

ROLE OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE

REPORT 2001

1. MEMBERSHIP

Ex officio

- 2 The Archbishop of Armagh, Most Rev RHA Eames
- 5 The Archbishop of Dublin, Most Rev WNF Empey

Elected by Standing Committee

- 3 Rt Rev BDA Hannon, Bishop of Clogher
- 4 Rt Rev JE Moore, Bishop of Connor
- 2 Dr M Darling
- 1 Senator M Henry
- 4 Rev Canon KA Kearon
- 3 Rev Canon WA Lewis
- 5 Ven DS McLean
- 4 Dr K Milne
- 4 Mr T Sargent TD

Co-opted members

- 4 Ms M Flanagan
- 0 Dr N Cox
- 5 Mr WT Morrow
- 0 Dr J Simpson
- 0 Professor B Walker
- 1 Mrs J Whiteside

Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod

- 4 Very Rev H Cassidy
- 4 Mr SR Harper

The full Committee met on five occasions and the number opposite each member's name indicates the number of meetings attended.

2. SUMMARY

Throughout the year, proposals for restructuring the Committee have been considered, agreed by the Role of the Church Committee and approved by the Standing Committee (Appendix N of the Standing Committee report to the General Synod).

The detailed work of the Committee has been carried out by the various Working Groups and items of particular interest this year are:

- the European Affairs group meeting with Sister Joan Roddy of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.
- report on the meeting of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches in May 2000 (Appendix).
- meetings with Ms Darina Allen and with Professor David McConnell of the Genetics Department of Trinity College Dublin.

- the Political Developments group meeting with the First Minister, Mr David Trimble in November 2000.

3. GENERAL

The Role of the Church Committee very much appreciates the leadership and guidance given by the Rt Rev BDA Hannon, who became the chairman of Committee in April 1999 for an agreed period of two years.

The Standing Committee, at its meeting in June 2000, elected the Committee for a period of one year to 30 June 2001 rather than the usual triennial period. This procedure was followed to facilitate a restructured Committee to commence on 1 July 2001. The co-opted members were also elected for a period of one year.

The Very Rev H Cassidy and Mr SR Harper were appointed to represent the Honorary Secretaries on the Committee. Mr Harper replaces Lady Sheil and the Committee acknowledges the contribution to the Committee made by Lady Sheil.

The current working groups, which deal in more detail with issues referred to them by the main Committee, are Medical Ethics, Social/Economic Issues, Political Developments and European Affairs. Ecological and environmental matters are dealt with by the Social/Economic Issues group.

4. THE FUTURE OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE

The Role of the Church Committee has formulated proposals for a completely restructured committee with a clearly defined role.

The Committee has considered its overall effectiveness and it is generally agreed that it no longer serves the needs of the Church of Ireland in the present environment where expert opinion is demanded by the media on a large variety of topics. The future of the Committee was carefully considered; in particular a redefinition of the role of the Committee, its relationship with the Standing Committee, the two Archbishops and the media, and the resources required in human and financial terms.

Notes on the origin and development of the Role of the Church Committee and proposals for a restructured committee, to be known as the *Church in Society Committee*, and are included as Appendix N of the Standing Committee report to the General Synod. The proposals have been approved by the Standing Committee.

5. MEETING WITH THE CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS IN IRELAND

The full Committee met with Father Sean Healy, of the Conference of Religious in Ireland, who was invited to address the meeting on the work carried out by CORI. Father Healy outlined the structure, vision and goals of the Justice Commission of CORI and introduced the Socio-Economic Review 2001 of the Justice Commission, entitled *Prosperity and Exclusion – Towards a New Social Contract*.

Father Healy described the professional approach taken by CORI in addressing topical issues. CORI is recognised as a Social Partner, and as such, has considerable influence in protecting the interests of the marginalised in the formulation of National Partnership Agreements. It was clear that the underlying vision of CORI is theology driven, with no affiliation to any political party.

6. MEDICAL ETHICS WORKING GROUP

The Abortion Hearing

The Standing Committee appointed the Rt Rev HC Miller, Dr PHC Trimble and Dr MRN Darling to represent the Church of Ireland at the oral hearing of the All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution considering the Irish Government's Green Paper on Abortion. The Committee received a transcript of the hearing, which took place on 5 July 2000. It was generally felt that the views of the Church of Ireland had been well represented at the hearing, and the Role of the Church Committee thanked Dr Darling for his contribution.

