

Utkast til høringsvar CPCE Church Communion

Per September 14, 2017

Church of Norway's Response to the CPCE Doctrinal Conversation on "Church Communion"

Introduction

Church of Norway hereby wishes to express our gratitude to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe for the document "Church Communion". We appreciate the work that has been put into the document, following the CPCE Assembly in Firenze, Italy in 2012. At that time two documents were adopted, based on the doctrinal conversations "Scripture, Confession, Church" and "Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé". We appreciate our chance to be involved in the continuation of these important and challenging conversations.

The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations sent the document to its Theological Commission for a more in-depth discussion, before a draft response was sent to the Council on Ecumenical and International relations and the Bishops' Conference for final comments and adoption. We are grateful for the extra time allowed for this process.

In the process we have taken into consideration our own discussions around the previously mentioned doctrinal conversations. We have also looked into the responses from other churches.

We have organised our response according to the key questions following the document chapters. Kindly find the final response from Church of Norway below.

- 1. Do you think that the CPCE's course of development is properly reflected in part 1 of the document? Which aspects would you like to see further elaborated upon or made more precise?***

We find the presentation of the developments in the CPCE to be adequate. Church unity is both a gift and a task. The chapter recounts what the basis for the Leuenberg Agreement is, and what the understanding of church unity is. The chapter also gives a description of the increased attention given to the work for church unity, a unity which requires a continuous movement towards a deeper understanding of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the church's witness and service to the world. We share this view, and we see the document itself as part of this positive development.

We also consider the course of the development of CPCE as properly reflected in the document. . There is no reason to question the intention of church communion described as an active participation of the member churches in a communion of worship, witness and service in Europe.

Although the first chapter of the document does not treat concrete organisational developments in-depth, these developments are elaborated upon later in the document. In light of the very clear organisational suggestions that occur in the chapters 3 - 5, we find it important to point out that chapter 1 could have introduced some key ecclesiological concepts, which then could have been dealt with in the course of the document.

Some of these ecclesiological issues have been thoroughly discussed in previous study processes, without necessarily leading to agreement. In response to some of these study processes, Church of Norway therefore recommended further work on the different understandings among CPCE member churches of what constitutes the Church, and the churches' relations to confessions.¹ These are important clarifications to be made before conclusions can be drawn on what constitutes a church communion, and what a communion in doctrine might mean.

In this regard, we would like to make a comment to the last part of Paragraph 2:

Other churches ask again and again about the ecumenical meaning of church communion and how the member churches of the CPCE might shape it. They have the impression that the concept of church communion is only to a limited degree suitable as ecumenical model, in that it models the diversity rather than the unity of the church, and so adds to the strengthening of the status quo.

It is unclear to us who the term "other churches" refer to in this paragraph. It would be helpful with a clarification in this regard, since the argument brought forward here is used later in "Church Communion" as an argument for change in CPCE structures. We do not necessarily share the view that the current ecumenical model only to a limited degree is suitable as an ecumenical model. To the contrary, chapter 1.3 refers to the very positive experience of church communion and how it is realised in the life and the shared worship of the communion, as well as through the doctrinal conversations, the existing formal structures and the common witness and service of the CPCE churches in the Europe of today.

2. Do you deem that the basic theological foundation of the model of church communion is properly reflected in part 2 of the document? Which aspects would you like to see further elaborated upon or made more precise?

We appreciate the attempt in Paragraph 46 to explain linguistically the challenge of translating the concepts of *church fellowship* and *communion* between different languages, as it is done in Paragraph 46. We understand the intention of bringing this in line with international ecumenical uses of the term *communion*. We are not convinced, however, that the translation of *Kirchengemeinschaft* in German into *Church communion* in English is correct, nor that it is necessary. A similar linguistic challenge can be found in Scandinavian languages. In our understanding there is a theological distinction between the terms *Church Fellowship/Community* and *Church Communion*, while *Kirchengemeinschaft* does not contain this distinction and can mean both. We could support an understanding of *Kirkechengemeinschaft* as church communion, meaning a deep organic understanding of churches belonging to one other. This, however, does not mean that a more binding structure

¹ CoN's Response to the CPCE Doctrinal Discussion on Scripture, Confession, Church, p.4

is necessary as a model for church communion. Anyhow, we find that the term *community* sufficiently expresses the fellowship to which we are committed. At this point, we would therefore recommend to keep the current name of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

A number of good theological reflections are offered in Part 2 of the document. The former study processes on “Scripture, Confession, Church” and “Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé” were both fruitful processes leading up to the CPCE Assembly in 2012. Church of Norway would have liked to see that some of the unsolved issues from these processes would have been further elaborated in this document on “Church Communion”. In addition to the already mentioned issues, we particularly miss theological reflections on diakonia as a constitutive element of being church, which is crucial to the understanding of church communion.

