

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

The Church as communion was the focus of the two sessions of the Ecclesiology Seminar. The June 11 session featured a discussion of the draft document "Towards *Koinonia* in Faith, Life, and Witness," the Stuttgart Statement of the Commission on Faith and Order of The World Council of Churches," led by William Rusch (ELCA, Office of Ecumenical Affairs) and John F. Hotchkin (NCCB, Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs). The June 12 session consisted of presentations and discussion on the letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Some Aspects of the Church as Communion" (June 1992). Bishop Raymond A. Lucker (New Ulm) presented reflections on the letter from the perspective of the local Church, and Francis A. Sullivan (Boston College) gave a theological analysis of the letter.

RESPONSE TO "TOWARDS KOINONIA IN FAITH, LIFE, AND WITNESS"

William Rusch began by situating the Stuttgart text within its background, the process that led up to it, and its purpose. This document is unique for the world conference of the Faith and Order Commission in that it provides a working theme. The text, described as a "discussion paper," is not meant to be a convergence text, but will be used to stimulate and orient conversation and as a resource for various groups.

Rusch noted that the reproduction of the full text on the Canberra statement on unity within the introduction of the Stuttgart text provides a hermeneutical key for reading the entire text. He stressed that none of us can read it as a theological text from our own tradition. With this caution, he responded to the document from his perspective as a Lutheran. He noted that the discussion paper does not present a complete ecclesiology and does not represent what would be sufficient for full communion among the churches. He lifted out certain elements of an ecclesiology described as a *koinonia* and then tried to determine to what degree it would find acceptance or rejection among Lutherans by consulting two resources: the statement *The Unity We Seek*, approved by the Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Budapest in 1984, and the policy statement *Ecumenism: The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, adopted by a Church-wide assembly of that Church in 1991.

Within these Lutheran statements Rusch finds an obvious commitment to communion ecclesiology and an emerging convergence with the Stuttgart paper and other ecumenical texts. The difficulty is that he finds that the framework is not sufficient for full communion. More specificity must be added to it. Furthermore, communion ecclesiology is subject to various interpretations that would not be accepted by all as legitimate forms of diversity.

Rusch concluded that much more work needs to be done on communion ecclesiology to realize its full ecumenical potential. Second, he cautioned against seeing in any one ecclesiology, as helpful and resourceful as it may be, the total solution to the scandal of disunity.

John F. Hotchkin presented his hopes and concerns for the Fifth World Conference in terms of hopes and worries. (1) Catholics have particular reason to hope for the true success of this conference, the first to be convened since they assumed full Faith and Order membership in 1968. (2) The theme *koinonia* is well chosen and offers more hope than prior themes advanced by ecumenists to envision church unity. Originating in the communion of the persons of the Trinity, it is a specifically Christian insight into the distinctive unity that bonds Christians together in the life of the Church. It penetrates the strong relationship between the "vertical-transcendent" and "horizontal-communal" dimensions of its life. (3) This theme, though not new (it appears nineteen times in the New Testament writings), has been the focus of much contemporary thought and reflection and is gaining in clarity and importance for contemporary ecclesiology. The 1985 Synod of Bishops identified *koinonia* as Vatican II's central image of the Church. It is true this theme can also be the source of earnest argument and tension, as witnessed by the critical reactions from other Christians to the CDF letter (May 22, 1992) on aspects of the Church as *communio*. This further evidences the seriousness ecumenists ascribe to the theme. It is not marginal, nor merely a rhetorical theme. (4) Communion ecclesiology turns a page, from concentration on the historical divisions of the past to a renewed in-depth understanding of the Church.

Notwithstanding these hopes, Hotchkin also voiced some worries. (1) The language of communion, as one sees in the Dublin/Stuttgart text, is not entirely stabilized in current usage. The reality is viewed from markedly different perspectives. While these can be enriching, they can also bring the danger of too quickly assuming a level or agreement greater than has been reached. That could be followed later by disillusionment with the theme, or the reproach that ecumenists were engaged in no more than a word game. (2) To encompass all perspectives uncritically, *koinonia* may be exalted to the point of unintelligibility. Once it comes to include everything, it ceases to mean anything. It is one thing to see *koinonia* as that form of unity that flows from the Trinity and is unique to the Church. It is quite another to speak of it as the destiny of the entire created universe. (3) Further discussion could be short-circuited by impatience. Those who emphasize, rightly, the social responsibilities of Christian life may fear that the strong "vertical-transcendent" element in *koinonia* may result in their

diminishment. That would be regrettable, as would the impulse to move too quickly in ecumenical discussion from the underlying reality of *koinonia* to what Catholics see as its inevitable expression in "hierarchical communion." The multivalent meaning of *koinonia* requires methodical care in its exploration.

CDF LETTER ON COMMUNION

Bishop Raymond Lucker reflected on the CDF letter as a bishop of a particular church. In general, he finds that the letter downplays the local church while stressing the universal Church.

In his pastoral reflections, Bishop Lucker noted that the concept of communion is helpful in describing the role of the laity since it stresses equality and mutuality. Everyone is gifted, is called to participate in the ministry of the Word, is called to share in the priesthood of Christ. He voiced a concern over young priests who are returning to the patriarchy and clericalism of the past, who are more concerned with power than mutuality. He finds breaches in the observance of communion, particularly in the relationship with the particular churches, and cited the influence of the Curia as an obstacle to communion since the Curia sees itself as an extension of the Pope and functions as an instrument of centralization. The relationship of the Curia to episcopal conferences is problematic. Chairpersons of committees submit their material to offices in Rome before action is taken by the entire conference. Likewise the synodal process has been coopted and reduced to an advisory group.

Francis A. Sullivan noted that the purpose of the letter from the CDF was to correct what the CDF sees as errors: (1) the failure to integrate the Church as communion with other images of the Church and (2) the error of giving priority to the particular church over the universal Church and what it calls an erroneous application of eucharistic ecclesiology.

Sullivan noted that in this document "the Church" is always the universal Church. There is a communion of persons, but no notion of a communion of particular churches. According to this document, to speak of a communion of particular churches is an analogical application of the term.

Sullivan discussed at length the problem of asserting the temporal and ontological priority of the universal Church over the particular church. He noted that a more balanced approach would be to acknowledge the relationship of mutual interiority that exists between the universal and particular churches. The universal Church can only actualize its concrete existence in the particular church. The eucharist can only be celebrated locally.

In sum, the letter represents a centralist, unilateral, universalist view of the Church.

SUSAN WOOD, SCL
Saint John's University
Collegeville, Minnesota