

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES**  
**Responses from some members of the Churches in Dialogue Commission**  
**to the Faith and Order Paper**  
*The Nature and Mission of the Church*

The Churches in Dialogue Commission (CiD) of the Conference of European Churches discussed in depth already in 2001 the Faith and Order paper *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* and sent its findings to the World Council of Churches. At its meeting in 2007 (Volos, Greece) CiD discussed together with some European members of the Faith and Order Commission the second version of this paper, namely *The Nature and Mission of the Church*.

In that context CiD decided to ask four of its members to respond from their respective church tradition to the four questions on the page 12 of this paper. The CiD members selected to prepare answers were representing the following church traditions - Anglican, Lutheran, Orthodox and Reformed. The initial intention of the CiD was to elaborate the four answers towards a consensus document. This perspective proved to be not helpful. Therefore the Commission decided to present the four answers on their own to the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches as a contribution to the discussion on this paper.

**An Anglican Response<sup>1</sup> :**

The following remarks are an Anglican contribution as part of an ecumenical European response via the CEC Commission Churches in Dialogue to the WCC paper *The Nature and Mission of the Church*<sup>2</sup>. Whilst it owes ideas to more formal Anglican responses, it remains the contribution of the author. This paper is not a response to the other WCC Faith and Order document entitled 'Called to be One Church' which was a product of, and accepted by the delegates at, the Porto Alegre Assembly in February 2006. Faith and Order Paper 198 comes from a lengthy study process within the WCC Faith and Order, and in which the CEC Commission played some part by its joint meeting with the European members of Faith and Order in Armenia in 2001. At that meeting the earlier draft *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*<sup>3</sup> was under discussion. This new study is a revision of that study in the light of comments received then. The purpose of the recent document is

To give expression to what the churches can now say together about the nature and mission of the Church and, within that agreement, to explore the extent to which the remaining church-dividing issues can be overcome. (para10)

To that end, the document has two types of material; the main text is that which is considered the common perspectives which are the harvest of ecumenical work in the last century, and the material in boxes is concerned with that which still causes divisions between and within the churches. So the study asks for a response which indicates answers to the following

- Does the study document correctly identify the common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues that still divide us?
- Does it reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church?

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Council for Christian Unity Paper CCU/FO/07/06.

<sup>2</sup> *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Geneva: WCC 2005

<sup>3</sup> *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, Geneva: 1998

- Are their significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed?
- How can the study document help your church, together with others, take concrete steps towards unity?
- What suggestions would you make for the future development of this text?

A common CEC response may well have to identify where the CEC member churches have reached some convergence and where we find ourselves divided.

**1. Does the study document correctly identify our common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues which continue to divide us?**

The study does identify in the main text of the document common ecclesiological convictions held by churches who take part in the ecumenical movement. The comments that follow are those of an Anglican within the Church of England and for Anglicans it is necessary to compare this text with the historic formularies, and to note the agreements. In addition to the historic documents (the Nicene Creed, The Book of Common Prayer, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Ordinary), Anglican views expressed in ecumenical agreements of a bilateral and multilateral kind which have already been signed. In this text are seen agreements both with the recent ecumenical documents which have already been signed and the historic formularies. This is not surprising as the Church of England has been a keen participant in ecumenical affairs since the founding of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948. The convergences noted in this document have been built on the theological work done in previous WCC documents in which Anglicans played a part such as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, *Confessing the One Faith*, and *Church and World: the Unity of the Church and the renewal of Human Community*. Many of the bilateral and multilateral agreements<sup>4</sup> in which Anglicans have been one of the partners have incorporated insights from these named documents.

Paragraph 24 rightly indicates that *koinonia* is to be found in the New Testament as well as in later periods though it fell out of use. While it is true that the concept of *koinonia* has emerged as a helpful theological tool and central notion in the quest for a common understanding of the nature of the Church as indicated in that paragraph it is important not to overload this word. In paragraph 15 the document, in the context of the section entitled 'Biblical Insights', cautions that 'subsequent reflection must always engage and be consonant with the biblical teaching.' More work needs to be done on how *koinonia* embraces diversity.

Indeed, more work needs to be done on the goal of the ecumenical movement itself. Is the goal of the ecumenical process a form of reconciled diversity in which separate churches continue to exist or is it the emergence of a united church with a common faith, structure and reconciled ministry?

