

Report on the International Biotechnology Consultation
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 7-10, 2006

Hosts

The Canadian Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, USA

Representatives

Rev. Dr. Richard Crossman – Canadian Council of Churches
Rev. Garth Minot – Caribbean Conference of Churches
Dr. Donald Bruce – Conference of European Churches
Dra. Elisabeth Ivete Sherill – Latin American Council of Churches
Dr. Sleiman Gebran, MD, MBA – Middle East Council of Churches
Ms. Clare Chapman – National Council of Churches of Christ, USA
Mr. James Bhagwan – Pacific Conference of Churches
Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm – World Council of Churches

NCCCUSA/CCC Working Group

Mr. Stephen Allen – Canadian Council of Churches
Ms. Clare Chapman – National Council of Churches of Christ, USA
Rev. Dr. Richard Crossman – Canadian Council of Churches
Rev. Cheryl Horne – Canadian Council of Churches (Field Education Student)
Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner – National Council of Churches of Christ, USA
Dr. Mary Marrocco – Canadian Council of Churches
Dr. Jim Rusthoven – Canadian Council of Churches
Rev. Marcel Welty – National Council of Churches of Christ, USA
Dr. Olivia Masih White – National Council of Churches of Christ, USA

Sunday, May 7, 2006 - Introductions

The International Biotechnology Consultation opened with worship led by Jim Rusthoven of the Canadian Council of Churches.

The first working session was chaired by Clare Chapman (NCCCUSA). Stephen Allen (CCC) was the Co-chair for the Consultation.

Greetings from the Host Councils

Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches brought greetings in the name of the Canadian Council of Churches and invoked God's blessings on the work. She expressed appreciation to the members of the NCCCUSA/CCC Working Group for their dedicated work in preparing for this meeting.

Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, Deputy General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, USA, welcomed the group on behalf of the NCCCUSA and brought greetings from its General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Robert Edgar.

Eileen provided a brief overview of the NCCCUSA, its members and work. She spoke of the significance of the meeting and called it a victory from three perspectives: (1) the initiative of the Canadian Council of Churches and the cooperative work with the NCCCUSA in convoking the Consultation; (2) the graciousness of the many Councils of Churches world-wide in accepting the invitation of the North American churches to

assemble; and (3) the fact that this ecumenical project has arisen from the lived experience of the churches who have seen the implications of the new genetics close up and, like Bishop Tutu, have said, "The system cannot endure".

Clare invited all present to introduce themselves so as to begin the process of getting to know each other and building the community of believers who together will enter into the work of the coming days.

The host councils presented the participants with symbolic mementos of the event, including small lapel crosses made of pewter, the first precious metal processed in the Thirteen American colonies, and a small piece of rock crystal from Canadian soil.

Clare reviewed the draft agenda – "Planning Meeting for Churches Forum on Genetics" – and invited comment.

Olivia spoke to the handout outlining responsibilities for worship and prayer during the coming days, as well as providing resource materials for use by the participants.

Stephen presented regrets from the All Africa Council of Churches which was unable to send a delegate and the Christian Conference of Asia whose delegate had been forced to withdraw, leaving too short a time-line to find a replacement. Dr. Resin Cavida Bahia, DVM, of the Philippines sent a written contribution on behalf of the Christian Conference of Asia. Every effort will be made to bring the insights of these Councils into the ongoing conversations through e-mail and other means of communication.

Monday, May 8, 2006 – Reports from the Regions

The day began with worship led by Clare, Eileen, Marcel, Olivia and Elizabeth. Stephen and Clare co-chaired the day's sessions.

Peter Noteboom, Associate Secretary for the Canadian Council of Churches Commission for Justice and Peace, attended the day's sessions.

Stephen introduced the work of the day, namely a series of presentations from each national or regional Council on its work over the past five years, the issues in genetic technologies that are of particular concern for their area, and the challenges now facing them. Questions and comments from the participants followed each presentation.

Middle East Council of Churches

Dr. Sleiman Gebran, MD, explained that the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) held three seminars (1995-1999) on bioethics in Lebanon dealing with beginning of life issues, end of life issues and a number of other concerns. The seminars ended for funding reasons. It is worth noting that the MECC was one of the pioneers in launching such seminars and introducing the importance of the discussion of such issues.

In 2001, the state of Lebanon picked up the work with a National Consultative Committee on Health and Life Sciences. The Committee membership was evenly divided between Christians and Muslims.

The Committee had four projects dealing with legislation regarding (1) patients' rights and informed consent; (2) genetic tests and diagnosis; (3) assisted reproductive

technologies and research on embryos; and (4) clinical ethics and ethical committees in hospitals. This Committee also made some recommendations on drug testing.

To date, legislation on patients' rights and on establishing ethical committees in hospitals has been approved. Legislation on genetic testing and assisted reproductive technologies must receive the approval of the religious authorities before any laws can be enacted. There are tensions between Christians and Muslims on these issues, and within the two religious groups as well. As a result, there are as yet no laws or regulations governing these matters in Lebanon. A social consensus between religious authorities on challenging issues is necessary before the implementation of any law.

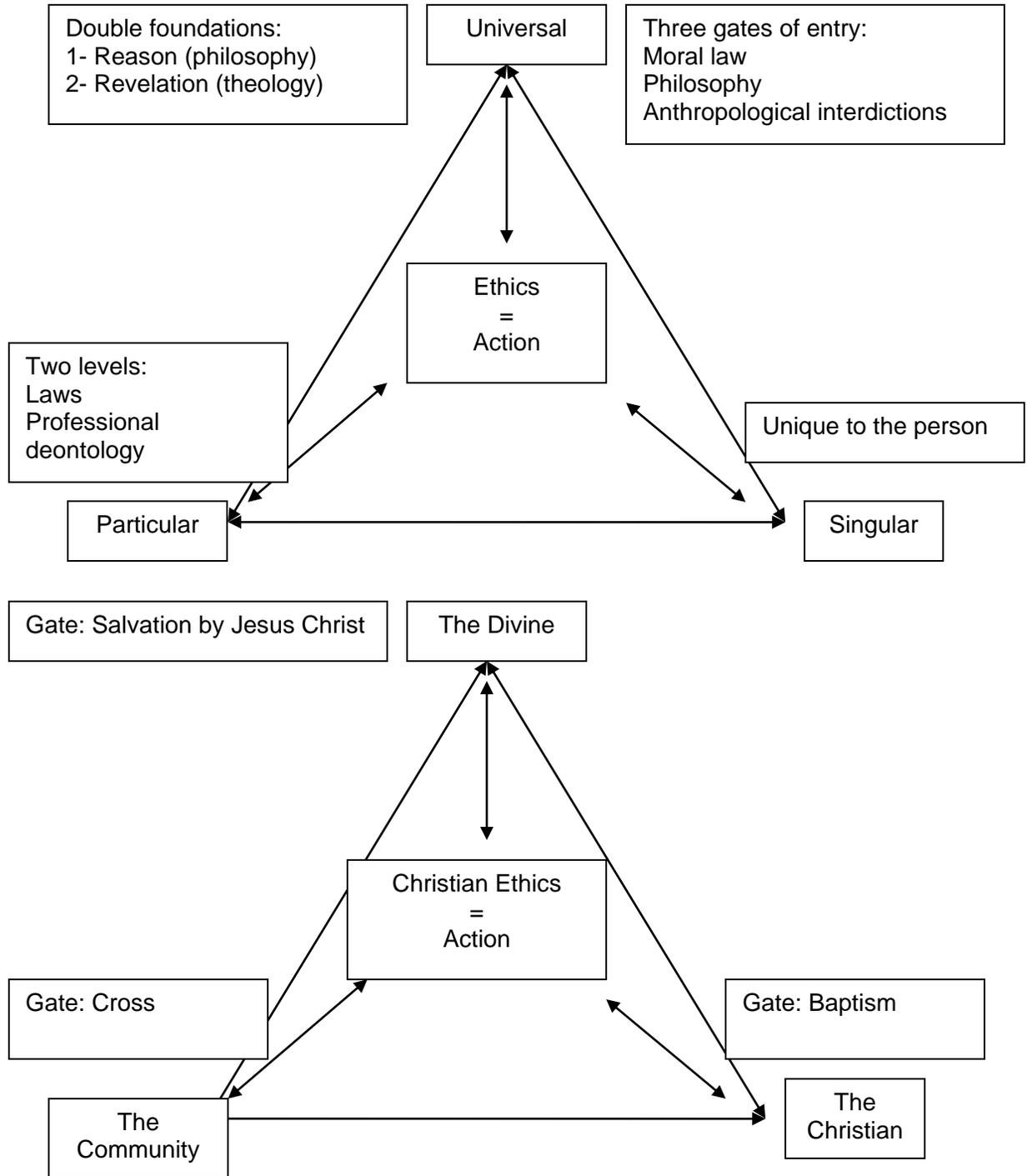
This National Consultative Committee also organized an international symposium on the ethics of science and technology in 2001. It dealt with bioethics, organ donations, experimentation on human beings, human genetics and the application of genetic engineering, infoethics, the information society, cyberspace and access to information, the ethics of science, environment, and the ethics of outer space.

