

Conference of European Churches
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe
– Leuenberg Church Fellowship –

Third Consultation about the question of Ecclesiology

Phanar/Istanbul, 27-30 April 2006

C O M M U N I Q U E

From 27 to 30 April 2006 the third consultation on the question of ecclesiology, jointly organised by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – formerly called Leuenberg Church Fellowship - took place at Phanar/Istanbul, the See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. With this meeting a series of conversations was continued which had begun in November 2002 in the Orthodox Academy in Crete and in June 2004 in Lutherstadt Wittenberg/Germany. The participants came from Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, as well as the Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches of the CPCE. All these Churches are CEC members. Observers from the Porvoo Communion and the Commission “Churches in dialogue” of CEC were also present.

The meeting was co-chaired by Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima (for CEC) and Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker (for CPCE).

After the discussion in Crete of the study “The Church of Jesus Christ” (Leuenberg Documents 1, Frankfurt/Main 1995), which was adopted in 1994 at the fourth general assembly of the CPCE, the purpose of the second consultation in Wittenberg was to describe and discuss Orthodox ecclesiology. The meeting in Istanbul looked at two topics, namely “catholicity and unity of the church” as well as “baptism”.

First, Prof. Risto Saarinen gave a paper on “Unity and Catholicity of the Church” from a Protestant point of view, followed by a presentation on “Identity as Communion. Building blocks of Orthodox Ecclesiology” by Prof. Konstantinos Delikostantis. Starting from an analysis of the usage of the word “catholic” in ecumenical documents, Saarinen pointed out, that the churches are no longer living in confessionally homogeneous territories, but that the concept of “place” is still important for the catholicity of the church. Catholicity is given in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. These doctrinal points give the space for the church, which is constituted in different levels of identity. Delikostantis emphasised that the eucharist is the essential basis of the orthodox ecclesiology. On this basis the understanding of the relationship between the local and the universal church is developed. Furthermore he pointed out that this concept of catholicity does not allow for any ethnocentric limitations of the church.

In an intense discussion of both papers it was clarified that “catholicity” cannot be separated from “oneness, apostolicity and holiness” of the church. It turned out as common conviction that the relationship between unity and catholicity has to be found in the local church. Each local church is “catholic”, whereby the term “catholic” expresses a dimension that goes beyond the locally visible life of the community. Catholicity is fully manifested through communion in the eucharist with other local churches. “Catholic” does not just mean “universal”, but implies a qualitative dimension, which defines Christian identity. There was

also agreement that the connection between the local churches is guaranteed by means of synodality. In both traditions catholicity is among other things experienced in the liturgical life, which is celebrated in continuity with the early church. There was agreement that catholicity and nationalism exclude each other while the diversity in culture, language and nation, in which the same faith is being expressed, is not contradictory to the catholicity of the church.

During the second part of the meeting the participants listened to a paper by Dr. Hans-Peter Großhans on “Baptism – A Sacramental Bond of Church Unity” from the Protestant side and Prof. Grigorios Larentzakis on “Baptism and the Unity of the Churches. Orthodox Aspects.” After clarifying the institution of baptism from the basis of biblical theology, Großhans developed the protestant understanding of sacraments and baptism as sacrament. Furthermore, he explained the relationship between baptism and faith and undergirded this view by pointing out the constitutive elements of a baptismal liturgy in a protestant church. The sacrament of baptism is only fully understood when it is recognised that it implies the bringing about the unity of the people of God. Larentzakis underlined the unity of all sacraments and especially of baptism, chrismation and eucharist in the orthodox theology. The fullness of the sacramental life leads to the unity of the church, which must remain the main goal of the ecumenical movement. Orthodoxy calls for the restoration of unity in the essentials of the Christian faith, as it must be recognised and confessed by all Christians and all churches together, in the diversity of the different dimensions, which do not touch on the essentials.

In the discussion important points of convergence as well as open questions were further addressed. Both sides agree on the fact that baptism with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be repeated. It presupposes true faith of the church as well as of the individual candidate. Furthermore, baptism takes place in a particular local church, but it also brings about a catholic dimension. In both traditions the term “mysterion” seems appropriate to describe the reality of baptism, which effects - through the Holy Spirit - cleansing from sin, rebirth, incorporation into the body of Christ and adoption as a child of God. Likewise the pastoral challenges in relation to the baptism of children from interconfessional marriages as well as the confessional identity of godparents, have increasing weight. There was a consensus with regard to essential elements of the celebration of baptism. This point requires further study. In both traditions the baptism is ordinarily administered by an ordained person. All these issues require further study in the perspective of a possible mutual recognition of baptism.

Common services of the Word and prayers were an important part of the consultation, which took place in a very constructive and hospitable atmosphere. On 28th of April the participants attended the Divine Liturgy in Valoukli Monastery for the feast of the Life-giving source Mother of God. In the afternoon the group was received by His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who underlined the importance of ecumenical dialogue and theological encounters despite existing obstacles. The participants recommend to CEC and CPCE that this consultation process continue, because it was felt that Christian churches in Europe are in need of common reflection on central theological topics.

Ecumenical Patriarchate/ Phanar, 30 April 2006.

List of participants:

CEC Delegation: Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Prof. Dr. Konstantinos Delikostantis (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Athens), Fr. Irinej Dobrijevic

(Serbian Orthodox Church), Rev Dr. Sergej Hovorun (Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow), Bishop Dr. Vasilios Karayiannis (Church of Cyprus), Prof. Dr. Dimitra Koukoura (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Thessaloniki), Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Graz), (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Istanbul), Lecturer Dr. Nicolae Mosoiu (Romanian Orthodox Church), Dr. Niki Papageorgiou (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Thessaloniki), Bishop Dr. Yeznik Petrossian (Armenian Apostolic Church, Etchmiadzin), Archpriest Veikko Purmonen (Finnish Orthodox Church), V. Revd. Archimandrite Athenagoras Ziliaskopoulos (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Frankfurt/M)

CPCE Delegation: Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker (EKD, Münster/Germany), Oberkirchenrat Dr. Michael Bünker (Ev. Church of the A.C. in Austria, Wien), Lecturer Dr. Hans-Peter Großhans (Tübingen), Oberkirchenrätin Dr. Dagmar Heller (EKD, Hannover), Oberkirchenrat Dr. Christoph Janel (VELKD, Hannover), Bishop Dr.h.c. Rolf Koppe (EKD, Hannover), Rev. Dr. Peter McEnhill (Church of Scotland), Erzbischof Dr. Edmund Ratz (ELKRAS, St. Petersburg), Prof. Dr. Risto Saarinen (Ev.-Luth. Church of Finland, Helsinki), Prof. Dr. Martin Wallraff (Ev.-Luth. Church in Italy, Basel), Ratspräsident Rev. Thomas Wipf (Swiss Protestant Church Federation, Bern)

Observers:

Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel (KEK, Commission on Churches in Dialogue; Münster/Germany)
Rev. Dr. Matti Repo (Porvoo Communion, Helsinki)

Staff:

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