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LUTHERAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC REPORT ON INFALLIBILITY IS PUBLISHED

WASHINGTON--The full text of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue report on papal infallibility will be published for the first time in the March issue of Theological Studies, the secretariat of the Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) announced.

The report, entitled "Teaching Authority and Infallibility," is the result of five years of dialogue by Lutheran and Roman Catholic scholars in the United States. Participants say that while infallibility is not the most central issue to be faced in this ongoing dialogue, it is perhaps the most controversial and emotional. It is the first ecumenical report to treat the subject of infallibility in depth and is expected to be one of the most important bases for all further ecumenical discussion of the matter.

The study was made public last fall but has not been available in published form until now. In the meantime it has occasioned considerable interest since it cast new light on a matter which was widely regarded for more than a hundred years as beyond hope of reconciliation between Catholics and Lutherans. The First Vatican Council defined the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870.

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Father John F. Hotchkin, director of the BCEIA secretariat, commented that the dialogue, as expected, does not report complete and full agreement between Catholics and Lutherans but does mark a significant convergence and a narrowing of the gap between them.

"Catholics have sought to show that the teaching on infallibility is linked to the promise of Christ that the Church would endure and be led in the power of Christ's Spirit," Father Hotchkin said. "It is a specific response of trust and confidence in that promise of the Lord. It is not an attempt to arrogate the authority that belongs to God alone nor an attempt to establish an authority alongside or independent of the authority of the Gospel."

"Lutherans are inclined to think Catholics may be overconfident in specifying a particular way whereby the promise of the Lord to his Church is realized," Father Hotchkin continued, "but they make clear that they do hold the same hope and confidence that the Church will be guided by the Spirit through the ages. Thus both sides can see that their positions are motivated by positive rather than negative concerns," he said, "and the way is opened to further progress together in our understanding of the Christian faith."

Catholics and Lutherans in this country have been in dialogue on a variety of subjects since mid-1965, discussing the teaching ministry with a concentration on papal infallibility since February 1974. The dialogue is co-sponsored by the Bishops' Committee, a standing committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and by Lutheran World Ministries, the U.S. office of the Lutheran World Federation.

Copies of Theological Studies are available at \$3.50 from the offices of the journal at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057

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