

## Report of the Presidium – General Assembly Budapest 2006

### Strengthening Community – The Profile of Protestantism in Europe

Europe is growing together. What will Protestantism look like and what challenges will it have to face? The future of the churches lies in their task of witnessing to reconciliation with God and with one another. The Protestant churches reconciled by the Leuenberg Agreement have experience along this way, which is neither natural nor simple. A real fellowship in witness and service of more than 100 churches throughout Europe has grown out of the theological consensus and fellowship in preaching and the eucharist. However, the hermeneutical openness which the concept of ‘fellowship’ brings into being allows different views, from a minimalistic understanding (the *Agreement* as a peace treaty), through an instrumental understanding (the *Agreement* as a framework for common action or as protection for minority churches) or a confessionalistic understanding (the *Agreement* as an alliance of Protestant churches), to a maximalist understanding of the fellowship as ‘one’ church.

The theme of this General Assembly is meant to emphasize the quality of the fellowship that has grown up, which has potential for the future of the churches and for reconciliation in Europe. Our report builds on the hallmarks of this fellowship.

#### 1. The CPCE is above all a worshipping fellowship

The study ‘The Church of Jesus Christ’ emphasizes the origin and foundation of the church in God’s justifying action to his people and thus shows the church as a fellowship which arises from God’s service to it, in the power of the Holy Spirit, as a ‘fellowship of believers’. It is the nature of the church to be a worshipping community which finds its expression in the regular celebration of worship.

As a fellowship reconciled in Christ, the CPCE lives by the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. This common participation in word and sacrament has consequences for all the spheres of the life of the community. This relationship between the foundation in worship and the practice of celebrating together requires the consensus also to be celebrated and experienced in a common life of worship. This is not a matter of liturgical uniformity or of the need to establish a formulation of faith which is the only one possible, but of a common confession of and participation in the body of Christ.

##### *1.1 Strengthening the fellowship in worship and church life*

This awareness that the common life of worship which is part of the declaration of fellowship should also be cultivated was implicit in the LA. The General Assembly in Belfast first expressed the will that the allied churches should also deliberately grow together more strongly in the life of worship.

A working group commissioned by the Executive Committee took as a first project the development of liturgical material for a ‘Leuenberg Sunday’ and for worship or regional Kirchentage extending beyond frontiers. In 2003 the working group, Frau Kirchenrat Susanne Labsch and Prof. Helmut Schwier (until 2001 the CPCE theological officer), under the direction of Dr Peter Bukowski, presented a trilingual collection of liturgical material: ‘We celebrate the diversity of churches’, prayers and texts from the signatory churches. As the

Executive Committee wanted to continue this work in a consistent way, in 2003 it called Dr Peter Bukowki to be the commissioner for liturgy. With the 'Department for Worship in the Rhineland' and its head, Pastor Dr Evang, he continued the project of an Internet area 'Liturgy for Leuenberg', which is meant to serve exchanges of the liturgical life of the churches. From July 2005 the team expanded the range with a liturgy page for each church; this has now been implemented with the competent help of our webmaster and specialist for communications, Thomas Flügge. Not only information about the worship of all the churches but also current orders of worship and materials on European themes and liturgical projects and institutions can be found here. Motivated by the success of this Internet area, Dr Hüffmeier proposed to the Executive Committee that they should think of a CPCE hymnbook. Thanks to the collaboration of Dr Christine-Ruth Müller and Herr Flügge, along with Frau Dorothea Monninger and Dr Ilsabe Seibt of the International Fellowship for Research in for Hymnology (IAH), you have the layout for a 'Protestant Hymnbook for Europe' in front of you, with a large selection of hymns in their original languages, 'Colours of Grace'. It also contains songs and elements of the liturgy of other churches.

Another project is still to come, the development of church partnerships right across Europe. The Secretariat sent a questionnaire about existing partnerships and consultations to the churches, and the next Executive Committee must discuss their continuation. The 'European Conference for Protestant Church Music' also offered possibilities for collaboration which must be further reflected on in the future.

### *1.2 A worshipping fellowship as a teaching fellowship*

As a worshipping fellowship the CPCE should also be a teaching fellowship, in order to be able to articulate the differentiated consensus. The doctrinal conversations are the qualitative hallmark of the CPCE, according to LA 39 an important element in church fellowship, since they serve as a constant check on the theological consensus. Since Belfast a tendency to move from reflection on the questions which separate to the construction of common projects has been evident. Thus the two present 'project studies' are not doctrinal conversation texts, but rather impulses towards praxis. They should not be tested primarily as texts but as a starting point for concrete proposals for the future of the CPCE and for further work in the communities.

- '**Evangelizing**' enumerates the new challenges for the Christian churches in Europe: how can the message of the reconciliation of God with men and women be formulated in a credible way, how can people be made enthusiastic about the faith without a zeal for conversion? The document indicates the desire to formulate a 'profiled understanding of mission' for Protestant churches in Europe. It was also to be the aim of this study to consider whether a church fellowship can be a vehicle for evangelization, and this should also be part of our discussions about the future of the CPCE.

- The study '**The Shape and Shaping** of Protestant Churches in a Changing Europe' was originally desired by the General Assembly in Belfast to clarify the specific features of church fellowship in a Reformation perspective. Both the project group and also the South East Central Europe Group have devoted themselves to this task. In order to clarify the mandate for any group, the Executive Committee asked the project group to consider specifically the question of the future of the CPCE as a concrete task for the General Assembly.

- The regional study '**Shaping the Church, Gaining the Future**', which in the end has concerned itself more with theological problems than with case studies, is an interesting and illuminating background documentation which can also be used very well in the communities and in theological research. Work on the text in the General Assembly is envisaged only on the project study, with consideration of the contribution from the South East Europe Group.

