

The Freudenstadt Appeal

Europe at the Crossroads: Decadence or Return to its Christian Roots?

From the 13th to the 15th of October of this year, 30 years after the founding convention in Berlin, 1974, the 7th European Confessional Convention met in Freudenstadt in the Black Forest. Under the motto "*The Christian Faith and the Future of Europe*" the conference – this time sponsored by Christians from three confessions – took up as its theme the common heritage of the Western World. The reason for choosing this topic was the acute spiritual and ethical problems currently facing Europe, problems which point to a latent cultural crisis accentuated by the extension of the European Union. The participants maintained that God has commissioned the community of Jesus Christ, individual Christians and their churches, to sharpen the voice of conscience through his Word, that, in this period of transition, those in authority may make the right choices and thus set the switches for Europe's future correctly. This is the objective of the present appeal, which we address to the leaders in state and church, and to all receptive citizens of uniting Europe.

I. The spiritual foundations of Europe

Among the peoples of Europe, at least since the 4th Century A.D., the foundational set of values has been shaped not only by the humanistic spirit of *Greek antiquity* and the *Roman sense of law*, but also and above all by the *Christian faith* in the triune God in accordance to his biblical self-revelation to the People of Israel. At the center of the resulting set of values is the view of man as the image of God and the acknowledgment of the dependence of all social life upon the Creator as the source of all good things. To this is added the New Testament message of the fulfillment of salvation in Jesus Christ as the renewing power that overcomes even death.

The Enlightenment, alongside the negative secularist constrictions represented by rationalism and materialism, brought forth some positive effects as well. Thus, despite occasional relapses, the Enlightenment established the practice of personal tolerance, free exercise of religion and the equality of all citizens before the law. Yet the 20th Century, against the background of a strongly weakened Christian substance in the church and society, saw the rise of two atheistic ideologies striving for world domination, ideologies which unleashed storms of fanatical intolerance and produced enormous blood-baths and destruction. But, within the same century, God, the Lord of history, put an end to these systems of domination and so opened new realms of religious liberty.

Positive beginnings since 1945

Thus, after the catastrophe of World War II in Europe, there followed a promising new beginning thanks to a deepened reflection upon the spiritual and ethical foundations which Christianity had shaped.

Nations who had been traditional enemies previously were reconciled with each other; former enemies at war with each other became good commercial partners or even friends. Already in the middle of the 20th Century, initial institutional foundations for European cooperation were established.

Likewise the Christian confessions took first steps toward mutual approach on diverse levels. In a period of intensive ideological threat, they were concerned to preserve their common Christian heritage and to give credible witness in the service of society.

II. Warning signs of renewed decline

The good effects produced since 1945 in many a European country oblige us to be thankful. Unfortunately, however, all of these positive developments are today overshadowed by disastrous developments. Christian faith is by and large being banished from public consciousness. Tendencies and forces of godlessness are again breaking through.

Evidently the widely acclaimed "community in values" of the European Union rests essentially on a further development of the French Revolution's principles of emancipation which often – like the proclaimed "rights" to marital infidelity or to abortion! - contradict biblical ethics. Thus Europe stands before a choice between the Christ and the Antichrist in the shaping of its future.

In the progressive de-christianization of Europe, *the separation of church and state* is often misunderstood to mean that faith should be exercised only within the walls of the church building. Faith's social relevance is thus ignored. Unfortunately, the worship services of both major Western European confessions are attended by only a small portion of church members. Correspondingly, privately and publicly practiced values increasingly deviate from those of the Christian message. No wonder that an increasing number of political figures, unlike their predecessors, are ignorant of the fact that those in high political office can only be really effective as long as they implore God's help and as long as they seek to do God's will.

The biblical understanding of *love of neighbor* is disappearing from the consciousness of many; in its place the spirit of the age proclaims the goal of „self-realization“. Since its liberation, Eastern Europe, too, is now being drawn into the orbit of this spirit. But in a society in which each one thinks only of his own gains in money, power and pleasure, the social fabric atrophies within a matter of decades: It is shocking to observe how the biblical commands and norms for *marriage and family* are not only being transgressed in the private sphere; they are also being rejected and ridiculed in the political and journalistic spheres.