We also find that the issue of oversight, understood as episkopé, is missing from “Church Communion”. In our Church of Norway’s response to the CPCE document “Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé”, we specifically pointed out that the issue of oversight for many churches is not only a collegial matter, but also includes a personal dimension. We then referred to the LWF Statement on Episcopal Ministry (1997), in order to deepen the understanding of episkopé for the mission of the church:

The LWF document underlines that the task of the ministry of oversight is to serve the church and thereby serve the purpose of caring for the life of a whole community. It also underlines that oversight never is a merely administrative and institutional matter, but is always personal. This personal character cannot be separated from its collegial and communal aspect (§§47-49.) The document also underlines that there is “a need for the Lutheran churches to develop a broader common understanding of how Episcopal ministry points to the diaconal dimensions of the apostolic tradition and also of how the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of episcopate take shape in practice.” (§ 61) On these issues, the CPCE document should be further broadened.

Any proposal to strengthen the formal structures of the CPCE would require further studies on ordination for ministry (and ministries), as well as the different elements of episkopé. Paragraph 56 brings in a new concept; “communion of communions”. We appreciate the wish of Protestant churches in Europe to appear as one body when encountering other churches or church families. However, this may not always be a relevant description of CPCE in all ecumenical dialogues, since CPCE remains a community of member churches, where many are committed also to other churches and church bodies. “Communion of communions” may confuse an understanding of a single church that together with all Christian churches form the One Church of Jesus Christ. Although it is necessary for Protestant churches in Europe to stand up for common interests as a community, we believe that any possible formation of ecumenical blocks should be avoided, so long as our basic common understanding of the church is that the church is both local and universal.

We appreciate Chapter 2.5’s review of church communion as an expression of the event of justification. However, in paragraph 58 the Cypriatic expression “extra ecclesiam nulla salus” is brought in rather surprisingly. We do not quite see the reason for this, since there is no in-depth discussion on the relation between the salvation in God’s justification and the role of the church.

Paragraph 61 deals with the matter of decision-making. Although we agree that it is helpful to have common methods for decision-making, we don't see that the method of discussion and voting as presented here, needs to be the only method to reach agreement in the understanding of the Gospel. It is one of several democratic procedures used in the ecumenical movement. Another decision-making procedure used ecumenically would be the method of reaching consensus. In this regard, we find Paragraph 62 most helpful. It brings in creativity as a helpful means of dealing with differences, which can help the community to avoid "to set up other standards arbitrarily".

Paragraph 64 brings in the significance of the ordained ministry for the being of the church. We strongly support further studies on this, and would like to reiterate the need for studying ordination in light of several ministries in the church, as we suggested in our response to "Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé":

Concerning 1: We support a critical examination of the understanding of ministries within the CPCE churches. This need is reflected in ongoing processes and discussions also within the Church of Norway.

Concerning 2: It is important for the churches to work on their patterns of ministry in a comparative perspective. At the same time it is possible to compare and recognize single ministries without necessarily having identical patterns of ministry.

Concerning 3: We agree that churches should ordain those responsible for the service of public preaching and the administration of the sacraments. However, this does not exclude the commissioning of others in situations of lack of ordained ministers.

Concerning 4: We agree with the necessity to consider the doctrine and practice of ordination, which also includes a clarification of the concept itself; whether it is exclusively linked to the ministry of word and sacrament or not.

Concerning 5: We support a further study on the diaconate, including its position in relation to ordination.

Mutual accountability within a fellowship or communion of churches does not immediately lead to a need for growth in formal structures. Although it may naturally follow as a consequence of deeper theological understanding among the churches, Church of Norway does not find it necessary, nor advisable to go in direction of stronger formal structures. Clarifications in the understanding of ministries within the CPCE churches, including the understanding of ordained ministry, are needed before further discussions on any binding formal structures can take place.² "Church Communion" does not give an account of the place and role of the ordained ministry (or ministries) in any binding synodical structures.

3. Do you deem that the current challenges faced by the CPCE and the model of church communion it represents are properly reflected in part 3?

We appreciate the attempt of finding satisfactory English terms for the German term «verbindlichkeit». A number of suggestions have been made in this document, as well as in

² CoN's Response to the CPCE Doctrinal Discussion on "Ministry, Ordination, Episkopé", p. 5

other ecumenical documents, such as “mutual engagement”, “loyalty obligation”, “mutual recognition” or “mutual accountability”. It seems that one of the challenges is to settle the degree of commitment of each member church to the church community, while another challenge is to settle the degree of authority of the church community to which the member churches are committed. Paragraph 70 points to the challenge of verifying this authority in order to be able to experience the communion. The paragraph then lists the five points of verification, which are the areas of community that already can be experienced. We appreciate the description of these five areas where community is experienced, and find the definition of these areas as a good expression of CPCE as a living and active expression and realisation of the Leuenberg Agreement.

