

ECCLESIOLOGY/ECUMENISM

Topic: Ecumenical Dialogue Discussion Episcopate/Episcopacy
Convener: Jeffrey Gros, Memphis Theological Seminary
Presenters: John Erickson, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary
David Thompson, Cambridge University

Dr. John Erickson, Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, presented a paper outlining some of the developments in ecumenical theological discussions of the episcopacy. He noted the Orthodox Catholic texts, "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity," (Munich, 1982), and "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God," (New Valaamo, 1987) published before the post 1989 shifts had made concern for Eastern Catholic central to this dialogue. The work of Lanne, Zizioulas and Tillard, their return to the anti-Nicean fathers, and Eucharistic ecclesiology are evident in this work. This appeal to the first centuries of the Church has been extremely helpful in this dialogue and work in Faith and Order and with some of the Reformation churches. However, this ecclesiology of the early Church, rooted as it is in small Mediterranean communities, seems somewhat abstract when we see the large, populous communities in which bishops minister today. Nevertheless, it is helpful to look at how three emphases emerge in this retrieval, and the values they contribute to the renewal of ecumenical thinking on the episcopacy: 1) Ignatius of Antioch focuses attention on the bishop as president of the Eucharistic assembly, gathering the gifts of the people, as an *alter-Christus*, a visible center of the community. 2) Irenaeus of Lyons emphasizes the role of the bishop as *alter-apostolos*, teacher of authentic doctrine, continuing the apostolic faith, insured by apostolic succession. 3) Cyprian of Carthage sees the bishop's role in a worldwide collegial unity, connecting the community in space and time with the local church, as *alter-Petros*. These aspects hold together emphases from Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox traditions, all contributing to an ecumenical view of unity. Protestants, not so focused on institutional forms, look to Irenaeus; Orthodox focus on the sacraments and faith, draw from the vision of Ignatius; while Catholic concerns for universality emphasize Cyprianic collegiality and primacy. The paper went on to outline the contribution and difficulties with this patristic retrieval of a Eucharistic ecclesiology which draws gifts and sketches a future informed by all three emphases.

Dr. David Thompson, United Reformed with Disciples background, professor of Church History Cambridge University, sketched the emergence of a theology of episcopacy in the ecclesiology of the international dialogues. As a historian he tests these understandings both by their functional as well as ontological views of ministry. He suggests for issues: 1) bishop as pastor of pastors, 2) relationship of bishops and teaching authority, 3) apostolicity and episcopacy, and 4) vocation of ordained ministry in the manifestation of unity. He then situates the theological discussion within the evolution of Disciples thinking, and the emphasis on representative rather than hierarchical roles for the ministry of oversight. A 1985 "Word to the Church on Ministry," provides some sharp questions, directed to Disciples,

but of ecumenical significance: 1) is “oversight” able to be seen in the variety of offices with such responsibilities, 2) can Disciples collegial commitments contribute to ecumenical discussions of the office of bishop, 3) in light of Scripture, Tradition and Disciples heritage can an office of bishop be owned and named, 4) what changes would be necessary, 5) in this development how would the wider Council of Ministers need to evolve, and 6) do church-wide leaders bear a ministry of *episcopo*. These questions also challenge those churches with the traditional offices of bishop, looking at residential bishops, curial cardinals and a variety of officer holders in the churches today. The paper goes on to outline further points of convergence in the dialogues and in the theology of the churches, both with bishops and those without an office so named. Approaches to teaching authority, apostolicity and the problem of parallel episcopal jurisdictions were reviewed. The paper ends with the significance for Catholic ecclesiology of the “People of God,” and moves away from validity to pastoral concerns in the theology of the Church and ministry as an important opening making dialogue with the Reformation churches more fruitful.

Both papers engendered intense discussion, looking both to the rich resources that return to the sources, direct theological and pastoral contact, and the intense theological dialogues of the last half century have contributed to clarification and convergence in the doctrine of ministry and the role of episcopo in the quest for the unity of the Church.

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