

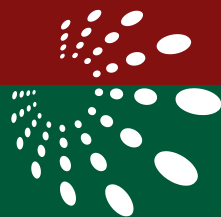
Gerhard Pross, Lothar Penners

Great Moments OF UNITY



Experiences of 25 years

Together for Europe



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MITEINANDER FÜR TOGETHER FOR
ENSEMBLE POUR L' INSIEME PER L'
MAZI ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ВМЕСТЕ ДЛЯ

europa



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Foreword

GERHARD PROSS

We entitled this book “Great Moments of Unity.” We listened to the sounds of the “*heavenly score*” and heard of a time of grace for the unification of God’s people. This prepared us to take courageous steps. A path full of surprises and wonders awaited us. With great astonishment we saw, what tremendous doors, indeed doors of church history, were opening before us: the miracle of the unity of God’s people and the miracle of reconciliation.

Just a few years earlier, it would have been unthinkable that emphatically Catholic Marian movements would meet with evangelical and free church communities and experience such unity. In this book we witness what we have heard about the “*heavenly score*” and what we experienced. Very personal accounts bear witness to the work of the Holy Spirit here and now.

It quickly became clear to us that our journey together is about reconciled togetherness and not about smoothing over differences. In our encounters with people, who were often so different, sometimes even perceived as alienating, we became on the one hand more deeply aware of our own identity and on the other hand we were united in our hearts by the Spirit of God. Attitudes were changed and keys to unity were given. Different styles of piety found common ground, not only denominations, but also bishops and Christian movements. This inspires confidence and hope.

The effects of this boundary-overcoming unity did not remain hidden behind church and community walls. Rather, under the motto *Together for Europe*, the socially transformative power of faith became visible at large events. Jesus’ command, “*Let your light shine before men*” (Matthew 5:16) set us in motion. Together with politicians

and bishops, we brought the fruit of our spiritual search and struggle for unity into society. Our message, that a prosperous future urgently requires cooperation rather than competing against each other, has put us in midst of the tensions of our time.

Diversity remains — even in the world of language and thinking. The different styles and influences that make *Together for Europe* so valuable - and at the same time challenging - can be found in the contributions of this book.

We look back with gratitude on the path we have been led along and marvel at the *great moments of unity* we have experienced on the way. We invite readers to accompany us on this exciting journey.

GERHARD PROSS in summer 2025

Foreword

FR. LOTHAR PENNERS

This book aims to provide information about the events that created the network *Together for Europe*¹. It describes the development through which approximately 300 spiritual communities, initiatives and Christian centers became connected with each other to varying degrees over the course of 25 years. It would go beyond the scope of this book to describe the full range of often very different paths that led to mutual openness, awareness and solidarity. The “small cloud of witnesses” that becomes visible here is therefore deliberately limited to the testimony of a relatively small circle of people. They understand themselves as being personally involved in events and processes which they have experienced as spiritually inspired and they feel committed to the present and future path of witness.

“To bear witness means: to pass on life in such a way that it becomes life in others.” (KLAUS HEMMERLE²) The individual contributions to this book, in their respective original (and individual) ways, are – above all - intended to be such testimonies of moments of unity and do not aim to provide even remotely complete documentation of the central events. The connecting texts on the individual topics, the historical background and the dynamics of the network’s development are solely intended to ensure that not only individual drops or flashes of inspiration are perceived. They are parts of a whole, a “cloud”, that wants to bear witness as such, comparable to the “great cloud”

¹ The term *Together for Europe* is used in various ways. On the one hand, it refers to the *movement as whole*, and on the other hand, it also refers to *individual conferences or events*.

² BISHOP DR. KLAUS HEMMERLE (1929-1994), Roman Catholic Bishop of Aachen (1975-1994).

of witnesses mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews³, and should be understood as part of the overwhelming testimony of the history of faith as a whole, which culminates in the testimony to the mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God!

From the development to the formation of the network “*great moments of unity*” (magic moments) were experienced. Not only representatives of the movements and communities had this experience but especially participating representatives of churches and society.

Therefore, this volume is not only about the testimony of established spiritual communities, but also about that of newer “movements” and new beginnings, which are said to be a response of the Spirit to the challenges of the present. Their networking into a *Together for Europe* can be a contribution to togetherness within and between the churches, to a Europe that finds itself from within, and to a contribution in the global world.

