

Report of
The Consultation on “Visions of Unity in our Churches – Points of
Convergence”
of The Churches in Dialogue Commission of
THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES
Budapest, 22-23 June 2011

The Churches in Dialogue Commission of the Conference of European Churches held a Consultation on “Visions of Unity in our churches – Points of Convergence” at Ráday College, Budapest from 22-23 June 2011. Those present were the CiD members as well as: Bishop emeritus, Dr Walter Klaiber, Methodist (Germany); Dr Martyn Davie Anglican (UK); Prof. Dr Annemarie C. Mayer, Roman-Catholic (Germany) and Prof. Dr. Konstantinos Delikostantis, Orthodox, Greece.

Five papers were presented on the theme of the Consultation from diverse perspectives:

Methodist: Bishop emeritus, Dr Walter Klaiber

Anglican, Dr Martyn Davie

Orthodox, Revd Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita

Roman Catholic: Prof. Dr Annemarie C. Mayer.

Lutheran/Reformed: Prof Dr Friederike Nüssel

“With the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to the witness of Holy Scripture and as expressed in the ecumenical Nicene – Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, we believe in the Triune God: Father Son and Holy Spirit . Because we here confess “one Holy

Catholic and Apostolic Church “ our paramount ecumenical task is to show forth this unity , which is always a gift of God”. (Charta Oecumenica 1)

Recalling these words of Charta Oecumenica we identified in the papers and conversations a number of points of convergence:

Convergence 1

The Unity of the Church is from God, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is not of our making but at the same time it demands our commitment to respond to God’s call to be one in word and deed.

Convergence 2

Unity demands expression in life and mission. Our search for unity must always be seen against the horizon of a lost and broken world to which the Church is called to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ. In our divisions we need appropriate structures or networks to enable this to happen.

Convergence 3

Between ecclesial and Eucharistic community there is an organic link. Any separation between these should be avoided. Unity of the church and in the Eucharist have to go together. There are steps that lead towards this but they are not a substitute for the ultimate goal of unity.

Convergence 4

Christian Identities are rich gifts of God to be shared with each other. We have to wrestle with the question about the

relationship between the maintenance of our particular ecclesial identities and the search for the visible unity in the One Church of Christ.

Convergence 5

The search for unity always exists in a particular context. We have to discern how our quest for unity relates to the timing of God and demands of mission in any given time or situation. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5) and one we must exercise when considering how to take forward the ecumenical agenda, not confusing God's timing with our own.

Convergence 6

“One Holy Catholic and Apostolic” is the starting point of the theological reflection on unity. The unity of the Church has to find expression in a Catholicity formed by a common confession of the Apostolic faith, common worship/liturgy, and a shared life and mission.

Convergence 7

The unity of the Church also requires both conciliar fellowship and mutual reception of conciliar decisions by the churches. There need to be structures that allow us to receive and reflect together on ecumenical texts, including the challenges outlined in the previous points of convergence .

Convergence 8

Using the same terms does not always lead to or reflect common understanding. Conversely different terms can mask a common

understanding. We need thus to continue in dialogue in a way that listens closely to the different ways words are used and interpreted. This takes humility and a capacity to hear and receive. However difference of interpretation can be a means of spiritual enrichment so long as listening goes on.

II

The five papers were warmly received and it is hoped that they will be published in due course. The task of the meeting was to try to discern points of convergence and divergence in the conception of the unity of the Church, as the main goal of the ecumenical movement. Our conclusion is not a statement but a description of some points of interest which we believe deserve further exploration. These emerged from the different presentations and points of view expressed in the discussion:

1. Christian Unity expressed from a **Methodist** viewpoint especially emphasized the missionary perspective of the Church.

Christian unity is based on the common essential convictions of the Trinitarian faith, and is inspired by a spirit of love and mutual respect, the shared love of God, the love of one another and the love of our neighbors, especially those who are most in need of the witness in word and deed. The interdependence between spirituality, worship and witness was expressed with reference to “evangelical , catholic and missionary” dimensions of the life of the Church.

2. The starting point for the unity of the Church from the **Anglican** perspective is the conviction that the unity of the church already exists since all God’s faithful people living and departed are perfectly united

with God in Christ and therefore with each other in the *communio sanctorum*. The problem with Church unity is how to give this fundamental unity appropriate expression in a visible form in line with the teaching of Scripture and the Fathers of the early and undivided Church. Since 1888 the churches of the Anglican Communion have developed an approach to this problem, classically expressed in the Appeal to all Christian People of 1920 in the basis of the four points of the Lambeth Quadrilateral (the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, the Apostles and Nicene Creed, the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and the historic episcopate locally adapted to the varying needs of the local church) in dialogue with the evolving thought of the wider ecumenical movement. From an Anglican perspective Anglicanism like all church traditions is a transitory phenomenon which will one day be taken up into the wider unity of a visibly re-united Church in which its gifts of faith and order will find a home. According to the Anglican viewpoint this visibly re-united Church can be seen according to the New Testament as an organic unity, a conciliar fellowship and as local churches existing in a relationship of autonomy – in –communion marked by mutual responsibility and interdependence.