Two working groups are envisaged for the theme, one only on the text of the study project and the other on the future organization of the CPCE.

- The fine older study '**Law and Gospel**, especially in respect of Decision Making on Ethical Questions', with its twofold perspective, was not accepted in Belfast but referred to the churches for their opinions. The final editing has been complete since 2005. It is unrealistic to strive for an even better revision. Therefore the Executive Committee has decided to publish it and commend it to the attention of the churches, so that this difficult theological theme continues to be discussed.

It is thus evident that the classical doctrinal conversations continue to have relevance but need to be reflected on afresh in the face of present-day challenges. The questions which do not separate churches are also still provoking conflicts in the churches' life together.

### *1.3 A worshipping fellowship as life together which crosses frontiers*

Church fellowship is anchored in the everyday growing together which is taking place in the regions. Alongside the work of the churches in crossing frontiers by the exchange of pastors, visits of communities, regional Kirchentage and the Internet, mention should be made of the regional theological collaboration which is being strengthened and inspired by shared worship and which in turn nourishes worship.

### **Consultations**

The instrument introduced in Belfast for regional forums and consultations on political, social and especially theological and church questions has proved its importance for the growing together of the churches across frontiers.

Consultations on theological education in Europe (2003 CPCE and EKD), on bioethics (2003 CEC with the support of the CPCE, with non-Protestant churches) and on the challenges of migration and the right to asylum (2004 by the Conference of the Churches of the Rhine [CCR] and CPCE, financed by the Church of Baden) allow the churches to consult their neighbours wherever important questions for the future are at stake.

Two consultations on the topic of 'Binding commitment in and between the churches' were organized in Strasbourg by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, the Advisory Committee of the 'Church and Society' Commission of the CEC and the Committee of the 'Conference of the Churches on the Rhine' for church leaders on both sides of the Rhine. The results of the consultations (13-15 December 2002 and 26-27 November 2004) were taken further in May 2005 as an inspiration for the Conference of Leading Clergy of the Churches on the Rhine and documented with a reader.

### **Regional groups**

The regular work of the constituted regional groups runs alongside the consultations. Here too there is welcome potential, with requests for new groups. So far officially only two regional groups exist, of different extents.

The South East Europe Group comprises 25 churches from 14 countries and enjoys a long tradition of shared work for the General Assemblies. The younger North West Europe Group comprises 12 churches from 5 countries (the Benelux countries, France and north-west Germany), which meet for discussion once a year.

Two new proposals come from the signatory churches: Denmark proposes that the former 'Copenhagen Regional Group' should be revived. If Poland and Russia could take part in it as well as the Scandinavian and Baltic churches, a real North East Europe Group would be created. Another request comes from the five church leaders on the upper Rhine. This body requests the Executive Committee to set up smaller Euro-regional consultation groups. The church leaders declare themselves ready to

install and co-ordinate such a regional group themselves (which could possibly even be attractive to all the churches on the Rhine). It would also be worth reflecting whether the General Assembly could not encourage the churches on the Rio de la Plata to form a regional group in their Latin American context.

Beyond doubt it is important for regional work to be intensified in the future. Theological collaboration that crosses frontiers which is also evocative for worship and in this way has existential and ecclesial consequences locally, forms more bonds (and is therefore more binding) than resolutions of the General Assembly. Regional collaboration becomes an existential motivation for the local communities and there are already very fruitful experiments in frontier regions.

However, the question of the mandate for these regional alliances inexorably arises. Regionalization is not to be understood as a territorialism of the regions but as the rooting of the local church fellowship. If the General Assembly confirms this orientation, the mandate of the regional groups would be to further the influence of the work of reconciliation by the regional churches growing together. The relationship to the doctrinal conversation groups would arise as a question only if a regional group collaborated in the themes of the doctrinal conversations. If the division of work is then clarified and supported in advance, both ways of working meet. The working group which is concerned with the future structure of the CPCE should also discuss these questions intensively.

## **2. Protestant fellowship**

### *2.1 The commission from Belfast: strengthening the Protestant voice in Europe*

The Belfast General Assembly emphatically required the voice of the Protestant churches in Europe to be strengthened and to be more clearly audible. In the future the Leuenberg Church Fellowship should be in a position, more prominently and more promptly than before, to give a clear Protestant witness on important current questions of politics, society and the ecumene and to build up its presence at a European level. The work of the Presidium and the Executive Committee have lastingly inspired and shaped the relevant resolutions.

Only if they make a common appearance do the Protestant churches in Europe have an opportunity to be seen and heard in the European public sphere. Their profile, rooted in the message of justification, should be recognizable to everyone. The special profile given with the confessionality of a church does not represent a state which is defective and therefore has to be avoided or overcome. Rather, being defined by different confessions is a phenomenon of the one church of Jesus Christ that has developed; it needs to be taken seriously and accepted and is to be regarded as a productive challenge to the life of the churches together, in the knowledge of the bond transcending the frontiers of churches and confessions which is always already given in Christ. The fellowship of the Protestant churches of Europe with their different confessions lives by this productive challenge. We can imagine that the positive experiences bound up with this need not remain a privilege of the churches which emerged from the Reformation.

It is important to recall the study 'The Church of Jesus Christ' which was approved in Vienna in 1994, with which we have described and expressed the understanding of the church that binds us together, namely that the origin of the church – the foundation from which it lives – can be expressed only in statements

which show the action of God which precedes all human action – that action in which the triune God elects the church, in which he calls it and justifies it, hallows it and sends it. The event which makes the church the church and which in a sovereign way precedes all human action and shaping is God's justifying act of liberation which is attested in the preaching of the gospel and celebrated with the sacraments.

