



eCOMMONS

Loyola University Chicago
Loyola eCommons

Institute of Pastoral Studies: Faculty
Publications and Other Works

Faculty Publications and Other Works by
Department

2011

Liturgy and Ethics

M. Therese Lysaught

Loyola University Chicago, mlysaught@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/ips_facpubs



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lysaught, M. Therese. Liturgy and Ethics. *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, , : 790-793, 2011.
Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Institute of Pastoral Studies: Faculty Publications and Other Works,

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Institute of Pastoral Studies: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
© Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2011.

interpreted Paul's teaching about freedom from the Mosaic law to be absolute freedom (see 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). They sought to demonstrate their liberty by, for example, eating meat offered to idols and perhaps even practicing various kinds of sexual freedom. One widely held interpretation is that at least some believers at Corinth styled themselves "the spiritual ones" and devalued the body on the theory that their true selves were purely spirit. A consequence of this thinking was that they did not consider things done in the body to be important. From the standpoint of an ethics of the body, they appeared libertine.

The term *libertine* is also associated with *antinomian* ("against law," referring to a philosophy of living without any moral regulation). In Rom. 3:8 Paul suggests that some of his detractors accuse him of teaching a gospel that is antinomian or libertine. He denies it (see also Rom. 6:1–2). The basis of their charge is his gospel of justification apart from the law and probably also his preaching that God's grace abounds freely to those under sin's power. In Rom. 5:20 Paul writes of the situation of those under the law that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more," and in Rom. 6:1 he asks a rhetorical question that likely reflects the charge of antinomianism: "What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace might abound?" Paul's answer is that freedom from the law happens through dying with Christ in baptism, a union with Christ that entails a renewed moral life (Rom. 6:2–19).

See also Antinomianism; Body; 1 Corinthians; Dualism, Anthropological; Freedom; Romans; Sex and Sexuality

Bibliography

Thiselton, A. "Realized Eschatology at Corinth." *NTS* 24 (1978): 510–26.

Charles H. Cosgrove

Life, Sanctity of

See Sanctity of Human Life

Life Support

See Bioethics

Liturgy and Ethics

The academy has seen a renewed interest in the connections between liturgy/worship and ethics/Christian living since the mid-1970s. Yet this connection pervades the Christian Scriptures. In Scripture, action is rooted in identity: the guidelines for what one does follow from who one is or claims to be. And in Scripture, one's identity is determined primarily by who one worships, to which god one belongs. In other words, in Scripture, worship is the root of ethics and supplies the criteria of judgment necessary for discerning proper action and the shape of the life of individuals and communities.

Old Testament

Some explorations of Scripture and ethics search for discrete precepts or rules that can be distilled from canonical texts (e.g., the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount). Such an approach, however, is foreign to the way Scripture understands ethics (a category that is anachronistically applied to Scripture). Rather, ethics—better, what one is to do, how one is to live, how a community is to live together—is rooted in identity. For example, Jews welcomed strangers not primarily because it was a universally right thing to do (in fact, it could be quite dangerous), but because they were Jews, they were God’s people, who themselves “were once strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exod. 23:9; Lev. 19:34).

In Scripture, moreover, identity is rooted in worship: who one worships determines who (or whose) one is. Not only strangers but also slaves, the Israelites were liberated by God not simply to be free from the Egyptians; they were liberated to become God’s people, to become the people who worship only Yahweh (e.g., Exod. 3:18; 7:16). This relationship between worship and identity is signaled in a number of ways. It was established liturgically, in the rite of the paschal lamb, whose blood marked the Israelites’ identity as those to be “passed over” when the final plague visited Egypt. It was sustained liturgically in the annual celebration of the Passover and other holy days wherein the Israelites reaffirmed their identity, celebrated God’s mighty deeds, repented of their sins, and restored right relationship with God and one another.

Further, it shapes the Mosaic covenant, where guidelines for worship and living are inseparably intertwined. The Decalogue (often misidentified as a code of ethics) is fundamentally liturgical, beginning as it does with injunctions regarding right worship: “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me” (Exod. 20:2–3 NAB). The entire first table of the Decalogue focuses on worship—idols, God’s name, the Sabbath. Worship, then, is the larger overarching and necessary context for understanding the remaining commandments in the Decalogue. Likewise, the 613 commandments in the Torah are a similarly integrated complex of injunctions about worship and life. Right relationship, right action, right form of communal life, the OT proclaims, can follow only from Israel’s right relationship with God.

Finally, the purpose of this action and life is worship—to give glory to God. The commandments are for God’s people. They distinguish Israel from the peoples among whom Israel finds itself. They trace what life looks like in a community that worships only God. How Israel lives bears witness to God’s power, presence, and truth. And when done rightly, it gives glory to God.

Of course, the very first thing the Israelites do after receiving the covenant is commit idolatry (Exod. 32). This becomes the overarching theme of the OT: Israel’s continued idolatry, the consequences, and God’s continued call for Israel to return to right worship. Certainly, the Israelites, both individually and corporately, violate many if not all of the commandments of the Torah. They commit adultery, kill, exploit the poor, fail to care for widows and orphans, and more. But the authors of Scripture make clear that this failure to follow the commandments and live in right relationship with one another follows from their

worship of their neighbors' false gods and their failure to properly worship Yahweh. The prophets never uncouple the connection between right worship and right living (e.g., Isa. 58:1–14; Hosea).

