

A response to The Nature and Mission
of the Church

From

The Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of
England

Council for Christian Unity

Faith and Order Advisory Group

The Nature and Mission of the Church

1. The nature and purpose of this study

*The Nature and Mission of the Church*¹ is the new study on ecclesiology from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. It is a revision of the 1998 Faith and Order study *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* in the light of comments received from churches, institutions and individuals and it builds on the theological work done in other Faith and Order documents such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, *Confessing the One Faith* and *Church and World: the Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*.

As the Introduction explains, the purpose of the study is:

...to give expression to what the churches can now say together about the nature and mission of the Church and, within that agreement, to explore the extent to which the remaining church-dividing issues can be overcome.
(para.5)

In order to try to achieve these two goals the text of the study is divided between two types of material, the main text and material in text boxes. The main text contains what the authors of the report believe to be the common perspectives on ecclesiology that have emerged from the ecumenical work of the last fifty years. The material in the text boxes explores areas in which they think there remain differences within and between churches.

The reason for the inclusion of these two types of material is the hope that the main text will enable the churches to discover or re-discover how much they now have in common in their thinking on ecclesiology, while the material in the text boxes will enable the churches to reflect on the extent to which their remaining differences are church-dividing.

What the Faith and Order Commission is asking for in response to the study is that the churches should respond 'in the manner they deem most appropriate' to a series of questions:

- Does this study document correctly identify our common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues which continue to divide us?
- Does this study document reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church?
- Are there significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed?

¹ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Geneva: WCC, 2005.

- Insofar as this study document provides a helpful framework for further ecclesiological discussion among the churches:
 - How can this study document help your church, together with others, take concrete steps towards unity?
 - What suggestions would you make for the future development of this text?

(Para. 8)

2. *The contents of this study*

After the Introduction in paragraphs 1-8 the study is divided into four main chapters, 'The Church of the Triune God,' 'The Church in History,' 'The Life of Communion in and for the World' and 'In and For the World' plus a 'Conclusion.' In the summary below the numbers in brackets refer to the paragraph numbers in the study.

I The Church of the Triune God

This chapter is divided into three sections.

Section A (9-33) looks at 'The Nature of the Church,' section B (34-42) looks at 'The Mission of the Church' and section C (43-47) considers 'The Church as Sign and Instrument of God's Intention and Plan for the World.'

The chapter argues that the Church is the creation of the Triune God through His Word and Spirit and consists of the common partaking of believers in the life of God. As such the Church is one, holy catholic and apostolic and a divine as well as a human reality.

The chapter notes that the Bible use a variety of images for the Church and focuses on four of these images, the Church as the people of God, the Church as the body of Christ, the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the Church as *Koinonia*/Communion which, taken together, illuminate the New Testament's vision of the nature of the Church in relation to God.

As part of God's design to bring all creation under the Lordship of Christ, the calling of the Church, the chapter says, is to act as the sign and instrument of God's plan for the whole world and to bring humanity into communion with God. From the earliest times the mission of the Church in fulfilment of this calling has consisted in summoning people to repentance, faith, baptism and care for those who are suffering and in need (*diakonia*).

In order that its witness to the Kingdom of God may have integrity the Church has not only to proclaim the Good News verbally, but also to take concrete action in union with all people of good will for the sake of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

The text box in this chapter notes a number of issues relating to the nature of the Church as the creation of God's Word and Spirit on which the churches have different convictions and on which further ecumenical discussion is required. These issues are:

- Whether preaching and the sacraments are the means of, or simply witnesses to, the activity of the Holy Spirit.

- The relationship between the institutional structures of the churches, in particular their structures of ordained ministry, and the presence and activity of God through His Word and Spirit
- The theological importance of institutional continuity in general and the continuity of the episcopate in particular as a means and guarantee of the Church's continuity in the apostolic faith.

II The Church in History

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section A (48-56) explores the idea of 'The Church *in via*,' section B (57-59) looks at the paradox that the churches are 'In Christ but not in full communion,' section C (60-63) is concerned with 'Communion and Diversity' and section D (64-66) considers 'The Church as Communion of Local Churches.'

The chapter argues that because the Church is an 'eschatological reality' that anticipates the nature of God's coming kingdom, but also a 'historical reality' exposed to the ambiguities of human history, it has to strive continuously to ensure that it manifests the characteristics of oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity given to it by God in the face of an ever present tendency towards division, sin and a failure to proclaim truthfully the apostolic message with which it has been entrusted.

