

SEMINAR ON SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

Since the group had discussed Wayne Meek's *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* in last year's meeting, this year's theme represented an attempt to continue a discussion of some of the sociological dimensions of sacramental and liturgical history. For this purpose, John Bossy's *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (New York: Oxford University, 1985) and his article "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700," *Past and Present* 100 (1983) served as the initial point of departure for a wide-ranging exchange. James Dallen presented his comments under the title, "Historical Description and Sacramental Theology."

James Dallen began his overview and critique of Bossy's work by noting that although the author's concerns are historical, they can provide a clarification of the nature and method of sacramental theology. Dallen suggested that the two meetings might follow a three-stage discussion; first, an examination of Bossy's work; second, an exchange on liturgy as source for sacramental theology; third, an analysis of what type of historical description is needed in sacramental theology today.

Beginning his presentation with Bossy's article, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700," Dallen noted Bossy's delineation of the Mass as a social institution that was uprooted for significant areas of Europe in the sixteenth century. Contrary to some historical analyses, Bossy does not see the medieval understanding of the Mass as both sacrifice and sacrament as dichotomized. The distinction of Mass as sacrifice and sacrament had the merit of bringing together the notions of satisfaction to God and the wholeness of the Christian community.

Bossy then underscores the medieval Mass as expressive of the sense of solidarity and social cohesion. If one accepts this view, then the Reformers' rejection of the Mass as sacrifice also entailed the loss of the ritual condition of social peace. As Dallen sums up this view, "though they [the Reformers] tried to make their worship the center of social unity, they failed because they provided no symbol with the power of the Host."

Dallen then gave a concise summary of Bossy's book. A major concern of *Christianity in the West* is "traditional Christianity" as distinguished by its use of Anselm's theory of salvation with its axioms of satisfaction and kinship. The sacraments of baptism and marriage, and the liturgies linked to death serve as a testing point for the axiom of kinship. In an equally insightful chapter, Bossy treats sin, penance, and the virtues within the medieval social system and again, comes to a positive assessment of the "social miracle" of the period.

With the reformation and counter reformation of the sixteenth century, Bossy uncovers a basic dynamic: the axiom of justification supplants the axiom of sat-

isfaction. As Dallen pointed out, Bossy also implies that the axiom of the individual before God replaced the axiom of kinship and thus, the medieval social miracle disappeared. In the practical realm, "what was decided about sacraments would determine what sort of social body the new Church would be." Because the Word replaced sacrament in some reform traditions, there was a loss of social unity: "the union to be sought was with that other spirit, God, not with that tiresome incarnation, your neighbour."

Bossy's final conclusions are based on the conviction that the transition from the medieval to the reformation period represents a shift from solidarity to civility. As Dallen summarizes it, "'Religion' became a worshipful attitude rather than a group following a way of life. 'Society' became a collectivity external to its members rather than a state of companionship. 'Christianity' became a body of beliefs rather than a body of people."

Dallen concluded his first presentation by commenting on Anselm's theory of salvation in connection with medieval sacramental practice and theology and on Mary Douglas' anthropological theory of the interrelation of ritual and the sense of the social body. First, Bossy fails to appreciate the Celtic and Teutonic cultural roots of Anselm's theory and thus misses this important relation between culture and liturgy. Furthermore, the shift from baptism to the repeatable sacraments produced a theology of atonement which gave prominence to Christ's obedience and a progressive incorporation into Christ, especially by penance and eucharist. Dallen then noted that "Anselm's theory and its cultural axioms thus resonated with liturgical experience as well." Second, Dallen briefly alluded to Mary Douglas' axiom that highly ritualistic societies have a powerful sense of solidarity while anti-ritualism breeds social individualism. In other words, Bossy's overall interpretation is corroborated by Douglas' work.

In his second and shorter presentation, Dallen focused on the question of liturgy as source of sacramental theology. Liturgy as celebrated by the assembled community exists, like music in "performance." Thus, liturgy includes "all describable aspects of the assembly's action and experience, not just those of its ritual leader(s) nor, especially, the presider's text." This axiom expands our notion of the contexts of liturgical action to take into account the entire life of the community. The historical context of the liturgy, in terms of both praxis and development, must also be carefully appreciated and evaluated.

Sacramental theology, in turn, requires not only a historical description of the liturgy of the past but also its interrelation with the theology of its time. Such a theology also profits from comparative historical descriptions of liturgies and theologies of different periods and a dialectical conversation between the praxis and theories of past and present.

These last remarks provoked a lively discussion among the participants on the conflict of interpretations that seem inevitably bound up with the tasks of liturgical and sacramental theology. Liturgy as "performance," seen within its several contexts, also suggests some of the methodological issues involved, such as hidden assumptions about "objective" historical descriptions of liturgy and criteria for the critical evaluation of our present rites. Given Bossy's sensitive appreciation of the social dimension of much that current liturgical and sacramental theology

would criticize, another question arises: do our current evaluations of the 'popular' religious practices of a period reflect an elitist and biased stance? On the other hand, do our descriptions take into account the hidden ecclesiologies that abound in various liturgical praxis and sacramental theory? The celebration of the eucharist at the convention provided a concrete and shared experience with which to test some of these questions.

Regis Duffy, as outgoing chair, then suggested that a continuing problem of the seminar has been the lack of preparation for in-depth participation, even with the assigned readings. He proposed that the group become a year-round working seminar in which papers would be sent out to participants several months before the convention to allow for some interchange and ongoing work. The working sessions at the convention would then be a richer and better prepared exchange of ideas and insights. This proposal was accepted by the group and the incoming chair, Kevin Irwin, will be in contact with the present and past participants of the seminar.

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