

**On the way to a common theology of religions in Europe**  
**Statement adopted by the CEC Churches in Dialogue Commission at its fifth meeting in**  
**Pullach/Munich, Germany (25-27 June 2008)**

In the *Charta Oecumenica*, Chapter 12 (Encountering other religions and world views), there is a recognition of the religious plurality in Europe and a definition of the task of the signatory churches “to take seriously the critical questions of others and try together to conduct fair discussions with them”.

Alongside this, CEC Central Committee has requested the Churches in Dialogue Commission (CiD) “to give some thought to the work of CEC in relation to interreligious dialogue.”.

The CiD is taking up this commitment of the churches themselves by devoting attention to dialogue between different religions in the context of its own mandate. It is not the responsibility of the Commission itself to engage in interreligious dialogues. But, in view of the *Charta Oecumenica* and of the specific request from CEC Central Committee, it does have the task of reflecting on what is required for there to be fruitful coexistence between the religions in Europe.

One of the prerequisites for mutual relations between religions is to clarify one’s own understanding of other religions. Even where we might look for clearly practical solutions, there is no way, in a rapidly changing European context, to avoid a theological reflection on which those practical solutions might be founded.

The CiD is aware that the member churches of the CEC have differing approaches to a Theology of Religions (ThR), by which term we understand the theological reflections of churches on their relations with other faith communities. For this reason, the CEC, whilst not identifying itself with any of the positions of member churches outlined below, is trying to reflect upon perspectives for a common basis of a ThR. In seeking to identify this basis CEC aims to establish which are the theological concepts and criteria which are used by the member churches of CEC in their relations with other religions.

A first step of the CiD in this direction was to collect and review church statements on a theology of religions (see list attached). This was done with the intention of making the work already done by individual churches available to the other member churches as well. The outcome of this activity is a provisional list, open to addition on which the following reflection is offered:

**The documents, examined, which are of differing length and character, agree to a large extent on the following points:**

- That ThR is one aspect of coming towards a recognition of the truth of the Gospel. – and that it must not lead to watering down the clarity of the Gospel .
- That God’s saving will is universal: God wants to lead all people into fellowship with His truth.
- That the creaturely nature of human beings and their being in the image of God is the basis for respect *a priori* for all religious beliefs

- That Jesus Christ is the centre of Christian theology and, as such, also the centre of ThR. Attempts to replace the Christocentric approach of theology by a “theocentric” one are problematical.
- That ThR is trinitarian theology: it explains God’s action in relation to non-Christian religions as the action of the triune God.
- That a “pluralistic” ThR which interprets religions as different ways of coming closer to the one divine reality is unacceptable.

**The documents examined demonstrate differing viewpoints on the following issues:-**

- That there is unanimous agreement on confessing the centrality of Christ, although differing views on the degree of exclusivity which is attached to this concept;
- That God’s universal saving will is related to the mission of the Church in different ways. Whereas, for some, God’s universal saving will implies the universal mission of the Church, others have stronger expectations of manifestations of God outside the Church;
- That there is basic agreement that the Christian churches must have an open attitude to non-Christian religions and be prepared to learn, although there is controversy about how strict the limits to this openness should be;
- Whereas some emphasise the Gospel’s claim to truth as expressed by the churches, others make a clear distinction between the truth of the Gospel and how it is expressed by the churches.

*Recommendations for further work*

1. The member churches of CEC are to be informed about this review of official church documents on ThR. They are to be requested to send the CEC additional material as well as comments on the list and on the documents it comprises;
2. The CEC should initiate a process of consultation on ThR between the member churches. The aims of the consultation process would be a) a generally greater awareness of the issue of a theology of religions, b) progress on the content among all those involved, and c) a joint learning process.

*Pullach, Germany  
26 June 2008*

**Theology of Religions: Statements from the CEC member churches**

***CEC - CCEE***

- *Charta Oecumenica* cap. 12

***Orthodox Churches***

- George C. Papademetriou: An Orthodox Christian View on Non-Christian Religions, in: E. Voulgarakis et al. (eds.): *Orthodoxy and Oecumene. Gratitude Volume in Honor of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomaios I*, Athens 2001, 109-120

- Viorel Ionita: Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity. An Orthodox Perspective, 2007
- Church of Greece, Archbishop: Adress to the Conference by the Synodal Committee on European Issues, entitled: "Islam: the extent of the problematics", 2007

### ***Protestant Churches***

- Chiesa Valdese: L'Ecumenismo e il Dialogo Interreligioso, 1998
- Guidelines for Inter Faith Encounter in the Churches of the Porvoo Communion, 2003
- Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD): Christlicher Glaube und nichtchristliche Religionen. Theologische Leitlinien, 2004
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark: Mission and dialogue, 2006
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark: Theses on the recognition of people of different religions in a multi-religious society, 2007
- Church of Norway: Guidance for religious encounter: A resource document for the Church of Norway, 2007
- Church of Norway: Joint Declaration on Freedom of Religion and the Right to Conversion, 2007
- Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund (SEK): Wahrheit in Offenheit. Der christliche Glaube und die Religionen, 2007
- Church of Norway: When Believers meet. A Study Guide on Interreligious Dialogue, 2007

### ***Roman Catholic Church***

- Johannes Paul II.: Enzyklika Redemptoris Missio, 1990
- Päpstlicher Rat für den Interreligiösen Dialog / Kongregation für die Evangelisierung der Völker: Dialog und Verkündigung. Überlegungen und Orientierungen zum Interreligiösen Dialog und zur Verkündigung des Evangeliums Jesu Christi, 1991
- Internationale Theologenkommission: Das Christentum und die Religionen, 1996
- Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre: Erklärung DOMINUS IESUS – Über die Einzigkeit und Heilsuniversalität Jesu Christi und der Kirche, 2000

### ***WCC***

- Baar Statement 1990
- Leitlinien für den Dialog und für die Beziehungen mit Menschen anderer Religionen, 2002
- Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding