

**FAITH AND ORDER PLENARY COMMISSION
NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH
GROUP 1
REPORT ON SESSIONS 14 & 17
2009-10-13**

The discussion illustrated the difficulty of people from such different backgrounds (including varying acquaintance with academic, pastoral, and other perspectives) to come together around a single theme that is so all-encompassing for Christian faith. The group sensed how after BEM, the discussion moved from phenomenon to essence that came about from a feeling it was both needed and possible. Now we are bumping up against the limitations of dealing with essence that can be used as a point of departure for further work that would focus on the life of the church in terms of particularity informed by the work of NMC. The sense of need for this was expressed in broad resonance for the papers from various geographic contexts that criticized the focus on theory rather than practice. In addition NMC has insufficient treatment of the active sense of church, including the dynamics of "going out" and "gathering in" that may be understood differently.

In terms of method for the commission, the speakers were given an impossible task and the hearers were given an even more impossible task. There is a strong sense of need for more space to hear, assimilate, and process presentations.

Some people expressed concern over the combination of Nature and Mission as if they are separate. Others voiced concern with negative connotations of "mission" as colonial. This underlines the need for continuing work on the intersections of ecclesiology and missiology. It was helpful to have the cultural context provided by the second panel, but it seemed to be set up with the expectation that global south regions would present differences linked to geography rather than other factors. A key question focused on how far ecclesiological convictions are shared even within communions when expressed in different contexts and the extent to which theology "comes out of the soil". A fuller answer would take account of the complex ways ecclesiology shapes church in the context and context shapes ecclesiology.

In terms of steps forward, there is a sense that further engaging the churches in the process is more important than developing a revised document at this stage. Some of the suggestions that arose in our discussion included further attention to:

- Addressing the north/south binary by conducting a study of the effect of migration to urban areas (sometimes across national borders). This results in networks of theological transmission that defy easy categorization and may produce divergent expressions within communions not accounted for by thinking only in terms of continents.
- Developing a study guide that uses the method of "receptive ecumenism" to assist churches in engaging not only NMC but also responses to it and Called to Be One Church.
- Including the specific questions posed by the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in further studies.
- Conducting a dialogue that builds on work done on presenting various ecclesial identities in NMC to explore the process through which such identities are formed.