

## SEMINAR ON SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

Though the topic of this year's seminar continued to be "Worship and Politics," due to some unforeseen circumstances, the announced program was somewhat altered. On Thursday, Margaret Mary Kelleher opened the discussion with the implications for the study of worship of Wayne Meeks' *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). Stephen Happel remarked on the hermeneutical issues implied by Meeks' book and moderated the two-day session.

After pointing to the salient social dimensions that Meeks describes in early Pauline Christianity, Kelleher noted Meeks' use of Victor Turner and Mary Douglas, particularly with regard to the way in which the Christian communities set limits for their group identities. Meeks treats the following questions—What were the social contexts of early Christian communities? How did ritual create and support these group limits? She raised these questions with regard to Meeks' interpretations: Were the experiences of community and liminality an ideal or a social fact? Are symbols more polysemantic than Meeks supposes? How does he show us the way in which the community is the subject of Christian discourse?

Kelleher then outlined the kinds of questions Meeks' study raises for contemporary theologies of worship. What is the social environment of North American Catholics today? How can the context be specified in local churches? How are we using ritual to create boundaries? What sort of world is the Catholic and Christian world creating through its rituals? Who has the power? How does it appear? Is the hierarchical shape of ministerial power a relic of the late antique world? Where are our structures of community, liminality, structure, and anti-structure?

Happel outlined the hermeneutical issues. He surveyed the present situation in the theology of the sacraments. He pointed to the ground-breaking reinterpretations of Aquinas by Schillebeeckx and Rahner, now almost 25 years ago (in English translation!). Their use of broadly existential and phenomenological categories established an "encounter" theology, an interpersonal hermeneutic. Since then there have been only a few attempts (notably liberationist) to provide a public (and hence political) interpretation. He argued that the classical notion of effectiveness (instrumental causality) is now being "thickened" through the social sciences to determine the precisely human dimensions of that causality.

But there are numerous problems. In the use of the social sciences in the study of worship, "experience" can be used descriptively and normatively. How is Meeks appealing to the social scientific mediation of that "experience"? Happel argued that there are multiple interpretive tools required in the study of worship, beginning with the (1) literary-critical and its understanding of the stylistic forms

or genres in which worship appears. Meeks' volume, though ostensibly a social-scientific description, functions as (2) historical-critical suspicion, requiring that we 'test' our worship against the original apostolic community's prayer and ecclesial structure. The (3) affective and psychological dimension of interpretation provides a discussion of the way in which worship negotiates the awe and dread which arises in the face of divine mystery. Finally the (4) social-pragmatic aspects of interpretation study the way in which rituals are community-founding and socially sustaining or changing.

In this final form of interpretation, Meeks' text serves well as an initial study of the symmetries and dissymmetries operative in early urban Christian communities. What it does not ask is whether this praxis is normative. Or rather it supposes certain ideal norms and does not ask how those norms function in its own method.

All levels of interpretation are required for the study of worship. The social scientific interpretations are highly useful in that they point to the fact that worship is both community expression and formation. They place orthopraxis as the foundation for orthodoxy and note that the ecclesial praxis of love (however fractured) is a promise of divine communion. Such sociological, anthropological and psychological analyses provide a way to describe the development and collaboration required in the ongoing patterns of conversion in Christian communities. They also clarify the structures of submission and dominance operative within the community and argue for ways of imagining future Christian projects. In this way, the "politics" of worship are not only neutrally delineated, but values are enunciated and avowed.

Participants in the discussion generally granted the usefulness of Meeks' analysis, while pointing to the ways in which his questions impinge upon contemporary worship and the study of the sacraments. Some pointed to the fact that just as Aristotelian philosophy offered an understanding of Christian faith in classical theology, so the social sciences do not totally exhaust Christian praxis, but help to interpret it. Key to the discussion was the recognition that God works not alongside other human agency, but in and through "secondary causes." One participant pointed to the fact that the relationship between the social sciences and Christian theology of the sacraments is not in a single direction. Rather, the notion of instrumental cause in the sacraments might be of help to the social sciences in their understanding of correlation. In preaching, social scientific analyses have provided criteria for determining the efficacy of this genre. One participant noted that such analysis has an intrinsically democratizing effect in that it raises expectations of collaborative input. The "subject" of the homily is no longer simply the preacher, but also the audience and the worship committee. Social science used in an understanding of the sacraments can help a community own both its prescriptive and descriptive moments. This also permits us to note the fact that all the sacraments do not effect or actuate an identical reality. In facing the fact of the community's radical multiplicity, for example, between those who can read and those who cannot, we recognize an important aspect of the dynamics of power in the Christian community.