We would therefore misunderstand the Belfast stimulus towards strengthening the Protestant voice in Europe if we were to reduce it simply to the level of Protestant public relations or even lobbying on the European stage. Qualified public relations are undoubtedly important. But here it cannot primarily be a matter of us and the special concern of Protestant churches. First of all it is important that the gospel which our voices often make so dumb is given a voice and that witness is borne to the action of God which precedes all human action. Our central question must be how the gospel of the justification of the godless by faith alone comes to people of the 21st century. Whether the Protestant voice is heard in Europe depends essentially on how the voice of the gospel can be heard in Europe.

## *2.2 Conferences of the Union of Protestant Churches*

The annual conferences for church members from the CPCE sphere are a model sphere of work for hearing the voice of the gospel. They are financed by the Union of Protestant Churches in the framework of its 'Berlin Bible Weeks', but largely organized by the CCE Secretariat, which prepares their themes. Without the committed collaboration of Kirchenrat Gerhard Frey-Reininghaus from Prague and Pastor Hans Jürgen Luibl from Erlangen it would be impossible to hold them in this form. The interest in reciprocal exchanges, the study of the Bible and getting to know the diversity of Protestant churches is still as great as it ever was. Themes like the expansion of the European Union (2002), the encounter with Islam in Europe (2003) or church buildings in East and Western Europe between rebuilding, converting and abandoning (2005) have been gratefully received. This work has been supplemented since 2004 by a range of UPC study conferences also for pastors from the CPCE sphere, which represent a further important element in the growing together of the church fellowship.

## *2.3 'Protestant voice' and press relations*

Following the Belfast resolutions the press relations of the CPCE have been put on a new basis. Since then there have been professional press releases for all events, conferences and declarations. They have been supplemented by interviews and occasionally by press conferences. Press relations have been entrusted to Oberkirchenrat Udo Hahn. It is especially thanks to his commitment that the Protestant voice has been heard in the world of the European media in an unprecedented way.

In April 2006 a further range of information was created with an Internet newsletter which appears at regular intervals and sums up news and documents from the work of the CPCE, its member churches and the European Union. Happily, demand is great.

## *2.4 The study of Protestant theology in Europe*

The strengthening of a voice always begins with shaping and cultivating it. The places assigned for shaping and cultivating the Protestant voice are the faculties of Protestant

theology and seminaries in Europe. It is no exaggeration to say that the quality of theological education will be a key factor in deciding the quality of the Protestant voice in tomorrow's Europe. Thus in 2003, under the mandate of the Executive Committee in collaboration with the EKD in Berlin, an international consultation took place on 'Education towards the Ordained Ministry within the Leuenberg Church Fellowship'. Invitations were sent to experts in theological education from 15 European countries.

Those who took part in the consultation called for the development, in rapid steps, of common, binding, Europe-wide standards for the content of the study of theology and examinations in it which lead to ordination within the churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship. As far as possible a suitable body of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship should be established for this. In the development of new curricula within the framework of the so-called Bologna process, account should be taken of the aspects of compatibility, mobility, college didactics and transparency. Only curricula which correspond to the standards to be agreed on can be recognized by institutions of theological education and the churches. A bachelor's degree which can be achieved after only three years of study does not fulfil these standards and cannot be regarded as a professional qualification for the pastorate.

The Executive Committee has welcomed the recommendations of the consultation and will present to the General Assembly a draft resolution on a project on the theme 'Theology Study for the Ordained Ministry in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe'. We imagine that a project group will be commissioned to work out the study, which can be approved as a basic document on theological education in the CPCE after being circulated in the churches.

### **3. The CPCE takes part in ecumenical fellowship**

The LA takes on a key role as a model of 'differentiated consensus' which makes possible stages of the reconciliation of formerly separated churches on the basis of doctrinal conversations:

The statement of a 'common understanding of the gospel', the statement that the former doctrinal condemnations no longer apply to the present-day teaching of these churches, pulpit and table fellowship, reciprocal recognition of ordination and making possible inter-celebration and the declaration and realization of church fellowship.

The possibilities of hermeneutic and method are evident in the fact that they have also proved themselves in the declarations between other churches, as for example between the Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed churches and in the 'Joint Declaration' by the Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Here the LA should not serve as an 'export model' but as a hermeneutical inspiration and a basis for similar texts with other churches. In this way it will fulfil its task of being at the service of the wider ecumene. Steps in the quest for unity differ, depending on the partner church.

#### *3.1 The ecumene within Protestantism*

The CPCE churches stand in forms of fellowship with **non-European Reformed and Lutheran churches** at an international level, especially through the Lutheran World Federation (as a communion of churches), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council. Thus there is a common life. However, this could

be deepened, and that is what the collaboration between the LWF and the WARC is striving for. The Reformation churches of other continents are also attempting to declare and deepen fellowships in their own context with the help of models which are related to the LA.

In the USA in 1997 'A Formula of Agreement' was signed as church fellowship between a Lutheran church, two Reformed churches and a United church. Church fellowship between the Anglican and Lutheran churches there became possible in 1999 through 'Called to Common Mission'.

A church fellowship has now become possible in the Middle East: on 26 January 2006 the 'Declaration of Amman' came into being, between Lutheran and Reformed churches. This agreement affects around 1.3 million believers and like the LA attempts a joint formulation of what agreement on central issues makes it possible for the churches to realize fellowship. These churches have agreed to take part in one another's worship, to celebrate the eucharist together, to give joint prophetic testimony for justice and peace, and to carry through joint projects which promote ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. Their eucharistic fellowship, the exchange of clergy and reciprocal participation in synods are orientated on a more effective presence in society and the task of reconciling cultures and religions. Particularly in the acute situation in the Middle East we have some idea of the prophetic role that these reconciled churches have.

