual and equal obligations on the part of the husband and wife. Canonists in subsequent centuries will take up the idea of two persons, with equal obligations to one another, rendering a debt or exchanging something between themselves over which each party has authority. The canonists will see this situation as a contractual situation. This contractual understanding of marriage, whether intentional or unintentional, emerges from the Pauline text of 1 Corinthians.

For Paul, conjugal abstinence is perhaps possible for reasons of prayer, but must be of a limited time, to avoid giving space for temptation by Satan (7:5). To understand this point, one has to consider that Paul had to confront certain encratic tendencies that held that abstinence from conjugal relations was a necessity for the Christian. While Paul recalls in 1 Cor 7:1 that “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” he redeems the value of marriage and conjugal relations, limiting the possibility of abstinence to the hypothetical instance of prayer and states with energy the general command “Do not refuse one another” (7:5). The idea that abstinence for prayer is a suggestion and not an obligation is reinforced by the fact that he writes by concession and not by command (7:6). Nevertheless, Paul gives this advice lest the couple be tempted by Satan through lack of self-control. Still further, (7:9-10), Paul states that the single should marry if they cannot control themselves; that it is better to marry than to burn. This will provide theologians in subsequent eras with a scriptural foundation for the understanding of marriage as a remedy for sin or concupiscence (*remedium concupiscentiae*).

The understanding of marriage as a safeguard from sin, or as involving elements of a contract, may give the impression that the Pauline understanding of marriage and marital sexuality is

negative; yet, 1 Cor 7:7 acknowledges that marriage is a gift from God. Even though Paul's particular vocation does not include the gift of marriage, Paul still acknowledges marriage as a gift of God to many members of the Church. In acknowledging marriage as a gift, Paul points, not only to the goodness of marriage as something flowing from God, but also, to the fact that some are called to marriage and others are not. The verse provides the foundation for understanding marriage as a specific vocation. However, in expecting an imminent return of Jesus, Paul prefers the unmarried state to marriage (1 Cor 7:38), because it allows one to be concerned with the affairs of the Lord (7:32-34); whereas, married persons must be concerned about worldly cares (7:28; 32-34). We need to be mindful of the "apocalyptic anxiety" that was transpiring in the urgent questions of the interlocutors.

Indissolubility and the unity of marriage

1 Corinthians 7:1-15 provides a number of insights regarding a Pauline theology of marriage and divorce. The Synoptics recorded Jesus' absolute prohibition of divorce and divorce and remarriage. Paul claims to have the commandment from the Lord that a wife must not depart from her husband. Jesus' statements were addressed to the men who would have been in a position to issue a bill of divorce. Paul appears to state that the commandment is that the wife must not depart from her husband or must at least resist the separation (1 Cor 7:10). If separation occurs the wife is not to remarry. Likewise, the husband is not to dismiss his wife (1 Cor 7:11); this is in keeping with the Synoptic tradition. Thus, with respect to divorce and remarriage of Christians, Paul did not permit the dissolution of the marriage of two Christians.

However, it also appears that Paul accepted that there were circumstances under which marriages could be dissolved. 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 describes the so-called Pauline privilege in which Paul considers the situation of a Christian married to an unbeliever. At the beginning of the Church, there was the delicate situation of the married couple of whom only one of the spouses was Christian. Paul prohibits those who are married to a non-Christian spouse from simply dismissing the non-believer (1 Cor 7:12-13), recognizing the natural duties and obligations of marriage and arguing that the non-believer can be sanctified by the Christian spouse (1 Cor 7:14). Implicitly, Paul suggests that marriage is a positive good leading to the sanctification of the non-believing spouse and the children of the union. The believer is not to dismiss his or her spouse. On the other hand, if the non-believer wishes to depart, he or she may depart (1 Cor 7:15). The Christian may not initiate the separation; the non-believing spouse must be the one who acts. In verse 15, Paul does not obligate a Christian spouse who has been separated for some reason to remain unmarried, as he does in verse 11. Neither does Paul mention a clear right to a second marriage. In this respect Paul Hoffmann writes: "That is understandable in view of the attitude of the Corinthians to marriage, and of Paul's expectation of the Second Coming."⁴ He continues: "But the principle of the revocation of marital obligations is so strongly formulated that the Christian partner may well in fact be free to enter a second marriage if he wants to." From the first days of Christianity, commentators have been unable to agree on the interpretation of the Pauline text in regard to two points: 1) Do the words of Paul to the convert spouse to continue to live with the unbelieving spouse, who wishes to continue the conjugal life, amount to a 'command' or are they only 'a counsel?'; 2) Does 7:15 allow only for separation of the spouses or does the apostle allow

⁴ Paul Hoffmann, "Jesus' Saying about Divorce and Its Interpretation in the New Testament Tradition," *Concilium* (1970/5), English edition, 63.

the Christian who has been abandoned to remarry? In any event, Paul admonishes the Christian spouses that God has called them to live in peace.

1 Corinthians 7:1-15 is important, not only because it touches upon early Christian praxis regarding divorce, remarriage and dissolution, but also because it gives insight into the Pauline understanding of a purpose of marriage and marital sexuality: a safeguard against sexual sin. Paul is writing in the expectation of an imminent *parousia*; therefore, rather than imposing absolute celibacy upon Christians, he indicates that it is better to have one husband or one wife than to fall into sexual sin or immorality (1 Cor 7:2). Implicitly, Paul says two things: 1) that marriage of Christians is to be monogamous (as indicated by the specifications that each one should have his own husband or wife, respectively), and 2) that marriage may serve as a safeguard against sexual immorality.

Marriage, Virginitly, and the End Times

For Paul, married life is good but difficult. It is marked by tribulations and by worries tied to the relationship of the couple, which at times, makes concern for the Lord less pressing. Consequently, he does not present marriage as the life most adapted to the urgency of the end times, to the eschatological return, so in 1 Cor 7:28, Paul speaks of worldly troubles or troubles of the flesh. Benedetto Prete writes that

with these words, Paul characterizes that religious tension that Christian spouses experience: that experience of feeling divided between the exigencies of family life and the requests of the faith, particularly the eschatological ones. With the term “flesh” (*sarki*), the Apostle indicates that the exterior man, that is, the man that lives in contact with the earthly realities, because he is married and bound to a family, feels, as a Christian, the internal tension between the duties imposed by his state and the eschatological demands of the faith.⁵

This concept is developed in different passages in the letter. In 1 Cor 7:28, he states that virgins that marry do not sin, but that with their husbands, they will have “worldly troubles.” These are the characteristics of married life that make it not the most favorable condition for awaiting the return of the Lord, since the wait should be lived in full concern for the things of the Lord, united fully to him. Marriage by its nature carries with it a necessary dedication and attention to the world, to the things of daily life, and to the needs of the spouses. It is not bad or evil, but the “times” demand focusing “without distraction” (7:35) on the things of the Lord. From here, Paul turns to inviting spouses to live as if they were not married, that is, detached from the preoccupations of married life since “the form of this world is passing away” and “the appointed time is very short” (1 Cor 7: 29-31).

Nevertheless, marriage, despite belonging to the economy of this transitory world and sharing in its somewhat provisional status, is esteemed by the Apostle as a *charism* (gift), alongside celibacy (1 Cor 7:7). Inasmuch as it is a gift, it plays a role in the growth of the body of Christ. Christian marriage is revealed in the eyes of faith as a mystery of Christ and the Church, a theme which is developed in Ephesians 5. The genesis of this concept can be gleaned from Paul’s words: “I

⁵ Benedetto Prete, *Matrimonio e continenza nel cristianesimo delle origini, Studio su I Cor. 7,1-40* (Brescia, Paideia 1979), 228.

want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor 11:2).

It is clear that for Paul, virginity is a preferable condition to marriage. The principle reason is that his expectation of the imminent return of the Lord and the “impending distress” (7:26) that it brings make it preferable to adopt a style of life that preserves intimacy with the Lord (7:35) without the worldly preoccupations and without the troubles in the flesh that are proper to married life (7:29-34). Virginity is therefore motivated by an undivided dedication to the Lord: “The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is worried about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided (*kai memeristai*)” (7:32-34).

There is another reason. Paul expresses his desire that all be like him (1 Cor 7:7-8). How exactly “was” Paul? Some say he was celibate; others say he was a widower; still others hold that he was married but separated from a wife who did not believe in Jesus. In any case, it is evident that Paul was not bound by a conjugal bond, and, therefore, he considered it possible and desirable that all could live like him without such a bond. Paul eventually asks that the Corinthians be imitators of him, as he is an imitator of Christ (11:1). The choice of the virginal state acquires a value, not only from the imitation of Paul, but from beyond Paul - from Christ Himself. The virgin is placed in the condition of imitating more fully and more radically the earthly existence of Christ.

Paul presents an ambivalent attitude in dealing with marriage: From one side, he teaches and defends the Christian value of marriage and of conjugal life; from the other, he proposes the suggestion of greater beatitude and superiority of the celibate life. The responses given about virgins (7:25ff.), like that for the betrothed (7:36-38) and widows (7:39-40) show a continuous oscillation between statements about the value of marriage and the objective excellence of virginity, which allows for a vital concentration on the Lord who is to come. Thus Paul recommends that “Each one should remain in the condition in which he is called” (7:24).

Conclusion

In summary, 1 Corinthians is rich with insights about sexuality and marriage. Our bodies have a “Christic dignity” and should be respected as such, particularly in the area of sexuality and marriage. While this dignity exists in individuals, it also exists collectively in the body of Christ, the Church. Marriage, therefore, is an ecclesial event, not merely a private function. In 1 Corinthians, Paul realistically acknowledges the sexual needs of the body and encourages mutuality and reciprocity between husband and wife in sexual matters. Sexual activity within marriage is a reasonable expectation which partners are mutually obliged to satisfy. 1 Corinthians is also important for its insights into early Christian pastoral practices with respect to divorce, dissolution, and remarriage. The Apostle shows great pastoral sensitivity to the delicate marital and religious situations of Christians, encouraging the married to strive for unity and peace within marriage. The most important contribution, however, seems to be the defense of the goodness of marriage and its establishment as an authentic vocation, a true gift for the sanctification of the spouses.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Does current Catholic moral teaching about sexuality and marriage express St. Paul's understanding of sexuality and marriage, found in 1 Corinthians?
2. Today, many people find the Church's teaching and practice regarding divorce and remarriage difficult and challenging. Is current practice a legitimate expression of Pauline teaching? How do Catholics remain faithful to God's Word yet sensitive to the situation of the divorced and remarried?
3. In generations past, when marriage was understood as a "contract," there was an emphasis on the "marriage debt" and what was "owed in justice." With a renewed emphasis on the understanding of marriage as a covenant, do current marriage preparation programs give sufficient pastoral attention, as St. Paul seemed to, to the reality and dynamics of the "debt"?
4. Does contemporary society have an appreciation of virginity for the sake of the kingdom or for undivided service to the Lord?

