

Document No. **12**

Report of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration
4-8 July 2008, Hofgeismar Germany

The Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration (the "Permanent Committee"), held its second meeting at Hofgeismar, Germany 4 -- 8 July 2008, hosted by Bishop Dr. Martin Hermann Hein of the Evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck, Germany at the Predigerseminar (Pastoral Seminary) Hofgeismar. The committee, comprised of fourteen members, continues the work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC (the "Special Commission").

Participants

Co-moderated by Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi of the Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi, the meeting was attended by members Dr. Agnes Aboum (Anglican Church in Kenya), Bishop Samuel Robert Azariah (Church of Pakistan), H.E. Metropolitan Bishoy (Coptic Orthodox Church), Mrs. Anne Glynn-Mackoul (Patriarchate of Antioch), Bishop Dr. Martin Hermann Hein (Evangelical Church in Germany), Dr. Nigussu Legesse (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church), Rev. Graham Gerald McGeoch (Church of Scotland), Dr. Magali Nascimento Cunha (Methodist Church in Brazil), and Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins (General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)), as well as Rev. Archpriest Mikhail Gundyayev substituting for H. G. Bishop Dr. Hilarion Alfeyev (Russian Orthodox Church), and Rev. Archpriest Vladan Perisic, substituting for H.G. Bishop Irinej of Australia and New Zealand (Serbian Orthodox Church). Apologies were received from H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Nifon of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church). The committee welcomed guests for the opening session Hon. Rev. Dr. Ofelia Ortega-Suarez, a president of the WCC and Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, formerly general secretary of the WCC. The work of the committee was facilitated by WCC staff Mr. Georges Lemopoulos, Rev. Sabine Udodesku, and the Reverend Canon Dr. John Gibaut, director of Faith and Order.

Setting

The Permanent Committee appreciated very much the congenial location for its second full meeting at the Evangelisches Predigerseminar Hofgeismar. The Committee was impressed with the expression of faith, hope and love represented by the work of the seminary, the senior living center and the other ministries of the Evangelische Kirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck. Joining in praise and prayer with the vital congregation at Christus-Kirche in Kassel, and being received by government leaders in the states of Hesse and Thuringia, provided a welcomed interaction with the local community. Walking in the footsteps of Martin Luther (1483 -- 1546) and of St.

Elizabeth of Hungary (1207 -- 1231) at the Wartburg Castle afforded the possibility to recall this significant period in Reformation history and to become better acquainted with a saint whose life is an example to all Christians. The Committee was grateful for the thoughtful planning of this meaningful encounter and the generous hospitality throughout the days of our meeting.

Background

The Committee heard from the Living Letters/Decade to Overcome Violence visit to Germany involving members of the committee and staff, which immediately preceded this session of the Permanent Committee. Their reports included stories of the struggles to reunify a country after decades of division, to heal wounds that in some places are hardly even acknowledged, and to reconcile after violence in the home, the family, and the nation. Hofgeismar's location adjacent to the old border between West and East Germany, the reports from the Living Letters' visits and from members of the Permanent Committee from their varied church contexts from Africa, Asia, the Balkans, Europe, the Middle East, and North and South America, all provided context for the committee's discussions, and included stories of hope and reconciliation from troubled areas, as well as challenges to the churches in others. The committee was reminded that the social and political contexts in which Christians live have evolved with very different ways of responding to social, ethical and justice issues. The stark image of memorials marking the suffering and death from religious, national and ideological wars described by the Living Letters team offered a sobering reminder of the need for dialogue and reconciliation.

Agenda

The work of the Permanent Committee for this second meeting focused on matters identified during the 2007 Damascus meeting and areas of continued concern in the life of the Council, including matters receiving particular attention in the report of the Policy Reference Committee of the Central Committee, such as, (a) expanded space – 10th Assembly, (b) programme plans 2009-2013, (c) progress on consensus matters, and (d) ecclesiology.

A significant portion of the meeting focused on the work of the Faith and Order Commission and in particular its reflections on Ecclesiology and Ethics. Reverend Canon Dr. John Gibaut, Director of the Faith and Order Commission, was present at the invitation of the Permanent Committee, in order to discuss synergies between the mandates of the Permanent Committee and the Faith and Order Commission.

NARRATIVE

Tenth Assembly

The Permanent Committee reviewed the composition and mandate of the Discernment Committee as included in the adopted Report of the Policy Reference Committee to the 2008 WCC Central Committee (Doc. No. GEN/PRC 04), noting in particular that the narrative section of that report lifted up the need to assure that the ethos of fellowship and consensus be maintained as fundamental to any proposal for the 2013 Assembly.

The Permanent Committee noted that the Discernment Committee is accountable to the Central Committee, and therefore, the next Assembly, in whatever form is decided, fundamentally will be an Assembly of the churches in fellowship through the

WCC. The earlier request [date] to the member churches from the General Secretariat for responses to the proposal for "expanded space" for ecumenical partners at the next Assembly, or an "expanded assembly," has received little response from the member churches. The Discernment Committee has been directed to continue the process of "listening" to the member churches. The Permanent Committee has identified the need to elicit aggressively additional reactions from the churches to this proposal so that sufficient information is available to the Discernment Committee prior to undertaking its work, and also so that ecumenical partners are not surprised by responses first received at the next meeting of the Central Committee.