The universities have become more involved in the teaching of bioethics. Lebanon's universities are: Balamad University (teaches ethics in a medical school and has a school of theology); St. Joseph's University (centre of bioethics and teaches ethics to medical and nursing students); the University of the Holy Spirit (organized two colloquia on bioethics); and the American University of Beirut (teaches ethics to medical and nursing students). The schools of nursing at two of these universities have organized seminars on the "ethics of the nursing profession".

Biotechnology isn't a high priority in the Middle East. Some work on ethics is being done in Egypt and Syria; the main work is done in Lebanon. The burning issues in the Middle East are medical rather than agricultural. There are more than 20 private fertility centres in Lebanon. Two hospital laboratories do some chromosomal testing for genetic abnormalities. More complex testing is sent to France or elsewhere in Europe. Other related areas of concern include:

- patient autonomy;
- distributive justice in a world of limited resources;
- informed consent;
- health delivery systems, including managed care and the financing of catastrophic illness (in countries where health care is considered to be a service for those who can pay rather than a right guaranteed equally to all citizens);
- when health care is subjected to the laws of the market place, injustices are inevitable.

The role of theology in bioethics in Lebanon could be portrayed in this way: the gatekeepers for the Universal (the Divine) are the theologians and philosophers; society should take its inspiration from the Divine to put controls, regulations and laws on human activities (acting in a dynamic way); and the singular (the personal) takes inspiration from society and from the Divine. This will allow each one of the society to take his decision.



Unfortunately in our times, theology may be influenced by politics and business. This is the challenge of the churches working in bioethics. That's why the arrows are on the two ends of the lines.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- At present, the issues for the Middle East Council of Churches are those surrounding the fertility clinics.
- Stem cell research, GMOs, and agriculture are debated in bioethics classes in universities but are not practical issues in Lebanon.
- The emerging issues to be faced in the next five years are beginning of life and end of life issues. Abortions, for example, are done in the majority of the hospitals in Beirut.
- Because of the confessional system of government, social consensus on issues is difficult to achieve. The French left behind a system in which each religion is proportionately represented in the government. If there is consensus between Christians and Muslims, a law will pass; otherwise, it will not. In the absence of consensus between the religions, the free market dictates.

Caribbean Conference of Churches

Rev. Garth Minott consulted with Mr. Gerard Granado, the General Secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches, in preparation for this meeting. While the Conference has not been active in the area of biotechnology, Mr. Granado is aware that at some point the churches will be invited to engage in discussions and must be ready to respond to individuals, governments, and institutions who seek advice from them.

Mr. Granado considered it important to be part of this Consultation in order to get a sense of what is happening in other regions. It will also help the Conference to identify persons who are capable and qualified in this area and who could help the Conference in its deliberations and participation in the future.

One critical area of concern for the Caribbean Conference of Churches in any discussion of biotechnology and bioethics is the matter of sustainable development. In the Caribbean, there is particular concern about the depletion of the environment, particularly in countries like Haiti where it is even more pronounced. Any exploration in this area has to be able to help the community in general, and Haiti in particular, to grapple with its situation with whatever technologies are available.

Mr. Granado insists that issues of gender, especially the needs of women, have to be taken into consideration because when policies and decisions are taken, the effects are far-reaching on women and children. Any discussion in this area must explore the ultimate effects they will have on women and endure to their benefit. The church will be concerned when the benefits of these technologies are negative for women. Women must not become means to ends. Women must play an integral part in our discussions and deliberations.

Colleagues at the University Theological College of the West Indies are concerned that they have not heard the voice of the churches on bioethical issues.

Our concerns around sustainable development are related to the poverty of the region, particularly in Haiti and Guyana. The other states in the region have been categorized by the World Bank and the IMF as middle income countries and, therefore, are not top priority in terms of development assistance, although there are pockets of poverty in these states. The use of biotechnology to enhance sustainable development in the region is commended.

Food security is another element of sustainable development. We are concerned about the availability of food for our people and the church is prepared to support the use of biotechnology where it enhances food security.

We are concerned about the spread of HIV/AIDS. Next to sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean has the largest incidence of HIV and AIDS and women are among the highest number affected. The churches support the work of identifying treatment for this disease, but where the testing excludes women, the churches will raise concerns.

In general, we are prepared to support any process that will serve to advance the sustainable development of the Caribbean, particularly where it relates to poverty and gender concerns.

There are four other issues that arise from my own dialogue, particularly at the university. Although they are not areas that the Caribbean Conference of Churches is looking at presently, they are areas it will have to explore and ones where scientists and other professional would welcome the contribution of the churches:

- abortion and all the issues involved; in a number of states the practice is still illegal although there are instances where it is permitted;
- premature birth – in our hospitals, we can sustain life at birth with available technology, but health care professionals, who want to do the right thing, are aware that in prolonging the life of infants who will always need care, they place great demands on all the social systems;
- end of life issues – hospitals are threatened with lawsuits because they do not have the resources to obtain the equipment to sustain people with end-of-life illnesses; this puts the health care system under pressure in its decisions as how to utilize very limited resources; and
- stem cell research is happening in the small territory of St. Lucia, using monkeys to carry out the research.

We are grateful to be part of this meeting. It is important for churches to engage in dialogue with universities and governments. We feel that it would be helpful for a communiqué to come out of this Consultation.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- It is doubtful that there are any government regulations or legal framework in St. Lucia with respect to stem cell research.
- With baby boomers moving closer to retirement, the Caribbean is an attractive living option – investors are acquiring hospital spaces in order to bring in expensive equipment specifically targeted to the retirement population, offering health care which the local people will not be able to afford (“genetic tourism”).
- The church has to be concerned for the development of our people – on the one hand we are open to whatever will help them to have a good quality of life, but in attempting to do that we will also explore the down side of new developments.
- When we are concerned about feeding our people and we are offered the means of alleviating the struggle for basic survival, even in the short term, we will consider it favourably; that is why the church needs to understand the problems of allowing “genetic tourism” in our region so that we can be a voice with our governments.
- Those who are promoting GMOs are not concerned about feeding the world; if they come to the Caribbean to test GMOs, the people on whom it is being tested

- will not benefit from the outcome; we have lived with 500 years of slavery and we know that this will not provide sustainable sources of food for our people; however, we also know that tourism, for example, is not designed to benefit the majority of the people in the Caribbean, but we have to survive – we can't just sit and fold our hands; so we will weigh the pros and the cons of GMO testing to see whether our people can benefit from it in some way; we know there is a down side, but if we feel there can be some benefit, the region may be willing to do it.
- On the question of how the churches in the Caribbean educate people about biotechnology, consider the model of HIV/AIDS; we have a number of education and communication processes in place on the ground – a network of schools, families, hospitals, governments; this model is working – HIV/AIDS infection is decreasing in Haiti; if we could develop something similar in biotechnology, we could use the same model.
 - The capacity of the churches to respond is limited to the availability of funding; the work of the Caribbean Conference of Churches with HIV/AIDS is funded to a significant degree by the Canadian International Development Agency and the World Council of Churches; areas that we identify as important but which do not attract funding cannot be addressed.
 - The universities are doing local research in agriculture to help farmers in the Caribbean in aquaculture; care is taken to ensure that they are not developing technology in one area that is harmful in another area.
 - There are studies going on in private facilities, largely funded by overseas research.
 - We cannot dismiss all approaches to biotechnology; we recognize that we are behind in understanding this area and that we must do our homework and be ready to enter the dialogue; the church needs to provide another perspective and be equipped to sit at the table.
 - There is an issue of access to food, i.e., of distribution as well as production.

Christian Conference of Asia

Dr. Rezin Cavida Bahia, DVM, provided the Consultation with a four-page outline (see Appendix 1) of a paper presented by Dr. Leonardo D. de Castro to a bioethics class in the Philippines which was titled: "Bioethics in the Asia-Pacific Region: Issues and Concerns". De Castro is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Philippines and serves on a number of professional organizations including Vice Chair, UNESCO International Bioethics Committee; Vice Chair of the Forum for Ethics Review Committees in Asia and the Western Pacific; Vice President of the Asian Bioethics Association; and Director of the Program for Curriculum Building and Intensive Training in Research Ethics sponsored by the Fogarty International Center at the University of the Philippines.

Rezin also sent, by e-mail, this assessment of the place of the churches in the areas of biotechnology: "The Church is really faced with a lot of challenges in the advent of new biotechnological breakthroughs. Churches here in our region – specifically churches in the Philippines – have not fully appreciated the ramification of biotechnological discoveries.

"Churches in this part of the world always uphold the sanctity of life and God's creation through advocacies and information and education campaigns regarding issues on

human rights, HIV/AIDS, flight of migrant workers and farmers, environmental conservation and the like.