P. LOTHAR PENNERS

³ Cf. Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

Information and background

For a better understanding of the book

WOLFGANG KEMPER

Togetherness also applies to the authorship of this volume. The connecting or interpretative sections of text were written by GERHARD PROSS and Father LOTHAR PENNERS. Their individual styles were deliberately retained. The same applies in essence to personal statements.

As someone who was not involved in this journey *together*, I was allowed to accompany the creation of the book and support the writing process.

The following is intended to assist readers in their reading:

- When a name is mentioned for the first time, it is written with a title and, if available, the associated movement is mentioned. After that, titles are generally omitted unless they are part of the name itself.
- This omission assumes that our collaboration is understood as collaboration between friends. However, since the joint journey also involves a collaboration between charisma and office, we have retained the title in places where the office is significant.
- At the end of the book there is an index of people, listing their names.
- When the authors quote Bible verses in their individual contributions, they have used their own Bible translations, which are not specifically identified.
- In Part I, speeches are reproduced only in excerpts. If a complete text can be found in Part II, indication is given in a footnote.

- Part II begins with an in-depth look at the topic of charisms, followed by further reflections and texts on *Togetherness*. In addition, we have compiled several key texts and speeches of which we believe are of particular importance for *Together for Europe*. If you are interested in learning more about individual events and texts, we recommend the publications which have already been published on this subject (see page 358).
- “Great Moments of Unity” is the translation of the German book “Sternstunden der Einheit”. We are aware of the impression of a translation and the German style of expression. We wanted to make this book available in English for readers from different countries within Together for Europe. But we could not write an original English version and ask for your understanding.
- And one last thing: some passages in this book have already been described in GERHARD PROSS’ book, HÖREN-WAGEN-STAUEN (Hear-Dare-Marvel)⁴, and have been incorporated here in a modified form.

⁴ GERHARD PROSS, Hören-Wagen-Staunen (Hear-Dare-Marvel), 2nd edition, October 2022, 320 pages, hardcover with dust jacket, price: €20.00, ISBN 978-3-9818340-4-8, in German language only.

PART I

Chapter 1

A special time

Between the German Reunification, the millennium, the Reformation anniversary and „Brexit“

The origins and development of the *Together for Europe* network can hardly be explained without looking at the historical context of the period. In the political sphere, the period between the German reunification and “Brexit” is worth to be mentioned here, but also the end of Marxist-Leninist state socialism in Eastern Europe – right down to questions about the religious determinants of history (“God’s intervention,” “Miracle of the reunification”). In the ecclesiastical sphere, the broad agreement between the “Roman” and “Lutheran” churches on the question of justification gave rise to the hope that walls between individual Christian denominations could also fall; that space would be freed up for a deeper view in which it is not primarily important to know about doctrinal differences with others, but rather to see them more in the light of the indivisible grace of God and the calling into the one body of the Saviour.

The combination of the keywords mentioned here has played a not insignificant role in the context of the development of the network. Whereby the keyword “Brexit” may suggest that even creative moments in history have their “kairos” and can pass by when the collective mood of a society or an epoch change - as has happened partly in the Western world, for example (among others) in resistance to globalization and transnational commitments.

Looking back on the first 25 years of *Together for Europe*, we can gratefully note that our network would be unthinkable without its origins in a special moment of providence and God’s guidance. But in

various places, it also required sensitive alertness to the finger-pointing of the “Holy Spirit.”

We feel that we as *Together for Europe* can only continue to be fruitful and effective if we remain alert to the opportunities for “divine journey preparation” (external grace) and “human journey action” (enlightened sensitivity and response).

External events

The entire period is characterized — especially for a faith-based understanding of historical developments — by a very close connection, and in some cases even interpenetration, between internal and external factors.

The celebrating and cheering people on the fallen Berlin Wall, for example, seemed to spontaneously awaken an Easter-like confidence in the victory of freedom, legitimized “from above” in history. Similarly, the minutes of joyful applause after the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in the St. Anna Church in Augsburg⁵ was more than just a joyful expression of satisfaction, because a historical burden had been lifted. There was something in the air like the beginning of a more fruitful togetherness.