A continuing area of significant differences between the churches is the relationship between the apostolic faith as witnessed to by Scripture and the traditions of the churches. Paragraph 61 helpfully notes that the 'Gospel has to be rooted and lived authentically in each and every place. It has to be proclaimed in language, symbols and images that engage with, and are relevant to, particular times and particular contexts.' Paragraph 70, however, does not do justice to those periods in history when the Church needed to be renewed. The churches that were shaped by the Reformation and others that were influenced by it would want a greater acknowledgement of the importance of the church needing to be continually renewed by the Spirit.

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<sup>4</sup> Reuilly Common Statement, an agreed document between British and Irish Anglicans and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches.

In paragraph 65 in the section entitled The Church as Communion of Local Churches the document expresses the view that '(t) he communion of the Church is expressed in the communion between local churches, in each of which the fullness of the Church resides.' It is not the case that all would agree that 'the fullness of the Church' resides in each local church. More work needs to be done in this area too.

In the Church of England decision-making is an important balance between the ordained and lay representatives discerning the will of God. There are deanery, diocesan and the General (or national) Synod in which decisions are taken. In addition, the House of Bishops has a series of processes by which Episcopal decisions are determined, collegially as well as conciliarly. When the matter of decision-making is discussed in chapter III there is no real discussion about who has the authority to make decisions. There is a real issue between a more centralised approach to decision-making in some churches and the more dispersed pattern in other churches. In the Anglican Communion a process is taking place to discern how far an individual province has a right to make a decision that is opposed by many other provinces in the Communion.<sup>5</sup>

In chapter IV the relationship between ecclesiology and ethics is raised with mention being made (in para112) of 'famine and starvation, natural disasters and the HIV/AIDS pandemic'. It is becoming clearer that stances on ethical issues to do with gender and sexual matters are, and will continue to be, church-dividing within and between churches. So more attention should be given to this relationship.

## **2. Does the study document reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the church?**

The document endorses the view (in par 34) that the Church has a vital role in salvation when it states,

'(i)t is God's design to gather all creation under the Lordship of Christ (cf. Eph1:10), and to bring humanity and all creation into communion. As a reflection of the communion in the Triune God, the Church is God's instrument in fulfilling this goal. The Church is called to manifest God's mercy to humanity, and to bring humanity to its purpose- to praise and glorify God together with all the heavenly hosts.'

This is clearly an aim that can be agreed by all but further specificity would have helped. The Church of England has given much creative thought to mission and this reader would have liked to see mention of the marks of mission which the Anglican Communion developed in the last decades of the twentieth century. These are to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom; to teach and baptize new believers; to respond to human need by service; to seek to transform unjust structures in society; to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation. Some of these issues are well known in WCC documents.

## **3. Are there significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed?**

The Church of England lays great stress on the role of Scripture. The material in paragraphs 13-15 on what the church means in the New Testament would benefit from further treatment. Worship is central to the life of the Church, as indicated in the quotation above, but the only other brief mention is in paragraph 36. This could be amplified.

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<sup>5</sup> The Windsor Report, London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004 is a report which deals with this very issue.

While paragraph 51 notes the discrepancy between ‘membership in the church, on the one hand, and vibrant profession and practice of the Christian faith, on the other’ in the context of our communities facing the challenge that ‘some of their members seem to “belong without believing” little seems to be said about the relationship between church and state. The Church of England is the established church in England but its sister church, The Scottish Episcopal Church, does not have that relationship with the state in Scotland. The document could helpfully address more adequately the relationship between Church and State than the discussion in Part IV.

For some in the Church of England it would have been helpful had the document included a discussion of the distinction between the Church visible and the Church invisible. From the sixteenth century the Church of England there has been a call to distinguish between the two forms of the church; between its form as a human institution, and the Church mystical. This distinction does not feature in the document, nor is there any reference to the communion of the saints.

The issue of the relationship between women and men in the church is a matter of current concern. The question of whether women should be ordained features in the section on ministry as one of the areas of disagreement but there is the further matter of the relation of the genders in theological anthropology.

The Church of England is not a territorial church, though it is diocesan and manifests itself in a geographically based parish system. The issue of territoriality which poses problems for some churches especially in Eastern Europe could be noted, particularly in a European response.