So We Do Not Lose Hope: Paul's Witness in the Face of Suffering

Rev. Rob Jack

The Second Letter to the Corinthians has been referred to as the *Gospel of Suffering* and the *Gospel of Hope*. In it, St. Paul offers himself to the people of Corinth as a living example of how to maintain hope in the midst of suffering. He has come to preach the Gospel and his preaching in word and deed is done in the midst of hardship, sacrifice and peril. In spite of what challenges he may face, his sole motivation is love: the love of Christ, and the love of the people whom Christ sent him to serve. Paul is a man on a mission and he will not accomplish this mission alone. His constant companion will be the Spirit of Christ, who urges him onward. St. Paul gives us a spiritual testimony that is as useful today as it was when he passed it on to the Corinthians. His testimony will focus on his weakness, his dying with Christ and the hope that death leads to resurrection.

Part One: We hold this treasure in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7)

Paul recognizes from the beginning that he possesses a great treasure within himself. At the same time, he recognizes his fragility as the bearer of that treasure. The treasure he has been given is Jesus Christ, the pearl beyond great price who was given to him through the Holy Spirit. It has been entrusted to him to be freely given away so that it may produce a great harvest. This precious gift of Christ is held in the most precarious of containers, the human heart. Earthenware containers crack easily, they wear down over the years and if the container is not properly prepared and sealed, things will seep in through the pores of the clay.

The same is true for the human person. Human beings can “crack” under the pressure of persecution, doubt, sickness and despair. If the person is not sufficiently sealed against the temptations and trials of life, sin can easily seep in and cause us to jettison the treasure of Christ so that they can fill themselves with whatever gives them pleasure or temporarily satiates their desires. But as sin gradually seeps in, the vessel itself begins to fall apart and becomes useless.

St. Paul knows his weaknesses and limitations and he recognizes that the only way to hold on to the treasure is to let the treasure transform him. It is the treasure that makes him the worthy vessel. The treasure seals him with the impenetrable love of the Holy Spirit, so that it is Christ that does the work in him and through him. He does not possess the strength in himself, but only through the transcendent power of God:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

If St. Paul has depended only on himself, the vessel of his being would have been shattered to pieces. It is only Jesus Christ who keeps him strong. Instead of the vessel protecting the treasure, the treasure consecrates and strengthens the vessel. St. Paul is helping his readers realize that they

will only be able to face the trials of life, bring the Gospel to others and nurture that life in themselves when they recognize that they are not God, but his servants. Alone they will be crushed, but with Jesus Christ, they will be conquerors.

Part Two: Death is at work in us, but life in you (2 Cor. 4:12)

When one examines the life of Christ through the heart of St. Paul, the key word that comes to mind is *kenosis*:

Jesus Christ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil.2:6-7).

The life of Christ was a constant libation of love, mercy and hope for the human race. St. John states this sentiment in his Gospel in this way: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain, but if it dies, it brings life (John 12:24). Jesus Christ served unto death so that the Father in love would restore him to a life of glory in the resurrection. Paul made these words the motto of his life. The only way for the treasure to be used is for the vessel to finally give way. St. Paul's hope for the Church at Corinth is that they possess the life of Christ, and he is willing to make his life an oblation so that Christ may come to life in them.

St. Paul offers this model to all who serve the Church. The Christian faith is only real for those who are willing to sacrifice for it and, if necessary, die for it. Jesus Christ gave us his Spirit from the cross. Paul received the Spirit and is now willing to give it up in order to pass it onward. All who serve the Church and each other have been given the same commission. People are often willing to suffer for material goals, and parents are willing to suffer for their children, but Paul asks them to go further if they are to serve Christ. In his apostolic ministry, Paul describes the many difficulties he encountered (2 Cor. 11:24-28): shipwrecks, beatings, dangers from fellow Jews, etc. He reminds those who serve the Church that bearing Jesus Christ comes at a cost. In order for the Gospel to take full possession of their heart, they must be willing to suffer for it, realizing that they do not suffer alone if Christ is their true and lasting treasure. Pope Benedict XVI echoes the teaching of St. Paul in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* when he writes

The true meaning of humanity is essentially determined in the relationship of suffering to the sufferer. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through "com-passion" is a cruel and inhuman society. Indeed, to accept the "other" who suffers means that take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. The Latin word *consolatio*, consolation expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude (*Spe Salvi* 38).

The mission of every Christian believer is to bring Christ to the world. This mission can only be carried out when Christians die to themselves by taking on the sufferings of others, so that the life of Christ can be passed onward. Christians do not carry this out because they seek suffering and death. Rather, they share in the sufferings of others because they possess a well-founded

hope from the resurrection that suffering and death in Jesus Christ will bring them to everlasting life.

**Part Three: Though our outer nature is wasting away,
our inner nature is being renewed every day (2 Cor. 4:16)**

If St. Paul sees himself as an “earthen vessel” (the what), and that his dying to Christ brings life to the world (the how), then the final question is why is St. Paul so confident? The answer is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul has previously addressed the reality of Jesus’ bodily resurrection with the Corinthian Church in Chapter Fifteen of the First Letter to the Corinthians. In his Second Letter to the Corinthian Church, he writes that the resurrection of Christ is the well-founded hope for all that he does:

we too believe and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence (2 Cor. 4:13b-14)

St. Paul knows now in faith that the resurrection has already begun in all who believe. The Sacrament of Baptism has buried all believers with Christ and has now raised them up to the dignity of God’s children as the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. This sharing in Christ’s resurrection is a preparation for the resurrection of the body when Christ returns in glory. Paul views all he has endured as a “slight momentary affliction” because he has his heart set on the prize of everlasting joy in heaven. His earthly existence is not an end, but a preparation for a new beginning. The “appointed time” is a day of salvation because Christ, our treasure, grows in his heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit directs his life, he makes his prayer fruitful, he makes his every action one that glorifies the Father. St. Paul does not view the death and resurrection of Christ as disconnected events. Rather, he sees them as integrally connected. Paul’s sufferings are not meaningless and empty. Rather, they are a wearing away of the old self of sin so that Christ may blossom in their hearts. If Christians desire union with the glorified Christ, they must die with the crucified Christ. Just as believers die daily to their own passions and sins, so every small death becomes an opportunity for new life, a new birth in Christ which began in the Sacrament of Baptism.

St. Paul’s message is not only for those who serve in the Church, but for all the members of the Body of Christ. Life, with all its burdens, struggles and sorrows can weigh people down. If people have only themselves on which to depend, these crosses will lead to despair, emptiness, loneliness and ultimately a spiritual death. Christ, who is Life, offers believers more than earthly survival. Life in Christ is not about endurance to the bitter end. Rather, Life in Christ is confidence that his life within them will overcome the effects of their suffering and fill them with hope that will not only be their companion in this earthly life, but also is the goal and fulfillment of all they are meant to be in the life to come. This message is not one of positive thinking or a type of denial, but rather it is the acceptance of a living hope, realized through a living faith in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. Paul knows that through a living faith and hope that it is God’s living, dynamic love that is shaping the life of Christ in his heart, that as he has shared in Christ’s wounds, so he will also share at last in his glorified, resurrected body.

Conclusion

The Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians offers to all people the hope he lives every day. His hope is that he does not fear suffering and death because he experiences them in union with Christ. Human frailties tempt Christians to abandon Christ and rely on themselves, but by dying to themselves and living for others, they receive and hand on the precious treasure of Jesus Christ. Through this reception and handing on of the Risen Christ, all Christians will discover every day that Christ grows in them through the power of the Holy Spirit. As Christians grow closer to all who live and share this faith, they will be able to offer true renewal to all who are burdened, weak and suffering despair. St. Paul knows that his suffering will not end in spiritual death, but ultimately in the glorious life of the children of God. He wishes for that goal to be the ultimate hope of all Christians.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. How have our earthen vessels been strengthened in carrying the Lord?
2. How can we offer consolation to the sick and suffering using these words of St. Paul?
3. How can we keep the hope of the resurrection alive in our prayers when we face daily struggles and hardships?

Paul's Death and Resurrection with Christ according to Philippians 3

Terrance Callan

In *Dying and Rising with Christ: The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Paulist, 2006) I have argued at some length that for Paul dying and rising with Christ is what Christianity is all about.

In Paul's view Christ has saved Christians from sin and death by uniting them with him in his death and resurrection. This union begins when we believe in Christ and are baptized into his death and resurrection. When we die with Christ, we die to sin and death. When we rise with Christ, we enter into a new life of freedom.

After our initial union with Christ in his death and resurrection, we continue to be united with him in death and resurrection throughout our lives as Christians. As Christians we form the body of Christ. And our union with Christ in his body is an ongoing union with him in death and resurrection.

This understanding of Christianity pervades Paul's letters. In what follows I will examine the way this understanding informs Paul's argument in chapter 3 of his letter to the Philippians.

The purpose of Philippians 3 is to warn the Philippians against people that Paul calls "dogs" and "evildoers" and against what he calls "mutilation" (v 2). Since he goes on in v 3 to speak of himself and other Christians as "the circumcision," it seems likely that circumcision is what he means by "mutilation." And this in turn makes it seem likely that the people against whom Paul warns the Philippians are people urging the Gentile Philippian Christians to keep the Jewish law. Paul implies that for the Philippians, keeping the Jewish law is a matter of putting confidence in the flesh. He describes Christians as those who do not put confidence in the flesh, but rather serve in the spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus (v 3).

If this is the correct understanding of Paul's purpose in Philippians 3, it is similar to his purpose in Galatians. The entirety of Galatians, however, is devoted to this purpose while only chapter 3 of Philippians has this purpose. In both cases Paul urges those he addresses not to keep the Jewish law in part by describing his own experiences. In both cases he begins by talking about his conversion. In Galatians he speaks of his conversion rather briefly (1:13-16) and proceeds to recount other events of his life. In Philippians he describes his conversion at somewhat greater length. In this description Paul presents his conversion as an instance of death and resurrection with Christ.

