

38 Group 12 Report to Faith and Order Plenary Commission

October 12, 2009

Nature and Mission of the Church

Session 14

General/first impressions:

Impression: after having read NMC several times, even now a person said that she would have difficulty in answering ‘what is it about?’ It is a rather abstract text – and the global south presentations in plenary showed the context of the text is traditional theological ecclesial language. The language is ‘churchy’ – with the question of the problems and issues of bishops and such questions.

The regional reports express the language of the ‘south,’ but both aspects are needed. Is this issue ecclesiology - a common area – or is just mission?

The contextual presentations of theology of church were theological, but rooted in lived contexts.

What is the purpose of the documents of Faith and Order? It is a Faith and Order task to do ‘pew level’ theology or more academic theology?

Not all Christians were part of this process (Pentecostals and Global Christian Forum type churches are not represented).

Is NMC a common understanding to *inspire* – which is easier or to do, or a common agreement document, which is more difficult.

The NMC are old theories of ecclesiologies recast once again. The presentations in plenary from the global south added the questions of what is missing from the presentation. It is a challenge to address these aspects.

Options for the NMC: 3 presented (keep it as is, shorten it, or expand it). That decision will affect the document’s revision.

Orthodox contextual presented this AM. It is not just a catholic/protestant issue.

What does ‘Church’ mean in the document? Universal/local/something else? It is hard to build without understanding the terminology.

Faith and Order is not for the parish level, but the local churches job to transfer it to the parish level. (I.e., should be academic)

What are the implications of this study?

Pacific theologians struggle with where to begin the study of Nature and Mission of the Church. They can't be separated – What is the nature of the church that is expressed in the mission?

Perhaps a wider framework to contribute locally? Response by moderator: this is why the initial study (NMC) was more theoretical. The study gives us the language/terminology to work with.

Need to analyze the NMC before we move forward to revise.

Are regional contexts more important than confessional contexts?

Perhaps a 'workbook' for the churches to use and teach the document once completed.

How do the local contexts influence the reading of the text? (how does the south see it, how does the north see it)

Interesting that the global south presentations addressed NMC without using the traditional language (bishops, sacraments, etc.)?

Number of responses received is a problem, but in part it may be that the deadline for responses is after this plenary. (because the deadline for responses was set before the date for the F&O plenary was set)

Comment in plenary session that the quality of the responses vary, as well as the variety of types of responses (few from member churches). One suggestion was that the quality of the responses be a guiding principle in assessment of the suggestions revision, as well as a preference in that context of member church responses. It is, after all, the member church's statement.

After hearing the various local contexts in plenary: to what extent is the definition of Church 'incarnational' in context of the various peoples? Is there a theology of Church that is universal and not in terms of place, time, and people? Is the 'Church' a relative identity to the time, place and people, or is there a transcendent identity?

Are the 'earth' and climate issues elements of 'church' or of 'moral theology'? Are we mixing our theologies?

Are the divine and human natures of the church in tension in the NMC?

Question of lack of women's voices? A 'from below' theological perspective is missing in the document. Even just the level of laity vs. ordained voices.

NMC should speak to the 'economy of God speaking in the lives of the people'

In the African prayer service at the plenary there was very 'abstract' liturgical theological language in the prayers and sermon. Why is it OK there, and not in a Faith and Order NMC document? It was noted that this was not an isolated experience of this; it is common in African services to use 'evangelical' language.

NMC would take too much time to discuss, (as well as the presentations) for one session of working group, or even of one plenary meeting. To develop the document a good understanding of the different churches is necessary. We need to live with each other as church to develop the statement (Church *lived* as body of Christ, communion, temple of the Holy Spirit). Pope John

Paul II's visit to the Romanian Orthodox Church when he said that he was there 'to contemplate the countenance of Christ in your church'. That should be our goal in NMC.

Inculturation is important as part of the NMC. The time of working group sessions is too limited.

The challenge to see 'Christ' in the other's church. Perhaps more self criticism of our own Churches should be part of the process. Make it a two way process *from* each church.

The division within the Orthodox churches makes having an 'orthodox' voice difficult in the document.

Is the document ever 'good enough' to use it?

Question 2: Advice for F&O as an ongoing process? Is NMC enough to have as a convergence statement?

Pentecostal: doesn't like to wait – send it to the churches to receive.

After this plenary – gives a context for developing a response to F&O for NMC 9 (for those who have not yet sent in a response).

The 'context' is needed for the NMC. Theory and context both needed.

Faith and Order is unique in that it is wide ranging theological body. It would be a loss to lose that level here with a more pew level approach to theology.

The context within the studies helps people and churches to understand the theology.

The 'boxes' in NMC document need to be related to the text better in order to understand the divergent points in theological discussion.

Preference for a short/concise text with extensive appendixes. Then the text would be accessible, but also have the theological density necessary for academics.

Is NMC mature enough for publication? A problem with WCC documents are they are too 'mid range'. They tend to be too *high* (academic) for the pews, too *low* (not theologically dense enough) for the academics. The WCC F&O as *the* theological forum suffers from being a compromise document maker. This needs to be addressed.

Perhaps a shorter NMC document, and invite local cultural contexts to write application/context texts.

NMC will never be 'perfect' but should be in dialogue with the academic world. Perhaps a working document being referred back and forth with academics and local contexts, rather than a 'final' document or statement.

The process of the discussion is vital. The goal of WCC is visible unity and that is understood. Is there agreement on that goal? What does that goal mean? That needs to be addressed.

The boxes (disagreements) are getting longer as the document progresses. What is the emphasis (commonalities or differences)? Are the differences ‘church dividing’?

The text and the boxes are both needed because it is the real situation (agreements and disagreements).

The essence of WCC/F&O (what does full visible unity mean) is at stake. This needs to be addressed. Is it the goal of the F&O expressed (full visible unity) the actual goal of the *members* of F&O? **Can we articulate what full visible unity means?**

Our group recommendations:

Contextual studies – in relationship with the theory. Look at national bilateral dialogues for examples and models (the USA Lutheran – Catholic bilateral on *Koinonia* was mentioned).

Regional meetings – are needed (all regions – north/south/east/west). Perhaps by internet/teleconference (being aware of the financial constraints). Perhaps in partnership with universities sponsoring with F&O conferences.

Is ecclesiology important for the global south (because of the mission emphasis)? Is mission important for the north? Changing of attitudes needs to be addressed/studied.

More *self criticism* of our own Churches should be part of the process. Make it a two way process *from each* church.