

APPENDIX L

MEISSEN COMMISSION MEETING SEPTEMBER 2010 REPORT

A meeting of the Church of England - German Protestant Church (EKD) Meissen Commission was held from 16 to 19 September, 2010 at the Leucorea conference centre at Wittenberg. I attended as the official observer for the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales.

After an introductory session and before proceeding to the main agenda items, members of the Commission visited places in the town associated with the Reformers, Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon, in particular the Schlosskirche on the door of which Luther is reputed to have nailed his 95 theses in 1517. Later in the meeting, members visited the Lutherhaus and were given a tour of the extensive historic building.

The years 2008 to 2017 are being observed by the EKD as a 'Luther Decade', 2017 marking the 500th anniversary of the publication of Luther's theses. Each year has been given a theme, this year's being 'Reformation and Education' with a special focus on Melanchthon, the *Praeceptor Germania* or 'Teacher of Germany'. The Reformation scholar, Dr Stefan Rhein, delivered a lecture on Melanchthon to the members of the Commission, drawing attention to the Reformer's erudition as a scholar, the renowned nature of the university at Wittenberg in the 16th century and the wide, international reach of Melanchthon's influence. At the time of Luther and Melanchthon (who was 14 years younger than Luther), Wittenberg had the most significant university in Germany. Melanchthon was essentially a man of dialogue, less strident than Luther, for whom Melanchthon nonetheless had a high regard. Melanchthon was particularly esteemed by the English Reformers, with 20 of his books being translated into English already in the 16th century.

Professor Michael Weinrich reported to the Commission on the formation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, a merging of the former World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Council, the latter having been characteristically conservative. The merging of the two bodies became possible when the Reformed Ecumenical Council agreed that apartheid was an issue of *status confessionis*, that is, involving a fundamental aspect of Christian teaching. One aim of the new body, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (representing 80 million Christians in 227 member Churches in 108 countries), is to deepen mutual commitment among the member Churches.

The Danish Church, which has now become a full member of the Porvoo Communion, had expressed an interest in participating in the Meissen Commission. It was decided to postpone consideration of this matter until after the Porvoo Contact Group had an opportunity of discussing it.

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The Commission discussed a draft Quinquennial Report, due to be finalized at the 2011 meeting. There were updates on partnerships between dioceses and parishes, delegation visits and the Meissen theological conferences.

There are currently 65 Church of England-EKD links with some ministerial sharing. The Commission is awaiting with interest the EKD's response to a Lutheran paper on ordination and commissioning as this raises the issue of lay Eucharistic presidency. The paper has not been well received in some of the EKD's regional Churches. Both the EKD and the Methodist Church have asked the Church of England to recognise their confirmations; this is currently being discussed within the Church of England.

Delegation visits are another of the established ways in which the Church of England and the EKD seek to share their common life, according to the Meissen Declaration (B.ii). The two Churches invite a delegation visit once in the lifetime of each of their Synods.

The Meissen theological conferences (two in every five years) have the purpose of building on the theological consensus and convergence already reached and working to resolve outstanding differences between the two Churches. The next theological conference will be held at Sarum College, Salisbury, from 11 to 14 January, 2011 on the theme, *Ecclesiology in Mission Perspective*.

The Commission discussed the ecumenical Kirchentag that was held earlier this year in Munich. The EKD and the Roman Catholic Church hold Kirchentag gatherings in alternate years with a joint, or ecumenical, Kirchentag being held every seven years. Tensions arose this year at Munich over lay Roman Catholic expressions of dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic hierarchy's approach to the sexual abuse crisis. Roman Catholic bishops were uneasy at this open discussion and consequently it is possible that no Ecumenical Kirchentag will be held when it is next due, in 2017. This would be a significant occasion, falling at the culmination of the already mentioned 'Luther Decade', and the EKD hopes that it will be possible.

The reform process within the Conference of European Churches (CEC) was noted by the Commission and led to some discussion of the subject. CEC was established in the immediate post World War II era and since the fall of the Iron Curtain and the former Soviet Union, the pivotal role of CEC in terms of East-West Church relations has changed at a very fundamental level. The cost of the 2009 CEC Assembly at Lyon contributed mainly to CEC's €200,000 deficit at the end of that year. The future programmatic work of CEC will focus on four areas: (1) Trust and Commitment; (2) Dialogue and Strengthening of Relations; (3) Coherence and Visibility; and (4) Witness and Responsibility. A reform working group will next meet from 1 to 4 October in Hungary and the next CEC Assembly is planned for 2013. The deficit is being addressed by major cuts within CEC's operation.

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Next year, 2011, will mark the 20th anniversary of the Meissen Declaration; the Commission will meet again in September 2011 in London.

Germany; Church membership (2008 statistics):

EKD	24,514,929
Roman Catholic Church	25,176,517
Orthodox Church	1,456,500
Protestant Free Churches	323,202
Other Christian Churches	33,274

Total Church membership 51,504,422 (62.8% of the German population. Other faiths and members of no faith tradition together comprise 37.2% of the population. There is a high number of non-believing people in Germany, partly as a result of the legacy of communism in the former eastern bloc.)

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