

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AS CATHOLIC?

In view of the extensive ecumenical discussion generated by the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession (CA),¹ the 1981 CTSA Seminar on Ecclesiology explored the theme, "Reception of the Augsburg Confession as Catholic? Issues concerning Church and Ministry."

To provide a point of departure, the following six questions were proposed by the seminar leader:

1. What would be the meaning and implications of reception/recognition of the CA by the Roman Catholic Church?
2. Some authors have suggested that the question of Catholic recognition applies only to the first, more doctrinal part of the CA (art. I-XXI). What are the presuppositions of such a distinction between the two parts? What are the doctrinal (especially ecclesiological) implications of the second part (art. XXII-XXVIII), and do these pose further problems from a Catholic perspective?
3. Does the ecclesiology of the CA adequately express:
 - (a) the visibility of the Church (cf. esp. art VII, VIII);
 - (b) the role of office in the Church (cf. esp. art. V, VII, VIII, XIV, XXVIII); and
 - (c) the nature and function of church authority (cf. esp. art. V, XXII, XXIII, XXVIII)?
4. How does the history of both the Catholic and Lutheran Churches since 1530 affect discussion of Catholic reception of the CA? To what extent is the CA representative of contemporary Lutheran thought? Do the statements of the Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue (e.g. Malta Report; "Eucharist and Ministry;" "Papal Primacy and the Universal Church") provide helpful material for further consideration?

¹In addition to *The Role of the Augsburg Confession: Catholic and Lutheran Views*, ed. by Joseph A. Burgess (Philadelphia: Fortress; New York: Paulist, 1980), which served as the primary point of reference for the seminar, cf. Robert Kress, "The Roman Catholic Reception of the Augsburg Confession," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 11 (1980), 115-27; Paul Misner, "Augsburg Then and Now," *JES* 17 (1980), 483-91; and Richard Penaskovic, "Roman Catholic Recognition of the Augsburg Confession," *TS* 41 (1980), 303-21; and "The Ecclesiology of the Augsburg Confession," forthcoming in *The Heythrop Journal*. The influential contributions of Joseph Ratzinger ("Prognosen für die Zukunft des Ökumenismus," *Bausteine* 17, 65 [1977], 6-14, and "Anmerkungen zur Frage einer 'Anmerkung' der Confessio Augustana durch die katholische Kirche," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 29 [1978], 223-37) are not available in English.

5. How can the Roman Catholic Church show, in a concrete way, that church office in general and papal primacy in particular are subordinate to the Gospel?

6. What questions arise concerning the "sacramentality" of orders and the distinction between bishop and priest (cf. art. V, XIV, XXVIII, and "Eucharist and Ministry")? What implications do recent exegetical studies, such as Raymond Brown's convention address, have for discussion of these issues?

The first session of the seminar was devoted chiefly to questions of method. In keeping with the theme of the convention, the seminar began by asking if a local church, such as that of Germany, could be seen as the primary vehicle for contemporary Catholic response to the CA; it was, however, observed that the CA itself seeks more widespread acceptance and has in fact achieved international significance. The discussion then turned to the hermeneutical problems inherent in interpreting a document which can be read in a number of different contexts. The question of assessing the CA in relationship to other Reformation confessions, as well as to statements of the early Luther and of Melancthon, its principal author, drew attention to the centrality of the theme of justification and provoked brief consideration of the issues raised by the divergent vocabularies and thought-patterns of the Catholic and Lutheran theological traditions. No consensus was reached on the meaning and possibility of Catholic reception/recognition of the CA: while some noted the absence of teaching on the papacy and argued that the CA could not be endorsed in any way without harmful pastoral repercussions among Catholics, others held that reception could be quite modest in scope (recognition as not heterodox) and recalled Joseph Ratzinger's careful distinction between Catholic recognition of the CA and recognition of the CA as Catholic.² Stressing that reception should be envisioned as a complex ecclesial process, affecting both Lutherans and Catholics, rather than as a purely juridical act, several participants suggested inquiry into the place of the CA within the entire Christian tradition, and urged in particular study of its contemporary function in Lutheran churches.

The second session examined more directly ecclesiological issues pertaining to the content of the CA. Wondering who determines when the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly (cf. art. VII), the seminar discussed the visibility of the divinely instituted Church and weighed the implications of the CA's emphasis on justification for the critique of existing ecclesial structures. Some attention was then given to the

²"Prognosen," p. 12.

role of the pope, as bishop of the church of Rome and as one entrusted with the task of strengthening the faith of the Church Universal. A final set of questions sought to specify the institutional elements necessary to maintain basic unity with the New Testament Church: Have Lutherans preserved the substance of ministry in presbyterial succession? Is the distinction between divine law and human law as clear as the CA presupposes? How variable are structural elements within the Church? Is monepiscopacy divinely ordained for all time or simply historically valuable (and in that sense divinely willed) for a particular period of the Church's history?

At the conclusion of the seminar, possible topics for future years were suggested. Proposals included: the nature of episcopacy; Edward Schillebeeckx' *Ministry* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); vicarious authority in the Church; the Church as the particular history of salvation within the general history of salvation; the Syriac ecclesiological tradition; the United States Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue's working text on justification; the implications of the charismatic movement for ecclesiology; and conciliarity as the basic form of church unity.

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