“A few churches may sporadically tackle issues related to biotechnology. If this exists, they are focused on issues regarding the use of GMOs. To my recollection, I have not encountered a church-related program in the region directly addressing issues in the use of biotechnological technologies such as reproductive cloning and stem cell research.

“In my personal experience, I have been part of deliberations of an Ethics Committee reviewing biomedical research/clinical trials involving human subjects. It is a good practice that the clergy and layman alike be part of these ethics committees so that any new biotechnological pharmaceutical products undergo scrutiny before they are used.”

Having read the text submitted by Dr. Rezin Cavida Bahia, the participants at the Consultation discussed the content, making the following points:

- The paper is a treasure trove of information about the state of the question in the countries of Asia, but does not reveal much about where the churches are in matters of biotechnology.
- There are influential scientists and others in Asia who are part of the conversations, but do not represent their churches.
- In one or two countries, the churches are seen as important players, but in most Asian countries the Christian population is negligible.
- Elsewhere in the world, for example in the US, there is a very large Christian population but a large number are anti-ecumenical; in Europe the affiliation rate is low and diminishing, yet the churches have a voice disproportionate to their numbers; therefore the question of the churches and their voice in the civil debates is a complex logarithm which pushes not only the question of interfaith work, but the question of relationships with other organizations – the WHO, the UN, the ILO. Who are our partners?
- Deciding on how to make an impact requires different strategies in different countries; the new Prime Minister of Korea, for example, is a trained feminist theologian.
- It is very helpful to have a summary of the official guidelines on stem cell research and cloning in specific countries of the vast area of Asia with its multi-ethnic, multi-religious make-up. Consider the difference between Malaysia and the Philippines (page 4) – a clear example of the Christian/Muslim fault lines, which raises the question of the importance of interfaith conversations on these matters.
- There is confusion about the use of the word “cloning” in the paper (and perhaps in our churches); for example, reference is made to “stem cells derived by cloning” (page 3) when it is more likely that what is meant is “stem cells derived from embryos” since only a very few cloned embryos have ever been created.
- In spite of the apparent futility of efforts to stop the “trend towards greater GMO use” (page 1), civil society debates do matter and it is worth while for the churches to engage in the public debate.
- There is no reference to nanotechnology in the paper.

Pacific Conference of Churches

Mr. James Bhagwan presented the paper he had prepared for the Consultation (see Appendix 2).

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- One of the dangers in the Pacific Islands is the lack of information and transparency with regard to agreements between governments and biotechnology companies like Diatranz in New Zealand or Autogen in Australia.
- The churches need to become pro-active in responding to issues – a difficult challenge because of the lack of people educated on the issues in the churches.
- Civil society groups in the Pacific are focused on human rights, women's rights, issues concerning HIV/AIDS, Indigenous rights.
- The issues that take precedence in public discourse are often political crises rather than issues such as GMOs and other biotechnology concerns.
- In the Pacific Islands, when the church speaks on an issue, it speaks with clear authority and with the support of the people.
- The opposition of the Tonga National Council of Churches to all forms of genetic engineering is in part a reaction to the Autogen experience, as well as a long history of exploitation, and to the fact that the people do not understand the distinctions between various types and purposes of genetic engineering.
- Biotechnology remains a discipline within the universities; the churches and seminaries are not always aware of what is happening.
- Agriculture is currently sustainable in the region, but there may be an opening for GMOs because of the financial rewards offered by the corporations.

Conference of European Churches

Dr. Donald Bruce reported that the Conference of European Churches (CEC) has had a Working Group on Bioethics since 1993. CEC is a fellowship of 126 Orthodox, Protestant, and Old Catholic Churches along with 43 associated organizations from all countries on the European continent. National Councils of Churches are associate members of CEC. Its membership extends well beyond the 27 member states of the European Union, spanning the whole of Europe, roughly following the bounds of the Council of Europe. CEC was founded in 1959 and has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

The bioethics working group was originally set up under the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS). EECCS was set up in the 1980s in order to enable the Protestant churches to engage with the European institutions, especially the European Commission and Parliament and the Council of Europe, other European bodies dealing with human rights and so on. When EECCS was amalgamated with CEC to form the CEC Church and Society Commission in 1999, the bioethics group continued with a wider membership of the new body, including Orthodox representatives.

The working group currently consists of about 15 members, all of whom have some expertise relative to bioethics – scientists, doctors, theologians, and so on. Five of the group have been members since 1993, providing a valuable continuity and experience; others have been with the group for shorter periods. It is one of the most active of the CEC working groups in terms of the production of material and engagement with institutions. The working group has had official observer status on the Council of Europe's biotechnology committee for some 10 years, and has good links with the European Commission's Ethical advisory group and the European Parliament. As a result, the group's reports have often been produced in response to opportunities to

comment or submit opinions to these bodies. Its reports are therefore directed as much to the secular world as to the churches themselves.

The issues the Working Group is addressing include:

1. Council of Europe Bioethics Convention. The Council of Europe has a much broader membership (46 nations) than the European Union (27) and is the organization that produced the European Convention on Human Rights. Right at the outset of its work, the CEC working group was given the opportunity to engage with Council's Bioethics Committee in the process of drawing up a Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, commenting on the drafts and articles. Since the passing of the Convention, the CEC group was granted official observer status and two members of the group attend the six-monthly meetings in rotation. We have engaged with them on commenting on working documents and additional protocols they have produced on such areas as cloning and biotechnological research.
2. The second significant impact made by the working group was in engaging in the mid-1990s with the European Commission and Parliament in the process leading to a Directive (European legislation) on biotechnology patenting. This directive caused a great political stir in Europe. The Green NGOs ran a major opposition campaign against what they saw as 'the patenting of life'; and at first the European Parliament rejected the Directive, but it was eventually passed in 1998. The churches criticized the Directive because it was written almost entirely with industry in mind (to enable the European biotech industry to compete abroad), but took little account of the major ethical issues raised in extending the scope of patents to include genetically modified life forms and human genes. The churches took the position that genes in themselves should not be subject of patents, because they are part of God's creation for the common good, and are in any case discoveries and not inventions. A patent might be allowed on the legitimate use of a gene in an invention, but never the gene itself. Similarly, the use of a truly novel genetic construct in an animal might be patented, but not the modified animal itself. Merely adding a couple of genes did not constitute inventing a mouse. Members of the European Parliament commented that, amid the opposing campaigning rhetorics of the bioindustry and NGOs, the careful and informed ethical analysis of the CEC group was much appreciated.
3. We have written reports on a number of issues in assisted reproduction.
4. The CEC group also makes use of work done within member churches. The Church of Scotland's Society of Religion and Technology Project did major work in the UK on GM food issues and animals in the 1990's, and engaged with scientists involved with the cloning of Dolly, the sheep. As a result the Church of Scotland was in a position to give an immediate and informed view on the ethics of cloning. It was able to feed this analysis into the CEC Working Group, which was in turn able to produce a report on animal and human cloning with a consensus by the whole group. This was then able to become an official report of CEC.
5. In some areas, however, there is a diversity of views within the group, so that a consensus cannot be reached. An example of this is on embryonic stem cells, where Orthodox and many Protestant views differ on the moral status of the human embryo. Here, the Working Group was able to produce only a discussion document which lays out the different views but does not come to a single conclusion. The diversity of the report reflected differences among European citizens, and its non-dogmatic style of

discussing the issues was unexpectedly welcomed by the European institutions wrestling with the same issues.

6. One of its most recent reports was on predictive medicine, genetic testing and diagnosis. This relates to the gene - therapy gap. Many genes are being identified which show a predisposition to some disease, but it may be a very long time before this leads to any therapy. This means although one may have a genetic test it is not clear whether or not knowing the information in advance of having symptoms is actually of use or is a burden, if you can do little about it. If we are able to know so much information, is there anyone now who is well? Categorizing genes as defective of normal can lead to using genetics excessively as a definition of a human being. As Christian we say that the worth of a person is that all alike are made in God's image not how far they conform to normality at a genetic level.
7. The Working Group is currently working on various questions to do with ageing. The average age of the European population is increasing, and this raises social and ethical questions, particularly as more people are getting into the 'very old' age group when the body's systems are declining. Yet research into degenerative diseases of old age is helping more people to live into this stage of life, which can also lead to debate on euthanasia. We also discuss the different worth of elderly people as seen in Eastern compared with Western Europe, and the role of the churches can play in promoting the value of life at all ages. It also raises questions for the future of the health care systems and how to prioritize the disbursement of funds. We hope to produce a report on ageing by the end of 2006.
8. A longer term area of work is that of human 'enhancement' – can you go beyond medicine and make 'better' people?

What are the challenges before us?

