

## RESEARCH GROUP

### PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Religion, Culture, and Sacrament: Two Case Studies  
Convener: Mark L. Poorman, C.S.C., University of Notre Dame  
Presenters: Deborah Blake, Ph.D., Regis University  
Michael Horan, Loyola Marymount University

The Practical Theology research group continued its three-year agenda of considering cases which require theological reflection and thereby exemplify the practical theological method of their authors. This year, in response to the sacramental theme of the annual conference, we discussed two case presentations which were constructed under the rubric of religion, culture and sacrament. Both presentations prompted spirited analytical discussions.

Deborah Blake of Regis University presented the case "Genetics, Ethics and Theology: A Methodological Proposal," a summary of her participation in a NIH-ELSI funded research project to consider theological issues raised by the Human Genome Project. The presentation generated discussion about "theological ethnography" as a research method. During 1992-1994, Blake did participant-observer research regarding moral discernment about Recombinant 8 Syndrome in a *Hispano* community in what is now northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. The syndrome, which has existed over three-four generations in the area, results in congenital heart disease, minor facial dismorphology, urinary system anomalies, and developmental delay. Blake set the stage for theological analysis with references to works of Clifford Geertz, George Lindbeck and Avery Dulles. Her presentation focused on the ethical reflection of one family affected by the Syndrome, as well as a description of the sacramental and theological categories which the community employed in facing the pastoral challenge of the genetic anomaly. Using slides and a detailed narrative, she demonstrated the community's operative sacramental theology, which centers on a graphic depiction of the passion and resurrection of Jesus. This communal approach to the genetic anomaly and other moral challenges contrasted with the original theological categories which the research project sought to test.

Michael Horan of Loyola Marymount University presented the case, "Sunday with Campus Ministry but without a Priest," an account of and theological reflection on a liturgical service in which two lay persons replaced an ordained presider at a regular Sunday worship service because of extenuating circumstances which made the priest unavailable. The ensuing communal reflection entailed catechetical, pastoral, sacramental and canonical dimensions. In his methodologi-

cal considerations, Horan made allusion to Tom Groome, Robert Hovda and John Westerhoff, and he employed James Fowler's stages of faith development, drawing particular attention to the movement from the synthetic conventional faith to the individuative reflective faith. He then elicited for discussion the experience of other participants in the group.

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