Europe from a Protestant Church Perspective

Marc Lenders

Marc Lenders is a Belgian citizen and a pastor of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. From 1966 to 1999 he was study secretary of the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (now the Church and Society Commission of CEC). He is now retired but continues writing and lecturing. He is a member of 'Avicenne', an interfaith group (Christians, Jews, Muslims and Humanists) seeking a common ethos for a plural European society. Avicenne is organising a series of colloquia on issues arising in connection with the proposed access of Turkey to the European Union.

Introduction

In this lecture I have deliberately decided not to speak of the ethical dimension, the social commitment of the churches in European society. It is not that I dismiss the importance of the churches' engagement in building a common ethos; without this the EU will remain a body without a soul. I am, however, convinced that in order to build this ethos we need to recognise the convictions of individual people. This is particularly true within a Europe which brings together people from all walks of life and wants to achieve a Union respectful of its diversity.

This is then the main reason why I have given this lecture a more theological form. I want first to look at the differences between the Christian churches in order to arrive at a dynamic consensus in the witness of our common hope.

There is another reason which justifies this approach, namely the fact that we in Europe are facing far-reaching changes. Europe, especially Western Europe which has been moulded since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, has entered a cultural crisis. This crisis manifests itself in a demand for meaning. In a hyper-technologised world the divide between reason and heart has deepened. The question of identity has made a forceful come-back. All this has a bearing on the way people experience their faith. Despite the encompassing secularisation process which is pushing every individual's convictions into the private sphere, convictions are today claiming their right to act in public.

Mythical Origins

Europe, I have discovered, has two mythical origins. One myth tells us that Europa is the daughter of Okeanos, the deep waters. According to the other myth, Europa is the daughter of Agenor, the son of Lybia (Africa), king of Tyre in Phoenecia on the east coast of the Mediterranean. This second myth is nearer to us, for obvious reasons: a princess, a king... But there is a link between the two stories: the princess has the habit of walking along the shore. She

is fascinated by the sea: perhaps a reminiscence of her affiliation to Okeanos? Anyway, she cannot keep away from the wide horizon which the sea offers her. She is waiting for something to happen. Zeus spots the attractive princess from Olympus. In order to seduce her he metamorphoses himself into a white bull. Europa's inquiring mind brings her nearer to the apparently placid animal. Trustfully she seats herself on the back of the bull. Then the bull rushes into the sea and brings Europa to Crete, where from now on she will be kept hidden from the outside world. Despite all the efforts of her father Agenor, who will command his wife and children to bring her back, she will never be found again.

As heirs of the Enlightenment we have become blind to the richness of meaning that myths conceal. We cannot square them with human reason, which we have entrusted with the power of defining what is true or false, right or wrong. Today, having paid a costly human price, we have become more critical of this absolutisation of human reason, recognising that philosophers have not been able to cope with the question of the origin of evil, and myths are gaining momentum.

Considering the myth of Europa, we discover that it contains a variety of symbols. Reason alone cannot comprehend their full meaning, but they can help us in our efforts to get a grip on the concept of Europe which time and again evades every effort to define it in a rational way. First, Europa came from a place outside our present EU boundaries; she is of Asian and African extraction. Second, she is attracted by the unknown. Third, Zeus kidnaps her and hides her in Crete: Europa, the traveller, is lost. Only Zeus knows where she is, and he is moulding her according to his own desires. Europa's many expectations have come to a standstill.

The symbolic material of this myth thus helps us to discover the two sides of Europe: on the one hand, the traveller, the stranger, the pilgrim, who is coming to us; on the other hand, a Europe which has become self-centred, tempted, as the result of a biased perspective - Crete is not a large island - to reduce the rest of the world to her own image. Europe's history has developed along those two antagonistic lines.

Christian Origins

If we look at the origins of the Christian faith in Europe we discover an interesting parallel with the story of Europa. This time the hero is a man who is a mixture of Jewish background and Roman citizenship. Paul started his second missionary journey in what is now Turkey, going systematically from town to town. Luke, the reporter, tells us that '*they travelled through the Phrygian and Galatian region, because they were prevented by the Holy Spirit from delivering the message in the province of Asia; and when they approached the Mysian boarder they tried to enter Bithynia; but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them, so they skirted Mysia and reached*

the coast at Troas' (Acts 16: 6-8). The following night Paul receives an explanation in a vision: a Macedonian - that is, a European - wants him to come over.

This also, in many ways, is a fascinating story.

First, it reminds us that the Christian faith is a transnational and transcultural reality. As Christians in Europe who on many occasions in our long history have equated Christianity and Europe, we should be conscious of this ambivalent heritage. Even today the concept of a 'Christian Europe' influences the perspective of many of us. It plays its today role in negative attitudes to Turkey's possible membership of the EU. Here Europe is confronted in a new and unexpected way with an old question which for so long it has refused to answer unequivocally: the question of its identity.

There is a second point. For the reader of the book of Acts, the intention of its author is clear: on their various journeys, Paul and his colleagues are not alone. A mysterious dialogue is going on, all the time, between Paul and his invisible mentor. Paul is not a puppet, blindly obeying some superior force: the unfolding of his journeys give evidence of a strategic mind. But neither is he a prisoner of his own decisions: fully committed to matching the contingencies of human life, he remains receptive. The episode of the man from Macedonia has captured the imagination of the churches in Europe. Does this story not corroborate the primary and central role the churches in Europe were called to play in the world? Europe had been chosen, with Rome as focal point. This interpretation is a good example of how a Bible text can be used to legitimise an ideology with its political components. I believe that we are on safer ground if we see this text as part of the *cantus firmus* (undertone) which runs through all biblical stories. The obstacles with which Paul is confronted are in line with Jacob's struggle with the angel; they echo the colourful story of Balaam riding on his donkey and an angel barring his way (Numbers 22). The holy scriptures speak of a God who is beyond man's understanding, and of a world which is fully wordly. Between these two poles a tension exists; revelation is the place where the two poles meet, and although theologicaly we restrict the word 'incarnation' to mean the mystery of the embodiment of God in Christ, I think that there is a relationship between revelation and incarnation.

I imagine that some of you are surprised that I decided to introduce this lecture on the topic 'Faith in Europe' by referring to the myth of Europa and to Paul's experiences with a mysterious persuader. There are various reasons why I did so.