- Within CEC, there are Working Groups in many areas so we have the challenge of how to communicate with those who are working in related fields, like agriculture or human rights.
- Across Europe there is a great diversity in the degree of engagement to which churches are engaging with these areas.
- One of the delights and challenges of a European working group is to learn to understand and work with the great diversity of national cultures, confessional situations and roles vis-à-vis the state. There are major differences in the roles that particular churches plays in their countries – in some a Protestant denomination may be the state church, in another the same denomination may be a small minority in a largely Catholic or Orthodox country, and vice versa. In some countries the church plays a major national ethical role; in others it is marginal in a mostly secularized state.
- Different theological perspectives can result in differing positions on such things as GMOs, differences that are not a simple function of confessional or national differences.
- The level of engagement by the churches differs from country to country. With all these differences, we ask: Who are we speaking to? To the people? The churches? Industry?

In Europe, the world of science and technology does not generally expect relevant and knowledgeable input from the churches. So the church has to earn the right to speak, which demands expertise and knowledge. When the church does speak, its position has

to be carefully nuanced and informed so that its voice will be taken seriously in the scientific community.

The genetically modified food crisis in Europe caused the scientific community to realize that it was seriously out of step with the culture. This is an opportunity for civil society, including the churches, to influence policy. We need to identify where Christian truths resonate with the wider society. At the same time, we have to recognize that there are times, as with the issue of patenting, where Christian truths do not resonate with civil society and we have to say, "We simply believe that that what you are proposing is wrong."

Donald distributed two documents: a list of published reports from the Working Group on Bioethics of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (see Appendix 3); and a Position Paper titled "A Theological Framework for Bioethics" which describes how the CEC group approaches the task of bioethics within the variety of its cultural and theological contexts (see Appendix 4). The texts of all the reports are available at <http://www.cec-kek.org>.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- The Catholic church is not part of CEC; the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) has an equivalent committee to our Working Group; we have shared together on some issues and especially at a bioethics conference organized by CEC in 2003.
- Euthanasia is a controversial issue in several European countries. One key question is the understand the different meanings which may be used by the term and their different theological implications, for example between switching off a life support machine and actively helping someone to commit suicide.
- In addition to national patent laws, there is also the European Patent Convention originally produced in 1973 to enable countries to have Europe-wide protection from a patent. In 1998, a directive from the European Commission was passed to harmonize the patent legislations. The directive has a number of complex articles.
- Another valuable publication is *The Ethics of Patenting DNA A discussion paper* published in 2002 by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics (28 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3JS www.nuffieldbioethics.org).

National Council of Churches of Christ, USA

Clare Chapman distributed two documents: (1) "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: A Policy on Human Biotechnologies" an intermediate draft of a document that will be presented to the 2006 General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA; and (2) an accompanying study document in support of "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" (see <http://www.ncccusa.org/news/051111BioTech.html>). Clare's report to the Consultation is made on behalf of the Human Biotechnology Policy Committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

NCCC is made up of 35 member churches representing some 50 million Christians in the U.S. The Catholic church is not a member but participates in programs of the Council.

Policy statements are developed and approved in two successive General Assemblies. “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” was presented for first reading in November 2005; it was amended based on feedback from that Assembly and subsequent input. The final text of the policy statement will come to the November 2006 Assembly for approval.

Policy statements are broader statements by the member churches of the National Council. They can have derivative documents on narrower issues. A derivative document could be a resolution on a particular item that is only briefly referred to in the broad policy statement. It is expected that policy statements be applicable for about 10 years and that derivative documents would be for shorter periods, subject to retraction or updating. The Study Guide is the first of the derivative documents related to “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”. A CD and curriculum materials are also in production so that the programmatic application of the policy will be in place when the policy is approved.

In the introduction to “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” reference is made to a policy approved in 1986 titled “Genetic Science for Human Benefit”. This policy deals with all genetic science. The current document is a revision of the section of that document dealing with human biotechnology, but does not contradict the 1968 policy. Applications relating to agriculture are important to Church World Service and Relief, a part of the National Council General Assembly, and to the member churches relief efforts around the world. In the near future, it is likely that that portion of the 1986 policy will also be addressed and updated.

The General Assembly in 2000 established a Feasibility Committee to explore whether a new policy statement on human biotechnology was required. On its recommendation, a committee was named – a diverse group including Orthodox representation. The Committee did its work over a two-year period, knowing that when crafting a statement for over 35 churches representing 50 million Christians there will be some areas where consensus cannot be achieved. The Committee determined early on where it could reach consensus – these appear in the document as affirmations everyone could agree to; there are also a couple of places where Committee members agreed to disagree.

Basically there is no legislation regulating these technologies in the U.S. There is no federal statute or case law requiring minimal standards for reproductive technologies or genetic science. In 2003, President George W. Bush limited stem cell research to a specific set of lines. With federal funding frozen, a number of states have provided funding to entice the industry, some through tax benefits, to bring jobs to their area along with scientists and technologists.

In the absence of regulations and with such enticements, the member churches are being drawn into this debate. When new developments, such as Dolly the cloned sheep, become news, the churches are called upon to make statements about the ethical and moral dimensions of what is happening. The churches see this as an opportunity to make an ecumenical response. Some of the churches have multiple statements on the issues while others may have one or none at all. The policy statements of the Council, therefore, serve different purposes for different churches.

Whenever there is a scientific breakthrough and comments are sought from the churches, it is the more conservative voices and televangelists such as Gerry Falwell and Pat Robertson who are heard. The National Council of Churches is more ‘centrist’ than conservative which leaves some 50 million voices not being heard in the debates.

The churches also had to deal with a “knee jerk reaction” – if Gerry Falwell is against it, I’m probably for it – which is not an informed scientific position. There is also the dynamic from the 1980s which saw the religious right identified with the Republican party, reflected as well in the Bush administration. President Regan’s long, slow death of Alzheimer’s disease, coupled with Nancy Regan’s pleading with the government and with Americans to support stem cell research, further engages some who are not really involved in the conversation. All of this becomes part of the secular backdrop against which the churches are coming forward with this statement.

It should not just be scientists and doctors and researchers who speak but also the voice of the churches, women, the poor and young people need to be heard and the church is the vehicle for all these voices to be at the table.

Highlights of significant content in “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: A Policy on Human Biotechnologies” include:

Section I The Committee felt strongly that it needed to start from a theological understanding of the work: “The member communions of the National Council of Churches join their voices together precisely to help put ethical, as well as theological concerns to the fore. Our churches are united in opposing cloning for human reproduction, and in wanting safeguards for ‘regenerative’ medicine. This policy statement is meant as a guide for our members and as a witness to our values in a complex and fast-moving debate” (lines 14-19). The Committee said this right up front, in the second paragraph, to set out the basis for going forward.

Committee Members worshipped together and worked very hard to live out the belief that “Our approach must be one of reverence, humility and deliberation ...” (line 21 ff). They also address in this section the concerns of those with disabilities and issues of justice in church and society – poverty, justice for women, environmental justice and a response to the urban crisis. “Without an awareness of current injustices in our culture and others, any advance in therapeutic (much less reproductive) biotechnologies threatens to enlarge current social divisions and create new ones.” (lines 48-50)

Section II “The Church’s Calling” deals with issues of faith and science, biotechnology and ethics, and pastoral care (member churches were clear that it was urgent to equip pastors and lay ministers to deal with these questions, to provide them with an informed response).

Section III “Key Challenges for Church Engagement” addresses stem cell research, embryonic stem cell research, the perception of disability, the conduct of the biotechnology industry (access, privacy, informed consent, adequate regulation, and patenting), and the fabric of the commonweal and the future.

Section IV “Recommendations” address various constituencies beginning with the NCCC General Assembly’s own resolve to undertake a series of actions. Then follows a series of recommendations addressed in turn to (a) its member communions; (b) congregations of its member communions; (c) recommendations to priests, pastors and others serving congregations; (d) recommendations addressed to the theological seminaries of member

communities and others engaged in theological education; and (f) recommendations to medical practitioners, health care professionals and researchers.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- The Glossary of Genetics in the Study Guide has still to be edited and modified.
- One issue on which the Council can engage with evangelical Christians is on global warming.
- A new organization called Christian Churches Together in the USA is a broader ecumenical table which includes Evangelical and Pentecostal churches – hopefully a place where we can engage with these churches.
- The National Association of Evangelical churches has a one-page policy statement on stem cells and essentially holds all other biotechnologies hostage to the stem cell question; the Orthodox, who would take a similar stand on stem cell issues, agreed to the text of “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” because they wished to support regulation of stem cell research.
- In the context of the U.S., the section in this policy on the conduct of the biotechnology industry is a strong political statement, particularly to the industry.

Latin America Council of Churches

Dr. Elizabeth Ivete Sherill addressed the Consultation on behalf of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) and distributed a copy of her text, “Sharing our Needs and Concerns” (see Appendix 5). The content of her paper is the result of her conversations with the two Secretaries of the CLAI, which has two regions. Rev. Israel Baptista is the General Secretary of the Council and Rev. Luiz Caetano Grecco Teixeira is the Secretary for the Region of Brazil within CLAI.

