

Dialogue in U.S.

Lutherans, Catholics Report Progress On Papal Infallibility Question

New York (RNS) — In a major statement on papal infallibility, the official U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue team has declared that "the ultimate trust of Christians is in Christ and the gospel, not in a doctrine of infallibility, whether of scripture, the church or the pope."

Separate statements issued by members of the two groups also indicated that Catholics and Lutherans should take each other's teachings into account in formulating their own witness to the world.

The general subject of the role of the papacy has been discussed in previous dialogues between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Statements indicating that a modified form of the papacy as a focus of Christian unity could be accepted by Lutherans and Anglicans were issued in 1974 by the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and in 1977 by the Anglican-Catholic International Commission.

But Father John F.

Hopkin, executive director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, noted that the new document is "the first ecumenical report to deal with the subject of infallibility in depth and detail."

In the common statement, both sides agreed that "whatever infallibility is ascribed to scripture, the church, or the pope, it is wholly dependent on the power of God's word in the gospel."

According to the statement, "the doctrine of infallibility is an expression of confidence that the Spirit of God abides in his church and guides it in the truth. This understanding should allay Lutheran fears that papal infallibility is a usurpation of the sovereign authority of Christ, and make clear that this dogma is not the central doctrine of the Catholic Church and that it does not displace Christ from his redemptive and mediatorial role."

The common document

stresses that "the context within which the Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility is understood has changed. Lutherans and Catholics now speak in increasingly similar ways about the gospel and its communication, about the authority of Christian truth, and about how to settle disputes concerning the understanding of the Christian message. One can truly speak of a convergence between our two traditions."

On the general subject of authority in the church, the common statement says that "Lutherans have a tendency to treat scripture as if it were identical with the gospel of the Word of God, while Catholics have shown a similar tendency with regard to tradition and church structures."

The document advises that "one cannot simply repeat scripture and tradition in order to be faithful to the gospel, but one must be open to new ways of structuring its transmission in the church."

According to the common statement, "because the

questions and concerns of our period differ from those of the nineteenth century, it becomes necessary to reinterpret or reformulate the concept of infallibility so that its valid theological insight may become more persuasive."

Examining differences which remain on the subject, the common statement notes that "Catholics, as well as many Lutherans, regret the absence in Lutheranism of a universal magisterium (i.e., of effective means of speaking to and for the whole church), while Lutherans, as well as many Catholics, believe that the doctrine and practice of papal teaching authority and infallibility are not yet sufficiently protected against abuses."

But, the document affirms, "in the new context, each side finds itself compelled to recognize that the other seeks to be faithful to the gospel. Further, given the convergence on the wider questions of authority and certainty in the church, it becomes possible to hope that

the two communions will be able to enter into further degrees of fellowship, while continuing to develop together their respective positions on infallibility."

In their separate statements, both the Lutherans and Catholics taking part in the dialogue stressed that it has become increasingly difficult to define exactly where or how they differ on the question of infallibility.

The Lutheran statement declared that "what many Roman Catholics, including those who regard as important the acceptance of this doctrine, now affirm is not what Lutherans have in the past rejected." And the Catholic participants affirmed that "this dialogue has been able to achieve a convergence about teaching authority and infallibility which could scarcely have been through possible even a few years ago."

The Catholic participants urged "that Catholic leaders invite Lutheran church authorities to participate in

the formulation of Catholic doctrine, in a consultative capacity, seeking to follow and even to go beyond the precedent set by the participation of non-Catholic observers at Vatican Council II," and that "Catholic theologians and religious educators make greater use of statements issued by Lutherans, especially when this will demonstrate and strengthen the unity of Christian faith."

Lutherans and Catholics in the U.S. have been in official dialogue since 1965, with a concentration on papal infallibility since 1974. The next subject for in-depth treatment will be justification, with the next dialogue sessions scheduled for Cincinnati in February.

Since the dialogue began, it has been jointly chaired by Dr. Paul C. Empie, retired general secretary of the LWF general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation national committee, and Auxiliary Bishop T. Austin Murphy of Baltimore.

Robert Wagner

Envoy Discusses Role

By FRANK MAUROVICH
RNS Staff Writer

New York — President Carter has asked his newly appointed personal representative to the Vatican to work especially on the issues of human rights and world peace.