I have already mentioned the first reason. The two stories point to the fact that Europe is larger than the EU; Europa and the Christian faith both came from regions which were part of Europe during the Greek and Roman period. I welcome the decision, taken on 3 October 2005, after 40 years, to start the negotiation process which will eventually lead to EU membership for Turkey.

This is a great challenge to the EU to seize an opportunity to put into practice the universal values it claims to defend and propagate. Clearly there is still a long way to go: there is a widespread negative attitude to Turkey's membership among the citizens of most of the EU member-states. Interestingly, though, we are back to the situation that prevailed at the beginning of the EU. At that time the primary reason for the agreement on coal and steel was to initiate a process of reconciliation between the recent enemies Germany and France. Today the EU is engaged in a process of reconciliation with Turkey, which for centuries was considered as the enemy. The legacy of history is shown in the fact that the strongest resistance among the 25 EU member-states to the opening of negotiations was in Austria; Vienna was twice besieged by the Turks, in 1529 and 1683. The churches will have their role to play in this debate, the more so since political opposition is to be found in political parties which are labelled as Christian.

A second reason for introducing our topic in this way has to do with the need for us, especially Protestants, to be more critical with regard to what we usually refer to as 'modernity'. Let me put my cards on the table at the very outset: I believe that as Protestants we tend to rely too much on the power of reason and the autonomy of the individual. Hence my decision to talk about Europe in terms of the myth of Europa and the mysterious encounter of Paul with an invisible persuader.

A Protestant Approach

After these prolegomena, I still have one last remark to make before I come to the substance of our topic. I shall limit myself to a Protestant approach to the Christian faith in Europe. There are good reasons for this. I can hardly imagine, for example, what a 'Conference of European Churches' view on the Christian faith in Europe might be like. Presenting a 'pick and mix' of the different traditions would entail the risk of arriving at the lowest common denominator: a statement without flesh and bones. On the other hand, embarking on a description of the different Christian traditions would go beyond limits of time and moreover would demand far deeper knowledge of those traditions than I possess.

My approach, moreover, will be *a* Protestant approach, not even *the* Protestant approach. The latter is impossible, because of the multiform character of Protestantism. Let me state that I locate myself in the Reformed tradition, which found its ecclesiastical point of departure in Geneva, which developed a relationship between reformation and modernity during the time of the Enlightenment, and which today is seriously confronted with the crisis in which 'modernity' finds itself. We have to ask ourselves whether the Reformed tradition has any future if, as many argue, we are moving from a 'modern' society to a 'postmodern' society. Unlike the churches of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church has traditionally adopted a defensive and critical position vis-à-vis modernity and is, therefore, less affected by its crisis.

The Protestant Reformation is embedded in the Christian tradition, but originated in the need to respond to new questions which arose at the turn of the sixteenth century. It was not the first time that the church had been challenged by the society in which it was evolving. This has been a continuing process. History shows that whenever the church has been confronted with drastic changes in society it has succeeded in responding to the new challenges confronting it. This was the case in the first centuries AD when the church had to translate its message, rooted in the Jewish tradition, in a world dominated by Greek philosophy: Paul's speech in the Agora is a good example of the difficulties involved. Reporting the event (Acts 17: 24-34) Luke writes that hardly any dialogue took place. Very politely the Athenians said 'We will hear you again on this matter.' Later the Church Fathers were more successful: they learned to express the Christian faith using the semantic tools of Greek philosophy, and laid the basis for Trinitarian and Christological theology. During the Middle Ages the church was again confronted with a completely new context: the intellectual dominance of Islam, the urbanisation of society, the growing importance of trade. The church responded to these challenges and succeeded in making an impressive cultural synthesis, building a cosmogony in which each part of reality, including faith, found its part. It was precisely the process of the dismantling of this cosmogony that opened the way to the Reformation.

Discontinuity and Continuity

What seems to characterise the development of the churches, then, is discontinuity; but this is only one side of the coin. At the same time we discover a single line which passes through all the different periods of church history: the line of tradition. At a time of religious absolutism, it is important that we should not forget this dual dimension, not just in church history but in the history of all religions. It is the permanent task of every church tradition to strike the right balance between discontinuity (taking stock of the context within which the church evolves, and responding to it) and continuity (not losing one's grip on a tradition which has developed from the origin of the church). Neglecting the importance of one of the two poles leads to a church which eventually dissolves itself or to a church which absolutises itself and is at risk of becoming alienated from the world.

In the Protestant tradition, it is the Bible which is the only authority. It was on the basis of the *sola scriptura* criterion that the Reformers re-evaluated church tradition, opposing the objectivity of the Scriptures to the objectivity of the magisterial power of the Catholic Church. One well-known consequence has been the plurality of the Protestant churches. This was partly a result of the national orientation of the churches, in line with the doctrine *cuius regio eius religio* [lit. "whose rule, his religion" - Ed.] which started to spread in Europe at the time of the Reformation, and

partly a result of different interpretations of the *sola scriptura* principle. The other main consequence was a shift in authority. Whereas in the Roman Catholic Church the power to interpret the Scriptures was in the firm hands of the magisterial institute, in the Protestant tradition this power shifted to the theologians. They became the people set apart to explain the meaning of the words of the Bible to the members of their communities. The importance attached to the sermon in the Protestant Sunday service signals the predominant role of the theologians.

In today's pluralistic society Protestants can no longer afford to live in isolation. In a typical historical trick, the social and political developments which are taking place in Europe are obliging the Protestant churches to rediscover their primary vocation: how to relate to the Roman Catholic Church in whose tradition they were born. In this respect one burning issue is the prominent role of theologians in the Protestant churches. A Protestant belonging to the Reformed tradition faces a dilemma: whether to accept an institution to which has been entrusted the power to define the content of faith and morality, or whether to submit to the subjectivity of a theologian, however well intentioned and intellectually well equipped he or she may be.