#### **4. Insofar as this study document provides a helpful framework for further ecclesiological discussions among the churches:**

##### **How can the study document help your church together with others to take concrete steps to unity?**

The Church of England has already made concrete steps towards unity with sister churches in the Porvoo Agreement, and taken steps towards closer relationships with churches in mainland Europe and in the British Isles, using material harvested in the ecumenical process. What is said in paragraph 98 about the ecumenical movement serving as a ‘stimulus and invitation to church leaders to explore the possibility of working together in appropriate ways’ is particularly true in the British Isles, and could become true in other parts of mainland Europe. If a revised version of this document is widely published in a form more suitable for discussion at every level of the church, then people even where this stimulus has already borne fruit will be more aware of the consensus that now exists, and where further works needs to be done to reach a full convergence.

##### **What suggestions would you make for the future development of the text?**

The material in its present form is not of the sort that can be used by the ordinary churchgoer. If it could be adapted in style and in presentation for a wider readership with examples of how ecumenical progress has been made in some localities (e.g. Local Ecumenical Partnerships, and Agreements which bind churches together as in the Porvoo Agreement) then this will give further impetus to the ecumenical movement in our countries.

## **A Lutheran Response**

### **1. Does the study document correctly identify our common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues which continue to divide us?**

Generally this document describes most of themes and results of multi- and bilateral dialogues during the last decades. Different Lutheran churches have participated in most of them. Especially influential is for this document so-called Lima paper (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982). Document of Lima is in turn influential to the theology of declaration and communion of Porvoo between Lutherans and Anglicans – in many ways.

One of the briefest definitions of the Church in Lutheran confessional writings sounds – ‘The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.’ (Confessio Augustana VII). This definition stated the minimum for the Church unity in 1530. Today it also sets a goal for ecumenical dialogue. According to it local churches do not need similar structures and traditions to be in communion with each other. At the same time common understanding of the very center of Christian faith is inevitable for Church unity.

In this study document is in a good way. It uses solid scriptural basis for describing the Church and tries to link the mission of Church to actual needs and situations of the world. For instance, the threefold names “people of God”, “body of Christ” and “temple of the Holy Spirit” correspond to many other ecumenical documents where Lutheran churches are involved, as also *koinonia / communio*. May be that Lutherans have not had as many common convictions as the NMC lays out, but ecumenically involved churches should by now have received them.

At the same time – there is lot of room for clearer identification in the document. One example may to be relationship between Scripture and later/continuing tradition of the Church.

Most of dividing (or different in a less strong level) issues are quite well described in this study document.

### **2. Does the study document reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the church?**

It does, when we speak about convergence of Reformation churches. Especially good examples of dialogue in Europe are Porvoo and Leuenberg (Lutheran-Anglican and Lutheran-Reformed). Convergence reached in those dialogues is more or less reflected in this study document. More complicated and less convergent is the ecclesiological dialogue between Reformation churches in one hand and Orthodox or/and Roman Catholic churches on other hand. It may even be the case that the intensive study and confessional awareness has resulted in an increasing number of doctrinal differences in ecclesiology. But continuation of those dialogues is still important mark of emerging convergence.

### **3. Are there significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed?**

There are quite a few ideas about the issue 'believing without belonging-belonging without believing' in this document. Of course, in many ways this is more European problem, but it needs theological reflection also ecumenically/internationally.

From the other hand - different Lutheran churches are struggling with many ethical issues which threaten to become church-dividing (economic justice, sexual ethics, radical human rights issues). Since the Lutheran tradition has not regarded ethics as a mark of the church, our theological ability to cope with these issues has remained limited. While the ethical debates are important, they need to be distinguished from proper ecclesiology.

The two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist do not only primarily manifest Christian life, but they constitute the communion, which is lived.

#### **4. Insofar as this study document provides a helpful framework for further ecclesiological discussions among the churches:**

##### **How can the study document help your church together with others to take concrete steps to unity?**

Text needs lot of dialogue and more clear identifications in positive statements and dividing questions between the churches. Improved and more concrete document will be good help for continuing dialogue.

The NMC can be helpful especially in Lutheran discussions with Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican traditions, since the doctrinal points of the text strongly represent the different elements of theology in these three traditions. We have reached a lot of unity with the European Anglican and Reformed traditions, and the document can provide more for worldwide agreements.

