

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

The first session was devoted to the question of the consent of the Church to the exercise of the infallible magisterium of the pope and was chaired by Roger McGrath.¹ Richard Costigan briefly outlined two Gallican (Bossuet and Tournély) and two papalist (Orsi and Ballerini) theologians on the question. According to the Gallican view, papal teaching receives its definitive certainty from the consensus of the universal episcopate. Countering this, the papalist view saw the pope as a monarch from whose juridical authority irreformable teaching proceeded without any possibility of criticism or reform by bishops. Thus the Gallican view thought primarily in terms of the faith residing in a shared way in the whole of the Christian community; the papalist view thought primarily in terms of the sovereign power of the primatial office.

The discussion brought out some historical clarifications. Thus, the Gallican view stemmed from the conciliarist controversies of prior centuries. Moreover, this view tended to be non-judicial; it preferred that episcopal acceptance of intended definitive papal statements be antecedent or concomitant rather than subsequent and juridical. Gallican supporters usually had a better knowledge of history than their papal counterparts. Thus, they would point to the nonreception of the bull *Unam Sanctam* as evidence of their view against the idealized view of many papal theologians.

On the other hand, papalist views were rooted in a monarchical understanding of the Church going back to Leo I, an understanding which saw truth coming from the pope to the whole Church. It was a view that appeared congruent with the classic Petrine texts of Scripture. Because of this monarchical view, Orsi and Ballerini would not admit it would be possible for a majority of the bishops to disagree with the pope's teaching; and they gradually forgot the medieval admission of the possibility of an heretical pope. Yet their papalist views did not destroy the meaning of councils; for, as Cajetan had said, it is precisely through councils that papal teaching is effectively received.

Both views appear to reflect the temperaments of the nationalities who were their principle advocates, the Italian and the French. Both views saw a value in having certitude about the content of belief and in having an easily recognized pope with the last word. Disagreement was over the extent of papal power.

¹The readings for the first session were: Yves Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," *Concilium* 77 (1972), 43-68, esp. 58-68; Timothy McDonald, *The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1984), pp. 258-65; Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, Vol. 2., p. 639 and pp. 840-42; Peter Chirico, *Infallibility, The Crossroads of Doctrine* (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), pp. 208-21 (further suggestions: pp. 143-44, 224-25, 239-42).

The two views set the stage for later developments. In the nineteenth-century papal infallibility became increasingly juridicized under the influence of De Maistre who claimed that what sovereignty was to the state, infallibility was to the Church. Further, there was an expansion of papal infallibility in practice in that it was largely assumed that what the pope did was infallibly the right thing. This expansion finds a residue even till this day in those Protestants who believe that Catholics look on the pope as divine. Yet the two Vatican councils can be viewed as limiting, not expanding, papal infallibility; they eliminated from the concept aspects that Melancthon had bitterly condemned centuries before. Further, Vatican I was ambiguous on many points and there is much leeway given to interpreters.

The modern descendant of the Gallican-papalist controversy is the tension between the local and the universal Church. Does truth emerge from the top and move down? Or does it emerge from the local Church with a testing or judging by the universal authority? Is not the process used by the American bishops in composing their recent social pastorals but an explicit structural expression of a dialectic that is always present in the movement toward truth?

In the second session, also chaired by Roger McGrath, Jane Russell presented a short paper on basic Christian communities (BCCs) as a starting point for an ecclesiology from below.² Such an ecclesiology begins with the local community's faith experience and its descriptions of that experience. Next comes the people's reflection on that concrete experience leading to mission statements. Finally, the professional theologian in contact with the people brings the reflection process to extensive dialogue with the theological Tradition of the Church. Despite its apparent novelty, this kind of ecclesiology, at least in the South American experience, does not seem to be incompatible with hierarchical Catholicism.

The discussion brought out the following. General conditions favoring the emergence of BCCs include geographical proximity, shared experiences, economic interdependence, religious cultural identity, political or ideological affinity, and kinship relationship patterns. In South America BCCs, though usually stimulated by initiatives from above, flourish among the powerless poor who become aware of being oppressed and who are situated in a tribal situation that makes for close-knit churches. The numbers in such communities range from thirty to fifty. In such conditions BCCs appear to be initiating and creatively integrating church units whose focal point is a self-transcending mission. They are the modern analog of the NT local church which derived from the family and ultimately constituted part of the Church universal.

What meaning can BCCs and an ecclesiology from below have for the Church in the U.S.? First, we need to realize how different we are from Third World com-

²The readings for the second session were: Frei Carlos Alberto, "The Church We Want," *Cross Currents* 26 (Spring 1976), 1-10; Rosemary Ruether, et al., "Basic Christian Communities," *Christianity and Crisis* 41 (September 21, 1981), 234-37, 238-42, 251-55; Gustavo Gutierrez, "The Irruption of the Poor in Latin America and the Christian Communities of the Common People," in S. Torres and J. Eagleson, eds., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1981), pp. 107-23; Leonardo Boff, "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church," *ibid.*, pp. 124-44.

munities. We are largely constituted at the moment of liturgy and not in a process that perdures through all facets of life. We lack the kind of folk religion and the hope for a future life which contributes to the cohesiveness of South American BCCs. Our pattern of life is far from the powerless poverty of our Third World relations; we are a church of the privileged and often of the oppressors. Further, ours is a more ecumenical experience.

Secondly, in the light of these differences we have much to learn. We need to find appropriate analogs to the close-knit communities of the Third World. Perhaps parish councils can facilitate deeper community experiences to move persons from mere passivity to active participation. We also need to learn that despite our wealth we do have need for one another. More importantly we need to learn that mission, not the centering on intimate community relations, is the goal toward which we must move. God, not ourselves, must be the center of our concern. Finally, we need to learn that the gospel is to be applied to the totality of life, not just to "religious" aspects.

Third, the Catholic Worker movement, perhaps, exemplifies what can be done in the North American setting. Its existence is based on service, not on the community, as an end; it is mission oriented. The black community as a whole has a contribution to make to the rest of our churches in that BCCs seem to flourish better within it than in other U.S. groups.

Fourth, we have problems that remain open. How are we to criticize ourselves as a Church of the privileged? How are we to become more deeply aware of our need to manifest our communion with all the dispossessed of the earth? How are we to validate the unique faith experience of every person and encourage the sharing of that experience with all others? What decisions shall we make with regard to the nature of the Church. Is the Church to be only of the committed? Does it include the indifferent?

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