

CATHOLIC-REFORMED DIALOGUE TAKES UP QUESTION OF AUTHORITY AND EPISCOPACY IN LATEST MEETING OF ROUND VIII

Washington —Participants of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue convened on September 29-30, 2014 for the fourth meeting of the eighth round at the national offices of the United Church of Christ in Cleveland, OH. The general topic for the current round is ecclesiology. The specific topic for this meeting was on the history and theology of the relationship between authority (episcopé) and the episcopacy, the third of four ecclesiological themes that are to be considered for the round; other themes include mission and identity, unity and diversity, ministry and ordination. The dialogue is chaired by Bishop Tod Brown, retired bishop of Orange, California, and the Rev. Cynthia Campbell, Ph.D., senior pastor of Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and former president of McCormick Theological Seminary.

Three papers were presented on the topic of authority and episcopacy. The first paper, presented by Anthony Cirelli, Ph.D., provided an historical and theological survey of the Catholic understanding of the question. In this presentation, Dr. Cirelli attempted to a.) demonstrate the New Testament evidence for a conciliar and personal exercise of authority by early superintendants (i.e., bishops), b.) explicate seminal Patristic sources (Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Cyprian) that serve as the normative expressions of episcopal authority in Catholic understanding, and c.) identify convergences between the patristic paradigms, conclusions from the modern ecumenical movement, and Vatican II. Substantial conversation ensued regarding the connection of bishops to the liturgical and sacramental life of the early Christian communities, especially as this connection made possible the emergent authority of a “monarcial” episcopos. The second paper, authored by Rev. Dr. Randi Walker (UCC), Rev. Robina Winbush (PCUSA), and Rev. Dr. Allan Janssen (RCA) presented the history and theology of authority and episcopacy through the lens of the Reformed tradition. Emphasis was given on the differing approaches and responses to leaders of the Reformation era, especially John Calvin, by each of the communions (i.e., Presbyterian Church USA, Christian Reformed Church in N. America, United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church of America). Attention was also given to the modern ecumenical invitation for the Reformed communities to consider the historical three-fold pattern of ministry, and case studies were offered that gave evidence for an episcopacy in certain periods and under certain conditions (e.g., the Mercersberg movement of the 19th century). The third paper, which was presented by Msgr. John Radano,

provided a comprehensive overview of the international and domestic contributions to the question of authority and episcopacy as this has unfolded in the modern ecumenical movement.

The next scheduled meeting is scheduled to take place in Chicago at the ELCA Headquarters in March of 2015.

Other Catholic dialogue participants included Dr. Kristin Colberg, Rev. Dr. Dennis Tamburello, Rev. Dr. Tom Weinandy, and Dr. Christopher Ruddy.

Other Reformed Church in America participants included Rev. Dr. Wes Granberg-Michaelson and Monica Schaap Pierce. Christian Reformed Church participants included Rev. Dr. Peter Choi, Rev. Dr. Sue Rozeboom, and Rev. Dr. Ronald Feenstra. The Presbyterian Church-USA participants included Rev. David Gambrell. United Church of Christ participants included Rev. Dr. Sidney D. Fowler and Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson.