

### Ecclesiology: *The Nature and Mission of the Church*

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Report of Group 10 (Andrey Kordochkin [moderator], William Henn [rapporteur], Ofelia Alvarez Coleman, Shahe Ananyan, Frans Bouwen [Bible study], Susan Durber, Gabriel Hachem, Stephen Harmon and Neal D. Presa)

#### Question area 1:

The aim of NMC was to provide common foundations for a vision of the Church about which we can all agree. As such, not much attention was given to context. Perhaps contextual comments could be added, especially in the fourth part or in an additional chapter. Others thought, however, that what seems to be called for is not simply the addition of further comments on context. Rather two different approaches seem to have been voiced. The approach of NMC does not seem related to context but to the traditional ecclesiological questions as treated in academic theology. How can contextual concerns be included, such as the ecclesiological views of indigenous peoples? Is it possible to harmonize the two methods of attending to both “classical ecclesiological questions” and to the “contextual experience of church” in a convergence text? Can a methodology which invites the expression of as many voices as possible produce the kind of text which is an agreement or convergence? At the same time, what we believe about the Church today needs to be in continuity with the faith of the Christian community through the ages. Opening the discourse to hearing what people think about the Church today in their various contexts is not a step that need be feared, as if one is opening up to heretical views. It is simply to make the conversation and the source of our work more inclusive. This is not to deny that much of what NMC includes is valuable; but methodological adjustments need to be made so as to include more voices.

There was much discussion of Metr. Geevarghese Coorilos’s paper, which surprised some because it focused more on the Indian context than on traditional orthodox ecclesiological themes. As contextual, however, it does illustrate inculturation, which is dear to Orthodox thought. Disagreement arose as to whether his paper is grounded more in the idea of kenosis or incarnation or the church’s witness (*martyria*) in the face of opposition and persecution. Some felt that his presentation witnesses to a plurality of ecclesiologies, all of which need to be taken into account. For example, those passages mentioning Daliths as making up the Body of Christ and as being a realization of the church are different from the ecclesiology of NMC, which suggests to some that only the church is a sign and instrument of God’s transformative work in the world. Others noted that there is some indication of God’s work outside of the church in NMC when that text speaks of the Kingdom of God; but it is not a prominent theme. Some felt that NMC over-privileges the church as the place of God’s presence. Would NMC recognize the church in the Daliths?

The presentation of Prof. Collins did attempt to point out how NMC included much that may be called experiential or contextual. Perhaps more effort could be made to include a description of the experience of the church in mission, which was described as the “aesthetic dimension” in Collins’ paper. Other papers pose the question of whether the experience of the global South has been taken seriously. Here in Crete, the absence of women presenters during the presentations on NMC suggests that their voices too have not been taken into sufficient consideration. It is not that the work in NMC is to be rejected but it needs to enter into dialogue with other ecclesiological views such as the view of church as family in the setting of creation

(land, sea, sky), as mentioned in the paper reflecting to context of Samoa, or the church of the Daliths, as expressed in the paper from India.

If we are aiming at a “convergence text,” then those who read the text must be able to recognize themselves in it. The four presentations that we heard during session 13 seem to suggest that the South does not recognize itself in this text, though not all in our group heard those presentations as having that message. In any case, a convergence text needs to be such that those who read it can recognize in it their own concerns and views.

From the presentations on this study, it seems that a stage for further listening is still needed. That is not to say that NMC is poorly done, but more needs to be considered so that more can claim ownership of it.

Concerning the practical question of adding more contextual ecclesiological material, it was noted that a “convergence statement” needs to be short and further material on context would lengthen the text of NMC as we now have it. An adequate expression of the wide range of contexts within believers’ experience of the reality of church could be quite long – perhaps requiring a lengthy introduction. NMC is already rather long.

Those not involved in the process that led to NMC naturally feel left out. We have heard that 80% of those present here in Crete are participating in a Faith and Order meeting for the first time. Such a fact can also be an advantage, in that it invites new insights and reflections on NMC.

Any further work on ecclesiology needs to consider the prospective audience of the texts produced. Who do we hope will read the text – experts, congregations? How can it be received and what is its purpose? Do we hope that it will change our way of being church or of proclaiming the gospel?

## **Question area 2:**

There is general agreement in our group that the presentations and discussion of NMC here in Crete shows that the text is not yet mature as a convergence document. We conclude this for several reasons. First, not enough communities can identify themselves in the present text. To take one example, the paper by Metr. Geevarghese and its enthusiastic reception by the plenary show that the contextual experience of being Church among the poor and the outcasts does not find expression in NMC. Second, the relatively small number of responses from churches to NMC would seem to suggest that those not responding did not find the text to be relevant. Might this be because its authorship stems more from Faith and Order theologians and officials than from a wide the churches themselves? In addition to the three options for this project presented to us in the aula (1. publish it as is with the spectrum of churches, and not only those churches that are more keenly interested in classical ecclesiological issues. To remedy this, a process of regional consultations could be the next step in our ecclesiological work, allowing the current text to interact with and be enriched by visions of the church in various local contexts. The ecclesiological insights emerging from more local contexts could provide constructive criticism of the current NMC text. Additional work needs to be done, in any case, to fill up what is missing according to the presentations of Session 13 from the perspectives of Africa, Latin America, Oceania and Asia. The voices of women also need to be better included.

More churches need to be heard from; it is impossible to choose from the various options of going forward with this project without knowing the views of the churches regarding NMC. The responses to the Porto Alegre statement “Called to be the one Church” could be an additional source for discerning future steps in the ecclesiology work of Faith and Order; the deadline for the churches’ responses to that text is 2013. Also other discussions of ecclesiology need to be considered. Otherwise, our ecclesiology text may end up sitting on book shelves but would not have any real influence. Also the bilateral dialogues could be more used.

If a new approach emphasizing context and experience is adopted, then the study on tradition and traditions could have important contributions to make to the work on ecclesiology. The specific theme of how tradition relates to one's view of the church could be profitably explored.

**Question area 3:**

The involvement of our churches rests at least in part on our shoulders. When BEM came out, we read it with great excitement. Our liturgical practice was changed. We could see that our voices had been heard. If we produce a text by means of a process in which the voices of the churches have been heard, those churches will be more committed to accepting it and to participating in the ecclesiological work of the Faith and Order commission. The world today is quite different from that of 1982 when BEM was published. We need to learn the lessons from that process and to foster the kind of open communication and methodology that an instrument like the internet has shown to be possible and helpful, so as to maximize the interaction with, exchange about and contribution to our ecclesiological work.