The lofty and blessing-rich commission of the Creator to build families is no longer seen by many as a personal responsibility. They see children as hindrances to their career and to their material prosperity. Shifting partnerships replace marriages of life-long fidelity. Same-sex relationships are naively idealized and are ennobled with public respect and legal recognition as "marriage-like" partnerships. Even leading political figures, by their own homosexual practice, contribute to the de facto abolition of the priority proper to marriage and family. Across professional lines and income groups, the virtues of *honesty, truthfulness, fidelity, and readiness for selfless service* have, in recent decades, been more and more supplanted by the vices of *dishonesty, falsehood, infidelity and self-aggrandizement*.

Threatening consequences

Wide-ranging effects of these wrong developments are already visible; even worse consequences can be prognosticated for the coming decades.

The widespread trend toward consumerist egotism and irresponsible self-realization has led in many European countries to a decline of the birth-rate to a level far below that which is necessary to sustain the native population. Millions of children, whom God had awoken to life in their mother's womb, were not permitted to be born. Experts estimate that alone in Germany in the last 30 years some 9 million children have fallen victim to abortion. To that number should be added millions of cases where healthy people in good financial situations, for the sake of their career, consciously abstained from having children altogether or at best confined themselves to a single child. This gigantic *dying-off factor*, till now hardly taken seriously, is leading inexorably to the collapse of existing pension and social-welfare systems. This process is being accelerated by the increasing tendency of gifted young people, out of fear of social restrictions and burdens, to leave their native land behind and to seek their fortune elsewhere. Is this not a sign that they have lost a sense of responsibility to their own nation? The collapse of population will be followed by a yet deeper collapse of cultural and political relationships if children are not rediscovered as the basis of the future and if the younger generation is not granted full attention and solidarity.

The *situation in the schools*, especially in the big cities, is also a source of concern. The level of achievement is sinking so rapidly, that a growing number of school graduates are unfit to learn a trade. An irresponsible practice of the obligatory sex instruction in the schools, too, has had disastrous effects on the moral consciousness of the students. Often, learning problems and behavioral disturbances – extending even to violent crime in the classroom – manifest themselves among young people as a consequence of insufficient loving care at home.

The *state* has lost its credibility in the eyes of many of its citizens. Due to widespread dishonesty, bad housekeeping and luxuriant life-style, the state is no longer in a position to finance generous welfare programs or to pay off debts incurred in the past. Thus a glaring state of emergency becomes visible in more and more social areas. But, locked in the petty quarrels of the political parties, the needed drastic reductions are undertaken only half-heartedly.

Mutual commitment in a European community presupposes the cultivation of identity on the part of the participating nations. This, however, is undercut by prevailing historical attitudes which focus, to the point of perversion, on the dark side of the past.

The factors of decadence described above mutually reinforce each other in an alarming manner. In certain European countries, massive immigration of people from other cultures aggravates the problem. Such immigration will probably increase, being coupled with ghetto- building cultural and religious demands. Such demands represent the potential for further threats in the future to living together peacefully in Europe, should, over the long run, a portion of the population prove unwilling or unable to enter into a spiritual and cultural integration in Europe. Thus *Islamistic movements* are consciously bent upon eliminating the remains of the former Christian culture in order to erect a theocratic dictatorship in its place.

For fruitful cooperation in the European Union, only truly European nations and peoples are suited, that is nations and peoples which have been and continue to be formed by the above described values. That means also that, in private and public life, love of God and love of neighbor be practiced and that the appeal to, or resort to, force be repudiated. For living together in a community of states demands concrete, loving attention to ones fellow citizens in charitable, social responsibility.

III. Return to the spiritual sources!

Europe at the crossroads

If Europe today and in the future wishes to avoid an ultimate slide into barbarism, there is no other way than to return to the living God Himself. Even today, just as at the beginning, the bond which inwardly unites Europe's peoples from the Atlantic to the Urals, can be none other than the Christian faith.

