

THE CONSULTATIONS

These consultations began with a brief visit to the PCPCU by a small delegation of the Seventh Day Adventists for one day in 2000, who met with Bishop Walter Kasper, then Secretary of the PCPCU, and Msgr John A. Radano. From this meeting came the agreement to have a small brief consultation the following year, in Geneva. The dates and place were chosen in relationship to the meeting of the working group of the CWCs which meets each year in May in Geneva to plan for the annual CWC meeting in October. The International Reformed Center John Knox, would be the venue. Three consultations have now been held in Geneva on that same occasion and in the same place.

The first consultation, April 8-9, 2001 included 4 Catholics and 4 Adventists. It focused on the "27 basic beliefs" of the Seventh Day Adventists. These 27 beliefs include traditional Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection of Christ, beliefs which are common to Christians. We started with this in order to find some common ground.

In the second consultation, May 20-22, 2002, on the theme of Sabbath/Sunday, two papers were presented. The discussion indicated common ground and divergences. As to common ground, we agreed that (1) Christian faith identifies the principle that a day of rest is a biblical injunction and serves as a weekly witness to the glory of God as our Creator and Redeemer in Jesus Christ, and is for the sanctification of humanity by the public assembly of believers to worship God; (2) in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Sabbath was not abolished but fulfilled; (3) we acknowledge all of this on the basis of obedience to the Word of God communicated in Holy Scripture, which is authoritative for the Church and normative for its teaching; (4) we both continue to heed the divine imperative for human life as embodied in the ten commandments.

There is *continued divergence* on: (1) our respective theologies of the day; (2) the distinction in days (Saturday versus Sunday); (3) our approaches to Scripture. While both see the fulfillment of Sabbath in Jesus Christ, Adventists emphasize the affirmation and purification of existing seventh-day sabbath observance by Jesus and the rest that Jesus promises to those who come to him, while Catholics understand that fulfillment as a transformation of seventh day Sabbath into first day observance by the redemptive power of the paschal mystery in the Lord Jesus' resurrection and his continued presence as risen Lord in the Holy Spirit. The creation emphasis of the Adventist tradition, including Christ as creator of Sabbath by virtue of being the eternal Son of the Father, contrasts with the eschatological emphasis of Catholic tradition, which envisions Christ as author of the new creation initiated by his resurrection. The respective doctrinal emphases are formative for ecclesial life and Christian discipleship of our communities.

The focus of the third consultation, held in Geneva, May 19-21, 2003, was "Principles of Biblical Interpretation". The discussion indicated the following. While both speak of the scriptures as the inspired word of God, we have different ways of approaching the role of human agency in the writing of Scripture and in its interpretation. For Catholics this warrants, due to the limitations of human beings, the necessary use of historical-critical method to fully appreciate the revelation of the Word of God in Scripture. However, historical-critical method is limited and not sufficient alone to adequately interpret the Bible. Adventists, on the other hand, while attributing a similar importance to human agency, prefer the utilization of a historical-biblical method to interpret Scripture so as not to allow biblical hermeneutics to be usurped by the secular assumptions of historical-critical method. In their view, any critical judgment upon the face value – or literal but not literalistic – sense of the biblical texts including the biblical account of history and cosmology diminishes its authority as the Word of God. Catholics argue that the literal sense of the text is important and necessary as well and ought not to be contravened. Nevertheless, they believe that the nature of the biblical text itself calls for historical-critical investigation, not in order to give it a secular reading but rather to clarify precisely the historical and secular aspects reflected in the Scriptures and thereby to deepen its religious meaning with respect to matters pertaining to salvation. In this respect the use of that method enhances our receptivity to the Word of God. For Catholics any hermeneutic that may lead to questioning or rejection of dogma confirmed by the Magisterium must be restricted. Adventists on the other hand believe that only the Scriptures should reaffirm, modify, or correct any doctrine or dogmatic statement.

Since both sides agree that the Word of God must interpret and address us if we are to take divine revelation seriously, this led to discussions about the principle of *sola scriptura* to which the Adventists adhere, in contrast to the Catholic adherence to the principle of Scripture and Tradition as the two distinct modes of the transmission of the Word of God. By the Word of God alone – Jesus Christ the incarnate Word – is the Catholic response to *sola scriptura*, a response that cannot isolate Scripture from tradition and the life of the Church.

Adventists dispute the role of post-apostolic tradition that is not clearly present in the Scriptures. They argue that the Church is beholden to the canon of Scripture rather than vice-versa, that the Church is the child of the canon and not its mother. But Catholics stated that the canon emerged from the womb of the Church and the Church discerns the authenticity and scope of the canon even as it envisions itself subservient to the Word of God.

In this context, matters such as purgatory, the veneration and the efficacious intercession of the saints, indulgences, and Mariology were questioned by Adventists and defended by Catholics. Adventists insisted there was no biblical warrant for them while Catholics admitted they emerged in the tradition of the Church but were biblically rooted. Again, this illustrated the principle that Catholics insist on the interpretation of Scripture within the “living tradition of the whole Church” and Adventists interpret Scripture only by other scripture passages, the principle of biblical intertextuality.

The conversation also manifested differences in fundamental theological issues between our two traditions. Paramount among them is the relationship between faith and reason, based upon the Catholic principle that grace perfects nature. Perhaps the Catholic inclusion of historical-critical method stems from the confidence that true reason and faith are complementary whereas Adventists distrust the use of unaided reason. This could lead to other issues for discussion such as our views on Christian anthropology.

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