

Tradition and traditions: Sources of Authority for the Church

This study emerged in the context of Ecumenical Hermeneutics. It was first proposed at Plenary Commission meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2004. In the following years Faith and Order Standing Commission elaborated the initial proposal and it was finally planned in two stages. First consultation took place in Cambridge in September 2008 and dealt with the issue of authority of the early teachers of the church: 'The Teachers and Witnesses of the Early Church: a common source of authority, variously received?' Report from the consultation is attached to this mail. The foremost question here is to discern the authority of the early church sources today.

The authority of the early church teachers is evident for some church traditions while seems alien to the others. The Cambridge consultation showed that various church traditions have received the early witnesses but show different levels in recognition of this fact. The Cambridge consultation agreed that 'it is important to receive, re-receive and pass on the teachings of the early fathers and mothers with the faith of the early councils' so that it shapes an ecumenical Christian identity and helps the estranged churches to get closer. (p3) The Cambridge consultation once again revealed centrality of the authority in ecumenical endeavor.

During the Plenary meeting in Crete there will be two sessions of 90 minutes length each dedicated to the Tradition and traditions' study (sessions before and after the lunch break on 10 October). In the first 90 minutes you will be in the plenary session: the Report together with the study will be briefly presented by the moderators of the study Rev. Dr Susan Durber and Most Rev. Dr Hilarion Alfeyev. Then will follow two or three brief reactions to the Report from the churches which do not have a tradition of addressing explicitly the early church teachers and witnesses as sources of authority. Then the floor is open for clarification questions and comments around the Report and the reactions to it. We encourage you to read papers from the Cambridge consultation which you will find on our web (please, see Appendix for instructions how to access the Faith and Order material for internal use only). The papers will help you to understand how the Cambridge consultation resulted with this Report.

During the second session the work will continue in groups and results of these discussions will be handed over to the Secretariat and later will be published in the plenary proceedings.

In the light of issues highlighted in the Report and in the prepared or spontaneous reactions the groups will reflect on three passages of the early church teachers: Ambrose of Milan, Gregory the Theologian, Isaac the Syrian (3-4 groups will deal with each author). Therefore in the first session, in plenary, you will be shortly introduced to these teachers of the early church. Some orientation questions will also be provided.

There is another task for the participants in the context of Tradition and traditions' study: the last 25-30 minutes of group discussions will be dedicated to planning of second consultation of the study in 2011 on Sources and Forms of Authority for the Churches. All these tasks will be facilitated by group co-ordinators who will receive a special training in advance.