

JOHN COURTNEY MURRAY GROUP

- Topic: America's Theologies and the First Amendment
Convener: J. Leon Hooper, Woodstock Theological Center
Moderator: Thomas Hughson, Marquette University
Presenters: Derek Davis, J. M. Dawson Institute of Church and State,
Baylor University
Rev. Thomas Ferguson, Archdiocese of Northern Virginia
J. Leon Hooper, Woodstock Theological Center

All three presentations approached the problem of pluralistic religions with an appreciation that the various religious commitments of the American people do, and ought to, have voice in public policy determinations. In his presentation, Davis surveyed the growth of new course offerings on church/state relations in both American denominational and state schools. Amid this growing interest (much of it in response to the recent fundamentalistic Protestant and Catholic entries into politics), the question then becomes: How ought explicitly religious commitments that are clearly identified with specific denominations enter public debates? Given the U.S. commitment through the first Amendment to the separation of church and state, Davis argued that a language other than that of any specific faith community must be found. He recommended a conscious attempt to develop a public theology along the lines outlined by John Coleman—a language that would be specific to the history of the common life lived on these shores among those of many different faiths.

Ferguson explored the possibilities of following through on Murray's recommendation that Catholics and others rely on the natural law in their attempt at a common public language. Perhaps more modestly than Murray, however, Ferguson argued that all America's faith communities are under obligation to contribute to a common (natural law) language, in part based on their obligation to positively contribute to the public order. He also suggested that an adequate natural law language would be considerably more developmental than Murray seemed to allow.

Hooper explored the possibility of moving into a fully theological, public discussion of America's social and political commitments. He argued that, while Murray in principle rejected the possibility of confessionally explicit theological discussion (until shortly before his death), the vacuous and sectarian nature of much that today counts for political and natural law discourse make it imperative that we find richer languages that might ground our common commitments to the public order. Similarly, the ongoing insistence by many Americans that their own

revealed truth claims ought to have a role in determining public policies, requires responses that are theological. Both the need to develop rich public languages and the need to adequately answer public theological claims suggest new commitments among America's religions to explore the possibility that God might be active outside each's own tribal group and an openness to the possibility of writing a common salvation history with denominations (and nonbelievers) previously understood to be outside God's gracious action.

The discussion period focused on more concrete problems such as the question of federal aid to private schools. Positions on that issue varied from no public aid to private schools, to public aid to all schools teaching the impoverished, to public aid to any school that claims religious grounding.

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PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

- Topic:** The Spirit in Practical Theology:
Reflections on Church Renewal in Two Case Studies
- Convener:** Mark L. Poorman, University of Notre Dame
- Moderator:** Mark F. Fischer, St. John's Seminary, Camarillo
- Presenters:** Patrick Howell, Seattle University
Discerning the Spirit in Seattle Church
after the 1984-1987 Vatican Investigation
Mary Garvin, Gonzaga University, and
Pat Parachini, St. Paul's College
Praying Together as a Faith Community:
Discerning and Meeting Diverse Expectations

The Practical Theology Research Seminar continued its examination of methods in practical theology by again considering cases for theological reflection. This year, in keeping with the overall pneumatological theme of the annual convention, both cases concerned the role of the Spirit in practical theological method. Regular members of the seminar received copies of the written case studies in advance, and additional copies were provided at the