The CPCE churches hoped to make a declaration of reciprocal recognition **with the Anglican churches** in Europe at a pan-European level after the Meissen and Porvoo Declarations had come into being, and also after the Reuilly Declaration (1999). A first consultation in September 1995 at Liebfrauenberg in Alsace had introduced the question. Subsequently, on 1 November 2003, the 'Anglican-Methodist Covenant' between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England was signed; this is a reciprocal recognition with eucharistic hospitality and recognition of ministries, but without any exchange of clergy. This declaration forms so to speak an ideal bridge to the CPCE and a model for further discussion. The dialogue at Liebfrauenberg was continued in this direction from 22-24 October 2004. The delegates from the Anglican churches asked for understanding of the fact that because of internal difficulties in their own communion they were not at present in a position to take far-reaching ecumenical steps. A continuation in a smaller group took place from 20 to 23 October 2005 in Klingenthal in Alsace. This session opened up a discussion of whether the remaining differences in ecclesiology really separated the churches. A further consultation is planned for 2007.

Hitherto no church fellowship has been possible **with the Baptist churches**, because of the dissent over the understanding of baptism. The result of the conversations between the European Baptist Federation and the CPCE, 'The Beginning of the Christian Life and the Nature of the Church', has been published as Leuenberg Text 9 and is to be discussed at the General Assembly, not primarily as a text but as a basis for further considerations on the recognition of baptism.

It could also be considered whether a study on the charismatic movements within the CPCE churches should not be on the agenda.

### *3.2 The inter-confessional ecumene*

The emphasis on a eucharistic fellowship in which the churches preserve their autonomy, but understand themselves as a conciliar fellowship, links us **with the Orthodox churches**. However, because of the divergences, particularly in ecclesiology, so

far no recognition of the Protestant churches from the Orthodox side has been possible.

With the CEC it has been possible to co-organize three consultations with the aim of a better understanding. It is evident that while we have a common basis in patristics, shared theological concepts are often given different content and interpreted differently, so that an important ecumenical task is to clarify the misunderstandings bound up with this in order to be able to analyse the differences better. From 28 November to 2 December 2002 the first session took place on Crete (Leuenberg Texts 8) under the guidance of Dr Hüffmeier and Prof. Viorel Ionita; it was concerned with the Orthodox criticism of the Leuenberg Agreement. The second session in Wittenberg from 25 to 27 June 2004 devoted its attention to the theme of ecclesiology. The group was invited to Constantinople by Patriarch Bartholomew from 27-30 April 2006 and also discussed the problem of the recognition of Protestant baptism. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima was the leader of the Orthodox delegation and Co-President Michael Beintker leader of the CPCE delegation; Co-President Thomas Wipf and Dr Michael Bünker also took part.

No dialogue was carried on **with the Catholic Church** at the official level of the CPCE, but there were dialogues in the regions and states. This year the 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' was also signed by the World Methodist Council. In this declaration the methodology already used in the LA is taken forward, and in a similar way the doctrinal condemnations in respect of the doctrine of Justification are declared obsolete. Even if the declaration could not secure the recognition of the Reformed churches and needed further development, it mentions as its goal full church fellowship, which is described as 'unity in difference'. The Catholic criticism of the LA is well known. However, the method of differentiated consensus is a method which is now also used in the ecumenical movement as by the Catholic Church, for example, with the concept of 'sister churches' or 'churches of another type', and forms of the recognition of Orthodox churches.

### *3.3 The goal and future of ecumenical work*

It is not simply a matter of carrying on dialogues in order to get closer to one another. The goal is to give ourselves a mutual account of our faith and by that to come ever closer to a common centre. All Christian churches see themselves exposed to new challenges in the future which no longer follow the classical criteria of inter-confessional dialogue, e.g. dialogue with non-believers or with believers who do not want to belong to any church or confession; confrontation with the fundamentalist currents within every church; the different forms of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue; understanding with the churches of other continents. The standpoints run right across the confessions. What we need is a motivating Christian dynamic which could enthuse our fellow men and women for the faith. For that we need an ecumenical dynamic which brings us back to the centre of faith. Concepts of identity, church politics and contextuality are theological questions which need far more attention as great obstacles to the ecumene.

### **Relations with the world bodies and the networking of work**

Thus the quest for the unity of the church should not be exchanged in the long term for a forum of voluntary co-existence. The World Council of Churches is working with the Christian world bodies on a 'reconfiguration' of the whole ecumenical movement, for which it lacks both visions and means. Perhaps the problem of financing is compelling us to network better the work of the confessional world bodies in Europe.

The demand for linking, slimming down and more effective forms of collaboration is becoming increasingly more urgent. How can we achieve a concentration of work with an effective division of work? The WARC has now replaced its European Assembly with church leaders' conferences, with the aim of strengthening the CPCE. We welcome this sign and would like something similar to happen for the European work of the LWF. To achieve that, the General Assembly would have to commission the new Executive Committee to make further initiatives in conversations.

#### **4. Fellowship in witness and service**

##### *4.1 Work in social ethics*

The stimuli from Belfast include a deliberate strengthening of the social-ethical dimensions of our witness and service. It has been thought urgent to discuss the theological and ethical aspects and the humanitarian consequences of political decisions from the perspective of the gospel and to express and find a hearing among the European public for the insights gained.

