

LITURGY/SACRAMENTS

- Topic: Impasse in Liturgy and Sacraments
 Convener: Judith M. Kubicki, Fordham University
 Moderator: Bruce Morrill, Boston College
 Presenters: David Dault, American Baptist College
 Anastasia Christine Wendlinder, Gonzaga University
 Nancy A. Dallavalle, Fairfield University

David Dault's paper, "Outward Signs: Toward a Semiotics of the Eucharist" highlighted the differing perspectives (or "worldviews") of Catholicism and Protestantism, particularly with regard to sacraments. Noting that this disparity can be especially obvious when one moves from Protestantism to embrace Catholicism, the paper focused on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as a focal point of the difficulty. The choice of this starting point emerged both from Dault's experience of participating in the RCIA as an adult and his being a Roman Catholic on faculty at a Baptist college.

Dault engaged in semiotic (sign-based) analysis of the two perspectives, making suggestions for moving forward once the difficulties are understood. He began by pointing out that Protestant and Catholic articulations take a common starting point—the phrase defining sacraments generally, "An outward sign of an inward grace." However, when examined in terms of their respective understandings, this common phrase actually points to the radical *disagreement* between these two groups at the level of semiotic function. That is, once we begin to understand *how* the bread and wine function as "outward signs" for each group, we can better identify the unstated disjunction in understanding. A lively discussion followed, offering additional perspectives that Dault had not mentioned. Several attendees with similar experiences, as well as research interests, affirmed Dault's analysis and encouraged his continued research in this area.

Anastasia Christine Wendlinder's paper, "Reconciling Table and Sacrifice: Challenges and Possibilities" examined the inconsistencies between the eucharistic theologies of table and sacrifice in current Roman Catholic practice. Her intention is to re-vision a notion of sacrifice more consistent with a Eucharistic practice centered on Jesus' last supper as narrated in the Synoptic Gospels and the full, active, and conscious participation of the assembly.

Although Vatican II aimed to retrieve a theology of the table, current practice—still rooted in the atonement theology of sacrifice—hinders full participation, especially by non-ordained members of the assembly. Historical studies suggest that the last meal celebrated by Jesus (a Passover Meal according to the Synoptic Gospels) is not atoning or expiatory in nature. Early Christians, however, soon began to associate the Eucharist with sacrificial rites other than communion, thanksgiving, and praise. As the Middle Ages progressed, the Church's focus became more and more the dramatic reenactment of Jesus' passion and death with less and less focus on his earthly life and resurrection.

Contemporary theological reflection on Eucharist seeks to link the celebration of the rite to the lives of believers outside the church doors. Within such a theological perspective, the notion of Eucharist as sacrifice can be relevant and compelling. Re-visioning sacrifice as “self-giving response”—to use Robert Daly’s phrase—is a step in the right direction. Nevertheless, such theological interpretation must be found in concrete expressions within the liturgy in order to be effective. A lively discussion followed the presentation that included specific examples of concrete words and gestures that need serious re-thinking in the Roman Rite.

Nancy Dallavalle’s presentation, “The (Non-)Ordination of Women: State of the Impasse” focused on the theologian’s predicament regarding the Church’s impasse on the “non-ordination” of women. The current ecclesial ban has, in fact, functioned—as Bishop Müller of Regensburg suggested—as “a sort of mental ecclesial schism.” Dallavalle identified two issues exacerbating the impasse, particularly in the US Church. The first is the concerted effort to interpret what was a devotional meditation on the creation of humanity as male and female by John Paul II as a theology with quasi-dogmatic status. The second is the increasingly sectarian nature of both a culture of social networking niches and the actions of a few outspoken bishops.

Dallavalle suggested two specific responses. The first is to appropriate Benedict XVI’s retrieval of the practice of the presider “facing east” during the Eucharist as a way to address the problematic focus on the gender of the presider. This would also serve as a corrective response to both trends by offering the opportunity to clearly articulate a Trinitarian theology. The second is to urge all parties to take seriously the upcoming “Year of the Priest” in order to encourage vocations to the priesthood as it is now configured. A lively discussion ensued regarding concrete steps that can be taken both theologically and practically.

The session concluded with moderator Bruce Morrill encouraging attendees to consider potential papers for next year’s meeting.

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