# SHAPING THE CHURCH, GAINING THE FUTURE

## The Shape and Shaping of Protestant Churches in a Changing Europe

### A contribution by the South East Central Europe Regional Group 2002-2005

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# Introduction

## A. Occasion and task

### 1. The challenge to the churches in the process of transformation

1.1 All over the world at present comprehensive processes of transformation are taking place in the context of a globalization which is dominated by economics. The conditions under which we live and our relationships are being given a 'new format' in processes of secularization with all their tensions and a new interest in religion and religions, from tendencies towards liberalization and privatization on the one hand to new fundamentalisms on the other. Individuals in societies, societies and states, communities of states and international relations are affected by it. In Europe it is being given its special stamp by the changes following the end of the East-West conflict and by the process of European integration.

1.2 The churches of the 'Community of Protestant Churches in Europe' (CPCE) face great challenges in these processes of transformation that are taking place. The different ways in which the Reformation churches are being shaped are stamped not only by theological insights but also by historical, social and political factors. Different though these challenges may be in individual contexts, the churches, each in its place and its particular historical situation, are being asked how they understand themselves, what shape they display, how they are present in society, and in what specific way their witness and service are perceived and shaped.

1.3 At the same time the churches in their traditional form do not feel that they are appropriately organized for the changes which are being set in motion through economic and social developments. The consequences of the progressive integration of the European Union for the churches in their legal and organizational shape can no longer be dealt with solely by each individual church; they call for understanding and common action.

1.4 However, not only are challenges arising from the change in historical situation. As a result of the way in which concrete shapes of the church and church structures are understood, different concepts and historical necessities and possibilities of being the church have developed, for example established churches (*Volkskirchen*) and free churches with different shapes, sometimes as majority churches and sometimes as minority churches. Moreover they differ in how far they distance themselves from the state. Given the structures in the churches and the way in which the churches understand themselves, in many churches the question of the mission of the shape and shaping of the church for witness and service is becoming an important topic: here questions arise not only about the shape and structure of the church but also about the shape and structure of communities which are directly affected and challenged by the changes in society and the church. In view of the far-reaching implications of these changes there is need for a clarification of the self-understandings of the church bound up with them and the corresponding shape and shapings.

## 2. The challenge to the 'Community of Protestant Churches in Europe' in the process of transformation

2.1 In view of these changes, questions are being asked not only about the contribution of the individual churches but also about the contribution of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. There is a need to express the self-understanding and the shape and shaping of the church community declared and realized in the Leuenberg Agreement, to develop them further and implement them. This applies to the shape and shaping both in their internal relations and in their external relations in the ecumenical and political or social context.

2.2 Of the four perspectives mentioned in the Leuenberg Agreement, 'witness and service, the continuing theological task, organizational consequences and ecumenical aspects', hitherto above all theological work on the traditional controversial theological themes has been done. We still await intensive attention to the other tasks. This concerns the forms of collaboration, coming together in networks or other forms of organization, and also making church fellowship concrete at the regional and local level, with mutual consultations and in project groups.

2.3 It also relates to the questions how and in what way Protestantism can have a say in Europe and introduce the insights of the Reformation. In this context what does it mean to call for a 'common' (single?) voice of Protestantism? How does this 'common voice' come about?

## 3. Attention to the question of the shape and shaping of church and church fellowship and the decision of the Plenary Assembly

3.1 The Leuenberg Agreement starts from the assumption that the existing differences in shaping and organization do not affect the foundation of the church. Nevertheless an exchange about the different forms is necessary. This diversity can represent a source of riches, but each individual manifestation must also ask itself how appropriate it is. A dialogue about that needs to be carried on within the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and with other churches, church fellowships and church federations.

3.2 On the basis of the insights gained in their doctrinal conversations, taking up the questions of the shape and shaping of Protestant churches in a changing Europe seems to the members of the South East Central Europe Regional Group to be an urgent matter. In the course of their meetings and discussions it has become increasingly clear to the regional group that the topic of shape is coming into the foreground, both in the changing social context and also in view of the different shapes and shapings of the churches in their visible form. So far insufficient attention has been paid to the subordinate significance of questions of shape, which is worth just as much consideration. As a consequence, in questions of shaping, the normativity of the facts has often taken over.

3.3 A preoccupation with the questions of shape and shaping will enable the churches to face the present challenges in a way appropriate to their task, and to create the presuppositions for doing so. Therefore the regional group also introduced the

theme of 'Shape and Shaping' into the Fifth Plenary Assembly in Belfast (open space).

3.4 The Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe resolved to make the question of the shape and shaping of the Protestant churches the topic of doctrinal conversations. It was recalled that the questions of shaping in the 'Protestant churches are subordinate to the insight that the foundation of the church lies in God's saving action in Jesus Christ.' Here there is space for shaping, but it must not be confused with randomness.

In its closing statement the Plenary Assembly laid down the following directives.

The doctrinal conversation should:

– reach a theological agreement on the criteria for the formation of churches;

– instruct that questions about formation are taken more seriously as an instrument for realizing and deepening Church fellowship;

– take into account the current processes of transformation in Europe both in Church and society, and their implications for the organization of Protestant churches;

– clarify what are the specific characteristics of Church fellowship in the Reformation view.

This commission from the Plenary Assembly was spelt out in project guidelines from the Executive Committee (see the Appendix). The regional group has worked on this basis.

## B.  Purpose, procedure and methodology

### 1.  The directives in the project guidelines from the executive committee

1.1 In the project guidelines, which provide a further basis for the doctrinal conversation and define its task, the executive committee has emphasized that witness and service need cooperation and partnerships in regionally different forms. Here the background of European integration and the challenges with which the churches see themselves confronted in this process need to be kept in view. The processes of transformation to which traditional organizations in Europe, including the churches, see themselves exposed, call for new forms of communication and organization.

1.2 The realization of church community by working on organizational questions is a new challenge in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, which has deliberately kept itself structurally weak. In addition to the proposals for more information and communication, there is the task of better reception of the results of the work of the CPCE in the individual churches. The consequences of the progressive integration into the European Union (EU) for the churches in their legal and organizational form can no longer be dealt with alone, but call to be dealt with together, in a way in which the churches show that they are organizations

capable of learning, and the approach of organizational evolution is highlighted as a means of change.

1.3 The following questions need to be thought about, particularly in view of the ecumenical aspect: the question of the signs of visible unity; of the definition of the relationship between word, church and ministry; of the relationship between the universal priesthood of believers and the ordained ministry, and here particularly the question of the service of leadership (episcope) in the church.

## 2. The procedure and methodology of the regional group

2.1 Starting from these directives, in its joint work the South East Central Europe Regional Group first essentially concentrated on noting the situation. Here both the different historical and social situations in the countries of the member churches of the regional group and also what the churches have in common and what differentiates them are taken into account.

The theological significance of such a phenomenological approach in analysis and interpretation and the theological challenges which arise from it have been reflected on. This has happened in particular in respect to the questions of the shape and organization of the churches in the sphere of the regional group, and also in the question of the significance of these challenges and insights for the shape and organization of the churches in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship and in its wider ecumenical relations. This also has consequences for the self-understanding and for the shape and organization of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe generally.

2.2 This has meant that in the relationship to the doctrinal conversation group the fundamental theological questions discussed there have also been addressed – in accord with the results and insights presented there – and specific theological questions have also been discussed which arose out of attention to the question of the shape and organization of the individual churches and communities (e.g. the question of models, and of the organizational shape of churches).

The consequences of the insights gained in this way have also been formulated jointly for the different contexts and conditions of the member churches of the regional group. The reflections presented in this study could be a stimulus for the other member churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe to investigate in an analogous way the questions of the shape and shaping of churches in their context and their challenges.

2.3 It has become clear from the way in which the procedure has developed that in the regional group the systematic discussion of the questions and challenges which it faces has been combined with an exchange of experiences about the particular situation of the churches and their theological position. In these conversations the different experiences and understandings of the churches (case studies) have been taken up and subjected to joint theological reflection. Thus the joint understanding of the gospel has been deepened further in a hermeneutical-theological approach to the joint understanding of the gospel, work has been done on existing doctrinal differences, and a 'joint orientation of witness and service' has been striven for in the current situation of the churches.

This mode of procedure makes it possible to take account both of the diverse historical conditions and 'non-theological factors' with respect to the question of the shape of the Protestant churches and also of the theological discussion about the different understandings the churches have of themselves, the different shapes and shapings of the church.

The churches of the regional group come from countries which are either already members of the EU; which are likely to join it soon; or which have not (yet) been accepted into the narrower circle of candidates for membership. Therefore this region seems in a particular way to offer a cross-section from which the future development of the EU can be observed. Important preliminary work towards this has been done by the 'Danube Churches Consultations' which have been carried out by the Protestant churches in Austria in cooperation with the German regional churches and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), together with the churches in the countries which are candidates for membership.

2.4 The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe needs new forms of communication and collaboration extending as far as structural changes in order to realize church fellowship. This also applies to the doctrinal conversations. They should become an opportunity for integration not only through the presentation of their results but even already by the process in which they work. Exchanges of experience of different situations and challenges in the different contexts and the experience of community in this exchange of experience and in the shared theological understanding are important.

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe needs such places for experiencing and learning. As has already been emphasized in the project guidelines, the South East Central Europe Regional Group has proved to be such a place for learning, at which different churches with a great diversity of shapes have been working together for years in an atmosphere of trust, with professional theological competence and church experience. In addition, the procedure in the regional group is proving helpful for a mediation of the insights gained and a constant exchange of experience with its member churches that already begins in the process of working things out.

## 3.   The structure of the study

3.1 The structure of this study has arisen out of the procedure and methodology of the regional group.

First of all the processes of transformation of Central and Eastern Europe are described (Chapter 1). The overall European integration provides the framework for this. In this context the special situation of Central and Eastern Europe is described, along with the far-reaching effects of political, social, religious and ecclesiastical changes.

3.2 They are the occasion for the theological reflections which begin in Chapter 2. Starting from the Leuenberg Agreement and the study *The Church of Jesus Christ*, the problem of the shape and shaping of the church is investigated and its ecclesiological relevance is surveyed in connection with the foundation, nature

and definition of the church. The normative theological criteria, guidelines and touchstones are applied here.

3.3    A further section investigates the question how the churches are reacting to the pressure for change to which they are exposed by the processes of transformation. In this connection the importance of models for the shape and shaping of the church comes into view. The most important thing here is their viability for the future, which calls not only for structural reforms but also for further reflection on the task of the church (Chapter 3).

3.4    The perspectives and consequences which arise from this are described in Chapter 4. They are first of all developed as tasks for the shape and shaping of the church, and then applied to the role of the church in society. After that, final conclusions are offered for the community of churches within the regional group.

## *Chapter 1  The European Context – Processes of Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe*

## A. Processes of transformation in Europe and the special background of experience in Central and Eastern Europe

### 1.  The problems

1.1    On European integration generally

European integration is not a unilinear process, shaped by one idea which leads to a goal, but a multi-level process of transformation which is not always free from contradiction. Moreover it is a historical process which is called forth by the particular situation. At present globalization is an important challenge to which a specifically European answer is required.

European integration can be understood as part of globalization (with a focus on the process of economic developments and deregulation of the markets which crosses boundaries). Here first of all the integration of Europe is the result of this globalization; secondly, it is an attempt to safeguard the 'market place' of Europe in the course of world-wide 'economization'.

However, European integration reaches further back and is to be understood from the history of Europe as a specifically European concern. European integration begins after 1945 in the West with the two slogans, 'No more hunger' and 'No more war', and continues with the fall of the Iron Curtain (the surmounting of ideological blocks). Combined with this is the attempt to overcome thought in terms of nation states, which comes from the nineteenth century, in favour of new, transnational structures.

At present European integration is challenged in particular by progressive globalization. But other deeper processes of European integration are playing a part in this integration, partly directed against economization and partly with a completely different history and different goals. So European integration is a progress which is taking place on many extremely different levels, and its individual elements cannot necessarily be linked together into a unitary movement.

1.2    Different developments

This development is the same for Western Europe and for South Eastern and Central Europe, as in principle the framework provided by globalization is the same. But for Central Eastern Europe this development has taken place at the latest since 1989, with an incomparably stronger dynamic. The reasons for this lie in the early history of the region, which differs from that of the West.

– Forty or seventy years of history in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union and the spiritual background of Communism have shaped the nations, societies and churches over the long term and in a ongoing way.

– Special emphasis should be put on the history of the Hapsburg empire, because it has shaped a large region of Eastern Central Europe; within this empire stronger common features developed than between other countries.

The Reformation and the Enlightenment as developments in the history of ideas have shaped Western Europe in a different way from Central or Eastern Europe. Different shapes of Enlightenment or mentalities in dealing with the Enlightenment have developed in the different regions. Here we should note in particular how the different ways of dealing with the Enlightenment are linked with the traditions of church and theology.

The Europeanization of Europe affects East and West equally, but the frameworks which have grown up in Central and Eastern Europe are different from those in Western Europe. This can be expressed as a thesis: Europe is being pulled between an undertow of the West and a bond felt by the East. This bond felt by the East is primarily a shared experience of what can be called 'Central Eastern Europe', which is independent in the overall European context and has grown up over history. To talk of an undertow from the West means, first, that the present process of European integration is taking place under Western and Western European auspices. Thus the history of the European Union is a Western European project, just as capitalism is a Western economic model – Central and East Europe are being integrated into this dynamic. Secondly, this undertow comes up against the independent experiential context of Central and East Europe and in this way is being changed and Europeanized. This process will be further differentiated by clearly perceptible regional forms.

At present the integration of Europe is most clearly being carried forward by the EU. Whatever the verdict on the project, the integration of Europe is ultimately not dependent on it, but at present cannot be conceived of and realized without it.

– However much the Europeanization of Europe is a process for the whole of Europe, it is perceived of in different ways in the different worlds in which people live. Thus for example in Central Eastern Europe, in contrast to the West, the feeling that it is possible to influence what is happening has declined.

## 2.     Shaping the thresholds of eras

2.1   To sum up, it can be said that the changes addressed and taken into account here go far beyond individual political or economic changes. They make it possible to speak of a process of transformation (a phrase which so far has been used only to describe developments in Central and Eastern Europe) which goes deep and thus inexorably raises the question of what abides (the soul of Europe, the meaning of history, European values, etc.).

2.2   At present it is an open question how theories can be developed which do justice to this process and allow it to be understood, formulated and grasped. There is an important task for theology and the Protestant churches here. The Western church already went through such processes in the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity; particularly at the time of the Reformation it shaped the transition in the freedom of the gospel and formulated it theologically. The

question remains whether and how it is possible to link up with these experiences in the future shaping of Europe.

## B.    Processes of transformation in politics and society

### 1.    The present situation – a brief survey

1.1    With the fall of the Berlin wall, in Central and Eastern Europe there was a clear Yes to freedom, linked with the struggles for freedom and the attempts at demo-cratization in the Communist period. It was bound up with a great Yes to Europe as a place of peace and prosperity. The expansion of the EU was understood as a political homecoming of Central and Eastern Europeans to Europe, to which they had long since felt that they already belonged.

1.2    But the integration got stuck. The long wait for entry into NATO and above all the EU unsettled both politicians and society. The fact that even after 2004 it is still not possible for people to travel freely and that there is no prospect of the introduction of the Euro in the framework of the expanded EU raises the question whether Central and Eastern Europeans are second-class Europeans.

1.3    In addition there were difficulties with the new freedom. The market economy created work, but also unemployment. Freedom was recognized not only as a gift but also as a hard task which even threatened to prove too much for indivi-duals. Free spaces have to be shaped in complete freedom. Alongside the mood of a new start in the new EU states there is also a mounting feeling of being handed over. Sociological investigations have shown that by comparison with the West, the people of Central and Eastern Europe feel that they are less 'masters of their own lives'. Experiences of being handed over in the long Communist era are mixed up with present experiences – and that constantly makes the new start difficult. In addition there is the ever-present fear of loss of identity through Westernization. These fears are matched in the West by unem-ployment, poverty and criminality caused by the so-called expansion of the East. The idea of an independent Central Europe is not a political option in the process of European integration.

### 2.    State, nation and the new Europe

2.1    The fall of the Iron Curtain with the end of Soviet power produced the formation of nation states – but also new ethnic problems. The formation of states can no longer take place through the understanding of the nation state as in the nine-teenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Rather, it has to take place in the context of Europe and the European Union. Here is the opportunity for Europe. With the EU a new transnational entity is coming into being (com-mon market, law, politics, military, etc), but its concrete form needs to be clari-fied. As a result of this the modern European state is changing. It is European-izing itself by giving up sovereignty, in order at the same time to be better pro-tected in global competition. The Europeanization of the state also includes stronger protection of minorities in the EU, and this can contribute towards overcoming problems in this sphere which have hitherto been conditioned by nations.