CLAI has not been engaged in biotechnology issues, but it is most interested in what is happening and keen to receive resources from this Consultation. The churches get many questions on how to respond ethically to these issues, and General Secretary Baptista is aware that the CLAI needs more education in order to respond.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- GMO crops are grown in Argentina.
- Civil society in Brazil is very active and the press has become critical of failures to enforce environmental regulations; as a result the people are becoming distrustful of GMOs, which may cost the producers a market.
- Activists are disappointed in the Lula government as they had hoped that it would fight more strenuously against Monsanto.
- The plantations in the west of Brazil are huge and very influential.
- Farmers who sow GMO crops are not concerned about future problems caused by planting genetically modified seeds even though they will contaminate existing crops and seeds.
- Poor people in the areas of these large plantations experience some improvement in their quality of life – a school is built, for example, so it is hard for them to question the long-term costs.
- Some states in Brazil, such as Parana, are resisting the spread of GMO soya by strictly enforcing licensing and other government regulations; Monsanto is not happy with this.
- The human aspects of biotechnology are less well-known in Brazil; the Catholic church doesn't have an official position.

- We need basic, popular-education style materials in order to educate the people; funding is a problem; most church funding goes into social programs.
- Brazil recently lifted a prohibition against embryonic stem cell research, allowing it on embryos that have been frozen for more than three years.
- Public information is needed; churches and humanitarian NGOs must become involved with educating the people on the ethical and moral implications of this research.
- The churches reach into the remotest areas of the country and can be effective agents of education.

Canadian Council of Churches

Rev. Dr. Richard Crossman explained that the Canadian Council of Churches represents 20 member denominations from many traditions – Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Presbyterian, United Church, Lutheran, Friends, Mennonite, Baptist, Salvation Army, etc. It has two Commissions, Faith and Witness and Justice and Peace.

In 1999, the Canadian Council of Churches convened a conference on biotechnology (Donald Bruce and Richard Crossman were among the presenters at it), from which a book was produced on the topic. Following that, the Governing Board created the Biotechnology Reference Group which is part of both Commissions. All the member churches are invited to send a representative to the Biotechnology Reference Group.

Since its creation, the Biotechnology Reference Group (initially chaired by Stephen Allen and more recently by Richard Crossman) has convened conferences in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Montreal and Toronto to provide educational opportunities for the churches, government officials, academics and lay people.

The terms of reference of the Biotechnology Reference Group are to study and educate. However, the Governing Board permitted it to advocate in the oncomouse case – an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada on the application for a patent on the mouse that had been genetically modified by Harvard University for use in cancer research. The Canadian Council of Churches in partnership with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada were interveners before the Supreme Court. The appeal overturned a lower court ruling which would have allowed Harvard to patent in Canada the whole genetic makeup of the oncomouse.

The Governing Board also permitted the Biotechnology Reference Group to participate in the proceedings of the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee (CBAC), a committee which advises seven federal government ministries in Canada on issues of biotechnology.

CCC and the Biotechnology Reference Group work on a forum model – an action-reflection model. Votes are not taken. Action only happens once there is consensus, which may occur for different reasons for different bodies. The forum concept has enabled the Roman Catholic church to be a member of the Canadian Council of Churches.

The Biotechnology Reference Group has produced resources such as *Life, Patent Pending* (arising from the oncomouse case and written by people from different denominations) in order to inform congregations and educational institutions of the

issues involved. The public school system in Newfoundland has adopted this material for their high school curriculum. Another resource, produced by the Faith and Witness Commission in coordination with the Biotechnology Reference Group, is a theological anthropology booklet called *Becoming Human*.

As chair of the Biotechnology Reference Group, I have met with the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Committee. This gives the church a more direct connection with the government policy making than happens in many places. A Roman Catholic, Suzanne Scorsone, a member of the Biotechnology Reference Group, was a member of the Canadian government's Royal Commission on Reproductive Technologies. A Quaker (Religious Society of Friends), Anne Mitchell, also a member of the Biotechnology Reference Group, is a member of CBAC itself. As chair of the Biotechnology Reference Group, I was invited to attend the most recent meeting of CBAC in Montreal, a gathering of experts among the stakeholders at which strategies for biotechnology in Canada for the next 25 years were under discussion.

Among the directions being considered by the Canadian government, on the advice of CBAC are these:

- the belief that there are six drivers in biotechnology issues in Canada: patient focused medicine, nanotechnology, vaccine technology, regenerative medicine, convergence methods between various resources, and the processing of increasingly large amounts of biotechnology data;
- that Canada needs to work out partnerships with developing countries in the area of biotechnology, especially in societal and ethical areas; for example, the need to work out ethically consistent protocols for drug testing and research by Canadian bodies pursuing their work outside of Canada so that they do so according to no less than Canadian guidelines;
- that Canada will aim for international leadership in regulating the area of biotechnology; develop effective commercialization that is ethically sensitive; help generate effective investment risk capital for future biotechnology research and development; help to meet the biotechnology needs of developing countries; expand the cooperation and support offered by CIDA in the area of biotechnology; and revisit the regulation protocols that currently exist.

The last point is a concern for the CCC because this may again raise questions around patenting. In a patent case between Monsanto Canada and a Saskatchewan farmer, Percy Schmeiser, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld Monsanto's patent on canola seeds and plants. Plants grown from Monsanto's genetically modified canola seed were found in Schmeiser's fields – a result of wind blown contamination, according to Schmeiser.

Monsanto claimed Schmeiser had violated their patent – raising the question: Are not Monsanto's canola seeds and plants "whole living things" as in the oncomouse case? Monsanto had genetically modified the seed and had a right to patent that technology, but did it "invent" canola seed itself? The Supreme Court made opposite decisions in these two patent cases. Therefore, there is a concern that there will be an effort by some to revise patent laws to favour greater ease in patenting "whole living things".

The Biotechnology Reference Group will undertake work on patent regulations and protocols for genetic financing, and coordinating research and concerns about commodification, including animal and plant pharmacological research.

Other issues which could emerge for consideration by the Biotechnology Reference Group include:

- genetically modified foods and the right to collect seeds by farmers in Canada and in other countries;
- nanotechnology, which currently is totally market-driven, i.e., there appear to be no regulatory protocols in place;
- aquafarming – Canadian fisheries have almost died and the problems of contamination in aquafarming is a great concern.

Among the challenges faced by the Biotechnology Reference Group faces are the following:

- funding for education and ethically responsible research for the public common good;
- keeping up with new advances;
- creating a world-wide network for assisting one another;
- continuing to give the church a voice in the formation of public policy;
- assessing the policy direction of the new minority government in Canada; we have no idea where it stands on biotechnology issues;
- while the CCC publishes in both official languages, the Reference Group lacks Francophone speakers and contact with Francophone theologians in Quebec.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- In reviewing the Supreme Court decision on patenting seeds, an expert agronomist concluded that, in her opinion, the judges were not fully aware of the biotechnological issues and agricultural dynamics of canola propagation in force when making their decision.
- The member churches of the Council are responsible for educational endeavours in their own congregations.
- The most effective way to influence government policy is to have personal and professional contacts with key figures in government decision-making or on advisory bodies.
- The Biotechnology Reference Group has produced a set of guidelines for approaching biotechnology matters. These guidelines were adopted by the Governing Board of the Canadian Council of Churches at its fall 2005 meeting.

World Council of Churches

Professor Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm presented the biotechnology work of the World Council of Churches, which is undertaken through its Human Genetics Group (the majority of members are from the North) and its Genetics and Agriculture Group (the majority of members are from the South). See Appendix 6.

The World Council of Churches dealt with biotechnology issues as early as 1970 but there was a long gap after 1989. The WCC did not even have a press release when US President Clinton announced the human genome project in 2000.

The WCC Human Genetics group was formed in 2001, made up of people from member churches whom Martin Robra knew were experts in their fields and invited to serve in that capacity, rather than as representatives of their churches. The first meeting of the group was scheduled for September 13, 2001 – two days after 9/11. The work of the group was impacted by limits on funding and by the fact that its membership changed with some frequency and rarely met with all members present.

The final texts arising from this work were adopted by the Central Committee and presented at the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2006. They are available on the WCC web site: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/ecology.html. The title of the document in its published form is *Genetics, Agriculture and Human Life*. Other titles in the series include *Climate Change* and *Convergent Technologies* (dealing with nanotechnologies). Another important WCC publication is from Faith and Order, *Christian Perspective on Theological Anthropology*.

In Porto Alegre, the challenge was to get the attention of the wider ecumenical community for biotechnology issues among the other agendas that the WCC has to deal with – globalization, the unity of the churches, the Decade to Overcome Violence, and so on. There was no plenary session on biotechnology but there was an ecumenical conversation which at least some of the delegates could attend. In each one, there was a reporter to the Central Committee which will meet in September and make decisions on priorities for program work in the next years. It will be important that this area of work, which is so important to the member churches, is increasingly recognized by the Central Committee.