Thus it is most regrettable that the *Preamble of the Constitution* of the European Union contains only a vague reference to "the cultural, religious and humanistic traditions of Europe" rather than a clear *appeal to God*, of the sort found in the constitutions of Germany, Poland and other European states. The insertion of an explicit reference to Christianity is important for constitutional reasons. Since Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, the Reformers and the Christian constitutional legists of more recent times, a tradition has developed in Europe which combines fruitful collaboration of state and church with a clear distinction between the two orders. It is imperative that the planned European constitution's conformity with basic Christian and occidental values be verified again throughout the whole text of the document. In particular, positive and negative religious freedom must be protected. Corresponding to their prophetic calling, the churches must retain the right publicly to denounce sin in the biblical sense, even when this goes counter to changing moral standards and corresponding legislation.

Only in this way can it be prevented that in the future, in Europe, political figures might interfere in the religious sphere or, vice versa, religious figures might high-handedly meddle in the area of politics.

Do not give up!

Concretely, what must be done in this alarming situation of which the majority of the population is not even aware? First of all we thankfully take notice of the fact that the entrance of the ten new member states into the European Union can open up a remarkable increase of new spiritual resources. For, in part at least, these are nations in which the Christian faith, under manifold attack, has unfolded a profoundly preservative power and has withstood the testing. What we all need is a renewed, daring fundamental trust in God.

We rejoice over such spontaneous spiritual awakenings among Europe's youth which are rediscovering their roots in the biblical faith of their fathers.

Likewise we believe it noteworthy that in Europe numerous remnants of Christian sensitivity and life remain in effect. Calling attention to this enduring Christian imprint on the majority of Europe's population, the churches should self-confidently and conscious of their mission make their public contribution to the contemporary discussions of social politics, education, culture, and medicine, in particular with reference to the contemporary problems regarding family law, bioethics, abortion and euthanasia. It is imperative for us European Christians to return to the sources of our common faith and to live that faith in such a way that our fellow citizens are able to recognize our practice as a witness to our belief.

Unfortunately, *confessional strife* accentuated to the point of religious warfare has contributed to Europe's spiritual decadence. Therefore, it is imperative to admit openly the churches' share of blame for this situation and to unite together in a common search for biblical truth. All who believe in Jesus Christ, whatever their confessional affiliation and tradition, should join in a communion of prayer and witnessing. Such a *confessional ecumenism*, by contrast to other forms of ecumenism which oftentimes minimize differences, will be marked by fidelity to authentic Christian faith, in an effort to build a united front against the antichristian currents threatening to infiltrate all confessional traditions.

The Gospel's message of hope

Europe needs a new encounter with the Gospel. For this reason, we support with all our hearts the contemporary efforts toward the *re-evangelization of Europe*. These efforts should also be specifically directed to the Muslim segment of the population. We rejoice over the beginning of missionary cooperation on a Biblical basis, and we hope that the separated churches in this way, too, will regain something of their lost unity. For only in the communion of the one Body of Jesus Christ can we, in the power of the Biblical message from Him as the one Lord and Savior of all mankind, respond effectively to increasing secularization and to the propaganda of foreign religions.

We encourage all efforts to bring the Gospel in credible contemporary form to that part of our population which is no longer reached by the regular activities of our local congregations. Each of us should grasp hold of the content of the biblical Gospel and its uniqueness over against all competing religious messages. Likewise we should resist the perversion of the Christian message through false theology and false preaching. For in Europe's struggle for the future, the only solid ground for hope lies in the conviction that Christ has triumphed over all the powers of decadence and destruction.

In demand: the "creative minority"

Through a movement of repentance and change of heart, beginning in individual circles and congregations, a new spiritual and moral climate can emerge in Europe. What is needed as well is that, once again, more and more women and men, especially younger ones, take up political and social responsibility in diverse social and professional positions, not out of craving for status, power and wealth, but rather in genuine devotion to God. In particular, in schools and institutions of higher learning, in medicine, in the media, and in business, we need leaders who place more value on humane service to others than on personal aggrandizement. True love of neighbor and self-denial, however, can come only from God.

Soli Deo Gloria!

The original title to Europe and its manifold opportunities belongs not to us citizens of the European nations but rather to God. As long as the church bells ring out in our lands, we are, therefore, invited expectantly and obediently to follow His call to worship, to listen to His word and to partake of the Lord's Supper. For, through Jesus Christ, God has reconciled the sinful world to Himself.

To all who believe in Him, He gives new and fulfilled life, and He makes them vehicles of blessing in their immediate surroundings and in their European homelands. In His name we together confess:
"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to every people" (Prov. 14:34).

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