It later became known that the consensus on the question of justification, however it may be judged, was largely achieved through an agreement between POPE JOHN PAUL II and BISHOP CHRISTIAN KRAUSE⁶, President of the Lutheran World Federation. They had come

⁵ On October 31, 1999, it was declared that the doctrine of justification, the center of Lutheran theology, is not divisive for the church. It is considered a central document of global ecumenism.

⁶ REGIONAL BISHOP DR. H. C. CHRISTIAN KRAUSE (1940-2024), Secretary General of the German Protestant Church Congress (1985-1994), Regional Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Brunswick (1994-2002) and President of the Lutheran World Federation (1997-2003), signatory of the Joint Declaration of Lutherans and Catholics on the

to the unanimous conclusion that the time was ripe for public understanding and had therefore agreed to work towards this in their churches.

Even though these highly visible external events were of course of central importance in their own right, it was precisely their public nature that — because political/military camps and ideological blocks were dissolving — that gave rise to a consistent spirit of dialogue and made it possible, legitimate and in a sense obvious to refer to the dialogue of togetherness.

Internal developments

In the following, we will look at developments in the Protestant and Catholic spheres which led to the crystallization of the network.

In the Protestant sphere, within the framework of *the Meeting of Leaders*

The worldwide charismatic renewal, which took place almost simultaneously in many churches in the 1960s and '70s, also gave rise to numerous new communities and movements or inspired existing ones in Germany within the Protestant regional churches and free churches. Some of their leaders came together in a “*Meeting of Leaders*”⁷, whose founding impetus included encounters at Craheim Castle.

From the very first meetings until today, the focus has been on seeking God’s guidance for the respective historical moment and empowering younger leaders to take on spiritual responsibility. It is not

Doctrine of Justification on October 31, 1999, in Augsburg. He was part of the team of ecumenical bishops who meet in the spirituality of the *Focolare Movement*.

⁷ The *meeting of leaders* is a network of friends who seek the unity of the Body of Christ and consists of approximately 250 leaders from spiritual communities, initiatives and ministries.

intended to be a meeting of organizational “leaders” of the respective groups with the aim of planning joint actions and enforcing agreements.

Since some of these leaders were particularly influenced by charismatic (prayer) experiences, listening to His Word together was at the heart of the meetings from the very beginning. This listening was complemented by an awareness of the unavailable but often gifted presence of the Holy Spirit, the giver of not only different gifts but also the bond of unity between them.

There is good reason to speak of a certain immediacy of the Spirit for the *Meeting of Leaders*: representatives of various spiritual communities came (and continue to come) together without the initiative of the church office, committed only to their spiritual experience and their spiritual gifts – listening to the Word of God and his message for the present and the way forward into the future.

Thus, it came about that at the meetings in 1997/98, the spiritual impression arose from listening in prayer: “Something new is dawning; we must be ready to take on more responsibility beyond our own communities – possibly even beyond the Protestant sphere.” Out of this grew the deep conviction: “God is gathering his people.”

In this sense, the charismatic experience of listening in prayer was an important pre-requisite for the success of *Together for Europe*.

In the Catholic sphere: Pentecost ‘98

As far as internal developments within Catholicism are concerned, the event known retrospectively as “Pentecost 98” is of particular significance. In the course of his preparations for the millennium, POPE JOHN PAUL II dedicated the year 1998 to the Holy Spirit, convened the so-called newer spiritual movements (“movimenti ecclesiali”) in Rome, and gave them a twofold instruction: on the one hand they should strive for “mature communication” among themselves and on

the other hand for “commonality in evangelization”. In contrast to the Protestant sphere (where “immediacy of the Spirit” set this process in motion), it was perhaps no coincidence that in the Catholic sphere the immediate trigger for cooperation initially came from the (Petrine) office, because, according to the Pope, the Church is guided on its path by “hierarchical ministries and charismatic gifts.” Ministries and gifts are as co-essential (equally essential) as they are co-existential (simultaneous) for the overall mission of the Church. The decisive factor, however, was: A few years after the decisions of the Second Vatican Council (cf. “Lumen gentium,” Art. 16), of which some observers felt it lacked sufficient experience in the question of charisms, he specifically assigned responsibility to the so-called “movements” and assigned them to the charismatic “wing” within the sphere of ecclesiastical associations.

