

CONTINUING GROUPS

WOMEN'S SEMINAR IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

- Topic: Reconsidering Sacramentality:
 A Conversation with M. Catherine Hilkert and Susan A. Ross
- Conveners: Susan M. St. Ville, University of Notre Dame
 Susan M. Simonaitis, Fordham University
- Moderator: Mary T. Stimming, Dominican University
- Presenters: M. Catherine Hilkert, University of Notre Dame
 Susan A. Ross, Loyola University of Chicago

The Women's Seminar in Constructive Theology continued to highlight, support, and further the creative contributions of women in theology by engaging in a fascinating discussion of Mary Catherine Hilkert's *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (Continuum 1997) and Susan A. Ross's *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (Continuum 1998). Hilkert and Ross opened the seminar by offering personal reflections on what attracted them to their research followed by overviews of their texts.

Hilkert noted that her experiences of feeling called to preach, of recognizing that the arts of preaching were not restricted to "pulpit preaching," and of being a member of the religious congregation of the Order of Preachers led her to reflect on questions such as: "Who is called to preach?" and "What difference does it make to the assembly if a woman preaches?" Acknowledging the influence of David Tracy's analysis, Hilkert described two approaches to preaching based on the distinction between the dialectical imagination and the sacramental imagination. Preaching based on the dialectical imagination, she proposed, focuses on the word event to the exclusion of the rest of the liturgy. According to Hilkert, a productive theology of preaching based on a Catholic sacramental imagination must draw attention to: the connections between grace and experience; interactive modes of preaching; the connections between word and ritual; how preachers en flesh the word and therefore the need for a diversity of preachers; and the need to rethink concepts of authority pertaining to the word and the preacher. Hilkert emphasized that the sacramental imagination that supports this theology of preaching must also be a *prophetic imagination*. A prophetic and sacramental approach to a theology of preaching accentuates the reality, for Hilkert, that it is the *community*—both men and women—that preaches through its *actions* more than its words.

Ross noted two sets of concerns that motivated her to bring the insights of feminist theology to bear on sacramental theology. She first described a gut-level feeling that there was a nondiscursive, embodied element in sacramental theology that had affinities with feminist theology. Secondly, her experiences of being invited to speak in parishes and of interviewing women in parish leadership positions exposed a deeper level of sacramental questioning than, as she put it, simply the role of women in marriage. Having searched the literature (especially post-Vatican II) for indications of the ways in which gender might be operating in sacramental theology, Ross discovered that "it was a case of what wasn't there that was really important." Thus, Ross hopes to have begun a process of opening the field of sacramental theology to feminist interpretation.

In providing some guides to her book, Ross emphasized the idea that a feminist interpretation of sacramental theology means rethinking the present sacramental system and not just including women in an already existing system. Further, Ross offered four criteria to guide the project. She underscored the importance of tolerance and appreciation for ambiguity as a structural component for understanding sacramentality. Secondly, serious analysis of the role of the body and gender in sacramentality especially with regard to ordination must be included. Ross also indicated ways in which she wished to provide a broader context for discussions of the body by employing models of family (inspired by Lisa Cahill's work) and by redirecting traditional theological use of bridal imagery. The use of representation theories drawing on literary and psychoanalytic resources constitutes a third criterion. Finally, an unwavering commitment to social justice must be integral to any sacramental theology.

Questions focused on preaching decisions, the use of family as a context, discerning the levels of experience, the role of social location, the body and essentialism, and the effect of the authors' ideas in practice. A particularly moving account of eucharist as a movement from the apophatic to the cataphatic was offered by one participant. The seminar raised shared themes: both theologians have begun necessary and constructive conversations converging on the issues of experience, justice, social location, and the complex nature of a life-giving and life-affirming sacramental praxis.

The seminar concluded with a reception at which the annual Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award was presented to Regina A. Coll, C.S.J. of the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame.

ELENA G. PROCARIO-FOLEY

Iona College

New Rochelle, New York