From the time of the Reformation Protestant radicalism has tried to restore the primitive church in its purity, obliterating 15 centuries of tradition under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This trend is constitutive of Protestantism and has recurred in different forms over the centuries. Within the official Lutheran churches small groups of people nicknamed 'Pietists' were active throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Great Britain had its Puritans. In what would become the USA many groups of dissenters from different parts of Europe found refuge and contributed importantly to the building of American society. Today this radical protestantism - and by 'radical' I mean aiming to get back to the roots of the gospel - is gaining momentum. While mainline Protestant churches see a steady decrease in membership the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are growing vigorously and becoming aware of their political muscle.

What is our attitude as Protestants to this proliferation? One way of solving the problem is to accept the various different manifestations of Protestantism as manifestations of liberty and autonomy, which are Protestant benchmarks: who am I to judge someone's interpretation of the *sola scriptura* principle? In order to legitimise this position some refer to the theological concept of the 'invisible Church'. I for my part have serious doubts about the validity of this argument. It is certainly correct that the mystery of the Church as People of God and Body of Christ is beyond our understanding. This is what Augustine and Calvin meant when they wrote about the invisible Church. But this does not imply that we should not take seriously the question of the church in its worldly manifestation. Calvin writes that 'we are requested to keep the visible Church in honour and to stay in communion with it'. He calls the church 'the mother of all believers'.

What does the visible church mean for Protestants who are divided into so many denominations? The recognition of the visible existence of the church supposes the existence of a borderline which defines who are within the church and who are outside it. Church history shows us that there were times when the church was obliged to draw the line. The Ecumenical Councils of the third and fourth centuries, in particular, show the church needing to define the content of its faith. The fixing of the canon of the New Testament is another example. But if there is a borderline, we are immediately faced with more questions: where is the borderline, and who has the authority to draw it? The Roman Catholic Church has answers to both questions: the scriptures and tradition delimit the content of faith; the apostolic succession assures the validity of the tradition; ultimately the interpretation of the content of faith is in the hands of the *magisterium* of the church. *Roma locuta est, causa finita est* ["Rome has spoken, the case is closed"].

Is the alternative, then, that there can be no borderline? This would imply that the church is diluting itself in society. This risk is a real one, as we can see from the theological developments in liberal German Protestantism at the end of the nineteenth century. The risk is all the greater because of the strong relationship which Protestantism has had with modernity. The important question, then, is how far Protestantism can go in its dialogue with modernity without losing its identity.

I have already mentioned the Evangelical Protestants who appeared during the so-called 'revival movement' in the nineteenth century in reaction to academic and liberal Protestantism. The Evangelical Protestants clearly felt the need to establish a clear borderline. They understood the *sola scriptura* principle not only in a fundamentalist sense but also as an instrument enabling Christians to find answers to contemporary questions, and thus they created a kind of *magisterium*. They are experiencing a new revival today, tinged this time with Pentecostal overtones, and are becoming vocal and politically influential in the USA and elsewhere.

We still have to answer the question 'How does the Reformed tradition comes to terms with the *sola scriptura* principle?' There is a dilemma: accept a *magisterium ecclesiae* (Catholic or Evangelical), or let each reader of Scripture pick up what he or she perceives as meaningful: an attractive option for many in these days of religious seeking. Is there a way out of this dilemma? I personally believe that the future of the Reformed tradition may well depend on its capacity to formulate its understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle in a new way. To repeat what the fathers of the Reformation had to say on this subject will not be sufficient. Nevertheless, their insistence on the intangible link between the Church and the Bible is still valid; it is an intrinsic part of the Christian tradition across the different confessions. Bible and Church go together; they interact. The question is: who has the authority to interpret the Bible in view of the primary role

this interpretation plays in the life of the Church? This question is very germane to the subject of our symposium for it has important ecumenical implications.

We have now reached the crux of the matter. I want to pull various strings together in order to identify the necessary conditions which Protestantism in its Reformed tradition has to fulfil in order to continue to play what I call its 'counterpoint' role vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church, in which it has its historical roots, and vis-à-vis modernity, in the context of which Protestantism developed but which has entered a profound crisis.

Modernity in Crisis

Let me begin with the second topic: modernity in crisis. When we speak of 'modernity' we mean a process which started in Europe at the time of the Renaissance - some historians would go as far back as the end of the Middle Ages - which against the backdrop of the collapse of the medieval view of the cosmos affirmed the human being as a free subject and human reason as a tool to understand and transform the world in which human beings live. This view of man led to great progress in many spheres of life, on the optimistic assumption that through the application of reason humankind was moving towards a better world. Ten years before the outbreak of the First World War, however, Max Weber announced in his well-known essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the 'disenchantment of the world': as a result of the instrumentalisation of human reason for merely economic purposes a rift was appearing between society and the economy, which had been living in symbiosis in precapitalist times. Soon after, the First World War left Europe not only economically in shambles, but spiritually broken. The optimistic view of human reason still had some decades to prevail, however. The Soviet Empire was supposedly created on the basis of scientific laws, but it would end in the Gulag. Meanwhile an Austrian painter who had been refused access to the Academy applied supposedly scientific criteria in distinguishing between higher and lower races; millions of innocent people where scientifically murdered, and his empire ended in smoke and flame.

We may well think that in Western Europe this does not concern us. In Europe we have learned the lesson: we point here to the creation of the European Union, the first aim of which was to safeguard peace. And indeed we should not underestimate the achievements of the EU. But institutions alone, however important, will not be able to cure Europe of its spiritual disease. Václav Havel reminds us that 'we should look to history as a magnifying glass on modern civilisation and as an urgent invitation - perhaps the last - to a general reappraisal of the way our civilisation conceives itself'.

Recent Contributions from the Conference of European Churches

The churches cannot stay aloof; and I think that they are aware of the crisis. The Conference of European Churches (CEC) has gained recognition as a regular partner in dialogue with the European institutions. This seems to me to be the result partly of a longstanding informal dialogue between churches and the European institutions, and partly of a recognition by the European institutions of the role churches still play in promoting a greater awareness of European issues among the public at large. (The churches ought to be aware that a positive attitude on the part of the European institutions is not devoid of self-interest.) I have with me two texts from the CEC website relating to the political integration process in Europe. The first, dated May 2001 with a foreword by my former colleague Keith Jenkins, is entitled *Churches in the Process of European Integration*, and the second, dated February 2004, is a discussion paper on the question of Turkey.