At times, the contrast between spiritual office on one side and the work of the Spirit on the other side was also described by using the categories of Petrine and Marian. These, in turn, overlap with the characterization found in HANS URS VON BALTHASAR’S “Traditions of the New Testament”⁸. BALTHASAR differentiates between the principle of “holiness” (“Marian”) and the principle of “leadership” (“Petrine”). It was even more remarkable that the representatives of the “movimenti”, who gathered in large numbers (350,000) in St. Peter’s Square, were told that their spirit-inspired fundamental forces would be a response to the challenges for faith and the future development of humanity.

⁸ HANS URS VON BALTHASAR (1905–1988), Swiss, Catholic priest, theological teacher, and cultural philosopher.

The founder of *the Focolare Movement*⁹, CHIARA LUBICH¹⁰, promised to the Pope at this event that she would take care of the co-operation between the spiritual movements. As part of fulfilling this promise, the Italian and German Focolare members invited Catholic movements to a meeting in Speyer in early summer 1999. This in turn led some participants, such as FRANCESCO RICCA, then secretary of the Lay Council and the *Comunione e Liberazione* movement¹¹, to question whether a certain union of church groups was not exclusively a matter for the “church office” and not for the groups themselves. At this point, FATHER MICHAEL MARMANN¹² (*Schoenstatt Movement*)^{13,14}, among others, became involved with a decisive statement: From a Catholic perspective, the hierarchy always has the right to bring church initiatives together; however, there is also – and especially for all baptized people – a free right of coalition “from below” to take initiatives in the spirit of the Gospel together.

⁹ The *Focolare Movement* began in 1943 during the war, founded by CHIARA LUBICH (1920-2008) in Trento, Italy. Its spirituality of unity is based on faith in God’s love and aims at unity and brotherhood.

¹⁰ DR. H. C. CHIARA LUBICH (1920–2008), founder of *the Focolare Movement* (recognized by the Church as “Opus Mariae”), which today is present in 182 countries, and whose president she was until her death in 2008. Chiara had a special passion for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. She was the driving force behind *Together for Europe*.

¹¹ The *Comunione e Liberazione movement*, or *CL* for short, is a Catholic lay movement founded in Milan in 1954 by LUIGI GIUSSANI. Its focus is on living the Christian faith in a concrete way in everyday life and making it culturally relevant.

¹² FATHER DR. MICHAEL MARMANN (1937-2019), Catholic priest, Superior General of the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Fathers and thus also Chairman of the General Presidium of the International Schoenstatt Movement (1990-2003). He was one of the initiators of *Together for Europe*.

¹³ The *Schoenstatt Movement*, or *Schoenstatt* for short, is a Catholic spiritual community founded in 1914 by FATHER JOSEPH KENTENICH in Schoenstatt, a district of Vallendar. At its heart is the “covenant of love with Mary” and a creative following of Christ in everyday life.

¹⁴ FATHER JOSEPH KENTENICH (1885–1968), Catholic priest, founder of *the Schoenstatt Movement* and its leader until his death.

Immediately after the meeting in Speyer, CHIARA LUBICH and ANDREA RICCARDI¹⁵ (*Sant'Egidio*)¹⁶ visited Schoenstatt with the desire to get to know “the soul of Schoenstatt.”

Pentecost '98 “meets” the *Meeting of Leaders*

The next important impetus for further development came at the annual meeting of the Association of Catholic Spiritual Movements in 1999. SEVERIN SCHMID¹⁷ (*Focolare*) had brought along a video about POPE JOHN PAUL II's meeting with Catholic spiritual movements. It was entitled “The Winds of the Spirit.” When it was shown at *the Meeting of Leaders* (which until then had been largely Protestant and Free Church-oriented), it provoked strong reactions and raised the question of whether the time had come for ecumenical cooperation between spiritual movements. WALTER KRIECHBAUM¹⁸ (*YMCA Munich*)¹⁹ reports in retrospect on *the 1999 Meeting of Leaders* in Bernhäuser Forst:

¹⁵ PROF. DR. ANDREA RICCARDI, professor emeritus of modern history, history of Christianity, and history of religion (University of Rome III), founder of *the Community of Sant'Egidio*, minister in the Monti government, president of the Dante Alighieri Society and co-initiator of *Together for Europe*.