The discussion anticipated the following day's presentations with a question about the emergence of normative activity in ritual behavior. Who decides what

the experience of the community is? What occurs when what constitutes this particular local church does not appear in the normative written text?

The second day's presentations were by Michael Downey concerning the communities founded according to the principles of Jean Vanier, especially at l'Arche, and by Margaret Mary Kelleher concerning her developing social hermeneutic for analyzing ritual behavior in the American context. Thus we had the example of a particularly "marginal" social group struggling to articulate itself in worship and a theory about the analysis of the rituals of social groups.

Downey focused upon status inconsistency and social mobility in Meeks' treatment of early Christian experience. He pointed to the author's remark that the sacraments held out hope for those in the anxiety of status inconsistency and a realizable intimacy for mobile figures in groups. Sacraments for him are effective in so far as they socialize people and are constitutive of community. The sacraments were the actions of intimate Christian primary groups, an antidote to the loneliness of those in between social states. Ritualization, therefore, must have varied according to age, tradition, culture and the contemporary experience of suffering and hope.

In Jean Vanier's communities for the handicapped and the non-handicapped, both have committed themselves to an ambiguous status in contemporary society. What happens in the minor rituals of such communities is that those who are normally "outside" the social structure are "inside" ritually. There is a clear "levelling" of roles so that there are not just "helpers" and the "helped," perpetuating situations of dominance and submission, but rather a paradigmatic community of justice and equality. Self-help and mutual help become the context for ritual (and therefore ritual studies). Eucharist, however, tends to assume the usual structure in which the major distinction must be between the literate and the non-literate, the givers and the receivers of help. With regard to social mobility, Downey noted that the achievement and bonding in Vanier's communities is not material or juridical, but affective, again breaking down the distinction between the weak and the strong, the cared-for and the care-giver.

Downey asked how the l'Arche communities (and others) might be better served and pointed to the possibility of ritualizing "lament" as a focus for prayer. Generally speaking it is necessary to integrate the negative into ritual in a creative way. There should be greater room for the apocalyptic in which divine intervention in human affairs and the necessary co-creativity of humanity are assured.

There was a lively discussion after this presentation, focusing upon lament and the meaning of the negative in relationship to the exaltation and resurrection of Christ, apocalypse and the language of imperial Armageddon, and the problem of maintaining a culturally and religiously induced isolation for the handicapped. Downey pointed to the need for a theory of presence through absence and to the public dimensions of eucharist in their confrontation with the pain of others. One speaker noted that the substitution of contemporary hymns in the present rite has largely erased the lament psalms from ordinary eucharistic usage.

Kelleher presented a precis of her method for anthropological analysis of eucharistic rituals. Based upon the work of Victor Turner and Bernard Lonergan, a fuller published version may be found in the article, "Liturgy: An Ecclesial Act

of Meaning," *Worship* 59 (Nov., 1985). Her goal is to objectify the public horizon of worship, to identify the characteristic forms of public spirituality, and to understand the social matrix in which the Church forms itself. Though not a full ethnography, her method has permitted her to isolate certain important self-interpretations of the communities she has studied, particularly with regard to the communion rites. She has been able to distinguish the dissonances between normative text and eucharistic praxis, the public and social character of the ritual subject and the various distinctions in ecclesiastical structure which make a difference outside worship.

The discussion which followed focused upon the nature and method of social science in its application to the theology of the sacraments. In the course of the discussion on both days, it became clear that further work will need to be undertaken to understand such methods and to apply them to sacramental praxis, both past and present. During the course of the second day, the participants noticed what was being demanded of interpreters in terms of careful perception and more authentic affect by treating the subject of ritual as a concrete, interacting community. The interpreter is not simply a neutral observer.

Next year's steering committee (Regis Duffy, moderator; David Power, and Stephen Happel) intends to evaluate the present project, though it is partial to continuing a discussion of the social scientific analysis of sacraments by focusing upon the late medieval period. To that end, we are likely to propose as a discussion text John Bossy's *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985) and his "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700," *Past and Present* 100 (1983) with a focus upon the general topic of the convention, "The Linguistic Turn in Theology." Papers and presentations will be requested at the appropriate time from those whose names and addresses we have. Anyone not participating in this year's seminar who would like to participate or prepare a paper should write to the moderator.

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