The paper *Churches in the Process of European Integration* is written in the perspective of the enlargement of the EU; ten new member-states were due to join. (This eventually happened in May 2004.) The paper expresses church concern about how to create real solidarity between Eastern and Western Europe in view of declining public support for EU enlargement in western EU countries and the economic imbalance between the EU countries and the candidates. The text demands that the EU define its objectives clearly and insists on the vicarial role churches can play in the integration process by offering a community of values. Interestingly, the paper is critical of an individualistic understanding of man. 'A major stream of European thinking, with its source in the tradition of the Enlightenment, substantially supports the role of the human individual as the basic unit of society.' Instead, the churches argue, the concept of community needs to be restored, with the family regarded as the basic unit of society.

What is striking in this paper is that the EU is primarily considered from the viewpoint of the candidate countries. This is of course to be expected given that the enlargement was high on the agenda of the churches at that time, but it has a consequence: nowhere in the paper is mention made of Europe's responsibility towards other parts of the world. When the text speaks about migration, it is referring to possible migration from Eastern Europe; nothing is said about the migration from the south. This seems short-sighted to me: European integration can no longer be considered without placing it from the start in its world context. There was a time that reconciliation between European countries was a first priority, but the agenda has moved on. European integration is no longer an internal European process; now it has to take account of the challenges of globalisation. The EU Constitution was trying to cope with this dimension, and the fact that its future is largely compromised will not help the EU to overcome its inward-looking attitude.

The second CEC document is more recent and deals with the sensitive issue of Turkey's possible EU membership. The main emphasis is on human rights, and in this context the issue of religious freedom. I very much welcome the fact that the paper states that the churches do not challenge Turkey's dominant Muslim values as in principle an obstacle to Turkey's eventual accession to the EU. The paper points out that unlike many of the supposedly 'Christian' countries within the European Union, Turkey is mentioned in the Bible; it is recognised as a 'meeting point between eastern and western cultures creating tensions as well as opportunities'. I must say that I find this a courageous and encouraging attitude, in view of the fact that a majority of people in the EU are opposed to Turkey's entry. And there is more. One section of the paper is entitled 'History of South-Eastern Europe and the process of reconciliation'. The need for reconciliation between the European countries and Turkey is an old theme in the European integration process: it echoes the theme which lay at the foundation of the EU, that of reconciliation between France and Germany. And lastly the paper recognises that the negotiations which have now officially started mean that the EU will have to come to terms with its own identity.

The Current European Crisis

Our theme is the crisis facing Europe and affecting the integration process today. It is a crisis which means that Europe is not going to be able to tackle the integration process through institutional engineering alone. The crisis has cultural and spiritual components, and the CEC papers rightly highlight this aspect.

When we consider the cultural dimension of the crisis the question of the future relationship between Protestantism and modernity is salient. More than any other Christian confession, Protestantism, especially in its Reformed and Lutheran traditions, has a long history in common with modernity. Some even envisage that Protestantism may well have no future in the light of the fact that we are moving from a modern society to a postmodern society. In my view this challenging idea needs to be taken seriously. As the Reformers did in their own time, we need to examine critically our own past, identify the new challenges and seek answers to them. The Roman Catholic Church sees itself as a institution, a body ('the body of Christ'); for Protestants, church has to be a 'church for others'. This world-oriented attitude implies a certain flexibility vis-à-vis the institutional dimension of church life but at the same time a critical distance vis-à-vis the worldly context. As Bonhoeffer noted, only the individual who believes is obedient, and only the individual who is obedient believes.

What contributions could Protestantism make to help overcome the present crisis in our society?

First, Protestantism needs to re-examine critically its own involvement in the process of modernity. If Protestants want to play a part in solving the problem, they first have to recognise that they are part of that very problem. Let us take one example. The conventional understanding prevailing in the Reformed tradition is that by divine commandment nature is to be dominated and exploited (Gen 1: 26). Theological support for the dominant economic model has hence been forthcoming at the expense of the notion of stewardship (Gen 2:15), which is equally called for. Thus the *sola scriptura* principle does not guarantee a non-biased interpretation! Another point which has to be examined critically is the individualistic understanding of salvation: from the very beginning Protestantism has arguably become more and more dependent on the dominant Zeitgeist which underlines the rights of the individual. The *sola scriptura* principle in fact implies that we should learn to think differently, to see reality in a different way.

Second, Protestants should examine the causes which have led to the present crisis. The question is not only 'what has gone wrong?' but 'why has it gone wrong?' Why is it that new avenues opened up by the Renaissance in the fields of the arts and sciences have ended in so many deadlocks? As Christians, we should recognise the following reasons:

1. The difficulty modernity has always had with recognising the reality of evil as a *mysterium*. Among philosophers of the Enlightenment Kant is an exception in that he recognises evil, speaking of *'das radikale Böse'*; but he cannot give it a place in a morality which is based on the autonomy of the person. Man's reason has become a substitute for God, helping us to work towards an harmonious world. This understanding has led to various forms of secularised messianism, with the consequences we know.

2. The absolute value modernity attaches to the autonomous individual. Modernity is caught in the false dilemma: either man is dependent on a higher reality, God, in which case he cannot be free, and hence not responsible; or else man is autonomous - a law unto himself - and there can be no God. Logically there is no way out of this dilemma; but Christians should question it in the light of what the human sciences have to teach us about what is meant by autonomy and heteronomy. To remain caught in this dilemma is to forfeit the paradox which lies at the heart of faith. The word 'paradox' should not be understood in an intellectual sense: 'paradox' points to the mystery of the Incarnation.

Protestant-Catholic Counterpoint

Let us now recall the 'counterpoint' which the Protestant churches played during the time of the Reformation vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic Church. This ecumenical function has today lost much of its former drive: is there any way in which it might be revitalised?