Philippians 3:4-11

Paul begins to describe his conversion by saying that he does not reject putting confidence in the flesh because he himself lacks grounds for confidence in the flesh. Rather, he claims, he has more reason for confidence in the flesh than anyone else (v 4). This makes it clear that Paul's argument is not self-serving. Not putting confidence in the flesh does not save him any effort, as it may the Philippians. He has already invested himself fully in fleshly confidence. Rejecting it is giv-

ing up the results of that effort. Thus the Philippians can be sure that Paul himself has nothing to gain from taking up this position.

In vv 5-6 Paul mentions seven reasons for his confidence in the flesh. The first four derive from the circumstances of his birth – “circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews” (v 5). His circumcision eight days after his birth incorporated him into the covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel. Thus it made him part of Israel, specifically a member of the tribe of Benjamin. The meaning of “a Hebrew of the Hebrews” is uncertain; it may mean that Paul and his family were speakers of the Hebrew language. Paul himself was responsible for none of these things. All result from his having been born into an observant Jewish family.

Paul follows these four items with three that reflect his own life choices – “with respect to law a Pharisee, with respect to zeal persecuting the church, with respect to righteousness in law blameless” (vv 5-6). He followed the Pharisaic understanding of what the law required, which was more demanding than some other ways of understanding it. Paul may have been born to a Pharisaic family, but he lived as a Pharisee by his own ongoing choice. His zeal for Judaism was so great (cf. Gal 1:13-14) that he persecuted the church. He saw Christianity as a threat to Judaism; consequently his zeal for Judaism moved him to eliminate that threat. His efforts to keep the Jewish law were very successful; when he measured himself by the requirements of the law, he found himself blameless.

Before his conversion Paul was quite confident that he knew what God wanted and that he was doing it. The extent of this confidence is clearest from his persecution of the church. His certainty that he knew God’s will made him certain that following Jesus was contrary to God’s will and that in turn led him to persecute the church. Paul perceived that following Jesus was not compatible with Judaism as he understood it. Since he was sure that Judaism as he understood it was God’s will, it was necessary to oppose following Jesus as contrary to it.

Paul’s conversion drastically changed this situation. Paul expresses this change in accounting language. “Whatever was profit for me, these things I regarded as a loss on account of Christ” (v 7). Paul’s conversion meant moving things from the profit column on his balance sheet to the loss column; his profits were suddenly re-evaluated as losses. Paul goes on to generalize this further, saying that he now regards “all things” as losses, and not only as losses, but also as “trash.” The reason for this re-evaluation was “the surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my lord” (v 8). This suggests that what has turned profits into losses is comparison of them with something of much greater value. The disparity between them makes the things of lesser value look like they lack any value at all.

This is the point Paul is trying to make. Becoming a follower of Jesus caused him to regard the things that gave him confidence in the flesh as loss rather than as profit. Therefore, the Philippian Christians, who already know Christ Jesus, should not seek the much less valuable confidence in the flesh that comes from circumcision and keeping the Jewish law.

Although Paul does not emphasize this, it is clear from what he says that he did not re-evaluate his profits as losses simply because he became aware of the much greater value of Jesus. The things that gave him confidence in the flesh brought him to the point of persecuting Chris-

tians. His conversion made him aware that this persecution was wrong, not simply inferior to Christ. Likewise, it made him aware that it was wrong to seek righteousness from the law; instead it should be sought by faith in Christ (v 9).

Paul's conversion was thus a drastic change in his thinking. What he had previously regarded as profit, he now regarded as loss and even as trash. His zeal for God had previously made him a persecutor of the church; now he was a member of the church and promoted it. He had previously sought righteousness by keeping the law; now he sought it by putting faith in Christ. This cataclysmic change in his thought and action Paul sees as a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

His conversion, Paul says, was a matter of being found in Christ (v 9), i.e., united with Christ, made a part of Christ. Because of his union with Christ, Paul shared everything important about Christ, above all his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ, Paul says he came "to know [Christ] and the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings" (v 10). Paul speaks of himself as "conformed to [Christ's] death if somehow I might arrive at the resurrection from the dead" (v 10-11). The first of many ways Paul was united with Christ in death and resurrection was by dying to his former way of thinking and acting, and rising to a new way of thinking and acting in his conversion. This was the first concrete instance of his union with Christ in death and resurrection.

Throughout this section Paul emphasizes the contrast between his pre- and post-conversion situations. He speaks of profit becoming loss and of death followed by life. In some ways his conversion turned his life upside down. He ceased being a persecutor and became an apostle. He ceased to seek righteousness from the law and instead sought it from faith. In other ways, however, his conversion did not completely reverse his former life. He remained one who had been circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and probably a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He may even have continued to be a Pharisee (cf. Acts 23:6). He no longer put confidence in these things, however, and regarded them as loss by comparison with knowing Christ. His attitude toward them was reversed, but not the things themselves.

Philippians 3:12-21

In discussing his conversion Paul presents it as a moment in which he died and rose with Christ. In the remainder of the chapter he speaks of the rest of his life as an ongoing participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The main reason that Christian life is an ongoing death and resurrection with Christ is that the salvation accomplished by Christ is not yet complete. Our bodies, and the material world in general, remain as they were before the coming of Christ. Salvation will only be complete when Jesus comes again to transform the body of our humiliation to the same form as the body of his glory (vv 20-21). Until then the followers of Jesus continue to share in his death as well as his resurrection. When Jesus comes again, they will simply live the resurrection life with him.

For this reason Paul clarifies that he has not yet fully attained the resurrection from the dead, but rather is still seeking it (v 12). He compares his pursuit of full resurrection with Christ to running a race (vv 13-14). He is like a runner who exerts himself to win the prize he will receive at

the end of the race, i.e., the fullness of resurrection with Christ. This image of his life as a race implies that Paul's conversion experience is extended throughout his life. Like a runner he forgets what lies behind him and strains toward what lies ahead. In this way he continually leaves behind what he formerly regarded as profit and looks ahead to complete union with Christ. He is caught up in death and resurrection with Christ. He has already died with Christ to what lies behind and looks forward to the fullness of resurrection with Christ when he reaches the end of the race.

In vv 15-17 Paul indicates why he has described himself at such length in vv 4-14. Paul urges the Philippians to think the same way he thinks (v 15), to imitate him and those who follow his example (v 17). In v 16 he urges them to continue what they have been doing. In the past the Philippians have thought the way Paul thinks. Right now they are in danger of changing their minds, probably because people are now encouraging them to keep the Jewish law and the Philippians are tempted to do so. To counter this Paul has described his death with Christ to putting confidence in the flesh and his resurrection with Christ to a new life. He has also described his ongoing death and resurrection with Christ as he awaits the fullness of resurrection with Christ. Paul asks the Philippians to join him in dying and rising with Christ and so to reject the temptation to keep the Jewish law.

Since the Philippians are Gentiles, not Jews like Paul, and since they have already undergone conversion to Christ when Paul writes to them, their death and resurrection with Christ cannot be exactly like Paul's own. Paul calls them to die with Christ by rejecting the temptation to keep the Jewish law and by accepting the incomplete state of their salvation through Christ. They should continue down the path they have been walking, not accepting the idea that they need to keep the law, not trying to make themselves perfect by keeping the law but accepting their imperfection until Jesus comes again.

Paul continues his effort to persuade the Philippians by describing those who do not follow his example. He describes them as enemies of the cross of Christ (v 18), people whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, who glory in their shame, who think earthly thoughts (v 19). This probably describes Gentile Christians who keep the Jewish law and persuade others to do so. They are enemies of the cross because they put confidence in the flesh rather than in Jesus' death and resurrection alone. Their god is their belly because they keep the food laws of the Old Testament. They glory in their shame because they are proud of circumcision and keeping other laws. Concern with keeping the laws is thinking earthly thoughts.

Paul continues by contrasting the earthly orientation of those who do not follow his example with the heavenly orientation of those who do. Paul says that our commonwealth is in heaven from where we expect a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (v 20). He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body (v 21). At that point our resurrection with Christ will be complete, and our dying with Christ will come to an end. Because of this expectation, we need to live now with heavenly, not earthly thoughts. This is what the Philippians were doing before they began to consider keeping the Jewish law. Paul ends by urging them to stand firm in the Lord (4:1).

Conclusion

In Philippians 3 Paul describes concretely what death and resurrection with Christ means for him. It has meant giving up his previous understanding of God's will and coming to a new un-

Paul's Death and Resurrection with Christ

derstanding in his conversion to Christ. It also means an ongoing effort to leave the past behind and look forward to the completion of salvation at the second coming of Christ.

Paul describes his own death and resurrection with Christ to offer himself as a model for the Philippians as he tries to persuade them not to begin keeping the Jewish law. Paul encourages them to die and rise with Christ by rejecting the temptation to keep the Jewish law and accepting the incompleteness of salvation.

In Paul's view death and resurrection with Christ is central to being a follower of Christ. Everyone who becomes a follower of Jesus does so by dying and rising with him. For each person this may unfold in a slightly different way. And as everyone lives life as a follower of Jesus, that person continues to die and rise with Christ. Again, this happens in many different ways.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What does Paul mean by speaking of himself and other Christians as participating in the death and resurrection of Christ?
2. What are the specific ways Paul says he has died and risen with Christ in Philippians 3?
3. How have you experienced death and resurrection with Christ?

Philemon – A Small Letter with a Big Message

Rev. Timothy P. Schehr

Just twenty-five verses long, Philemon is the shortest of Paul's surviving letters. Yet this seemingly slight contribution to the Bible, heard just once in the three-year Sunday cycle of readings (23rd Sunday C), can hold its own against Paul's grander compositions such as Romans or 1 and 2 Corinthians. Like them, its message is Jesus Christ and the transformation His death and resurrection bring into the lives of men and women in this world.

The name of the addressee is not certainly not one we hear everyday. Like the more familiar name Philip, the name Philemon includes within it the Greek word for "love" or "friendship". The man appears to have lived up to his name. He was generous. From the second verse of the letter we discover he welcomed the church to gather at his home for prayer. This detail puts Philemon in company with other generous early Christians we know from Paul's letters. Other house-churches included the home of Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19) and in Rome (Rom 16:3-5), also the home of Nympha in Laodicea (Col 4:15).

