

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

THE PAPACY IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

Pursuing issues suggested by its discussions of the Augsburg Confession and office in the church,¹ the CTSA Ecclesiology Seminar devoted its 1983 sessions to examination of "The Papacy in the Light of Recent Ecumenical Dialogue."

Contemporary literature on the papacy provided the basis for the seminar.² In order to stimulate discussion, the following questions were proposed by the Steering Committee; questions 1-4 were prepared by David Stagaman, questions 5-12 by Peter Chirico.

1. How should the primacy of Peter be understood in the light of recent work on Peter in the New Testament?

2. In view of the early history of the church in Rome, how should we understand succession to the primacy of Peter by the bishops of Rome?

3. How did sovereignty and jurisdiction come to be central for the self-understanding of the papacy?

4. Is primacy of jurisdiction the best term for describing papal primacy? What alternatives might we propose?

5. What dogmatic (as distinguished from canonical) restrictions do you see as limiting the exercise of the papal primacy?

6. What does the phrase *jure divino* mean when it is used to describe an office in the church? Are ecclesial diversity, collegiality and subsidiarity *jure divino*? If so, how do these condition the exercise of papal primacy, which is also *jure divino*?

7. Given the historically conditioned nature of all existence, does the fact that a structure, an office or a charism is present in the New Testament guarantee that it must exist for all time, or even that it has preference over some later structure, office or charism?

8. What is the meaning of the individual adjectives used by Vatican I to describe the jurisdiction of the pope: "supreme," "full," "ordinary," and "immediate"?

¹ Cf. John P. Galvin, "Seminar on Ecclesiology: The Augsburg Confession as Catholic?", *CTSA Proceedings* 36 (1981), 171-73, and "Seminar on Ecclesiology: Office in the Church", *CTSA Proceedings* 37 (1982), 162-64.

² The assigned readings were: Raymond Brown, *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York, 1975), pp. 63-83; Karl-Heinz Ohlig, *Why We Need the Pope* (St. Meinrad, 1975); Paul Empie and T.A. Murphy, eds., *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* (Minneapolis, 1974), pp. 9-38, 192-208; Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (Cincinnati, 1982), pp. 49-100. Reference was also made to the observations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the latter text (*AAS* 74 [1982], 1062-74).

9. A bishop has ordinary jurisdiction in his own diocese. So does the pope, according to Vatican I. Do these two jurisdictions cover exactly the same objects? Are there any differences between them? Are there some acts of jurisdiction in a local diocese which are prohibited to a pope?

10. The Final Report speaks of conditions for the exercise of papal infallibility beyond those mentioned by Vatican I (p. 95). Can there be such further conditions? If one can add further conditions, is it not possible to reject any claimed *ex cathedra* definitions which fulfill the conditions of Vatican I on the grounds that they do not fulfill such further conditions? Would this not make for a solution to all Protestant objections?

11. What is meant by the Final Report when it says that all subsequent developments must be "consonant with Scripture" (pp. 59, 70, 71)? What do you mean by this?

12. What is the relationship of the *consensus fidelium* to an infallible ("irreformable") decision of the pope or of a general council? (Cf. Final Report, pp. 71ff, 95, and the critical observations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *AAS* 74 [1982], 1072-73.)

The twenty-four participants at the opening session began by considering the role of Peter in the New Testament, observing that both the Petrine ministry and the understanding of that ministry seem to have evolved during the New Testament period. While noting the wide range of concern with Peter and especially his prominence in various strands of the resurrection tradition,³ initial discussion focussed chiefly on methodological questions. Consideration of the implications of recent exegesis led to asking if New Testament history supported later developments and if new interpretations of the New Testament required modification of the theology of the papacy.⁴ Some emphasized the presence of cultural conditioning within the New Testament itself, and wondered what precisely within the New Testament is normative for subsequent generations of Christians; others drew attention to the increased interest of exegetes in sociological matters, and questioned the suitability of the rubric "trajectory," popular in contemporary literature,⁵ as a means of unifying disparate material. The Petrine texts were thus found to raise issues analogous to those suggested by the diversity of New Testament material on the general structure of church office.

Recognizing the importance, especially in ecumenical perspective, of the concrete way in which the papal office is realized, the seminar then engaged in an extended consideration of papal jurisdiction. Particular attention was paid to the teaching of Vatican I, with emphasis on the need

3. Cf. Gerald O'Collins, "Peter as Easter Witness," *Heythrop Journal* 22 (1981), 1-18.

4. The complexity and importance of these issues are underscored by the comments of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the interpretation of Petrine texts in the New Testament (*op. cit.*, p. 1069).

5. Cf. especially James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971).

for proper exegesis of the texts; current interpretations of the doctrine of Trent on monogenism and original sin (DS 1510-1516) were cited as a model for such work. Efforts to find an alternative vocabulary for expressing the content of papal primacy reflected concentration on the papacy's unifying role, though it was also observed that the pope does not bear sole responsibility for church unity. Some stressed the value of specifying the limits inherent in papal primacy as a way of clarifying the nature and scope of papal jurisdiction; the principles of collegiality and subsidiarity and the need for legitimate diversity within the church were mentioned as limiting factors which reflect the appropriate paradigm of unity to be envisioned for the church. After a brief discussion of *jus divinum*, during which it was suggested that the existence of a structure *juris divini* need not imply the permanence of that structure, the session concluded with a timely reminder of the need to distinguish carefully between what is personal to a given pope and what is inherent in the papacy.

The second session, attended by ten participants, devoted its more limited time to an analysis of papal infallibility. General consensus existed on the role of the Petrine office as guardian of unity in faith, and on the value of locating papal infallibility within the general infallibility of the church. Some argued that infallibility plays a positive role in the articulation of the common faith, and this not merely in response to challenge or denial. Others suggested that, since doctrine is not the sole carrier of faith, propositional dogmas are of limited value; in this connection, attention was drawn to the importance of imagery in the New Testament and in texts such as *Lumen gentium*. On the whole, the seminar found the formulation of Vatican I's teaching on infallibility more conducive to contemporary reassessment than the same council's doctrine on the primacy.

Toward the end of the seminar, some time was given to planning for the future. Roger McGrath was chosen to succeed John Galvin on the Steering Committee, whose other members remain Peter Chirico and David Stagaman, the new Chair. Topics suggested for next year's convention at Georgetown include: pluralism in church polity, ritual and doctrine; the relationship between the local churches and the church universal; the notion of world church; mission theology; Petrine ministry in the New Testament; the function of councils; the theology of reception; the ecclesiological implications of the new Code of Canon Law; and Herwi Rijkhof's *The Concept of Church: A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology* (Shepherdstown, 1981).

JOHN P. GALVIN
St. John's Seminary
Boston