

## 29 Group 03 Report to Faith and Order Plenary Commission

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### Working Group # 3 on *The Nature and Mission of the Church*

Group three has been grateful for the opportunity to engage the *NMC* text together. Our discussions have fostered a better understanding of the diversity of our various traditions that enrich our common faith. While the quality of our time together renews our hope for the future work of Faith and Order, the specific content of our conversation suggests that *NMC* is not yet a convergence text. Our group regards the discussion on *NMC* as the most important work of this conference and thus regrets that more time was not scheduled to allow the Plenary Commission to more fully participate in this important work.

In its current form the *NMC* offers the churches a valuable tool for continuing our common exploration of ecclesiology. With that acknowledged, our study group would like to share some of our impressions of the text as it stands today and offer some suggestions for the further development of this important project.

We have grouped together our detailed discussions into three primary critiques of the text: the text does not adequately speak to our experiences in our various settings, the text does not yet representative of our understanding of who the church is, and despite its name, *The Nature and the Mission of the Church*, the text primarily presents a view of the nature of the church and gives relatively little attention to the church's mission.

First, the current version of this important text suggests more of an ontological and theoretical view of the church, rather than what most of us experience in the contextualized ways our communities live out the Faith. Rather than present a common ecclesiology *NMC* appears to approach ecclesiology with a specific idea of the church already in mind. In this way *NMC* reflects a continuation of the implicit ecclesiology of *BEM* that builds upon the last fifty years. While it is important to build upon the important work that Faith and Order has done over the years, it seems to us that the current text presents a shortsighted and static view of the church that is becoming incarnate in so many different ways today.

Second, the current text does not adequately represent our view of *who* we are as the Body of Christ. The church is not merely concerned with the poor but is actually comprised of the poor. The church does not direct its effort to the poor as others apart from those who comprise the church, but instead, the mission of the church involves all sisters and brothers in Christ working together for the transformation of the world.

Third, *NMC* does not seem to adequately address the activity of the church in the world. The minimal attention given to the mission of the church, combined with a narrative tone that feels declared from above, rather than one that has emerged from below, weakens the text's capacity to speak to all of our churches.

We offer three suggestions for Faith and Order's future work on ecclesiology. First, that the work and insights of the Tradition and traditions project increasingly inform the further development of this text. It was the experience of our group that the challenge of constructing a convergence ecclesiology invariably involves those same questions related to our different approaches to tradition. Second, further work should more boldly address the contextual

concerns in which our churches witness to the world. In this regard our common concern for the health and sustainability of creation, our prayers and efforts to overcome the scandal of poverty and war, and the reality of religious pluralism should be addressed in greater detail if we are to provide a credible account of the church to the world. Third, the fact that many new forms of church are emerging in many different contexts around the world must be taken into account if we are to make a credible and *representative* witness of the church to the world today.