Very important will be more intense dialogue with the Evangelical and Charismatic traditions and hearing of theirs contribution to this dialogue.

##### **What suggestions would you make for the future development of the text?**

This text needs answers from the churches, new theological contribution from different bilateral dialogues and 'translating' to the language used on grassroot-level of churches.

More extension of ecclesiological and ethical reflection will be needed during this process.

### **An Orthodox Response**

#### **1. Does the study document correctly identify our common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues which continue to divide us?**

This text is a synthesis of all the results achieved in the ecumenical field during the last few decades. From this perspective, it manages to identify the common ecclesiological convictions of our churches, as well as the issues which still divide us and which demand further reflection and theological analysis.

The study document names the attributes of the Church, but, as far as the content of the last three of these is concerned – the holiness, the catholicity, and the apostolicity – the description it provides is incomplete from the Orthodox point of view.

From the Orthodox point of view, *koinonia* is a concept which involves the fact that the communion members take part in the Eucharist. That is why in Orthodoxy, this term is used particularly in the phrase „Eucharistic Koinonia or communion“. Consequently, this term cannot be used with respect to the relationship with other Christian churches or denominations, unless they have reached the same doctrinarian teaching.

Also, among the issues that differentiate the Orthodox churches from the Protestant ones is the fact that the Holy Sacraments are 7 in number.

## **2. Does the study document reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the church?**

To answer this question, one or several terms of comparison are requisite here. Whereas the dialogue between the Protestant churches has known important progress in ecclesiology during the last few years, in the form of the Leuenberg and Porvoo Agreements, the same thing cannot be said regarding the dialogue with the Orthodox churches.

If we relate this text to the theological dialogue carried out between the Patriarch Jeremias II of Constantinople and the Lutheran theologians from Tübingen during the years 1573-1581, we can notice that, at the end of the 16th century, the ecclesiological differences between Orthodoxy and Protestantism were mostly identified, differences that have remained unsolved ever since.

The final report of the 10th meeting between Romanian Orthodox Church and Evangelical Church in Germany (Cluj-Napoca, 2002), whose theme was „The Being and Unity of Christ’s Church – the Diversity of Churches in History”, broadly referred to many of the issues contained in the present document. The basic consensus regarding the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), the Holy Sacraments, the sacramental priesthood, the apostolic succession of episcopacy, the reception of Ecumenical Councils and the authority within the church were formulated as conditions for the achievement of unity. Thus, the only merit of this text is that it provides a more comprehensive and explicit systematization of these issues.

## **3. Are there significant matters in which the concerns of your church are not adequately addressed?**

With regard to the mission of the church, this text mirrors a broader unity of perspectives than it does with regard to the nature of the church. However, from the Orthodox point of view, the emphasis has to be laid on the fact that the fundamental mission of the church in the world is man’s salvation, attainable through the Holy Sacraments, that is, man’s sanctification, which goes all the way to deification, seen as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart of man. Although the text never fails to consider the eschatological component of ecclesiology, it reduces this component to the external transformation of the world, and to the intervention of the church wherever there is injustice on Earth (thus, presenting the church in its social dimension), leaving aside man’s inner transformation and sanctification.

The text does not clearly state the fact that the Church was founded on Christ’s Passion on the Cross, which is essential from the Orthodox perspective.

With respect to the Communion of Local Churches, the position expressed by the document, according to which „local churches are held in the communion of the Church by the one Gospel, the one baptism and the one Lord’s Supper, served by a common ministry“, does not fully accord with the Orthodox view, which demands the unity in doctrine, practice and canon law of the local churches held in communion.

## **4. Insofar as this study document provides a helpful framework for further ecclesiological discussions among the churches:**

**How can the study document help your church together with others to take concrete steps to unity?**

As far as the limits of diversity are concerned, reflection within the Orthodox Church – the most traditional of the Christian churches - has to be maintained. Questions need to be raised with respect to the level of diversity allowed in practice, ethics and organization, because these aspects are closely related to the teaching of faith (doctrine). Thus, the Orthodox Church has to first clarify these limits, reflecting on the doctrinal implications of the above mentioned issues. For example, a Eucharistic prayer which does not correctly render the Orthodox teaching, fails to produce the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Saviour, being thus null and void.