The Permanent Committee recognized that "expanded space" for ecumenical partners at the next Assembly, or an "expanded assembly," could put at risk the achievements of the Special Commission and its successor committees, particularly by exacerbating the dynamics experienced by the Orthodox churches, which are few in numbers in the fellowship of the WCC membership and do not figure at all in most of the ecumenical organizations which may be interested in participating in an expanded assembly (e.g. CWCs, Specialized Ministries and most of the REOs, NCCs, IEOs). While consensus process of governance and allocation of representation on governing bodies have eased the impact of this situation, the structural minority status is not fully mitigated by adjusting modes of governance in the WCC and could be overwhelming to effective Orthodox participation in an expanded form of Assembly.

It was noted that the Global Christian Forum (GCF) was a successful experience of expanded space outside of the current structure of the WCC. It is understood that a representative of the GCF will participate in the meeting of the Discernment Committee.

Programme Plans 2009 -- 2013

The Permanent Committee was provided with a very helpful overview prepared by Deputy General Secretary Georges Lemopoulos entitled "Reading the WCC Programme Plans from an Orthodox Perspective" that classified Orthodox Church engagement in various areas and also posed some fundamental questions that transcend specific programmatic activities. (Report attached.) The overview noted that there are areas of rather good, or at least satisfactory levels of Orthodox participation, but also many areas of concern regarding Orthodox participation or lack of response. There seems to be a corollary tendency on the part of the WCC and ecumenical partners to discount the importance of maintaining Orthodox involvement and profile when the Orthodox Churches themselves choose not to participate or respond. For instance, if the pattern continues of creating organizations (such as EAA, ACT, ACT Development) that are related to WCC work but not fully of the WCC -- and hence do not include the Orthodox or account for Orthodox concerns -- this tendency will be exacerbated.

Progress Report on Consensus

The Committee received a report of the efforts since 2003 to implement the consensus model of decision-making presented by committee member Anne Glynn-Mackoul. The report included a survey of opportunities provided to train the moderators, recorders and rapporteurs in this new model of meeting, and an assessment of efforts in these areas that still need to take place. The Committee affirmed this assessment, and also noted that as the WCC has been living into this new model, it has

encountered deeper layers of meaning in the consensus process than simply institutional changes in the conduct of meetings (such as moderating sessions and recording decisions). Rather, the Council has begun to experience the profoundly spiritual changes possible for its work if it fully embraces the consensus model, and works to transform the culture of the WCC in all of its expressions into a culture of consensus.

The Report of the Special Commission itself anticipated that the change in ethos of the Council would need to go beyond rules, training and technical aspects. Consensus is more conciliar than parliamentary and more inclusive than adversarial. The emphasis on decision-making serves an institutional logic, the consensus method, as an effort to build the "common mind" aims at strengthening the fellowship. Even in cases of "business" matters, the consensus method points to the possibility for churches to express their faith which also is "made effective through love" (Gal 5:6). (Report of the Special Commission Appendix B.)

The Committee noted in its 2007 Damascus Report that "The challenges of this significant change in the culture of the WCC may require additional adjustments as well, including attention to planning the schedule of meetings to allow sufficient time for consensus to develop around issues that may be on the agenda of a meeting, and sufficient time for the drafting of statements and reports that allow consensus to develop around a text." (2007 Damascus Report). Recent meetings reinforce the importance of this observation.

Introduction to the programmatic work of the Faith and Order Commission

Over the course of several sessions, the Committee listened to a thoughtful and thorough presentation by the director of Faith and Order introducing the work of the Commission in a number of important areas. (See report attached.) The director reported on:

- a. the substantial Orthodox participation in the leadership of Faith and Order,
- b. progress in the area of ethics (in particular the study on moral discernment),
- c. sources of authority: Tradition and Traditions
- d. involvement of Faith and Order in facilitating the communication among bilateral ecumenical dialogues and the united and uniting churches convocation
- e. work with Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- f. involvement with Common Witness regarding holy women and men
- g. substantial work on the question of the One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition
- h. Ongoing consultation on the matter of particular interest to the Permanent Committee: ecclesiology. In particular, Canon Gibaut reviewed the process of reception to the two documents, "The Nature and Mission of the Church," and "Called to Be the One Church."

A rich and stimulating discussion followed.

Baptism

On the subject of baptism, the Permanent Committee noted that the very fact of pressing the ecclesiological questions has led to renewed discussion in the area of

baptism. Old questions are being raised with new vigor: Is baptism needed for salvation? Is baptism by water and spirit or by word and spirit? The theological background of mutual acceptance of baptism deserves renewed discussion in our time.

The Committee was reminded that agreements on recognition of baptism are being reached already in certain national and regional contexts. An example of such an agreement in April 2007 among different Christian churches in Germany was mentioned in particular ("Magdeburg Agreement"). It was noted that research has been undertaken (although not published) to ascertain the number and content of such agreements worldwide. A concern was expressed that in the global ecumenical movement we may reproduce work unnecessarily. On the other hand, sometimes issues such as baptism and ecclesiology are not addressed at all because they seem so distant to matters of war and peace, justice and injustice, requiring the immediate attention of churches.

