

ECCLESIOLOGY

- Topic: Identity of a Eucharistic Church in an Ecumenical Age
Convener: Susan K. Wood, SCL, Saint John's University, Colleagueville
Presenter: Gerard Austin, Catholic University of America
Respondent: Maxwell Johnson, Saint John's University, Colleagueville

Gerard Austin explored the tension between the two terms "eucharistic church" and "ecumenical age." He recalled his experience as a member of the United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue and its statement that we may share more in common with our dialogue partners than we do with many persons within our own communions. He emphasized that matters of unity are never simply theological or liturgical, but are political and historical as well. Two examples include (1) the overshadowing of the purpose of the Eucharist, namely the unity of the Mystical Body, by a theology of the Real Presence due to historical reasons and (2) various understandings of common liturgical texts conditioned according to their location.

Within the two extreme interpretations of "eucharistic church" and "ecumenical age," one extreme welcomes all baptized Christians to full participation at their Eucharist. The other requires explicit membership in that particular eucharistic ecclesial communion. The U. S. Roman Catholic bishops adopted a more nuanced statement that "because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to holy community." We must inquire into the nature of this oneness of faith and membership.

Following David Powers, Austin advocated moving from an emphasis on sacrifice and offering to one of God's gift to us in Christ. This shifts the emphasis from what is done in the sacrament by the priest to what has been done by Christ and to the remembering of that by his people who receive his action in thankfulness.

Austin identified the major stumbling block to eucharistic unity as the role of the priest-president at the Eucharist. The Augustinian sense of viewing Eucharist as the action of the whole Christ, head and members, has not yet been sufficiently retrieved. Eucharistic sharing awaits a mutual understanding of the nature and authority of church order and ministry.

Maxwell Johnson responded by underscoring the experiences of *koinonia* that cut directly across ecclesial boundaries. He argued that common liturgical

texts are not heard the same way in different contexts because the sources are reformulated in such ways within the official liturgical books that they are not the same texts at all. Johnson questioned Bernard Cooke's argument that "current theological clarifications are filtering down to popular understanding." Citing the current interest in certain traditional eucharistic devotions, Johnson wondered whether the post-Vatican II liturgy is being approached from an increasingly pre-Vatican II mind set and piety. SWAP represents yet another challenge to the identity of a "Eucharistic Church."

Johnson noted the parallels between David Power's emphasis on gift and Luther's theology of the Eucharist as benefit and gift. He cited Eucharistic Prayers which suggest that the activity of the Holy Spirit through the reception of holy communion is the very means by which a "oneness of faith, life, and worship" is constituted. Johnson located a theology of eucharistic sharing within the implications of baptism rather than within a theology of ordained ministry.

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