

Conference of European Churches

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe

- Leuenberg Church Fellowship -

4th Protestant-Orthodox Consultation: Baptism in the Life of Our Churches

Vienna, 30 October – 1 November 2008

Communiqué

(1) Between 30 October and 1 November 2008 a consultation took place in Vienna on the topic “Baptism in the Life of Our Churches”. The consultation had been organized jointly by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of European Churches in Europe (CPCE) – formerly the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. It continued the conversations started in 2002 in the Orthodox Academy of Crete and taken further in 2004 in Luther’s city of Wittenberg and in 2006 in the Phanar in Istanbul. Bishops and theologians from Orthodox churches on the one hand and from the Lutheran, Reformed and United churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe in the other also took part in this fourth meeting. Likewise one observer each from the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Porvoo Church Fellowship were present. All these churches belong to the CEC.

(2) The co-chairs of the conference were Metropolitan Prof. Gennadios of Sassima (for the CEC) and Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker (for the CPCE).

(3) The results of the discussion on baptism in previous bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues of recent decades were described in two introductory contributions. Pr. Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita spoke on baptism in the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogues; Prof. Dr Michael Beintker on baptism in the Orthodox-Reformed dialogues. From the beginning these dialogues indicated a high degree of agreement on the nature of Christian baptism.

(4) Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima described baptism in the life of the Orthodox Church. He emphasized that now was the *kairos*, the time to produce a common understanding of baptism, in order in the medium term to attain full eucharistic fellowship. He developed the basic features of the Orthodox doctrine of baptism in detail, especially the connection with chrismation and the eucharist, and described the ecclesiological perspectives for a reciprocal recognition of baptism. Here the Orthodox reservations about some phenomena in the baptismal theology and practice of the Western tradition must be listened to and worked on. Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae Mosoiu spoke on the order of the Holy Mystery of baptism in the Orthodox Church; he spelt out the wealth of the Orthodox baptismal liturgy and its relations to Holy Scripture and church tradition, especially to what is said by the church fathers. He described the role of baptism in the process of the saving event and explained its place in the contexts of the life of the church. He emphasized as a special feature of the Orthodox understanding of baptism both its inner unity and also the difference between baptism and chrismation. Prof. Mosoiu also emphasized that through baptism and chrismation Christ takes shape (*morphe*) in those who are baptised and consequently God accepts them as sons and daughters.

(5) From the CPCE side Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel spoke on baptism and the baptismal order in the life of the Protestant church and Prof. Dr. Martin Wallraff on stimuli from the theology of the church fathers for the Protestant understanding of baptism. Starting from empirical investigations into the current significance of baptism in the Protestant churches, Prof. Nüssel developed the Protestant doctrine of baptism and the elements of Protestant baptismal practice. A baptism which is administered in accordance with the gospel does not become valid by human recognition of it; it is valid through God's promise and his action in baptism. Human recognition of baptism therefore can only mean assent to God's promise in baptism. She gave as an example the reciprocal recognition of baptism by eleven churches in Germany, in which baptism is reckoned to be a "sign of unity", because the baptized is united with Christ and at the same time with his people of all times and places. Prof. Wallraff recalled the consensus of the early church which manifested itself in Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381), according to which any baptism with water in the name of the triune God is to be regarded as valid. He pointed out that the Protestant understanding also agreed with the patristic

tradition that baptism is grounded in faith and presupposes it. Prof. Wallraff also illuminated by means of Augustine the connection between baptism, evangelization and education which has again become topical today.

(6) The importance of the topic, namely that baptism is of central importance for the life of the church, was confirmed at the consultation. Both sides once again endorsed the view that baptism with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be repeated. There is agreement between the two traditions about the nature of baptism. Likewise the view was endorsed that baptism is as a rule administered by ordained persons. The consensus on the essential elements of the celebration of baptism could be worked out more clearly: the creed, the baptismal questions, the renunciation of evil, the commitment to life in accordance with baptism and the word of blessing. The rich diversity of liturgical forms does not separate the churches; it can be an enrichment. There is also unanimity that baptism is to be performed in the presence of the community. The use of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed is appropriate to the common understanding of baptism and to the state of ecumenical dialogue achieved. In both traditions – despite all the differences – it should be noted how baptism, chrismation and eucharist on the one hand and baptism, confirmation and Lord's Supper belong together. According to the Orthodox view baptism and chrismation find their fulfilment in the eucharist. Both traditions face the task of taking up the significance of baptism and faith in Christian instruction in view of the questions about meaning asked by men and women today and to clarify the message of the gospel.

(7) Both traditions produce good arguments for the reciprocal recognition of baptism. Regardless of all differences that still exist, we recommend that our churches should take steps towards a reciprocal recognition of baptism if this is not yet the case. In view of the existing differences we are aware that ecclesiological consequences which call for further work are bound up with a fundamental agreement on baptism and its reciprocal recognition. Thus for example the different views about chrismation and confirmation must be brought closer together.

(8) The conference took place in a very constructive, open and friendly atmosphere. On 30 October those taking part were guests at the Reformation reception of the

Protestant churches in Austria. On 31 October – the day of the commemoration of the Reformation – they attended solemn worship in the Lutheran City Church in Vienna. Following that they were received by His Eminence the Metropolitan of Austria, Dr. Michael Staikos, at his official residence. During the audience the Metropolitan bestowed on the Bishop of the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria and General Secretary of the CPCE, Dr. Michael Bünker, on behalf of His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Cross of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Metropolitan explicitly welcomed the process of theological consultation between the Orthodox churches in the framework of the CEC and the churches of the CPCE and emphasized that the reciprocal recognition of baptism was taken for granted in Austria. Common prayers were an important part of the consultation. Personal encounter and joint theological work considerably deepened the fellowship between those taking part in the consultation process and their understanding of each other's traditions. They indicate that the consultation process will be continued.

Vienna, 1 November 2008

Translated from the German original

**Konsultation der Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen (KEK) und der
Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)
– Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft –**

**4. Konsultationsgespräch
Zeit: 30.10.-02.11.2008 ; Ort: Kardinal König Haus, Wien**

List of Participants

Orthodox Delegates	
Dr. Ciprian Burlacioiu	Romanian Orthodox Church
H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima	Ecumenical Patriarchate
Prof. Dr. Anestis Keselopoulos	Church of Greece
Prof. Dr. Dimitria Koukoura	Ecumenical Patriarchate
Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis	Ecumenical Patriarchate
H.E. Metropolitan Michael of Austria	Ecumenical Patriarchate
Prof. Dr. Nicolae Mosoiu	Romanian Orthodox Church
Archpriest Veikko Purmonen	Finnish Orthodox Church
V. Rev. Archimandrite Athenagoras Ziliaskopoulos	Ecumenical Patriarchate
Protestant Delegates	
Rev. Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker	EKD
Rev. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich	Church of Norway
Rev. Caterina Duprè	Chiesa evangelica Valdese
Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Großhans	Univesity Münster
Rev. Dr. Olga Lukacs	Babes Bojai University
Rev. Dr. Peter McEnhill	Church of Scotland
Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel	EKD
Rev. Marita Tuomi	Evangelical Lutheran Church Finnland
Prof. Dr. Martin Wallraff	Ev. Luth Church Italy
Observer	
H.E. Archbishop Mesrop Krikorian	Armenic Apostolic Church
The Rt. Revd. Michael Jackson	Church of Ireland

Staff	
Rev. Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita	CEC
Rev. Dr. Jochen Kramm	CPCE
Mrs. Renate Sbeghen	Interpreter
Mrs. Donata Coleman	Interpreter