

SEMINAR ON SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

To reconvene the Sacramental and Liturgical Theology continuing seminar the topic "Paul Ricoeur and Sacramental Theology" was chosen. In preparation for the seminar, active participants were asked to read David Power's book, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of Liturgy*, and Stephen Happel's article, "Prayer and Sacrament: A Role in Foundational Theology," *The Thomist* 45 (1981), 243-61.

In the opening paper, Stephen Happel discussed "The Hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Sacramental Theology." He first noted the various ways in which Ricoeur's thought has proved useful for sacramental theology. As a philosopher, outside our theological tradition, Ricoeur with his keen and challenging insights on the nature of symbol has provided the underpinnings for the rethinking of such questions as the relation between the ritual and sacramental dimensions of liturgy, between sacramental word and action, and between symbol and thought. His analysis of limit-experiences and their expression has provoked a renewed awareness of conversion and the changes it demands. Ricoeur's distinction between explanation and understanding with its corollary of existential appropriation effectively countered a prevalent technology and romanticism of symbol. Finally, his more recent explorations of the connections between the oral and written word has revealed the need for a more developed sacramental approach to this question.

Happel then went on to explore some of the ways in which the work of Ricoeur could be useful for the sacramental theologian. First, the latter's theory of metaphor as redescribing ourselves and our world also has sacramental implications. Secondly, the therapeutic dimension of narrative, as developed by Ricoeur, has already found a resonance in Power's notion of "lamentation." Finally, another question evoked by Ricoeur's thought is how does narrative found a group? Applied to our concerns, how do the passion and resurrection accounts, for example, form the post-Easter community?

In the third section of his talk, Happel summarized the use of Ricoeur in David Power's *Unsearchable Riches*. He noted with particular appreciation certain aspects of Power's treatment such as art as transformative and the founding character of sacrament. In a final section, Happel outlined some of the problems he sees in the use of Ricoeur by sacramental theologians. First, while metaphor can optimistically be described as breaking open the possibility of a new world, we sacramentalize in a world caught in-between where we are and where we should be. Secondly, does Ricoeur really tell us how God speaks to us? Do his brilliant insights on the nature of poetic language exhaust the nature of sacramental language? For while Ricoeur's world discloses, it does not effect change. This con-

trasts sharply with the effective nature of sacrament.

In response to Happel's presentation, several questions emerged. First, Is the world that Ricoeur presents "real" or not? After some discussion of the kind of eschatology that sacrament symbolizes, related questions about how desire and feeling function ontologically in Ricoeur were pursued. David Power noted that Ricoeur's "as if" is one of the more suggestive elements of his thought. Another area of interest was the way that Ricoeur relates affectivity to the question of will. This reflection provoked a discussion about how Ricoeur recovers limit expression and healing in his treatment of narrative. Since symbols function at the margin of experience, there is an ongoing need to develop narrative forms that are capable of dealing with this experience. Power's idea of "lamentation" ("the community's perception of its own and humanity's sin") seemed particularly apt to address this need. Power himself noted that the Christian community can be marginalized because it assumes too much about God. Lamentation is a continual corrective for this situation.

In his paper, "The Subjective Dimension," Regis Duffy focused on one aspect of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, his notion of "appropriation." His underlying contention was that Ricoeur's theory of appropriation should be distinguished from the question of the praxis of appropriation. (The terms theory and praxis were employed in the sense that Matthew Lamb has defined them.)

Starting with a well-known description of appropriation that Ricoeur gives in his essay, "Phenomenology and hermeneutics," ("To appropriate is to make what was alien become one's own. What is appropriated is indeed the matter of the text. But the matter of the text becomes my own only if I disappropriate myself, in order to let the matter of the text be"), Duffy proposed three questions for discussion.

First, Does sacramental theology in its theoretical formulations adequately dialogue with the flawed praxis situations within which sacrament must be appropriated? The question might be restated in this way: Does sacramental theology deal exclusively with ideal speech-acts? Ricoeur offers the suggestive example of reading as similar to the performance of a musical score. The analogy is helpful precisely because the performance situation, in the case of even the most skilled artist, is fraught with the possibilities of banality, if not disaster. Further, not only the perspective of the performer and audience must be taken into account, but also the differing expectations of the composer, the music critic, and someone like T. Adorno of the early Frankfurt School who, in addition to these roles, was a social critic of musical performance.

There is a clear distinction between theories of performance and performance praxis. In an ideal performance, of course, there is a dialectic between these two dimensions of music, but such performances are not the normal music-making of our lives. When a theory of interpretation, therefore, speaks of the end result of appropriation as "the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better," this is to say no more than a theory of psychoanalytic interpretation that postulates a similar therapeutic self-understanding and appropriation. In other words, the praxis situation does not deny the theory but challenges its assumptions. Further, clarity of theory does not necessarily beget transforming praxis.

A second question: In the act of appropriation, to what extent does our flawed experience hinder our passage to actualized meaning and its consequences? Ricoeur correctly insists on the avoidance of romantic subjectivism in the act of appropriation. On the other hand, Ricoeur himself acknowledges the importance of experience as the last brace of the hermeneutical arc. While a theory of appropriation may legitimately assume that this final brace of lived experience will hold, a praxis of appropriation might suggest that the interpreting subject is often enough left in midair at this point. In brief, we have the problem of the "truncated subject," to use Lonergan's evocative image.

The final question: How competent must a subject be to communicate and appropriate symbolically? The purpose of the question is to continue the line of thinking of the previous two questions. Stated differently, To what extent must communicative competence and symbolic appropriation be reexamined in view of the Christian experience of sin and its consequential effects on sacramental praxis? Ricoeur's description of the event of appropriation as "playful" is perceptive but presumes a great deal of the appropriating subject. While agreeing with Happel's remark that everyone need not enter therapy in order to symbolize, Duffy suggested that the therapeutic question might help us to assess more realistically the praxis situation as a dialogue partner with theological theories of appropriation.

Before closing the final session of the seminar, the participants were asked for suggestions about issues that might be studied and discussed for next year's meeting. Among the themes proposed were: historical and theological questions associated with the origin of sacraments; an examination of the images of nurturing, birthing, and so forth as part of sacramental understanding; the question of whether worship is a unique source of *lex credendi* for culturally diverse peoples; the understanding of sacrament as ecclesial acts; and the affective dimension of faith and sacrament.

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