

RESEARCH GROUPS

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: Edward Hahnenberg, Xavier University
Presenters: Michael A. Fahey, Marquette University
Ann K. Riggs, National Council of Churches, Faith and Order

The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (Geneva) is concluding 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 official response (*Catholic Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, ed. Michael Fahey, 1986). To devote attention to this new document still in preparation, the CTSA board of directors established a research group to study and analyze the document over a three-year period. This year's discussion was the third and final in the process.

The original text that the research group had available for study was dated November 1998; a second provisional and a third final version (still under embargo) were subsequently made available to the speakers. The third version, now entitled "The Nature and Mission of the Church," was revised in January 2005 at a drafting meeting in Chichester and is scheduled for reception by the Standing Commission of Faith and Order at Crete, June 14-21, 2005. This is the text that will be presented for voting and promulgation at the upcoming World Assembly of the WCC, February 14-23, 2006, in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

In his opening remarks the moderator of the research group noted that undertaking the study had been recommended by the Faith and Order Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 1993. The Faith and Order Commission invited churches, universities, institutes, and societies 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 moderator then introduced the two speakers.

Again this year a large turnout of some fifty auditors were in attendance. The first presentation, given by Michael A. Fahey of Marquette University, was entitled "Initial Responses to the Faith and Order Text and Its Revised Presentation of Primacy." In his favorable assessment of the document he noted that part one, "The Church of the Triune God" remains basically the same; part two, "The Church in History," continues to stress that the church is *in via* (a pilgrim church), and sees the church—in a new formulation—as "In Christ but not yet in full [visible] communion." It also retains the stress on the Church as a communion of local churches. Part three is no longer "The Life of Communion in and for the World" but simply "The Life of Communion." Before the section on the ordained ministry there is now

a whole segment on the “Ministry of All Faithful” followed by a section described as “Ministry of the Ordained within the Faithful.” After the section on “Conciliarity and Primacy” there is a concluding segment on “Authority.” Finally, in nos. 119 to 123, the conclusion, now described as “In and for the World,” echoes Vatican II’s *Gaudium et spes*.

When this CTSA seminar met last year (2004) in Reston, Virginia, especially at the urging of our ecumenical Lutheran collaborator William Rausch, it was decided that at the 2005 session the section of the draft discussing (papal) primacy would be addressed. To this end, Fahey read verbatim the revised pertinent sections (nos. 102-104). The notion of primacy was judged to have been articulated with nuance and historical sensitivity. It is remarkable in that, for the first time ever in a WCC document, a pontifical encyclical (on the papal office) is cited.

Ann K. Riggs, National Council of Churches, Faith and Order, who serves on the international standing committee, then outlined the procedures that had been used to reformulate the text, to prepare it for the general assembly, and to elicit official responses from churches and academic institutions. She concentrated on ways that the text might receive a fruitful “reception” throughout the worldwide communion.

During the ensuing lengthy general discussion it was suggested that the CTSA board of directors be asked to commission a study similar to the one edited for the Society in 1986 on the Lima Report. Participants in the research group were urged to prepare commentaries on the *Nature and Mission of the Church* for academic journals, as well as for weekly or biweekly magazines and Catholic newspapers. Perhaps Archbishop Levada of the CDF, or Cardinal Kasper of the PCPCU, or an official from the International Theological Commission, might be invited to host a symposium on the text. Others suggested that the international organization of theologians known as INSeCT might be asked to plan a congress on the topic.

This CTSA Research Group has now completed its mandate.

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