A critique of the commodification of human life connects the concerns of the North and the South in dealing with the new biotechnologies. Surfing the internet for American reproduction clinics' home pages reveals the extent of such commodification which violates the very core of human dignity.

This commodification is global and expresses itself in many ways – including the issues raised by GMOs. A challenge for the WCC is to be able to lead a discussion about globalization between the North and South. At Porto Alegre, there was insufficient time to engage in a thorough conversation about the reformist paradigms of the North and the more fundamentally critical approaches of the South arising from their particular experiences of the consequences of globalization.

The following are among the points made in the response to this presentation:

- Donald helped the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ghana in 2004 to prepare a paper laying out some basic ethical issues arising in biotechnology for future discussion, although the main focus of the ethical discussions were issues of economic injustice and environmental damage.
- Regulatory issues are extremely important. Two options are (1) "Let's liberalize everything because if we don't allow it, they will just go to Singapore;" and (2) spark a world-wide civil society debate to work towards world-wide regulations (after the model of Australia's decision to become a nuclear-free nation, for example; or the creation of an indemnity fund required from companies like Monsanto to be held against as yet unknown consequences of GMO seeds).
- The churches have a unique situation in terms of both their international presence and their presence in even the smallest communities around the world.
- In terms of prioritizing a fight against the exploitation of women, the effects of poverty and marginalization seem greater than the issue of "designer babies" in the First World.
- Issues may differ from country to country, but common questions can be asked: Does this technology advance the common good? Does this technology uphold human dignity? Does this technology "do no harm"? These questions can be asked of both human and non-human technologies.

- It is important that each of the groups represented at this Consultation speak with their own representative on the Central Committee to secure interest and support for the work in biotechnology.

Tuesday, May 9, 2006 and Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Morning worship on Tuesday was led by Mary, Sleiman and Heinrich. On Wednesday, Richard and James led worship. Stephen and Clare shared the responsibility of moderating the sessions.

Emerging commonalities and differences

- These new technologies are not just technologies but also a matter of ethics and our Christian faith. We turn to similar places theologically – being created in the image of God, the meaning of Creation, the reality and the power of evil.
- One participant saw the need to assess these technologies in light of their effects on those who are most vulnerable. Our basic ethical criteria is not ideological – it seeks to understand the complexities of the technical, economic, political, social dimensions while holding the needs of the most vulnerable in particular concern.
- Another stated that before discussing such issues about the *consequences* of technology the first theological question that needs to be asked is one of *principle*, “Is this intrinsically a wrong technology? Did God intend for human beings to be doing these things?” Then the question of what effects the technology will have and who will be most affected can be asked.
- It is important to remain in conversation with those who develop these technologies in order to understand the risks and the possibilities as we reach conclusions. However, we differ in our relationship to scientists and the scientific community – in some churches, science is seen as more of a threat.
- The ability of the churches to participate in civil society discourse, to communicate directly with governments, and to affect government policy varies enormously from one region to another.
- We approach these technologies as both blessing and bane, seeing great potential as well as great challenge in them. We hold out great hope that, through the gift of God which is rationality and the sciences, suffering can be alleviated, starvation can be addressed, and so forth.
- At the same time, we have to specify which technologies have such potential from those that are more of a challenge – GMOs, for example, have problematic benefits from the viewpoint of the South.
- We have a different emphasis between the North and South on human, animal and agricultural applications, as well as on which technologies most impact us.
- These are emerging concerns for all of us, unlike times when we have had issues in the ecumenical world that were very well known in the North but less so in the South, or vice versa. In this instance, we have an opportunity for a common analysis at the outset.
- These issues are closely related to economic globalization. Sometimes the ecumenical movement finds itself arrayed against the powers and principalities.

In this case it is the power of international corporations that are an enormous challenge.

- Economic globalization relates to some issues but not to others. GMOs have a major impact on globalization. We need to challenge the claim that we need GMOs to feed the world. In the stem cell field, the commercial, aspects so far only play a small role, at least in Europe. Because the technology is still in its early stages and is very uncertain, many companies are waiting to see if the promise of the technology will be realized in practice. Most stem cell research is so far in the public domain.
- A lot of the primary research is done in the public sector, but that research is often used by the private sector. How are resources distributed between public and private interests?
- The rich developing countries, where the basic research is happening, are isolated from countries which may want to do applied research but don't have the means to do so. There is a vast difference in resources between the North and the South for research and development.
- There needs to be a special concern for gender issues and the needs of women in doing this research.
- A commonality I heard was for basic education in the churches on issues of science. The churches feel a need and responsibility to speak and have the potential to speak globally as one voice, but in order to be heard, they have a responsibility to become as knowledgeable as possible.
- In speaking globally, we risk saying something bland because of the different contexts. Whatever we say, the context is important. There are some things we can say globally but we also need to speak locally.
- We are united in our objection to human cloning.
- We are concerned about gene patenting and issues around human enhancement.
- Do we agree that early human life is not a 'thing' but that from the beginning human life has a worth? How does this impact our position on the use of embryos for research? While embryos have status and some conditions need to be applied to their use in research, there is the concern that we become too rigid.
- Responsible regulation needs to be pursued globally – it may vary from place to place, but it is a common concern.
- We need to establish a common vocabulary as we have different understandings of some terms.

Work of other ecumenical colleagues

- The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (USA) looks at the conduct of multinationals with its own set of priorities and issues.
- In some regions, the interfaith reality will bring other voices to the table.
- The other Christian World Communions are also working on the issues of biotechnology.
- Brazil is predominantly Catholic. The issues of abortion and where life begins, for example, are not open to discussion. The Latin American Council of Churches finds that these are very delicate issues to deal with.
- The response of the Pontifical Council on the Promotion of Christian Unity to an invitation to send someone at this Consultation was that sending someone to an

ecumenical discussion would bring to the table someone with a doctrinal base when the rest are operating from an ecumenical base. However, they are interested in working through the Joint Working Group. The first rule of ecumenism is that participants define themselves. At its recent consultation on biotechnology, the Vatican defined a very broad range of interests in this area.

TESTING THE FEASIBILITY OF A CONFERENCE

Emerging topics to shape the agenda for a conference

- stem cell research and related issues (human genetics, genetic testing)
- biomedical research
- patenting
- integrity of creation
- equity issues (women, children, the poor)
- GMOs in agriculture
- human enhancement
- global regulatory requirements
- convergence of human technologies
- cloning
- the connection between biotechnology and the economy, globalization
- HIV and AIDS
- power, greed
- anthropology and theology
- beginning of life issues
- end of life issues
- justice and ethics
- risk, uncertainty and precaution

This list was clustered into the following categories:

- (1) GMOs
- (2) stem cells and cloning
- (3) human genetics
- (4) topics that cut across the issues such as globalization, risk, patenting, regulation, ethics, anthropology, theology, etc.

Opportunities/expectations/outcomes of an international conference

- The need for a conference is critical because of the need for a catalyst to enable all the churches to become engaged. Some of the issues we face in the developing world are not new, but we need opportunities to present our case, to have our positions heard.
- Holding the conference will be the occasion for a unified voice from the churches. Through it, we will say to the world that the churches are a stakeholder to be reckoned with. In this age of globalization, the conference would enable the churches to exercise their reach on a global scale, using their diverse networks.
- The work of Christian unity is a goal in itself and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity always has a theme and accompanying materials. It would be wonderful to produce a reflection that a pastor anywhere around the world could use in a sermon dealing with the issue of biotechnology.
- It would also be good to have a pastoral moment to remember those who are affected by biotechnologies such as Percy Schmeiser, the farmer who lost the

- patent infringement battle with Monsanto. Could there be some way in which he – and others like him all over the world – would know that they are not alone but that the churches are remembering and concerned for them.
- My hope is that we begin a network that supports the churches who have limited access to resources. As individuals working in churches we cannot keep up with all the science and theology involved.
 - I look forward to getting a sense of the landscape of the ethical concerns and the biotechnology interests and involvement around the world, comparable to what we have experienced here.
 - My hope is that we prepare a written document, an education tool, so that people in every region can know what is happening in other regions.
 - It takes a great deal of time to prepare a communiqué – we need to think through the logistics of how it would happen. It might be helpful to draft it in advance
 - We can assume there will be press coverage and the danger of not having a communiqué is that the press coverage becomes the statement about the conference.
 - A communiqué can be shared with people in our regions after the conference. It doesn't speak for the churches but to the churches, and perhaps through the churches but at their own discretion.
 - There needs to be a formal report of the work that is done at the conference – along the model of this Consultation – so that it can be an on-going resource, providing a look at the religious and secular landscape.
 - The products that can emerge from the conference are (1) a compendium of what is being done internationally; (2) a communiqué and report identified by a date and a city to mark it in history; (3) the launch of an engagement on the issues with the principalities and powers.
 - My greatest hope is that the work on biotechnology would become a fixed desk and function within the WCC and one of its functions would be to assist each region, as a priority matter, to have a conference of its own.
 - The ecumenical movement needs to be strengthened, especially in the South. The South has issues which are distinct from the North.
 - I hope that we would get a firm commitment from the church leaders to support what we are trying to do. For example, each regional office could have an intern working on biotechnology. Ideally we should have a staff person in each region who could do this work.
 - One option regarding capacity might be identifying a person from a partner organization who could be seconded to do this work for a period of time.
 - If it is not the WCC, there needs to be some central place for dissemination of information and support for the regions.
 - We need to consider working with the seminaries/theological institutions as a centre for information, a 'clearing house.' It would be helpful to have some place or person where knowledge of issues for a region would be housed.