2.2 A new way for the European states to deal with one another in the framework of the EU is an important step in the process of European integration. But it must be followed by a second step: mutual reconciliation between states. Here we can learn from the history of European integration – for example from the changed relationship between the arch-enemies Germany and France after the Second World War.

## 3. Democracy and civil society

3.1 Today democracy is an essential part of the political history and social self-understanding of Europe. Here a democratic awareness and democratic structures developed in modern Europe in particular, in long and sometimes painful learning processes. That is true for both Eastern and Western Europe. Up until the 1970s there were dictatorships in Western Europe (Greece, Spain, Portugal). During the period of Communism the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe had hardly any experience of democracy. If an integration of the whole of Europe is to succeed, democracy must be developed as a basic form of society and politics.

3.2 Closely bound up with democracy is the phenomenon of civil society. This is a matter of the perception and shaping of social responsibility between the public political sphere and the private individual sphere. This responsibility takes shape through diverse forms of self-organization and self-administration (through associations, civic initiatives, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], etc.). Whereas a civil society has come into being in Western Europe over the past fifty years – not least as a counter-movement to apolitical individualism – there were very few beginnings of a civil society in Eastern Europe before 1989. The ideology of politicization and the way in which the state commandeered all spheres of life, along with the totalitarian claim to power, prevented this. Although there was no public civil society positioned between the state and the private sphere, there was in fact a 'latent' civil society through informal networks of communication and the linking of groups with a social and political orientation. It was particularly important that in the processes of transformation this developed further and became 'public'. This already happened during the CSCE process, through the Solidarity movement in Poland, the Leipzig Monday demonstrations and then the Round Tables.

## 4. Europe and culture

4.1 If the economy (in the form of globalization) provides the real framework of orientation for the integration of Europe, within which new structures of a political and social kind are developing, culture too belongs in this background. On the one hand it goes historically deeper than economic, political and social integration (one can even say that it was first a certain European culture which produced a particular way of understanding the economy and political action); on the other the discussion of a European culture, of culture as the 'integration of integration', is a secondary discussion which owes itself primarily to the economic dynamic, though it sees itself being at a critical distance from this.

It may serve as an illustration of this development to note that the concept of a 'European culture' or the challenge of a European cultural policy were not primarily bound up with the process of European integration. Such questions have been raised only since the 1990s, especially in the context of the question of a 'European identity' which is not solely in the economic sphere but identifies and transcends the boundaries of a society fixated on and reduced to the economy.

4.2 So in the discussion we must make a very precise distinction between cultural foundations (the discussion of values, etc.) on the one hand and social and political functionalization on the other. The attempt by means of culture, as for example in the project of a European soul, to counter the danger of a purely economic integration, or even to perfect it, has gone wrong. Moreover culture is in principle not the cement for economic and political processes which cause disintegration. Nor is there the kind of unitary European culture which would be necessary for this. All we can note is a diversity of cultures with similar values; the way in which they belong together remains abstract. It is possible and meaningful only to strengthen similarities between neighbouring cultures in order to link them together.

4.3 Just as there is no unitary culture with different sub-cultures, so too Europe is not simply 'multi-cultural', if by that one understands simply the addition of every possible cultural scheme based on different value systems which provide the background for their interpretation, without asking about what holds European society together and thus supports it. At this point the question of a common European culture as a framework for understanding and action needs to be taken up. This is already in process at the legal level: not every culture (with every possible value) is legally possible in Europe, but only one which can be interpreted in a legally safeguarded rule which extends all over Europe and can thus be introduced into European culture. In this sense even an Islamic culture is European, whether it has grown up in the course of Western history or come into being through the new European migration (Euro-Islam), in so far as it proves itself legally against the background of interpretation.

4.4 But this does not mean that culture, too, is not changing. A culture has come into being through history and there is no guarantee (perhaps provided by constitutional law or basic law) that particular cultures will continue. Thus the capacity of cultures for change (as a sign of culture) is also a possibility for developing a communally participatory culture.

4.5 The same is true of pluralism. It is definitively only a way of describing reality, not a value in itself. A value, even through legal evaluation, comes from a particular value system which opens up different possibilities.


## C. Processes of religious transformation: the dispute over secularization as a quest for a new model for Europe

### 1. Secularization as the result of European intellectual history

1.1 The theme of secularization is deeply rooted in the intellectual history of Europe. For a decisive element in that history is the distinction between

'worldly' and 'spiritual' which has a foundation in Christian theology and was fought for over history; it is institutionalized in the distinction between 'state' and 'church'. This distinction underwent various transformations and changes in history. One of the important changes is connected with the history of the Reformation and the Western Enlightenment: religion and church were limited to the spiritual realm and were stripped of secular competences. In this tradition secularization is predominantly seen as the loss of the influence of religion and the church. Conversely, religion and church become separate and independent spheres in a 'worldly world'.

1.2 Only occasionally is this movement seen not only as a loss but also as a gain: the worldly world as a sphere in which the Christian notions of freedom, human dignity and regulated relationships have been realized. However, in recent decades it is clear from a look at European history that neither the principle of loss nor that of realization are enough to do justice to the urgent questions of a return of the religious. This is also the starting point for the current discussion of secularization as a quest for a new model for Europe – especially through the specific experiences in Central and Eastern Europe.

## 2. Secularization: new perspectives

2.1 The further one orientates oneself from West to East, the more powerful becomes the critical question, above all from the churches, about the Western variant of secularization. This is perceived and criticized in many respects as a process of becoming worldly: it is said that by becoming worldly in this way Europe has lost its religious dimension and thus the power of the religious also to shape the public realm. With this worldliness the basic values rooted in religion also disappear. The freedom of the individual levels out into individualism. In short, Europe is increasingly becoming a project without a soul and without a spirit. This criticism of secularization (becoming worldly) is often mixed with (social and) political options: criticism that Europe is becoming worldly becomes criticism that it is becoming Western. In this perspective, processes of transformation which affect the whole of Europe can themselves be evaluated as historical losses which necessitate a return to the old and well-tried.

However, this criticism is not just conditioned theoretically or by (church) politics. Rather, it can base itself on a new interest in the religious in Central and Eastern Europe, which does not exist to the same degree in the Western context: the religious traditions are still alive and religious interest is increasing, especially among the thirty-five-year-olds – more than in the West.[1]

2.2 In particular the entry of critical questions and positive experiences into Central and Eastern Europe offers the opportunity to continue the project of secularization for the whole of Europe, which has become problematical, and develop it further. This could happen, for example, under the slogan of the rediscovery of God in secular times.

Here the starting point is the integration of Europe as a secular project, in the first place constituted as a common market, through politics and constitution. If

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[1] Cf. the three tables in Appendix 2.

we define this project more closely, words like peace, reconciliation, human dignity, protection of minorities, democracy and the validity of legal norms come into play. Though these key words are universally valid, they are by no means accessible, nor can they be taken for granted; but it is important that they are kept alive in the different contexts, are legitimated by the different traditions, and serve to orientate action. At this point not only ideological communities but also churches and religions are asked to spell out their message in the context of integration. Religion is thus gaining new significance in the public sphere, something which the old European secularization thesis had not supposed. It is once again becoming a topic here.

To perceive the independence and distinctive worth of religion becomes the task of the churches and religious communities and a challenge in and for the process of European integration. This is not given excessive religious significance, but is learning afresh to deal with religion as the basis of social relations and as an independent world. The task of the churches is again becoming that of ensuring that this is understood as a rediscovery of God in a secular age.

## D.    Processes of transformation in the church

### 1.    The churches under pressure to change

1.1    Opportunities and challenges

1.1.1  As we have indicated, the far-reaching processes of transformation have resulted in the European churches today being exposed to strong pressure to change. That is particularly true of the Protestant churches in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. The authoritarian systems of rule in the former socialist states have been replaced by a fundamentally changed, pluralistic society. Thus the churches have opened up opportunities and free spaces which have long been unknown. As a result they are faced with new tasks and challenges for which they were not able to prepare themselves. These include the growing competition from other religions and world-views and new, quite different, Christian groupings. They will have to face these challenges.

1.1.2  The churches often feel that their situation is ambivalent. On the one hand there is a series of positive experiences which continues to support them. There is joy and gratitude, but also pride, at having survived in difficult times. Confidence is growing that the old traditions have not completely disappeared and that their presence is helpful and stabilizing in the new situation. And the recognition of the churches in the state and civil society is growing. However, on the other hand there is also experience of a series of deficiencies: a loss of membership, individualization, the effect of marginalization, financial difficulties, a past which has not been dealt with, a theologically traditional orientation which is not sufficiently open to the future, a tendency to form a ghetto, and little sense of the ecumene.

1.1.3   Like their Western sister churches, the churches of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe want to remain recognizable as churches with a Reformation stamp in a Europe that is growing together. They are therefore seeking to

redefine their profile which has been shaped by history, each in its place and under its conditions. In particular the young generation thinks it important not simply to catch up with developments in the West after a time-lag. It wants to be able to shape its church in a viable way for the future on the basis of its own insights and experiences. For this it needs assurance for its future work and viable perspectives. These include not least a plausible institutional shape of the church which is orientated on the changed demands. Analyses of the situation and definitions of standpoints, along with the quest for orientation and impulses for action, have therefore taken on increasing significance.

1.2 Being a Christian in a changing world

1.2.1 Being a Christian, belonging to the fellowship of Christians, being a member of a church – all this has long ceased to be one of the elements of a 'European' existence which is essential or even taken for granted. Despite all the traditions of the folk church (*Volkskirche*) which are still present, in Europe being a Christian is a form of existence which is above all based on an act of conviction and which calls to be explained by theology and proved by a way of life. This is a consequence of the changes which began with the Enlightenment and have made the individual the focal point of reality.

1.2.2 At the same time it is a possibility which arises through faith itself: in the Protestant tradition in particular the fact that it is impossible to go behind one's own faith is necessarily part of the history of Protestant faith. The Pietistic movements took this seriously, but at the same time made faith a personal phenomenon by concentrating on a subjective act of faith; here the public dimension of faith, the relationship of God to the world before any constitution of faith, was lost. So it is understandable that there are no strategies or plausibility structures for being a Christian in the world beyond the institutions and traditions of the folk church. At present this is being made even more difficult by the fact that there is a widespread and deep-seated scepticism about Christianity in the wider European public, not least as a result of Communist propaganda.

## 2. Consequences for the churches

2.1 Church and nation

2.1.1 After the end of the Communist dictatorship, new space opened up for the development of national identity. It was not the state as such but the nation which was looked to again for orientation in the processes of transformation. Since the Reformation the nations (even before the states, or the nation states) were bound up closely and in diverse ways with the shape of the church. Among other things the church also became the vehicle of the national memory. The problems that this brings with it were evident for example in the conflicts in Yugoslavia, in which the Orthodox Church in Serbia came close to practising a Greater Serbian power politics.

Conversely, however, there is also an opportunity for the church to change this consciousness that the church is the guardian and mediator of the national consciousness by ensuring that the nation learns through looking at God to

detach itself from false fixations on the national. Here reconciliation can take place as the healing of memory: memory heals, but where it has been traumatized it must itself be healed. With their joint project 'Healing Memory – The Healing of Memories' the CPCE and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) have set themselves this task.

2.1.2    A look at Hungary makes clear another problem relating to the national. Hungary's history, including the history of Protestant Hungary, begins with recollection of the baptism of Stephen. That stands at the beginning of Hungary's nationhood. 'Greater Hungary' is a nation which also transcends the state frontiers of Hungary. This can become problematical in the context of a European nation-state ideology, but there is an opportunity here in the framework of a new Europe which transcends national frontiers, in a Europe of regions. The relativization of the state by Europe and the concept of its regions creates and promotes new spheres of encounter which can pick up old traditions.

2.1.3    The same can be said of other regions, in whose demarcations old nation states have been superseded. Thus the region of the Upper Rhine with its three countries (German, France and Switzerland) represents a new sphere of encounter which transcends nations. Here in particular the churches and their institutions (The Conference of the Churches on the Rhine) are strengthening the encounter. In this way a new form of ecumenism is becoming possible, which is being realized at a national level in Central and Eastern Europe only to a limited degree.

2.2    The church and the power of the state

At the time of the 'revolution', the churches in Central and Eastern Europe often assumed an important role in the implementation of political changes (Solidarity in Poland, the Leipzig Monday Demonstrations, the Round Tables). They received considerable recognition for this in society. Later 'the church' was seen as being no longer so significant and influential. The church has often felt this to be a loss, but it does have its positive sides.

2.2.1    In the long term it is too much to ask the church to exercise state power; nor is that its task. Moreover it must be remembered that the state does not have a high status in Central and Eastern Europe. Sociological analyses show that the church gains acceptance where it is not connected with the power of the state. As Detlev Pollack has put it: 'Religious communities must evidently accept all the greater loss of legitimation, the nearer they are to the state.' So the lesson of the separation of church and state must be learned all over again in the post-Communist period and spelt out for the whole of Europe.

2.2.2    A further temptation for the church lies in wanting to legitimate itself by promising to provide what the state cannot: for example a fundamental basis of values or reassurance in uncertain times. The churches will fail here. At the same time they must follow critically the way in which the (nation) state on the one hand and the (transnational) entity of the EU changes: for example from the goals of a welfare state to those of a state which provides help in emergencies.

2.2.3   The churches are given a further important task among the topics of the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, that of safeguarding peace. The CSCE process was a focal point for the identity of the churches in the German Democratic Republic. What successful projects in safeguarding peace can Protestant churches, including those in Central and Eastern Europe, point to? At all events the task is still not settled.

2.3     The church as diaspora in civil society

2.3.1   A civil society is indispensable for the further development and deepening of the process of European integration, in which structures of civic involvement come into being in the individual states of the EU and between them. The 'Europe of citizens' is necessary as a counterbalance to the danger of a Europe of the Brussels bureaucracy.

The discovery and development of a 'European civil society' represents a great challenge to the churches in Europe, which because of their history are bound up with the political form of organization of the state by coming close to it or distancing themselves from it, and by their present structures, and which in part have been shaped by these structures down to the present day. They once again find themselves more and more in the sphere of civic society and are addressed there as possible partners. How it is possible to give the nature and independence of the church a distinctive shape between its state origin in public law and a future in civil society is one of the open questions especially addressed to European Protestantism.

2.3.2   It is necessary, but not without risk, for the churches to find their place in civil society. The goal of this development could be deliberately to be a 'diaspora church' against the background of civil society and thus to shape a post-modern European model of the church. This step is possible because the church as an entity *sui generis* is not fixated on particular state or national institutions: it makes its own decisions about dialogue partners and communication frameworks. The step is necessary because both state and church are losing plausibility as institutions. By contrast the rise of a European civil society offers a more appropriate sphere for the public communication of the gospel.

2.3.3   This way is not simple for the churches. First it means getting rid of the idea that, as before, the state is the real public arena. It also means bidding farewell to the privileges that the churches think they are due. Secondly, it means that the church must develop out of the narrow confines of a self-satisfied churchiness. And thirdly, it represents a new challenge, in that the church must venture on to the pluralistic market place of civil society. There it will appear as a kind of NGO or association, as one lobbying group among others. At the same time it will have to make clear that its mission is rather different, because it has an obligation to the gospel. In time it will (have to) enter into civil partnerships which compete with one another, enter into discussions and movements without being able to dominate them. So it must learn to deal with functionalizations in the framework of the movements of civil society.

2.3.4   Democratizations – of the state as of churches – thus represent a further challenge. In the face of the temptation to the church to become hierarchical

and episcopal, the presbyteral-synodical element must be reinforced as an expression of democracy within the church. Likewise it will be necessary for the church to follow actively the difficult process of the democratization of Europe, which is far from complete. The democratic principle is not assured either in all European countries or within the EU (the status of the European Parliament!). Here Protestant churches could have an important function at a European level for both the shaping of the church and the shaping of Europe.

## 3. Questions about the present form of the church

3.1     The local church

3.1.1   The basic form of the Protestant church is the worshipping community; here worship is unthinkable without the 'rational worship' of service to the world. This basic form is essentially organized in the local community. It also has priority in the future shaping of the Protestant churches. In the local community Christians hold services, experience their religious socialization, are supported in their lives (from baptism to death), and experience the personal and ethical (diaconal) dimension of faith.

However, to the degree that life in Europe is changing, the function of the local community is also changing. The abandonment of traditions, individualization, heightened mobility and technical forms of communication (from televised services to internet chat) are making ties to the local community disappear. It is also becoming clear that the classical local community can integrate those baptized there only to a certain degree.