3. The unity of Church is a matter of constant concern for the **Orthodox** Church and its life and worship. Understanding the Church as “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic” is the starting point of the theological reflection on unity, as those properties derived from the theanthropic constitution of the Church as the Body of Christ. The prototype of this unity is the triune God whereas the measure of it is catholicity. The Church has always felt herself united in faith, love, in the one baptism and holiness of life, and especially in the common partaking of the

Eucharist. In the Eucharist celebrated *epi to auto*, it is the same Christ that is communicated from the Apostolic times to today. It is the whole Christ confessed and transmitted from generation to generation in all places. On the basis of the Eucharistic ecclesiology the unity of the Church is essentially centered on the bishop, but the bishop is never alone but acts with his presbyters and deacons in the midst of the Christian community. The bishop is the sign and guarantee of the diachronic and synchronic unity of the Church across space and time.

In Orthodoxy the One Church does not exist as something above and beyond the diversity of particular local churches. Rather the One Church is precisely the diverse local churches in full sacramental and ecclesial communion with each other on the basis of the One Apostolic faith that they all confess and which is expressed in the Liturgy and in their manner of life and witness in the world.

4. The vision of unity from the perspective of the **Catholic** Church might best be described based on the following three questions: (1) What does the overall vision of the unity of the Catholic Church look like? (2) What should this unity in practice look like? (3) And how can an operational implementation of the model preferred by the Catholic side be achieved?

The overall goal consists in the unity of all Christians in the *Una Sancta*, the one and only Church of Jesus Christ. From this long-term goal follow elements and factors which provide the framework for an ecumenically compatible model of unity from a Catholic perspective. If the Church is understood more as a sacramental entity than an institution, the Christ mystery represented in the Eucharist releases and demands communion in the apostolic faith, the sacraments and a ministry serving the two. This highlights in an ecumenical context the intra-Catholic stressing of the interdependence of Eucharistic and ecclesial

communion, ministry and church and Church universal and particular or local churches. These (intra-Catholic) elements constitute the parameters for a model of operational implementation as a *communio* of denominational churches still in imperfect communion with the Catholic Church which should become local churches in the full sense of the word. In this model of 'ecumenical' *communio* ecclesiology the Papal ministry is conceived of as being in the centre of unity and the communion/college of bishops rather than having just juridical tasks for the governing of the Church.

5. The ecclesiology of the Community of the **Protestant** Churches in Europe takes as its starting point the fact that the classical Reformation marks of the Church make the One Church of Jesus Christ visible to the eyes of faith. On the basis of this Reformation understanding of the Church CPCE has developed a model of unity based on differentiated consensus that has succeeded in overcoming the divisions of the Lutheran and Reformed churches in relation to Christology, Eucharistic theology and predestination. In CPCE the general priesthood of all believers is seen to result in the responsibility of all Christians to bear witness to the Gospel. The CPCE also holds that God calls ministers of word and sacrament that are ordained to do public proclamation of the Gospel, and that episcopate/oversight is necessary for the sake of the unity of the church in its proclamation of the Gospel.

Conclusion

We are Christians from a wide range of Church traditions and yet we see the importance of holding together the Church's liturgy and ministry with its witness and service in the world. We all see a picture of the Church which corresponds to the model given to us in Scripture and particularly in St Luke's account of the Church in Acts 2:37-47. On this basis we long and pray for the unity of the Church, transcending

the historic divisions between East and West, Catholic and Protestants. We consider it our common challenge to all who follow Christ to explore with fellow Christians how our eight points of convergence are reflected in our respective traditions and to discern with penitence and hope how the barriers between Christians that prevent this vision of the Church receiving its full realization may be broken down to the glory of God, so that the divisions between God's people may be healed as a sign, instrument and foretaste of that day when all things on heaven and earth are united to God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10).

We urge our churches, to commit themselves:

“to follow the Apostolic exhortation of the letter to the Ephesians and persevere in seeking a common understanding of Christ's message of salvation in the Gospel; in the power of the Holy Spirit, to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one Faith ,expressed in the mutual recognition of baptism and in Eucharistic fellowship as well as in common witness and service”. (Charta Oecumenica 1)

Report approved by the meeting