The Committee observed that there is a need to continue to harvest information on both theological reflection and practice in churches and in national and regional contexts on questions of baptism as well as the nature and mission of the church.

Ecclesiology

The Committee conducted an extended conversation on the relationship between the work of Faith and Order and the Permanent Committee in the area of ecclesiology. Canon Gibaut framed the conversation by noting the important contribution of Orthodox scholarship and theology, which roots the discussion in Eucharistic theology and eschatology. The current mechanism for council-wide discussion of ecclesiology, however, is the response process on the two documents, "Nature and Mission of the Church" and "Called to be the One Church." The committee noted with some disappointment the low number of responses to date and gave serious consideration to what might be the reasons and how to encourage additional interest.

The challenges in offering theological studies for the consideration of the churches include the differing priorities faced by member churches in their local contexts and ecumenical organizations. To the extent that enthusiasm exists for documents such as "The Nature and Mission of the Church", and "Called to be the One Church", it may be helpful to the process of reception and response by member churches that those engaged with the document undertake the personal task of eliciting response, an approach that marked the BEM process and was particularly effective.

Changing Ecumenical Landscape

The Committee noted the very different ecumenical landscape that marks the end of the Twentieth and beginning of the Twenty-first centuries. The ecumenical movement, which was originated to overcome the fragmentation of the Christian churches, has itself become fragmented and is subject to centrifugal forces that reflect the era. For instance, it was noted, with relationship to the united and uniting churches, that the zeal that once characterized that movement has waned significantly. The WCC continues to hold two primary objectives: to accompany the churches in calling one another to visible unity and to offer coherence to the ecumenical movement. The challenges of the era only strengthen our resolve to seek that unity for which Our Lord prayed.

Next Meeting

The Permanent Committee has tentatively reserved dates for its next meeting, with arrival anticipated on 1 July 2009, with an opening session in the evening and departure on 5 July 2009, with consideration to be given to appropriate planning for the development of its report and recommendations. The agenda will focus on common prayer and the Midterm Evaluation, and include discussion on moral and ethical issues from the perspective of the Report of the Special Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration recommends:

- 1. That an urgent reminder be sent to Member Churches who have not yet responded to the proposal for "expanded space" for the 2013 Assembly or an "expanded assembly", urging them to respond by 1 November 2008. This renewed call should be by letter from the General Secretary to the member churches and by email to the Central Committee members, and by web posting. It should also be included in the summary of issues to the Central Committee following the next meeting of the Executive Committee.**
- 2. That the mandate of the Midterm Evaluation Committee include evaluation of the WCC's progress in implementing the main findings of the Special Commission and that the team be invited to attend the next meeting of the Permanent Committee.**
- 3. That all efforts be undertaken to facilitate the deepening of the Council's embrace of the consensus model, transforming the culture of the WCC in all of its expressions into a culture of consensus. To this end, the Committee restates here by reference Recommendation 6 from the 2007 Damascus Report of the Permanent Committee¹ emphasizing the additional levels of training and reflection necessary to this process. The General Secretariat is encouraged to undertake more intentional efforts in (a) consulting with member churches or ecumenical organizations that use consensus, (b) providing some consensus orientation in the planning of all meetings of the WCC to assure that the consensus methods are fully established as the default model for all phases of meetings, and (c) orienting and training current WCC staff and new staff at the time of their employment in the consensus model.**
- 4. That the Permanent Committee and the Faith and Order Secretariat continue the close collaboration that marked the work of the Special**

¹ 6. affirms the intention to train the leadership of WCC (officers, moderators of committees and commissions) on consensus procedures and urges the consideration of similar training for rapporteurs, **recommends** that this training of the leadership and rapporteurs consist of intentional and ongoing training and evaluation, **recommends** that a presentation on consensus decision-making to participants of major ecumenical meetings of the WCC be included very early in the agenda of such meetings, and **recommends** that the agendas of meetings be designed to facilitate discernment and development of consensus in the drafting of any report and statements.

Commission on matters of common interest and concern particularly ecclesiology, with special attention to issues identified by the Special Commission (cf. Report of the Special Commission paragraphs 14, 15, 16). The Permanent Committee would draw the attention of the Faith and Order Commission to these issues and asks for its help, putting these issues as much as possible into focus during its work.

- 5. That the WCC continue to encourage member churches to respond to the two ecclesiological documents currently being circulated "Called to be the One Church" (Porto Alegre) and "The Nature and Mission of the Church" (Faith and Order), identifying the purpose that will be served by each document and the responses received. This encouragement should employ multiple approaches, including: (a) renew the invitation to the churches for responses; (b) engage centers of theological inquiry close to the ecumenical movement to undertake to respond; and (c) engage in regional consultations around the documents, also by inviting regular local or regional gatherings to include on their agendas consultation about these documents and the issues raised. Where necessary, efforts should be made to accompany member churches or build their capacity to respond.**