

**APPENDIX Q**

**MEISSEN COMMISSION MEETING SEPTEMBER 2009 REPORT**

A meeting of the Meissen Commission was held at Whalley Abbey, Diocese of Blackburn, from 17th-21st September, 2009, chaired by the Bishop of Croydon, the Rt Rev Nick Baines. The Commission is a joint Church of England and German Protestant Church (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD) body, but has an observer representing the three Celtic Anglican Churches. It is my privilege to fulfil this role for the current five-year period.

The Meissen Commission exchanges information about developments in the two Churches and promotes co-operation, mutual understanding and partnerships. Some of the issues covered at the Whalley Abbey meeting will be highlighted here.

The years 2008 to 2017 are being observed in the EKD as a Luther Decade, leading to the 500th anniversary of the Luther's posting of his theses on the church door in Wittenberg. Each year is being devoted to a different Reformation theme. This programme presents an opportunity for the EKD to assert itself and highlight its witness in a growingly secular German society. Allied to this is a current reform process in the EKD, in which the Church is seeking to re-structure in the light of a decline in active Church membership. Part of this process is the intention to amalgamate 'Landeskirchen' (regional Churches), reducing the total number from 23 to between 8 to 12. A new three-fold focus on mission, preaching and liturgy is a fundamental part of the reform process as the EKD seeks renewal. The EKD brings together Lutheran, Reformed and United (Lutheran/Reformed) regional Churches in a national Church.

The 10th July, 2009 500th anniversary of the birth of Calvin provided an opportunity for the predominating Lutheran Churches of the EKD to learn about the Calvinist tradition and for the dispellings of what Professor Michael Weinrich, a member of the Meissen Commission, described as 'negative to even slanderous prejudices based on distortions and perversions introduced in the times of the Reformation'. It was reported to the Commission that the uptake of Calvin 500 material indicated great interest both in the EKD and in wider German society.

The Commission spent an afternoon at Blackburn Cathedral, focusing on interfaith issues. Under the responsibility of Canon Chris Chivers, the Cathedral has a special interfaith ministry, engaging with the Muslim community. Anjum Anwar MBE, a Muslim woman, was the first Muslim to be brought into a Cathedral staff in the Church of England - she works with Canon Chivers in the Dialogue Development Programme. In the evening, the Commission considered interreligious challenges facing the Church of England and the EKD in a session led by Archdeacon Michael Ipgrave. He identified four areas of particular concern: radicalisation, the oppression of women in Muslim communities, 'being separate' and Muslim schools. Archdeacon Ipgrave indicated the difficulty of knowing precisely what is happening within different religious communities. He spoke of the Church's approach to interfaith relations in terms of 'presence, engagement and hospitality'.

#### Standing Committee – Report 2010

A special presentation on the study process leading to the centenary conference, ‘Edinburgh 2010’, was given by Dr Kirsteen Kim, who identified certain changes of perspective over the past century, such as from ‘kingdom’ language to ‘spirit’ language, from a centralized to a ‘polycentric’ world-view, and from universalism to pluralism. In discussion, members of the Commission felt that there was a need to bring insights from the Edinburgh 2010 process to bear on the Meissen agenda and relations between the Church of England and the EKD.

In considering the future of the Meissen Commission, the outgoing German Co-Chair, Bishop Johannesdotter, recalled how the Meissen Agreement had signalled a mutual commitment in life and witness and growth together to visible unity. He emphasized that while the Agreement had led to regular meetings of the Commission, conferences, co-operation and exchanges/partnerships, the two Churches should not be satisfied with a ‘minimum’. The incoming German Co-Chair, Bishop Weber, who has been heavily involved in Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, said that there needed to be a greater awareness of what has actually been achieved in ecumenism. Equally, however, he called for a focus on those things that have not been possible. There was a need for a strategic approach to promoting practical joint-work, Bishop Weber said, and he also called for the Meissen Commission itself to engage in more in-depth reflection.

Other agenda items, which are recurring topics at the Commission’s meetings, were updates on partnerships, the Meissen Library at Durham, the teaching of German history in England, and wider ecumenical structures in Europe.

The Commission attended Eucharist services in a local parish where a Lutheran pastor has been ministering for several years. He celebrated Holy Communion according to the Church of England’s liturgy and it was explained to us that Church of England ecumenical canon law permits this on condition that it is made clear that the Eucharist is in fact a Lutheran Eucharist. Similar arrangements are possible involving clergy of other Churches. The Commission attended Evensong on the Sunday in Blackburn Cathedral, when the preacher was Dame Mary Tanner. The Bishop of Blackburn kindly entertained the Commission to an evening reception at the Bishop’s House.

Ian M. Ellis  
2nd October, 2009