

Summary

Embodying Christ: Meaning and Significance of the Ritual in 1Cor 12–14

This work understands 1Cor 12–14 as a text concerned with early Christian ritual and addresses the question: What does the text of 1Cor 12–14 reveal about the symbolic universe and social implications of this ritual? Early Christian meetings are understood as a complex ritual which has meaning and significance that could be interpreted on the basis of exegesis of 1Cor 12–14. Meaning denotes the worldview communicated through it, significance denotes the influence of the ritual on the lives of the believers and their community. As its meaning, three metaphors appear out of the exegesis: a temple in construction, Christ's body with many members, and an image of the Spirit working in believers. These images are being played out, strengthened, and embodied in the ritual action. Apart from communicating the worldview and corresponding values, the significance of the ritual lies in that it creates a space of liminal freedom. Charismata are a dynamic reality and are not bound to particular persons. That is true especially in the case of prophesying and speaking in tongues, which based on analysis of the primary sources are in this work understood as speaking in an inspired state by a person who is being filled with the Spirit. Generally, prayers, thanksgiving, and hymns constituted the content of these particular charismata. Time dedicated to the practice of these manifestations of the Spirit created a space where anyone could, for a moment, enter a role connected to this activity. When this activity was over, participants reintegrated to the social structures of the church community and outside world. This work argues that the practice of charismata was instrumental in strengthening the cohesiveness of the community, the shaping of relationships, and the formation of roles and identities. In this view, 1Cor 12–14 does not present a model of the church, but rather a look into a complex event in which the described phenomena, particularly prophesying and glossolalia, contributed to the formation of the Christian worldview and community.