This text cannot help the church take concrete steps towards unity, unless the dividing issues mentioned are surpassed either through the reaching of a consensus, or through the affirmation of their neutral character for the unity of the church.

### **What suggestions would you make for the future development of the text?**

Concerning the future development of this ecclesiological text, it would be desirable that the all too often mention of the role of the church in the world – as it appears in parts I B, I C, IV and many other places - should be renounced. Likewise, the text should be restructured, on the basis of the two concepts used: the nature and the mission of the church. The fact that the text is divided into two chapters, „The Church of the Triune God“ and „The Church in History“, introduces a clear distinction between the eternal and the historical aspects of the church, which should be avoided through the restructuring of the entire text.

Although the text mentions the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol, it subjects it to the „sola scriptura“ principle, too. It would be desirable that, beside the ecclesiological teachings of the Bible, the patristic ecclesiology of the first millennium should be mentioned, too, as it is fundamental for the orthodox theology. The apostolic faith is acknowledged not only in the Holy Scripture, but also in the writings of the Fathers in the post-apostolic period.

With respect to the recognition of the baptism, the text which led the Christian churches in Germany, known as „Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen“, to mutual recognition of the validity of the baptism, should be consulted.

Apart from the theological dialogue, there is no other way towards progress in ecclesiology, which is not merely a theme, but the theme par excellence on which the final success or failure of the ecumenical dialogue depend.

### **A Reformed Response:**

#### 1. The Church as *Creatura Verbi*

For the Reformed Churches nothing is more essential to emphasize in ecclesiology than the fact that the church is a creature of the Word of God, as communicated by the Holy Spirit. If this is the basic principle of NMC, the document can be considered as highly promising in the ecumenical process. Consensus in the basic principle has to be complemented, however, by consensus about its theological consequences.

One test of the basic principle is the role of the *Bible* in the theological argument. In NMC biblical texts have a prominent place: Not only is a plurality of biblical metaphors for the church being evaluated, but the document also draws the important insight from the biblical material,



that “diversity appears not as accidental to the life of the Christian community, but as an aspect of its catholicity” (p. 6 / Nr. 15).

When the role of the Bible is affirmed, the role of *tradition* over against the Bible has to be clearly reflected. In NMC the role of tradition is addressed on page 6 / Nr. 15: “The same Holy Spirit who inspired the earliest communities guides the followers of Jesus in each time and each place as they strive to be faithful to the Gospel. This is what is understood by the living tradition of the Church.” Missing is a more profound reflection on the relationship between Bible and tradition.

A negative test of the basic principle is the critical role the Bible plays in theological discourse and in the life of the church. On page 11 / Nr. 45 we find the following formulation: “Therefore the visible organizational structures of the Church must always be seen and judged, for good or ill, in the light of God’s gifts of salvation in Christ, celebrated in the Liturgy.” The sentence *can* be understood in the sense that it also includes the Bible as a critical principle – but it can also be understood in the sense that the critical principle is primarily the ecclesial tradition. The criteria for criticism within the church being such an important issue, further clarification of this point is required.

## 2. Creatura Verbi and episcopacy

From a Reformed perspective, the fundamental dividing issue of ministry is correctly identified in NMC (p. 5, cf. p. 25). For the Reformed Churches, the issue is directly linked to the basic principle, the fundamental role of the Bible in the making of church doctrine. If a plurality of church structures in the New Testament is acknowledged (cf. 1), there remains no biblical foundation for episcopacy as the *exclusive* institutional realization of the people of God. And if the Church as *Creatura Verbi* has to be interpreted as *Creatura Spiritus*, it is a *non sequitur* that only through episcopacy the church can be kept truthful. A strong doctrine of tradition seems to be the logical presupposition of a strong doctrine of episcopacy. From a Reformed perspective, both stand in contradiction to the basic principle of *sola scriptura*.

## 3. Ecclesiology and other communities

NMC identifies three different types of ecclesiologies, all of them with different implications for the acknowledgement of other communities *as* churches (p. 16-17). While types 1 and 2 affirm that only one community (and, in some cases, a few more) can be considered as churches, type 3 allows for a theologically legitimate plurality of churches.