All those historical particulars we value so highly are hard to come by with this letter. We cannot be certain where Paul was at the time he wrote Philemon. Rome seems likely but not certain. Other localities like Ephesus and Caesarea by the Sea could likewise claim this one. Caesarea, for example, has the advantage of being fairly close to Philemon's home in Colossae. Such closeness would go along nicely with Paul's request that Philemon have a room ready for him when he arrives for a visit (verse 22).

Paul mentions others in his opening lines. There is an Apphia whom he calls "our sister" and an Archippus whom he calls "our fellow soldier." Are these names carried by Philemon's wife and son? If so these details provide us with a picture of an early Christian family. But Apphia and Archippus could also be servants in Philemon's household. Or they may be members of the extended Christian family enjoying Philemon's hospitality, perhaps even serving in some official capacity within Philemon's house-church?

Philemon is the only one of Paul's seven undisputed letters that is addressed to an individual. In some respects it is very much like a letter any one of us might send to a friend. It is comparable in size to a letter we might write. It is apparently written in his own hand just like ours. This is worth mentioning since Paul's usual practice was to dictate his letters to a scribe. A final feature that Philemon shares with a letter we might write is that, as we often do, Paul has a favor to ask.

Paul valued Philemon as a special friend. This has significance because Paul had an extensive network of friends. No other undisputed letter by Paul to a friend survives. (The letters to Timothy and Titus are regarded by many as not Pauline.) It is not unreasonable to assume Paul wrote other letters like Philemon. In the closing lines to the beloved in Rome the apostle asks his readers to extend greetings to an extensive network of friends. Some of them may have received letters from Paul as Philemon did. After all, if even presumably weighty letters like the one to Laodicea, and others to Corinth were lost, how many briefer messages from the apostle did not survive, whether discarded or treasured by individuals until lost to ravages of time?

Paul's letter announces that he is sending a slave back to Philemon. Paul wants his friend Philemon to welcome this slave as an equal in the Lord. The slave's name is Onesimus. He was a young man who left his master and ended up with Paul. The precise circumstances for his leaving are unknown to us. Was he unhappy? Was he feeling unappreciated? We simply do not know. What we do know is that while he was with Paul Onesimus became a Christian.

The apostle understands that Philemon may be reluctant to take his former slave back. But Paul wants him to consider the fact that Onesimus was away for just brief time. And he should weigh that brief time against the fact that he can now think of Onesimus forever as a fellow believer.

Paul seems confident that his request will be granted because of the mutual respect Philemon and he have for each other. Paul even takes the liberty to make a lighthearted play on words in his letter. The name Onesimus means "useful" but Paul hopes it is Philemon who will prove "useful" to him by allowing Onesimus to return. Paul asked Philemon to appreciate the fact that he and his former slave were now members of the body of Christ; they were therefore spiritual equals. We cannot know whether Philemon appreciated Paul's sense of humor or not. We do not even know if he allowed Onesimus to return. But the cordial tone of the letter suggests that Paul anticipated his request would be granted.

For all we know the early church cherished this letter and retained it in its library of sacred literature precisely because the ideal of human equality is expressed so candidly within it. But what makes the appeal in this letter unique from other appeals for equality is the fact that the argument is based on our common bond in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In our time it is difficult not to read this letter through the lens of our own experience with slavery in America. Does Paul condone slavery? It scarcely reads like the impassioned pleas of the abolitionists known to our history. Paul does not decry Philemon's life-style. Nor is there is call for emancipation. But looking for such things in this letter may be unfair. After all, we cannot expect Paul to view slavery from a viewpoint that humanity reached only so recently. On the other hand Paul does challenge Philemon and the rest of us to think about what it really means to be bonded in Christ.

The close bond between Christians is clearly evident in this letter. Paul speaks of his brothers and sisters. And he now counts Onesimus in this number. Just as faith in Jesus shatters barriers between Gentiles and Jews so it shatters the barriers of social convention like that of master and slave. Of course this theme is more famously expressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he says "...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (3:28)." But in this letter to Philemon this ideal of unity of Christ receives practical application. The time has come for Philemon to put faith into action.

Just as Paul's imprisonment does not diminish him in the eyes of fellow Christians like Philemon, so Onesimus' status as a slave should not diminish him in Philemon's eyes. Onesimus is now a fellow Christian. Just as Philemon would rejoice to see Paul set free, likewise he may rejoice to see Onesimus set free. The lesson is there for the citizens of this world to pick up. The world has taken some big steps towards the ideals that drive Paul's thinking in this letter; but the world

has much further to go. Should such a house of equality ever be constructed, its builders can look at this little letter as a significant contribution to its foundation.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. Are people like Onesimus in our lives? People we could release from the bonds of our preconceptions?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Paul and Philemon? Do such relationships exist for us?
3. How could we prove “useful” to God?
4. How do we regard Paul’s view of slavery in this letter?

The Scandal of the Cross: The Spiritual Foundation of Christian Morality

Rev. Michael A. Seger

The Iconography of the Passion

Standing in the autumn rain in St. Peter's square, a group of priests on sabbatical waited for Pope Benedict XVI. Immediately in front of the priests at this Wednesday audience a group of Buddhists stood waiting. From Asia, they carried prayers for peace. One of the group on sabbatical was a Maryknoll missionary who ministered in Japan. He spoke fluent Japanese and as he stood there one of the Buddhists asked him a question. Looking at the figure of Christ on the cross that flanked the papal chair, she asked, "Why do you show your god nailed to a cross?" He thought only for a moment and answered, "This is how God chose to reveal His love for us."

Perched on the Aventine hill in Rome stands the ancient church of Santa Sabina. One might easily overlook the cypress doors at the end of a weathered loggia. But high in the upper left corner rests the earliest extant depiction of the crucifixion. Not the cross alone, but the passion of Jesus flanked by Mary, his mother and John, the beloved disciple. The panel dates from the early 5th century. Standing before this depiction, one naturally asks: Why so late a date? Surely, the passion of Christ formed the center of the Paschal Mystery from the outset.

Art history has wrestled with this very question. Art historians note that the triumph of Constantine becomes the triumph of the cross. Soon the cross as symbol rests with the Alpha and the Omega to proclaim the triumph of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Lord and God. As one art historian pointed out "a long time would pass before the cross, and especially the crucifixion with the body of Christ, would appear in iconography, because crucifixion is a pagan form of torture. In 340 the torture of the cross was abolished" (Castellotti, www.Traces-cl.com).

The Scandal of the Cross

The early tradition of Christian iconography faced the challenge that St. Paul addresses with characteristic vigor and candor: the scandal of the cross. Early in his preaching ministry Paul discovered the centrality of the cross. Amid a crisis of divided loyalties, Paul reminds the Corinthians: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor 1:13) He lays out the foundation of his preaching authority: "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17). The wisdom of the cross reveals the mystery of God's wisdom. As the Maryknoll missionary said to the young Buddhist woman – this is how God chose to reveal His love for us.

Paul gets it right; for, "has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Cor 1:20) The power of the cross of Jesus Christ resides in its paradox that refuses to be leveled to mere platitude. Living the mystery of the redemption of the cross – this paradox – deepens faith that the seeming foolishness reveals redemptive love that holds back nothing. This wisdom eludes the worldly:

The Scandal of the Cross

For Jews demand signs and Greeks see wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:22-25).

Paul goes on to assure the Corinthians that “we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:7-8). Importantly, faithfully living the mystery manifests the presence of the Spirit who “searches everything, even the depths of God”:

So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (1 Cor 2: 11-13).

The Spirit Paul preaches is not a generic spirit but the Spirit of Jesus Christ who set at the core of discipleship the wisdom of the cross: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’” (Matt 16:24).

The Cross: “Lest the Cross be emptied of its Power”

This message of the centrality of the cross marks both Jesus’ ministry with its striking call to discipleship as well as – we suggest – the preaching of Paul. To the Galatians Paul says, “I should boast of nothing but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: through him the world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). So, how does “the world being crucified to me” touch upon moral living for the disciple of Jesus Christ?

A kenotic love

To begin with, what struck St. Paul and continues to challenge Christian discipleship is the quality of the *love* that living as a disciple demands. The love is a *kenotic* love – that is, one that empties itself (*kenosis*), holding nothing back. On the cross, Jesus surrenders to the will of his beloved Father. So, living the world as “crucified to me” draws each of us who follow the Lord into the self-emptying trust that marks his darkest moments of seeming abandonment on Calvary. We face this self-emptying love empowered in the Spirit of the Paschal Lamb. Hearing Paul speaking to his beloved if rambunctious Corinthians drives home that only the living Spirit of Jesus strengthens us to face the cross and its paradoxically redemptive love. This journey draws each of us into the mysterious depths of God whose wisdom until the eschaton will never fail to prove a stumbling block to some and to strike others as sheer foolishness.

The Cross: the path of *ascesis* and *transcendence*: Two Elements of Pauline Morality

Two essential elements of this *kenotic* love are *ascesis* and *transcendence*. Before discussing these two elements we need, however, to dispel an often misunderstood element of Christian suffering. The self-gift of *kenotic* love does not lionize suffering *per se*. Suffering is not a human good. Indeed, suffering forever challenges human aspirations, raising perennial questions about the meaning of human suffering. For the faithful Christian the cross, however, points toward a deeply meaningful encounter with suffering. The Paschal Mystery reveals the ultimate redemption of suffering and even death: “O, Death, where is thy victory? Where is thy sting?” (1 Cor 15:55) The cross testifies to the Lord’s entering into the depth of human suffering and redeeming it in Easter glory, not removing all suffering like an indulgent parent. No one who journeys through human loss, pain and separation in death avoids that turn in the road that brings one face to face with the dark night of the soul. Here the Spirit of the Risen Christ – to echo Paul – draws one deeply into the heart of God: a place always illumined by divine love.

To return to *asceticism*, we observe that an essential element of ethics in general informs Christian ethics as well: self-mastery and self-discipline (*ascesis*). To believe that living the intuitive command “Do good, avoid evil” is possible without hard-fought self-mastery is to indulge in an optimism bordering on the infantile. Shaping our freedom for excellence in essaying a life of virtue demands both human toil and divine grace. Our faith tradition tells us that from the cross Christ draws this asceticism into the mystery of the redemptive suffering of Our Lord. This drawing into the mystery of the cross forms a foundational pillar of Christian spirituality.

But the Christian spirituality of the cross is never an exercise in suffering for suffering’s sake. The Paschal Mystery testifies to the glory of the resurrection of Jesus – the triumph of gracious love over suffering and death. The cross of Jesus Christ points beyond suffering and death to *transcendence*. Here we encounter one of the deepest meanings of the cross in Christian spirituality. For the meaningful uniting of one’s self-denial to the love of God made manifest on the cross transforms this suffering in a moment of ultimate transcendence. The glory of Easter morning blazes in every darkness of Calvary.

