

"The Eucharist and Popular Religiosity"

Moderator: Terrence Tilley, University of Dayton

Reporter: Diana L. Hayes, Georgetown University

Presenter: Gary Macy, University of San Diego

Respondent: Joan Timmerman, College of St. Catherine

To open the conversation: Joan Timmerman, College of St. Catherine

At the continuation of the plenary session on Dr. Gary Macy's paper which was presented earlier in the conference, the respondent, Joan Timmerman, and interested members of the Society presented questions and engaged in dialogue with the presenter. There were a number of excellent questions. Dr. Timmerman raised several "clusters" of questions, first, regarding Macy's discussion of the shift in significance of priestly ordination as a requirement for celebration of the Eucharist so that ordination became irreversible while other sacraments, such as marriage, did not. The reasons, according to Macy were, beginning in the Middle Ages, anthropological and sociological rather than theological. It was done in order to remove control of religious life and the priesthood from lay lords. Such irreversibility was not necessary for the sacrament of marriage as it could be ended by entering the religious life or by the death of a spouse.

Her second set of questions involved "moving between historical research and constructive theology"? What was the value in doing so? The presenter's response was that working in historical theology frees one from the fear of change in the tradition of the Church because one recognizes that as change has occurred in the past, it can also, therefore, change in the future, laying the foundation for substantive future changes to come about.

The third substantive question raised the issue of possible "missing data" regarding popular religiosity and its practices. How does the researcher decide what is admissible and what is illegitimate and therefore is denied access to becoming part of tradition. Macy's response was that forms of popular religiosity are continually shifting, some fall away, others are lost while others still persist over time and become tradition. He noted that what is or are allowable expressions of Christian faith are still a question for discussion today.

After the interchange between the presenter and respondent, written questions that had been submitted earlier were discussed. They were many and varied. Several touched on the distinction between *res sacramentum/sacramenti*—was there a double sense expressed? The response was yes: the signifier (word) means the same thing but what it signifies changes. Other questions raised other

points of clarification such as the meaning of spiritual in the Middle Ages and whether or not there was a clear distinction between clergy and laity prior to the thirteenth century.

There was also time for further discussion from the floor. This proved to be very lively ranging from the significance of medieval devotions, the understanding of the Eucharist in the Middle Ages as "ultimate relic"; the shifts in meaning of symbol, sacramentality, spirituality and other terms and devotions and the relationship of issues arising today such as women's liturgies, the rise in devotions such as Benediction and the need to explore the significant symbols of young people today and how they can play a role in the Eucharistic celebration and other rituals.

Both Macy and Timmerman engaged the audience in the dialogue to which they responded with enthusiasm in exploring the significance of Macy's exposition on the popular religiosity of the Middle Ages to contemporary religiosity. The well-attended session was felt to be informative, challenging and very accessible by the participants, providing as it did much more time for critical, in-depth dialogue between presenter, respondent and audience.

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