¹⁶ *The Community of Sant'Egidio*, founded in 1968 by ANDREA RICCARDI, is a worldwide Catholic lay movement that is now represented in over 70 countries. Its main focuses are prayer, peace, and helping the poor.

¹⁷ SEVERIN SCHMID, spokesperson for *the Focolare Movement* in Germany (1996-2008), responsible for ecumenism at *the Focolare Movement's* center in Rocca di Papa (Rome), later in the Movement's General Council (2008-2021).

¹⁸ WALTER KRIECHBAUM, Protestant pastor, worked full-time for 37 years at *the YMCA in Munich* in various functions, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*

¹⁹ *The Munich YMCA* is part of the international YMCA movement, which aims to provide young people with social and spiritual inspiration through leisure, educational and spiritual activities.

“ Some had brought along the video of the 1998 meeting of Catholic movements with the Pope in St. Peter’s Square in Rome. I was responsible for organizing the Meeting of Leaders at the time. I remember being told that we didn’t really have any more time in the program, so we would squeeze in the video screening somewhere after one of the evenings and find a room for it. The video was initially rather marginal, but then suddenly took center stage.

HERBERT LAUENROTH²⁰ (*Focolare*) also reacted to this from his immediate experience and his view on the developments in the cooperation between Catholic and Protestant movements within the *Meeting of Leaders*:

“ On the Catholic side, there was the powerful impetus from JOHN PAUL II and the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, JOSEPH CARDINAL RATZINGER,²¹ who – in a move, that was quite new and quite revolutionary for Catholic customs – for the first time gave a kind of place to the charismatic forces within the Church. However, we only then really became aware of the significance of their statements when we encountered the ecumenically influenced “*Meeting of Leaders*.” In a certain sense, our shared history as *Together for Europe community* resembles an “ellipse”: the form or shape of a narrative that swings, oscillates between

²⁰ HERBERT LAUENROTH, speaker at the Ecumenical Life Center in Ottmaring, spokesperson for the Focolare Movement in Germany for several years, employee at the international study center of the Focolare Movement in Rocca di Papa (Rome).

²¹ CARDINAL JOSEPH RATZINGER, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1982 to 2005, Pope of the Roman Catholic Church from 2005 to 2017 (BENEDICT XVI).

two focal points: St. Peter's Square in Rome and the "*Meeting of Leaders*." But this is precisely what makes the more original awakening of the People of God vividly apparent: not only between hierarchy and institution, but as an experience of unprecedented "synergy" within the entire, many-voiced People of God. For me, this is a reality that — to name a date — began with Pentecost '98.

As mentioned, the video had an enormous impact on the Protestant and Free Church participants at *the Meeting of Leaders*. They were very impressed and moved by the "place assignment" that POPE JOHN PAUL II gave to the new spiritual movements, because they felt understood by the Catholic Pope in their innermost concerns. They often suffered from the fact that they had almost no space in the established churches, and now POPE JOHN PAUL II gave the Catholic spiritual movements a place in the church, even a very prominent one. The coexistence of office and charisma, of Petrine and Marian (to use the Pope's original words again), expressed in a very precise way the self-understanding of spiritual communities and movements, also in the Protestant sphere. Some Protestant and Free Church participants initially had to overcome a certain resistance to the word "Marian," but they immediately understood its deeper meaning and agreed with it. They were particularly amazed by the word "co-essential," which astonished them greatly and they deeply appreciated their role. From then on, reflection and theological consideration of these statements repeatedly determined the course of the discussion in subsequent meetings.

Chapter 2

The founding phase of *Together for Europe*

Ottmaring, October 31, 1999 – Rothenburg, March 2000 –
Munich, December 8, 2001

The three events in Ottmaring, Rothenburg and Munich form something like the narrower founding phase of the network. We will go in more detail about them below.

Ottmaring – Reformation Day – October 31, 1999

The encounter between those of the *Meeting of Leaders* and “Pentecost ‘98” and the question of what this meant in terms of divine guidance motivated BR. GÜNTHER RATTEY²² and REV. GOTTLÖB HESS²³, members of the *Brotherhood of Common Life Ottmaring*²⁴, to take the initiative. Following the celebrations marking the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” they invited CHIARA LUBICH, ANDREA RICCARDI and 50 other representatives of Protestant and Free Church communities from Germany to an afternoon meeting with Catholic movements. The following report by GABRI FALLACARA²⁵ (*Focolare*) provides a personal insight into this meeting:

²² BR. GÜNTHER RATTEY, deacon, member of the Brotherhood of the Cross, Ottmaring, co-founder and long-standing member of the steering committee of the *Meeting of Leaders*.

²³ GOTTLÖB HESS, retired Protestant pastor, long-standing member of the steering committee of the *Meeting of Leaders* and the *Brotherhood of Shared Life*.

²⁴ The *Brotherhood of Shared Life Ottmaring*, or *Ottmaring Brotherhood* for short, is an ecumenical Christian community in Ottmaring, a district of Augsburg, which lives according to a shared lifestyle of prayer, community and service.

²⁵ GABRI FALLACARA, Focolare member, close collaborator and confidante of CHIARA LU-



I witnessed the birth of Together for Europe and the process of its development, which was made possible by the immediate acceptance of a few “pioneers”. I will return to a few founding moments.

At this meeting, besides CHIARA and ANDREA RICCARD also HELMUT NICKLAS²⁶ (YMCA Munich), GERHARD PROSS (YMCA Esslingen, responsible for the *Meeting of Leaders*, a convention of leaders of Protestant movements and communities in Germany), Pastor GOTTLLOB HESS, BR. GÜNTHER RATTEY and other Protestant founders and leaders participated. It was an unforgettable moment.

A creative joy filled the room. At the end of the meeting, HELMUT NICKLAS asked how to proceed and expressed his willingness to continue the fellowship, that had just begun.

CHIARA replied with a sentence that became the guiding principle for a new path: „I have never made plans. There is a ‚score in heaven‘ that is being realized on earth. God knows it and we want to follow Him step by step. We meet to get to know each other and to listen together to God's plans.”

This meeting was not only influenced by the impressions of the morning. The participants were particularly moved by the question of whether and how the impetus that emerged from Pentecost ‘98 could play a role in intensifying contact between the *Meeting of Leaders* and the Catholic movements. It seemed CHIARA LUBICH had gained the impression that this opened an opportunity to channel her willingness to contribute to the realization of the Roman promise in an explicitly

BICH, for many years co-responsible at the Centro “Uno” (Ecumenical Secretariat of the *Focolare Movement*).

²⁶ HELMUT NICKLAS (1939-2007), General secretary of Munich YMCA (1972-1996) and leader of the *Meeting of Leaders* (1990-1999), co-initiator of *Together for Europe*.

ecumenical direction. Her words, which she later quoted repeatedly, “*The score is written in heaven,*” can be interpreted as follows: Heaven composes — the melodies, even “musical phrases” which are coming up, must be “read,” understood and if necessary “played.”

At the end of the meeting in Ottmaring, GERHARD PROSS therefore asked CHIARA LUBICH, if she would like to come to the next “*Meeting of Leaders,*” which was to take place in Rothenburg in March 2000, in order to listen together with others - with hope to recognize the next beat in the heavenly score.

Looking back, the afternoon meeting in Ottmaring can therefore be seen as the first “sound” in the triad of the ecumenical network *Together for Europe*, along with Rothenburg 2000 and Munich 2001.

Rothenburg – *Meeting of Leaders* – March 2000

CHIARA LUBICH agreed to attend *the Meeting of Leaders* in Rothenburg in March 2000. She came together with a team of leaders from the *Focolare Movement*. The former Protestant BISHOP DR. ULRICH WILCKENS²⁷ was also invited to the meeting.

When CHIARA was about to begin her presentation, she said she felt such a strong presence of the Holy Spirit in the room and such harmony with her charism that she had to pause for a moment. In her subsequent presentation, entitled “Love among one another as the path to unity,” all those present felt the same strong impulse towards unity that had characterized the “*Meeting of Leaders*” from the very beginning. It became clear to everyone: here two streams are coming together which have the same original impetus, the same charism.

²⁷ BISHOP PROF. DR. ULRICH WILCKENS (1928-2021), professor of New Testament, bishop of the Holstein-Lübeck district in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church (1981-1991), later representative of the Council of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) for communities and spiritual fellowships.

