

**WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
INTER-ORTHODOX CONSULTATION**

*“THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH”
A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement
(Faith and Order Paper 198, 2005 WCC)*

Aghia Napa/Paralimni, Cyprus, 2-9 March 2011

COMMUNIQUE

1. The consultation met from 2 to 9 March 2011, with the goal of responding to *“The Nature and Mission of the Church” -- A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement (Faith and Order Paper 198, 2005 WCC)*, in the Holy Metropolitanate of Constantia in Aghia Napa, Cyprus upon the invitation of the World Council of Churches, and thanks to the gracious hospitality of His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos of Cyprus. H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and H.E. Bishop of Damietta (Coptic Orthodox Church) co-moderated the encounter. H.E. Metropolitan Vassilios of Constantia-Ammochostos, moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, received and hosted the participants in his diocese. Forty hierarchs, priests, deacons, university professors, lay (male and female) and youth, coming from nearly all the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, as well as representatives of the World Council of Churches and the Faith and Order Commission, were present. Most of the participants in this meeting were also members of the Faith and Order Commission. It was a particular honour to have present at this meeting the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. The consultation heard and discussed twenty papers, addressing the text as a whole and section by section. These presentations featured several concrete and precise proposals for redrafting the NMC text; therefore, the present response is accompanied by all of the papers presented, together with their drafting suggestions, in order to contribute to the redrafting process.

2. In December 2005, the Commission on Faith and Order launched its latest results on the study on ecclesiology, *“The Nature and Mission of the Church”*. The text seeks to express some common convictions about the role of the Church, its nature and mission, and to identify issues and ecclesiological difficulties which continue to divide the churches today. This important text already has been sent officially to the WCC member churches inviting them to study and evaluate the document as well as to offer their reactions and response. The Orthodox Churches participated in the drafting process.

3. It had been proposed that the WCC convene an Inter-Orthodox Consultation, inviting the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches to study, discuss and produce a common reaction. The unique purpose of such a meeting was to facilitate the Orthodox

Churches' response by providing a "common response" on behalf of all Orthodox Churches to this important ecumenical text. Convening such an Inter-Orthodox consultation is not a new pattern; several similar consultations have been planned and organized by the WCC in the past, facilitating the process of a unified Orthodox response – but also contribution – to major WCC studies.

4. Members from almost all the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches were present in this consultation, coming from: the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Patriarchate of Serbia, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Albania, the Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia, the Orthodox Church in America as well as from the Armenian Apostolic Church, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the Coptic Church and the Church of Malankara. These representatives were supplemented by staff from WCC and guests.

5. Along with the discussion on a series of various topics, the programme included prayer and visits to local parishes. On the first day of the consultation, 3 March, a Te Deum was celebrated by H. B. Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus in the historic monastery of Aghia Napa. At the opening session H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima, expressed gratitude and warm thanks to the archbishop for his generous hospitality, extended regularly to inter-Orthodox and ecumenical gatherings, and he also highlighted the archbishop's life-long struggle to overcome dividing lines, in his own country and elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, Metropolitan Gennadios added, *"walls of separation and division still exist in the world, and one of our priorities as Orthodox is to continue our struggle for peace, reconciliation and friendship among peoples and nations."* Archbishop Chrysostomos underlined the significance of the fact that *"Orthodox theology is primarily ecclesiological"*, and concluded, *"Christianity cannot be understood except as the Church"*. Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC general secretary, expressed appreciation both to Archbishop Chrysostomos for his hospitality, which is a tangible sign of his ecumenical commitment, and to Metropolitan Dr Vassilios of Constantia-Ammochostos, moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, for hosting the consultation in his diocese and for his many contributions to the work of Faith and Order.

6. In the afternoon, the general secretary together with Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima, vice-moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Metropolitan Dr Vassilios of Constantia-Ammochostos, moderator of the Faith and Order Commission, and Georges Lemopoulos, deputy general secretary of the WCC visited H. B. Archbishop Chrysostomos II at the archbishopric in Nicosia. At the meeting, they spoke about the importance of dialogue and the role of religious leadership, particularly in situations of occupation, division and conflict. *"Cyprus is an island at the crossroads of civilizations and religions"*, Tveit said after his meeting with the Archbishop. *"It has a long experience of peaceful coexistence between people of different confessions and religions"*, he added, and ended by observing that the *"conflict in Cyprus is not a religious one, but religion has become part of the separation. The conflict has prevented people from visiting and worshipping in their holy sites. I am encouraged that the archbishop has taken initiatives to meet with the Turkish*

Cypriot religious leadership and is willing to work with them. These are signs of hope for the future.”

