

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

The Ecclesiology Seminar's two sessions were both related to the overall convention theme of the sources of theology, the first focusing on the modalities of reception of papal teaching and the second on the ecclesial person.

In the first session, attended by 40 and chaired by Jeffrey Gros, F. S. C., Director of the Commission on Faith and Order in New York, J. Robert Dionne, S. M., presented the main ideas and conclusions of his new book, *The Papacy and the Church: A Study in Praxis and Reception in Ecumenical Perspective* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1987). In this major work, Dionne studies several issues in the period from the beginning of the pontificate of Pius IX to the end of Vatican II, focusing especially on some in which a papal teaching was eventually changed. Long-held papal doctrines on, for example, the ideal church-state relationship and on religious freedom, after some years of constructive criticism by prelates and theologians, were changed by Vatican II and approved by the Roman Pontiff, Paul VI. His research in papal and conciliar texts and in other sources shows, as a first conclusion, that these changes took place through the interplay between papal authority and the modalities of reception on the part of the church community.

Moreover, drawing on Troeltschian terminology (church-institution; sect-association), he indicates, as a second conclusion, that the Roman Catholic Church really is a *koinonia* on the level of word rather than simply an institution in a static sense. That the church has in praxis been a living *koinonia* of faith comes through further in his study of the process preceding the Marian definitions of Pius IX and Pius XII. He shows from detailed study of the records that there was more extensive and genuine ascertainment of the beliefs of the faithful before these definitions than has generally been assumed. Both the authority and the members of the church and the theologians, Dionne thinks, should learn from this historical analysis, which is a real *locus theologicus*, or source of theology.

Respondent Harry McSorley, of the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, noted what he considered positive contributions in Dionne's work. He stated that Dionne provides a better explanation of what happened regarding these church issues than one who would maintain that the word "change" should not be used in speaking of them, but only "development." He said that we need to recognize that growth in church doctrine has not always been homogeneous and continuous, but rather has at times entailed *discontinuity*, and that Dionne's detailed demonstration of this discontinuity in these several controversies is a significant contribution. He cited a statement of Cardinal Koenig at Vatican II, quoted by Dionne in the book, to the effect that truthfulness regarding the church's teaching should always be the guiding norm.

The discussion focused closely on the issues raised by Dionne, who noted that he is not interested in encouraging dissent in the church, but only in historical analysis. He mentioned that he is working on a book on papal infallibility itself.

In the second session, Carla Mae Streeter, O. P., of the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, spoke on "The Ecclesial Person: Basic Theological Source." 19 were present at this session chaired by Mark Fischer, director of the Diocesan Pastoral Council of Oakland. Streeter began by explaining two original diagrams illustrating the nature of the active ecclesial person and his/her place in the church community. There is no need, she maintained, to choose between *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* as the prime guide to ecclesiology, for reflection inspired by both will show that all ecclesiology comes from the intelligent ecclesial person as its prime source. She noted the influence of Lonergan also in her thinking.

The "existential subject" is the person that not only understands and experiences the faith life, but acts responsibly and creatively through his/her choices. This active person decides in relation to other selves, and these persons grasped by religious love are bonded by common meaning and value as a result of their experience. Their *koinonia* is a mature interdependence of persons who evaluate all in the light of the Mystery that is the reference point of their choices.

Such persons may not become theologically trained, but they are in their attentive, intelligent questioning and responsible choosing the most basic source of theological reflection. Indeed, such have given us the Christian Scriptures. In such persons, if they become theologically trained, theology may take its rightful place as the mediating discipline between religion and the cultural marketplace.

Functional specialties of persons do emerge, but "ministry" need no longer be a term confined to those engaged in work directly within visible ecclesial structures. Ecclesial persons bring ministry to the broken human household wherever they are. This is an ecclesiology in a new key: *ecclesia* exists where these authentic ecclesial persons are, and they are the most basic theological source.

William McConville, O. F. M., of the Washington Theological Union, serving as respondent, thought that Streeter's portrayal of the ecclesial person seemed rather abstract and ideal, and would have benefited from the inclusion of concrete factors that shape the church: liturgy, self-sacrifice, work for justice. He noted that pain and authoritarianism, rather than grace, are prominent in the actual reality of church experience for many. Carla Mae Streeter commented that she intended these factors to be included in her statements about what it takes to become an involved, responsible and creative ecclesial person. In the discussion, a woman of Hindu and Moslem parentage said that the description of the ecclesial person was beautiful, and she hoped to see it put into practice by Christians.

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