



NEWS

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CATHOLICS, SOUTHERN BAPTISTS PLAN FIVE-YEAR CONSULTATION

REPORT TO U.S. BISHOPS CITES WIDE RANGING ECUMENICAL GAINS

WASHINGTON--Southern Baptist and Roman Catholic scholars will soon begin a series of dialogues, to be conducted initially over a five-year period, on "The Nature and Function of the Church." Bishop James D. Niedergeses of Nashville is Roman Catholic co-chairman of the consultation, to be co-sponsored by the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) and the Department of Interfaith Witness of the Baptist Home Mission Board.

Announcement of the new consultation was made in a report prepared by the Bishops' Committee for presentation to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) meeting in Chicago May 2-4. BCEIA currently co-sponsors bilateral consultations with eight other churches or church families, with some discussions going back 12 years or more, others begun within the past six months.

The report, entitled "Progress in the Dialogues," provides an overview of work that has been done or is now anticipated.

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In doing so it offers a wealth of information on significant but little known developments in the ecumenical field including a dialogue with the Presbyterian and Reformed churches on ethical questions (such as abortion and the relationship of the churches' position to public policy); an Anti-Defamation League-U.S. Catholic Conference study group that plans to discuss the issue of government aid to private education; and a possible gathering of Catholics with knowledge of Indians and experienced with medicine men. The latter would be an outgrowth of awareness by the BCEIA Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions of the need and value of dialogue with representatives of the native American Indian religions.

The following are among the development reported by BCEIA in each of the bilateral consultations:

--The Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation, co-chaired by William Cardinal Baum of Washington, is co-sponsored with the standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops. It recently issued a statement expressing concern for the future of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and its relations with the Turkish authorities. The consultation is preparing a common statement on the Sanctity of Marriage and will also undertake dialogue concerning the religious upbringing of children of Orthodox-Roman Catholic marriages.

--The Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation (ARC) is co-sponsored with the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations of the Episcopal Church. Last December it issued two documents,

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"The Twelve Year Report" and "Second Response to the Venice Statement" which, respectively, summed up the dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in the U.S. since 1965 and offered further comments on the statement on "Authority in the Church" published by the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation. ARC may undertake a major study of Christian Anthropology intended to explore the imagery, function and roles of men and women in the life of the Christian Church. Objectives: a clearer appreciation of the role of Mary in Catholic theology and devotion, a clarification of the issues concerning women in the ordained ministries of the churches, and the relationship of these objectives to the broader contemporary questions of the Christian family and human sexuality. Bishop Raymond W. Lessard of Savannah co-chairs this consultation.

--The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, co-sponsored by Lutheran World Ministries, has since 1974 been engaged in a discussion of Infallibility and the Teaching Authority of the Church. "The dialogue is now well advanced," the report said, "and shows signs of positive results. The members of the consultation hope to be able to complete their report on this subject by the end of the current year." Co-chairman of the consultation is Auxiliary Bishop T. Austin Murphy of Baltimore.

In an independent by related development, a group of New Testament scholars is working on a book, expected

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to appear in the next several months, on "Mary in the New Testament." This effort, like its predecessor, "Peter in the New Testament," derived from suggestions made by the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue. This project, coordinated by Lutheran World Ministries with the support of the BCEIA and financial assistance from the Catholic Biblical Association, has engaged New Testament scholars from beyond the Lutheran and Roman Catholic communities.

The report also noted the annual meetings, which began three years ago, between presidents of the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church with archbishops and bishops of the NCCB. Discussion at the 1978 meeting included the recent report of an International Lutheran/Catholic Consultation on the Theology of Marriage and Mixed Marriage, communion policies being developed for consideration by the general assembly of the Lutheran Churches, and possible programs Catholics and Lutherans might share to commemorate the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980. Bishop Bernard F. Law, chairman of the BCEIA, co-chairs this annual meeting.

--The Presbyterian and Reformed/Roman Catholic Consultation is co-sponsored with the North American Area Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It is now in the second year of what is planned to be a three-year series of dialogues on points of common contact and distinctive

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differences between ethical methods and traditions. Besides the churches' approach to the issue of abortion and public policy, another case study under consideration in this dialogue concerns the address of the two churches to the question of human rights as exemplified in their statements concerning South Africa. Bishop Ernest L. Unterkoefler of Charleston is Roman Catholic co-chairman of this consultation.

--The United Methodist-Roman Catholic Consultation is co-sponsored with the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Within the past year it has begun a new series of dialogues on the subject of eucharistic doctrine and devotion in the churches. The Catholic co-chairman is Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown.

--The Roman Catholic/Disciples of Christ dialogue is unique in that it includes an international dimension. It is co-sponsored with the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church and the (International) Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council. On the Catholic side the BCEIA is joined by the (Vatican) Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity as a sponsor of this dialogue. Baptism is the subject for the 1978 session which will be held in Rome. Consultation co-chairman is Auxiliary Bishop Stanley J. Ott of New Orleans.

--The Oriental Orthodox/Roman Catholic Consultation got underway with an organizational meeting late last year. Initiated by the BCEIA and the Armenian Church of America,

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the Oriental Orthodox representation was expanded to include participants from the Syrian, Coptic, Ethiopian and Indian Malabar churches. Auxiliary Bishop J. Francis Stafford of Baltimore is co-chairman.

The new joint work/study group between the Anti-Defamation League and the USCC was facilitated by the BCEIA Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations in late 1977. At its first meeting in Washington, D.C. the group discussed questions related to Israel, the Jewish people and peace in the Middle East. Discussions have also been held between representatives of the Secretariat, the USCC and the Synagogue Council of America to specify still further areas of common Catholic/Jewish concern. Bishop Francis J. Mugavero of Brooklyn is moderator of this Secretariat.

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