It also notes that although all the churches participate in some way in Jesus Christ they are not yet in full communion with each other and that the relations between individual Christians never completely escape the distorting effects of sin. It is for these reasons that work for Christian unity is such an urgent task and Christians have to pray daily for the forgiveness of their sins and constantly engage in repentance, mutual forgiveness and restoration.

According to the chapter both diversity in unity and unity in diversity are gifts given by God to His Church. However, there are limits to diversity outside of which it becomes destructive of unity and unity, particularly when identified with uniformity, can also be destructive of legitimate diversity.

Finally, the chapter declares that the communion of the Church as a whole is expressed in the communion that exists between local churches, in each of which the fullness of the Church resides, a communion which is sustained by their common possession of the 'living elements of apostolicity and community,' defined as Scripture, baptism, the Eucharist and the service of a common ministry. The goal of the search for full communion is realised when all the churches are able to recognise the fullness of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in each other.

There are four text boxes in this chapter.

- The first looks at the disagreement between the churches over whether it is right to talk about the Church as a sacrament. It notes that those who do feel it is right would still distinguish between the way in which the Church is a sacrament from the way in which baptism and the Eucharist are sacraments and that those who do not would still see the Church as God's instrument to accomplish His purposes.
- The second examines the continuing disagreement between the churches over whether the presence of sin in the life of the Church means that it is right to say that the Church itself sins. It asks whether those on both sides of this debate might agree that the

relationship between sin and holiness in the Church is not a relationship between two equal realities, because sin is contrary to the Church's nature and God's will for it.

- The third considers the way in which issues to do with diversity affect the relationships between churches. It looks at the way in which particular emphases are reflected in 'the life and witness of different churches', the different weight which different Christians place upon the maintenance of 'ecclesial and confessional identity' and the different ways in which the churches regard the 'ecclesial status of other churches and other Christians.'
- The fourth notes the different ways in which different traditions use the term 'local church' to refer to the Church at the congregational, diocesan and provincial and regional levels, but nevertheless agree that the local church, however defined, 'contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church' and is united to every other church within the Church universal.

III The Life of Communion In and For the World

This chapter, which is the largest in the study, is divided into eight parts. Section A (68-73) is concerned with 'The Apostolic faith,' section B (74-77) looks at 'Baptism,' section C (78-81) looks at the 'Eucharist,' sections D and E (82-89) consider the 'Ministry of all the Faithful' and the 'Ministry of the Ordained' respectively, section F (90-98) explores 'Oversight: Personal, Communal, Collegial,' section G (99-104) is about 'Conciliarity and Primacy' and section H (105-108) is about 'Authority.'

The chapter argues that the Church has to remain faithful to the apostolic faith, which is something that is constantly evoked by the Word and the Spirit speaking through the witness of Scripture in the context of the 'living tradition of the Church.' The content of the apostolic faith is set forth in the Creeds of the Early Church (particularly the Apostles Creed), proclaimed in the Confessions of Faith of the churches, preached throughout the world today and articulated in the churches' Canons and Books of Discipline.

The apostolic faith is something that has to be lived out in relation to the world with the confession of God as creator, for example, leading to a commitment to care for the well being of humanity and all that God has made.

A concept that is related to that of the apostolic faith is the concept of the 'apostolic tradition.' According to the chapter this term refers to:

...continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and Eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and needy, communion among the local churches and sharing the divine gifts which have been given to each. (71)

A church that is in the apostolic tradition is a church that has these characteristics.

The chapter sees baptism as the basic bond of unity between Christians and a summons to them to overcome their divisions. It defines baptism in a comprehensive fashion as:

...the celebration of new life through Christ and of participation in the baptism, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 3:13-17; Rom 6:3-5). Baptism involves

confession of sin, conversion of heart, pardoning, cleansing and sanctification. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, incorporation into the Body of Christ, participation in the Kingdom of God and the life of the world to come (cf Eph 2:60. Baptism consecrates the believer as a member of 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' 1 Peter 2:9). (75)

Baptism involves a life long growth into Christ and a vocation to share the joys and sorrows of one's neighbours and to take part in the struggle for the dignity of the suffering, the excluded and the poor.

The chapter declares that there is a dynamic connection between baptism and the Eucharist in that at the Eucharist baptismal faith is re-affirmed and grace is given to enable Christians to faithfully live out their Christian calling. It defines the Eucharist as:

...the celebration where, gathered around his table, Christians receive the body and blood of Christ. It is a proclamation of the Gospel, a glorification of the Father for everything accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification (doxologia); a memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus and what was accomplished once for all upon the Cross (anamnesis); an invocation of the Holy Spirit (epiclesis); an intercession; the communion of the faithful and an anticipation and foretaste of the kingdom to come. (79)

Participation in the Eucharist demands reconciliation and sharing between Christians and because it is the sacrament that builds up community it also leads Christians to challenge injustice, racism, estrangement and lack of freedom.

The chapter sees all Christians as receiving gifts from the Holy Spirit to enable them to play their part in the mission of the Church and maintains that all Christians are called to act as a 'royal priesthood,' offering spiritual sacrifices to God. However, it also argues that from the earliest days of the Church the Christian community, guided by the Holy Spirit, has appointed ordained ministers to assemble and build up the Church by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and guiding the Christian community in its worship, mission and service.

Over the centuries the Spirit has led the Church to adapt its ministries to meet the needs of particular contexts and various forms of ordained ministry have been blessed with the Spirit's gifts. There is no single pattern of ministry in the New Testament although the three fold order of bishop, presbyter and deacon had become the generally accepted pattern across the Church by the third century. Ministerial succession, focused in the act of ordination, has been one of the ways in which the Church has maintained its apostolicity.

According to the chapter, episkopé/oversight is the ministry of co-ordination that allows the gifts and ministries given by the Holy Spirit to enrich the unity and mission of the Church as a whole. Episkopé has taken many different forms in the history of the Church, but as something that is entrusted to particular people and also belongs to the Church as a whole it needs to be exercised in personal, communal and collegial ways.

The chapter views conciliarity and primacy as being about the exercise of ministry at every level of the Church throughout the world.

It describes conciliarity (the practice of Christians taking counsel with one another for the well being of the Church) as being an essential feature of the life of the Church, grounded in the common baptism of its members, which characterises the life of the Church at all levels.

It suggests that primacy is linked to conciliarity because of the need for someone to preside over gatherings of Christians to ensure good order and to assist in the promotion, discernment and articulation of consensus. Although the exercise of primacy has been a contentious issue in the history of the Church in recent years there seems to have been an increasing willingness to discuss the possibility of a universal ministry in support of the mission and unity of the Church.

On the issue of authority the chapter makes a number of rather disconnected points:

- Jesus exercised an authority that ‘placed itself in the service of human beings’
- Jesus gave his disciples authority to teach witness and baptise
- Authority is intrinsically related to the concepts of communion and interdependence
- Authority in the Church comes from God and is marked by God’s holiness
- Ordination exemplifies the communal aspect of authority in the Church because in ordination in that both the action of the ordaining ministry and the assent of the faithful are required.

There are five text boxes in this chapter.

The first text box is about baptism. It notes that while there is a high degree of agreement about baptism some significant issues remain. These are:

- The difference between churches that baptise infants and those that baptise only those who can make a personal profession of faith
- The inability of some churches to recognise baptisms performed by other churches and the consequent issue of ‘re’-baptism
- The differences involved in the use of the terms ‘sacrament’ or ‘ordinance’ to describe baptism
- The issue of whether baptism effects or merely reflects new life in Christ
- The difference between churches that baptise in the name of the Trinity and those that baptise in the name of Jesus Christ
- The difference between those churches that use water in baptism and those that believe that the use of water is unnecessary
- The difference between those churches that believe that baptism is necessary and those that do not celebrate baptism yet ‘testify to the spiritual experience of life in Christ.’

The second is about the Eucharist. It notes that despite the agreement on the Eucharist achieved through the *BEM* process there are significant differences about this issue as well. These differences concern:

- Whether the Eucharist is primarily a meal in which Christians receive the body and blood of Christ or primarily a service of thanksgiving
- How the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is made present in the Eucharist
- The ‘nature and mode’ of Christ’s presence and the ‘role and invocation’ of the Holy Spirit
- Eucharistic sharing and its relationship to unity between churches.

