

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

- Topic: A Catholic Response to *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*  
Convenor: Michael A. Fahey, Marquette University  
Moderator: Ann K. Riggs, National Council of Churches, Faith and Order  
Presenters: Jaroslav Z. Skira, Regis College, Toronto  
Richard J. Sklba, Milwaukee  
William G. Rusch, Faith and Order in North America, New York

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (Geneva) is continuing the process of preparing a major ecumenical document that potentially could be as important as the well-known Lima Document: *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1981), to which the CTSA commissioned and published an office response: *Catholic Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, ed. Michael Fahey (1986). To devote the attention that this new document, still in preparation, deserves, the board of directors of the CTSA established a Research Group that is studying and analyzing the document over a three-year period with the possibility of publishing its findings. This year's discussion was the second in the process. The two presentations delivered in 2003 by Catherine Clifford and Francis A. Sullivan were published last year in *Ecumenical Trends*.

The text that the research group had available for study is dated November 1998; a second provisional revision still under an embargo was made available to the speakers provided that they did not cite from the text verbatim. In his opening remarks the convenor noted that undertaking the project was recommended by the Faith and Order Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 1993. The Faith and Order Commission continues to invite churches, universities, institutes, and societies (such as the CTSA) to reflect on the text in the light of questions such as: How much can one recognize in the text an emerging convergence on the nature and purpose of the Church? What areas in the document need further work or addition? What steps might one's own Church take even now toward promising a mutual recognition of other churches?

*The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, like the Lima Document, contains two separate segments: first, the main text represents common perspectives that can be claimed largely as a result of the pioneering work of the bilateral and multilateral consultations of the past fifty years. Secondly, the material printed "inside the printed boxes" explores areas where differences remain both within and between churches. Does this "boxed" material represent major church-dividing differences, or legitimate expressions of diversity?

This year's presentations were delivered to a large turnout of more than fifty auditors. The first presentation by Professor Jaroslav Z. Skira of Regis College, Toronto, a member of the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church, was entitled "Eastern Christianity and *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*." In his detailed, generally favorable, assessment of the document he noted that the largest unresolved

issue is the notion of the "church as sacrament," and how this is expressed in the ministries of oversight at the local, regional and worldwide levels. The second presentation, written by Richard J. Sklba, Auxiliary Catholic Bishop of Milwaukee, and read by Professor George Tavard, focused on four specific questions: the document's use of Scripture; sacramentality and the nature of the Church; the role of the episcopacy; and the time-conditioned nature of the Gospel. The final written presentation, from a Lutheran perspective, was the work of William G. Rusch, from the Foundation for a Conference on Faith and Order in North America. His text urged the Roman Catholics to give greater attention to the brief reference regarding the role of "primacy" in the Church (no. 103).

During the ensuing general discussion it was decided that next year, in 2005, the research group will give particular attention to the various forms of primacy in the Church, and will attempt to synthesize the conclusions of the research group reached over the three-year study period. Persons interested in participating in the formal discussions next year are invited to submit suggestions to the moderator at [ariggs@nccusa.org](mailto:ariggs@nccusa.org) or to the convener [michael.fahey@marquette.edu](mailto:michael.fahey@marquette.edu).

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#### THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Topic: The Church's Theology of Homosexuality  
 Convener: James B. Nickoloff, College of the Holy Cross  
 Moderator: James B. Nickoloff, College of the Holy Cross  
 Presenters: Bernard J. Cooke, College of the Holy Cross (emeritus)  
 Gary Macy, University of San Diego  
 Jamie Phelps, Xavier University of Louisiana

The third and final meeting of the Research Group continued its examination of the theological implications of the church teaching on homosexuality. Rather than revisiting questions of biblical interpretation and sexual ethics, three panelists at San Jose in 2000 reported on the theological anthropology, the theology of God, and the Christology which either ground or are implied by the teaching on homosexuality. At New Orleans in 2002 three more panelists examined the notions of sin and grace, church, and spirituality associated with the teaching. This year the Group turned its attention to the soteriology, theology of history, and theory of revelation implicit in the teaching, taking once again as principal sources of this teaching the "Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics" (1975), "Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual