

## **Ecclesia semper reformanda**

**Impressions of the first meeting of the study group on the “ecclesiological reflections on the renewal of the Protestant churches in Europe” in Berlin. By Paul-Benjamin Henke.**

Ecclesia semper reformanda: almost all the CPCE member churches face similar challenges. On the one hand there is the decline in membership through demographic change and departures from the churches which demonstrably have an effect on their financial strength. On the other hand for years a departure from tradition has to be noted in the sphere of worship and occasional office such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. What can a church of the future look like that wants to fulfil its task in the face of these challenges?

As was resolved by the CPCE Council at the beginning of 2009 a group of ecumenists is to analyse and evaluate the processes of church reform which are at present taking shape in many member churches of the CPCE. By the next General Assembly in 2012 in Florence the study group is to present a document on the topic “Ecclesia semper reformanda. Ecclesiological reflections on the renewal of the Protestant churches in Europe.” The work on it will be done mainly in small thematic working groups. All the participants will meet once a year to discuss the course and progress of the work. Thus much responsibility for the document as a whole lies in the organization and continuity of the working groups.

The opening consultation took place in the Schwanenwerder conference centre in Berlin from 16 to 18 October 2009, prepared for by the CPCE office and the Evangelical Academy in Berlin. All in all 30 theological students, pastors and social workers from 15 countries and university teachers from many CPCE member churches took part. In advance of the conference, the CPCE office in Vienna had asked the member churches to send documents on church reform which were to form the material for the consultation process. The conference opened with three lectures that illuminated the theme from the perspectives of theology, ecumenism and systematic theology. Discussion of further progress within the consultation process then formed a focal point. As a way of proceeding the participants resolved to analyse the process of church reform in three stages. First their context would be looked at from a sociological perspective, then the clarification of the theological understanding of the terms “renewal and reform” would be clarified, and finally there would be theological reflection on the relationship of church reform to ecclesiology and spirituality. Here the documents already existing are only then starting point. Those taking part in the series of consultations also hope to move forward to new insights. In the twenty-first century

too the CPCE member churches are to find a form which does justice to the structures of their time: "Ecclesia semper reformanda".

At the end of the conference the study group attended Sunday worship in Berlin Cathedral. Almost 'to order' Bishop Dr. Wolfgang Huber, former chairperson of the EKD Council and key initiator of the EKD reforms, was the preacher.

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