The third is about the ordained ministry. It explains that while there are points of ecumenical convergence on this topic there are six issues that need to be explored further:

- The location of the ministry of the ordained in, with, among, or over the people of God
- Eucharistic presidency
- The threefold ministry as a means to and expression of unity.
- The Sacramental nature of ordination.
- The restriction of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament to men only in some churches
- The relationship between the apostolic succession of ministry and the apostolic continuity of the Church as a whole
- The ways in which ordination is considered constitutive of the Church.

The fourth is about ‘Episkopé, Bishops and Apostolic Succession.’ It suggests that the relationship between episkopé and apostolicity is one of the most difficult and divisive issues in the Church, but that even on this issue there are signs of convergence.

- Ecumenical reflection has revealed hitherto unrecognised parallels between the way that oversight is exercised in episcopal and non-episcopal churches.
- Both episcopal and non-episcopal churches have been able to acknowledge a degree of apostolicity in each other.

The fifth is about conciliarity and universal primacy. It notes that there is still much work to be done to achieve convergence on whether a universal ministry of conciliarity or primacy is necessary or acceptable. In spite of extensive ecumenical study, disagreements remain about the significance of the ministries exercised by St Peter and St Paul and what they might imply for some sort of universal ministry in the Church today.

IV In and for the World

This chapter of the study, which is not divided into sections, is concerned with mission and ethics.

On the subject of mission it declares that:

The Church is the community of people called by God who, through the Holy Spirit, are united with Jesus Christ and sent as disciples to bear witness to God's reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation. (111)

Fulfilling this calling means engaging in evangelisation in obedience to the Great Commission, but also involvement in issues to do with human health, social justice, peace and the defence of human life and dignity.

On the subject of ethics it contends that Christian ethics are rooted in God's forgiveness and grace and take shape as the Christian community seeks to discern the will of God in specific times and places. Christians can and should join with the adherents of other religions and all persons of good will to promote morally good ends and should collaborate with political and economic authorities to promote the values of God's kingdom.

The chapter argues that Christian communities are called to be accountable to each other in respect to their ethical approaches and that there are times when the Christian community needs to take a common stance in order to preserve its authenticity and credibility. When Christians or churches disagree over ethical issues they need to engage in dialogue to determine whether this disagreement can be overcome and, if not, whether it is truly church-dividing.

Conclusion

The study concludes by noting that in recent years the ecumenical movement has seen both progress and regress. There has been progress as churches have accepted the implications of the common affirmations made in documents such as *BEM* and have moved towards mutual recognition. However, there has also been regress in that there has been a '...significant retrenchment in some areas, expressed in a re-confessionalisation or an anti-ecumenical spirit.' (Para.121). In this situation, it argues:

All the churches, at all levels of their life, are called upon to engage in the task of articulating together a common understanding of Christian identity: the dynamic and pilgrim character of the people of God, constantly called to repentance and renewal. (121)

As part of this process of articulation, the *Nature and Mission of the Church* is:

...an attempt to express what the churches might now claim together about the nature and mission of the Church; and, within that perspective, to state the remaining areas of difficulty and disagreement. If the churches were able to agree together to a convergence statement on the Church, this would further significantly the process of mutual recognition on the way to reconciliation and visible unity. (123)

3. Responding to this study

There are six points that need to be made in response to this study.

First, this study does seem to correctly identify a set of common ecclesiological convictions held by the churches involved in the ecumenical movement. That this is the case can be shown in two ways:

(a) By comparing what is said in this study with the ecclesiological statements both historical and contemporary that have been produced or agreed by the individual churches. In the case of the Church of England, for example, what is said in this study is compatible with what is said in the three historic formularies of the Church of England, the *Thirty Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the 1662 *Ordinal*, with the 1938 report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian doctrine, *Doctrine in the Church of England*² and with the two recent House of Bishops statements *Apostolicity and Succession*³ and *Bishops in Communion*.⁴

(b) By comparing what is said in this study with the material to be found in bi-lateral and multilateral ecumenical conversations and agreements. This material can be found, for instance, in the three volumes *Growth in Agreement* and *Growth in Agreement II and III*.⁵

There is not space in this paper to undertake a detailed synoptic comparison along the lines just suggested, but if such an exercise were undertaken it would demonstrate that a set of common ecclesiological convictions about issues such as the relationship between the Church and God the Holy Trinity, the mission of the Church, the marks of the Church and Ministry and the Sacraments does exist and is accurately reflected in the main text of the *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.⁶

Secondly, there are a number of areas in which further development of the main text would be helpful.