3.1.2   Alongside this, new forms of communities are growing: communities not based on parish boundaries but made up of interested people. If church communities are seen as part of civil society, membership is not defined through tradition but more intensely through commitment. This tendency shows the limits of the traditional model of the local community but at the same time reveals its opportunities: where much is in upheaval, a world which provides security, in which the individual is at home and can take a responsible place, is all the more important. At all events for the future, too, it is a possible way of living out faith.

As well as the local community, locally there are other communities. As well as the communities made up of interested people these include entities which transcend the parish, like deaneries and parish federations. All in all they represent the local church. It is natural to take account of this ongoing development with a new concept of a 'local church'.

3.1.3   The question of how the local community relates to the church, which relates both to theology and to organizational theory, represents a further challenge to the previous model of the local community. It cannot be disputed that the local community belongs to the church which can be experienced in faith, but that leaves open the question whether there are not other forms of the church which likewise belong in this reality of faith and therefore can or must assume a concrete shape. Protestant churches have developed above all as churches within the boundaries of a people, a land, a nation or a state. These shapes

have formed administrative organizations on the one hand and on the other shapes of the church with a claim to ecclesial quality (for example through the office of bishop). Precisely at this point there is a danger that as a compensation for the declining commitment to the church this ecclesial quality is more intensely emphasized and formed in shapes of the church which transcend the parish. For Protestant ecclesiology, this is to be resisted.

3.1.4 Only worship has ecclesial quality. There are particular shapes, functions or levels of action of it. Protestant churches have recognized that an understanding of the church exclusively orientated on the local community is not enough – nor can it meet the demands of being present in fields of action which transcend the parish or of opening itself up to new Europe-wide or world-wide fields of action. The shaping of the church must take account of that. However, it does not follow from this that the church *qua* church therefore needs further hierarchies transcending the parish. The stronger connection with individual communities and churches and the friendliness between them which is urgently needed requires reinforced communication, efficient work and responsible dealings with one another. To achieve this it is necessary to discover the worlds in which Christians live as fields of action for the church as well as to strengthen the local community.

3.2    The church and its ministries

3.2.1 The 'ministerial church' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lived by precise descriptions of its ministry in the framework of church and society. Such definitions of the church as institution are now out of date. What the church is and what its ministry means can no longer be taken for granted; for many people these are an open question which calls for new answers.

3.2.2 Following the differentiation of society, the ministry has meanwhile taken on a diversity of new functions (moderator, manager, spiritual director, pastor) which lead to an overburdening of those who hold office and a confusion of roles. In times of increasing uncertainty in the church and society and of a Christianity which is becoming more diffuse, the ministry is at the same time proving to be a stabilizing factor in an unstable situation. It is increasingly interpreted and accepted as a ministry of leadership. Here the view of community and church is often seen as analogous to that of a firm and its management structures (hierarchization). The media society wants institutions to have a personal presence. Those holding church office also seek to meet this need.

3.2.3 Attributions to which expectations are often attached are not to be rejected, but the ministry is part of the basic shape of the church and thus puts persons and human communication at the centre of church and community. Here perhaps is the real secret of the acceptance of ministry in the present too. There is also a place for the public, non-ecclesiastical significance of the ministry, since according to the church's understanding it is a public ministry. But all this unmistakably carries with it the danger that the ministry in its original and real significance will be distorted.

## *Chapter 2   Theological Considerations*

## A. Shape and shaping

**1.   The insights of the Leuenberg Agreement and the study *The Church of Jesus Christ* as a basis and starting point**

1.1    Anyone who makes the shape and shaping of the church as explicit a theme as the Plenary Assembly of the CPCE did in its commission and the regional group in its task is also under an obligation to explain how this reflection relates to the basic principles of the Reformation understanding of the church.

For the Leuenberg Agreement the shared understanding of the gospel is normative and sufficient not only to explain church fellowship but also for the unity and thus for the understanding of the church itself. 'The Church is founded upon Jesus Christ alone. It is he who gathers the Church and sends it forth, by the bestowal of his salvation in preaching and the sacraments' (LA 2). Therefore 'the practice and form of the Church should be determined only by the commission to deliver this testimony to the world' (LA 4).

The Agreement emphasizes that this was already the common conviction of the Reformers. This includes the fact that 'the Word of God remains sovereign over every human ordering of the Christian community' (LA 4). However, the Agreement does not go more closely into the questions thus indicated. We are to assume that it saw no occasion to do this on the basis of the consensus which had rightly been recalled.

1.2    The Leuenberg Church Fellowship's study *The Church of Jesus Christ*[2] takes up the distinction and connection between the foundation and the shape of the church put forward at the Reformation. It develops them and supplements them by statements about the origin and nature, definition and marks of the church, in order to make a 'Reformation contribution towards ecumenical dialogue on church unity'. 'The churches of the Reformation share the conviction with other Christian denominations that this community' – namely 'of sinners pardoned and sanctified by God in its concrete existence in congregations and churches' – 'does not have its *foundation* and *mission* in itself, that therefore its *shape* is not arbitrary and that it cannot autonomously set itself its own *historical tasks*. This action of God provides the norms for shaping the church and defines its mission from which then results the commission of Christians' (CJC 87).

In the view of the study the task of distinguishing is indispensable not only for the essence but also for the shape and shaping of the church. 'On the one hand, the church is an *object of faith* and on the other, it is at the same time a *visible community*, a social reality that can be experienced in the diversity of historical forms and shapes' (CJC 91). From the reference to the foundation and mission of the church at the same time it follows that the shape of the church 'is not arbitrary' (CJC 87). God's justifying action does not exclude independent

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[2] Cf. Wilhelm Huffmeier (ed.), *The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity*, Leuenberg Texts 1, Frankfurt am Main 2001.

human action, but is the basis for it and qualifies it. That provides the theological foundation to shape the church 'in the freedom of faith … and to respond to historical transformations in church and society' (CJC 89). This also makes it possible to meet the suspicion of a Protestant understanding of the church determined by docetism, which is expressed time and again. Rather, the decisive factors in both a positive and a negative respect are formulated: any shape and shaping must correspond to the *foundation* of the church, namely Jesus Christ, and the task of the church, to bring its salvation near to the world in word and sacrament. No shape and shaping may obscure Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church and put the task of the church in question.

1.3    It is the merit of the study on the church that following the Reformation tradition is has referred to the essential distinction between foundation, shape and mission of the church and introduced it into the ecumenical discussion. In its view that has been the basis to make the Leuenberg Church Fellowship possible (cf. CJC 85). The shape and shaping of the church assumes its own unmistakable function by an appropriate distinction between foundation and shape and connection between them. That is indispensable where it is important for the church to be recognizable as a visible community in time and among men and women. These insights of the study on the church must be taken up and developed further.

**2.    Phenomena and concepts: foundation, essence, properties and shape of the church**

2.1     It is necessary - at least in a first approach – to clarify and define the concepts and the phenomena expressed by these 'concepts'.

A first step towards distinguishing between foundation and shape is to grasp shapes. A particular *shape* is perceived in such a way that a shape is grasped as a shape. At the same time the perception and recognition of its 'essential' elements, its 'essence', are bound up with this perception and knowledge of a shape.

2.2    If we talk of the 'shape of the church', we must take account of the fact that we are speaking about shapes which are difficult to grasp. It must be asked what visible realizations of the church are to be the subject which is grasped and interpreted as a shape (e.g. the worshipping community, other social forms of the local church, the different particular churches, church mergers like the EKD, church fellowships as a shape of churches, the worldwide fellowship of churches as a shape of the church). Regardless of whether we choose the worshipping community or a particular church as subject, as the shape, it is evident that we are talking of a historical, living and highly complex shape.

In the case of the church we have a shape which is time and again also in process of change, a shape which is newly produced and has to be produced anew. Our experience of recognizing the shape of 'the' church in its many shapes makes it possible for us to speak of the church as a shape. The consequence can only be that on each occasion it is made clear what shape of the church is being talked about and a discussion is carried on. That leads us to the specifically

theological questions which arise from the distinctions between God's action and human action, the visible (manifest) realization of the church and the 'hidden' church which is believed in and can be 'experienced' only in faith.

2.3 The definition of the relationship between divine action and human action assumes special significance in the shaping of the church and the way in which it takes shape. According to the confession of faith this is an event with a cause and an effect. The church owes the fact that it is a shape to the action and activity of God, but this comes about only through human beings who are called to faith and into the community of believers and who hand on their experience of God, offer service in word and sacrament.

In this connection the study on the church emphasizes: 'God's justifying action does not exclude independent and free human action, but provides a foundation for it and qualifies it, requires it and creates space for it as the freedom of faith. People recognise what God alone can do and thereby become free to do what is entrusted to them. This provides them with the foundation to shape the community of believers, its order and ministries in the freedom of faith, to tolerate differences and to respond to historical transformations in church and society, but shows them also the limits of such activity' (CJC 89).

While the way in which the church is shaped is grounded in God's action, it can never be perceived beyond human action. The emphasis on the exclusiveness of God's action does not exclude the fact that believers are involved in this event. It puts it in its right place.

2.4 Raising the question of the 'essence' of the church is fundamentally appropriate even if we know that we cannot answer it conclusively. It makes it possible to arrive at further distinctions in the shape and shaping of the faith, e.g. about the combination of theological and 'non-theological' factors, of planned action (shaping) and contingencies in the process of being shaped, between identity and historical and social change.

2.5 The distinctions between foundation, essence and form and the connections between them introduce 'regulative concepts'. They do not solve the problem of the content of each term, but they do help us to grasp 'church' more precisely. These distinctions and connections are important in that they make it clear to us that foundation, essence and shape must be constantly distinguished, but not separated. Where foundation, essence and shape coincide (e.g. the church subsists only in a way in which the church takes visible shape, which seems to be the case with the declaration *Dominus Iesus*), there is no room for argumentation and ecumenical openness. Where there is only a simple consensus and no differentiations in a basic consensus, nor the possibility of abiding differences reconciled in a basic consensus, ecumenical conversation is at an end.

Thus the distinction and connection between foundation, essence and shape opens up space and the possibility, in encounter and critical dialogue, of approaching another shape of being the church, and in the light of that understanding the gospel and thus perceiving oneself anew and learning for oneself. This distinction opens up the practice of the model of unity in reconciled difference and at the theoretical level the opportunity of the 'differentiated consensus'. In practice, for the shaping of the church as human action this means

that: 'In the freedom of faith Christians and the church can and ought to go forward and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ within their respective contexts. Changes in society or in the forms of life and order of the church do not have to result in a loss of identity; on the contrary: they offer opportunities for new spiritual experiences when the church lives with commitment from its foundation' (CJC 89-90).

### 3. The task of making shape and shaping correspond

3.1 The study on the church says that the shape and shaping of the churches should correspond to their essence, their task and their definition. Therefore 'it is the task of the ecclesial community constantly to examine its shape and to reform it (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) so that it is in accordance with its essential attributes and nature given in its origin' (CJC 93). It is therefore important to look for correspondences, so that the shape of the church can do most justice to the theological tasks under the changing conditions of the time. It is necessary, however, to explain what 'correspondence' means.

3.2 It is important for the definition of the 'foundation and essence' of the church, to which shape and shaping should then correspond, for the statements about the foundation and essence of the church and its characteristics in the history of the church to be gained in a process of experience and reflection which finds its first form in the writings of the New Testament and then in the confessions and teachings of the church(es). There are common features here, but also different views of the foundation, essence and essential shape of the church and their current interpretation. A discussion about this needs to be carried on in the churches and between the churches.

It is rightly emphasized in the study on the church that not every shape is the expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Therefore it is the task of the church fellowship constantly to examine its shape and to reform it in such a way that it corresponds to the essential attributes given in its origin (CJC 93). Its shape can also be changed because historical developments and processes of social transformation have an effect on it. Here the shape and shaping of the church will constantly have to orientate themselves by the basic ecclesiological data mentioned.

They state what is indispensable for the church if it wants to be and remain the church. However, it does not follow from this that its shape should also be derived without further ado from the theological conditions and thus like them is fixed once and for all. Rather, in a process which is never completed, time and again it has to be examined on the basis of its foundation and its essence, its mission and task, though it can never be identical with these. The development of these criteria in the next section is meant to be a contribution to this process.

## B. Theological criteria, guidelines and touchstones for the shape and shaping of the church

**1. The foundation, mission and task of the church**

1.1 The church has its foundation and origin in 'God's action to save humankind … in Jesus Christ' (CJC 85). At the same time this says what the church lives by and what it is for. 'The *mission* of the church is its task to witness before all humankind to the gospel of the coming of the Kingdom of God in word and action' (CJC 85).

The pertinent statement that nothing but word and sacrament are constitutive for the church and therefore it is not necessary for the true unity of the church that the same forms of ceremonies should be appointed by people everywhere, needed to be made more precise, as is shown by the history of its influence in several respects. First, this statement has to be protected against the misunderstanding that the ceremonies are random. Word and sacrament are not formal entities but a particular word which comes to us, a particular gift that is promised us. From this, the essence of the church is defined. From this, criteria, guidelines, and touchstones arise for the task and shape of the church and the way in which it lives. They are not abstract guidelines and criteria, but the possibility of life for the church opened up in word and sacrament.

In the light of this understanding particular descriptions follow of how the church can gain a historical shape consistent with its foundation. This is not a matter of extending the constitutive characteristics but of the guidelines which arise from these constitutive characteristics. We have freedom in shaping, but not freedom from an appropriate shaping. The criteria, guidelines and touch-stones relate to fundamental theological statements about the understanding of the church. In that they are applied as a criterion for orientation, by way of example further concretizing criteria arise which can indicate how far the current social shape of a church and the present shaping of its work correspond to its task and its determination.

1.2 To speak theologically of the church then means that it has its origin in God's creative action. It is the basis and limit for all human action, including that in the church. Thus it is always first God's affair and not ours. It is removed from human and likewise also clerical and theological reflections on what can be done. We cannot want to get a grip on a church which is gripped by God. Any church reform has its beginning and its end here. We cannot either save or ruin the church. Its sole opportunity is that God has called it to life and keeps it alive.

However, this insight should not lead us to fold our arms, waiting and doing nothing. In sending his Spirit God resolved on the church in order to make known the message of his salvation for all the world that has dawned in Jesus Christ. He has thus at the same time decided on our collaboration. For centuries and beyond all boundaries he calls, gathers and sends men and women in his church for witness and service. Thus God has to a considerable extent put his cause in our hands. That is reason enough to work indefatigably so that the church can correspond even better in shaping and shape, true to itself and in keeping with the times, to what God makes possible for it and therefore also expects of it. A church which lives by God's grace thus deliberately lives beyond its relations. However, that does not give it *carte blanche* constantly to fall short of its possibilities.

1.3 Because the church has its foundation in God's saving will, it is there neither of itself nor for its own sake. Its mission is the task which God has given it, of attesting the gospel in word and action to men and women at all times and in all places. This task makes the church unique and indispensable. But it also shows it its limits: the church is a witness and mediator, but not a body that produces or manages salvation. Thus it is not an end in itself, but God's instrument.

Part of its mission – similarly in the sense of a 'touchstone' – is that it is church for the world. How otherwise could it fulfil its task? The world is not only the place where the church is to be found, where it simply stays or perhaps to which it adapts itself, where it awaits interested visitors or simply hibernates, because the world is likewise also the place of evil and violence, fear and disaster. Precisely because the church has to deliver the message of our salvation in this place for God's sake, the church is the church not just in the world but for the world.

Thus it addresses itself to each and every one who seeks a successful life, orientation and meaning. It also owes its witness to society and must therefore have the courage to enter the public arena. Even if its message appears alien and alienating there, the church can hardly show credibly in any other way that the gospel does not just mean private salvation for souls, but also seeks out men and women where human rights and human dignity are at stake in social and political contexts. Because it is a church for the world, the pious niche, the church within the walls, cannot be a model for its future. Rather, it understands itself as a place of meeting in its spiritual life and as a missionary movement for the world.

## 2. The marks of the church

2.1 According to the Reformation understanding the *marks (notae) of the church* are the fundamental expressions of the life of the church, which show that a visible shape of the church is true to its foundation and its nature and in this is true church. Luther therefore also understood the marks of the church as its 'hallmarks'. These are, not exclusively but primarily, the unfalsified, pure preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance with their institution. 'With this the Reformers claimed to identify those fundamental features of the visible life of the church through which the origin of the church presents itself and through which a church holds fast to its origin' (CJC 94).

2.2 The Reformers mentioned further 'marks' over and above these classical marks. They too make God's grace present. For Luther (cf. *On Councils and the Church*), in addition to God's word, baptism and eucharist they include the office of the keys (confession and absolution), the order of the ministry of the word (bishops, pastors etc.), prayer, suffering for the sake of the gospel and also observing the second table of the Decalogue. Similarly, the Bohemian Confession of 1575 speaks of five 'certain and infallible marks' of the true church. In addition to the classical marks there are: church discipline, the cross, tribulation for the sake of the truth, obedience to the gospel and the law of Christ, and especially love of brethren. In the Reformed tradition the marks of church

discipline (*disciplina*) and the obedience of the faith are added (cf. Leiden Synopsis XL, 45).

