

SEMINAR ON ECLESIOLOGY

The first session, chaired by Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C., Director of the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, dealt with the Reformed-Roman Catholic (R/RC) Dialogue on the Church. Both speakers were actual participants in the dialogue. John T. Ford, C.S.C., of Catholic University of America, noted that a first series of meetings produced in 1977 the joint statement, "The Presence of Christ in Church and World." He reported on the progress thus far achieved in a second series of talks which is producing a document now nearing completion. The exploration of beliefs common to the two communions began with a historical reassessment of the ecclesial concerns of the Reformation. Though they recognize that the differences emerging at that time have certainly continued to the present, they think that the cooperative, ecumenical restudying of history helps to break down stereotypes and misunderstandings.

As for doctrinal commonality, they focused on two areas of basic agreement: Christ as the only mediator, and justification by grace through faith. Unless ecclesiology takes a christological focus, they believe, it will be tempting to exaggerate structural differences and overlook ecclesial commonalities. A major remaining difference, seemingly insoluble, between the two is the Reformed idea of the church as *creatura Verbi* and the Catholic idea of it as *sacramentum gratiae*. Other remaining problem areas are the question of the "reception" of ecumenical agreements and the ecclesial implications of the mutual recognition of baptism.

Lewis Mudge, dean of the San Francisco Theological Seminary, began his response by noting his steadily growing sense of being in imperfect communion with the Catholic Church. He was present at the 1985 synod in Rome, and the sight of the pope functioning collegially with the bishops reminded him of the functioning of a Reformed presbytery. The document now being written by the R/RC dialogue group, he says, is a "very real step forward." The first chapter may be the best thing in it, so much does its telling of our common story together in the same language help mutual understanding. The christological focus of the document is a strong point, he believes, and even the "word" and "sacrament" question is illuminated by the clarity of language. He urges as a great symbolic act a big assembly in Rome in the year 2000 of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

In the discussion, Patrick Granfield suggested that a pneumatic focus in addition to the christological might be a constructive move, and Thomas Potvin echoed this as being a theme strong in early Christian theology. Peter Chirico suggested common work on a concrete issue like economic justice.

At the second session, chaired by Mark Fischer, director of the Diocesan Pastoral Council of Oakland, William McConville, O.F.M., new president of Siena

College, offered an original study of the "tragic" element in the church, asking "Do we need an ecclesiadicy?" Starting from the fact that, beside those who suffer on behalf of the church, many suffer *because* of the church, he seeks categories that may illuminate this experience and add to the self-understanding of the church. He stressed that he was not referring mainly to the "sinfulness" of leaders misusing their authority, or to anyone's "sin." Rather he thinks that there are modes of suffering in the church that cannot be linked to sin, but which flow from the fact of human limitedness, and at times from the conflict of two virtues, both proper and necessary but seemingly impossible to reconcile. This he calls the "tragic," drawing insights from scholars of drama and literature who show how objectives of equally high value can undermine and ruin each other. He offered some applications of these concepts to the present tensions in the church, leading to the notion of "ecclesiadicy," which means a reflection on the tragic dimension of the church and the suffering which ensues from it, with a resulting deeper insight into the reality of the church.

Anneliese Sinnott, O.P., of Marygrove College in Detroit, offered a response that had a striking immediacy and eloquence, for she applied McConville's ideas to a real ongoing event, the massive church closings in Detroit. She showed the traits of the tragic in the Detroit decree, noting how tragedy illumines the forces of evil that lie beneath the surface of a situation, how it forces people into new and painful choices that are not clearly good or evil, and brings a new perception of what is valued resulting in possible new conflict. While concurring with McConville that tragedy need not be attributed only to sin, she described how the authoritarian behavior of archdiocesan officials consistently added to the distress of the people. In perceptive closing remarks, she hoped that ecclesiadicy could provide the theological and practical strength for the people in the pews to grow in the life of the church. To be effective, ecclesiadicy must address racism and ageism and sexism in ways that the church has not yet done.

In the discussion, Susan Wood, noting that a trait of Greek tragedy is fatalism, asked if ecclesiadicy needs to be fatalistic. McConville said that it should not be such, or stoical or passive, but rather involved and always trying. Anneliese Sinnott, replying to a question, said that people need to be made aware that their efforts to influence authority are legitimate and not something to feel guilty about.

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