The Virtue of Chastity as Ordered Desire

Before developing a specific example of living “the world crucified to me” within the vocation of marriage and family, we need to sketch the moral virtue of *chastity* and its relationship to the cross of Christ. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes in #2337 and following that

Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrity of the gift.

The virtue of chastity falls under one of the basic cardinal virtues: *temperance*. In the moral virtue of temperance bodily desires are brought under the guidance of human reason; so excessive drinking and eating, for example, are basically irrational for human well-being; whereas one's temperate use of both food and drink being tutored by reasonable restraint allows for authentic human freedom and fulfillment. Reasonable tutelage for one's sexuality describes the realm of *chastity*. The virtue seeks *right order* for our relationality in all of its dimensions. The cross of Jesus Christ points to the asceticism that any virtue demands since developing a *virtuous character* entails a hard-fought battle. In our discussion of the cross and the vocation to marriage we assume the rich discussion of the Catholic tradition on marital chastity.

Living the Cross in Christian Vocation: The Vocation to Marriage and Family

Keeping *marital chastity* in mind, we illustrate our discussion, by sketching what living “the world crucified to me,” looks like in the context of living one's vocation. Importantly, we no longer think of the experience of a *vocation* exclusively in the context of ordained ministry. In our baptism Christ calls each of us to a life in service of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the call to married life continues to be one of the most frequent calls. Our illustration will focus on marriage. Much of what is said *mutatis mutandis* can apply to these other forms of vocation.

That caveat in place, we observe that from within that call to a married vocation comes the invitation to the cross – to both ascesis and transcendence: living the call to become no longer two but one (Matt 19:6). The Roman Catholic teaching on marriage never excludes the need for self-mastery and sacrifice. Indeed, the Second Vatican Council in its monumental *Gaudium et spes* in the context of its discussion of marriage and family notes that

Outstanding courage is required for the constant fulfillment of the duties of this Christian calling; spouses, therefore, will need grace for leading a holy life: they will eagerly practice a love that is firm, generous, and prompt to sacrifice and will ask for it in their prayers (GS 49).

Struggling to be firm in one's fidelity, to be generous in self-giving and prompt in sacrifice demands a prayerful relationship with God from within the sacrament of marriage. Importantly, these acts of sacrifice align themselves with the cross of Christ and thus transcend mere exigency; that is to say, practical necessities that must be endured such as transfers for business careers or sharing smaller space in a home or unavoidable financial pressures. The key difference is that the sacrifice – large or small – roots itself in the rich soil of self-emptying love that founds a marriage and enriches God's realm with the great blessing of children. The Lord of the Cross blesses this love, drawing it to his sacrifice:

Our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of marriage. He abides with them in order that by their mutual self-giving spouses will love each other with enduring fidelity, as he loved the Church and delivered himself for it....Spouses therefore are fortified, and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament; fulfilling their conjugal and family role by virtue of this sacrament, spouses are penetrated by the spirit of Christ, and their whole life is suffused by

faith, hope and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God (GS 48).

The spirit of Christ penetrating a sacramental marriage draws all self-discipline and self-sacrifice into the redeeming transcendence of the Paschal Mystery. Marital ethics in particular and relational ethics in general in Christian faith leads to this encounter with the Cross. The way to perfection winds its way through self-sacrifice in love where the light of the Paschal Mystery sheds its light on our pilgrim way. The insight that the often arduous demands of the marital vocation present the transcendental ground for one spouse to help in the sanctification of the other cannot be dismissed or overlooked.

The Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et spes* notes that “Marriage and married love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children” (GS 50). Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* promulgated in 1968 soon after the closing of the Council begins by noting that the vocation to marriage and the openness to children demands sacrifice:

The most serious duty of transmitting human life, for which married persons are the free and responsible collaborators of God the Creator, has always been a source of great joys to them, even if sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress (HV 1).

Later in the context of the real possibility of observing moral restraints concerning the form regulating the spacing and number of children within a marriage takes, the text notes that “To dominate instinct by means of one’s reason and free will undoubtedly requires ascetical practices, so that the affective manifestation of conjugal life may observe the correct order, in particular with the observance of periodic continence.”

Paul VI goes on to argue that such ascetical practices ennoble marital love rather than diminish it. The description of the spiritual values enriching marital relationship bears all the marks of the cross of Christ: “It demands continual effort, yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities being enriched with spiritual values” (HV 21). Crucial to grasp is the *fully human* dimension of living marital chastity: love is an act of the will informed by our ever-deepening grasp of the loving design given us by God for human fulfillment. Engaging free will and intellect in creative encounter with moral challenges manifests the deepest nobility of human action. Such informed freedom roots morality. Without both self-knowledge and self-mastery, human acts can too often deteriorate into mere blind reactive actions at times utterly devoid of authentic human meaning.

The transcendence that self-mastery and self-sacrifice makes possible touches upon the entire family:

Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace, and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favors attention for one’s partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepens their sense of responsibility (HV 21).

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Living the vocation to marriage and family, then, leads to the foot of the cross of Christ. This sacrifice with its manifold expressions roots itself in self-emptying love thus drawing its Christian meaning and its ultimate goal in the transcendent glory of the Resurrection.

Conclusion

The crucifixion scene carved high atop the cypress doors of St. Sabina in Rome reveals the mystery of divine love inaugurating the Kingdom of God. In the realm of Christian ethics, the scandal of the cross of Jesus Christ draws natural *ascesis* and hoped-for *transcendence* of traditional ethics to a deeper spiritual level within the context of the economy of salvation.

St. Paul knew this truth as he aligned his ministry and its sufferings and eventual martyrdom to the truth of the Crucified Lord. The reticence of early Christian communities to embrace the scandal of the cross finds more than a little echo in the modern heart. After all, our Lord's call to carry one's cross at the center of Christian discipleship invites critical self-examination both individually and communally. Such self-examination forces one to look at the quality of the *love* that informs the moral life. We face the challenge of constant conversion into the person whose character and actions reflect the God who mounted the cross to reveal the way he loves us.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What is the role or function of art in Christian evangelization?
2. What prayer comes to your mind and your heart when contemplating the Lord hanging on the cross?
3. The Lord's invitation to "take up your cross" comes to us in the context of American culture. What challenges do you foresee in following this invitation for 21st century Americans?
4. Where in your life can you outline the call of the Cross – the invitation to self-emptying love (kenosis)? How have the sacraments supported your response?
5. If someone asked you "why do you hang your God upon a cross?" what would be your response?

The Ecclesial Nature of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Rev. Benedict D. O’Cinnsealaigh

Show Me the Gifts of the Spirit

Who has the gifts of the Holy Spirit? Does a Christian receive all these gifts at once or only those necessary for a particular mission or task? Are these gifts received at Baptism or Confirmation? Do priests receive special gifts at their Ordination; men and women at their Marriage? Are these gifts virtues or skills?

As a newly ordained priest and in parish ministry only a year, plenty of questions came flooding into my thoughts. Typically, Sunday homilies came easy to me. Normally they weren’t difficult struggles. But the “high holy days” were the exception and this first year, the Solemnity of Pentecost, became my Waterloo. Coming up with ideas wasn’t the problem. My mind was overflowing with them! In fact, I must have written that homily seven times! But, each rewrite lacked what I hungered to uncover. Frustration even set in when I realized that what I wanted to say wasn’t even clear to me! There were just too many questions about a genuinely immense mystery.

By the time Pentecost Sunday arrived, even more ideas were floating around in my head. I was absolutely distracted. The procession was arranging in the back of Church and my mind was still muddled with thoughts and images. As I revered and incensed the altar and proclaimed the opening collect, I still had nothing. I listened to the first reading, responsorial psalm, the second reading, and the Gospel acclamation. Still nothing! As the deacon proclaimed the Gospel, my thoughts were an *empty vessel*. There was no more time to prepare. I moved from the presidential chair, reached the ambo and looked out over the congregation.

As I glanced out over the congregation, my gaze first fell on a married couple. During Advent Season the husband had asked me for a favor. His wife told him she didn’t want him to give her a Christmas present. She explained lovingly that she had everything she could possibly need or want. More material *things* were not necessary. Instead, she asked, would you take the money you would have spent on a gift for me and give it to another? In the parish was a really remarkable person, a single mother, one with no children of her own, but who adopted and fostered a number of children considered at risk. This woman formed a *family*, was a loving mother, embraced each child, and was particularly careful of each child’s spiritual needs. Every Sunday she attended Mass with her children. She was a truly spiritual person and, although she never saw it herself, she was a model Christian for the people of the parish.

Moved by his wife’s suggestion, the husband not only contributed the money he would have spent on his wife’s gift, but he also contributed the money his wife would have spent on him. He asked me to pass along this substantial amount of money to this special mom and her family. It was to be an anonymous gift. The single mom was to be told that she was greatly admired for her generosity and the care she was bestowing on the children. Upon receiving this gift, thinking she was invisible to the parish family, the lady was moved to tears.

My second glance that day at Mass fell upon another couple. The wife, an obstetrician, provided health care to women with limited incomes; many had no medical insurance or money to

pay doctor bills. Across from this second couple was a woman who initiated the parish soup kitchen providing hot meals for those in need. Behind her, a couple who ministered to children in need and operated the reading center for adult literacy. Glancing to my right, on Our Lady's side altar of Church, I saw another woman who taught immigrants English as a second language.

Suddenly, it hit me. My heart was absolutely convinced of a truth I had not uncovered, nor acknowledged. Excitedly, my eyes continued to look out over all the Mass attendees, there were parishioners teaching and volunteering their time to be sponsors for the RCIA program, men and women instructing youth in the CCD program, people organizing youth groups. Youth leaders, readers, ushers, servers, and bereavement ministers were everywhere I looked. There were excellent fathers, sons, and husbands; and superb mothers, sisters, and wives. The Church was alive with faith-filled people. Each of them in their own way, gifted, outstanding, generous, and committed Christians were assisting the community. As I was chaotically searching for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, trying to find something interesting and engaging for a homily, I overlooked what in that one moment the Spirit revealed to me. His gifts were right here, in front of me, being acted upon within God's people.