2.3   Thus the 'marks' which can be experienced also include the Christian life, Christians' service of God in the everyday world. These last marks (observing the second table of the commandments) differ from the first, connected with word and sacrament, in an important respect. The latter are not as completely clear as the former. One cannot recognize from the good works of Christians in the everyday world whether and how they take place in faith. Moreover in some circumstances, individual Christians react to the same challenges of everyday life with different decisions and works.

The development of further marks indicates that further marks of the church can be derived from the fundamental marks and these make these fundamental marks concrete. This should again take place in a historical process of the reception and interpretation of the gospel in time and for a particular time.

## 3.   The essence of the church

3.1   To describe the *essence of the church*, the study on the church links up with what is said in the creeds of the early church. There follow from this the marks which are given to the church by way of its divine origin and which are in this sense 'original'. According to this, its essence is characterized by its unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity (cf. CJC 92-3). However, these attributes do not guarantee that every concrete visible church which claims them for itself is thus in fact also the true and valid expression of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. They indeed describe the true church, but this remains the object of faith. It is not simply invisible , but occurs in the church which can be experienced in a concrete way. This is always the place at which what is believed to be the true church is recognized and witnessed to.

3.2   The visible form of the church for which men and women are responsible must therefore be formed in human accord with the 'essential characteristics' of the church. Here talk of correspondence makes it clear that the shape of the church cannot simply be deduced from the 'essential characteristics'. Rather, it is important to look for correspondences, so that the church can best do justice to the 'essential characteristics' in its shape, under the changing circumstances of place and time. These marks are valid for all times and places. However, what corresponds to them must be sought and shaped in the situation.

3.3   The visible church is 'apostolic' in corresponding to its task of preaching the gospel purely and administering the sacraments in accordance with their institution. The apostolicity of the church is not a possession. Rather, it owes itself to the activity of the word of God which gives faith that opens up reconciliation and brings liberation. Therefore the church can be the church only when it listens to the word of God as this occurs in Holy Scripture and allows its forms of expression to be governed by that.

3.4   The 'holiness' of the church that is believed in is holiness given in liberation from the power of sin and through forgiveness. The visible church can only keep asking for such holiness time and again. The holiness of the church that is

believed in is matched by the church in its shape through the purity of its preaching and through a life in accord with the gospel 'in obedience to the commandments of God' (CJC 92). The study on the church rightly points out that this includes the readiness of the church to confess its own guilt and to ask for forgiveness (CJC 92). It has its holiness in powerful intercession for the right to life and the dignity of every man and woman and in its commitment to preserving peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

3.5 The 'catholicity' of the church mans that every individual community and church as the visible shape of the universal (catholic) church is bound up with all Christian communities and churches in all places and at all times. That means that individual churches and communities must not be shut in on themselves and must not be forgetful of history. It puts them in a fellowship of mutual perception and intercession, to share mutual responsibility and readiness, in a fellowship of faith, hope and love.

3.6 The 'unity' of the church that is believed in is a gift of the triune God. In Christ we can and should be one as members of the body of Christ. That puts an obligation on the empirical churches also to realize this unity visibly in a unity in diversity, in a unity in reconciled diversity, which makes church fellowship possible. It allows the differences between the churches to be experienced as a fellowship supported by a common understanding of the gospel – sometimes also an enrichment full of tensions.


**4.    The task of the church**

4.1 In the study on the church the task of the church and thus of Christians as the people of God (cf. CJC 102) is defined more closely by taking up the classic distinctions which have been handed down since early Christianity as *leiturgia* (the worshipping community), *martyria* (public witness to the gospel), *diakonia* (perception of Christian responsibility to people in church, society and state) and *koinonia* (fellowship with God and others) (cf. CJC 104ff.). Witness and service require offices and institutions which are ordered in accordance with the understanding of God. 'There is fundamental consensus in the conviction that all Christians participate through faith and baptism in the office of Christ… and all are called to witness and to hand on the gospel and to intercede before God for one another (priesthood of all believers)' (CJC 99). There is need for an 'ordered ministry' for the service of the public proclamation of the gospel and the offering of the sacraments. This term embraces the totality of church services. The ministry of public proclamation bestowed by ordination is part of this ordered ministry (CJC 100).

4.2 But what kind of a church is needed today? In view of the far-reaching processes of religious and social transformation this question is becoming increasingly urgent, both inside and outside the church. What do people expect of it, if they expect anything at all?

Many people today are asking what is valid, what provides support and endures, if not for eternity, then at least for their own lives and as far as possible afterwards. That would provide more certainty, make life more reliable and help

in the search for meaning, so that life would be successful. Despite the mistrust of the institutions of society nurtured by many disappointments, quite a lot of people would be very happy if there were still an authority that one could trust, that one knew was there if one needed it, that provided support to cope with failure and loss, that was not afraid to be the voice of the dumb and those who lose out in society, that could give a kind of security and fellowship which cannot be found anywhere else. That is what the church is needed for today.

4.3 This raises first of all the question of the shaping of its work. What would it have to change and what effects would that have on its present form if it were possible to do justice to people's expectations? But this question does not go far enough. In the end of the day the question is whether the church can do what others expect of it at all. How far is it legitimate to think of the church in terms of need, after there has been such explicit talk of the definition of its task and its eschatological calling? Must that not result in a focus on 'what the church has to offer', primarily orientated on human longings and lacks?

However, to turn towards people and take their needs seriously does not a priori mean eagerly echoing what they say or compliantly meeting their wishes. Rather, it means sharing life with them with its heights and depths. Such a church is also needed today, even if that means constantly treading a tightrope. It can only stand by its cause. And who says there is no longer any need for the distinctive themes of Christian faith and life, even if they are expressed in a different way: less perhaps as a longing for salvation and need for redemption and more in the hope of also being able to cope in crises and anxieties?

4.4 How the church encounters people here in order to bring its message near to them is evidently the decisive factor today. The risen Christ took the road to Emmaus with the two distraught disciples. He went along with them. He listened to them when they simply had to talk because their hearts were so full of all their hopes and disappointments. Then he explained to them that his cross and death in Jerusalem made good sense for God. It was not the end but a beginning, the beginning of a life which could not be lost. That dawned on the disciples in their meal with the risen Jesus. They recognized who the one who had been on the way with them really was, the one who made their hearts burn and who then with the familiar gesture of the breaking of the bread gave them certainty that fellowship with him is unending, because it survives suffering and death.

Such a church is needed today, an 'Emmaus church' which goes along with men and women in the name of Jesus Christ and under the promise of his presence, and accompanies them through life even if they do not ask for it. That would be a church certain of the presence of its Lord, which gains its strength from that. Therefore it can be near to people and listen to them. It shares with them their hopes and fears, and knows how to interpret their experiences from the encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. However, that would also be a church which was not afraid to keep reassuring itself of its mission. So it does not withdraw itself fearfully from the world. Rather, it can understand its mission in a more comprehensive way and its responsibility for the world in a more direct way and accordingly shape itself more resolutely than it had the courage to do previously. Such a church is needed today.

## 5. The eschatological mission of the church

5.1   However, it is not enough to understand the mission of the church solely in terms of its task. According to the biblical witness, as 'fellowship of saints' it is also the place where those gather whom God has chosen as his people for his kingdom. The study on the church also recalls that (cf. CJC 88-9). Moreover with reference to Rom.11.28f.; 15.8 it expects that the mission of the church 'will be fulfilled in such a way that when the Gentiles have been admitted in full strength the "whole of Israel" will be saved' (CJC 102). Here the church is no longer just an instrument in God's hand; to some degree it becomes the advance guard of the kingdom of God. In this way it receives an eschatological determination which goes beyond its mission. That means that the church must be thought of not only in terms of its origin but also in terms of its goal. Here, however, we must always keep in view the consummation that is still to come.

5.2   That means that it is important to be even clearer about the provisionality of its shape. A church orientated only on mission could succumb to the attractive but erroneous notion that the shape of the church can 'in principle' at some point be made to accord with its mission. However, if the eschatological aspect is added, there is a more marked recognition of an inequality which cannot be overcome in this age. Thus what becomes the decisive impulse towards an *ecclesia semper reformanda* is not the conformity between origin and shape which might perhaps be desirable, but an insight into the non-conformity, so as to keep looking for a shape of the church which corresponds to its foundation and its mission.

5.3   The question of the future of the church which is often perhaps oppressive today thus appears in a new light. The real question then is not whether it has a future at all. What is decisive is how the church relates to its future, whether it is still capable of a future at all. Wilhelm Dantine's distinction between a church which wants a future and a church which does not want a future is still valid today. According to this definition a church which does not want a future should be 'understood as a church which has "cemented" its whole understanding of God and salvation in such a way that it can expect only ill from any change in the future. By contrast, a church which wants a future would be a church which looks forward and is open to the future.'[3]

5.4   Many people are worried about how their communities will survive the far-reaching processes of social transformation. But they also know that the question of the future of the church will not be answered with anxiety about their own survival. Rather it is decisive for the church to correspond to its mission for witness and service. For the message itself bears the future within it. If the church believes its proclamation and stands by its cause, it has a future. However, it has no promise that it will remain unchanged in its present form, with its present structures and institutions, just as it is.

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[3] Wilhelm Dantine, 'Entwurf einer Ekklesiologie der Zukunft', in Michael Bünker (ed.), *Wilhelm Dantine, Protestantischer Abenteuer. Beiträge zur Standortsbestimmung de evangelischen Kirchen in der Diaspora Europas,* Vienna and Göttingen 2001, 179.

## *Chapter 3    Church in Transition*

## A. Renewal through reforms

### 1.    Becoming a serving church

1.1    The pressure to change with which the churches in South East Central Europe see themselves confronted has led to efforts at reform which, when looked at in detail, have quite different aims. Some of them will be mentioned here by way of example.

Thus in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia, the freedom regained in 1991 has become the occasion for an extensive 'programme of mission and evangelization'. The church is concerned on the basis of its mission 'to serve people and the nation better through the gospel and diakonia' and thus become a 'serving church'.[4]

1.2    Like many other churches, up to 1989 the Evangelical Methodist Church in Macedonia was forbidden to engage in any form of social work. When this became possible again, despite great poverty among its members the small church deliberately decide on performing this task. Given the widespread distress, it developed a varied form of diaconal commitment: meals on wheels for needy old people, looking after handicapped children and supporting their parents, working for the personal rights of women, emergency help with firewood, clothing, energy costs and medicines. For many Christians, particularly Orthodox Christians, it was unexpected and initially also disturbing that Methodists were convinced that Christian life is expressed in works of mercy and therefore help is given without respect of persons.

### 2.    Structural reforms

2.1    The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary is preparing a reordering of its structures of leadership. These are to become slimmer and more transparent; decision-making processes are to be simplified and not least expenditure is to be cut. The pressure to reduce costs and the attempt to make structures more dynamic also play a key role in the reform plans for other churches. In addition, the responsibility for diakonia and education as a result of the political and social upheavals which has again become evident has confronted the churches in Eastern and Southern Europe with a variety of new tasks.

2.2    Other churches within the CPCE have reacted to the upheavals after 1989 more with a heightened emphasis on the episcopal office and the extension of epi-scopal structures. On occasions this has led to the rejection of the admission of women from the pastorate, of the ordination of trained women theologians, and of the commissioning of voluntary preachers. It may be doubted whether this re-sistance is the right way to defend one's own church against feared influences

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[4] Cf. the study on this presented by Julius Filo, *Horizonty obnovy cirkvi* (Horizons of Church Renewal), Liotivsky Mikulas 2001 (with German and English summaries).

from the West, such as a supposed liberal theology. However, there are also suspicions in some Western European churches. How far the tendency of a growing structural episcopalization which is unmistakable here follows the expectations of a diffuse public or succumbs to the pressure of the media and is thus subject to pressures which are alien to the matter certainly needs clarification.

At any rate it appears doubtful whether these developments are to be reckoned among the diversity in the shape of the ordered ministry talked of in the study on the church, however much that is to be welcomed. They need at least to be examined, because the possibility cannot be excluded that differences relate to the foundation and not the shape of the church. Thus the relationship between foundation and shape would possibly call for a renewed discussion.

## 3. Consequences of experiences of migration

3.1 The processes of transformation also include the migratory movements by which European countries have already been affected by decades and by which the churches are also being affected today to an increasing degree. For example, the Waldensians in Italy face an increasing 'Africanization' as a result of the influx of immigrants into southern Europe; this brings expectations and tasks for the small church of a kind that it has not hitherto experienced in its long history. In some places the migrants already form the majority in diaspora communities which are in any case small. Although they share the same confession, people here are often very alien to one another in piety and culture. Here the question of the shape and shaping of the church are becoming particularly important under the slogan 'Essere Chiesa Insieme' (Be the church together).

3.2 The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania has had migratory experiences of quite a different kind. The mass exodus of its members had resulted in the collapse of its previous structures and far-reaching changes in its work. After 1989 the church of the Siebenbürgen Saxons, which in any case is now markedly reduced in numbers, lost 80% of its members within 15 years through the wave of immigration to Germany. On the deadline of 30 June 2004 it still had 14,606 members in the 253 church communities which still exist, many of which are only 'minimal communities' and 'points of pastoral support'.[5] For the Protestant minority, which has become small, bidding farewell to the folk church (*Volkskirche*) of the past was thus unavoidable, as was the quest for new structures.

3.3 As a result of a thorough process of consultation the church has agreed in future deliberately to perform its service to the communities and to society as a diaspora church in the twofold sense of the word.[6] To do this, it has developed a church model orientated on the changed situation and redefined the fields of action in terms of key tasks. A corresponding theological scheme has been worked out in the recognition that the new structural model also calls for a changed self-understanding of the church.

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[5] According to Daniel Zikeli, *Eine Kirche zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft – Streiflichter zu Situation der Evangelischen Kirche in Rumänien* (typescript), 2004, 4.

[6] Cf. Christoph Klein, *Ausschau nach Zukunft, Die Siebenbürgisch-Sächsische Kirche im Wandel*, Erlangen 1998, 80ff.

It understands the church more markedly than before in terms of the community. Here community no longer means just the formal parish, which in some circumstances no longer exists, but the 'committed community' gathered in the name of Jesus, even if only very few, 'two are three', meet together.[7] In future the cities will form the centre of the Siebenbürgen church. The city communities will be developed as 'central communities', from which, with the help of diaspora pastorates also to be established, service will radiate to the surrounding countryside.

3.4 Evidently it has been this theologically and structurally deliberate attitude to the changed diaspora situation that has stirred the church to make a new start. At any rate, after the years of upheaval with all their losses and the new start, the period after 1994 has been experienced as a 'period of unprecedented activity' and thus 'a stability which has not been felt before',[8] because 'we no longer have to define ourselves over breaks'.[9]

## B. The role of models in the organization of the church

### 1. The church in New Testament models

1.1 'Diaspora church' has become a determinative key word for the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania in its situation of upheaval. It has helped this church to reassure itself of its identity and gain orientation for its future work. With a new spiritual and theological conception and a new structural model it has shaped the church so that it has a future. At all times there have been such mottos and models in the church of Christ, all of which have been governed by the same effort.

1.2 Already in the New Testament the church is often spoken of in images. As is well known, the New Testament does not offer a unitary understanding of the church but hands down notions of it with different accents and therefore also very different images. The event which is named by the word church can evidently be described only in images. Images can make the church visible and understandable within the limits of comprehension.

Thus for example it is seen as the temple of God (1 Peter 2.4ff.). It thus appears - 'virtually', as we would say today – as God's building made up of living stones (1 Peter 2.5) which has Jesus Christ as its foundation (1 Cor. 3.11) or its cornerstone (1 Peter 2.6) or even keystone (Eph. 2.20). By contrast, talk of the travelling people of God (Heb. 11-13, esp. 13.14) reminds the community that it is always still on the way: it will reach its destination only at the end of time, yet nevertheless must not become tired nor settle down too soon. The image of the body and its members (1 Cor. 12.12ff.; Rom. 12.4ff.) which Paul takes over from the terminology of his day and which he interprets in ecclesiological terms means that the community already lives in this world by the salvation given in Christ as the head of the body (Eph. 4.15f.). It is therefore also expected to use

[7] Klein, *Ausschau* (n..5), 86.
[8] Zikeli, *Kirche* (n.4), 6.
[9] C.Klein, in *Landeskirchliche Informationen*, No.19, 15 October 2004.

its manifold gifts, like the members of the body, meaningfully and resolutely for 'reasonable service' in the world.