All three types have their problems: While types 1 and 2 tend to an exclusiveness which denigrates other churches, type 3 tends to reify diversity and downplay ecclesial divisions. NMC should make clear that ecclesiological concepts are – as any theological concept - in need of ecumenical correction, and therefore only have a relative status in the ecumenical process. To be concrete: No church should definitely negate another church’s ecclesial character on the basis of its own ecclesiology.

## 4. Ministry

NMC identifies the ministry as one, if not *the* dividing issue between the churches. In that light it is interesting from a Reformed perspective, that among “the gifts and resources needed for its life and mission in and for the world” given by God to the Church, the document only mentions “the grace of the apostolic faith, baptism and Eucharist as means of grace to create and sustain the *koinonia*” (p. 19 / Nr. 67). Not being mentioned under the means of grace is the ministry. If

that is not only a matter of omission, this would be an important sentence for the Reformed Churches: The church *only* depends on God's Word, given to her in the preaching of the Gospel and in the Sacraments. More likely, however, the ministry is implied in the "apostolic faith". If this is the case, it would be of high theological importance to explicitly separate the two, and not to let Scripture and tradition be fused in one.

The *Ordained Ministry*, in NMC, is not linked to the Ministry of all the Faithful, but is considered as being founded in the calling and sending of the apostles by Jesus (p. 23 / Nr. 86). From a Reformed perspective, it is highly questionable whether this can be a "common ecclesiological conviction". For the Reformed Churches, the Ordained Ministry is part of the Ministry of all Faithful, differing from it only by a functional differentiation, but with no other ontological and/or soteriological status.

Again, the statement that "there is no single pattern of conferring ministry in the New Testament" (p. 23, / Nr. 87) can gladly be affirmed from within Reformed theology.

In the whole document the issue of the *ordination of women* is not mentioned. For the Reformed churches, however, this is not a problem of marginal importance, but of fundamental hermeneutical and theological significance. Although it is one of the most intriguing ecumenical questions, under no circumstances can it be excluded from a basic ecumenical document on the church.

## 5. Episcopal and non-episcopal churches

NMC correctly states that the ecumenical process has brought episcopal and non-episcopal churches to discover "hitherto unrecognized parallels (...) in the way oversight is exercised" (p. 25). Again, on the basis of the *sola scriptura* principle and the consequence, that there is no exclusive organizational structure to be drawn from the New Testament, no single concept of the ministry of leadership should be formulated. NMC is right in simply stating the remaining differences (p. 25). It would again be helpful to point more critically to Scripture as the criterion to judge between the differing concepts.

Irritating for Reformed theology is a sentence like the following: "There seems to be an increasing openness to discuss a universal ministry in support of mission and unity of the church and agreement that any such personal ministry would need to be exercised in communal and collegial ways" (p. 28 / Nr. 104). While from a Reformed perspective one can freely agree to the second part of the statement, the first part does not include a general tendency in Reformed theology. The sentence suggests a drive towards a universal ministry which to us does not seem justified by the evidence.

## 6. Israel

In its exposition of biblical texts, NMC mentions the election of Israel as a "decisive moment in the unfolding realization of the plan of salvation". It also states that "the Church remains related, in a mysterious way, to the Jewish people, even as a branch is grafted onto the rich root of an olive tree." Such a statement stands in deep continuity with Reformed tradition, which from the beginning stressed the interconnectedness of Old and New Testament. Reformed theology was also among the first to point to the fact that Israel's election has not been withdrawn after the coming of Christ. This second point, the ongoing loyalty of God to his people, needs to be formulated more clearly in an ecumenical statement on the nature of the Church.

## 7. The Mission of the Church

NMC expresses many promising aspects in search of an ecumenical view of the Church. From a Reformed perspective, even the title could be more adequate. As NMC states on several occasions, the only *raison d' être* of the Church is its apostolicity, its being sent to the peoples of the world. Therefore, there is no nature of the church apart from its mission – the Church's mission *is* the nature of the Church. The title of the document, therefore, should more adequately read: "The Mission of the Church".

### **Conclusion**

The CEC Commission Churches in Dialogue, having discussed this four responses, have agreed to send this document as their response to the WCC's invitation to comment on the document *the Nature and Mission of the Church*. Although we could not come to one agreed statement, nevertheless we trust that this one document expressing four views from the European perspective, will be of some help in the process the WCC is undertaking.

*Malaga, Spain, 14th of May 2009*