

Consultation on Mission
'Challenges and opportunities for the mission of the Churches in
Europe today'

Budapest, 29th-31st August 2011

Report and Recommendations

The Churches in Dialogue (CiD) Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) organized a consultation on challenges and opportunities for the mission of the churches in Europe today from 28-31 August, at Rady College in Budapest, Hungary. The consultation was graciously hosted in the office of Dr. Istvan Szabó, Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District in Hungary, and a member of the CiD Commission. Dr. Szabó welcomed the participants among whom were members of the CEC Central Committee, representatives from CEC mission partners and a group of mission specialists.

CEC AND THE MISSION OF CHURCHES IN EUROPE

Mission in Europe has been a central agenda item for CEC from its beginning. In 1975 CEC established a Study Secretariat which, in 1997, became the Churches in Dialogue Commission (CiD). European secularism has been an important focal point for study and dialogue from the outset. Meetings, one in co-operation with the Catholic Bishops Conference of Europe (CCEE) at Riva del Garda (1984), and the CEC General Assembly in Stirling (1986) added impetus to the study of mission. A partnership in the 1990s with the World Council of Churches (WCC) investigated missionary congregations. Consultations during the same period with evangelicals and Pentecostals and the European Evangelical Alliance led to a fruitful dialogue relating to the respective practices and understandings of mission.

Further mission reflection was elaborated by the Consultation: *'Giving an account of the hope within us'* at Bad Herrenalb (2000); it was a key feature of the *Charta Oecumenica* (2001) which also acknowledged Europe as a multi-religious continent; and mission was stressed in a global partnership in *'Towards meaningful co-operation in mission'* (Bad Segeberg, 2003) at a consultation of churches from Latin America and Europe. The mission consultancy established between 2004 and 2011 led, among other activities, to a mission consultation, (Budapest, 2007) that addressed migration, new and emerging churches, secularisation, and proselytism; another consultation focused on *'New and Emerging Mission Movements in Europe Today'* (Pullach, 2009); and CEC's contribution to the Edinburgh 2010 Mission Conference which focussed on mission, unity and ecclesiology.

CEC's commitment to date leads naturally to the hope expressed by the participants at this current consultation that ways might be found to strengthen the organisational commitment of CEC to the mission of the Churches in Europe.

WHAT HAS BEEN DISCUSSED DURING THIS MISSION CONSULTATION

The CCEE President, H.E. Cardinal Péter Erdő, greeted the consultation participants and drew attention to the 'New Evangelisation' of Europe called for by Pope Benedict XVI and, in doing so, emphasised the legacy of city missions between 2003 and 2008 which proclaimed the need for the world to encounter Christ. In the task of mission

there was the potential for a discovery of deeper unity between and among the Christian traditions.

CEC's engagement with questions and practices of mission: Following the presentation by Viorel Ionita, a consensus emerged around the need for mission activity to be located more closely to the organisational centre of CEC, and that the CiD remain the appropriate place to locate theological reflection and study of mission in Europe. Consideration should be given to identifying a more appropriate and effective way forward along with a timeline for a new structural relationship between CEC and its mission partners.

Exploration of the issues relating to **secularisation:** Darrell Jackson's presentation addressing the mission challenges of secularism argued that Europe is simultaneously pre-secular, secular and post-secular. Generational variations in survey data suggest that secularisation may not be the inevitable end of history. This may be reflected in the shift from secular ideological hostility towards religiosity to a secular benign indifference towards historic Christianity.

John Baxter-Brown raised the question of the mission of the Churches in Europe and their relationship to questions of **mission, discipleship and power**. He cited the biblical texts of Matthew 4 and 28 with reference to Europe's established churches.

Viorel Ionita and Darrell Jackson introduced three **ecumenical texts dealing with mission**. The *Charta Oecumenica* recommends consultation regarding plans for evangelisation; the Edinburgh 2010 *Mission, Unity and Ecclesiology Study Theme* encouraged a common commemorative mission Conference in 2110, whilst *Christian Witness in a multi-religious world* stressed the concept of mutual respect.

Cristian Popescu's presentation on **migration** prompted discussion of the membership of CEC and the new migrant churches. It was too simplistic to believe that the Rest could save the West and further work is also required to understand the reasons for churches tending to treat migration as a diaconal rather than a missiological theme. The integration of migrants and the discussion of Roma with reference to a study of migration were both discussed.

Katerina Dekanovska discussed **relationships with other religious communities**, underlining the situation of European mission agencies with a long experience of seeing Muslims converting to Christianity in Europe. It was felt that generating a wider awareness of European centres, such as Bijbelhuis (Antwerpen, Belgium) which engage in mission work among Muslims, might multiply learning and understanding of such fruitful practices. Attention was also drawn to the exemplary work of the Orthodox Church in Albania.

Dietrich Werner discussed **mission and theological education**, highlighting the marginalisation of theology and especially missiology within European Universities, the need for joint programmes of theological education and ministerial formation, and the need for common standards to measure missiological orientation in programmes of theology. The need for this is underlined by the claim that Europe is 'the most difficult mission field in the world today'.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF CEC IN SUPPORTING MISSION IN EUROPE

1. We recommend that CEC develop a means of exploring how Churches in Europe can develop a shared terminology and understanding of common mission.
2. Appreciating the substantial contribution of the mission partners to the mission activity of CEC, we recommend that CEC work towards strengthening the structures of

co-operation framed by an appropriate Memoranda of Understanding. *Ad interim*, until the new structures of CEC emerge, we recommend that the CiD Commission together with the mission partners should continue to organise an annual mission consultation (at which future themes may include 'mission and power' 'theological and missiological education', and 'missional responses of the churches to secularisation').

3. We recommend that the CiD Commission should encourage a deeper commitment to existing ecumenical statements on mission, such as the *Charta Oecumenica* and the *Edinburgh Common Call*, and *Christian Witness in a multi-religious world*. This might include encouraging the formal ecumenical education of pastors and priests but it should also include the informal engagement of the laity. Finally, in this respect, we recommend that CEC should encourage the Churches in implementing the statements. We also recommend the collation of models of best practice for exploring how such statements can be implemented at the parish and congregational level, including their translation and the use of social media for such purposes.

4. We recommend that CEC, in considering the new ecumenical realities and vibrant ecclesial changes that are shaping an expanding ecumenical space, should develop an appropriate platform for the widest possible Christian and ecumenical engagement in connection with questions of mission in Europe.

5. The presence of migrant churches in Europe is a gift to the wider life of Europe, and therefore of concern to the wider life of CEC. We recommend the creation of appropriate space and mechanisms within the CiD Commission to facilitate theological and missiological dialogue in co-operation with CCME, for example, concerning migration within Europe. We also recommend that CEC should consider elaborating a Code of Conduct for relating to migrant churches in Europe.

6. We acknowledge that the relationship between mission and power is an appropriate subject for dialogue within CEC but that this may be framed differently at various levels: political, ecclesial, and spiritual. In particular we recommend that a discussion of mission and power be incorporated into one of the proposed annual mission consultations.

7. We recommend that the CiD should take concrete steps towards establishing closer relationships with the existing European missiological networks in order to strengthen joint missiological education and formation within Europe.

Budapest, 31st August, 2011