Report to the General Synod 2000

The Committee noted that the motion before the General Synod in 2000 to receive the report of the Role of the Church Committee was amended by the exclusion of the paper on Artificial Feeding and Hydration and the Response to the Green Paper on Abortion. However, the Committee felt that the debate on the report was very useful, as it gave members of the Synod the opportunity to express their views on the various issues contained in the report.

7. SOCIAL/ECONOMIC ISSUES WORKING GROUP

Genetically Modified Foods

The group arranged with Ms Darina Allen to address the full Committee at a meeting held in April 2000. Ms Allen urged caution on the use of genetic engineering and conveyed her views on genetically modified foods. The following points were made by Ms Allen:

- There is confusion about the moral implications of tinkering with the 'building blocks of life' in a way that was never intended by nature.
- GM foods, which are mostly unlabeled, are readily available on shelves for everyone to eat.
- No-one can predict for sure what the long term effects of eating GM foods will be on humans and animals.

The group also heard a presentation by Professor David McConnell of the Department of Genetics in Trinity College, Dublin in June 2000. Professor McConnell explained in detail the advantages of genetic engineering and made the following points:

- Certain foods can be produced in much greater quantities, which can be of benefit in feeding Third World countries.
- Crops can be produced that are resistant to particular pests, which obviates the necessity to use insecticides or weed-killers that are non-selective and consequently harm other wildlife.
- Some medicines which could not be made in sufficient quantities with natural substances, are now manufactured in vast quantities using genetic engineering.

The Committee is very grateful to Darina Allen and Professor McConnell for taking the time to make very interesting and informative presentations to the Committee.

8. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS WORKING GROUP

Reform of the House of Lords

The Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords concluded with the publication of the Wakeham Report. The report recommends that 31 seats are allocated to faith communities of which 26 go to Christian Churches. As the representation of the Churches is based on baptismal numbers, sixteen of those go to the Church of England, leaving ten for the other denominations.

The member churches of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland are dissatisfied with the recommendations which have now been adopted by the UK government.

The Long March

The working group met with representatives of The Long March, which describes itself as “an organisation formed to provide a platform to enable the innocent victims of terrorism in our province to have their voices heard”. The meeting, which took place in June 2000, enabled the group to hear the concerns of the representatives for the victims of terrorism.

Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

Under the ‘Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity’ section of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Church of Ireland and other Churches, groups and individuals were invited by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to submit recommendations for inclusion in a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The Human Rights Act 1998, which incorporated the European Convention on Human Rights into United Kingdom law, deals with individual rights. The proposed Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, which will include the Human Rights Act 1998, is designed to take into account the peculiar circumstances of the divided society in Northern Ireland.

In order to participate effectively in the Bill of Rights process, the Political Developments Group expanded its membership to include legal expertise. In February 2001, it sent a draft submission of proposals for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights to the Human Rights Commission.

Northern Ireland Civic Forum

The Churches Consortium met at Stormont in June 2000 and agreed the process for nominations to the Northern Ireland Civic Forum. Three applications were received from members of the Church of Ireland, and two were selected to be put forward to the Irish Council of Churches for consideration.

At the ICC meeting it was agreed that one man and one woman should be nominated from the list of applicants put forward. The list contained two applicants from the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church and one applicant from the Religious Society of Friends, the Salvation Army and the Life-link Network of Churches. The two nominations put forward to the Churches Consortium were Miss Daphne Gilmour from the Presbyterian Church and Mr George Glenn from the Church of Ireland.

These, with two nominated by the Roman Catholic Church and one by the Independent Evangelical Churches, were formally appointed to the Civic Forum by the First Minister and the Deputy First Ministers in September 2000.

The Belfast Agreement

A Meeting was held at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, with The First Minister, Rt Hon David Trimble on 17 November 2000. The following matters were discussed: Policing, Decommissioning, the Northern Ireland Executive, the proposed Bill of Rights, Parades, and recent Loyalist violence in North and West Belfast.

9. WORKING GROUP ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The group met with Sister Joan Roddy of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace to discuss how the churches might most effectively contribute to the issues relating to immigration in the Republic of Ireland.

The present unsatisfactory situation exists because the Government appears to have been taken unawares by the steep increase in immigration. Its policy has been hastily implemented with unacceptable delays in processing applications for asylum. Difficulties are being experienced in providing interim accommodation, particularly due to the policy to re-locate asylum seekers outside Dublin.