Pastoral Consequences

As a priest, this incident became a profound pastoral realization. It allowed me to see that everything needed for the building up of the parish, the diocese, and the Church, or to put it more exactly, for the Kingdom of God, was present through the workings of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in these people who accepted the Spirit's gifts, and who were gathered for Mass. This was present in three ways: 1) the faithful Christian people, themselves, are gifts of the Spirit; 2) the faithful are given the gifts for the sake of their own personal holiness; and 3) together the faithful, priest, and people have every gift, charism, talent, and fruit of the Holy Spirit that is necessary for the Church to be made present, fruitful, and vibrant; and for the Kingdom of God to be made visible.

God's message that Pentecost Sunday was not for the people; it was for me, God's shepherd of His people. Frankly, it is obvious to me, and to anyone who knows me, that I do not have all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This being said, what I did learn from this experience was that I don't have to have all the gifts personally. Rather, as the spiritual leader of the parish community and as the father of communion, the priest needs to be aware of where these gifts manifest themselves and allow for those gifts to be utilized in the service of the parish and community. As a priest, it is also my task to encourage the faithful to open their wills, souls, minds, and hearts to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the gifts the faithful receive are to be used for Christ's mission. In this sense, the priest is like the conductor of an orchestra. He has his own part in bringing everything together, but he is not the one who instills the spiritual gifts. Saint Paul might refer to it this way: the Priest stands in the place of Christ as the head of the Body, but all the parts are necessary for the body to be whole and healthy.

Incarnational

This view of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is both incarnational and ecclesial. The Catholic Church has always been unashamedly and uncompromisingly committed to an incarnational theology. God touches his people not in some magical and ethereal fashion, but through real and embodied signs, material reality, and actions. The sacraments, and indeed the Church herself, are the

great expressions of this *incarnate* reality of God's presence among us. According to the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a sacrament is "an efficacious sign, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which the divine life is bestowed upon us" (224).

In other words, a sacrament is a way in which God reaches out from heaven and touches his children's lives. While it is *mysterious*, meaning that it has its source and end in God, it is also real and immediate. God really does touch us, change us, embrace us, and show us his love. The most profound expression that makes God's love incarnate is through the Eucharist. In a *real* way God changes bread and wine into the Body and Blood of His Son to save us, liberate us from sin, and feed us for our journey to communion with each other and with God. The Eucharist is a sign of God's great love for us. As a sacrifice, it shows how much the Father loves us. God willingly gave us everything He loved most, his only begotten Son. On the other hand, the Eucharist tells us that Christ willingly gave up everything to reveal how much he loved the Father. He gives himself in order to bring us into communion with the Father. This "communion" is the Father's desire. The Divine Logos became man for love of the Father. Christ, the incarnate Logos, suffered and died to restore us to the Father's love. With Christ there is no holding back, nothing reserved. Everything is given over for the love of the Father.

An incarnational character is central to all the sacraments. Probably the most beautiful expression of this incarnational closeness is seen in the Sacrament of Marriage. While marriage is a sign of the great love a man and woman have for each other, the rite first declares that marriage is a sign of God's love for us. If a sacrament is God's way to reach out and touch our lives, this indicates that for the groom and bride, each should be the minister of the sacrament to their respective spouse. The groom and the bride are to be instruments of God's love to one another. In an incarnational sense, each married spouse is to offer something of the presence, voice, help, comfort, compassion, and even tender embrace of God for the loved one. God reaches out and kisses his beloved through the sacramental instrumentality of each spouse. In a more poetic way, the touch, embrace, and kiss of each spouse is an expression of the touch, embrace, and kiss of God.

If the sacraments show us anything at all, they surely indicate that God desires to be close to us. God desires to touch our lives. It is incredible how God is willing to make his *touch* or *presence* real to us. The same incarnational character is found in all of God's gifts, in the gifts of creation and in the sacramental gifts. Why should the presence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit be any less incarnational in character?

Saint Paul: Individual and Ecclesial Pneumatology

Saint Paul's theology is an excellent framework for understanding both the individual and ecclesial character of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church through both pastors and the faithful. There has always been a strong tendency to interpret the *spiritual gifts* of the Holy Spirit in a compellingly individualistic way. The catechetical preparation for the liturgical celebration of Confirmation has certainly tended to empower such a notion with its concentration of the list of gifts (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord) (CCC1831) received through the sacrament (cf. *Introduction to Catholicism*, The Didache Series, Illinois: Midwest Theological Forum, 2005, pp. 142-149).

The Ecclesial Nature of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* underscores this point when it states: “The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1830). In addition, commenting on the fruits: “The *fruits* of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory” (CCC 1832). Such an interpretation is legitimate, as individuals do receive these gifts. And, as we have already stated, this is an appropriate understanding of the gifts as the gifts, charisms, and fruits of the Spirit are best understood when they are seen as an incarnational reality.

However, while both Scripture and Tradition maintain that the gifts are given to individuals they also even more strongly maintain that such gifts are given for the building up of the Church and for the sake of the Kingdom. All gifts have an ecclesial character and are given for the sake of the ecclesial mission. Ecclesial mission here does not simply mean involvement in the parish community or the structures of the Church; rather, it calls us to transform the “world” into the Kingdom of God. This clearly is Saint Paul’s understanding of the nature and character of the pneumatological gifts.

The first point concerning the theology of Paul on the gifts of the Spirit is the sheer multiplicity of gifts that are present even in the primitive Christian community:

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1 Corinthians 12:4-14	1 Corinthians 12:27-30	Romans 12:6-8	Ephesians 4:11
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wisdom• Knowledge• Faith• Healing• Working of miracles• Prophecy• Discernment of spirits• Speaking in tongues• Interpretation of tongues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apostles• Prophets• Teachers• Miracles• Healings• Helps• Administration• Varieties of tongues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prophecy• Ministry• Teaching• Exhortation• Giving• Leading• Showing mercy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apostles• Prophets• Evangelists• Pastors• Teachers

There are other gifts, not directly mentioned in the lists above, which, nonetheless, Scripture suggests are gifts of the Spirit. These gifts include: hospitality, voluntary poverty, and celibacy/virginity for the sake of the Kingdom.

In First Corinthians, Paul speaks of “different kinds of spiritual gifts,” “different forms of service,” and “different workings,” but the “same Spirit,” the “same Lord,” and the “same God.” In this Trinitarian formula, Paul indicates that it is God the Father, Son, and Spirit who bestow on the Church the gifts and works that are necessary to carry out the mission of Christ. The gift of

the Spirit, Paul states: “is given to the individual for some benefit.” Whereas, this may seem to support an emphasis of the gifts as primarily for the sake of the individual’s salvation, yet it’s the very nature of the gift itself, be it wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, discerning spirits, speaking and interpreting tongues, and even the ability to do mighty deeds that indicates a communitarian and evangelical objective. To support this interpretation, Paul frames this teaching within his theology of the ecclesial body: “God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as He intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (1 Cor 12:19ff). “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it” (1 Cor 12:27). In 1 Corinthians, Saint Paul goes on to teach that while the gifts of the Spirit are given to individuals, they are also given for the sake of the whole body into which the individual is incorporated.

The Letter to the Romans repeats this same message, but in an even more anthropomorphic fashion. The body, itself, is to become a living sacrifice, dedicated and offered to God (Romans 12:1). Yet, this individual body has a corporate aspect, as Saint Paul understands all Christians to be sharers in the one Body of Christ: “For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another” (Rom 12:4-5). Paul goes on to identify the mission of the parts, the People of God, as the Body of Christ, in accordance with the gifts they have received from the Spirit. The gifts are to be exercised for the sake of the whole Body and, in particular, for the sake of the mission of the Body, which is the mission of Christ and the Church.

This understanding is not unique to Paul. Jesus emphasized these same points in the parable of the talents in the Gospels of Matthew (25:14-30) and Luke (19:12-27). Jesus clearly states that talents are to be used so that they may reap a benefit, not for the servant, but for the Master. Just before Christ’s Ascension, the Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit from the Father who will form Christ’s followers and prepare them to carry out Christ’s mission. It seems reasonable then to assume that the gifts, charisms, and talents, which the Holy Spirit gives, are communicated primarily for the sake of carrying on Christ’s mission. Indeed, in its central document on the nature and mission of the Church, the Second Vatican Council states: “Thus every layperson, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself ‘according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal’” (*Lumen Gentium* 33). The same Council emphasizes the “secular, temporal, and evangelical” character of the laity. The Laity “to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world. By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (*Lumen Gentium* 4). Pastors should clearly understand that the mission of the faithful is to transform “the world,” and the pastor’s ministry is to prepare, encourage, and support the laity in carrying out this mission. Gifts are bestowed for the sake of building God’s Kingdom.

Do You Know Where Your Treasure Is?

The gifts of the Spirit are treasures you are asked not to bury, but to ‘invest’ and put to work in the field of the Lord for the sake of salvation. As servants of the Lord, pastors need to look out over their flock and ask: Where are these gifts and talents to be found? Am I burying what the Lord has given me through and in my flock? Am I putting the Lord’s wealth to work? As servants of the Lord, the laity needs to ask: What gifts and talents has the Lord given me for the sake of His Kingdom? Do I use these talents or gifts as the Lord desires? Do I use them first

and foremost for the sake of the Kingdom? Gifts and talents are for the sake of the whole body, says Saint Paul. And the Lord promises that in the end the Master will ask for an accounting.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. The Sacrament of Confirmation is often seen as a personal sacrament which is given to the individual Christian in order to build up their faith. Can the sacrament of Confirmation also be seen as an ecclesial sacrament meant to build up the Church and make present the Kingdom of God?
2. In the document *Lumen Gentium* the Second Vatican Council said that the gifts of the Spirit are given to the faithful for the building up of the Kingdom of God (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 7, 12, 13, 33). How do you use these gifts in your daily life and how does that use build God's Kingdom on earth?
3. What is the role of the Pastor in making the gifts of the Spirit, present in the faithful, effective in the parish community and the wider society?

Paul's Self-Understanding as a Preacher

Deacon David J. Shea

Mediator of Meaning

One of the more enduring images for the preacher is that of “mediator of meaning.” It refers to the self-understanding of the preacher and it was put forth in the 1982 document from the National Catholic Conference of Bishops Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled In Your Hearing*:

The person who preaches in the context of the liturgical assembly is thus a mediator, representing both the community and the Lord...The preacher represents this community by voicing its demons, and thus enabling it to gain some understanding and control of the evil which afflicts it. He represents the Lord by offering the community another word, a word of healing and pardon, of acceptance and love.

