

## *Logikē latreia* (Romans 12:1) as a Definition of Liturgy\*

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### ***I. Introduction: Paul's Trinitarian View of Offering and Its Relevance Today***

During this Pauline Year, we have been invited to examine Saint Paul's message not as something static and archaic, but as living and relevant today.<sup>1</sup> Here in Rome, it seems right to begin with Paul's address to "all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints" (Rom 1:7). Considered to be Paul's "theological chef d'oeuvre" and "magisterial compendium of his theology,"<sup>2</sup> Romans is addressed to a community he had

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<sup>1</sup> See Benedict XVI, "Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI," *Celebration of First Vespers of the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul for the Opening of the Pauline Year* (Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls, 28 June 2008) <<http://www.annopaolino.org/interno.asp?id=45&lang=eng>>.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 559, 561.

never met (Rom 1:13).<sup>3</sup> We are still that community, to which Paul offers a theological frame and definition of Christian worship.<sup>4</sup> I am referring particularly to the phrase λογικὴ λατρεία, or “rational worship,”<sup>5</sup> in Romans 12:1, which the Church thereafter will often use to describe what it is doing during the liturgy. The passage in question reads as follows:

Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν τοῦ θεοῦ παραστῆσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν. <sup>6</sup>	I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacri- fice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your <i>spiritual worship.</i> <sup>7</sup>
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Does this define what liturgy is according to Saint Paul and as interpreted by Church Tradition: the sacrifice of our lives to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit? In other words, is this phrase of the Epistle to the Romans, among the best known and most quoted New Testament texts, quoted in liturgical services with an understanding of its use by Saint Paul? Or is it used out of context to reinforce a predetermined and ultimately unrelated point of view?<sup>8</sup> Many early commentators

<sup>3</sup> Although Romans 1:13–32 is addressed to the Gentile Christians of Rome, it also applies to Jewish Christians who are also living unrighteously (Rom 2).

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, “Christian Worship: Scriptural Basis and Theological Frame,” *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4–9.

<sup>5</sup> The range of words used to translate λογικὴ is discussed below.

<sup>6</sup> *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition*, ed. Barbara Aland et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 552.

<sup>7</sup> Revised Standard Version (RSV). Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent English quotations from the Bible are from this translation.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Oden, ed., *Romans*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament, 6 (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxi–xxii. For an introductory bibliography on the Epistle of Saint Paul to

and Church Fathers were content to take phrases out of context and use them as they willed.<sup>9</sup> Is that the case here?

## ***II. Romans 12:1 in Context: The Unity of the Epistle***

In the structure of Romans we see a contrast between the Gospel, which reveals God's righteousness (Rom 1:1–17), and the idolatry and wickedness of all people (Rom 1:18–2). Because of our unrighteousness and falling short of God's glory, we are "justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Rom 3:24–25). The phrase is reminiscent of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Jesus acts as high priest, making intercession before God on our behalf (Heb 9:23–26). All cultic worship is personalized in Christ who is our model. This is also seen in Romans 6, where Paul speaks of baptism: Jesus "died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:10–11). Living in Jesus is only possible through the Holy Spirit through whom we put the deeds of the body to death and are raised from the dead (Rom 8:11–14). In order to live this reality fully, Saint Paul tells us to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [or rational] worship" (Rom 12:1); this offering is to be "sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16).

The section of Romans beginning with chapter 12 contains a *παράναισις* – an ethical exhortation – often associated exclusively with morality and considered to begin a new, independent section of Paul's letter. However, Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428) observes that Paul often has the teaching

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the Romans, see Thomas H. Tobin, SJ, "Paul's Letter to the Romans," *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 398–412. For an overview of Saint Paul and Liturgy, see Robert F. Taft, SJ, "Saint Paul: The First Christian Liturgical Theologian," *Assembly. A Journal of Liturgical Theology* 36:1 (January 2010), 10–16.

<sup>9</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Sherbrooke, QC: Éditions Paulines, 1994), 96.