These examples make it clear that the different metaphors each set out to describe what the church is in order to make its uniqueness understandable. The New Testament has concentrated in talk of the people of God and the ecclesia, which means both the local community and the universal church, the christological and spiritual fullness which occurs in it and the promises with which it is endowed.

## 2. Majority and minority churches

2.1 Other models which have grown up in history shape our understanding of the task and shape of the church no less than biblical metaphors. They can be seen in designations like folk church (*Volkskirche*), free church or minority church.

By virtue of their origin they are the result of historical and sociological developments each of which has also led to a definite understanding of the church which has also shaped itself in different models of the church. They have served to provide identity by a lasting process of constant communication, but also by demarcation and controversy. It is therefore natural that in the course of this development the different models of the shape and organization of the church have finally also become guidelines - not only for their life and action, but also for their self-understanding.

2.2 The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe is characterized by the fact that with their assent to the Leuenberg Agreement, majority and minority churches have declared church fellowship with one another. Most churches in the sphere of the South East Central Europe regional group are minority churches by virtue of the number of their members. Each in its context, they bear witness to the claim of the gospel on the whole of life. Often that means distinguishing themselves from the social mainstream. That can lead both to the liberation of the church from conformism and also to sectarianism which is not in keeping with the Reformation. What conclusions are drawn from the fact of being a minority will depend on its future capacity to shape the church.

2.3 Moreover many of the minority churches in the sphere of the regional group represent ethnic minorities. That is an enrichment of the cultural diversity in any place and also a potential threat as a source of conflict. Experiences from the most recent past show that under the pressure of social change, orientation on people and nation can still put in question the life of a church fellowship.

In the medium term progressive secularization and increasing pluralization on the market of offers of religious meaning can mean that churches and religious fellowships can find themselves numerically in the minority in particular societies. A diverse diaspora is forming which is increasingly difficult to comprehend, and this makes it difficult for the churches to orientate themselves and to occupy a place in the society in which they live that corresponds to their task and makes their witness and service meaningful.

It remains the task of the churches to ensure that human rights are upheld without division and to work for a viable civil society in which social plurality is experienced as an enrichment. Commitment to the rights of all minorities, shared service to the weak and a fellowship of the churches which is lived out in prayer, worship and diaconal action make it possible to accept positively the sociological fact of being a minority and moving to the task of a diaspora church.

2.4 If a large part, or even the predominant part, of the population of a land belongs to a particular church, it is usually called a majority church. These churches too have long been confronted with a lasting loss of membership. It can be so great that majority churches become minority churches. The regional churches of East Germany are a clear example of this. As a result, not only, but to a considerable degree, of the doctrinaire system of the German Democratic Republic, within a few decades they have shrunk so much that by now their membership amounts to precisely 20% of the East German population.

Above all the majority churches have lost much of their power to shape society and gain allegiance. They are not the only ones to have had this experience; social institutions as a whole have largely lost prominence and acceptance. The churches have also lost the monopoly of giving meaning which has been theirs for centuries. Today they again find themselves in a market of offers of meaning on which they must compete with a variety of other and also very dubious offers of orientation.

This process of transformation is both a cause and a result of the permanent loss of membership. Its effect is further heightened by increasing statistical aging and a steadily declining financial income. This development has compelled the churches often to take radical measures. Rigorous reduction in expenditure, the abolition of posts and far-reaching structural change have often led to drastic cuts in the work that had been carried on previously.

2.5 Thus the majority churches are tending to come closer to the minority churches. At all events they have important features in common. With a few exceptions, membership is based on baptism. In both the majority and the minority churches the focal point of church work lies in the local communities, which are structured on the parochial principle. They likewise have in common the problem of centring pastors which derives from this. Above all the basic experience of what it means to be different from the majority of the population if one wants to live and confess one's faith, this experience of the alien nature of Christian existence in the world, can be had not only in the minority church but increasingly also in the majority church, given the extended secular environment.[10]

So there are not only divergences between the churches. Even if differences of course remain, they are no longer primarily orientated on demarcation and thus lose their divisive character, so that the significance of partial correspondences for the common task of service and witness will grow further in the future.

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[10] Cf. also Marc Lienhard, 'Leben in der Minderheit', *Quatember. Vierteljahreshefte für Erneuerung und Einheit der Kirch*e 60.2, 1996, 102ff.

### 3.     Models as reflections of society

3.1.   Models of the church do not come into being without connections to a
particular social context. If this link is denied, they can hardly become
effective either in the church or in society. However, that also means that
models of the church are always exposed to particular social influences. To
this degree models are at the same time reflections of society. It is important to
be aware of this interaction.

3.2    It can be demonstrated already from the time of the Reformation. In order to
ward off the renewed rise of spiritual and secular force in the Protestant
churches which emerged from the Reformation, Luther declared that to
provide the functions of order that they needed was the task of the worldly
authority. He transferred them to the relevant authority and made the local
rulers the 'summus episcopus' for their sphere of rule. Thus this decision had a
thoroughly theological foundation, but it had enormous political consequences
for church and society. The result was the state church, which according to the
state's administrative ordering was directed by a state authority under the
supervision of the local ruler. This regulation lasted in principle in Germany
until 1918. Its effects can still be felt today in the German regional churches.

Luther's decision also had consequences extending all over Europe. The
Reformation majority churches could find their institutional form largely
within the particular state order. By contrast, the minority churches had to
organize themselves in controversy with the all-powerful Roman Catholic
church and mostly in resistance to state authority. Here as a rule it was
impossible to achieve more than toleration and a legal status based on that of
an association.

3.3    A further example of the ambivalent interaction of church, state and society –
at any rate in Germany – is the model of the folk church (*Volkskirche*).[11]
Schleiermacher initiated it to replace government by the local ruler, but its
freedom and independence of state supervision was originally to be achieved
by a 'church through the folk' shaped from its midst. Above all in Wichern,
the task of a religious renewal of the people was also associated with this.
Whereas the programme of a renewed Christianization largely remained the
affair of the 'Inner Mission', the concept of the folk church in the empire at
the end of the nineteenth century was used in church politics to propagate the
idea of the unity of church and nation. National Socialist church policy
grounded its concept of a German national church orientated on the people on
it. By contrast the resistance of the Confessing Church was guided by the
Barmen Theological Declaration.

3.4    In the course of its history the model of the folk church with its different and
often diffuse shapes has proved to be amazingly flexible and capable of
change. On the one hand it has been highly prone to become an ideology
through the permanent influence of state and society. On the other hand the
model of the folk church has time and again offered room for potential protest

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[11] For the history of the term see Wolfgang Huber, 'Volkskirche', *TRE* 35, 249ff.

and efforts at church reform, though here it is usually also used at the same time to legitimate the status quo. Despite this ambivalence the folk church has lasted to the present day, unnoticed or precisely because it is conceptually so vague.

Meanwhile it has taken on determinative characteristics of pluralist society. The consumer and spectator mentality of that society recurs in the folk church. Where it is not binding structurally, it can easily be understood to be random and shapeless. Thus the folk church runs the risk of coming up against its limits. How much pluralism it can tolerate will presumably be the decisive question for its future.

There was a dispute in the regional group as to whether and in what sense the term 'folk church' is meaningful for the self-understanding of the churches. Several variant meanings were taken into consideration. If folk church is understood to be a church which includes among its members the numerical majority of a particular population, then the term is appropriate only to a very limited degree, since most churches of the regional group are minority churches. But if the designation 'folk church' is meant in Schleiermacher's emancipatory sense as a church organization built up from below and orientated on its base with a shallow hierarchy, that is an appropriate expression of the self-understanding of some churches. 'Folk church' is used equally appropriately if it means that even a numerically small minority church can be open and deal competently with the questions of the whole of society. Finally, the designation is accepted positively if a particular church knows that in its land it is responsible in a territorial sense for the whole. There is therefore always a need, particularly for minority churches in the diaspora, time and again on the basis of their own experiences to clarify whether and in what sense they understand themselves as folk churches.

## C. Becoming a viable church for the future: the quest for new models

### 1. Model processes

1.1 In view of the far-reaching upheavals with which the churches are confronted today, many of the traditional and internalized models are no longer sufficient to shape church work in a way which is viable for the future. A series of (predominantly West) German and Swiss regional churches have therefore pre-scribed extensive model processes extending over several years. As a rule, here the whole structural, financial and personal foundation of previous work has been put to the test. The sets of tasks are analysed and brought up to date in the face of changed demands. Everything that is crucial for setting future priorities for church action is examined, up to and including the self-understanding of the regional church. A new model is developed from this by which the church in question seeks to orientate itself from now on for understanding its mission and fulfilling its tasks. Not least in this way it also seeks to communicate an inviting and authentic image of itself to the public.

1.2 The result sometimes has drastic consequences for the institution of the church as a whole, extending to the communities and those who work in them. It not

only confirms a considerable need for reform but also shows what has to be done to slim down structures, save money and concentrate personnel resources. As many people as possible should be involved in this process of reshaping, so that they can participate in tasks and decisions and promote communication, cooperation and concentration. The expectation is that in this way church work can be shaped better and also brought closer to people.

1.3    Thus model processes are examples of the reshaping of church work. They are instruments of integration and also for giving a profile to those who are active in the church, wherever and in whatever way. Thus they can provide decisive impulses for the renewal of the church. However, it is still too early really to be able to evaluate the expense and use of such ambitious aims. Some of the model processes are not yet even complete.[12]

How far the results are also useful in practice must emerge from their implementation in the everyday life of the church. At all events it is to be expected that the development of models will be examined by parish workers and other active members of the community to see whether the results are appropriate as an aid to orientation and support in their everyday work in church and community.

## 2.    Mission statements and mottos

2.1    Models are not only the result of tedious analyses; they can also develop in more brevity in the form of mission statements and mottos. For example, the Evangelical Church in Baden deliberately dispensed with any spelt-out model and instead decided on 'mission statements'.[13] Theological considerations were also normative here. The concept of model is to be reserved for God's biblical promises which present the aims of church action and therefore cannot be defined by human beings. Particularly in the church, plans and aims are never a completed process. This theological and eschatological proviso is to be kept alive through the 'mission statements'.

The task of the mission statements is to make Christians more certain of their faith and to strengthen their self-awareness in secular society. They are to give competent and eloquent advice in questions of faith. Therefore it is important for the mission statements to have a language which is contemporary, in other words modern and understandable. They are at the same time to stabilize the church membership and intensive identification with the regional church. If they are to do this, an agreement is needed on the common foundations of fellowship in the church. That is what is expected of the mission statements.

2.2    Mottos are shorter than mission statements; they serve as signals and with brief, terse sentences can convey what is provisionally important for the church and its work for the future. By now there is a whole series of such mottos or ecclesial concepts which have come about for various reasons.

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[12] The result from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria was published as early as 1998 under the title 'Perspectives and Focal Points of Church Work over the Next Few Years. The Principles'.
[13] Which appeared under the title *Leitsätze* in 2001.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'church for others' is such a key phrase, and it has also been widely taken up in the ecumenical world beyond Europe.

2.3    To mention another more recent example: since the end of the German Democratic Republic, guidelines for future work have been developed in the East German churches. The concept of the 'participating church' presented itself as a motto to provide orientation and had an unusually strong resonance. It points to what has for a long time been an indispensable part of the church, which has sometimes been left out in the cold, yet is nevertheless indispensable. The motto of the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of St Gallen (Switzerland), 'Near to God – near to people', has likewise made its mark.

2.4    Mottos of this kind are perhaps most suited for conveying an image of a church as one would want it to be. Their fascination is considerable. They have a programmatic effect and indeed are meant to, but they do not yet offer a programme for a church capable of renewal. They contain directions and at the same time are open enough to develop ideas, and possibly also visions, for the church of tomorrow. They inspire and invite thought and involvement. A well-thought out and spelt out conception is necessary for convincingly demonstrating the need for reform, up to and including the necessary structural changes. Without them, by experience key ecclesial concepts, however inspiring, can achieve little. But they can set processes of development in motion and thus counter frustration and resignation.

By contrast, mission statements and mottos seldom get as far as the structural questions which are so loaded with problems. Even developed models often come up against their limits here. Then they hardly play and role in debates on structure. The result is that structural problems often are decided under pressure to act, without any scheme that takes them further. Often purely economic or financial perspectives are ultimately normative for decisions. Then often no investigation is made to see whether they are in fact appropriate for a task, shape and organization of a church that is viable for the future.


## 3.    Paradigm change: the church as a service industry?

3.1    Given the way in which, as we have seen, church models are bound up with sociological paradigms like state and administration, people and nation and pluralistic society, it can hardly be surprising that business is now offering itself as a model. By now wide areas of public life are open to its influence: not only politics but also science and culture, sport and leisure time. Business has also initiated the development of models. By now not only businesses but also public institutions like universities, hospitals and administrations have formulated their models. It is not very different with the churches, whether Protestant Diaconia or Catholic Caritas, orders and dioceses and even some regional churches.

3.2    Of course at first sight it is not so wide of the mark for churches and the institutions they support to be regarded as 'service industries'. They do indeed set out to serve people. They therefore seem quite comparable with non-profit organizations or service enterprises for the common good. The churches too need a solid economic basis for their work. Therefore they too should learn to think in

business terms and act accordingly. That is the recommendation from the business world. The churches should understand that they themselves are businesses which have to be run in accordance with business rules if they are to be successful. Therefore they should no longer close themselves off to management methods, advertising, marketing strategies and above all customer orientation.

3.3 It is beyond dispute that church organizations have every reason to optimize their business. From this perspective it is to be welcomed if churches allow themselves to be stimulated by business to form their own model processes and also develop appropriate independent procedures for them. Evidently the business paradigm is particularly suitable for making the churches aware of the way in which they are perceived. By subjecting themselves to the external perspective of a self-critical examination which is alien to them, surprising insights and constructive impulses for action can develop. In this analytical process it also becomes possible to recognize how firmly the churches are still rooted in other, originally also secular, paradigms.

3.4 However, here the limits of the business paradigm also become evident. Business must adapt to the market place. Service industries, however much they are devoted to the common good, are no exceptions. Churches can do that only to a limited degree. The gospel which is the basis for their service does not in itself conform with the market. It does not go by supply and demand. So it does not submit to the law of the market economy, but rules it out. Nor can it accept seeing the message of the free grace of God as the 'product' of the church that it is promoting. However, strictly speaking that too is not true.

The church does not have the gospel at its disposal, nor does it produce it. To some degree it is responsible only for promoting it. That is its task, and therefore it goes on the market with what it has been given to offer. If there is no demand for it, it cannot simply change its business. It cannot alter its range of products to compete with those who offer meanings. The church stands and falls by the message of the gospel.

3.5 Of course the church should present people with what it has to offer in as focussed and as attractive a way as possible. However, a priori certain limits are imposed on the customer orientation that is required. The church serves all men and women without exception, in particular the weak and disadvantaged members of society. So it always also has to do with people who cannot be considered consumers 'on the market'. Even if they are not invited into the church as 'customers', they are nevertheless welcome without their 'purchasing power' playing any role there. Here the business paradigm fails.

In contrast to business, the church cannot go by the slogan 'The customer is king'. It would certainly be even more difficult to bring the gospel to people if the marketing had to be orientated on the need and taste of the customers. So the success which is decisive as the aim of business cannot be the decisive category for the church. Because the gospel is at stake, the church does not have success in its own hands. It can and should do everything conceivable to be successful, but success will never be a measurable factor for it. Nevertheless it does not doubt that success will come.

3.6 If, then, the church wants to assert itself on the market of those offering meaning with what it has to offer it will not highlight its 'product' less but more. What makes the church unique and indispensable is not what the competition in any case already has on offer, and with added vitamins, but what is as unique and unexpected as the message of the gospel. That at any rate is the knowledge gained from the business paradigm. The business paradigm is quite suitable as an analytical instrument. However, there are elementary theological reasons against developing a viable model of the church on this basis alone.

## 4. The opportunities for systemic organizational evolution

4.1 Despite the somewhat critical evaluation of the business paradigm, it is legitimate to ask whether other orientation models of secular origin are more suited to contribute to the shaping of a viable church for the future. Sociology offers such a model with systemic organizational evolution. For example, the initiative 'Evangelically Open' in the Evangelical Church in Austria works on this basis.[14]

Organizational evolution sets out not only to indicate defects but also as far as possible to overcome them with its methods. Therefore it seeks to combine the aim of an effective, mobile and innovative organization with the mission and self-understanding of the church.

4.2 Here organizational evolution is concerned with more than superficial strategies of success. It has explicitly in view that 'church organizations are not free of ethics and theology', but rather are 'to a large degree orientated on values'.[15] Therefore in organizational evolution it is particularly important to 'orientate theological reflection on change by criteria of faith, by substantive aims which correspond to the task of the church, its self-understanding as an organization of organizations and the needs of the time'.[16]

4.3 With this criterion, changes can then be initiated and affirmed as 'system-specific transformations referring back to the potential for self-criticism that can be found in Christian tradition and with the participation of those affected'.[17] Here the fact that those affected become involved is a decisive shaping principle for an organizational evolution that promises success. The church today cannot really change without the active participation of its members. This should be an obvious conclusion for Protestant churches. They need only to activate their own self-understanding for their reform processes, and for this the priesthood of believers has always been an essential element.