Funding an international conference

The role of the World Council of Churches

This may be a first occasion to see what decentralized ecumenism would look like. We see the WCC as contributing its corporate status, infrastructure, office space, translation services, and its institutional capacity in such matters as indemnification, insurance, the ability to get visas for participants, to receive funds and handle an audit at the conclusion of the conference. The WCC can also publish the documents, utilize its distribution system, and house archival material at the end of the event.

We also need to set out what the regions are bringing to the initiative, including funding for the conference as well as contract staff, the outcomes of this Consultation in terms of the shape and vision for the international meeting, and the expertise of regional staffs.

Not all the member churches of the WCC are part of, or in relationship with, their regional councils. For example, the complex structure of the African church may have members who won't feel the All Africa Council of Churches speaks for them. We will need to work through the issues and tolerate ambiguities.

Resources from the regions

- As an expression of decentralized ecumenism, we need to take an inventory of what each region could offer to planning and carrying out a conference. When these contributions are known, combined with what the WCC can offer, we will know if proceeding with the conference is feasible.
- The Canadian Council of Churches is committed to working towards a conference and seeking resources as necessary.
- CEC has experience in how to approach many of these issues and could make that available; CEC may also be able to offer some administrative support.
- NCCCUSA has networks as well as both capacity and considerable expertise in fundraising.
- Germany has human resources, although the German churches are struggling financially.
- Our denominations may have funds that could assist people in being able to attend the conference.
- The European Commission might help in funding people from Third World countries. This would not be a contribution from a single government – accepting money from government agencies could be problematic.
- The Lutheran World Federation may have funds to enable people to come to a conference.
- The work that has been done in regions in recent years is an asset, as is the diversity of worship and traditions.
- We have connections to theological schools – to people who teach these issues and people who are learning about these issues; likewise we have connections to people on our own Councils and our own denominations who are dealing with these issues.

External funders

Eileen addressed the participants on the matter of external funders. She has worked with two private benevolent foundations whose original purposes related to the environmental movement and are now engaged as well in biotechnology. These are people who urge caution in the application of biotechnologies – both human and plant life. They are concerned that the new genetics may be a euphemism for the old eugenics. They are interested in the role of the faith communities in these matters, but are not much connected with them. They believe that the faith communities could take

their concerns from a loosely confederated endeavour to a world-wide movement because the churches have the infrastructure to do that.

These foundations recognize that there is a reductionism in secular humanism that asks why there should be any reservation about germ lines, about human enhancement, and so on. Eileen is not recommending that they attend the conference, but it would be wise to be aware of who we work with in the various regions. Like it or not, we have a midwifery role. Eileen posed the question: Who are the people like that in your regions?

At this early juncture of relating to foundations, we have moral authority with them and we have to be good stewards of that and think about how we wish to relate to this emerging movement. Traditionally the churches have been an add-on to the environmental movement. This is a signal that there is a recognition that the churches have a contribution in their own right and not simply to assist with a campaign, for example.

In this new style of ecumenism, there will be new partnerships from among those who used to be outside the bounds of how we wanted to operate. One of the sources of money for this conference is going to be from groups that have funded environmental work.

The Canadian government funds relief and development programs submitted by churches. For example, the Canadian Lutheran World Relief receives matching grants from the Canadian International Development Agency. It is possible that this conference could be eligible for a matching grant from the Canadian government.

The Pacific Conference of Churches relies on funding from Australia or the UN for work that is in line with their funding criteria. A partner agency, the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy provides the theological perspective in the NGO community. However, the relationship between church and government is negative.

In Brazil, the relationship between church and government is closer. The current Minister of the Environment is a Catholic. The most likely source of government, or other funding, in Brazil would come from money earmarked for the environmental movement. The Catholic church in Brazil is active in this area as it relates to the poor, such as the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (Pastoral Land Commission).

We have to be aware of moral issues behind possible avenues of funding. Each of our bodies has different criteria for where we go for funding. Garth reported that his bishop is always skeptical of funding agents whose *modus operandi* are not in the best interests of the Christian faith. We would not be seeking funding from pharmaceutical corporations, biotech firms, or their foundations.

Alternatives to a global conference

- It is more a question of what could be done in addition to a global conference which will raise the profile of the concern of the churches on a global stage. The conference will make other means of communication more viable. For example, now that we've met face-to-face at this Consultation, it is easier to extend the discussion via the internet.
- Whatever we do, it is important – certainly for North America – to provide the opportunity for online participation. There are possibilities for long-distance

participation on-line, not as a replacement for attendance in person, but an opportunity for a greater number of people to feel connected with what is going on.

- It is difficult to get a sense of the give and take of the issues when you work on line. If this is an important component, it needs to be factored into the planning process itself in order that it work as well as possible.

Framework for an international Christian ecumenical conference on biotechnology

Time: Late 2007 or early 2008

Location: Factors to be taken into account in determining a location include cost for the venue and for travel; accessibility; ease of obtaining visas; language; and the needs of the local church. Some funders attach expectations about the location of an event. The WCC has organized a number of global conferences in the South and would have good advice about the choice of a geographic location and venue. North America would probably not be a good choice due to the difficulty in obtaining visas.

Length: After some discussion, it was felt that an optimum length of time for the conference would be four nights and three days, excluding travel time. The final decision (including whether or not a weekend would be involved) will have to be made by a planning committee as so many variables come into play – the availability of a suitable meeting place, responsible use of financial resources, travel arrangements, and so on.

There were diverging views on the advisability of building into the conference opportunities to experience the locale where the event is held. Suggestions included the possibility of connecting with the church or churches in the region.

Size: 60 to 80 participants, depending on funding (with an estimate of needing to raise \$1,000 per participant; \$75,000 is probably the maximum that can be raised in this time frame.)

Participants: The following points were made in a discussion about the composition of participants at the conference:

- The presentations from the Councils of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific made it clear that these churches want to become more engaged in the issues of biotechnology. We should look for maximum participation from these regions so that people can go back and take leadership.
- The conference should be for people in leadership in the churches and ecumenical agencies who need to understand why this is a challenge the church should take up.
- Participants should be people in the more pastoral areas of the church rather than those in leadership who tend to be more political.
- The people who need to be at the table are people who are passionate about the issue of the church and biotechnology and are natural multipliers.
- CLAI would want to have people there who are in daily contact with the poor and who have to have answers to the questions raised around biotechnology.
- We need young people to be there – such as divinity students.

- I think we should not do anything to attract scientists; we are looking for an ecumenical encounter.
- Some might be willing to come as observers at their own cost. A caution is that this would mean that the First World would probably outnumber the developing countries.
- In assisting those who don't have capacity, it would be better for a church to donate funds rather than underwrite the cost of sending people so that everyone comes to the table on the same basis.
- Whom do we involve beyond the WCC and its regions? The Christian World Communions? Catholics are not part of the WCC and we don't want to exclude them. This could be addressed through regional councils who have Catholic members; or through the Joint Working Group.

During a detailed conversation on the question of interfaith participation/observers at the conference, the following points were made:

- We need to have this conversation among the Christian churches first; we ought to make this a Christian ecumenical conference with the lingua franca being Christian theology; the focus of a subsequent conference might be interfaith work on biotechnology.
 - Much depends on the location of the conference; if it is in a Muslim country, we definitely have to include people of that faith.
 - Although it is demanding to persevere with interfaith conversations, it is something we must do.
 - The presence of interfaith observers would enable us to test our own perceptions; these would not be practitioners, but people who could help us to understand the degree to which our theological reflection complements their perceptions from their own theological perspectives; where does it complement their faith experience and where does it present a problem to that faith tradition? This would make them a resource to the conference.
 - Later, when we engage with people of other faiths, it will be beneficial to have had their presence among us at the conference.
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- We need to think carefully about the role of observers; will they have a place on the agenda? Or told beforehand that they will be not have an official role?
 - One option for observers would be the use of a track system which would allow participants – scientists, pastors, theologians – to meet with colleagues.
 - Another approach is to hold plenary sessions within the Christian tradition, but in addition have papers or workshops with different foci.
 - An interfaith observer may speak on his own behalf and not as a spokesperson for his/her religious tradition.
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- Funders are more likely to be concerned about the implications of biotechnology and want to explore what the faith communities can add to the civil discourse than with ecumenism as such; they do not wish to bankroll something which will touch off religious disputes or the possibility of introducing political issues into the conference.