- The material in Chapter II does not fit together easily as a single unified chapter. It might be better to divide this material up so that sections A and B go into the current Chapter I and section C and D go into the current Chapter III. If this suggestion was to be adopted it would mean that the study would consist of three chapters, the first chapter looking at the fundamental nature of the Church, the second looking at how the communion of the Church with God is expressed in the life of the Church and the third focussing on mission and ethics.
- The material should be less abstract, with reference being made to specific examples to illustrate what is being said. It is striking, for example, that the section on 'the Church in history' contains no examples of how the Church has actually existed in history. There is

² *Doctrine in the Church of England*, London: SPCK, 1982

³ *Apostolicity and Succession*, London: General Synod, 1994.

⁴ *Bishops in Communion*, London: CHP, 2000.

⁵ L Vischer & H Meyer (eds) *Growth in Agreement* Geneva: WCC 2002, J Gros, H Meyer & W Rusch (eds) *Growth in Agreement II* Geneva and Grand Rapids: WCC/Eerdmans 2000 and J Gros, T F Best and L F Fuchs (eds), *Growth in Agreement III*, Geneva and Grand Rapids: WCC/Eerdmans, 2007.

⁶ A comparison between what is said in *The Nature and Mission of the Church* and what is said, for example, in the statement on the unity of the Church issued by the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961, the Anglican-Reformed statement *God's Reign and Our Unity* published in 1984 and the statement on ecclesiology by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Church as Communion*, published in 1991, will serve to establish this point.

an obviously an issue about how to decide which examples should be chosen, but having examples would help what is currently a rather dry and abstract text come alive.

- In paragraphs 24-34 and 57-59 extensive use is made of the word *koinonia*, which is used with reference to the Godhead, the Church and the whole created order. It would be helpful if there were greater clarity about the relationship between these three uses of the word. In what way is the *koinonia* within the Godhead like or unlike the *koinonia* within the Church and how is this like or unlike *koinonia* within the created order as a whole?⁷

In addition, attention needs to be given to the question of whether the fresh study of the use of *koinonia* in the New Testament that has been undertaken by biblical scholars in recent years still supports the way the word is used in *The Nature and Mission of the Church* and the issue of how *koinonia* can include diversity needs to be looked at.

- The question of who is the subject of the Church needs to be addressed. Is it Christ, the Spirit, or the faithful, or all three indwelling each other? When we talk about the Church, about whom are we talking? This is an issue that is important in itself and that has implications for other issues such as the questions about whether the Church is capable of sin and error.
- There needs to be more discussion about the origin and end of the Church. Specifically, more needs to be said about the fact that the Church has its origin in the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit within the Godhead and about how the fundamental end of the Church is to enable people to participate in this relationship now and in eternity.
- Reference needs to be made to the importance of worship and liturgy in the life of the Church. In the current text there is only one minor reference to this issue in paragraph 36. Discussion of this matter also needs to make clear that worship is not primarily something that the Church offers to God, but God's gift to the Church in which it is enabled to share in the worship offered to the Father by the Son through the Spirit.
- It would be helpful for the study to begin with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God, briefly referred to in paragraph 109, and to explain how the Church and its mission related to this.
- There should be a more extensive examination of what 'church' means in the New Testament with the material in paragraphs 13-15 being considerably expanded.
- It should be noted that the Church is a foretaste as well as a sign and instrument of the kingdom.
- As it stands, the study focuses on the institutional aspects of the Church. A greater emphasis on the dynamic character of the Church along the lines suggested (very briefly) in paragraph 14 and more material on the work of the Church would be helpful.

⁷ This point is explored in more detail in P M Collins 'Communion: God, Creation and Church' in P M Collins and M H Fahey (eds), *Receiving the Nature and Mission of the Church*, London: T&T Clark, 2008, pp.21-41.

