

CATHOLIC-REFORMED DIALOGUE ENGAGES IN CRITICAL STUDY OF ECCLESIOLOGICAL UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Washington —Participants of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue convened on March 16-17 for the third meeting of the eighth round at St. Paul's College in Washington, DC. The general topic for the current round is ecclesiology. The specific topic for this meeting was on unity and diversity in the church, the second of four ecclesiological themes that are to be considered for the round; other themes, to be explored in future meetings, include mission and identity, authority and episcopacy, and 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.

A jointly prepared paper on the topic of unity and diversity in Catholic and Reformed ecclesiology was presented by Dr. Kristin Colberg, Rev. Dr. Ronald Feenstra, and Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson. This paper provided an overview of the topic in light of convergences already achieved, and divergences that remain, as these have been identified in the international Reformed-Catholic Dialogue and in the overall modern ecumenical movement. The clear signs of unity the authors celebrated as real fruits of the ecumenical movement were the sacramental fact of our sharing in a common baptism, as well as our recognition of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Significant differences that remain include our recognition of one another as church, our view of holiness or sinfulness of the church, our recognition of the ministry and ordination of one another's leaders ("...can we have union between churches with diverse structures of ministry?"), our approach to moral issues, and our structures of authority.

On this last note of divergence between the Reformed and Catholic traditions, the authors of the paper concluded that in order for advances to be made on this topic of unity and diversity, lingering questions on the role of authority and the episcopacy need especially to be addressed: "...it seems valuable to look at open questions that remain on this issue of unity and diversity in the church and, especially, the relationship between this topic and issues related to authority...(and)...coming to a greater mutual understanding of the function and role of *episkopos* sheds tremendous light on our respective (and perhaps shared) understandings of the relationship between unity and diversity in the church."

The presentation of the main paper was accompanied by robust conversation and commentary that provided fertile ground for further revisions on the topic of unity and diversity. Individual groups met in extended sessions to discuss the continued planning and progress on each respective topic. The third group on authority and episcopacy will present their paper at the next meeting. Broad topics that will be addressed include an historical overview of the origins, theology and practice of the *episkope* of the episcopacy, as well as a review of the status of the question in light of the published reports of the modern ecumenical movement.

The next scheduled meeting will be hosted by the United Church of Christ and will take place September 29-30, 2014 in Cleveland, OH.

Other Catholic dialogue participants included Rev. Dr. John A. Radano, Dr. Kristin Colberg, Rev. Dr. Dennis Tamburello, Dr. Christopher Ruddy, and Dr. Anthony Cirelli, (SEIA staff). Absent was Rev. Dr. Tom Weinandy.

Other Reformed Church in America participants included Rev. Dr. Leanne van Dyk, Rev. Dr. Wes Granberg-Michaelson and Rev. Dr. Allan Janssen. Christian Reformed Church participants included Rev. Peter Choi and Rev. Dr. Ronald Feenstra. The Presbyterian Church-USA participants included Rev. Rev. Robina Winbush. United Church of Christ participants included Rev. Dr. Sidney D. Fowler, Rev. Dr. Randi Walker, and Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson. Absent was Rev. David Gambrell.