I am convinced that for the future witness of the churches in Europe much will depend on the quality of the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. The original aim of the Reformation was to reform the Roman Catholic Church. Later, having been excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church, which reacted with the Counter-Reformation, the Protestant Churches went their own way. Today, when the Roman Catholic Church and the traditional Protestant churches are alike facing a steady erosion of their membership, both confessions are tending to underline their differences. The declaration *Domini Jesus* has been for many Protestants the occasion to rediscover why they are Protestants. It is too early to anticipate which direction this pontificate will take. The odds are not necessarily in favour of its entering into a real dialogue with secularised society. The new pope is pursuing the 'restoration' process of his predecessor. However, I am not sure that we cannot expect from him, a native of Germany, the country of Luther, a real will to enter into dialogue with the Protestant churches. If that does happen, then the question is: how far are the Protestant churches prepared to enter into a substantial dialogue of this kind? At first glance the partners in this dialogue seem not to be equal. The Roman Catholic Church knows precisely what it stands for; the Protestant churches have a more difficult task in this respect, for the reasons already mentioned: a plurality of confessions, and theologians going back to the sixteenth century are faced with the Roman Catholic *magisterium ecclesiae*.

Sola Scriptura

However far apart the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions may seem, it nevertheless remains the case that both ultimately subscribe to the *sola scriptura* principle. Tradition, the *magisterium*, however important in the Roman Catholic Church, cannot contradict the Scriptures. The most important issue is however the question of the interpretation of the concept of 'truth'. The different Christian traditions have in common the *sola scriptura* principle, but its application has led to different interpretations which have eventually ended up in different doctrinal positions. The question is: how is it that Scripture, a compilation of stories, liturgy, exhortations, celebrations, images, ends up in the form of conceptual and dogmatic formulae which are defined and instituted by the various churches? This process of conceptualisation of the doctrine of faith took place both in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Protestant churches in the wake of the Reformation: the word 'dogma' is part of the theological vocabulary of the seventeenth century. Pierre Gisel, the systematic theologian from Lausanne, explains in his book *Croyance Incarnée* that these developments have to be understood in the context of the Counter-Reformation which led to the creation of the *magisterium ecclesiae*. Gisel notes that at the time of the Church Fathers and until the Middle Ages the situation was different: there was a intrinsic link between the truth of faith and its doctrinal value; *lex cognoscendi* and *lex orandi* went hand in hand. In

modern times this link was weakened; *lex cognoscendi* became autonomous, and churches used their dogmatic positions in ecclesial war to the stalemate; there is now the risk that this war might be reinvigorated now that the wind of confessionalism is blowing again.

Is there a way out of this deadlock situation?

Here I can only share with you what I discovered after my retirement. I was trained as a systematic theologian and wanted to go back to theology. I discovered with the help of others that the Bible did not have to be read in such a way as to legitimise doctrinal positions. Contemporary interchurch declarations are still imprisoned in this approach to the Scriptures. Today we have at our disposal a wide range of new tools which can help us to enter more deeply into the human dimension of the Scriptures. We learn to understand that this compendium, in its diversity and poetical beauty, reflects the experience people had within their own history and the history of their own people in their encounter with God.

Scripture always presupposes the existence of a people: Israel in the time of the Old Testament; the Church in the time of the New Testament. For the Church the Bible summarises in a paradigmatic way the history and destiny of humankind, from its beginning to its end, meeting a God revealing himself in the contingency and fragility of everyday life. The great contribution of Karl Barth was to remind the churches that one has to distinguish between the Bible as a text written by people and the Word of God. Pierre Gisel invites us to go further. Barth's understanding that God reveals himself once and for all is too restricted. His attitude reflects Barth's clear opposition to the natural theology which dominated the theological scene in the nineteenth century. It falls short in not giving sufficient space to the reality of everyday life. For it is precisely in the midst of everyday life, in the ambiguity and contradictions that revelation operates. We should not therefore be seeking a higher religious wisdom behind the text of Scripture; the text cannot be a 'pretext'. We must come nearer to what is genuine in Christian faith: the Incarnation: God involving himself, without giving up his otherness, in the worldly life of people. The distinction between word and text can be see as an analogy of the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus.

Where do we now stand as churches in the light of this understanding of the *sola scriptura* principle?

Is it not correct to state that the same God who revealed himself through the testimonies of the various Biblical actors, who was recognised and confessed as God in ignominious death on the cross, is still revealing himself today in the weakness and the short sightedness of the churches? What would be the practical implications for the Christian faith in Europe once we recognised that

we as humans are part of the same story which started with Abram's response to the call of the unknown God? In the Middle Ages the Church was aware that despite all the disturbances occurring in people's life and history there was a continuity. The stained glass windows in Chartres Cathedral give evidence of this continuity. We see appearing in sequence the great names of the Old Testament, then the stories told in the New Testament, and then the baker and other craftsmen living in Chartres.

I cannot speak here on behalf of the Roman Catholic tradition; but for the Protestant tradition, recognising that the God we confess refuses to lose anything which is part of our daily reality would imply that we cease to reduce ourselves to the role of mere protesters. Paul Tillich spoke of the 'unilaterality' of Protestantism. Of course protest needs to be allowed in the Church; but we need to remember the words of the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch, who wrote in the first part of the last century and whose work is being rediscovered today. He spoke of three dimensions of the church - the institutional dimension, the mystical dimension and the protesting dimension - and was looking for a new synthesis of the three. For him this synthesis had happened three times in history: the first at the time of the Old Testament prophets, the second during the fourth and fifth centuries, and the third in the Middle Ages.

What about Europe today? The vision of a dominant church is over; but the need to interlink the three dimensions has not lost its relevance. For the Protestant tradition this implies: recognition of the importance of the institutional dimension of church life for regulating/organising the religiosity of the people; and recognition of the mystical dimension. This dimension has been present in the way Protestants live their faith, and I think it is still present; but it reduces itself to the level of Protestants as individuals and not as members of a body. This fact may explain their awkwardness with regard to sacraments and symbols. These are however precisely the elements which point to God's mysterious presence in the worldly everyday life of men and women. Sacraments - and I would include even the sermon here - and symbols express more than words can the depth, the richness and the beauty of God's presence.

A Scottish Perspective on Europe

Alison Elliot

Alison Elliot is a former moderator of the Church of Scotland. She continues to serve on the Central Committee of CEC, and is enjoying being an honorary fellow at New College (the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh) and associate director of its Centre for Theology and Public Issues. She also has various lay advisory roles with civic organisations such as the Royal

College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Centre for Research into Families and Relationships and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations.

