

SPIRITUALITY TOPIC SESSION

Topic:	The Sacramental Nature of Lived Experience
Convener:	Peter Feldmeier, University of Toledo
Moderator:	Marian Maskulak, C.P.S., St. John's University
Presenters:	Wendy Wright, Creighton University Julia Feder, University of Notre Dame
Respondent:	Peter Feldmeier, University of Toledo

Wendy Wright's paper was entitled, "A Dialogue with God: Motherhood and the Sacramental Imagination." Addressing the discipline's focus of critical examination on lived experience, Wright reflected on Pope John Paul II's 1981 Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (FC) and its contribution to family spirituality, particularly how family life conditions sacramental possibilities. Wright pointed out a number of contributions FC provides to the sacramental imagination. Among them was its corrective from past magisterial reflections on the family. The patriarchal approach of past documents was replaced with a more balanced vision for women, and John Paul made particular effort to show how social participation constitutes an essential context for Christian holiness. John Paul also presented an ideal expression of the family, which provides the church with a model to strive for.

The greatest liability of FC, Wright argued, corresponds to its asset as a model. That is, Wright saw this model as disconnected to the real life of families. The model works virtually like a platonic ideal, one that exists on another realm than the phenomenal world. While John Paul recognizes that there are many challenging dynamics and a great deal of brokenness in families, he relegates them to "hard cases." Perhaps the most telling rupture from real life is John Paul's appeal to the Holy Family as the great model, i.e., a sexless, morally perfect family with one child who has the divine nature. To be sure, Wright did not want to jettison John Paul's ideal framing, but argued that, for a real sacramental imagination to enliven in the faithful, it had to "dance together" with real life families.

Julia Feder's paper was entitled, "Post-traumatic Healing as a Sacramental-Spiritual Practice." Here she addressed how healing from sexual trauma is intimately a sacramental issue. Drawing on insights from Edward Schillebeeckx, Feder argued for a fully embodied understanding of spiritual practice. While this is, in itself, not a provocative notion, Schillebeeckx's position is utterly inclusive. Authentic healing, holiness, and prayer requires reconciliation and flourishing of one's own personal integrity, one's social relations, and one's institutional relations.

While suggesting the necessity for such a full integration is a universal principle for Schillebeeckx, its implications are profoundly so for the healing of sexual trauma. Here the victim is particularly unmoored of her own ego-boundaries, appropriations of healthy relationships, and so on. One simply cannot heal, she argued, unless all of our *selves* (personal, social, institutional) are healthy. "Each of these three is critical in a discussion of post-traumatic healing, for healing cannot occur on one level without the cooperation of the other two."

Feder's paper moved to liturgical practices, particularly the Eucharist and the issue of healing from trauma. Schillebeeckx shows, she argued, the Eucharist ritually provides an eschatological vision and the possibility of participating in it in some way. This participation, particularly in the context of the brokenness of the participants provides conditions for healing.

But, she warned, poorly engaged ritual or a community that either banalizes suffering or promotes spiritual apathy can actually exacerbate the victim's suffering and impede healing.

Peter Feldmeier responded. In addressing Wright's paper, he likened her critique of FC to other reviews of John Paul's work, which typically praised John Paul's wisdom and insights but blanched at his typical lack of attention to real life experience. Feldmeier also concluded that theologies and spiritualities that do not speak to the real, lived human condition were "bankrupt." This is not to say, he declared, that they have no assets but just that these resources simply cannot pay the bills. One question he raised for Wright was how one actually accounts for the messiness of the human condition in either a magisterial document or a treatise in spirituality. He asked, "Would one virtually have to offer hundreds of life scenarios and how show how graced encounters can be modeled?"

Regarding Feder's paper, Feldmeier reflected on the value of seeing the world as interpenetrating, thus one's holiness and wholeness really does implicate everyone else. To Feder's claim, "My individual salvation is tied up with my relationships and the health of society and institutions in which I live," Feldmeier asked, "How far can you go with this claim? What about saints whose sanctity was developed in spite or even because of dysfunction around them?" Feldmeier also reflected on Feder's claim that ritual can act as a countersign and even undermine one's spiritual life, as we see in 1 Cor 11:27ff. Feldmeier asked, "Is a mediocre Mass worse than no Mass?"

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