The preacher, in a very real way, stands between the two parties, oftentimes in tension, striving to make a meaningful connection between the words of Scripture and the everyday activities, struggles, problems, and joys of the congregation. It is a challenging task of interpretation: interpreting what is going on in the lives of the people and interpreting the sacred texts to find a meaningful axis of convergence between the two. The preacher journeys into the scriptures with an in-depth understanding of his people, having been touched by them in their dealings with a whole assortment of issues. It is a matter of being one of the members of the congregation, but also being different and apart from the congregation. The preacher walks a line somewhere in between being Christ and being one of the congregants. It's difficult and delicate and it is here that the preacher finds his point of meaning with the very ministry of Christ – the preacher strives to be an authentic reflection of God's Word as spoken in scripture, and, at the same time, a reflection of God's work in people's lives.

Paul's Identity as Preacher

Paul's letters provide us with surprising insights into his self-understanding as both minister and preacher. He, like most preachers, appeared to have an excellent understanding of the role that preaching played in the larger context of his ministry, but he was also very clear that preaching was *the* ministry to which he had been called – “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17 NAB). While Paul evangelized, established congregations, and catechized, above all he was a preacher. For Paul preaching was vital. While he likely would not have used mediator in referring to his preaching identity, in his own way, Paul was very much a *mediator of meaning* as he straddled the line between the Hebrew Scriptures and the challenges and issues of his congregations. He interpreted the sacred texts in light of his first-hand conversion experience and then applied them to the specific pastoral circumstances of his own diverse congregations.

Scripture scholars and authors variously described Paul as human, emotional, passionate, arrogant, forgetful, and even contradictory. His writing suggests that while these may all be appro-

priate attributes for describing him, Paul referred to himself as “a servant of Christ Jesus” (Romans 1:1 NAB), “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 1:1 NAB), and “an apostle sent not by men or by any man, but by Jesus Christ and God his Father” (Galatians 1:1 NAB). His determination for and commitment to preaching the Gospel found its authority in a radical transforming life-changing encounter with the risen Christ. He brought the same intensity and fervor to his preaching as he had brought to his persecution of Christians and he understood his ministry as one of bringing Christ to the Gentiles. Paul saw himself as the spokesperson for Christ himself and aligned his identity with that of Christ; he believed that he was called by God to be a preacher – “We speak in Christ’s name, pure in motivation, conscious of having been sent by God and of standing in his presence” (2 Corinthians 2:17 NAB). Paul was saying, in effect, that if he had any identity, except one that reflected Christ, it would be an obstacle for bringing the Word of God to his congregations. The notion of the divine nature of preaching is addressed in Timothy George’s foreword to *Stewards of the Story: The Task of Preaching*. Placing preaching in the context of stewardship, he stresses the daunting responsibility assumed by those who respond to this call and he underscores the reality that expectations and responsibilities come with this ministry and that all preachers will be held accountable for them:

God-called preachers...are *stewards* of this amazing Story (an account of God’s purpose for the world and for each of us). There is great joy in such a stewardship, but it brings a burden as well. Story-stewardship implies a unique calling, a divine commissioning, a holy accountability, and a distinctive demeanor among those who would handle it well.

Paul as Witness

For Paul, it was never about his self-esteem or his self-aggrandizement; it was always about Christ. When he preached Paul wanted people to hear Christ and for Christ to be manifested in his own person. Paul loved Christ with such an intensity and passion, that it was impossible to listen to him and not be emotionally impacted by what he said and how he said it. Paul’s credentials set him apart as a preacher – he who was once a Pharisee and a persecutor of Christians, had become a Christian himself and an apostle, missionary, and evangelist. As a preacher Paul was a powerful witness for Christ and he brought life and authenticity to the Gospel by virtue of his willingness to witness to what had happened to him. It was the character of his witness, as a believer, that made Paul such an effective preacher. People then, as they do today, wanted to hear a person of witness in the pulpit and that’s what they received from Paul. This is quite consistent with the guidance of the United States Bishops in *Fulfilled In Your Hearing*. In the concluding paragraph of the chapter on “The Preacher,” the bishops make reference to a survey that was taken among parishioners about what they expected most from a homily: “When the results were in, the answer was clear. What the majority wanted was simply to hear a person of faith speaking. Ultimately, that’s what preaching is all about, not lofty theological speculation, not painstaking biblical exegesis, not oratorical flamboyance. The preacher is a person speaking to people about faith and life” (15).

Putting the Assembly First

Paul faced some unusual challenges that had everything to do with the itinerant nature of his ministry. He was responsible for multiple congregations over an impressive geographic area, and while he endeavored to maintain personal contact with each of his them, that frequently wasn’t possible. Yet, his letters were very particular in that they addressed specific pastoral and moral is-

sues in an almost precise and categorical manner. Clearly Paul had first-hand knowledge of what was happening to his congregations and he used that information in the development of his homilies, so that when he preached he did so with particularity and relevance.

Paul seemed always to place the assembly first and he took an authentic congregational perspective in dictating his letters/homilies. His preaching was then an extension of his ministerial work and it was the way that he kept the Gospel alive and fresh for his listeners. Paul's approach to preaching, placing the congregation in a preeminent position, serves as an excellent model for all preachers of all times. The people who sit in the pews week after week are the critical starting point for preaching and these same people must exert an unrelenting influence on every aspect of the homily reflection, preparation, and writing process. Good preaching must always reflect the community and the more precisely we can preach to them the more likely they are to leave Mass with the feeling and conviction that the homily was preached specifically to each of them; that they each received, understood, and perceived it as being practicable and functional. Paul understood that he had to know his people and what was going on in their lives if he was going to preach to them. In his book, *Ordained to Preach*, Charles Miller discusses the importance of the congregation as the starting point and continuing focus of preaching when he says: "A priest is a preacher by ordination, and when he is true to his calling, he never reads or studies or has any experience for himself alone; he must always be thinking about nourishing his people through preaching."

Paul's Preaching Style

If we were asked to evaluate a preacher, the first thing we'd insist upon doing is to listen to him or her preach. As important as the content of a homily is and how it is structured and written, there is a great difference between words on a manuscript and words delivered in the context of an actual preaching event. Homilies are meant to be heard not read, and words on a page inadequately convey the passion and energy, the gestures and facial expressions, the volume and projection, and the wonderful varieties of inflection, pausing, and pacing that a preacher brings to the delivery of a homily to a living, breathing, and responding congregation. Preached words are full of life and they have an immediacy about them, and the manner in which a preacher is perceived as he or she stands in the pulpit can either advance or hamper the way a homily is received and the impact it has.

In assessing Paul the preacher and evaluating his style, all that we have is his letters, and ordinarily this would represent an insurmountable handicap. Yet Paul's letters provide us with a great deal of information about his approach to preaching. The style of Paul's writing closely parallels that of speech. His choice of words, the pattern of phrases, the images that he employed, the basic sentence structure and punctuation he used, are all characteristic of public speaking: "Now then, teacher of others, are you failing to teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? ... You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" (Romans 2:21-22 NAB). "God chose whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's lowborn and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28 NAB). "They claimed to be wise, but turned into fools instead; they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images representing mortal man, birds, beasts, and snakes" (Romans 1:22-23 NAB).

Scholars suggest that Paul dictated his letters given their distinctive oral nature. In his book, *Paul the Preacher*, Raymond Bailey makes the point that Paul's letters "were written as performance literature....Paul intended them to be read publicly in the churches and dictated them in a fashion conducive to that purpose." There is, as a rule, a genuine sense of urgency about the letters and they seem to reflect Paul's uneasiness and anxiousness. It is easy to envision Paul pacing across a room as he dictates a letter, growing increasingly more energetic and impassioned as it takes shape, frequently stopping, restating, correcting, and revising. Clearly Paul knew what was happening in his congregations and he understood the issues and the problems they were facing, and as much as he wanted to be able to preach to them in-person, letters were often his only option. He dealt directly and particularly with their struggles; he wrote as one who knew them personally, as one who cared deeply for them, and he wasn't hesitant to place himself in the congregation as one who shared and experienced their struggles as evidenced by his frequent use of "we" and "our" over "I" and "your": "rather what I wish is that *we* may be mutually encouraged by *our* common faith" (Romans 1:2 NAB); "But if *our* wrongdoing provides proof of God's justice, what are *we* to say?" (Romans 3:5 NAB); "Through him *we* have gained access by faith to the grace in which *we* now stand, and *we* boast of our hope for the glory of God" (Romans 5:2 NAB).

Nor was Paul afraid to poke his finger in the eyes of his congregation to get their attention and to motivate them to change – he confronted them in a concrete, specific, and relevant manner. In all of his writings, he wanted people to recognize his letters as his very own. Having heard him speak, having listened to him preach, he hoped that they would be able to make the connection between his spoken words and his written words.

The urgent and often intense nature of Paul's letters suggests that he never held back – could not hold back – when it came to preaching the Gospel; *inbibited* is not a characteristic of his preaching. Paul brought an unparalleled passion to his preaching that was a consequence of his own personal encounter with the Word. He relinquished all emotional restraint in the pulpit, and as a model for the demeanor of the contemporary Catholic preacher, there is none better than Paul.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What specific practices of Paul as a preacher can you take and put into practice in your preaching?
2. What elements of Paul's preaching style can be used to improve your delivery of the homily today? How appropriate is the exercise of style in Catholic preaching?
3. To what extent do you embody your faith and give life to the Gospel in your own witness as a preacher? What does it mean to witness in faith as a preacher? Would witness be a word your parishioners would use to describe you as a preacher? If not witness, how would you be described by your parishioners? How does this compare to how you see yourself as a preacher?
4. How are we to interpret Paul's letters for preaching? How can we come to a better understanding of what Paul said and how that is relevant to the living of the Christian life today?
5. It was important for Paul to address particular issues in a forthright and specific manner in his preaching while giving his congregations something very particular to do as a consequence of

his preaching – these are the trademarks of his preaching. To what extent are you particular and concrete in your homilies – in the content, message, examples and illustrations – and do you strive to provide your congregations with something particular to do? To what extent do you preach on moral issues in your Sunday homilies? What should our approach be when it comes to preaching on sensitive and volatile moral issues such as contraception, cohabitation, and sin? How forcefully and particularly should we address these issues in our Sunday homilies?

***Koinonia* in the New Testament: Integral Dynamic of the Christian Life**

Betty Jane Lillie, S.C.

