

issue is the notion of the "church as sacrament," and how this is expressed in the ministries of oversight at the local, regional and worldwide levels. The second presentation, written by Richard J. Sklba, Auxiliary Catholic Bishop of Milwaukee, and read by Professor George Tavard, focused on four specific questions: the document's use of Scripture; sacramentality and the nature of the Church; the role of the episcopacy; and the time-conditioned nature of the Gospel. The final written presentation, from a Lutheran perspective, was the work of William G. Rusch, from the Foundation for a Conference on Faith and Order in North America. His text urged the Roman Catholics to give greater attention to the brief reference regarding the role of "primacy" in the Church (no. 103).

During the ensuing general discussion it was decided that next year, in 2005, the research group will give particular attention to the various forms of primacy in the Church, and will attempt to synthesize the conclusions of the research group reached over the three-year study period. Persons interested in participating in the formal discussions next year are invited to submit suggestions to the moderator at [ariggs@nccusa.org](mailto:ariggs@nccusa.org) or to the convener [michael.fahey@marquette.edu](mailto:michael.fahey@marquette.edu).

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#### THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHURCH'S TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Topic: The Church's Theology of Homosexuality  
 Convener: James B. Nickoloff, College of the Holy Cross  
 Moderator: James B. Nickoloff, College of the Holy Cross  
 Presenters: Bernard J. Cooke, College of the Holy Cross (emeritus)  
 Gary Macy, University of San Diego  
 Jamie Phelps, Xavier University of Louisiana

The third and final meeting of the Research Group continued its examination of the theological implications of the church teaching on homosexuality. Rather than revisiting questions of biblical interpretation and sexual ethics, three panelists at San Jose in 2000 reported on the theological anthropology, the theology of God, and the Christology which either ground or are implied by the teaching on homosexuality. At New Orleans in 2002 three more panelists examined the notions of sin and grace, church, and spirituality associated with the teaching. This year the Group turned its attention to the soteriology, theology of history, and theory of revelation implicit in the teaching, taking once again as principal sources of this teaching the "Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics" (1975), "Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual

Persons" (1986), and "Responding to Legislative Proposals on the Discrimination against Homosexuals" (1992) of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992); and the U.S. bishops' letter "'Always Our Children': A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers" (1997).

Bernard J. Cooke began his report on soteriology by sketching two divergent anthropological models current in the church which in turn undergird differing soteriologies. A first understanding of the human and of human destiny locates the dignity of human persons in the transformative effect of God's loving presence on human beings and human communities. Sin, in turn, is viewed as the fracturing of human relationships upon which healthy human personhood depends. Christ's own ministry sought to repair violated persons and broken relationships, work which Christians (and others) continue today. A second, and older, view sees human nature as unchanging and bodiliness as suspect because it hinders the freedom of the human spirit to follow what is good and true. Feelings, especially sexual feelings, which deviate from the laws of nature (considered absolute, unchanging, and univocal) lead people to sin; only divine forgiveness and freely given graces allow humans to attain their destiny in this view, which undergirds the church's present approach to morality and thus to homosexuality.

In his comments Gary Macy explained why he finds a "gnostic" theology of history at work in the church teaching on homosexuality. The teaching itself is aggressively ahistorical, textual interpretations by the magisterium are taken as immutable, and magisterial texts are exclusively self-referential since scripture is treated as simply another magisterial text. "Gnostic" here implies (1) a disregard of the historical, cultural, economic, and social circumstances in which these texts were produced; (2) the exclusive reservation of interpretive power to ecclesiastical authority; and (3) the limitation of legitimate sources for knowing God's will to texts produced by those so empowered. The system is closed, which means that the continuous tradition is not available for interpretation by scientists, historians, or exegetes—or even by the faithful when their moral sense is at variance with that of the magisterium. An examination of the notes of the documents under consideration reveals a further pattern of circular argumentation: the text gives meaning to the notes supplied in support of the text that gives them meaning. Here too the historical setting of the texts seems irrelevant.

Jamie Phelps took up the theological understanding of revelation underlying the church teaching on homosexuality. Making use of Avery Dulles's typology, Phelps considered five possible models of revelation—as doctrine, as history, as inner experience, as dialectical presence, and as new awareness—and concluded that the primary understanding of revelation here is doctrinal or propositional, as Dulles describes it. This means that supernatural revelation takes the form of words whose clear meaning must be accepted for salvation. The content of revelation is to be found in two sources: the canonical scriptures and tradition,

which, as Dulles puts it, both supplement and interpret the Bible. In the "Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," the magisterium claims to base its teaching on homosexuality both on reason illuminated by faith and on revealed truth, the latter found exclusively in scripture and tradition authoritatively interpreted by the magisterium.

The discussion among the approximately 80 people in attendance which followed this year's presentations seemed to focus on two matters. First, it became clear that the examination of any one of the theological underpinnings of the church teaching on homosexuality raises significant ecclesiological *and* ecclesial questions. Second, the marked interconnectedness of the theological concepts under consideration (e.g., God, the human, grace and sin, etc.), while not surprising, perhaps points to a major reason why the church is unable at present to move beyond a theoretical and practical impasse.

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