

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

**2. Consultation about the question on ecclesiology**

Lutherstadt Wittenberg, June 25 – 27, 2004

**COMMUNIQUE**

**We believe in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church”.**  
**(Charta Oecumenica I)**

From 25-27 June 2004 a consultation on the question of ecclesiology took place in the study centre “Leucorea” in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, the place of origin for the Reformation. This consultation was jointly organised by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – formerly called Leuenberg Church Fellowship. With this consultation the conversations which had begun in 2002 in the Orthodox Academy in Crete about the ecumenical significance of the teachings on the Church of Jesus Christ, were continued. Also in this second meeting, the participants were bishops, male and female theologians from Orthodox and Ancient Oriental churches, as well as the Lutheran, Reformed and United churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. A guest from the Porvoo Communion was also present. All these churches are CEC members.

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 this consultation was to describe and discuss the Orthodox ecclesiology. Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis/Graz presented the main paper on “The One Church and Its Unity. Some Considerations from the Viewpoint of Orthodox Theology”. Prof. Dr. Marksches/Berlin responded with a follow-up paper and commented on the Orthodox perspective from the viewpoint of the Reformation ecclesiology.

Both papers were intensely discussed. The teachings of the Church Fathers and the confessional statements of Constantinople (381) were perceived as fruitful ecumenical potentials for both sides. It turned out, however, that common terms are often used with different contents and interpreted differently. A remaining ecumenical task is to enlighten misunderstandings connected to this fact and to point out differences. A characteristic example was found in the question, whether the Orthodox use of the term “Mysterion” for the reality of the church expresses the same as the Protestant distinction between foundation and shape of the church.

Exclusivism according to which there is no truth and no salvation outside a certain church was critically considered. In soteriological as well as in ecclesiological respect it is not possible to distinguish simply between “inside” and “outside”. This also implies a new understanding of heresy and schism. Human beings cannot determine the boundaries of salvation by themselves. Thus the existing problems are understood as common difficulties in the Church of Jesus Christ, they encourage therefore not to emphasise what is separating the churches but to highlight what churches have in common and to make them aware of this.

Within the course of the discussion the following was found as an expression of a common position: Ecclesiology can only be dealt with properly within the context of the doctrine of the trinity, the context of christology, pneumatology, soteriology and theological anthropology. Ignoring any one of these perspectives leads inevitably to reductions. The universal church is not compiled of incomplete part-churches, but exists as a community of equally valid local churches, without any overriding importance or subordination of any of these churches. The local church is supplied with all the marks

of the nature of the church, which enable the salvation of human beings. The idea of love, which binds together the persons of the Trinity and in which they interpenetrate each (perichoresis) person, has come to be an important impulse for the understanding of the unity of the church.

Agreement exists on the basic meaning of the four essential attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church. However, differences were apparent concerning the interpretation of each of the attributes and their relation to the shape of the church, which can be experienced. The understanding of the holiness of the church, especially against the background of the Reformation perspective that the church as the people of God can also be called a sinner, led to a longer discussion. According to the Orthodox opinion the church as the body of Christ cannot sin. In the understanding that the holiness of the church is a gift of God to human beings, who confess their sins in every worship service, basic common features emerged. For the Protestant churches the confession of the holiness of the church is the main statement, and at the same time, with the reference to the fallibility and the need of forgiveness for the church they want to express that the church cannot be identified with the eschatological Kingdom of God.

As a task for further work the clarification of the attribute of apostolicity was recommended, especially the question of different forms of the apostolic succession and the relationship between Holy Scripture and Tradition as well as the authority of the Councils of the early church. Also the question which was raised in Crete, as to how far the understanding of unity in the Leuenberg Agreement can be a model for the unity between churches of the Reformation and Orthodox churches. Despite many commonly stressed positive elements, this could not be discussed more closely and needs further detailed consideration. In doing so the significance of the sacraments, Eucharist in particular, should be discussed more intensively.

Services of the Word as well as prayers were an important part of the consultation, which took place in a very constructive and hospitable atmosphere. This was valued by the participants as a good example for ecumenical dialogue, in which people try to understand each other, rather than trying to teach one another. Together the issuing of the Confessio Augustana on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1530 was honoured. The participants recommend to the Conference of European Churches and the Leuenberg Church Fellowship the continuation of dialogue. The continuing talks should consider how the common witness and the common service of the churches in a Europe which is growing together, can be strengthened and how the life of the participating churches can be given the benefit of the talks.

Lutherstadt Wittenberg, 27 June 2004

#### **List of participants:**

CPCE Delegation: Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker (EKD), Oberkirchenrat Dr. Michael Bünker (Ev. Church of the A.C. in Austria), Rev. Caterina Dupré (Tavola Valdese), Dr. Juhani Forsberg (Ev-Lutheran Church of Finland), Oberkirchenrätin Dr. Dagmar Heller (EKD), Oberkirchenrätin Dr. Christina Kayales (VELKD), Prof. Dr. Christoph Marksches (HU Berlin), Rev. Dr. Peter McEnhill (Church of Scotland)

CEC Delegation: Ciprian D. Burlacioiu (Romanian Orthodox Church), Prof. Dr. Anestis Keselopoulos (Church of Greece), Prof. Dr. Dimitra Koukoura (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Graz), Lecturer Dr. Nicolae Mosoiu (Romanian Orthodox Church), Prof. Dr. Alexandros Papaderos (Ecumenical Patriarchate), H.E. Bishop Dr. Yeznik Petrossian (Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church), Archpriest Veikko Purmonen (Finnish Orthodox Church), Deacon Alexander Vasyutin (Russian Orthodox Church).

Advisers: Prof. Dr. Reinhard Frieling (Marburg), Rev. Canon Dr. Charles Hill (Porvoo Communion)  
Guest: Lecturer Dr. Hans-Peter Großhans (Tübingen)

Staff:

CPCE: President Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier (Director of the Secretariat), KR Dr. Christine-Ruth Müller  
CEC: Rev. Dr. Keith Clements (General Secretary), Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita. (Study Secretary)

Interpreters: Dr. Tamara Hahn, Rev. (cand.) Stephan Johanus