The Word *Koinonia*

In composing the New Testament texts, the writers began with the words already available in the Greek language of the day. Then as their work continued, it often happened that the expression of the message took on a theological meaning that developed profound understandings of the integral truths of the Christian life. In our time it can happen that research in a theological dictionary of the Bible or in a lexicon might start with word meanings at the everyday level, and then move a person into deep insights of the topic under study. Such may be the case with the word *koinonia*.

Koinonia is variously translated as “partnership,” “communion,” “fellowship,” taking its root meaning “sharing” from *koinoneo* which means “share in,” and *koinonos* which means “one who goes shares with you” or a “participant” such as a “partner.” The main element is that of fellowship and thus is well adapted to express inner relationship.

In secular Greek *koinonia* was a business man’s term for a business partner or associate. It was also used for the close life partnership of marriage which had more comprehensive extension than other kinds of fellowship. Further, in a religious vein, though polytheistic in context, the word was used in connection with the sacrificial meal that became a kind of communion of the gods with humankind. That thinking continued through Hellenistic and Roman times.

The language itself, then, had cultural and religious roots that enabled it to move forward in Gospel writing to express important aspects of the Christian life. A case in point is in Luke’s Gospel. The Evangelist speaks of James and John as partners (*metochois*) with Simon in the fishing business (Luke 5:7). But right after that the text may suggest to the reflective reader that their leaving all to follow Jesus made them partners (*koinonoi*) in the realm of the apostolate where they would share the work of bringing the Good News of salvation to the nations (Luke 5:10).

The Formation of *Koinonia*

The greatest use of the word *koinonia* occurs in the Pauline writings, but we are not surprised to find the concept in other parts of the New Testament. In the theology of Mark, the establishment by Jesus of *koinonia* among his chosen disciples finds its natural setting. Jesus himself embodied the mystery of the kingdom which he imparted to his associates. It must be borne in mind that the initiative was his. They would be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15). That was the beginning of Jesus’ *chaburah*, his religious association of friends. Luke called those men apostles, which some interpreters term companions.

We are cautioned not to reduce *koinonia* to merely friendly relationships with one another. The vertical dimension is the primary one, and it is founded entirely on Christ and the Spirit. The concept of participation is found in many of the texts, for we participate in the blood of Christ, in his body, indeed even in Christ himself with his sufferings, the Spirit, and in the promise of future

glory in his kingdom. In the first epistle of John it is the Word who is life who is the starting point for the union of believers (1 John 1:1-3). Thus the horizontal dimension derives from the vertical relationship, and can only be understood in connection with it.

A cursory reflection on the ministry of Jesus recalls to our minds the fact that the apostles of Jesus not only left all things and followed him (Luke 5:11), but they remained with him throughout his apostolate and were the subjects of very special instructions (Mark 4:11). But it would seem, as we look ahead, that the *koinonia* begun in Galilee would be destined to a sudden and traumatic end at the time of the Passion and Death of Jesus, and certainly after his Ascension. But in the upper room in Jerusalem the night before he died Jesus provided for the continuance of what he had started. Such simple things as bread and wine became the provisions for the continuance of their fellowship by and through his saving and sacrificial death on the cross. Through Jesus' life-giving death the very power of sin and death would be broken and in his triumph the fellowship which he started would grow and spread to all the nations.

As to the place of the Twelve in Christian community it can be said that because of their closeness with Jesus all during his public ministry they came into a special role in authenticating the Jesus tradition and in decision making for the community. That is implied in such texts as Galatians 1:18-2:10 and Acts 6:2-6; 15. An eschatological aspect of it prevailed in Matthew's Gospel where it is said that the apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28-29).

Whereas at first the eschatological aspect prevailed, Paul brought to the fore the missionary aspect of the apostleship. The *koinonia* established by Jesus would extend to all the nations, and ultimately find its fulfillment in the eternal glorious *koinonia* in heaven. In the Father's house there are many rooms prepared for those who believe in God so that they may be taken by Jesus to his kingdom to be with him (John 14:1-3). Jesus did not leave his loved ones desolate (John 14:18) but promised that he and his Father would come and make their home with them (John 14:23). He promised to send them his Holy Spirit, the Counselor, and he gave them his peace, thus directing and fortifying their perseverance in *koinonia* with one another and with him (John 14:25-29).

***Koinonia* in the Early Christian Communities**

After the Ascension of Jesus the community of about one hundred twenty believers returned to the upper room where they had been staying and devoted themselves to prayer as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. After Peter's first sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) about three thousand souls were added to the community (Acts 2:41).

Three summary passages outline somewhat ideally the characteristics of the Jerusalem community (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16). The fact that their number increased day by day indicates that they must have had a significant impact on the society of Jerusalem at the time. United in purpose these early Christians were faithful to the Apostles' instructions, to *koinonia*, to the Eucharist and prayer. These were the external expressions of the internal spirit of fellowship which united the members of the group among themselves and with God. Holding all goods in common assured the care of the poorer members of the group. Joy flowed from their faith, and they were assured of salvation when the judgment comes. The church is thus implicitly identified with the remnant of Israel.

Much of the material of Acts 2:43-45 concerning “fear,” “signs and wonders,” and “shared goods” / *koinonia* may have been dictated by the transition to the story of Acts 3:1-10 which includes Peter’s disavowal of monetary means. Acts 4:32 has the same interpretation of Christian fellowship *koinonia* in terms of a community of goods / *panta koina* as we observed in Acts 2:44. The universal surrender of goods is a product of later idealizing as confirmed by Acts 5:3-4 which appears to presume that Ananias’ donation was voluntary and that his sin lay in the false pretense of total giving. Furthermore, popular memory would not have preserved the name of Barnabas if his gesture had not been exceptional. Rather than being a story of total mandatory dispossession, the story of Ananias and Sapphira demonstrated in a fearful way an instance of pneumatic scrutiny of the sinner by the believer, thus showing the Spirit’s presence in the first community removing the wicked from the group for the good of the group and hopefully for the correction of the offender (Acts 5:1-10).

A moment’s reflection on the letters of Paul will also show that in other early Christian communities situations were not always perfect. The abuses mentioned of the Corinthian church, among others, indicate that the performance often fell far short of the ideal (1 Corinthians 1-6). The real lack of assimilation of some aspects of the message is in sharp contrast to the nobility of the fellowship to which they had been called.

On the other hand there is growth toward the ideal. A sense of togetherness characterized the fellowship of believers, so that they were found daily in the temple together, and they enjoyed table fellowship with those who were privileged table-fellows of the Risen One (Acts 2:46). Eucharistic overtones are found in “the breaking of the bread,” (Acts 2:46) but Luke seems not to distinguish the Eucharist and the common meal.

Luke’s Gospel speaks of the origin and growth of Christianity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who formed witnesses to testify to what Jesus had done and taught. Paul was such a witness. Acts depicts the emergence of Christianity from its Jewish matrix into a religion of worldwide status. Solidarity with the mother church, however, was always maintained (Gal 1:18-2:2); and the spirit of community which characterized the Jerusalem community was found in the groups of the new converts.

Eventually it was the turn of the Gentile converts to become involved in the mutual sharing of the community of believers. It seems that somehow the giving of material things is the external sign of a deeper kind of fellowship which is internal and spiritual. This in turn again brings about a change in external conditions.

At the same time, sharing in faith and love promotes friendship and good works, as is so beautifully set out in Paul’s greeting to Philemon. It is an example of the *koinonia* that embraces both the horizontal and the vertical aspects of the good that was theirs in Christ. The beauty of the passage will speak for itself:

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints, and I pray that the sharing (*koinonia*) of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ. For I have derived much joy

and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you (Phlm 4-7).

Appealing to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, Paul urged, "So if you consider me your partner (*koinonon*), receive him as you would receive me." He pointed to a new relationship, that of brother, which then existed between Philemon and Onesimus forever (Phlm 15-17). They were then both related in the Lord, being adopted sons of God in baptism.

As the life of the early Christian communities spread to the other nations it lost nothing of the efficacy of that true and deep *koinonia* that united the believers to one another in a common faith and endeavor. Christ partook (*kekoinonaken*) of human nature "that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb 2:14-15). Through Baptism believers were incorporated into the body of the Risen Lord. In the breaking of the Eucharistic bread their union with one another was strengthened and their assimilation and transformation into the body of Christ became a pledge of eternal glory.

Transformation through *Koinonia*

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews recalls former days when new converts endured many hardships and sufferings for the sake of their faith, and sometimes even became partners (*koinonoi*) with those so treated (Heb 10:33). In view of a great and abiding reward they looked to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of their faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).

From this we can see that the sharing of the early Christian communities went far beyond any pietistic camaraderie; it embraced suffering, and extended to the hope of eternal reward. They became different people so that others could recognize that they had been with Jesus. Their transformation in Christ was begun (Act 4:13). Further, the notion of the transformation through *koinonia* brings us to the writer of 1 Peter 5:1 who calls himself a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory (*doxas koinonos*) that is to be revealed.

Even more, not only are we partakers in glory, but we even become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). This strong expression describes the transformation of human nature by divine grace. While the idea appears elsewhere in different terminology (1 John 1:3; John 15:4; 17:22-23; Rom 8:14-17), the expression itself does not appear elsewhere in the Bible. Perhaps the writer employed it here as an apt expression for the fullness of the Christian life.

What more glorious situation could one imagine than to express the fellowship of Christian community as the fellowship with the Father through the Son in the Spirit. This participation in some way in the nature of God himself is to share in the communion of the three Divine Persons whose very nature is triune *koinonia*.

Conclusion

Now we can see that the *koinonia* begun by Jesus in the choice of his apostles, which was continued by them in the early Christian communities both in Jerusalem and in the Gentile nations, had a distinctive character about it that is considered by some to be a distinctive quality of Christi-

anity. This ideal fellowship of life and love should be the fulfillment in the Church of the glory of God manifest to the world.

Given Divine life in Baptism, humankind can live in the Spirit and the Spirit in them. In this *koinonia* they can come to live a life of truth and goodness which transforms their interior disposition and conforms it more and more to Christ who is the perfect image of the Father. In the Eucharist Christ is received, the memory of his passion is renewed, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. To live this *koinonia* faithfully is to be distinctively Christian.

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What is involved in saying that *koinonia* in the Christian life is more than merely friendly camaraderie?
2. How does the interactive sharing of temporal goods and spiritual goods enhance the *koinonia* of the Christian life and even bring about a change in external conditions?
3. How does a person come to share in some way in the triune *koinonia* of God the Father through the Son in the Spirit?

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