One of the games that visitors to Scotland play is that of trying to pin down the differences between Scottish and English culture. And it is often claimed that relationship with the rest of Europe is one element in these differences. Scottish institutions, and in particular the churches, have their own roots in direct exchanges with colleagues in other countries that owe nothing to relations with England. There is also a belief that current debate about developments in the European Union are less passionate in Scotland than they are south of the border.

Let's begin in Rotterdam, a global port, with a large and poor immigrant population. Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece provided a pool of guest workers to rebuild the city in the aftermath of the Second World War. In the 1950s and 1960s people from Morocco and Turkey joined them. Later, independence in Dutch colonies led to an influx of Mollucans and Indo-Dutch as well as people from the Antilles and Suriname. More and more Africans arrived in the 1980s and 1990s and then the aftermath of the communist governments in Eastern Europe led to people arriving from there and to refugees from the Balkans.

For a busy European port, this picture is not surprising. At present, in the Netherlands, there is one refugee for every 500 of the population. But this has been an enduring pattern for Rotterdam and, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Netherlands was home to one refugee to every twenty-five or fifty inhabitants. And it was at that time that the Scots Kirk was established there, in 1642.

The first 50 years of the church were very active because of people seeking refuge from the Covenanting War in Scotland. At that time, Rotterdam was referred to as a 'nest of Covenanting refugees'. Ministers were trained and ordained in Rotterdam and returned home to support congregations there at this harsh time. By 1690 the congregation numbered 1000 and had two ministers. Five years later a larger church was built.

The migrant nature of the Christian community persists. Today, as well, we have Christian communities trying to integrate into the city with a history of persecution in their own background.

The example of Rotterdam shows that the church links between Scotland and Europe aren't just dilettante ones of cultural appreciation or young men going on the Grand Tour, although both of these are also relevant. These links have often been forged in the blood of a history of persecution. Playing a key role in this were the Scottish mercenaries. In 1626, five per cent of Scotland's population were sent to the wars in Germany and, doubtless, contributed to the spread of brutalism and torture that was characteristic of that period.

Of course, Scottish links with mainland Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also important for working through the details of the new Reformed ideas of doctrine and church governance. Geneva was central to this exchange, and Scotland owes the Geneva Bible, the Book of Common Order and the Metrical Psalter to groups who gathered round Knox there in the middle of the sixteenth century. Geneva was a poor city which people passed through and where they met other refugees from the various ecclesiastical crises of the time. It has been noted that Geneva's generosity in this period was the source of much of its present wealth, since many Huguenot refugees brought with them skills of banking and watch-making. The Huguenot connection with Scotland was a vibrant one and much of the procedure in the Church of Scotland owes its origins to debates with French Huguenots. The burning bush, which appeared on the Acts of the General Assembly in 1691, is also a favourite Huguenot symbol.

However, sharing a history and making that work in the interests of better cooperation are not the same thing. Despite these historical and institutional connections, Scots can be just as insular as any other British people and the debate about Europe has had its ups and downs. In 1979 it was reported that Scots did not like being members of the European Community and that, if you wanted to get on in Scottish politics, it did not do to be a European. However, being pro-European is currently a respectable position to take, with little of the simple nastiness associated with it south of the border. Many of the people associated in Scotland with a pro-European position have been of high calibre and high credibility across the political spectrum, such as John P MacIntosh, Alick Buchanan-Smith, Neil MacCormick, John Smith and George Reid.

This doesn't mean that people in Scotland are enthusiastic about Europe. The Church and Nation Committee regularly presents detailed reports on Europe to the Church of Scotland General Assembly which are seldom challenged, but at the same time virtually never debated, although in the 1960s it was a more contentious subject.

Perhaps the key to the nature of the debate is the fact that the major constitutional issue in Scotland is devolution and the issue of Europe has been a subsidiary part of that debate. Central to both discussions has been the question of sovereignty. And this is where a fundamental difference between Scotland and England becomes apparent.

The English understanding of sovereignty centres on the absolute sovereignty of the Crown in Parliament. By contrast, in Scotland it is assumed that any sovereignty is limited by our obligations under God. Any civic or political authorities are expected to be answerable in their actions to God and accountable to the people. The Scottish perspective makes it much easier to embrace the idea of shared sovereignty that is encapsulated in the European Union. If sovereignty resides with people who are both Scottish and European, then the sharing of

sovereignty is located in that nested identity and is not a problem, although details of how it is realised may be. This allows the debate to be more pragmatic than it often is in England.

These are ideas that run deep and may explain differences between Scotland and England in the extent to which they embrace the EU. However, precisely because it is a pragmatic issue in Scotland, any opinion poll or referendum in Scotland would be vulnerable to the details of the proposals, so support for a particular European project would be decided on its merits. For all the cosy feeling that many of us detect towards Europe, we should remember that in 1975 the only area in the UK that voted against continued membership was the North West of Scotland.

Scots are great travellers and are well represented in European institutions. Perhaps we're not great as visionaries. The picture from this account is of Scots as pragmatic, principled and pugnacious. We like to believe that we operate comfortably on a wide international canvas and, once there, we take off our rose-coloured spectacles. These are reserved for looking back towards home!

Summing Up the Presentations

Richard Seebohm

Richard Seebohm comes from a Quaker family and has worked in the steel industry, in the civil service and at the Quaker Council for European Affairs in Brussels. He is at present writing about how government and business interacted between the two world wars.

Our theme was 'With what shall we save the world?', but in the event we had a serial review of all the connotations of the words 'Faith in Europe'.

Alison Elliot, former moderator of the Church of Scotland (first woman and first lay person for 450 years) spoke of the Scottish take on Europe. Over the centuries the Scots had emigrated, taking their religion with them. The Netherlands had been an important destination from the seventeenth century - then easier to reach from Edinburgh than London, and sharing the Reformed faith. (This made us think of emigrant religious communities generally as a subject for study, especially those coming from countries with strongly nationalistic faiths.) The Scots saw government as a people's covenant with God rather than with a divinely appointed monarch, so that being anchored in the people there was nothing frightening about shared sovereignty or a constitution. They still had memories of what the 'sovereign' English had done to Scotland. Scotland House in Brussels was the home of 'Scotland Europa', also known as the Westminster

Bypass. Thus the SNP was Europhile, but more with an eye to devolution than with an unquestioning enthusiasm.

Jo Shaw , now a professor at Edinburgh University, spoke of the (then) current state of play in the EU. She did not expect the constitutional treaty to be salvaged in its present form. This was in spite of the fact that all the member states had signed up and about half had ratified. Blair had ducked his responsibility in April 2004 by delegating the decision to the populace without any serious attempt to justify to them his decision to sign. This let the ratification genie out of the bottle. Saying no was costless to the citizen, as the French and Dutch realised.

Future accession treaties for new member states would give opportunities for the treaty amendments that were needed for the continued functioning of the EU - the Nice Treaty was workable for 25 members but not really for more than that. Unanimity would still be needed, with awkward results if it were derailed.

There are many levels of regret. The existing treaties are a confusing tangle of amendments. It is a pity that the 'pillars' have not been brought into the full EU machinery; in particular, Justice and Home Affairs is still inter-governmental and not open to scrutiny by the European Parliament. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (incorporated into the draft treaty) has symbolic importance, and the EU needs to give itself capacity to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights. However, the Convention (the body that drafted the treaty) has been a useful forum for putting the new member states in the picture. At least, unlike the US, the EU polity has not been captured by big business. The (then current) UK presidency has taken some of the steps proposed in the treaty towards transparency for the proceedings of the Council of Ministers.

We should not disregard the effectiveness of the European Parliament, especially given the highly professional service of the advisory staffs supporting the various party groups. The Parliament addresses hard issues, whilst national parliaments tend to be sidetracked. Its links to member states are sadly weak.

Marc Lenders, formerly study secretary at the Brussels Ecumenical Centre and speaking from a Reformed Church allegiance, gave us a deeply thought presentation of his theological standpoint on faith in Europe. The theological discord that this might reveal has to be recognised before ethical dimensions of faith can be explored, important though these are.

He asked us to recognise the force of myth. Europa, who came from the middle east, was abducted by Zeus in the form of a bull. He marooned her in Crete and she could no longer exercise her curiosity about the outside world. Not exactly myth, there was the story of St Paul,

driven by a dream to abandon early Christianity's heartland in the middle east and make his way to Rome. And we had a reawakening of these images as Turkey, now Muslim, applies to join the EU.

Christianity is transnational, transcultural. St Paul should not be seen as giving legitimacy to the idea of 'Christian Europe'. Also, his readiness to listen and then decide gives the lie to determinism. The EU from its inception has been a journey of reconciliation. Turkey is yet another staging point (and note that the Austrians had the seventeenth century Ottoman invasion to reflect on). But Protestantism is many-branched. It isn't feasible to pick and mix, so Marc's analysis had to reflect the Reformed [Calvinist] viewpoint. He had to some extent to resist the pressures of 'modernity', the enlightenment, reason as unique power, the unchallenged autonomy of the individual. It is easier for the Roman Catholics to stand up to these. The Protestants had to adapt while not losing grip, and succumbing either to a loss of identity or to fossilised extremism. The *cuius regio eius religio* concept from the Treaty of Westphalia made Protestantism national, nationalistic and fragmented. Also, the return to the Bible as authority - the *sola scriptura* principle - required interpretation and put power into the hands of theologians as well as princes of the church. Yet the Protestants, whilst trying to escape from 300 years of Catholic authority, have to admit that they had inherited the fact of faith from the Catholics. There has to be a visible church, and for this you need a boundary to determine who is in and who is out. Current evangelicals are perhaps over-keen to specify where this borderline lies. You shouldn't read the Bible to search for legitimacy but to meet God. Their Pentecostal wing, however, reaches ordinary people who were lost to the conventional churches.

The EU recognises that the churches have more than a marginal mission. It was looking to them to place non-economic values on the agenda when enlargement was being debated. These included the point that community is more than a bran tub of individuals. The concept of stewardship came in here, and the understanding that neither personal gain nor personal salvation are all there is to life on earth. Marc was worried in this context that the churches pay insufficient attention to the EU's position in the wider world. At the cusp, do we see Turkey as 'Europe' or 'wider world'? The concept of European identity still needs our reflections.

The Catholic-Protestant dialogue is difficult, partly because the Catholics are able to say exactly what they stand for. Could Protestants, drawing on the myths, parables, exhortations and exaltation in the scriptures, do likewise? (W H Auden had said: 'truth is Catholic, the search for it Protestant'.) What we must look for is incarnation - 'where God is'. God does not separate Himself from daily realities. The Protestant church should recognise its three roles: the institutional, giving its people a structure for their observances; the mystical, sacraments and

symbols to express God's presence; and also (the dimension that Marc left for another occasion) protesting - with a very small p.

Tim Duffy, of the Scottish Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, provided a Catholic perspective.

The fact that he is a 'papist' doesn't mean that we can't walk together in a Faith in Europe context. Catholic social teaching fits in with the faith in Christ that we all have in common. And Jesus Himself recaptured the social message of Isaiah. We should not give up our own allegiances. We share the search for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (though neo-conservatives cause us concern). Bonhoeffer asked what Jesus expects of us today - prayer, virtuous action. Tillich asked, what is our ultimate concern? But we have also to ask what are our idolatries? Does our concern for faith in Europe limit our view? We should not identify Europe with Christianity and see the rest of the world as mission territory. (It is time for a non-European pope!)

Thinking more specifically about faith, did Christianity become real for us only in terms of liturgy? Or, 'is liturgy what people do'? Tim sees faith more widely, on three specific levels.

1. **Culture, identity, 'who I am'.**

   Catholic teaching traces this through the Graeco-Roman heritage; recognition of external earthly sovereignty; the primacy of Rome (although the Donation of Constantine which purported to validate it was spurious); the 'sublime recapitulation' of the Benedictine monastic rule; the Islamic inputs of number, medicine and science; the great schism of 1054, 'when we all felt self-sufficient'; then in the nineteenth century Pope Pius IX authenticated the Church's traditional beliefs and Leo XIII gave parallel recognition to modernity; the twentieth century brought new and complex ambiguities. Identity matters, because it is transcendentally drawn. We must expand it from insularity to God's image and the infinite worth of each of us.

2. **Economics, resources, 'what I have'.**

   The concept of community call us to respect each other and not to see other people instrumentally. The common good is not utilitarian. You can't hold down a skilled or professional career without a spiritual element in your makeup. Spirituality is the divine version of economics.