- There should be more reflection on the nature of the Church's unity, including a discussion about the relation of particular theological traditions, denominations and world-wide groups of churches to the Church as a whole and some reflection on the fact that many in the Western world now sit loose to traditional denominational identities and are disinterested in denominational agendas and the issue of unity between denominations.
- Paragraph 65 balances the local church and the worldwide communion of the Church as a whole. The paragraph should be expanded to take into account the fact that not everyone would agree that the 'fullness of the Church' resides in each local church and to address the debate about whether the local church derives its existence from the Church universal or vice versa.
- There needs to be a discussion of the issue of the importance of the *consensus fidelium*, looking at how it is expressed and its place in the Church's decision-making processes.
- The discussion of authority in paragraphs 105-108 is far too brief. There needs to be much more discussion about the authority of Scripture and Tradition and the discussion needs to be related to what is said about the Apostolic Faith in paragraphs 68-73 and about structures of oversight and decision making in paragraphs 90-104. In addition, the discussion of authority needs to be at the beginning of the chapter rather than at the end.

Thirdly, more work needs to be done on the issues on which the churches are still divided. Eight areas in particular are either not covered or not covered in sufficient detail.

(1) The goal of the ecumenical process. There needs to be a text box looking at the continuing disagreement between the churches about whether the goal of the ecumenical process is a form of reconciled diversity in which separate churches continue to exist or the emergence of one united church with a common faith, structure and ministry and this key area of disagreement is not noted. It would be interesting, for example, to compare what the WCC's New Delhi Statement, the Decree on Ecumenism from the Second Vatican Council and the Leuenberg agreement have to say on this issue.

(2) The relationship between the Apostolic Faith as witnessed to by Scripture and the traditions of the churches. Paragraph 70 seems to assume a seamless continuity between the faith attested in Scripture and what is transmitted in the tradition of the Church and fails to address the classic Protestant concern that in the process of its transmission in the life of the Church the apostolic faith can become seriously distorted or corrupted with the Church needing to be constantly renewed by a return to the biblical witness. This remains an area of significant disagreement between churches that were influenced by the Reformation and the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches and is something that needs to be acknowledged with a text box being dedicated to this topic.⁸

(3) The relationship between the different ways in which churches are ordered and their understandings of the Church's nature and mission. What needs to be explored is whether these different forms of church order are rooted in a common understanding of the Church's nature and mission or whether they indicate that, in spite of the ecumenical convergence on issues of

⁸ For a contemporary Church of England discussion that engages with this issue see *Unpacking the Gift - Anglican resources for theological reflection on the Gift of Authority* London: CHP 2002

ecclesiology in recent years, the churches still have fundamental differences about what the Church is and the mission that God has given to it.

(4) The appropriate level(s) for decision making in the Church. Chapter III discusses matters to do with conciliarity and collegiality, but does not make a connection with the issue of who has the authority to make decisions about what. In the Anglican Communion the question of whether individual provinces and dioceses have a right to make decisions that are opposed by the wider Communion is one that is causing intense controversy and other Christian communions are facing similar issues.

This is also an issue between, as well as within, different Christian traditions with historic divisions between the more centralised approach to decision making that has developed within the Roman Catholic Church and the more dispersed patterns of authority to be found in other churches. Once again, a text box exploring disagreements in this area would be helpful.⁹

(5) The issue of territoriality. There is continuing disagreement in relation to countries such as Greece and Russia about whether it is right to say that a particular country is the territory of a church of a particular tradition and that it is therefore inappropriate for other churches to work there. Behind this specific disagreement is the more fundamental issue of whether or not there should be only one church in each geographical area. These are important disagreements that raise the issue of the exercise of jurisdiction in a multi-cultural world and the relation between majority and minority churches. As before, a text box would be useful.

(6) The relationship between Church and State. Church-state relations are mentioned briefly in chapter IV of the study, but the important disagreements between the churches about whether it is right or beneficial for a church or churches to be officially recognised by the state and about the status of churches that do not have this recognition are not noted and need to be.

(7) The relationship between women and men in the Church. The question of whether women should be ordained is mentioned as one of the remaining areas of disagreement over ordained ministry. However, the wider issue of the right relationship between women and men in the Christian community is one on which there are major disagreements which relate to profound issues of theological anthropology and on which a more extensive discussion is required.

(8) The relationship between ethics and ecclesiology. This is touched on in chapter IV, but it would have been useful to have had a text box setting out the areas of disagreement on this issue (such as, for instance, whether and in what circumstances different approaches to ethical issues can properly be church dividing). This looks like it is going to be a key issue within and between churches in the years to come and so more attention needs to be given to it.

