

There was a speaker on the radio the other day who was a teacher of 'Creative Writing' courses at an American university. He said a thing that I agreed with whole-heartedly. Here is a summary.

"When students come to me, they want to be creative! They want to express themselves! I say to them, there will be plenty of time for that. There have been ages where people have tried to learn what makes for powerful speech, and good sentences. We know what some of these are. Go and learn the forms. That is the first job. The forms will then set you free. 'As an example of 'learning the forms'

The lecturer talked about the movie 'The Karate Kid'. The 'kid' wants to learn Karate, so his teacher tells him 'go and polish the car. Like this '(big circle) polish on, polish off, polish on, polish off' Then 'the kid' has to 'paint the fence' and later 'sand the veranda'. So finally, when his frustration at all these seemingly meaningless tasks, the 'kid' puts all the movements together in a flowing way. The seemingly meaningless 'forms' have become 'Karate'.

This is what also happens when one is studying any academic discipline. One first of all has to learn what other people have said. Even at the level of a doctorate, the 'creative' part of it is only about 10% of the whole work. The other 90% is learning what the field is about and making sure that the candidate knows what everyone else has said, and can evaluate it sensibly. That is not easy either.

Now here is another story. I saw a documentary on the TV about 'Chaos mathematics'. The idea behind this mathematics is that the

shapes and patterns we see in nature are governed by mathematical rules. Take for example the differentiation in shape that we see in the patterns of hair colour on animals. A British mathematician in the 1950s used his knowledge of patterns from code breaking to develop the mathematics for some shapes in nature. He was ignored and reviled because he was coming from 'left field' as it were. The other scientists, whose lives had been shaped by their knowledge of 'the field' could not stomach someone coming from 'out of the field' and proposing some ideas to *them*. The same happened about the solution to the problem of how each part of the DNA molecule decides which part of a protein will be made. There was a group of about 24 scientists all working on the problem, but the solution came from a man who 'was not part of the club' as the chapter in the book describing this process calls him.

So in some parts of life creativity comes in a conservative way. That is, creativity comes as a variation on a big theme. One 'learns the forms' and once one has learned the forms, and learned to love them and appreciate them, working with the forms provides the background against which creativity and freedom can come.

This is how I view the Eucharist. The structure of the liturgy (Eucharist as a repeatable part of our baptism) is a 'form' which governs our approach to God, and then shapes our understanding of life. Loving the form means that I can trust it to hold me, while I pour myself into it each week.

But like all forms, it can become dead. I can't see how people think that the Eucharist is 'boring' or that going to church is 'boring' when what happens there is that our whole lives

are opened up to God and examined, and that we have 'communion' (Union? congress? is this erotic?) with God. But this possibility is only open to those who know the forms and live the forms.

Then the creativity with them can emerge. This is what we do when we construct and celebrate our 'informal' Eucharist. It too has the same form as the more formal one, but we have filled it with other contents so that it is at once perhaps more engaging, and more scary because of that.

But there is this other kind of 'left field' breaking of the mould kind of creativity in which people who do not know the forms, or people who are not bounded by the tradition come in with new ideas. I saw this happen when we had a 'gospel reflection group' with a mixture of people in it. Some were 'churched' and others weren't. The Churched people had more difficulty with the form of the gospel reflection because they had been schooled by the academic discipline of 'Bible Study'. It was more important to them to know "what it might have meant for them in Jesus' time" than it was to be able to identify what was going on in them with this scripture now. The 'un-churched' people did better at this, and showed more creativity with the process.

On the other hand, I have been shocked by people who have just 'celebrated the Eucharist' without authorisation. I can remember saying to a dear friend of mine who did this 'What!?! I spend all this time going through the process of learning about the Eucharist and gaining authorisation from the Anglican Church to do this thing, and here you come and just do it!'. I was shocked.

But I have to admit that this is the

very thing that Jesus did. He says in Matthew's gospel that he has not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, so there we have Jesus placing himself very much at the centre of the life of God's people, but the way he did it was so shocking to the people who thought that they knew what it meant to be God's people that they had to crucify him.

This is not easy. About the whole business of Christian initiation and the relationship between baptism and Eucharist (what each means, who may come to each and what really matters) is 'up in the air' again. I have read a book where at an Anglican congregation in San Francisco everyone was invited to the Eucharist as a replica of Jesus' open invitation, and baptism came later. In the Acts of the Apostles there is a great variety of practise in the Church about Baptism, Eucharist and the presence of the Spirit, so now too, for me all these questions are 'up for grabs' again. The pieces have not yet fallen down in their new configuration yet either. One thing I do know though, which I learn from having loved the forms. The freedom to let my personal elements be thrown up in the air (yet again) both in thought about Eucharist and Baptism and the 'forms' of the Church, and in moving to a new country is given to me by the security of knowing that in living the baptismal life, of 'dying-entombment-rising' I am held by the life of Christ, in whose life my own is hid. He will keep me safe.

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