From this perspective, voluntary work can therefore no longer be regarded as a substitute or a way of filling gaps, if the churches can no longer provide paid workers because of a lack of money. If Christians work in their church without

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[14] Cf. Thomas Krobath, Monika Salzer and Michael Bünker, '"Offen Evangelisch" – Die Evangelische Kirche in Österreich findet zu ihrer Organisationsentwicklung', in Andreas Heller and Thomas Krobath (eds), *OrganisationsEthik – Organisationsentwicklung in Kirchen, Caritas und Diakonie*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2003, 47ff.

[15] Andreas Heller and Thomas Krobath, 'Kirchen verstehen und als Organisationen gestalten', in *OrganisationsEthik* (n.13), 10.

[16] Ibid., 11.

[17] Ibid., 26.

recompense, then this participation takes on a right and a dignity of its own. In this way they also witness to what is given from the beginnings of the church with the gospel itself and is indispensable for handing it on.

4.4    Organizational evolution also has plenty of room for church model processes. But they are not its presupposition. Organizational evolution can also take place by shaping specific projects. The initiative 'Open Evangelically', which has already been mentioned, has also agreed on this procedure. However, often today the development of a model of organizational evolution comes first. Experience shows that new models are particularly required in situations of upheaval. They are required 'when outside pressure mounts, competition grows and consensus in the organization as a whole no longer seems guaranteed'. 'Consensual legitimations, an assurance of an internal standpoint and offers of identification to workers are then the motives. Models can and should be frameworks for orientation and impulses towards innovation.'[18] This observation from organizational science fits in quite precisely with the starting conditions for church model processes.

4.5     If a church resolves on a process of reform and also wants to use the instrument of organizational evolution, it first has to arrive at an understanding about particular criteria. These include a consensus on the goals to be achieved. What is to remain as it was before? The new that is to come into being also requires critical support, so that it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the theological quality of the evolution process and its character in shaping the church. Since of course in the church, too, there can be no evolution without contradiction and resistance, they sometimes need to be integrated into the process as a creative potential. That applies not only to resistance within the church; it must also be possible to articulate from outside the alien nature of the church and the way in which it is put in question so that it can examine its relationship to society accordingly.[19]

4.6.    All this presupposes that the church is ready for far-reaching learning processes and also deliberately understands itself as an organization which is constantly learning. Then it can understand its organizational character as on the one hand indispensable and on the other as time-conditioned and changeable. Therefore while it will not refuse reforms, it will submit them to a constant theological examination. The church's capacity to learn must show itself precisely here.

On this presupposition the Reformation principle of *ecclesia semper reformanda* means that while church reform is certainly not just organizational reform, it is also that. However, in the end changes promise success only if they can orientate themselves on the content of faith, and the necessary balance between preserving and renewing is observed in reforms. For that reason, too, organizational science emphasizes that restructuring processes in the church require more theology, not less.

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[18] Andreas Heller, Andreas, '"Wir wollen Leisten lernen, denn im Dienen sind wir schon ganz gut!" – Chancen und Risiken von Leitbild-Entwicklungen in kirchlichen Organisationen', in *Caritas. Zeitschrift für Caritasarbeit und Caritaswissenschaft* 1/1997, 12.
[19] Cf. Heller and Krobath, 'Kirchen verstehen' (n.14), 37.

## 5. Expectations of a renewed church

5.1 What kind of church is needed today? Behind all efforts at reform and regardless of all discussions about models, this is the disturbing question which constantly recurs. In view of the far-reaching processes of religious and social transformation it is becoming increasingly urgent both inside and outside the church. What do people expect of the church, if they expect anything at all?

Churches can gain a future only if they are ready to face the challenges of the present and in so doing also to grapple with their past. Therefore the learning experiences which they have had in the course of their history with the changing paradigms and different models need to be kept alive. In this way they have faced up to the social conditions which prevailed at a particular time, under which the church had to be shaped. Here, however, they have quite often opened themselves up to ambivalent and problematical influences. For the churches this can only be an occasion to ensure, with an awareness of the past and a lively eye to the present, that the claims and expectations of society do not once again become the normative provisos for their action. Therefore they will always have to face up to the more stubborn and resistant elements of the Christian message which need to be noted, particularly when the issue is the identity and changing of the church.

5.5 In this way it is recalled time and again that the church lives in the world but not by the world. By definition it is an 'institution in transition'.[20] For example the church must accept that there are both resolute and irresolute followers of Jesus in its midst. Both groups have been there from the beginning. Already in the New Testament we meet the narrower circle of disciples and the wider circle of 'fellow-travellers'. Jesus did not reject them or push them aside. He lived with a scene of sympathizers.

That has not changed throughout church history to the present day. Any church is dependent on the confessing and committed core community and at the same time it must live with the grey zone of sympathizers, those who are 'loyally remote from the church'. The church has to endure this tension and also take account of it in its social form.

5.6 Jesus did not require those in distress and sickness whom he had helped to become his disciples in return. That too has consequences for the church, for its preaching and also for its shape. Its service of men and women, above all of the needy in diakonia, must take place as Jesus meant it, and be taken for granted to such a degree as to rule out any superficial expectation of something in return and any urgent recruiting. 'The service of the church can be good advertising for the cause of Christ only if it refrains from being advertising.'[21] In a society which wants to have everything, including help for the handicapped, calculated down to the last handshake in order to pay for the contribution, this unselfishness which is taken for granted can become a witness to the coming kingdom of God.

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[20] Cf. Wolf-Dieter Marsch, *Institution im Übergang – Evangelische Kirche zwischen Tradition und Reform*, Göttingen 1970.
[21] Pavel Filipi in 'Gestalt und Gestaltung – theologisch' (typescript), 2003, 10.

## *Chapter 4    Perspectives and Consequences*

## A.    For the shape and organization of the church

### 1.    Church and diakonia

1.1    The task of diakonia

According to the Leuenberg Agreement the church's proclamation gains credibility through the unanimous witness of the gospel and through the common service of love. This service is addressed to human distress and attempts to help it. But it also tries to relieve the causes of concrete need. To do, that the churches have to perceive their common responsibility for justice and peace in the world (LA 36). In this whole span from concrete help for the individual to the global context, diakonia proves to be the essential expression of the life of the church. According to the Leuenberg Agreement it serves to realize church fellowship and fills this with life.

This basic notion is taken up in the study on the church resolved on by the Vienna Plenary Assembly in 1994 and taken further (CJC 106-7). Alongside *martyria*, *leiturgia* and *koinonia*, *diakonia* takes its indispensable place in fundamental reflection on the mission of the church and the task of Christians. Here the Reformation insight is recalled that the perception of this task must not lead witness and service to drift apart. Both dimensions – witness and service – need each other and strengthen each other.

The churches represented in the regional group try to carry out diaconal work professionally and to root it in the life of the church, in prayer and worship. One of the valuable experiences of the churches of the region is that after the fall of the Iron Curtain diakonia could come to life again. Only as a result of that could many people experience what church means in the full sense of the word. It is this diaconal challenge that is leading the churches into a far-reaching process of orientation about their place in the society in which they exist and in the wider context.

1.2    Church and diakonia belong together

Churches in an open and pluralistic society must be recognizable as churches which provide effective help (CJC 112). So church and diakonia belong together. The church does not wait for people to come to it, but always already finds itself on the side of the poor and needy. It does not first have to go in search of distress, because through Jesus Christ it knows that it is already put among those in distress. Diaconal work reminds the church to do its work effectively. This includes a concern for the best possible quality, for support and training for voluntary and paid workers which is up to this standard. Diaconal work reminds the churches to see those who seek help as mature people, who also have a say, and for whom diakonia acts as an advocate.

The study on the church further explains that the mission of diakonia also applies to individual Christians and at the same time requires the churches to

perceive their political and diaconal responsibility in society. Here we have the prophetic task of the church to intercede for justice. The 'Ecumenical Social Mission Statement' may be mentioned as one example of such help with orientation.[22] Two forms of diaconal work should supplement one another: institutionalized diakonia which offers professionalism at the highest level, and community diakonia, which is based primarily on voluntary work. Both forms of diaconal work belong together. Commitment to diakonia for human rights and social rights, to a culture of justice and solidarity, takes place on a local, national and European level.

1.3    Collaboration beyond boundaries

It is the declared aim of diakonia to go beyond the boundaries of states and confessions and so realize collaboration in a wider context. The task of diakonia to argue for a lasting balance between market economy and social security, between competition and solidarity, in a Europe that is growing together, requires credible local commitment, networking which extends beyond regions, and representation all over Europe. Since it was founded forty years ago (1966), an organization like EURODIACONIA with its regional platforms has realized these new forms of cooperation beyond national and regional boundaries.[23]

It is important for the churches to see that to some degree they are taking part in the total European social development. Occasionally the broadening of perspectives and the deepening of collaboration leads to a deepening of nationalism at the political and social level. In an analogous way it can also be said of the churches that the broadening of ecumenical perspective, the deepening of cooperation and church fellowship beyond the boundaries of confession and state can also lead to a strengthening of confessionalism and self-satisfaction on the part of local churches. There should be no losing sight of the fact that this tendency does not start from the churches which are growing together more strongly, but from social developments. What happens will essentially depend on how far it proves possible to develop forms of participation in decision-making processes which guarantee a high degree of collaboration on the part of a particular church and its members.

The consequence which follows for the CPCE is that collaboration in the realm of diakonia which crosses boundaries must be intensified. A stronger networking of churches and diaconal institutions makes sense in preventing witness and service from drifting apart. That is especially the case with the churches in which church and diakonia are not represented by the same persons. Work on joint statements on questions of social ethics, which has been done in exemplary fashion by the Consultation of the Churches on the Rhine, needs to be strengthened. The questions at issue are: poverty and the fight against poverty; employment and the labour market; care for the old and health policies; biopolitics; immigration, migration and asylum.

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[22] *Sozialwort des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen in Österreich,* edited by the World Council of Churches, Vienna 2003.

[23] Cf. EURODIACONIA, Strategic Plan 2004 – 2006, resolved on 12. June 2004 in Revfülöp, Hungary.

## 2. Church and education

2.1. To shape and to form (educate)

Processes of shaping are processes of formation ('Bildung') – in a very simple way: where there is shaping, something arises, forms. And the concrete shape need not always be identical with the original intention or the will to shape. Therefore processes of shaping are also in a deeper sense processes of formation in the educational sense. They accompany and regulate shaping, show up false developments, correct them, and can also deal with imperfect forms. So processes of shaping themselves require formation, which as concrete processes of formation must be part of the processes of shaping.

The processes of European transformation represent a phase of upheaval, and in addition call for this upheaval to be shaped. What capacities are needed for understanding this upheaval better? One can also ask what kind of 'European educational formation' is needed in order to be able to shape the upheaval both individually and as a society. This is linked up with Christianity and the church. Perceiving the European dimension of the church is a new task which calls for new capacities, new formation. The upheavals represent both new opportunities and uncertainties for the world in which Christians live that have to be overcome. Here it is important for the churches to help to disclose the European dimension of Christianity for their members.

2.2 Education as a key word for European integration

Education is not on the agenda either in the political programmes of the European institutions or in those of the churches of Europe – at any rate it is not on the list of priorities. This is a major defect in the process of integration of the churches of Europe. The integration of Europe will fail if it does not prove possible to perceive the basic questions and needs of individuals and societies as a background to and motivation for integration, over and above the economic perspectives. Beginnings are being made here (discussion of values, the intellectual traditions of Europe, the identity of Europe, ethics, etc.). However, what is left out of the equation is how these can be productively included in the process of integration as given and presupposed foundations. European integration is essentially a process of education which has to be shaped.

These processes of education as integral elements in the European process of integration necessarily include religious education. For on the one hand religion conveys an individual and collective knowledge of orientation. One cannot speak of the 'soul of Europe' without at the same time addressing a religious dimension, bringing religion into the conversation and thus initiating processes of religious education.

Secondly, religion itself needs education to be able to practise the co-existence of religions on a European level (religious education as self-enlightenment and understanding strangers). Thus time and again religious tolerance is called for, but without shaping the processes of education connected with it. However, such processes are necessary if religious tolerance is to be more than a retreat

into a quiet place, namely a positive contribution of religion towards practising tolerance in society.

2.3    Religious education remains indispensable

All over Europe at present this task is coming up against two difficulties. First, it is disputed that religious education is part of the European canon of education. In the West the debate is taking place in the context of an enlightened, secularistic laicism. In the East the Communist tradition, in which education of people and social education has to follow atheistic principles, is still influential. This continues at a European level generally: religious freedom with this largely negative determination hardly leaves any room for a positive law which not only makes the practice of religion possible but promotes it and requires it as a constitutive element of European education.

The second difficulty is that churches, including the Protestant churches, are largely withdrawing from responsibility for education, contrary to their own competence for education in Europe which has a theological basis and which has grown up through history. The reduction to a supposed 'core business' which comes about as a result of economic pressure can lead to an abandonment of all the processes of communication and education which are associated with the communication of the gospel. In short, there is a reduction to what is presumed factual, the worshipping community as the real centre, and the question how this community forms itself or what is formed in this community is left out. Faith is detached from education.

With this, further processes of education are also dropping out on the European level. So people talk of European values and suffer under the recognition that traditions in which values are handed down are disappearing, but overlook the fact that this process of values and handing them down is a process of education. Thus while there is talk of the necessary work of reconciliation which is part of European integration and which is the original task of the churches, people forget that reconciliation remains an empty promise without information, discussion, understanding strangers, translation work, in short without an educational framework. The 'voice of Protestantism' should be heard in Europe and brought to bear: but at the same time the question is left aside how this voice will be formed and what it would have to say to the educated of Europe.

2.4    The responsibility of the churches for education

Despite these difficulties the task of church and religious education in Europe remains indispensable. On the political side we may start from 'Recommendation 1202 of the Council of Europe', dated 1993. Here the task of religious education is sketched out in the framework of a democratic Europe. Section 3 states: 'Religion provides an enriching relationship for the individual with himself and his god, as well as with the outside world and the society in which he lives.' A decline in values, increasing intolerance, viewing reality solely in economic terms – all these are problems which religion is expected to deal with. Therefore, according to the closing sections, religious education has to be guaranteed.

There have not been similar approaches on the part of the churches of Europe. Certainly the *Charta Oecumenica* names the 'common responsibility of Europe' as a task which includes 'helping to shape Europe' (section 7); however, nothing is said about the need for European education, at least not directly. Indirectly, though, there is a reference: 'Our faith helps us to learn from the past, and to make our Christian faith and love for our neighbours a source of hope for morality and ethics, for education and culture, and for political and economic life, in Europe and throughout the world.' So one can learn with the help of faith and introduce what one has learned into education. Here it is necessary to draw the consequences and describe and institutionalize faith as a learning process. That happens, for example, when the churches again become aware of their responsibility for education and maintain their own schools for this – often at considerable sacrifice. Here that secular church education is given which attempts to do justice to the task and to the traditions (as they have entered into the shaping of Europe or have been submerged in it). So it is in a position to give Europe that dimension which corresponds to its own identity.

## 3. Church and theology

3.1     Europe as a context for theology

As a scholarly explication of the gospel, theology has an indispensable function for self-understanding both inside and outside the church. There are some indications that theology is no longer doing justice to this task today. These indications become concentrated where theology seems to forget the context of its own work and withdraws from upheavals. But there are also signs that theology is developing and is also incorporating into its work the context of Europe with its painful experiences of the past and present.

Because of theologians' own historical experiences, this contextualization of theology is indispensable. It means discovering the category of history as the background against which Holy Scripture is to be interpreted. Theology must refer more strongly than before to the non-conceptual formations of tradition. The history of piety or the standards of what makes up Protestantism in its different manifestations which are historical or have grown up regionally need critical perception and theological discussion.

3.2     European challenges

Europeanization is a challenge to theology in two ways. First, like any discipline in the Europe-wide attempt to safeguard standards, it will standardize itself. Here theology must struggle for independence in the face of an alien ideal of knowledge and a one-sided academic policy. The theological faculties will have to advance their process of self-understanding in order to make clear to the public what subject-matter it has to work on academically. The standards which are necessary for safeguarding religious and church education must be laid down in conjunction with the churches. That applies to everything from training for the ministry to church kindergartens. The other challenge is that Protestant theology in particular must regain its European

breadth. The Reformation and Reformation theologies were phenomena which related to the whole of Europe; today theological faculties are more individual projects specific to nations or regions.

