

FOLLOW-UP SEMINARS

"The Church and the Eucharist"

Moderator: Mary Ellen Sheehan, University of St. Michael's College

James Nickoloff introduced the session with review of his response, Mary Collins noted the questions submitted and focused them for discussion. The bulk of the time was devoted to table discussion, after which there were interventions for the plenary group, with Collins bringing the discussion to a synthetic closing.

The discussion focused on the relationship of the elements of the ritual process in Eucharist: Ingathering of the community, breaking open the Word, entering into the mystery of God by the power of the Holy Spirit in table fellowship, and the passage out into the world again in mission. Nickoloff noted again the relationship of each of these elements to the action of the Christian community in the world. In this he added to Collins's two crises in liturgical reform: hegemonic confusion and ascetical deprivation; a third, the community's experience of liturgy as separated from the wider world, and its implicit challenge to the culture was also noted, in this case the US culture.

There was extensive discussion of what constitutes "liturgical data" for analysis and reform, moving beyond the actions of the celebrant and the aesthetic ritual to the content of the prayers and their global or reduced focus, the cultural elements and ethnic diversity which bring the complexities of the world into ritual, and the insertion of the local assembly into the wider and longer historical process. The question of local (diocesan) church in relationship to the congregation was discussed. Many Catholics are congregational and papal, with a lack of sense of solidarity in other dimensions of ecclesial life.

Collins focused the questions and proposed them as contributions to the table discussions. The resources of fellow Christians in the Reformation and Orthodox traditions, especially in emphases on the Spirit's action, personal participation and the emphasis of the whole community in the Eucharistic process, was suggested. Collins noted that these elements of Eucharistic analysis and critique were a common heritage, some Augustinian, which can contribute to ritual critique and reform. A question raised about the Pelagian possibility arising in emphasis on the action of the whole eucharistic community, was placed in the context of an ecclesiology which recognizes the whole Christ as acting in the celebrating community.

Among the responses from the tables, the image of the ecclesial circulatory system emerged as embodying the interpenetration of the world, the eucharistic celebration and the whole ritual process which embodies the Church. No element

is absent from the whole, so that the world is not absent at word and table, nor is there somehow an absence of the eucharistic Christ in the daily life and witness of the Christian in the world. Extensive discussion occurred on the concrete embodiment and values inherent in taking account of the whole ritual process and expanding eucharistic analysis beyond the celebrant and the elements to the whole of ecclesial life.

The positive values of multethnic parish life in witnessing the catholicity of the Church, and the world Church, the significance of the variety of experiences and styles of worship in embodying the diversity of eucharistic life, and various ways of developing eucharistic analysis and critique in the multiplicity of cultural contexts seemed to focus most table discussion.

Collins wrapped up the discussion, focusing on the pluralism and interdependence of the ecclesial circulatory system, with its ritual center never divorced from the realities of the world and the richness of human consciousness. She left the group with two observations: (1) We are groping toward a world Church. Dissatisfaction is the work of the Holy Spirit. Reception of the reform of worship is studied in the diversity of the faith and ritual life of the people and not only in the revised liturgical books. Sharing of creative successes will enable us to move beyond a single minded analytical perspective in ritual analysis. (2) In the ritual circulatory system, the presider has an appropriate importance, but there is a pluralistic decentering going on. It is essential to rely on a broader analysis of the responsibility and consciousness of the entire assembly. The quality of preaching and presiding is demanded and enabled by the assembly itself and does not rely solely with the presider. Everyone in the Church at every spiritual level needs access to the variety in the Church and in each congregation.

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