It would also be useful to know whether the capital G in Gospel in paragraph 116 was intentional. Is reference being made to the Church's proclamation of the good news about Jesus Christ or to the material contained in the four canonical gospels?¹⁰

Fourthly, while a number of areas over which there are concerns in the Church of England and which require more adequate treatment have already been highlighted in what has been said about the study's coverage of divisive issues, there are also two other

⁹ For a contemporary Anglican discussion of this issue see *The Windsor Report* London: Anglican Communion Office 2004

¹⁰ Concerns have also been expressed about the spelling in the report as a whole as in its use of a capital S for sacraments.

areas of concern to Anglicans which are not necessarily divisive, but which it would have been helpful for the study to address.

The first of these is the distinction between the Church visible and the Church invisible. The point here is that it has traditionally been recognised both in the theology of the Church of England, and in Christian theology more generally, that a distinction needs to be made between the two forms of the one Church of Jesus Christ, the Church as a human institution in this world and what Richard Hooker calls the Church ‘mystical.’ The former is visible and divided, the latter is undivided but invisible. In the words of Hooker:

That Church of Christ, which we properly term his body mystical, can be but one; neither can that one be sensibly discerned by any man, inasmuch as the parts thereof are some in heaven already with Christ, and the rest that are on earth (albeit their natural persons be visible) we do not discern under this property, whereby they are truly and infallibly of that body. Only our minds by intellectual conceit are able to apprehend, that such a real body there is, a body collective, because it containeth an huge multitude; a body mystical, because the mystery of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense.¹¹

The Nature and Mission of the Church makes no mention of the distinction between the Church visible and invisible. It refers exclusively to the Church visible, making no reference to the existence of the communion of saints, or to the fact that we cannot assume that all who are members of the Church as a visible institution are truly members of the body of Christ or among God’s elect. In order for the study to give a proper theological account of the Church this issue needs to be addressed.

The second is the question of the role of the Church in salvation. The report declares that the Church is God’s instrument in achieving His purpose of uniting all things in Christ (Para. 34). What it does not address is the issue of what this means in terms of those who, in the history of the human race, or today, either have not been, or are not currently, members of the Church.

Most (if not all) mainstream churches would not now want to affirm the belief that ‘outside the Church there is no salvation’, but there are still large numbers of Christians and churches, particularly in the Evangelical tradition, who would want to say that without membership of the Church, in the sense of explicit commitment to Christ, salvation is not possible.

The difference between these two approaches raises the issue of how the Church and its mission are related to God’s saving purposes. What is the role of the Church in salvation if people can still be saved without belonging to the visible Church? This is an issue that has been extensively discussed by Christian theologians,¹² but it is one which *The Nature and Mission of the Church* does not address and which it needs to, particularly given the heightened importance of the question of inter-faith relations in today’s world.

From an Anglican viewpoint it would also have been good to see the ‘five marks of mission’ developed by the Anglican Consultative Council between 1984 and 1990 mentioned in the discussion of the mission of the Church in this study. These marks are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

¹¹ R Hooker *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* III.I.2

¹² See for example chapter 7 of *The Mystery of Salvation* by the Church of England Doctrine Commission (London: CHP 1995 and the sources which the chapter cites).

- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Fifthly, in addition to the issues of content highlighted above, the way the material is made available needs to be considered.

At the moment the study is pitched at quite a high academic level and consists of single written text. If the intention is that the ordinary members of the churches should discuss the material it contains then consideration needs to be given to also making the core material available in a variety of different formats (work books, CD Roms, digital projection material etc.) pitched at a range of different target audiences with different levels of education. In addition it would help readers who are not used to academic theology if some versions of the material were illustrated by the use of stories that related the issues discussed to real life situations in the life of the churches. As has already been noted, the present text is very abstract in tone.

Sixthly, if there was widespread study and discussion of a revised version of the material in *The Nature and Mission of the Church in the Church of England* this would help the Church of England to continue to take concrete steps towards unity.

It would do this in two ways, (a) by making people aware of the degree of ecumenical consensus about the Church that now exists and (b) by helping them to see where there are areas that are still divisive and on which further progress towards agreement needs to be made.

M B Davie 25.2.09