"Both the President and Vice President Mondale mentioned human rights and world peace as reasons for my appointment, but the essential thing is maintaining the good relations between the United States and the Vatican," said former New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner.

In an interview in his Park Avenue law office just hours after his appointment was officially

announced, Oct. 18, Wagner said that he envisioned his new role as "improving communication between President Carter and Pope John Paul II by promoting understanding between these two leaders."

"Understanding," the 68-year-old political warrior explained, "is an important part of diplomacy."

Asked if his combination of political expertise and Catholic training would give him special assets for his new post, Wagner responded with a chuckle, "Well, it won't hurt."

He said he was "surprised and pleased" by the election of the first non-Italian pope in 455 years.

Although he had never met Pope John Paul II, Wagner said he had a "very good impression" of the Polish prelate from people who met Cardinal Wojtyla when he visited New York in 1969 and 1976.

Comparing the roles of the president and the pope, Wagner said, "They're different, of course. One's a political leader. The other is a spiritual leader. But in many ways, their responsibilities coincide, especially on humanitarian issues."

"After all, the pope is the leader of 700 million Catholics in every country in the world. And the Church is deeply involved in helping people spiritually and materially through its education and social justice efforts. The

Vatican doesn't need an army, it has a spiritual army — and that's much more powerful," Wagner stated.

Citing the role of the Church in Latin America, as an example, Wagner said, "I think the Church is right in helping people to find a better life for themselves and their children in a non-revolutionary way. Otherwise, there will be a revolution with violence and chaos and the wrong kind of leadership."

The Vatican envoy's appointment entails several visits a year to Rome to discuss international issues and humanitarian concerns with the pope or Vatican officials. But the position, although sensitive, is unsalaried and carries no diplomatic status.

Wagner said he was aware of critics who saw his Vatican appointment as infringing on church-state separation, but he reported that he himself had not received any criticism.

"I think that kind of thing is dying out," he said. "We've come a long way from the days of Al Smith when people really believed that if Smith were elected president, the pope would sail down the Tiber and up the Potomac."

Wagner insisted that religion and politics are separate spheres, but he stressed they were complementary. "One cannot be dedicated to the people and to public service without first being dedicated to God," he said.



Auto-Symbolism

This restored Model T Ford is used by the Archdiocese of Newark, N.J., to symbolize the transformation that can happen to people when a spiritual restoration occurs in their lives. Msgr. John M. Smith, spokesman for the diocese, said the program hopes to "help thousands of area Catholics to re-examine their relationship with God." (RNS)

Arlyne Weider in Samoa

To answer the question: Arlyne "Arly" Weider, the mother of Father Timothy Weider and the quondam owner of the Ave Maria Studio, is in Samoa, or more specifically, the 40 by 15 mile island of Western Samoa.

According to a letter from Mrs. Weider received at the Courier-Journal last week, she is serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer at the Alafamua School and Workshop of the Western Samoa Association for the Blind in the nation's capital, Apia.

"It is the first and only school for the blind and any kind of handicapped child in Samoa," she writes. "The name Alafamua, in Samoan, means the first guiding light out of darkness. Not

only is the school able to lead the blind of this country out of darkness, at the same time it is able to show the public how wrong their old ideas about the blind truly are."

Of the social life, she says, "I have lived and have agia (family) in two villages." The two villages are Tafitoala and Matafa'a. In the latter, "I stayed three weeks in a fale (Samoan house) with a family of 12 learning the customs and the language," she writes.

She hopes to have her own house "on the sea the first of January within walking distance of the school."

At the school there are also adults who "make cane furniture, baskets and

macrame," she says. "The workers get paid for their work an average of seven tala a week."

(The most recent quotation on the tala values it as about \$1.05 in U.S. currency.)

The government, she says, does not support the school which, "runs by whatever assistance can be mustered and is at a low ebb at present. I should say the lowest. No one has been in this office since last Spring and it shows. Nothing seems to be coming in and I am told there is no money."

Mrs. Weider closes her letter with the statement that she would love to hear from diocesan friends. She may be reached through the Peace Corps, Box 880, Apia, Western Samoa.

BUSINESS NEWS



F.J. GRASBERGER

Friedrich J. Graserberger of Pittsford, associate director of the Center for Governmental Research, Inc., is the new chairman of the board of trustees of St. Bernard's Seminary. New trustees on the 20-member board are John Desserer Jr., John Graserberger and Marcus Merriam.