## B.　For the church in society

### 1.　Church and civil society

1.1　Society as a public sphere

The public sphere is the place where different agents of a society work together for the common good. This sphere used exclusively to be determined by the church and the state. What the Reformers say about 'authority' has to be understood against this background. By contrast, modern societies are differentiated in many ways. Therefore today a whole series of further agents belong in the public sphere, not only in the sphere of religion but also in civil society, business, education and the media. Churches are agents like others in this public sphere.

This fact represents a great challenge to the churches of the regional group. Today they often find themselves in a divided situation: on the one hand they encounter tendencies to force religion and church back into the private sphere again; on the other hand there is a growing need for religious orientation in public discourse for the enormous number of ethical questions which determine the future.

At the same time it must be maintained that the churches are fundamentally different from other agents in the public sphere. They proclaim and bear witness to the lordship of God in Jesus Christ, which is more binding on them than any earthly loyalties. That frees the churches for solidarity and prophetic criticism. Therefore they do not represent their own interests but act as advocates for marginal groups and the excluded. Certainly they act in a particular context, but they put this within the universal framework of the promises of God.

1.2　The participation of the churches

The study on the church speaks of the prophetic criticism of the churches of and in society (CJC 113-4). In this way it also indicates the place of the church and makes it clear that the church can no longer understand itself as being outside society, over against it or possibly even above it. From this the study concludes that the prophetic critical word of the church is credible only if it exposes itself to criticism through the gospel of Jesus Christ and renewal through the word of God. Thus the ecclesiological insight that the church is *creatura verbi divini* forms the background to any current standpoint. Here the churches are not concerned to 'Christianize' state or social institutions, but to remind them of their responsibility for the common good, for which they are appointed.

The participation of the church in civil society is to be seen in a differentiated way. Alongside the various church groups, initiatives and networks which

carry on their activity completely in the realm of civil society, there are those organizations of the church which in a special way are orientated on service to the world. These include diakonia, missionary agencies and others. This diversity makes it possible to experience the Pauline picture of the church as the body and its members.

The connection between the churches and the church agents of civil society is particularly important, because it is shaped by a specific tension between independence and involvement. The church agents in civil society are not mere extensions of the church itself into the social sphere, nor are the church agents in civil society an agency that has nothing to do with the task of the church in the narrower sense. It is an important task of church leadership to keep this tension alive and make it fruitful.

The study on the church says that the life of the church in a plural and open society is 'a task to shape the Christian life and the existence of the church' which it has to accept (CJC 111). It is a matter of the recognizability of the church which is given through the foundation and determination of the church that is laid down in the gospel. The church expresses itself in solidarity with the excluded, in naming the causes and consequences of poverty, in supporting truthfulness and transparency in public life, in commitment to local effort at participation in social processes and through the development of forms of community which are participatory and ongoing.

1.3     The model of the Round Table

The 'Round Tables' of 1989/1990 were one of the fundamental experiences of the churches of our region. They stand for the need to develop visions and goals for the future and to build up forms of co-operation despite different and varying convictions. In this threefold task the 'Round Table' can serve as a model for the work of diakonia, for ecumenical collaboration and for the participation of the churches in civil society which will also prove viable for the future.

The churches make an important contribution to the development of civil society. They encourage their members to take political responsibility and themselves engage in various campaigns, alliances and networks. They en-courage their clergy and church workers to give an effective church testimony in the world and train them for this. In terms of content a broad spectrum is covered, for example commitment to work for those affected by HIV/AIDS, the 'decade for overcoming violence', or the *processus confessionis* in the face of economic globalization and the church programme of 'business at the service of life'.

## 2.     The churches in the process of European integration

2.1     Since its beginnings in the post-war period and with more intensity in recent years the process of European integration has time and again led to the question what values Europe has on the one hand and what goals on the other, and how Europe can shape itself adequately from them. The question of shape

(giving Europe a European shape) is an essential task of the process of European integration.

This process is also having its effects on the churches. First, they have to find an identifiable form for themselves in order to be able to join in the processes of integration and be perceived as conversation partners. Secondly, the processes of integration are continuing in the churches. Here the question is: what European shape does Protestant Christianity really have in Europe?

2.2 The present shape of the Reformation churches in Europe is historically the result of the transference of organizational tasks to secular institutions. The 'administrative paradigm' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, according to which the church administers word and sacrament, and at the same time in terms of organizational theory has become an administrative unit, is no longer enough. The economic paradigm which seemed to be replacing the administrative paradigm in the last thirty years may be equally inadequate. Therefore to gain a European shape the Protestant church must agree about the essential possibilities and necessities of shaping itself.

## C.     For the fellowship of churches in the regional group

### 1.     The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and its ecclesial quality

1.1  The churches which have signed the Leuenberg Agreement have declared church fellowship on the basis of their common understanding of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance with their institution and 'in loyalty to the confessions of faith which bind them or with due respect for their traditions' (LA 30). 'Church fellowship means that… churches with different confessional positions accord each other fellowship in word and sacrament' (LA 29). That includes the mutual recognition of the participating churches as being churches in the full sense, regardless of the differences in confessional status, in the shape and practice of church life. It also means that the churches involve share together the message of the gospel and celebrate the holy eucharist with one another. In accord with the Reformation tradition the Leuenberg Agreement confirms that this is 'necessary and sufficient… for the true unity of the church' (LA 2).

1.2 Thus such a church fellowship itself takes on ecclesial quality. This gives the churches of the CPCE new possibilities of relationships and also new mutual obligations. That leads to the question of the institutional form of this church alliance, which strives for 'the fullest possible co-operation in witness and service to the world' (LA 29).

### 2.      The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the question of its shape

2.1　Ecumenical history knows alliances of churches or church agencies which are usually based on the principle of 'federation' (e.g. the Swiss Evangelical Church Federation, teams of Christian churches, ecumenical councils, etc.). The institutions involved cultivate ecumenical dialogue with one another and collaborate in those areas which are important for strengthening the common witness and do not affect their own ecclesial identity. These models of inter-church collaboration do not explicitly include the question of fellowship in word and sacrament and the reciprocal recognition of the churches in the full sense. Another model which is practised less frequently is that of 'organic union'. Two (or more) churches agree on a new form with its own identity. The presupposition is that both (all) involved want to arrive at full agreement about all the essential marks of being church. Most unions in Europe are between Lutheran and Reformed. However, only part of them have developed a third independent type of confession – also in the sense of church law. These confessional unions are marked by a shared spiritual leadership and a shared (united) confession. Less far-reaching unions are described as administrative unions. They have shared leadership and administration and are sub-divided territorially into Reformed or Lutheran communities which maintain their own confession.

2.2　The Leuenberg model of Protestant unity in reconciled difference begins from the centre of the church's being: the shared understanding of the gospel as the message of justification and the celebration of the sacraments in accordance with their institution. Fellowship in word and sacrament – understood as a fundamental consensus – maintains as it were the difference in confessional status and the shapings of the church. The churches involved maintain their complete organizational independence, but renounce the claim to be 'exclusively' church. They are church in the full sense, as individuals but also together.

Fellowship in word and sacrament means that the church must take shape at different levels. Here each level has its own ecclesial quality and its own function within the Protestant church as a whole: the church community, the regional church, the assembly of regional churches at a national level and the Leuenberg Church Fellowship at the European level. Fellowship in word and sacrament is realized at every level and gains its ecclesial quality from that.

2.4　If we take note of the fundamental consensus aimed at in the Leuenberg Agreement, the shape of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe could theoretically go beyond that of a federation of autonomous churches. But because there is no common confessional status, the model of a union is on the one hand not possible, and on the other neither necessary nor worth aiming at because of the ecclesial quality of the fellowship. In addition the Leuenberg Agreement requires that an independent shape of church unity and mutual commitment be sought at the level of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, a shape which takes up the shared fundamental consensus and at the same time respects the ecclesial quality of all levels of being the church in the fellowship.

**3.　Church fellowship as mutual recognition and representation**

3.1 The mutual recognition of churches with the granting of pulpit and eucharistic fellowship also makes possible and calls for reflections on a reciprocal representation. No church in the Community can claim that it is inappropriate for its members to take part in the life of another church. Legal questions of membership or church order are secondary to this and if need be can be subsequently regulated by a bilateral agreement.

3.2 Church fellowship implies complete reciprocal recognition of 'ministries' and thus the recognition of ordinations in all participating churches. In the individual churches, self-determination of the presuppositions for ordination and the possibility of election to a church ministry remain intact. That also applies to churches which so far have not recognized the ordination of women. On the other hand, however, for them it means recognizing the ministry of a woman minister who has been ordained in another church of the CPCE. The reciprocal recognition of ministries means that no CPCE church will introduce ordination for one of its ministries without consulting the Community.

3.3 Reciprocal recognition is especially important in the diaspora situations in which many churches of the CPCE have to live. Individual families or small groups of Protestant Christians who have found it difficult or impossible to gain access to their home churches should be able to take part in the life of a CPCE church without any restrictions, attending its worship, receiving baptism and eucharist and claiming pastoral care.

In the case of marriages between members of the different churches of the Community the principle of reciprocal representation means that the couple being married have complete freedom to decide in which church they will have the ceremony, and in which church they will have their children baptized and engage in church activities. A later move to another church is not ruled out.

3.4 The processes of migration and integration in today's Europe present the churches with a further challenge. Certainly it is not to be expected that the majority of members of a community will change their abode, but there will be an increasing possibility of this. The churches of the CPCE must ask themselves what Christian hospitality could mean for the shape of their communities. Because of their historical experience with brothers and sisters who have had to flee, the churches of the Reformation are under a special obligation to be open in their shape to people who want to find a new home in their communities. It will generally no longer be a matter of founding further foreign communities but of accepting into the life of a particular church brothers and sisters in the faith who have another origin, perhaps with a special status (community, class), but as full members with all rights and obligations. Our church community makes that possible.

**4. Church fellowship as the fellowship of different identities which have grown up and a growth in one's own identity**

4.1 It is of the essence of a church fellowship that it does not put in question the identity of any of the member churches as this has grown up. These identities

have in part grown up through history; they relate to a history of faithfulness to the confession, to one's own practice of faith, to one's own people (which is often not without suffering). By definition the church fellowship wants to keep these identities and this fellowship in its midst.

It is equally clear that 'identity' is not a static concept. It develops in time, with new challenges and occasions. It is not prescribed once for all time either in the confessional writings or in the ordinances of the churches. Church fellowship in word and sacrament makes possible not only historical coincidences but also new *kairoi*, new discoveries, which the Holy Spirit communicates to us and which have an effect on our own identities as churches, keep them open and extend them.

4.2    The question which has to be put in the CPCE is therefore: does not the very existence of the CPCE, which knows that it is indebted to its churches, represent a broadening of the perception of the identity of a particular church? That does not mean that as churches we give up our loyalty to the confession and to church order. But it does mean that we also integrate into our background, our decisions and our praxis what moves other churches of the CPCE and thus through the identity of the others extend our own identity and keep it open.

## 5.    Church fellowship as fellowship which can link up with the ecumene

5.1     The Leuenberg Church Fellowship is based on a fundamental ecumenical consensus, fellowship in word and sacrament. Thus it is a model of church unity which can be universalized, which can flow into the ecumenical dialogue.

However, the church fellowship based on the Leuenberg Agreement is ecumenically credible only if it also cultivates ecumenical dialogue as such.

It should therefore promote ecumenical dialogues about the unity of the church both regionally and all over Europe and bilateral dialogues between confessional families (the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches, Anglican Church). There was a dispute in the regional group as to how far in this framework the CPCE should itself carry on bilateral dialogues as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship and in addition had to be represented in the relevant multilateral ecumenical bodies.

5.2    The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe should also take note of other ecumenical models in the question of shape. For example the World Council of Churches has three organs: the Presidents and the Executive Committee, the Central Committee which numbers 150 members, and the General Assembly. The Conference of European Churches also has a similar organization: the Presidium, the Central Committee which numbers about 40 members built up by regions, and the General Assembly.

### 6. Church fellowship as (synodical) fellowship for consultation and opinion-forming

6.1 In the church fellowship the principle of not intervening in the so-called internal affairs of a church is relativized through the Leuenberg Agreement. Any member church is still responsible before its Lord for its decisions. It cannot delegate this responsibility to another church or to the totality of the fellowship. At the same time it is obligated to look beyond its own boundaries – to 'look into the fellowship'. Therefore it should raise the question what kind of effect this or that decision can have for the other churches.

6.2 There is a series of challenges to which the churches of the CPCE must react individually. But the Church Fellowship offers a possibility of consulting the other churches, gaining information from them and discussing with them how they have reacted to the concrete challenges and taken note of these voices in making its own decision. This can come about for example by inviting representatives of the sister churches to the discussions of the leading church bodies (synods, church councils, etc) with a right to speak. A further possibility would be to hold thematic regional consultations or having written (or electronic) statements.

It would be important for all the churches of the CPCE to be permanently informed (e.g. through the networking system of the Protestant Churches in Europe, NPKE[24]), about which challenges are facing the churches or how they are to react to them. The doctrinal conversation groups set up by the Executive Committee are and remain a proven instrument in the sphere of theological opinion-making, and these can be enlarged by the formation of theological opinion close to praxis and reports on experience from the regional groups.

6.3 Time and again the formation of a European Synod of Protestant Churches has been proposed. This would express in church law the ecclesial quality of the CPCE. In this way the binding quality within the CPCE could be strengthened and the common voice of Protestantism be heard more prominently.

In principle 'the synod represents the fellowship of the baptized who agree about church action, trusting in the reality of the Holy Spirit which is promised to them'.[25] The essentials of the synodical process are as follows. Those taking part in the joint consultation are delegated by their particular (local) churches and represent their church. The delegations from the churches consist of 'ordained' and 'lay' members; the appropriate representation of both genders should be ensured. It is desirable for each church generally to have the same number of votes, regardless of its size. The agenda of the synod should be governed by the concerns of the churches concerned, i.e. 'from below'.

6.4 However, considerable objections are also being made to the formation of a European Synod of Protestant Churches, and these must be taken into account. Thus it is pointed out that the concept already has a clear meaning in church law. It denotes the leadership organ of a church which makes decisions and acts on its own authority. A European Protestant synod would merely have

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[24] http://lkg.jalb.de/lkg/jsp/lkg.jsp?side_id=72&lang=en.
[25] 'Synode', in RGG[4] 7, *col*.1975.

limited and 'transferred' and thus restricted 'authority'. Alongside these objections grounded in church law, some churches of the CPCE fear the rise of an overarching, centralized structure which would lay claim to further competences (and above all finances). It should further be recalled that there is no agreement on the use of the term 'synod'. It is also used for periodical joint meetings of representative and elected persons (the Leuenberg Synod in the Czech Republic) or for a conciliar process lasting over a period (the Swiss Protestant Synod).

6.5     In so far as the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe has an ecclesial quality, the synodical element cannot be bracketed off from the question of its shape. But the creation of a more binding structure need not necessarily imply the formation of a synod. It could be helpful to combine the idea of the synod with the process of communication which has been described earlier.

The history of Protestant synodicalism shows that the matter is primarily one of the realization of the principle of the mutual consolation of brothers and sisters. The starting point was that no particular church can fully perform its task without the solidarity of others and cannot solve all its problems alone. Questions often stood on the agenda of synods which either affected the member churches as a whole or were beyond the powers of individual communities and churches. The hope for the consensus of the church is always bound up with the mutual consolation of brothers and sisters.

6.6     The synodical element is an indispensable part of the shape of the Protestant church. It is therefore natural to shape this synodical element in the CPCE particularly as a transparent process of communication and structured consultation. Combined with the hope of a developing consensus on shared central questions, this process could also develop into an instrument for the formation of binding opinions. The Plenary Assembly in Belfast in 2001 stimulated the implementation of thematic consultation. The proposal on the theme of migration has been taken up by the Churches on the Rhine. Thus this form of consultation is evidently already taking shape, with the goal of arriving at shared positions.

6.7     Because of the unclarities that have been described it is worth distancing oneself from the establishment of a European Protestant Synod. Instead, a Council of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe should be formed. The essential function of a synod, that of joint consultation and the formation of joint opinions, could thus be rooted in the CPCE.

The Council would primarily have the function of networking, coordination and opinion-forming for the decisive questions of being the Protestant church in Europe. It would have to ensure that there were constant links between the CPCE and its signatory churches and thus make possible focussed and strengthened reciprocal processes of communication.

This definition of tasks would take account of the objections to a binding quality which smacked too much of church law. With the formation of a council, through the participation of the churches, at the same time further concerns of the synodical principle could be taken up: the members would be chosen by the Plenary Assembly. The Council would include 'ordained' and

'lay' members. With the participation of the churches the agenda of the CPCE would also be determined 'from below'.

