

SEMINAR ON ECCLESIOLOGY

The topics of the two sessions of the ecclesiology seminar were an ecclesiology which subordinates hierarchy to community, and the foundations of governance in the church. Susan Wood, S.C. (Saint Mary College, Leavenworth) was the major presenter on Thursday, June 13. She spoke on "Tradition, Sacrament, Politics: Starting Points for Ecclesiology." Michael A. Fahey, S.J. (University of St. Michael's College, Toronto) spoke on June 14. His title was "Church Law and Ecclesiastical Order."

ECCLESIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY

Presentation. Susan Wood, promising "starting points for ecclesiology," sketched the foundations for a communal vision of church to twenty-eight seminar members. In the first part of her presentation, she treated the image of the People of God as the basis for understanding "democracy" in the church. In doing this, she

1. portrayed the "People of God" model not merely as a supplement to the "Body of Christ" model but as a correction to its realized eschatology and hierarchical orientation;
2. interpreted the priesthood of the baptized and the priesthood of the ordained not as individual gifts but as two relationships—that of member and that of representative—within the community; and
3. refined the concept of democracy in the church by speaking of its basis in liturgical participation, of its concept of the ordained priest as representative rather than delegate, and of the community as that which effects the ontological difference between ordained and nonordained.

She secured this last point by reference to J. Zizioulas's *Being as Communion* (1985), which argues that ministry is "relational," having more to do with community than with individual gifts.

In the second part of her presentation, Wood turned to the image of church as *communio*. This image, she said, is a necessary supplement to the People of God image, and has two aspects. The first is eucharistic. A eucharistic ecclesiology faithfully reflects the emphasis in *Lumen Gentium* 26 on the bishop as eucharistic presider and governor. But it leaves little scope for the laity apart from participation in the sacraments. The second aspect of *communio* imagery has to do with base communities and the role which God's word plays in them. Referring to L. Boff's *Ecclesiogenesis* (1986), Wood noted that base communities experience ministry, service, and relationship—all forms of *communio*—in the absence of ordained ministers.

Wood concluded by synthesizing the various images of church. She rejected the "false choices" of clergy or laity, sacrament or word, and christology or

pneumatology. Instead, she insisted on the primacy of community, on its right to a eucharistic presider, and on episcopal authority which exists to serve—not to transmit or authenticate—the community's gifts.

Response. Joan M. Nuth (John Carroll University, Cleveland) affirmed Wood's emphasis on the community as the starting point for ecclesiology and her rejection of the dichotomy between christology-sacrament-clergy and pneumatology-word-laity. Further, she noted that functional and ontological concepts of priesthood are not mutually exclusive. Nor are they a basis for distinguishing between the priest-hoods of the baptized and of the ordained. Both of them, she said, must be seen as a unity in order to "sacramentalize" the priesthood of Christ. She concluded her remarks by suggesting that a community-centered ecclesiology would be receptive to the idea of a "relative" ordination of leaders for a particular community, as distinct from the "absolute" ordination which exists without particular assignment.

A discussion followed, moderated by Mark F. Fischer (St. John's Seminary, Camarillo). In the discussion, Peter F. Chirico (Seattle University) called for an understanding of hierarchy not as worldly status but as the ability to discern gifts. Such a rehabilitated understanding, he suggested, would sever the burdensome link between hierarchy and the monarchical model of church. But Thomas R. Potvin (Dominican's College of Philosophy and Theology, Ottawa), citing the origin of "hierarchy" in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, expressed doubt that the term could be rehabilitated. Chirico argued further that ordination, like every sacramental ritual, always needs to be "received" by the community. To this extent, he noted, Susan Wood's subordination of "official" ministry to the charisms which it serves is already a present reality.

GOVERNANCE AS SHEPHERDING

Presentation. The Friday meeting of forty seminar members began with Michael Fahey's treatment of "Church Law and Ecclesiastical Order." In the first part of his presentation, Fahey defined the "governors" of the church—those who create and apply its laws—as those who exercise "caring undertaken in imitation of the Good Shepherd." He sketched the etymology of the Latin word *regere* (to govern), linked it to the Greek *poimaino* (to shepherd), and noted uses of *regimen* in the documents of Vatican II and in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Then he proposed that ecclesiology reinterpret the "authority" of bishops not as a coercive power but as the creative potential of an author to inspire new life.

Fahey noted an apparent inconsistency between the teaching of Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law. Vatican II documents state that lay people share in Christ's threefold office—including the kingly or ruling function. The Code of Canon Law states that only the ordained can govern but that the laity may cooperate in this governance (c. 129). How can lay people share in Christ's kingly function, Fahey asked, if they are incapable of governance?

In the second part of his talk, Fahey focused on the historical institutions of governance. In particular, he argued that church governance is so marked by history that such governance "must ever remain open to accountability and reexamination." Constant in the church is the existence of caring ministers of

governance, Fahey said. But he added, alluding to E. Schillebeeckx's *Church* (1990), that we must resist the temptation to equate the indefectibility of the church with mute allegiance to the ministers of governance, as if conflict within the church were incompatible with its nature.

Theoretically, the "institutional" church acknowledges that its institutions and traditions are subject to and correctible by the gospel, said Fahey, but "it is weak on methods of recognizing these criteria." Such methods, he suggested, would include attentiveness to monastic, clerical, and religious life, as well as to the prophetic witness of the faithful. Such attentiveness would avoid the "magisterial monism" by which some Catholics turn to the hierarchy as the sole norm of truth.

Response. Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C., of the United States Catholic Conference, affirmed Michael's insight that the historical institutions of governance are in the realm of the imperfect. He noted that

1. in today's ecumenical dialogue, one looks for the approximations of "convergence" rather than the closure of an absolute "consensus";
2. the institutions of governance are not only historically conditioned, but culturally conditioned as well; class or tribal loyalty may shape institutions as much as a putative "rational analysis"; and
3. the degree to which any structure of governance may be termed "intrinsic" to the gospel hinges on the concept of liberty developed in the Pauline corpus and on Christ as the one who exercises ultimate *regimen* in the church.

Anneliese Sinnott (Marygrove College, Detroit) moderated the discussion that followed. It began with a comment by Thomas J. Green (Catholic University), who said that lay people can exercise governance, at least in the sense that they are eligible for ecclesiastical offices such as tribunal judge and diocesan chancellor. Daniel L. Donovan (St. Michael's College, Toronto) argued that the term "pastoral oversight" is preferable to the legalism of "governance."

Patricia F. Walter (St. Mary Seminary, Cleveland) and Joseph A. Hart (St. Bernard's Institute, Rochester) concurred that authority is not primarily delegated by a superior to an inferior, but resides in the community, and is recognized by it. Hart noted the irony of women and married pastoral associates whose "authority," recognized by their communities, is "confirmed" by the award of a contract because ordination is not possible.

1992 Seminar. In each of the two sessions, seminar members were asked to suggest topics and presenters for the 1992 sessions. These suggestions were collected by the steering committee members who were present (M. F. Fischer, J. Gros, and A. Sinnott) for further deliberation.

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