There was an extensive discussion of the role of aid agencies such as Action by Churches Together International (the WCC development agency) and national church aid agencies at the conference. These agencies are often on the front lines, daily struggling with such issues as GMOs (and sometimes allied with

industry which contributes seed for a tax credit), intensification in agriculture, and many other issues that are relevant to a conference dealing with biotechnologies. On the other hand, issues dealing with human genetics would not be of concern for them.

The aid agencies would come to the table with a lot of stake and their agenda could dominate. However, there would be something paradoxical about a conference with people discussing the theology of biotechnologies and not having present the people who struggle every day with their application in the work they are doing.

The focus is to gain understanding across the regions; some aid agencies have started independent research to understand the effects of their own aid programs. If we are going to talk about these issues, they have to be there; they know what actually happens in the field.

The Planning Committee could simply ask the REOs to send smart, good people with good intent; those who both bless the dawn of the age of biotechnology for the alleviation of human suffering and those who are wise enough to be concerned.

We need to develop protocols for observers, for interfaith engagement, and for the presence of church aid agencies that are acceptable to us and to those we invite so they are clear about the terms of their presence.

Theme/content: The following points were made in a discussion about the focus of the conference:

- The Latin America Council of Churches (CLAI) has an emphasis on sustainable development and has worked very closely with the poor and with the organizations that try to alleviate poverty. Its interest in biotechnology is more related to how biotechnologies can be used to alleviate poverty than the latest developments.
- Pacific Conference of Churches is interested in learning the basic information the church needs to understand the interface of science and sustainable development.
- The theme could be broader, for example genetic technologies and justice, with plenary sessions on the grouped areas. This conference will be cited for years and the title will become the catch phrase for what comes out of it.
- The intrinsic issue is what is right to do before God. We don't want to lose the distinctive focus on the conference. Perhaps the theme needs to be "The churches and genetic technologies."
- We are in the area of "Biotechnologies: A Faith Frontier." We don't want to pre-empt attracting those for whom the issue isn't so much justice as dignity. We need a working title that conveys the sense that this is about biotechnology and the challenge it presents to people who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.
- There is a First World/Third World divide on the issues – life forms and patenting on the one hand and agricultural and GMOs on the other.
- What brings us together is a respect for creation and the dignity of life whether it be plant and animal or person.

General structure of the conference: The following points were made in a discussion about the shape of the conference, without attempting to reach a consensus:

- A suggested general structure could be having input at a mapping out of a number of major issues (stem cell research, GMOs, cloning, human genetics) at a plenary session, followed by inputs (or a panel) from regions on how this issue affects a region; begin the dialogue in plenary to feed into the workshop sessions to go into greater depth.
- Rather than getting so caught up with specific issues, the more basic question is: what are the emerging biotechnologies and what challenge does that present to the churches? If we skip that question, we have ceded the whole conference to those already involved and that was not our point.
- This is a global conference which can do things that can't be done anywhere else; for example, we need to make North and South dialogue an integral part of the structure of the conference.
- It would be important to make people familiar with work that has been done through an anthropological, theological opening presentation – a lecture that would make people curious, that would ask questions and mark the points where in these biotechnologies questions of anthropology show up.
- A theological presentation framing things in a certain way may be reductive; in practice the sorts of questions posed and the way you handle GM crops theologically is quite different from the way you handle stem cells, for example. If you say that they are on a par, you have already pre-framed both issues, rather than looking at them for themselves.
- If the conference is for people who have responsibility in the churches and need a way to get close to these issue, then there is no place to start except with theology. A good theologian, such as Mary Elizabeth Tucker, could look at all of the statements that have come out of all of our regions and talk about why at this moment this conference is taking place.
- The debate between faith and reason is surfacing here. In this conference, let's give the weight to the faith perspective. If we overload the conference with the reason perspective, we may defeat the whole purpose.

Speakers: The following points were made in a discussion about speakers for the conference:

- Are we concentrating on getting Christian speakers or speakers affiliated with faith in one way or another? Many potential speakers could be very ideological. Within our own constituencies, we should be able to find the speakers we need who are Christians and truly engaged in the field.
- When planning is done at a detailed level, the choice of speakers can shift us away from thinking and praying together to attending an event with expert speakers and learning what they are thinking and saying.

Organizational infrastructure for planning a global conference: The following points were made in a discussion about the how the planning function for the conference will be organized, without seeking a consensus from the group:

- One model would be that this group act as an Advisory Committee, providing the conceptual framework for the conference, with a Planning Team to be responsible for the details and logistics working out of the WCC, if the Central Committee gives final approval to the conference.

- Until we have formally requested the WCC's participation, the involvement of the REO delegates to this Consultation in planning for the conference remains to be clarified.
- If we go with the model of an Advisory Committee and a Planning Team, some people from this group should be on the Planning Team so that there isn't a gap between its work and what has happened here these days
- Should we be thinking of a Steering Group rather than a Planning Team? There are some things that are properly our decisions. We need a more interactive process.
- We are not the sponsoring body, so I am concerned that we not name people to the Planning Team, especially since Asia and Africa were not able to be at this table.

Pre-conference planning: The proposal was made that a pre-conference package be prepared that would enhance the readiness of the participants to benefit from the conference. It might include a compendium of terminology and a bibliography of resources built with regional input, as well as some orientation to the location in which the conference will be held.

Communication/Promotion: Among the suggestions in this area was requesting staff of the Christian World Communions to promote the conference; the need for a capacity to communicate with media; developing a compelling rationale for the conference for with relevant constituencies; a solid communication system among the Consultation participants; and clear allocation of responsibilities.

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Richard and James led morning worship. Stephen and Clare shared the responsibility of moderating the sessions.

Heinrich felt that the WCC would be open to hearing a proposal for an international conference on the model of decentralized ecumenism. Eileen suggested that communication proceed both through Martin Robra, who has been supportive all along, as well as directly to the Central Committee. A letter, along with this report, should be sent to them, and also to the REOs whose support facilitated this gathering.

Mary and Eileen will draft the letter which should deal primarily with the proposed role for the WCC in the conference, in the context of decentralized ecumenism. We want to avoid giving the impression that details for the conference are set in concrete; rather, by appending the report we will be indicating the scope of our work here as we explored various aspects of the conference.

The inventory of what we can offer will be helpful, although it may not cover everything the WCC needs from us. They may have some things to ask from us; for example, "Could you look over how you reported what was going on in your regions and refine a template that we could use so that when people come to the conference, we could compare apples and apples."

It was agreed that all the Consultation participants will speak to their Central Committee members on the subject of work on biotechnology (see Appendix 7 for a list of members).

At the September Central Committee meeting, it is important that the work on biotechnology get priority ranking along with other initiatives such as the Decade to Overcome Violence and globalization. Until now, biotechnology has been seen as a Northern issue; since Porto Alegre, there is a momentum to elevate the status of the biotechnology work.

Those representing their Council here need to report back to their REO. We need to send the report of this Consultation to the General Secretaries of the Christian Conference of Asia and the All Africa Council of Churches, whose delegates were unable to get to this meeting. These delegates should also receive this report.

Among the key points that were emphasized for the conference were the importance of including presentations of the work in the regions (as happened at this consultation); clarity about the fundamental challenges presented by the biotechnologies and how they affect the churches; an emphasis on the faith perspective and the role of faith in discerning the implications of genetic technologies; a prominence for worship together; and an opportunity to gather as regions at some point in the conference.

In response to the question as to what the regions most needed from the international conference, the following points were made:

- a network we can call on to know what is happening; as a source of education so we can know what we need to be equipped to respond;
- sustainable development;
- to enable pastors, not to learn how to pastor, but to know what is happening in science – what stem cells are, what IVF is for, and so on;
- networking and communication; resources to help in the parishes when scientific issues arise.

The participants agreed upon the following timeline and responsibilities following the conclusion of this Consultation:

Task	Date completed	By
1. Draft report of the May 7-11 meeting	May 22	Anne
2. Review draft	May 31	CCC/NCCCUSA
3. Revise report	June 7	Anne
4. Review draft	June 15	All delegates
5. Final draft	June 20	Anne
6. Draft letter to WCC	May 31	NCCCUSA/CCC (Eileen/Mary; signed by Stephen and Clare)

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| 7. Distribute report and letter to WCC/REOs/Delegates | June 30 | |
| 8. Establish List Serve | May 22 | Marcel |
| 9. Contact funding sources | As soon as possible | Eileen |
| 10. Talk to Martin Robra | | Eileen |
| 11. Delegates take inventory at home:
"What can we offer?" Send information to Clare (cchapman@gccuic-umc.org)
and Stephen (sallen@presbyterian.ca) | June 15 | Delegates |
| 12. Delegates write reports to REOs | Own timing | Delegates |
| 13. Delegates contact their representatives on WCC Central Committee (see Appendix 7) | July/August | Delegates |

Steven and Garth led the worship service concluded this International Biotechnology Consultation.