6.8 With the well-tried model of a Europe of regions, regionally orientated work will in future become increasingly important in the CPCE. It can be promoted and strengthened by the formation of the Council. Where no other regional groups exist, they should be formed and could introduce their concerns into the work of the CPCE. Conversely, the link of the CPCE with the churches of a region could also be strengthened by the involvement of regional groups.

## 7. The ecumene as a field of learning

7.1 The church today is unthinkable without the ecumene. The ecumene is part of its essence. Nevertheless ecumene must constantly be relearned. It is not a additional voluntary contribution by the churches in times when things are going well and should go better together. Ecumene is an obligation, in relationship to the partner churches which often by no means fit in with one's own ideas, to preserve theological honesty, reliability and fairness in dealings and, if it is indicated, also loyalty in criticism.

7.2 Ecumene begins and succeeds with a recognition of difference which is worked out together and dealt with together. That presupposes that the churches involve each understand themselves as fully valid churches. There must be as much self-awareness in self-understanding.

The churches must not fall into the ecumenical trap of thinking that all the churches together are the church. Ecumene may not be sought because Protestant churches are too weak and feel too isolated to be able to act independently.

Ecumene today must mean even more the promotion of a life together which goes beyond boundaries under the slogan of regionalization – also of majority and minority churches. Regionalization is a principle of European integration. EU regions will become increasingly important. At the same time regionalization is a principle which could help to shape local fellowship, from the local community to the wider region.

7.3 The sociological fact of majority or minority churches also shapes ecumenicalfellowship in a particular context. Governed by particular historical developments, the relationship between majority and minority churches is often burdened by misunderstandings and prejudices. The situation of the minority churches which find themselves faced with large majority churches in the ecumene can awaken forces of adaptation, demarcation and also cooperation. Although these forces are not always shaped by theological insight, they have far-reaching effects on the self-understanding of a particular church, its worship and teaching, on the piety of its members and not least on its form. Joint action, to which the churches in Europe have committed themselves in the *Charta Oecumenica*, must take account of this fact.

The national ecumenical councils, which often consist of many very different and numerically small churches, nevertheless attract public attention and gain

social relevance if they can profile themselves as forums of joint and competent church action. Therefore the CPCE in East Central Europe furthers the active cooperation of its member churches. On the basis of the *Charta Oecumenica* it asks its member churches to make this collaboration increasingly its task.

*Appendix 1*

# PROJECT GUIDELINES

**Resolution of the 5th General Assembly**

The 5th LCF General Assembly resolved to take up the issue of the shape and organisation of Protestant churches as a subject of doctrinal discussion. It was emphasised that questions about the organisation of Protestant churches are subordinate to their foundation in God's saving action in Jesus Christ. This permits a freedom in terms of structure which should not, however, be confused with arbitrariness. The General Assembly gave these directives:

The doctrinal discussion should:

– reach a theological understanding on the criteria governing Church organisation;

– ensure that organisation is taken more seriously as an instrument for implementing and deepening Church fellowship;

– take into account the current processes of transformation in Europe both in Church and society, and their implications for the organisation of Protestant churches;

– clarify what are the specific marks of Church fellowship in a Reformed perspective.

**Explanatory statement**

The Leuenberg Agreement (LA) states: 'The Church is founded upon Jesus Christ alone. It is he who gathers the Church and sends it forth, by the bestowal of his salvation in preaching and the sacraments. In the view of the Reformation it follows that agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and in the right administration of the sacraments is the necessary and sufficient prerequisite for the true unity of the Church.' (LA 2) This statement draws on the wordings of the confessional documents (Confessio Augustana VII; Heidelberg Catechism, 54f. amongst others).

These affirmations were developed further in the consultation document entitled *The Church of Jesus Christ*, adopted at the 4th General Assembly of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship in Vienna. It reads: 'The Leuenberg Church Fellowship became possible because Reformation theology makes a fundamental distinction between the foundation, the shape and the mission of the church. The foundation of the church is God's action to save humankind first in the people of Israel, then in Jesus Christ. In this fundamental action God himself is the subject, and consequently the church is an object of faith. Since the church is a community of believers the shape of the church has taken various historical forms. The one church of faith (singular) is present in a

hidden manner in churches (plural) shaped in different ways' (*The Church of Jesus Christ*, p. 85).

Because of this relationship between the Church as creature of the divine Word and the empirical churches, the shape of churches is not arbitrary (ibid., p. 87). Each historical church has the task of witnessing in its shape to its original nature (ibid, p. 91).

That is why, given the embeddedness of the Church in history, care should be taken to distinguish between the true Church and the false Church: 'not every shape of church is in fact an expression of the true one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The church can in its concrete shape become a false church if the witness that is entrusted to it is falsified in word and deed. It is the task of the ecclesial community constantly to examine its shape and to reform it (ecclesia semper reformanda) so that it is in accordance with its essential attributes and nature given in its origin' (ibid, p. 93).

Insofar as the organization of the Church is related to the Church, object of faith, its critical principle, the converse is also true: the hidden church does not exist independently of physical structures, but only within them. It can therefore be said that the reality of an outward structure and the actuality of a tangible shape are just as integral a part of the being of the Church as an ordained ministry. Nonetheless, it is the Reformed understanding that these must both be subordinate to the Word of God (cf. Tampere Theses I).

The Leuenberg Agreement makes a fundamental distinction between the declaration of Church fellowship (LA 30–34) and its realisation (LA 35–49). The question about the shape and organisation of Protestant churches is in response to a desire for the realisation of Church fellowship. In order to meet this, the Leuenberg Agreement has identified four subject areas: witness and service (LA 36), continuing theological task (LA 37–41), organisational consequences (LA 42–45) and ecumenical aspects (46–49). On the 25th anniversary of the Agreement, the Executive Committee, in a spirit of self-criticism, noted that the work on the implementation of Church fellowship had been too unilaterally focused on the continuing theological task. But this particular theme 'shape and organization' now makes it possible to highlight the other three aspects of the realization of Church fellowship:

– Witness and service require cooperation and partnership in forms which differ from one region to another. It is necessary to take into account the conditions of European integration and the challenges faced by the churches in this process. The process of transformation, in which traditional institutions in Europe including the churches find themselves, requires new forms of communication and organisation: with this in view, the Vienna Assembly spoke of a Protestant network, and the Belfast Assembly moved that forums, consultations and project groups be established as new forms of cooperation among the churches.

– The work on questions of organization and their consequences for Church fellowship presents an immediate challenge for a Church fellowship whose structure is intentionally loose. Vienna had given encouragement to strengthen channels of information and communication; there remained the task of ensuring a more effective reception of the results of the work of the Church fellowship by the individual churches. At the same time these churches find themselves in their classic form inappropriately organised to face the challenges of the mutations that are

triggered by economic and political evolution. Progressive integration into the European Union has had certain consequences for the legal and structural shape of these churches. These can no longer be shouldered by each church on its own – they appeal to a common strategy by which the churches would declare themselves to be able to learn and where the principle of organizational evolution would be highlighted as a means of change.  In this way the situation can be avoided whereby the usual 'paradigm of administration' is simply replaced by the 'paradigm of enterprise' that is now in vogue.

– Discussion about the ecumenical aspects is particularly stimulated  by questions about the signs of  visible unity, the definition of the relatedness between Word, Church and ministry, the relationship between the universal priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry, and in particular by the question about structures of oversight (episcope) in the Church. These are the basic matters of debate arising from the Porvoo Common Statement and the proposed dialogue with the Anglican Communion.

**Structure of the doctrinal conversation**

The themes of the doctrinal conversation are richly textured, lending themselves to a combination of  doctrinal study and contextual case studies.

1. Following the decision of the General Assembly, the Executive Committee is launching a doctrinal study group to work on the shape and organisation that collaboration  among the Protestant churches in Europe might assume – following the declaration of Church fellowship and faced with the challenge of an emergent new Europe

   In making nominations for this group, the churches are requested to include the names not only of theologians but also of experts in Church law and government.

2. The Leuenberg South and Southeast Europe Regional Group is requested to carry out case studies to determine the implications that this project might have on the co-existence of the Leuenberg churches in their region. For that, the already established location of study, in which various churches with a great diversity of shapes have been working together in an atmosphere of trust for many years is used to good effect. This is within the Leuenberg framework and drawing on theological expertise and ecclesial experience. The case studies could also lead to reflection on the experiences associated with the participation (or envisaged participation) or non-participation in the European Union of countries where the churches of the Regional Group are located.

3. The connection of the two separate studies will be ensured by having two persons working both in the doctrinal discussion group and in the South and Southeast Europe Regional Group. In the course of this work it will be decided how the results of the ad hoc group are to be married with the case studies of the regional group, with the overall aim of submitting a joint report to the General Assembly.

4. It may be advisable to involve other professionals in dealing with specific issues or to draw upon the expertise of the ecumenical institutes.

   The following themes may be considered:

- The shape and organization of Protestant churches and the question about the visible signs of unity.
- Church oversight (episcope).
- How to organize collaboration among the Protestant churches.
- How to make the voice of  Protestantism heard in Europe.
- How better to co-ordinate the fields of action of the alliances of churches and confessions in Europe.
- What institutional forms are needed for European Protestantism to have a common voice in questions concerning the whole of Europe.
- Other themes (cf. results of the open space sessions in Belfast).

**Schedule**

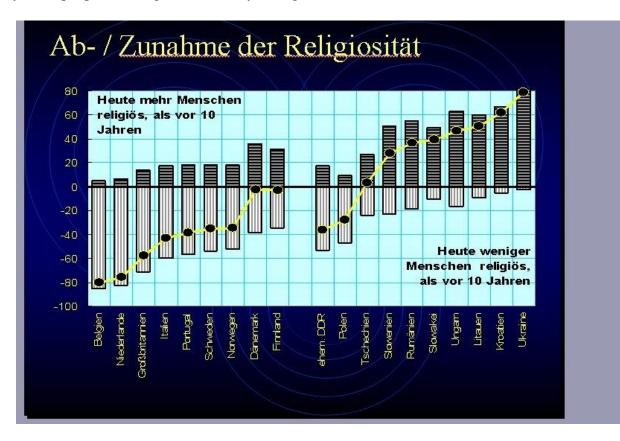| | |
|---|---|
| by June 2002: | Constitution of the doctrinal study group, in tandem with the launch of the case study project by the Regional Group |
| June 2002: | Decision of the Executive Committee on the composition of the study group |
| September 2002: | Feedback from the member churches |
| December 2005: | Finalizing of a joint text combining the results of the study group and the regional group |
| Spring 2006: | Adoption of the text by the Executive Committee |
| Summer 2006: | Submission of the text to the General Assembly followed by the invitation to the Leuenberg churches to respond. |

*Adopted by the Executive Committee on 15 December 2001*

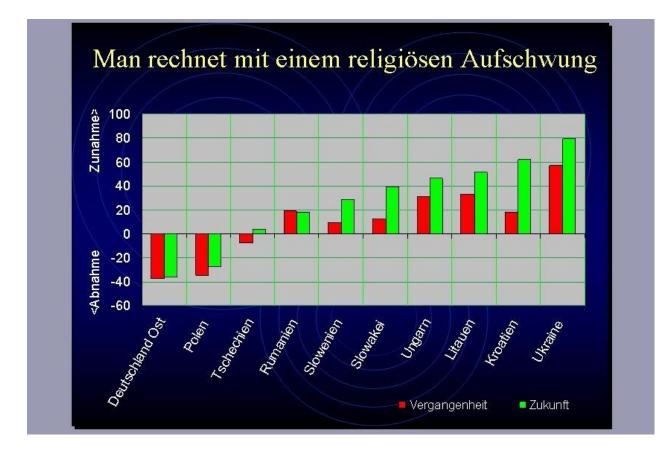*Draft and Revision: OKR Dr. Michael Bünker, Vienna; Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker, Munster*

## *Appendix 2*

Tables from the report by Professor Miklos Tomka during the conference of the
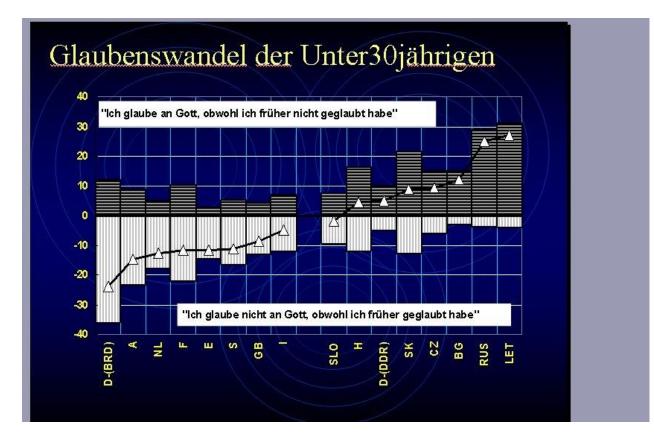regional group in 2004 in Enkenbach (see n. 1)

[Translation: Decline/Increase in Religion
Today more people are religious than ten years ago
Today more people are religious than ten years ago]



People are expecting a religious revival
Increase/Decrease

Change of faith among the under-thirties
'I believe in God although I didn't use to'
'I don't believe in God although I used to'

## *Appendix 3*

**LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE SOUTH EAST CENTRAL EUROPE REGIONAL GROUP, 2002-2006**

Bischof Dezsö Zoltán **Adorjáni**, Cluj-Napoca,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania

Dean Jürgen **Astfalk**, Genova,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy

Assistent Dr. Lubomir **Batka**, Sväty Jur,
Comenius University Bratislava, systematic theology

Oberkirchenrat Prof. Dr. Michael **Bünker**, Vienna,
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Austria

Pastor Pál **Erdélyi**, MTheol, Vlcany, Slovakia,
Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia

Prof. Dr. Pavel **Filipi**, Prague,
Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren

Bishop General Dr. Julius **Filo**, Bratislava,
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in der Slovakia

Privatdozent Dr. Matthias **Freudenberg**, Erlangen,
Evangelical Reformed Church in Bavaria

Prof. Dr. Martin **Friedrich**, Berlin,
CPCE Secretariat

Deaconess R. Doris **Fuchs**, Eisingen (retired),
Evangelical Regional Church in Baden

Dr. Jindrich **Halama**, Prague,
Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren

Bishop Dr. Bela **Harmati**, Budapest,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

Pastor Dieter **Heidtmann**, Brussels,
CPCE representative on the Commission for Church and Society, CEC

Prof. Dr. Alasdair **Heron**, Erlangen,
University of Erlangen – Reformed theology

Bishop Dr. Ludvik **Jošar**, Bodonci,
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia

Prof. Dr. Karol **Karski**, Warsaw,
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland

Assistent Dr. Miloš **Klátik**, Bratislava,
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia

Pastor Dieter **Kuller**, Munich,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria

Pastor Dr. Hans Jürgen **Luibl**, Erlangen,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria

Bischof Dr. Michael **Márkus**, Tata,
Reformed Church in Hungary

Pastor Daniel **Márkus**, Tata,
Reformed Church in Hungary

Oberkirchenrat Michael **Martin**, Munich
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria

Präses Joachim **Metten**, Lachen,
Evangelical Reformed Church in Bavaria

Oberkirchenrat Gottfried **Müller**, Speyer,
Evangelical Church of the Palatinate

Prof. Helmut **Nausner**, Vienna,
Evangelical Methodist Church in Austria

Pastor László **Orbán**, MTheol, Cluj-Napoca,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania

Kirchenrat Martin **Penzoldt**, Stuttgart,
Evangelical Regional Church in Württemberg

Kirchenrat Thomas **Prieto Peral**, Munich
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria

Archbishop Dr. Dr. Edmund **Ratz**, St Petersburg,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELKRAS)

Pastor Marek **Řičán**, Český Těšin,
Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic

Pastor Dr. Birgit **Rommel**, Stuttgart,
Evangelical Regional Church in Württemberg

VDM Markus **Sahli**, Bern,
Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches

Dr. Paul-Gerhard **Schullerus**, Judetul-Sibiu,
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania

Dr. Péter **Szentpétery**, Budapest,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary

Pastor Anton **Tichomirov**, Erlangen,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and Other States (ELKRAS)

Professor Dr. Joachim **Track**, Hanover,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Chairman of the Regional Group

Bishop Jan **Valent**, Novi Sad (to 2003)
Slovakian Lutheran Church in Serbia

Bishop Vladislav **Volný**, Český Těšin,
Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic

Pastor Mark **Wehrung**, Bischheim (retired),
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Alsace-Lorraine

Oberkirchenrat Dr. Helmut **Zeddies** (retired), Schöneiche near Berlin,
Theological Adviser to the Regional Group

Pastor Dr. Daniel **Zikeli**, Bucharest,
Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania

Pastor Martin **Zikmund**, Prague,
Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren