

Faith and Order, Chania, Crete 2009

Report Group 4

Rapporteur: Myriam Wijlens

The Nature and Mission of the Church

Group 4 valued both the text and the input given by the different speakers. We are grateful that over 50 responses have been received to this document. Yet, we would like to mention the following points.

1. It is good that so many churches responded, but we are concerned that many did not. We think it important to know why, because this will have an impact on the reception of the document: Is it because they had no time or was there a doctrinal reason, such as that there was no one who could legitimately speak on behalf of such a community. It might be necessary to point out to churches that if they do not respond, we are deprived of a dialogue with them. This is particularly the case if a church was involved in drafting the document. We are also concerned that there are few responses from the developing countries. Consideration should be given to the publication of the responses (also electronically).
2. The responses must be carefully weighed with regard to their authority. A response by an individual should not be weighed equally with the official response of a church.
3. With regard to the nature of this document: it is neither pretending nor intending to be the final word on the nature and mission of the church. It should be seen as a kind of *in via* declaration which reports on the awareness of the level of unity already present and outlines the remaining differences. So, although this document in a way only captures a certain stage of the process of the restoration of the church of Christ, it is important to commend this text as a convergence document, for three reasons:
 - first, it is “a good enough document” for the time being because it would be unlikely that another document could give us much more at this time;
 - secondly, future generations would benefit from knowing what we have already agreed on and what thus must be protected and promoted. We can then hold each other accountable to this agreement;
 - thirdly, this document itself has already changed and influenced our churches and thus has already produced fruits by the mere fact that it has been discussed by so many.
4. Yesterday we learned how important it is to take into consideration the context in which the church lives and is thought about. There is the Church with an upper case “C” and there are the churches with a lower case “c”. This document is predominantly about the Church with a upper case C., whereas the context relates primarily to the churches with a lower case c. Some might be tempted to say we should start with the context and explicate this, but group 4 feels that despite the great value in this approach, it would be impossible to take up every feasible context. Hence we wonder, in light of the reception of this document, whether it might be helpful to use a more accessible language which is in one way general, but allows precisely because it is general the transfer to the local context. It might also be helpful to offer a study guide to assist the reading of the document through the lenses of the local context. The regional and national councils could help with this.
5. Likewise the academic nature and the predominantly Western perspective and method. This of course relates to the intended addressees of the document: if we want the document to

have an impact on our non academic fellow Christians the document must be made more accessible. Hence, a study guide might help.

6. Group 4 supports the need to emphasize more strongly the mission of the church. The mission of the Church is to preach the gospel and the gospel also speaks about creation. Holiness does not relate to people only, but also to the way we treat God's creation. The responsibility of the church to take action in preserving nature could be more strongly emphasized and seen from a more holistic perspective. Climate change makes even more urgent the need to advocate care for creation and justice for the poor.

In conclusion, group 4 commends the document as a convergence document as long as the responses are taken into consideration. We recommend a study guide to enable reception at all levels in the churches.