The Presidium and the Executive Committee have often made statements on current developments, for example on the work of the EU Convention on the Future of Europe (22 June 2002), on the occasion of the referenda on the EU constitution (9 May 2005), and on freedom of religion and opinion in connection with the dispute over the Muhammad cartoons (8 April 2006). Recently a declaration has been made on the theme of 'International Security, Peace and the Use of Armed Force' (18 August, see below). The statement on the EU Constitution from a Protestant perspective was conceived as an aid for the communities. In our view, despite some points that can be criticized, the constitutional treaty represents a considerably improved foundation for the co-existence of individuals and states in Europe. Therefore the Presidium has supported the ratification of the constitutional treaty, even if talk in the preamble of the 'religious heritage' of Europe seems too pale, because the recognition that all state authority is exercised in responsibility before God and fellow human beings is at any rate implied in it.

Increased sensitivity could also be observed at a regional level. Thus the South East Europe Group made a statement on the expansion of the EU (24 April 2004) and on 2 May 2005 a declaration on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Both declarations were explicitly welcomed by the Executive Committee. With the South East Europe Group we emphasize that by deepened solidarity the CPCE has to contribute to the dismantling of the 'silver curtain' between rich and poor states of Europe and between poor and rich in many European societies. We endorse the view that the task to live out reconciliation does not end at the frontiers of Europe, but obligates Europe to the world-wide quest for peace and justice.

Great attention was paid to the cross-frontier consultations of the Churches on the Rhine and the CPCE on the challenges of migration and flight held at Liebfrauenberg near Strasbourg (10-12 May 2004). In a declaration sent to all the CPCE churches, the churches which took part have committed themselves to shouldering effectively their responsibility for humane dealing with refugees and migrants in a way that is grounded in the Bible, and to ensuring that the attitude of the church can be recognized publicly and noted where possible in the process of European legislation and in the national implementation of the law. The churches and their con-

gregations can make a decisive contribution towards creating and maintaining a climate of hospitality, acceptance and tolerance and breaking down prejudices.

The work of the CPCE in social ethics is powerfully supported by the CPCE professional group for questions of social ethics which has met regularly since 2004 to discuss concrete projects and focal points of work. This professional group is one of the 'task groups' prompted by the Belfast General Assembly. Most recently the professional group has developed a programmatic paper on the work of the Protestant churches in Europe on social ethics and prepared the programmatic paper 'International Security, Peace and the Use of Armed Force'. The statement brings up to date the various traditions in the Protestant churches on the preservation of peace in present-day political conditions, and is extremely topical in view of the use of military troops to assure peace in crisis areas.

#### *4.2 Co-operation with the Conference of European Churches*

Since the last General Assembly, collaboration with the Conference of European Churches has been intensified and deepened in several respects. As well as the consultations with the Orthodox churches on the question of ecclesiology and the joint project 'Healing of Memories' (see under 3.2 and 6.3) there was fruitful collaboration for the conference on bioethics in Strasbourg in November 2003 ('Human Life in Our Hands? The Churches and Bioethics') and the joint appearance at the 2005 Kirchentag in Hanover. Regular consultations take place between the leaders of the CEC and CPCE.

On 1 September 2004 Pastor Dr Dieter Heidtmann began his activity in the Brussels office of the CEC as CPCE representative in the CEC's Church and Society Commission. In addition to his work for the Commission, Dr Heidtmann advises the Executive Committee on all questions which affect political Europe. He writes or edits the Europe Infos on the CPCE website and co-ordinates the work of the CPCE professional group on questions of social ethics. In recent months, among other things he has been responsible for the statements of the churches on the EU Green Book on demographic development and was responsible for the holding of a consultation in Brussels on the future of the European social model, 'Our Joint Future for a Social Europe'.

The collaboration between the CPCE and the CEC accords with the spirit of the Charta Oecumenica and fills with life the obligation the CPCE has imposed on itself of a growing collaboration between the Christian churches. It is good if the Christian churches also adopt a common standpoint when they can. Declarations on ethics and social ethics at a European level clearly gain in importance if they have been made in the ecumenical responsibility of all churches. Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that when the Protestant churches adopt a position on ethical themes, they allow themselves to be guided by presuppositions and criteria of ethical judgment-making which are specifically in accord with the gospel. It must also be possible to present the Protestant perspective at this point in ecumenical conversation and in the European public scene. Here the work of the CPCE on social ethics links up with the doctrinal conversations in quality and tradition. In an ecumenical framework it will not gain stand out by demarcation but by the strengthening of collaboration, by bringing together the concerns of the Protestant churches and by further ecumenical work. Here the dovetailing of the work of the CPCE in social ethics with the CEC Church and Society Commission on the one hand guarantees the Protestant profile in Europe but on the other hand also enable the churches to take a concerted stand over

against the political institutions. In the medium term a network of conversation partners on questions of social ethics should be built up in the CPCE member churches.

#### *4.3 CPCE representatives in ecumenical symposia*

The presence of the CPCE which has grown up is also mirrored in a clear increase of enquiries from the wider ecumenical context. We frequently receive invitations to the synods of our member churches, and representatives of the Executive Committee or the Secretariat have been very glad to take part in them whenever that has been possible. Wilhelm Hüffmeier was a representative at the Porvoo Church Leaders Conference in 2002 and Fleur Houston in 2006. Elisabeth Parmentier and Martin Friedrich visited the CEC General Assembly in 2003 as CPCE representatives. Michael Bünker was an observer at a consultation between the Porvoo churches and the Orthodox churches of Europe in December 2005. This shows that the CPCE is taken for granted as an important agent in ecumenical co-existence in Europe. Things still look different at the world level. Thus when the LWF, the WARC and the WCC recently held their General Assemblies, the CPCE did not receive an official invitation. However, by prior arrangement it proved possible for delegates from our churches to introduce CPCE perspectives and send greetings.