The Government has neglected to make it clear to the public that, under European Law and the Geneva Convention, it is obliged to admit asylum seekers and consider their applications. Local communities have not been properly prepared for the reception of asylum seekers and their educational, dietary and other needs.

The churches might usefully contribute by publicly commenting on the thrust and implementation of government policy, giving due recognition to the very real difficulties, yet enforcing the call for humane treatment of immigrants. The churches might also commend the case of immigrants due to be located in the local parish, alert the parish to the difficulties, and ensure that immigrants are made welcome and encouraged to participate in local services.

The Church and Society Commission

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches met in Moscow from 5 - 9 May 2000. Dr K Milne, who was appointed by the Irish Council of Churches as an observer on the Commission, attended meeting and a report is included in the Appendix. Attached to the report are notes from the Commission on the proposals for an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

European Professionals Network

The Institute of European Affairs has set up a European Professionals Network, which will meet each month to consider social, ethical and economic matters that affect Ireland and the European Union. The Network will be an informal forum for discussion and briefings on strategic issues. Mr Robert Greer will represent the Church of Ireland on the Network.

APPENDIX

**REPORT BY DR K MILNE ON THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY
COMMISSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES, MOSCOW,
5-9 MAY 2000**

The Commission represents the Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches of Europe, and the meeting, which I attended as an observer on behalf of the Irish Council of Churches, focussed on the role of the Orthodox in the ecumenical movement, particularly in Europe. In addition to the working sessions of the conference we were visited by Metropolitan Kirill and were received and addressed at the Danilovski Monastery by His Holiness Alexei II, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia. Both of these leaders, and others whom we met, including Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, had played prominent roles in the turbulent events of the recent past in Moscow.

It is of major significance that the second half of the twentieth century, a formative period for the ecumenical movement, when the World Council of Churches was established and Vatican II took place, was a time when the Orthodox churches were, for the most part, deprived of normal relations with the churches of the west by the Iron Curtain and the Cold War. Now that the Soviet empire has gone the way of other empires, and the Communist regimes have largely lost power, meaningful dialogue between east and west has begun: this encounter was the main business of the conference.

The differences of outlook are substantial, and surfaced, for example, during discussion of the submission already made on the Church and Society Commission's behalf to the EU convention that is drafting the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (paper appended), and in discussion of the *Charta Oecumenica*, which is at present being formulated. Whether in working-groups on these documents, or in the course of the more general agenda of plenary sessions, profound differences were noticeable. The Orthodox churches, not least that of Russia, have been influenced by very different historical experiences from those of the west, whether Roman, Anglican or Protestant. Differences on points of doctrine have a long history and memories of what are perceived by the Orthodox as past injustices, ecclesiastical and political, at the hands of the west, dating from the crusades and before, linger on (something that should not be impossible for us in Ireland to understand), to the extent that the Russian church leaders repeatedly claimed that western attitudes to the troubles in Chechnya were at best ill-informed, and sometimes betrayed double standards. Prior to our conference the executive of the Commission had met with the Russian Foreign Minister and issued a statement a copy of which is appended.

Both the Patriarch and the Metropolitan (and representatives of other Orthodox churches) affirmed their commitment to ecumenism, and expressed appreciation of the ecumenical contacts that had enabled them under Soviet rule to have some contact with other Christians. They also, however, indicated that there were major obstacles to closer understanding

- the ordination of women
- the permeation of much of western theological thinking by a liberal ethic, and
- western proselytism.

They also, nevertheless, wished to engage in continuing dialogue, given the greatly increased number of Orthodox believers in the EU.

By definition, the membership of CEC and its Church and Society Commission is largely Orthodox, Lutheran and Reformed in composition. Anglicans form a very small proportion. But it would seem to me, resulting from informal contacts in Moscow, that Anglicanism, with

its liturgical and episcopal ecclesiology, can, at some points, have a closer sympathy with Orthodoxy than have the other Protestant churches. The Orthodox churches of central and eastern Europe have, despite being driven underground on occasion, a continuity of worship and doctrine that contrasts with those churches deeply influenced by the 16th century Reformation and the 18th century Enlightenment. Anglicanism has a distinctive history, different from that of the Orthodox, different from that of the Free Churches, and while the Church of Ireland has a tiny place on the world ecclesiastical scene (as the Republic of Ireland has on the political) that does not mean that we can have nothing either to say or do.

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMISSION

Plenary Meeting of the Commission
Moscow, Russian Federation, 5-9 May 2000

EU CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

At its meeting in Moscow from 5 to 9 May, the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches, covering churches throughout the whole of Europe, was able to give consideration to the submission already made on its behalf to the Convention drafting the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Commission wishes to endorse all the points made in that submission, of which we enclose a copy. We would like to take this opportunity to give emphasis to some of those points and to add some comments.

The churches represented on the Commission already have a record of commitment to the promotion and defence of human rights, with a special emphasis on social and cultural rights. These are all rooted in genuine Christian tradition. This commitment is expressed through the churches' engagement with European organisations – the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU. We therefore welcome the commitment shown by the member states of the EU in launching the process of the development of a Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Convention has not yet determined how the Charter is to be structured. It is not yet clear what emphasis will be given to social and cultural rights, nor how the defined rights will be limited. In endorsing the view that this Charter should be legally binding, we recognise that the real test of this Charter is the enforcement of the rights contained in it, as much as their formulation. We insist that no provision of this Charter may be interpreted as restricting the scope of the rights guaranteed by European Community law, the law of the member states and international conventions, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights, as interpreted by the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

We warmly welcome the idea that the Charter should be introduced with a preamble which lays out the common values on which the integration process is based, as outlined in Article 6 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. To this we would add the values of peace, solidarity and participation.

As people coming from the whole of Europe, and not just from the member states of the EU, we stress the importance of extending the process of consultation on this Charter to include the potential member states, beyond the hearing scheduled for June. If the fundamental rights in the Charter are to be expressions of values common to people across Europe, is it not only right that it should be drawn up with the participation of all those likely to be affected by it.

The potential member states are members of the Council of Europe and most have recently undergone the process of drafting their own constitutions. Since the Charter relies not only on European and international legal sources, but also on the national constitutions of the member states, those countries will be well placed to make a precious contribution based on their recent experience.

We look forward to the first complete draft being available soon. We will continue to monitor closely the forthcoming debate, particularly that on social and economic rights.

For the enforcement of the Charter to be successful, it is crucial there should be wide public discussion. We welcome the steps which the Convention has taken towards making this process as transparent and as open as possible. However, we note that in very few of the EU member states represented on our Commission is there adequate public awareness of this development. We therefore encourage members of the Convention to publicise their work more widely, so that their commitment should not be lost in the face of public suspicion and ignorance. We commit ourselves to promoting discussion of the Charter within our churches and beyond.

PRESS RELEASE FROM CHURCH & SOCIETY COMMISSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES MEETING IN MOSCOW (5-9 May 2000)

CHURCHES EXPRESS CONCERN ON CHECHNYA

The Russian Foreign Minister, Mr Igor Ivanov, stressed the importance of dialogue with churches over the issue of Chechnya when he met a delegation this weekend in Moscow from the Church & Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC).

The CEC had already made clear its concerns that military intervention of the kind which had taken place in both Kosovo and Chechnya did not lead to solutions for violent situations, but instead made them worse.

The Church delegation consisted of the Executive Committee and staff of the Church & Society Commission who are in Moscow for their annual plenary meeting at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church has, for its own part, expressed general support for Russian government policy in Chechnya but has stressed that civilians should be protected and peaceful solutions found. Mr Ivanov strongly defended his government's record. However, he committed himself to ensure the return of civil society to Chechnya and to elections there in two years. The future of Europe and the implications of the EU enlargement process for Russia were also discussed in the meeting, which lasted almost two hours. Mr Ivanov pledged himself ready to continue dialogue with Churches over these issues.

Earlier in the week some members of the delegation had met Prof Oleg Mironov the Russian Federation's Commissioner for Human Rights who admitted that mistakes had been made over Chechnya and he was pressing a number of cases with the Russian government.

Commenting after the meeting the Moderator of CSC, Mr David Skidmore, said "We were heartened at Mr Ivanov's openness and commitment to dialogue and valued very much the chance to express the concerns of many of our churches about what is happening in the Northern Caucasus."

The meeting of the Church and Society Commission also considered the *Charta Oecumenica* and the contribution of the Churches to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and concludes on Monday with a meeting with the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Alexei II.