

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

In the first session, on Thursday afternoon, June 12, Joseph Komonchak of Catholic University gave a presentation on the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. Focusing mainly on the "Final Report" issued at the end of the synod, he pointed out in a close and systematic analysis of the text that the Final Report is not an adequate or even accurate gauge of the theological issues discussed at the synod. Rather, to understand the synod as a whole, one must study the pre-synodal responses of the churches, the Initial and Second Reports of Cardinal Danneels and the discussions in the hall and in the language groups.

He discussed particularly two ecclesiological issues raised in the Final Report: the basic notion of the Church and the realization of ecclesial communion. Regarding the first, the Final Report emphasizes two ideas of the Church, "mystery" and "communion." These two spiritual terms appear to have been consistently used to replace or downplay the idea, so prominent in Vatican II's *Lumen gentium*, of "People of God." Neither the pre-synodal responses nor the synodal interventions require this development, noted Komonchak, which seems guided by a concern to warn against "merely sociological" concepts of the Church. The ecclesiology of "communion," cautions the Final Report, "cannot be reduced to purely organizational questions or to questions about power." In the Final Report, almost all serious questions raised about the concrete structural implications of ecclesial communion have disappeared or been translated into vague spiritual terms.

Regarding the second ecclesiological issue, that of the realization of ecclesial communion, Komonchak shows a similar pattern, taking five points in succession. (1) *Unity and diversity*. A major concern in the pre-synodal responses from the churches was that of the relationship between the universal Church and the local churches. The Initial Report of Cardinal Danneels also notes that *Lumen gentium* includes "the basis for legitimate pluralism within the unity of the Church." But in the Final Report, pluralism is used only in a pejorative sense: "a pluralism of mainly opposed positions leads to dissolution and destruction and to a loss of identity." (2) *Inculturation*. Numerous responses from the churches and speeches in the synod hall mention this issue. But in the Final Report, notes Komonchak, there is no reference to the request of the local churches for greater freedom of adaptation (of the *Church's* way of doing things) in order to meet the challenge of inculturation.

(3) *Collegiality*. Numerous references in the pre-synodal responses, in the Initial Report, and in the synodal interventions to the practical implementation of collegiality are passed over in the Final Report, which contents itself with general references to "collegial spirit" and to "communion." (4) *Participation and co-responsibility*. The Final Report does begin with a clear and strong assertion that,

"Because the Church is a communion, there must be participation and co-responsibility at all of her levels." Komonchak considered it good that the Final Report stated this, even though it did not go beyond the hortatory. (5) *The Synod of Bishops*. The Final Report contains no reference to the Synod itself, despite the fact that several pre-synodal responses and oral interventions had raised questions about its procedures. Komonchak noted as a "problem" the fact that the whole process of the synod was governed by a concern for secrecy.

In the discussion after the paper, numerous interesting points were brought out. The first week of the synod was, Komonchak thought personally, "a remarkable display of the catholicity of the Church," and was not simply dominated by curial cardinals. He did note indications that Cardinal Ratzinger exerted quite a bit of influence on the German bishops. Cardinal Hamer spoke unfavorably of "subsidiarity," saying that it is a concept from the secular world and not from Vatican documents. On at least one occasion Cardinal Ratzinger insisted strongly on Vatican II's *continuity* with what had gone before, so that one should not speak of the council as justifying changes in the Church. In this connection, Komonchak opined that it would be very useful to have new scholarly commentaries on the council documents.

In the second session on Friday afternoon, June 13, Mark F. Fischer, director of the Diocesan Pastoral Council of Oakland, offered a presentation entitled "The Authority of Wisdom: Pastoral Councils in the U.S. Church." In it he dwelt mainly on the nature and distinctive traits of diocesan pastoral councils and discussed their role and value in today's Church. There is a paucity of scholarly literature on them, he noted, but there are at least 88 of them in the 170 U.S. dioceses. They mainly define pastoral goals, deliberate the mission of the diocesan church, and recommend policy.

Fischer devoted considerable attention to defining the "authority of wisdom." It is contrasted with the authority of pastors and bishops, in that it is not attached to office, rests on its communal character, and on persuasion rather than coercion. He discussed three aspects of the definition of this kind of wisdom: philosophical, theological and pedagogical. Regarding the first, the philosophical, he discussed the importance of experience in the task of conceptualizing conciliar authority of wisdom. Indeed, he maintained that concrete experience is not only important but necessary in this effort, because it is only through many sessions of dialogue with others about particular issues that one really realizes the nature of the *process*.

Fischer illustrated the theological aspect of wisdom in diocesan pastoral councils from the case of the one in Oakland, and showed that such councils have a legitimate power stemming from the members' faith and baptism. It is not the power of coercion, but the power of building trust, shaping a communal vision, and winning acceptance of it as being an appropriate consequence of the revelation accomplished in Jesus Christ. When worked at earnestly by a number of committed people, a council can discern an appropriate pastoral response of the Church to the gospel message.

The pedagogical aspect is the matter of preparing people for participation and leadership in councils. Despite the number of councils already existing and func-

tioning, there is a relative lack of understanding of them. Theologates and colleges have not commonly offered courses in councils. There is need for instruction of seminarians, candidates for lay ministry and other Catholics in the idiom and dynamics of pastoral councils. This education, however, should be broader than just a formal course or two, for it is not just a matter of knowledge but of the gradual acceptance of the Church itself as being a lived communal enterprise.

The extended discussion that followed focused rather closely on issues raised in Fischer's presentation, and included perceptive comments from persons with experience of their own in diocesan and parish programs.

RICHARD F. COSTIGAN, S.J.
Loyola University of Chicago