

## ECCLESIOLOGY

- Topic: Trinitarian Ecclesiologies of Communion  
 Convener: Susan K. Wood, Saint John's University, Collegeville  
 Moderator: Juliann Heller, Saint John's University, Collegeville  
 Presenters: William G. Rusch, National Council of Churches  
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William Rusch analyzed how authority has been treated in four recent ecumenical texts.

*How Does the Church Teach Authoritatively Today?* (Faith and Order Paper 91) identifies the urgency of addressing the issues of authority for divided churches and notes some key aspects without notably furthering the discussion. *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111) relates authority to ministry. Authority has the character of responsibility before God and is exercised with the cooperation of the whole community—an indication of a *communio ecclesiology*. The authority of the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ, who received it from the Father and confers it by the Holy Spirit. There is the need of the community by its response and acknowledgment—a role for the *consensus fidelium*—to protect authority from the distortions of isolation and domination.

*The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (Faith and Order Paper 181) connects authority with a view of the church as *koinonia* and roots authority in the Triune God. It acknowledges a significant role for the entire community, although most discussion of authority occurs within a reflection about a ministry of oversight. The framing of the discussion within conciliarity stresses the interconnectedness of the life of the church. Authority is not the exclusive prerogative of those with a ministry of oversight or primacy.

On the international level, the most impressive work on authority is in *The Gift of Authority* (ARCIC 1999). This text stresses the primacy of Scripture and the "ministry of memory." In this ministry the most visible components are bishops, whose continuity is embodied in ordination by prayer and laying on of hands. They represent order as a necessary complement to the vitality of the Spirit's gifts to the church. The text is confident that in the collective consensus of bishops in succession of oversight entrusted to the apostles, the entire community has a reliable means of testing and control so that one can speak of the infallibility of the church. Although Anglicans and Roman Catholics both have synodical structures, Anglicans are more accustomed to an active role of the laity. The text does not resolve the difference between deliberative and consultative roles of synods in the two traditions. An open question is whether the Anglican Communion with its provincial autonomy is open to instruments of authority binding on the whole church. The most controversial aspect of this text will be the conclusion that there is now "sufficient agreement on universal primacy as a gift to be shared." The particular ministry of the Bishop of Rome is one expression of such universal primacy.

Dennis Doyle examined the communion ecclesiologies of the Roman Catholic Jean-Marie Tillard, Greek Orthodox John Zizioulas, and Free Church theologian Mirosław Volf. He highlighted how their respective versions of communion ecclesiology reflect their confessional differences, and how they stretch each other's visions to be inclusive of the other.

Tillard's communion ecclesiology is inclusive in these respects: (1) Communion ecclesiology requires that offices in the Church be explained always within the context of the Church's mission to be a communion. Offices are first of all ministries of service to this communion. The juridical is subordinate to the relational. (2) Communion ecclesiology qualifies and limits the exercise of Church offices in ways reassuring to Christians of other communions. (3) Communion ecclesiology emphasizes the constitutive role of the local church in ways appealing to Orthodox and to Protestants.

Zizioulas uses communion ecclesiology to affirm a worldwide episcopal structure. The relationality of communion is expressed above all in the eucharistic assembly of a local church presided over by the bishop and in the interlinking episcopal structures of the church. With Tillard, Zizioulas affirms the church as a communion of communions. He is also open to discussion concerning the possibility of a Petrine ministry for the whole Church, as long as that is understood as serving rather than negating the Church's essential episcopal foundation.

Volf finds in Trinitarian communion the model of what the church should be. He offers an extended reflection on the existence in complementarity of relationality and individual personhood, and on the implications of this for individual Christians, for local churches, and for relations among local churches. He acknowledges the problematic tendencies toward individualism within his own tradition as much as he criticizes the perceived demise of the individual with the episcopal traditions. He affirms the ecclesiality of episcopal traditions as one type of Christian tradition among others, holding that apostolic succession can be desirable but not necessary for catholicity. He has recently considered the possibility of a scripturally based ministry of unity based on a Trinitarian model rather than on a monarchical model.

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