The occasions on which the CPCE or individual members are invited to speak on ecumenical themes are almost too many to list. The President, Professor Parmentier, in whom for large areas of the public the Protestant voice seems virtually to be personified, had the most appointments. Thus she gave lectures – and this list makes no claim to completeness - in Nuremberg, in Vienna, in Berlin (at the 2003 ecumenical Kirchentag), in Marburg (at the jubilee of the religious conversation in 2004), in Heidelberg, Paris and Dublin; she took part in platform discussions and wrote numberless newspaper articles. A worship service broadcast on Easter Day 2005 by Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, in which she was able to present the work of the CPCE under the theme ‘Believing without Frontiers’, made the most impact.

#### *4.4 Stimuli towards church mergers*

The Leuenberg Agreement made very cautious statements on the question of an organizational merger of individual churches (Ars. 44f.). One notes very clearly that the misunderstanding had to be avoided that as a kind of union confession the LA was pressing for church fusions. So the Agreement has not directly promoted this process of merging churches. However, it has facilitated this course where the churches were in any case moving along it.

In two countries the stimuli which have been at work for a long time have recently achieved a breakthrough. In the Netherlands, in 2004 the Hervormde Kerk, the Gereformeerde Kerken and the Lutheran church merged to become the Protestant Church of the Netherlands. This had been preceded by more than four decades of difficult negotiations in which the theological foundations and the legal forms of the common church had to be worked out. Here the Leuenberg Agreement played a decisive role, so that the new church can now refer simultaneously to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Canons of Dort. The method of regarding the traditional doctrinal condemnations as no longer applying in the light of the agreement found in the understanding of the gospel pointed the way for the fellowship. We wish the new church in the Netherlands God’s blessing for its shared way.

The same is true of Alsace-Lorraine, where six months ago the Union of the Lutheran church and the Reformed church was achieved. Here the negotiations were not so tedious, since there was already a great deal of co-operation, but now here too there is also a joint synod and church government. Again the Leuenberg Agreement provides the necessary theological foundation. It is worth noting that not only does the newly-formed Union church bear the designation 'Protestante', but the two individual churches which continue to exist have both added this adjective to the old confessional designations, with reference to the change of name of the CPCE, which in French is called 'Communions d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe'.

## **5. The CPCE is a binding community**

Community in word and sacrament strives for an authority which is binding in and between the churches, both regional and continental. This becomes clear in the German use of the word 'Verbindlichkeit', where other languages have only 'authority'. We are still experimenting about how tolerable it can be to be a binding fellowship which could think, speak and act in a way which is international and goes beyond frontiers.

### *5.1 Binding through the quality of theological work*

The common understanding of the gospel to which the LA refers is not a static concept, but 'must be further deepened, tested... and continually be made relevant in the contemporary scene', especially in the studies which do further work on doctrinal differences. The authority of the doctrinal conversations depends primarily on their theological quality and on the correspondence between theology and the questions which men and women are now asking. However, even if the reception cannot be directed 'from above', it must concern us, for these studies draw the framework within which freedom for unresolved differences (but not differences which separate the churches) exists. They are decisive for the quality of the fellowship that is lived out and for the CPCE's own profile. This framework in which consensus unfolds, is tested in specific sets of questions and lived out in worship, is a 'common voice' which offers a common foundation and support with cultural and theological differences. The study 'The Church of Jesus Christ' is illuminating in five respects: as an application of the ecumenical distinction between foundation and shape, as a test case of differentiated consensus, as a basis for decisions on disputed questions of ecclesiology, as a deepening of the LA on the question of ministry, and as an expansion of perspective for the churches which have also signed the Porvoo declaration. If the LA does not give any criteria for the importance of study texts and these are not binding, as the LA is, there should be a priority for the studies which are decisive for the fellowship which has already been declared. For these also to become binding as an experience for community members, they should influence teaching in the community, in preaching, in the liturgy, in catechesis, in further education and in exchanges between communities.

### *5.2 Binding through structural changes*

Over the years, the deliberate structural slimness of the CPCE and the autonomy of the churches have been recognized as a difficulty for the reception of theological

work, for public relations and for the possibilities of decision-making. A centralism which would make the identities of the churches disappear would contradict the LA, but we need a binding quality which obligates us to one another. After long years of free growth the question arises how far a stronger structuring is necessary. The future shape lies in the hand of the delegates to this General Assembly.

The **General Assembly** should continue to be the place where the churches together give profile to their orientations, so far in remarkable harmony. However, there is a need to discuss how often it can and should be convened, how its representative character can be guaranteed, and how the reception of the results and decisions by the churches can take place successfully.

The project of a **CPCE synod** presents the question of an authority recognized by all, the representation and mandate of the delegates. The project of such a synod provoked discontent, so the General Assembly in Belfast asked for various proposals, which you have in the study 'The **Shape and Shaping** of Protestant Churches in a Changing Europe'. It is important for the process to take place carefully and in common, for such a synod would presuppose the acceptance of an authority for consultation or decision-making on important questions which concern all the churches.

So far the **Executive Committee** has had the task of putting the orientations of the General Assembly into practice, with the help of the Secretariat. However, in recent years the Executive Committee has often found that it has had a new function: instead of being just the organ of co-ordination between General Assemblies it has been increasingly clearly been made responsible for ideas, initiatives and future plans. Here too the General Assembly should decide whether this is to be the case in the future. The influence of the media is also changing the role of the **Presidium**. The media world calls for a charismatic and representative personality, something that in principle is really remote from the Reformation tradition but is necessary. This task also no longer corresponds just to that of the leadership of the Executive Committee and the Secretariat, but also to an 'episcopal' mandate in the service of unity, combined with visitations.

