

APPENDIX J

MEISSEN COMMISSION

11-14 SEPTEMBER 2008

The Meissen Commission is a joint body of the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Germany (EKD) with the purpose of furthering greater co-operation and unity between the two Churches. I attended this meeting, held in the Protestant Academy in Meissen, Saxony, as Observer for the Celtic Anglican Churches.

The EKD, while it is termed a 'Church', comprises the 23 Landeskirchen (regional Churches) in Germany, some of which are Lutheran, some Reformed (Calvinist) and some United (Lutheran/Reformed). The EKD thus embraces different denominational traditions, but holds together effectively although naturally not without tensions at times. There is some discussion over whether or not it is, in fact, a 'Church', since it embraces different denominations. This discussion is ongoing, and no doubt will continue for a long time. However, the ordained ministry is fully interchangeable throughout the EKD.

The Meissen Commission was formed in 1988, following an initiative taken by the late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie, when he was an official visitor to the 1983 German celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. The Commission is called 'The Meissen Commission' because its governing Agreement was signed in Meissen (in the Lutheran Cathedral). This year's meeting was held in Meissen and the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Agreement was marked by an evening of reflection on the process and a special service in the Cathedral.

The emphasis in the Commission's work is on practical co-operation. Some of issues discussed during the meeting were: the twinning of parishes and congregations, English participation in Kirchentag events, youth exchanges, general sharing of information, mutual visits by administrators, the Meissen Library (at Durham), and the teaching of history as it impinges on Anglo-German relations.

There was some discussion of a more doctrinal nature, chiefly focusing on the Anglican and German Protestant understandings of ordination and the practice of episcopacy. Some of the German Landeskirchen have bishops, but they are not in the historic succession. There was discussion of the proposed Anglican Covenant, the EKD being very interested in our current dilemmas.

A particular issue is the question of the enlargement of the Meissen Commission to include the Celtic Anglican Churches as full member-Churches. At present there is one observer

Standing Committee – Report 2009

representing the three Celtic Anglican Churches; this is shared on a rotating basis, which I understand to be five-yearly.

It has to be said that there are very mixed feelings about enlarging the Commission. The Scottish Episcopal Church is in favour; the Church in Wales is against (at least for now); and the Church of Ireland has not formulated an official view, although it would be fair to say that a cautious openness to the concept has been expressed in the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue. There would, of course, be funding implications. However, it would ultimately be for the Church of England and the EKD to agree to any enlargement, and there is no enthusiasm for enlargement on the English side; I am not aware of EKD perspectives on this.

An alternative to the Celtic Anglican Churches joining the Meissen Commission as full members would be for them individually to consider having their own bilateral committees with the EKD. However, once again, funding would be an issue, as possibly to some extent would be language. The Meissen Commission works in English when meeting in England and in German when meeting in Germany. A meeting that worked only in English would somehow lack parity, I feel, but I expect that there are sufficient Church of Ireland people who would be able to engage. Then again, I feel the Church of Ireland's double jurisdictional context would make it more suitable for us to have our own relationship with the EKD.

Some years ago, the late Dean of Cashel, David Woodworth, developed a quite elaborate link between the Church of Ireland and the EKD in Herne, North Rhine/Westphalia. I was involved in several encounters and found it very fruitful. The work was mostly in English, but there was some translating. The funding, at least on the Irish side, was at the discretion of local bishops.

I. M. Ellis

21.10.08