



AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY

**AUSTRALIAN  
JOURNAL OF  
LITURGY**

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# AUSTRALIAN ACADEMY OF LITURGY

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# AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF LITURGY

*Volume 8    Number 3    May 2002*

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# Techno-Doxology

## Technology and Liturgy in Dialogue

*Inari Thiel*

What technology would you identify as the most significant in your life?

If you're like most of my students (undergraduates in Microelectronic Engineering or Information Technology) and the participants who attended the opening session of our AAL conference in January, you've probably nominated some twentieth-century innovation, perhaps something related to telecommunications or medical science. However, my choice is far more basic: writing.

Writing is, of course, the academic's stock-in-trade: we are commonly judged by our publications, and we commonly assess our students by means of their written accounts of laboratory exercises or their written responses to essay questions; but the significance of writing goes far beyond academic assessment practices. As a culture, writing enables us to retain more information than any one generation can remember, and to retrieve information that has been lost for one or more generations. Can you imagine how your mobile phone might have been invented if every generation of engineers had to remember or reconstruct Maxwell's equations and a host of other pieces of information, and if experimental development were dependent on the practitioner's ability to recall all variables and results from one iteration to the next?

But perhaps this discussion of writing as the most significant technology in my life raises the question: What is "technology"? For many people, no doubt, the

term conjures images of machines of one sort or another, from the microcontrollers in heart pacemakers to the draglines in open-cut coalmines; but Neil Postman<sup>1</sup> identifies even language itself, as well as statistics and other methodologies as “invisible technologies” that have powerful effects. Liturgists will doubtless be more familiar with Walter J Ong’s extensive exploration of similar issues<sup>2</sup>.

### **Technology and culture**

The relationship between humans and their technologies is a dynamic one — we develop technologies in keeping with our cultural values and purposes; but our culture is also shaped by our technologies. For example, the development of plane geometry in Egypt facilitated the restoration of land markers after flooding, a practice embedded in a culture that recognized ownership and control of discrete portions of land<sup>3</sup>; and the establishment of capital-intensive factories in industrial Europe necessitated the accommodation of workers to round-the-clock shifts, which in turn required a restructuring of social interactions<sup>4</sup>.

We sometimes see the culture-embedded nature of technologies most vividly when we attempt to transfer the technologies developed in one cultural context to another<sup>5</sup>. The tragic accident that occurred in 1985 at the Union Carbide chemical plant in Bhopal represents the end of a chain of events, many of which can be directly linked to the mismatch of US-developed industrial processes and the culture of that community. On the other hand, sensitive applications of imported technologies can enhance the maintenance of traditional cultures, as we see in the use of robust mobility aids and transportable telecommunications systems among travelling indigenous groups in central Australia<sup>6</sup>.

### **Attitudes to technology**

So, how do you feel about such recent developments in technology as Artificial Intelligence, genetic engineering, and nanotechnology? Are you excited by them, or apprehensive about their possible implications?

Human beings have generally tended to be ambivalent about technological development. Our mythology, from the Tower of Babel through Prometheus and Icarus to Frankenstein, all express concern about the effects of unchecked technological progress. Carl Mitcham<sup>7</sup> notes that much early skepticism about technology incorporates a moral critique of our reliance on it. He reminds us that Plato took a generally negative view: writing is artificial and encourages weakness of memory; medicine encourages recourse to what we would call a “technological fix” rather than the discipline of a healthy lifestyle, and also (in a proto-Darwinian line) facilitates the survival of the weak who, having survived, will reproduce ... and there goes the gene pool!

Others, from Archimedes to da Vinci to Mumford, have worried about the “will to power” that is manifest in the technologies with which we attempt to make nature conform to our will rather than *vice versa*. On the other hand, Enlightenment thinkers like Francis Bacon identified technological progress with the *Imago Dei*, and saw philosophical speculations as the root of moral decay.

### **Technology and world-views**

Our technologies change the way we see the world and ourselves. Scanning electron microscopes and radio telescopes have enlarged the scope of our cosmos: “all that is, seen and unseen” becomes both more complex and possibly

less mysterious as we become more confident that we can and will know what there is as our tools of investigation are refined.

These developments have also changed our ways of engaging with the world. We can see detailed real-time transmissions of space walks, volcanic eruptions, military manoeuvres and the frenzied feeding of sharks, all in the safety and comfort of our living rooms. How does this affect our perceptions of risk or our sense of awe?

Our technologies also have an impact on the ways in which we imagine ourselves. While da Vinci was exploring hydrodynamics, his contemporaries were diagnosing their mental states in terms of the fluctuation of “humours”; at the height of the steam age, Freud developed theories of repression and displacement of human feelings; and in the age of computers we tend to look at ourselves as sophisticated von Neumann machines, and imagine that if we can create a silicon-based intellect we’ll have discovered some useful insights into human intelligence (conveniently forgetting how little our aircraft have in common with the natural flight systems of birds).

### **Technology, culture, and liturgy**

The question of interest to readers of this journal is: How does all this relate to liturgy? For me, a couple of obvious issues spring to mind. There is the question of the relationship between our liturgical rites and the cultures in which they developed. If liturgical practices and technologies are both dynamically interwoven with their cultures of origin, can we still conduct the same rites as our forebears whose metaphysics was so very different to our own? And if, as twenty-first century technophiles, we feel that the world is in principle under our control (even if a few of the fringes escape our clutches for the moment),



where does the christian concept of a personally interested God as presupposed in our liturgical practice fit in to the culture in which we operate? This is not a new question — it's been asked since the seventeenth century or so — but each generation requires an answer.

The challenge of modern technology to liturgy is not one of styles of proclamation (spoken sermon vs. PowerPoint presentation) but one of how the world is framed for participants within and beyond the church's rites. This is the challenge with which we attempt to grapple, and around which I hope to have opened a space for conversation that will continue within the AAL beyond the Techno-Doxology conference of January 2002.

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<sup>1</sup>Neil Postman, 'Invisible technologies' in *Technopoly: the surrender of culture to technology*. Alfred Knopf, Inc, 1992. Reprinted in Nancy R MacKenzie, *Science and Technology Today: readings for writers*. New York : St Martin's Press, 1995, 128-136.

<sup>2</sup>Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the technologizing of the world*. London : Methuen, 1982.

<sup>3</sup>James Burke, *Connections*. London : Book Club Associates, 1978.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*. New York : Vintage Books, 1964.

<sup>5</sup>cf. Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: from garden to earth*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1990, 124-161.

<sup>6</sup>Stephen Johnston, Paul Gostelow & Evan Jones, *Engineering and Society: an Australian perspective*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Melbourne : Longman, 1999, 155-156.

<sup>7</sup>Carl Mitcham, *Thinking through Technology: the path between engineering and philosophy*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994, 275-299.

## Thesis Abstract

# The Prophetic Character of Eucharist

*Carmel Pilcher rsj*

Submitted December 2001

Awarded April 2002

Christian Eucharist is prophetic when the celebration challenges the participants to live community that is united and cares for its poor. Remembering in a prophetic way challenges the participants to enter into the mystery being recalled. In the act of making memorial in a prophetic way, Christians imitate Christ, and so continue to bring about the saving action of God's liberation from oppression in the present. At times in history this prophetic act required the ultimate self-sacrifice of martyrdom. However, at all times prophetic Eucharist requires the witness of Christian living in accord with the action being remembered. The clearest sign of this right living is a community that is united in peace and harmony, and provides welfare for its oppressed.

In this paper I will argue that the divine command 'Do this in memory of me' is a call to Christians to celebrate Eucharist that is characteristically prophetic. The first Christians, who gathered to make memorial in faithfulness to Jesus' command were Jewish. Jewish memorial provides the foundation for Christian worship. Central to Jewish remembering is the Exodus covenant. This event signified the relationship that God forged with a people through an act of liberation from oppression. Throughout its history the people of Israel struggled to remain faithful to covenant living, often requiring the presence of a prophetic voice to call them back to authentic remembering. Through the annual celebration of Passover by Jewish families the event of Exodus was relived in

word and gesture in thankfulness and praise. Through remembering the past event became present, and depending upon the action of remembering, led to a future possibility. When the participants responded to God's faithfulness by reaching out to others, and especially the poor, then God's liberating action was evident. Remembering that leads to corresponding witness is prophetic.

Eucharistic memorial finds its genesis in Jewish memorial. The supper accounts of Paul and the evangelists reflect the worship of the early Christian communities, which was modelled upon the practice of Jesus and his disciples. The Christian scriptures, especially the supper narratives and the recorded meals of Jesus, provide the source for determining the elements that characterize Eucharistic memorial. The scriptures also provide the earliest accounts of Eucharistic practice amongst the first generation of Christians. The foundation event for Christians is the paschal mystery, the memorial of God's great act of liberation in Jesus. The first Christians gathered on the Lord's day to celebrate the Lord's supper or the breaking of bread. Eucharistic memorial that is prophetic is evident in both the community of Acts, and in the intervention of Paul, to the Corinthian community. Christians are challenged to imitate Christ's great act of liberation through corresponding witness that is evident through a community united in love and outreach to others, especially the poor and oppressed.

Having laid the foundations for Eucharistic memorial that is characteristically prophetic, we will then turn to the early Christian tradition for the light it sheds upon Eucharistic thought and practice. This study will explore the possibility of prophetic Eucharist as celebrated by the ancient Christian church. A selection of early Christian writings will be examined. These will include ancient church

orders: *Didache*, *Apostolic Tradition* and *Didascalia*, as well as the writings of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Each will be studied in turn for the contribution it makes towards a tradition of Eucharistic memorial that is characteristically prophetic.



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# Liturgy and Technology continuing the conversation

*At this conference we will:*

- Process the experiences of technology in worship
  - Name the issues raised
- Seek a language to take the discussion further

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Then post your response to the question:

*What do you see as the most significant issues facing liturgists in this age of technology?*

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