### **Finances and Secretariat**

It is particularly thanks to the commitment of some churches that the CPCE has been able to develop and grow. I shall be expressing our thanks to them at the end.

However, the CPCE is now in a situation in which it is hardly possible to guarantee financial security for the future. As well as the budget fed by the contributions of members, hitherto time and again specific means have been found for a limited period or for individual projects or personal posts. Today I must ask the signatory churches for a clear financial commitment. Both the Vienna and the Belfast General Assemblies were of the opinion that all signatory churches should help to support the Community, at least for specific projects, at least with a token contribution. Although there are many among our churches which have few resources, I would like to call on them to consider when and how they could make a financial commitment to the CPCE.

All these questions are not just about organizational elements but about a basic attitude towards the fellowship that has been achieved: how much authority do we grant to the ties into which we have entered, the common theological confession, the fellowship in preaching and celebrating the eucharist? How far will we venture to bind ourselves together in such a way that we give one another authority over our destinies and allow us to be bound, also by a constitution?

## 6. Reconciling fellowship in Europe

### 6.1 Publications: *En route towards Europe – Theology for Europe*

The reference to Europe in the title of the Leuenberg Agreement already requires the CPCE member churches to reflect on Europe. Europe is the continent which, more than any other, has determined the fortunes of our world – for better or worse; it is the continent of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, but also the continent from which two world wars started, the continent which was split by the Iron Curtain, the continent whose peoples are now growing together into a political community, although here the greatest degree of difference is to be found in the smallest area. The witness and service of the Reformation churches on this continent are directed first of all to those who live in Europe, who are shaped by the history of this continent, which is both successful and full of suffering, and who are now thinking about the shaping of their common future in a way which is both expectant and sceptical.

The task of looking more closely at Europe as the place of our witness and service has for the first time been performed in a book presented to the Belfast General Assembly under the title ‘En route towards Europe – Perspectives of Protestant Churches’. Like a kaleidoscope, the contributions showed how colourfully and diversely Protestant churches describe their relation to Europe today, yet in a way which still coheres. The book has proved to be an important element in the acceptance of European horizons by the Protestant churches. We know more about one another than we used to. And we also know more about Europe.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that we have already found our place in Europe. We are still ‘en route towards Europe’. A further stage of reflection on this way is the book which has been prepared for this General Assembly. Its title, ‘Theology for Europe – Perspectives of Protestant Churches’, makes clear the theological scope of the theme of Europe. What holds this Europe together? The contributions in the new book seek answers to this question from the theological traditions of the Protestant churches and Protestantism in Europe. It is important to note the importance of the religious and ethical dimension for the co-existence of individuals and peoples, cultures and regions from the different perspectives of the more than 100 churches of the CPCE. Martin Friedrich, Hans Jürgen Luibl and Christine-Ruth Müller have advanced this book project with great care and have been its editors.

The next European date is already imminent: the Germany Protestant Kirchentag in 2007 will have Europe as a focal point. The CPCE will take part in the Forum on Europe and among other things plans to present a further publication to the Kirchentag, a pamphlet on the theme ‘Europe and the Protestants’.

### 6.2 Network of Protestant voices in Europe - Internet work

Since 1999 the internet page of CPCE has been called up on the Net under [www.leuenberg.net](http://www.leuenberg.net). In collaboration with the John a Lasco Library in Emden, after the Belfast General Assembly the model of ‘Reformed-Online’ was adopted for the project of a network of Protestant churches in Europe and successfully built up. News, documents and information about the CPCE and its member churches are available to anyone in the three official languages of the CPCE. With the ‘network’ a communication platform has been created on which new, documents, reports and statements from the 105 member churches specific to regions or particular themes can be called

up. Many forms of co-operation have come about in this way. The area of 'Europe' links the substantive relations between a reconciled difference of European churches and the political, social, cultural and religious dimensions of the idea of Europe. Documents can be found here by distinguished authors from theology, church and society. The liturgy page now comprises liturgies from 12 countries or regions and a selection of important liturgical texts and materials. The weekly newsletter reaches many subscribers from the spheres of the media, politics and the ecumenical movement, extending as far as the Vatican.

Thus the Internet page has become an important forum for European Protestantism – the number of users, which is constantly rising, speaks clearly for the quality of the service and for the need for such a platform.

### *6.3 Healing of Memories*

An exemplary process of Christian reconciliation has taken place under the title 'Heilung von Erinnerungen/Healing of Memories'. Here the CPCE Executive Committee took up a suggestion by the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz and shaped the process in collaboration with the CEC. Between 5 and 7 May 2005 an 'Interconfessional and Interdisciplinary Symposium "Healing of Memories" of Christian Churches in Romania' took place in Klausenburg/Cluj/Kolozsvár under the leadership of Pastor Dieter Brandes, which was followed in May 2006 by a further symposium in Iasi. Dealing with the past through memories may lead to pacification and reconciliation, as the partners involved in the process each put themselves in the perspective of the other and allow different interpretations of history instead of putting themselves above it with their own perspectives. That is true both of peoples and ethnic groups and of churches and religious fellowships. Here, in dealing with one own's history and the history of others, it is possible to experience what unity in reconciled difference can mean. Healing and reconciliation are signposts on a way which is marked out for the churches by the gospel promise of reconciliation. From 2007 onwards 'Healing of Memories' will continue under the responsibility of the CEC and be advertised as a contribution by the Protestant churches to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly which is taking place the same year in Hermannstadt/Sibiu.

