

Conference of European Churches
Second Eastern Orthodox-Porvoo Consultation
Sambata de Sus, Romania, 27-30 March 2008

Communiqué

A second Porvoo-Eastern Orthodox consultation on the Porvoo Common Statement was held from 27th to 30th March at Brancoveanu monastery, Sambata de Sus in Romania at the initiative of the Conference of European Churches. Following the model established at the first consultation in 2005 in Järvenpää, Finland, clerical and lay theologians were invited from churches which are signatories of the Porvoo Declaration, and from Eastern Orthodox Churches. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Fellowship) again had observer status. Metropolitan Laurentius of Ardeal and Bishop Ioan of Harghita were present for part of the second full day of the consultation, welcomed us and warmly supported our work. Throughout the consultation, worship was held in the Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox traditions.

The Revd Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita and the Revd Dr. Matti Repo introduced the consultation, recalling the shape and content of the consultation in Järvenpää. The first topic identified at Järvenpää as fruitful for further discussion – ‘The compatibility of the understanding of the Church in the Porvoo Common Statement and the Orthodox understanding of the Church’ - formed the basis of this consultation. Background information was provided by way of brief reports on the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue (presented by Revd Dr. Stephanie Dietrich) and the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue (presented by Asst. Prof. Dr. Ionut Alexandru Tudorie).

Papers were then presented on the following topics: ‘The Nature of the Church in the Orthodox Ecclesiology’ (Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima, who could not be present in person but whose paper was read by the Revd Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita), ‘The true Church of Jesus Christ and the concept of the Church in the Common Statement understanding’ (the Revd Prof. Dr. Samuel Rubenson), ‘Can Christian Unity be attained? Reflections on Church unity from the Orthodox perspective’ (the Revd Prof. Dr. Vaclav Jezek), and ‘The concept of church unity in the Porvoo Common Statement. Unity and diversity’ (the Rt Revd Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher).

Discussion following these papers was intense and fruitful. Out of our different church traditions, we affirm that the true Church of Jesus Christ is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. It is manifested in the local eucharistic community, where the Word is preached and the sacraments administered,

under the oversight of the bishop or his representative. Further, both Orthodox and Porvoo churches' participants join in affirming many elements of a common vision of the unity of the Church, including the central place of the eucharist in the worship and life of the Church, the Catholicity of the local congregation and of the whole Church, the role of bishops in focusing unity and fostering appropriate diversity, and that the laity has an essential place in our theological understanding of the Church. Furthermore, we can join in affirming that the Holy Trinity is both the source and the model of an appropriate diversity in unity, and of unity in diversity, in the life of the Church.

Various questions were raised that need further discussion, including some which bear on differences between our church traditions. In respect of diversity, there was some disagreement about what would constitute legitimate diversity in the life of the Church, and points raised in discussion included the need to account for the roots of diversity and the need to develop or apply criteria for evaluating legitimate diversity. The unity of the Church, as expressed in outward, visible form, would need to be able to encompass considerable diversity, but how far and in what form this is so would need more exploration. Another area of disagreement concerned the Porvoo Common Statement's reference to the Church's need for repentance. A further area of discussion concerned the relationship between the inner, mystical reality of the Church and the particularity of historical churches. Relevant here would be the differing accounts of history, and of God's providence in history, offered by our church traditions.

A substantial discussion focused on the very use of the term 'church', which can be applied in ecumenical discussion in so many different ways and at so many different levels that misunderstanding can follow. There was agreement on the application of the word 'church' in relation both to the local eucharistic community and to the one true Church of Jesus Christ, and also common concern that the ecclesiological status of 'intermediate' notions such as 'national church' or 'denomination' had not as yet been adequately explored theologically. The Orthodox would see the autocephalous churches as full expressions of the one Church of Christ, and not as denominational divisions; but the Orthodox may also need to attend to overlapping jurisdictions in the Orthodox diaspora. The Porvoo churches perhaps need to consider further the nature of denominational identity in the light of situations in which the agreement itself has created overlapping or 'parallel' jurisdictions.

We discussed the concept of 'unity', and its relation to concepts of communion, catholicity, apostolicity, mutual accountability and love. We acknowledge that the Porvoo agreement establishes, not a complete model of unity, but rather a process towards closer unity. The Porvoo churches and the Orthodox Church share a common commitment to the full, visible unity of the Church. Both traditions could agree that full, visible unity would require at least: the total mutual recognition of ministries; a common theological basis; a corresponding, coherent liturgical and sacramental life; and full continuity with the living tradition of the Church. From the Orthodox side,

there would also be the need for the organization of the Church geographically according to canonical tradition.

The consultation was conducted in a spirit of mutual appreciation, trust and inquiry. It was held 'in between' Western and Eastern Easters, the Porvoo churches having already kept the Easter feast, while the Orthodox were still in Lent. The calendrical and liturgical difference helpfully reminded the participants of the necessity of continuing dialogue for the sake of Christ's followers in their ordinary discipleship.

We wish to thank the Conference of European Churches and the Brancoveanu monastery for making this consultation possible, and in particular the community of the monastery for their hospitality. Metropolitan Laurentius quoted a Romanian saying to the effect that the person sanctifies the place, but he added that the place may sanctify the person. We felt that our gathering, and our discussions, were indeed sanctified by this place. We hope to continue exploration of the topics outlined at Järvenpää in a further consultation, and recommend that the CEC strongly support that proposal. Participants are further invited to share their rich theological experience of the consultation with their colleagues and church members.

Participants:

Orthodox participants

Mrs. Elena Speranskaya, Russian Orthodox Church

Revd Prof. Dr. Daniel Benga, Romanian Orthodox Church

Mrs. Dr. Elenei Kasselouri and Mr. Georges Hatzivassiliadis, Church of Greece

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ionut Tudorie, Romanian Orthodox Church

Revd Prof. Dr. Vaclav Jezek, Orthodox Church in the Czeck Lands and Slovakia

Revd Prof. Rauno Pietarinen, Orthodox Church of Finland

Prof. Nathan Hoppe, Orthodox Church of Albania

Revd Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita, staff

Porvoo participants:

Revd Canon Dr. Anders Bergquist, Church of England

Revd Dr. Stephanie Dietrich, Church of Norway

Prof. Dr. Samuel Rubenson, Church of Sweden

Ms Anne Burghardt, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Estonia

Bishop Michael Jackson, Church of Ireland

Revd Canon Prof. John Riches, Scottish Episcopal Church

Revd Dr. Jeremy Morris, Church of England

Revd Dr. Matti Repo, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Dr. Kaisamari Hintikka, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Staff

Representative of the CPCE:

Prof. Dr. Stefan Tobler, Evangelical Church of the Confession of Augsburg, Romania