

## WOMEN'S CONSULTATION IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Women and Prophetic Sacramentality  
Conveners: Phyllis Kaminski, Saint Mary's College  
Elisabeth Brinkmann, College of New Rochelle  
Moderator: Rhodora Beaton, Saint Catherine University  
Presenter: Susan K. Roll, Saint Paul University, Ottawa

Susan K. Roll's presentation on "Women and Prophetic Sacramentality" was structured around a sequence of thought-provoking questions. These questions were posed to the audience in the context of the presentation, and audience members were later invited to reflect on them in small groups.

Roll began her presentation with a question concerning women's agency and personhood. She illustrated this question with reference to Canada's "Famous Five," a group of women who, in the late 1920s, fought the prevailing interpretation of the Canadian Constitution that excluded women under the claim that "only persons can be appointed to the Senate." After the activists won legal recognition that women were indeed persons, a woman was appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1929. After examining the implications of the "death of the subject," personalism, and difference, for agency, Roll concluded by asking, "What form might women's agency take in discourse on sacraments?"

In her second question, Roll addressed the significance of sacramental mediation in the current Western cultural context of "im-mediate gratification." Suggesting that the immediacy of online interaction has shaped the Western perception of reality, Roll argued that in online interaction, persons are "absorbed" into what they are doing. Person and machine are integrated. Such an integration raises the question of the place of mediatory actions in the sacraments in a world in which im-mediation is more and more frequently the norm.

Turning to the explicitly ecclesial context, Roll addressed the significance of Church authority in the sacraments. Citing the phenomena of "Kitchen Table Eucharists," non-sacramental anointing of the sick, and Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest, Roll questioned whether the immediacy of experience in these sorts of celebrations trivializes the sacrament or reduces its universality. Given the metaphors of our own time and the traditional belief that God works through the sacraments, but is not bound by them, Roll suggested that the criteria of matter and form, and validity and liceity, might profitably be considered through the lens of energy. She asked, "How can we theologize about sacraments as energy?"

In the final portion of her formal presentation, Roll examined the significance of women's bodies through the lens of the historical development of rituals for the Churching of Women after Childbirth (none of which are currently approved for use). Beginning with Hippolytus, whose rite calls for new mothers and midwives to be grouped with the catechumens, Roll questioned whether these rituals had historically acted to suspend the baptisms of women for several weeks after the birth of a child. Here she posed the question of the significance of gender for the

sacraments, concluding with a return to her initial question: “What does it mean to say that women are persons in the Church?” In addition to this question, she also posed the following questions for small group discussion: “What are the deeper issues which we are not yet addressing? What might these questions mean for prophetic sacramentality in the future?”

A lively discussion followed in which appreciation was expressed for the introduction of energy as a metaphor for sacramental activity. Other issues were raised, including a discussion of the relationship between motherhood and priesthood, and the observation that there is a “creeping congregationalism” within Roman Catholicism that mirrors the “creeping sacramentality” which can be observed in many Protestant communities.

The Ann O’Hara Graff Memorial Award was presented to Jamie T. Phelps of Xavier University of Louisiana, Institute for Black Catholic Studies. C. Vanessa White, M. Shawn Copeland, and Mary Catherine Hilbert each offered congratulatory comments for the occasion.

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