***Liberated, Connected, Committed: A Christian Response to the Challenges Facing Europe.***

The 8th General Assembly of The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), September, 2019.

In September I travelled to Basel to represent British Methodism at the assembly of churches brought together through the Leuenberg Fellowship. I joined about a hundred and fifty others for five days of worship, presentations, discussions and debates – and for mealtime/late evening *Gemutlichkeit* (fellowship). Lutherans and Reformed Christians from Germany and Scandinavia were in the majority, but European Methodists were well-represented, as well as some of the smaller churches such as Italian Waldensians and Czech Hussites.

The Swiss city of Basel straddles the river Rhine and sits right on the border with France and Germany. Its ancient Munster – the medieval cathedral that is now part of the Swiss Reformed Church – has been a significant centre of church life for centuries. Erasmus, whose writing helped to spark the Reformation, is buried there and Karl Barth, the most influential Protestant theologian of the 20th century, was baptised in its font. And it was the Munster that hosted the assembly, providing a rather sombre setting for discussion, but (in its ‘high choir’) an environment for moving worship. Organisation (as you might expect) was very smooth and translation helped those of us who don’t easily flip from one language to another.

*Being Church Together*

This key document reflects on the implications of European Protestant churches being in full communion with each other. Does that mean that we are now, in effect, a single church? Some thought it did, but others wanted to maintain a degree of independence for churches in each nation or region. The result was a compromise, but the intention is to work on concrete expressions of unity between churches through a ‘charter for church communion’. As well as the rather inward-looking business of church relations within the fellowship, CPCE committed itself to look outwards, both in terms of relations with other churches (Anglicans, Catholics and the Middle Eastern evangelical churches were especially mentioned) and in the commitment to society (especially in public ethics).

Other documents and debates reflected recent developments in Europe. Migration has added to the religious pluralism of Europe. Although in Britain we have become used to large communities of people from non-Christian faiths, this is something new in many parts of Europe. At the same time, migration has also brought Christians from many different churches, especially Pentecostals, to add to the denominational mix. An especial concern was the rise of popular nationalism which has different forms across Europe, but has created a disturbing tendency to be less welcoming to new-comers and less committed to traditional European values of tolerance and openness.

**Four high points from the assembly:**

**Sunday Worship in the Munster**
On Swiss national day we gathered with other invited guests for morning service and the Swiss foreign minister welcomed us. Cardinal Koch (Pontifical Council for Christian Unity) and Mario Fischer (new General Secretary of CPCE) signed an agreement between Catholic and Protestant Churches. The liturgy was solemn and reformed, but lightened by an alpine choir singing a ‘yodelling liturgy’. As we queued to receive communion, alphorns droned in the background.

**The Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches**

We heard a passionate address from Rosangela Jarjour, General Secretary of the FMEEC, highlighting the plight of Christian communities that have been displaced and persecuted.

**The Sant’Egidio Community**

We heard a keynote address from Andrea Riccardi, leader of Sant’Egidio, the community that began in Rome and works with the homeless and marginalised. He spoke of fear as the malady haunting Europe, of Christian community as a place of gratuity and of the sacrament of loving the poor.

**A Night on the Rhine**

As a change to the solemnity and formality of most of the assembly, the final night was a banquet on board a cruiseboat on the Rhine. I found myself on a table of Methodists, Waldensians and French Reformed, a reminder of how much binds us together as Europeans and Christians.

All the documents from the assembly can be downloaded here:

<https://www.leuenberg.eu/documents/>

Richard Clutterbuck