3. **Politics, power,' what I do'.**

'Power tends to corrupt...' but we have to accept and exercise the personal responsibility of power. The gospel gives it to us. But it must be mandated, not usurped.

In the EU context the concept of subsidiarity is important, too: power should be conferred at the most appropriate level. It makes a difference where the mandate comes from - the words paternal and fraternal come to mind. Power delegated from above can always be withdrawn ('power devolved is power retained'), whilst power from below is a matter of trust and accountability. Furthermore, accountability means more than just checking up. A statement from Vatican II: 'Let them not think that these bishops and priests are expert in every issue.'

The summing up session is best reported by "sound bites".

- Don't forget to add the ecological to the economic in your analysis.
- And don't think that growth in $ terms is all there is to economics.
- Of course, England and Scotland have very different takes on the Reformation.
- Multiculturalism doesn't mean that we should squeeze religious education out of schools.
- Religious diasporas, just as religious minorities, need to have a voice.
- The organisation and role of the EU must matter to us.
- There (as elsewhere), faith groups have a unique contribution to make.
- It helps to disperse power (subsidiarity) and not to be imprisoned at the EU level by the individual member states. The Single European Act spoke of an ever-closer union of peoples, not an ever-closer union of states.
- Religion has been a factor in violence - so how should the world make itself secure? The EU has the potential for 'soft power' as well as force. (CIMIC - civil-military cooperation - has a place.
- Whatever happened to the World Council of Churches' 1994 Decade to Overcome Violence? We have, and shouldn't belittle, the supranational forces for peace: the UN, the OSCE, and indeed the EU.
- Corporate power is a factor, including the arms trade.
- Some of our fellow-Christians are fundamentalist, and aggressively so. We need to get closer rather than hiding from them. Ecumenism isn't just Orthodox/Catholic/Protestant.

Summing Up the Conference

Philip Walters

Dr. Philip Walters is the secretary of Faith in Europe and a researcher, commentator and writer on religious life and religion-state relations in Russia, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In the final session Philip Walters identified what for him had been the main themes coming out of the presentations and discussions at the symposium, and the other participants added their own comments and raised questions for further discussion.

Europe and Diversity

Marc Lenders had spoken of a Europe 'respectful of its diversity'.

Chris Patten has observed that the nation-state is the largest unit to which people voluntarily feel allegiance. Globalisation, paradoxically, promotes regionalisation: some commentators have spoken of 'glocalisation'. The Single European Act envisaged ever-closer union of peoples (rather than of nation-states): it would be good to refocus on this aim. There is the potential within the European Union for the smaller nations to make their voices heard, especially since the EU's recent expansion eastwards.

As the EU grows, an ever more important question concerns the role of religious minorities and diaspora groups. Every religion is a minority somewhere, and has experience of minority status. The question arises as to how immigrant faith groups can become integrated: does their sacred story become integrated, or does it remain based in their home country? Do they remain liminal? The aim of some churches, particularly Orthodox churches, in diaspora is to preserve their own identity, including their national identity.

How should religious groups best make their concerns known: via their own institutional structures, or through more informal channels?

How Europe Runs Itself

The main problem in England is not Euroscepticism but gross ignorance. The failure of ordinary citizens to feel connected with the European institutions is not the fault of the latter, however, but the result of the failure of national parliaments to convey information and contact back and forth.

Subsidiarity - that power should be exercised at the lowest appropriate level - is a principle of governance explicitly recognised in the Maastricht Treaty. It echoes principles of governance

found in Catholic social teaching and in Calvinist church practices. An African proverb: 'Hold power like an egg: not so lightly that you drop it, nor so tightly that you crush it.'

Christian social teaching addresses culture, economics and politics. We could redefine these respectively as identity (who I am), resources (what I have) and power (what I do). We thus bring abstractions to the personal level and stress the need for a personal practical response. Citizens should be empowered.

There may never be a European Constitution, because people have now got a taste for saying no in referenda, and perceive moreover that they can say no and make a gesture but at little actual cost. The implications of the failure to introduce a European Constitution are not as negative as they might appear at first sight, however. The role of referenda is potentially positive.

The Unique Nature of Churches and Faith Groups

They are at once international and local. They fruitfully combine an identification with secular concerns with an aloofness from the world. They have three manifestations: institutional, mystical and protesting.

Areas of Concern for Faith Groups

The proposed Constitution recognised the contribution of faith communities to the future of Europe and committed the EU to 'open, regular and transparent dialogue' with them. Even though the Constitution has not been ratified this concept has already been approved by all the member states.

Areas identified in the symposium as of particular concern to religious believers were: employment; the environment; human rights; migration; and interdenominational and interfaith understanding (Catholic-Protestant-Orthodox-Muslim). Faith communities need to address the question of how to overcome the hurt done by the Christian world to the Islamic world. Without Islam the world would lack medicine, science and numbers.

It is also necessary to take up dialogue between religious people on the one hand and humanists/secularists on the other. Protestants could be bridge-builders here. The debate on secularism in Turkey could shed new light on debate on this topic in Western Europe. There is growing tension between the secularist intelligentsia elite on the one hand and fundamentalist evangelicalism on the other. Does Faith in Europe have a role in facilitating dialogue here?

If people love one another they will learn from one another. The world was saved even before it was created, and the development of the idea of salvation via particular denominations is a later development. We need to get back to that original understanding.

Europe's Role in the World

Ecumenism is not about reconciliation between churches but about reconciliation with the whole world on the basis of values common to all humanity. An important question is what Europe stands for in the world as a whole and what (if any) its global aims are. The EU needs to overcome introspection and recover self-confidence. A new motivation for an outward-looking orientation will be reconciliation with Turkey (St Paul started his work there).

A particular global concern for faith communities is the role of armies and the power of the armaments industry. We need to study 'soft power'. The WCC set up a programme to overcome violence in 1994, and we are now in the fifth year of the decade to overcome violence (2001-10). It is disappointing that these initiatives have had so little resonance in the churches. There is work going on in this area in the OSCE: building up an army of people with peacekeeping skills. Perhaps the churches can encourage people to come forth to be part of this development, to build up a standing force of peacemakers.