7. After the meeting with the archbishop, Metropolitans Gennadios and Vassilios together with Dr Olav Fykse Tveit and Mr Georges Lemopoulos visited His Excellency Dimitris Christofias, the president of the Republic of Cyprus, at the Presidential Palace. Metropolitan Gennadios conveyed to the president the warm greetings of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the thanks of all participants for being well received in this apostolic and very hospitable island where so many sufferings have happened on the course of history. During the meeting, Dr Tveit was able to explain the work of the WCC and its member churches in conflict and post-conflict situations. He expressed the WCC hope for peace efforts in Cyprus: *“We believe that walls can come down, including the ‘wall’ which divides Cyprus today. There is however a wall in our souls which also needs to be addressed.”*

8. On Sunday 6th March all the members attended the divine. Liturgy which was concelebrated at Saint George’s Cathedral of the Holy Metropolitanate of Constantia and Ammochostos, by Metropolitans Vassilios of Constantia, Chrysostomos of Messinia, and Bishop Ignatius of Branicevo, and many clergy. The D. Liturgy was followed by a visit to the occupied area of Cyprus. The group was taken to the Monastery of Saint Barnabas, the Apostle and founder of the Church of Cyprus, as well as to the ancient Basilica of Saint Epiphanius of Salamis. On leaving the occupied area the participants visited the Cathedral of Saint John the Theologian at the Archdiocese in Nicosia.

9. On Monday 7th March the consultation’s members visited the Holy Stavropegic Monastery of the Virgin Mary the Theotokos of Kykkos. H. E. Metropolitan Nikiforos of Kykkos and Tylliria generously received the group and wished the participants every success in their work. Metropolitan Gennadios thanked him very warmly for his generous hospitality. Whilst at Kykkos the members had the opportunity to pray in the ancient church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, to admire the unique Byzantine museum and ended the visit with a lunch offered by the monastery.

10. After intensive discussion and thorough consideration of the above-mentioned Faith and Order Study on Ecclesiology, the Consultation stressed, among other things, that:

- 1) The issue of ecclesiology has been taken very seriously in ecumenical discussions during the last decades. Without any doubt, ecclesiology remains in our times the crucial issue for Christian theology in ecumenical perspective. As the churches are challenged to make theology more relevant for the modern world, ecclesiology today becomes central for a church-centred ecumenism and church-centred theology.*
- 2) The NMC text is drafted as an explanation of ecclesiology, based upon the various ecclesial traditions, yet it fails to reach the level of a “convergence text.” The text was drafted with a western philosophical methodology.*

- 3) *The Church is a mystery in God's providence, and is not systematically defined in Holy Scripture and in the patristic teaching. The text provides various definitions from different Church traditions, but the text does not define how the Church is related to God's kingdom.*
- 4) *Meanwhile Christ in his communion/koinonia enters entirely into human existence, in soul, heart, mind and body, and he sacrifices himself in his whole humanity.*
- 5) *We are grateful for the efforts of the Faith and Order Commission and acknowledge all those who worked under difficult circumstances to draft this ecumenical document. It is clear that some churches have used it as a study document on the way to finding their own ecclesial identity. Let us recall here the words of Charles Brent, the chairman of the preliminary meeting in preparation for the Lausanne First World Conference on Faith and Order: "...our journey is a long one... controversy loves war and discussion loves peace... someday [there] will be one flock under one Shepherd."¹*
- 6) *The One Church today is the continuation of the apostolic community of the first days. If the denominations are to overcome their present stage of division, communion must be restored among them. They must find the common roots of their faith, the living Tradition, which is experienced in the sacramental life of the One Church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, communion must be realized anew in each place and time. The Church exists within the context of its calling to proclaim God's purpose for the world and to live it out in historical contexts and situations.*

And let us conclude with the words of St Basil the Great:

"I think then that the one great goal of all who are really and truly serving the Lord ought to be to bring back to union the churches who have 'at different times and in diverse manners' divided from one another. ...for nothing is so characteristically Christian as being a peacemaker, and for this reason our Lord has promised us peacemakers a very high reward..."²

Aghia Napa, 8th March 2011.

¹ Cf. Charles Henry Brent, Report "A Pilgrimage towards Unity", of the Preliminary Meeting for the World Conference on Faith and Order, Geneva, Switzerland (17-20 August 1920), 90.

² Letter CXIV, reconciling repenting Arian churches.