This understanding in our church also corresponds to our understanding of paragraph 80. We do not see that the distinction between “declaration” and “realisation” takes us from a “pre-conciliar” to a “consiliary” situation. Signing the Leuenberg Agreement was already an active realisation of church fellowship, a step taken in a consiliary situation. Based on this understanding we do not find it necessary to enter into formal synodical structures. The Church of Norway Synod expressed this view in 1999, when the decision of signing the Leuenberg Agreement was formally taken.³

The recommendation not to form synodical structures corresponds to Paragraph 84 b), raising the question of whether initiatives towards a common church order are necessary. Formally, Church of Norway recently separated from the state. The church is currently in the process of developing a new church order. The historical heritage and current situation of Church of Norway makes it formally impossible to consider entering into a European Protestant synod. This may also be the case for member churches with a completely different structure, e.g. churches belonging to an existing European or International church structure. This view of Church of Norway does not affect our commitment to CPCE as a community of churches.

As for the question of catholicity, there seems to be a concern from “other churches” (Paragraph 85) that CPCE’s current model results in status quo. It is not quite clear to us who these “other churches” are, and we also don’t recognise the danger of a status quo. We find that CPCE already gives ample space for vibrant ecumenical life and deepening theological conversations.

We believe that a crucial point for the life of the universal church, and therefore an important challenge for CPCE, is how we regard *diakonia*. The diaconal service of the churches not only contributes to ecumenical fellowship and commitment through a common service to the world. We also believe *diakonia* to be part of the very essence of being church, and must therefore be part of the very essence of a church communion. It is therefore surprising that this perspective seems to be lacking in the document, and we hope this may come to the fore in continuing studies.

4. How do you regard the recommendations outlined in part 4? Which suggestions would you wish to emphasise, and which are you sceptical about? Where should the CPCE focus its efforts over the forthcoming years?

³ The signing of the Leuenberg Agreement was followed by a signatory statement, dated November 19, 1999. Point 5 in the statement clearly says that Church of Norway does not wish a development towards European Protestant synodical structures.

Church of Norway understands the need for CPCE to be a clear expression of church unity on several levels. We believe that we do unite in common worship, in professing the faith together and through acting as one community in our service to the world. Paragraphs 90 and 96 expresses these needs by using the term *one church*. Although we support the need to highlight our unity, we do not find the use of the expression *One church* formally correct. *One church* is also an expression of the universal church, understood as the Church of Jesus Christ. In a wider ecumenical setting, it could therefore be misleading to use this expression as descriptive for a community of Protestant churches in Europe. We believe that CPCE is an adequate expression of a community of several churches. This is also how we read the articles 42 – 45 in the Leuenberg Agreement.

To the recommendations given in chapter 4, we have the following comments:

Paragraph 102 suggests more collaboration on ministerial formation. Church of Norway appreciates the idea of exchange of knowledge and collaboration on relevant themes related to ministerial formation. However, as our church's education for ministry is part of university education, it is difficult to add further formal guidelines to the ministerial formation.

Paragraph 108 suggests topics for further exploration in the coming years. We appreciate the suggestions and will be happy to take part in conversations on these topics. As for the third proposal, to explore Christian faith and Islam in the context of the Europe of today, we suggest that inter-religious dialogue as whole be taken into account. It is important that Christianity and Islam are not treated as particular opposites in an increasingly multi-religious Europe.

We find that the first part of Paragraph 109 clearly expresses the need to strengthen our community. We do not see the need for strengthening the structures in order to achieve closer unity, as it is suggested in the last part of the paragraph.

We appreciate the acknowledgment of other ecumenical bodies in «Church Communion», whether they are ecumenical organisations, or theological agreements where churches have entered into deep and committing communions. As Church of Norway is a member of a number of ecumenical organisations, and have signed and is committed to several agreements, we do not agree with the characteristic in Paragraph 126; that “most other ecumenical models have not yet led to the desired results”. We regard our ecumenical commitments as rewarding on our common journey towards unity in the One church of Jesus Christ. To apply a pilgrimage motive to our common ecumenical journey may be helpful in this regard. It is in this perspective we see the CPCE model of “unity in diversity” as a valuable contribution.

5. *Do you opine that the suggestion of compiling a “charta spiritualis” should be pursued? Should the CPCE clarify the principle of communion on which it is based more clearly in its English title by changing this from the “Community of Protestant Churches in Europe” to the “Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe”?*

The Paragraphs 112 and 116 launches the idea of a *charta spiritualis*, as a spiritual guide to how churches can live in close community with each other. The proposal seems to be closely connected to the “Charta Oecumenica” of the Conference of European Churches. As far as we understand it, the “Charta Oecumenica” still gives valid advice to churches on how they can

journey together towards closer unity. It would be helpful to have a clearer description of what a possible *charta spiritalis* would entail.

Church of Norway finds that the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe adequately describes what CPCE is, and what we want it to be. We will be happy to take part in strengthening the community further, and do not see that a change of name is needed to this end.

With these comments, we hope to contribute to a very important conversation on what it means to be church, and what it means to be in communion with each other. Although we for different reasons hesitate to enter into further formalisation of structures of the CPCE, we want to reiterate our commitment to our common journey as Protestant churches in Europe. In this commitment lies a strong sense of communion, in our common witness and service to the gospel.

Yours sincerely,

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