### *6.4 New study projects*

So far there has not been a General Assembly which has been presented with finished descriptions of projects for further work. Hitherto such descriptions have always come about only in connection with a General Assembly. The consciousness of a more binding character and effectiveness which has grown up has led to our being able to present to this General Assembly several projects to select from for further work. These are:

- a draft project 'Scripture- Confession - Church' for a doctrinal conversation on the understanding of scripture, the hermeneutics of the confession and the relationship between message and being the church,
- a draft project for a doctrinal conversation on the theme 'Church Doctrine and the Formation of Confessions of Faith on Questions of Social Ethics',
- a draft project for a doctrinal conversation on the theme 'The Protestant Understanding of Ministry, Ordination and Episkopé',

- a draft project for working out a basic document on the theme ‘Theology Study for the Ordained Ministry in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe’,
- a draft project on the theme ‘Dare to Educate, Strengthen Protestantism, Shape Europe’,
- a draft project on the theme ‘Protestant Worship in South East and Eastern Europe between Preservation and Change’.

Together we have to decide what proposals are to be worked on before the next General Assembly, with what priority and urgency and in what form. Of course it is possible to recommend further projects and put them to the vote. At all events there is no lack of important prominent themes and questions. And that is a good sign for the way of our church fellowship.

### *6.5 Protestant theology for the future in Europe and the world*

With Protestant theology, Protestant Christianity in Europe has an important element for forming fellowship. Protestant theology – like any other discipline – can be practised only in a way which transcends countries. Its fundamental questions and insights are not essentially different in Prague or Vienna from what they are in Helsinki, Heidelberg, Amsterdam or Strasbourg. Regardless of all regional peculiarities and accents there is an awareness of the problem running right across Protestant Europe which will also clearly make itself felt in a theology that is aware of its obligation to the truth, and thus bring out a binding European dimension of theological work.

The emphasis on the gospel marks the real in-depth profile of the subject of Protestant theology: the orientation on the gospel of Jesus Christ as the all-decisive, redeeming word of God for the future of human beings and their world. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe will gain influence and power in witnessing to the degree that it roots itself in the gospel which has been spoken to it. Through living by the promise and claim of the gospel, it will continue to grow together and deepen the fellowship in the life of churches and witnesses which has been gained in Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion:**

At the end of this report, the Presidium would like first of all to thank all the churches, but once again to mention those which have made a special commitment to the church fellowship. Thus the life and vitality of the church fellowship can be noted in yet another way.

We owe extraordinary thanks to the churches of the EKU (now UEK) which have financed the staff posts in Berlin and thus have put both their rooms and their President at our disposal! Thanks are due to the German churches generally, and to the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, which have played the greatest financial part and thus made many projects possible. The churches of Denmark, Norway, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and France also helped to support the smaller churches. We particularly appreciate the fact that both the Swedish and the Finnish church, which have not signed the Agreement, make an annual contribution which is greater than that of many signatory churches. In advance of the General Assembly the Reformed Church in Hungary has also clearly increased its contribution, though like the small Lutheran Church in Hungary it is already bearing a special burden as host to the General Assembly.

We thank the churches which have given towards the cost of printing 'Colours of Grace': the EKD and its Liturgical Conference, the VELKD, the FSPC, the Protestant Churches in the Rhineland and in Baden. We are also grateful to the church in Baden for financing and co-ordinating the consultation on 'Migration and Asylum Law'.

We are grateful to the Westphalian church for taking over the post of Professor Friedrich in Berlin and to the Württemberg church for taking over the post of Dr Heidtmann in Brussels, and to both for declaring themselves ready to extend this delegation. For a long time the Bavarian church has financed Frau Dr Müller's post. The Rhineland church has given a special contribution of € 20,000 for the Internet presence for the period from 2004 to 2006, and I dare to hope that perhaps another extension may be possible.

The Lutheran Church in Bavaria is particularly to be thanked for the South East Europe Group, which for 20 years has been under the patronage of Landesbischof Dr Johannes Hanselmann. We are delighted that Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich shares the motivation of his predecessor to cross frontiers. We also include in our thanks Professor Joachim Track, who has now led the regional group for years and this year is handing on the baton to Oberkirchenrat Michael Martin. Again the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, namely Oberkirchenrat Wilfried Neusel, is to be thanked for co-ordinating and financing the North West Europe Group.

The churches from Westphalia, Württemberg, the Rhineland, Baden and Hessen-Nassau are together with the agency 'Churches help Churches' and the EKD promoting the Healing of Memories project. The greatest contribution here has been made by the Gustav-Adolf-Werk in the EKD by putting the position of the project supervisor, Pastor Brandes, at our disposal.

We hope that the various successful projects will continue to motivate churches to collaborate in projects.

For this creativity and these developments we are also grateful to a highly motivated Executive Committee. Our warmest thanks go to all members of the Executive Committee and their representatives. We are particularly grateful to Dr Luibl as 'Europe commissioner', Dr Bukowski as 'liturgy commissioner', Pastor Dieter Brandes as the one responsible for the 'Healing of Memories' project, Oberkirchenrat Udo Hahn as 'media officer', and Vice-President Joachim Christoph, who is our legal adviser – and to the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany which made the collaboration of these two possible.

And in the background of the church fellowship stands and works indefatigably a very small staff, through whom so many miracles become possible: Dr Christine-Ruth Müller, pastor and skillful fundraiser, who has found a solution to all the difficult situations; Frau Hera Moon, who juggles with the languages and texts; Prof. Martin Friedrich, who reliably masters the marathon between the study groups and church authorities; Thomas Flügge, our webmaster who is also responsible for the youth ecumenical group; and Dr Dieter Heidtmann, CPCE collaborator in the 'Church and Society' Commission of the CPCE in Brussels. The President of the Head Office of the EKD (now UEK), Dr Wilhelm Hüffmeier, has guided the fortunes of the Secretariat brilliantly for nineteen years. The CPCE bears the signature of this team. We can be proud of it. Thank you!