New Testament and the Early Church

The NT continues the story of Israel and shares the moral logic of the OT. Thus, worship and ethics are again inseparable. In Jesus' temptations in the desert, the fundamental question is one of idolatry, which he finally answers decisively with a version of the Shema, an OT liturgical practice that orients all life toward the worship of Yahweh (Matt. 4:10). When asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus again begins with the Shema: "You shall love the Lord your God . . ." (Matt. 22:37). In the Gospels, Israel once again finds itself oppressed with its religious and political leadership engaging in the externals of religious ritual but worshiping in fact at the altars of idols, particularly the power of the Roman Empire. Thus, the hearers of the prophetic proclamation are called to repent, to turn again to God, to live under God's kingship again, for as in Egypt, "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

To live as God's people—to worship, love, and trust God—leads to distinctive and countercultural economic, social, and political practices. Thus, God's people will care for those along the wayside (Luke 10:25–37), forgive (John 7:53–8:11), give away all their possessions (Matt. 19:16–24), love enemies (Matt. 5:44), make peace (Matt. 5:9), and more (see Matt. 5–7). Such is the distinctive witness of those who now follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24), God incarnate, as the Israelites followed Yahweh in the desert.

As in the OT, liturgical practice remains key for orienting all of life toward the worship of God. Echoing events of the exodus, the blood of Christ spilled in the passion on the Passover establishes the new covenant and demarcates God's people from those who worship other gods. Those baptized into his "name" (cf. the Decalogue) are grafted into God's people, the church, be they Jew or gentile. They are sustained in their identity as the body of Christ in the sharing of the Eucharist. This liturgical participation calls and shapes them to imitate individually and corporately God incarnate, the Christ, in whom they participate.

Yet as with the Israelites, the early church falls into idolatry and false worship. Destructive factionalism stems from idolatrous claims to "belong" to baptizers rather than to Christ (1 Cor. 1–4); it is the "double-minded" who wish to be friends with God and the world who meet the greatest censure (Jas. 1:8; 4:8); even the appearance of idolatry is cautioned against (Acts 15:29; 1 Cor. 8:4–13). And the cause for one of Paul's most extensive liturgical discussions is the scandalous continuation of economic divisions in the context of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34). Constructively, liturgical language becomes the idiom for Christian living—Christians are called to become a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1–2)—and the paschal referent of that sacrifice becomes the repeated warrant: for reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17–20), caring for the poor (Gal. 2:10), loving one's enemies (Matt. 5:44), and more. In short, the shape of the life of the Christian community is to follow from its identity as Christ's body sustained through participation in a panoply of communal and liturgical

practices (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 2:5–11) (see Yoder).

Contemporary Context

These connections between worship and the Christian life continue through most of Christian history. From the martyrs to the monastics and the saints, the Christian tradition is replete with those concerned not simply with doing good in the world, making right decisions, or even living upright, moral lives. Rather, the tradition is peopled with exemplars primarily concerned with being united with Christ via prayer and liturgy and thereby living in the form of Christ in the world.

With the advent of nominalism and voluntarism in the fourteenth century, Luther's notion of "the two kingdoms," and the Enlightenment, this connection was severed, and "morality" became a separate sphere of inquiry, a realm of individual decision-making for which "rational" (i.e., universal) justifications must now be discovered. Yet, a return to Scripture and tradition complicates this notion of morality as well as other conventional assumptions—for example, that a sustainable theological distinction can be made between issues in "social" ethics (e.g., poverty) as opposed to "personal" ethics (e.g., sexuality).

A Christian ethic that seeks to take Scripture and tradition seriously must grapple with the almost constant witness of Scripture and tradition that the norms for Christian living derive from one's identity as a member of God's people, of Christ's body, the church, and that the primary question for any ethic is this: who or what does one worship (Hauerwas and Wells)?

See also Ecclesiology and Ethics; Idolatry

Bibliography

Hauerwas, S., and S. Wells, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*. Blackwell, 2006; Saliers, D., E. Anderson, and B. Morrill. *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch*. Liturgical Press, 1998; Searle, M. "Liturgy and Social Ethics: An Annotated Bibliography." *SL* 21 (1991): 220–35; Spohn, B. *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics*. Continuum, 2000; Yoder, J. *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*. Herald Press, 2001.

M. Therese Lysaught

Living Will

See Bioethics

Loans

In the contemporary world, "to lend" typically refers to the practice of granting someone the use of something with the expectation that it be returned, or of giving someone the use of money with the explicit agreement that it will be repaid with interest. Although the worlds of Israel and the early church knew such practices, lending in the Bible has a different emphasis. Here, lending typically takes the form of generosity to the needy, and in the NT in particular, economic relations, including lending, should avoid the demands of obligation and reciprocity.