In his presentation, BISHOP WILCKENS vividly illustrated how the schism of the Reformation had called into questioning the credibility of the Gospel and promoted secularization. He illustrated this using the example of jurisprudence. As a result of the Reformation, the sovereigns felt obliged to support one side or the other, which led to tension over whether Protestant or Catholic law should apply. This in turn gave impetus to those forces that demanded a neutral, secular legal system. Even though those present were familiar with much of the history of the separation of the churches, his remarks on the profound impact of the Reformation on society touched their hearts and deeply affected the audience.

It was decided not to continue the program as usual, but to respond appropriately to these presentations. Therefore, the participants gathered in the afternoon to reflect in silence and prayer on the morning's presentations and to give space to the Spirit of God to deepen their understanding of what they had heard. In the shared silence, FATHER ERNST SIEVERS²⁸ (*Emmaus Community/CE*), a Catholic priest, following a spiritual sense, asked the present Protestant brothers and sisters for forgiveness for all that the Catholic Church had done to Protestant Christians over the past 500 years. He himself describes the situation as follows:

“ It didn't take long before I felt an inner impulse to go forward, but I didn't dare. Then I heard a clear, though silent inner voice saying: “Go!”, which I felt compelled to follow. So, I went forward and asked my Protestant brothers and sisters for forgiveness for all the rejection, for the know-it-all attitude,

²⁸ FR. ERNST SIEVERS, Catholic priest, missionary in Ghana and Uganda for 40 years, initiator of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in both countries.

for the arrogance of the Catholic Church, as whose representative I considered myself at that moment.

My Protestant brothers and sisters gladly complied with this request and, in turn, asked their Catholic brothers and sisters for forgiveness. It was as if this request had opened floodgates in the invisible world. The Spirit of God set an enormous dynamic in motion. Prayers of repentance and penance, personal or on behalf of an entire community or denomination, were spoken with moving words. It was a special hour of God. There was so much to confess: between Protestants and Catholics, between large churches and free churches, between churches and movements.

For all those who were there that afternoon, three more voices should be heard here. GERHARD PROSS (*YMCA Esslingen*) reports:

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This *Meeting of Leaders* in Rothenburg in March 2000 was to become an extraordinarily remarkable event. It changed the *Meeting of Leaders*. Something new was born that would also shape my life and my ministry in the future.

The *Meeting of Leaders* is open to charismatic elements, but it is not an emotional meeting. Yet that afternoon, many tears were shed. Almost all the approximately 100 leaders had tears in their eyes. It was difficult for me, with tears in my own eyes, to lead this “hour of prayer.” But afterwards we knew that something new had begun here out of repentance and deep emotion. Neither before nor since I have experienced such a heartfelt movement of repentance. Of course, it touched our feelings. However, we knew that it was not only our emotions that were involved, but that a moving touch of the Holy Spirit happened in our prayers.

Unity is important, as every attentive reader of the Bible has known for long. But in that hour, I deeply experienced the significance of unity in God’s heart and how many of my beliefs are significantly less important than the unity of the body of Christ. It changed me — it changed us. In that hour, with rare clarity, I sensed something of the heavenly Father’s pain over the division in the Church, the bride of his Son, and I heard God’s passionate call: “Gather my people.” Gathering the one people of God became my mission and our mission.

When we met next day for a final discussion with CHIARA LUBICH, she asked us whether we, as Protestant and Catholic, German and Italian movements, wanted to set out on this journey together. She has chosen strong words for this, saying: „Shall we get engaged?” On behalf of the *Meeting of Leaders*, she held out her hand to me, and I agreed to her proposal. From this reconciliation, something new was born: the *Together Movement*. Together we set out on our journey and considered what the next steps might be. Once again, we tried to listen to the next beat of the heavenly score.

GABRI FALLACARA (*Focolare Movement*) recalls:

“

And then came Rothenburg, in March 2000. About 100 leaders from some 50 movements, communities and ministries were present, most from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, some from the Free Churches, others from new spiritual communities, and a small group of Catholics.

CHIARA was invited and spoke about the “art of loving” and about Jesus crucified and forsaken. Her words were very well understood, and she called for mutual love between the

Protestant and Catholic movements to be put into practice and developed immediately.

Then something unexpected happened: a moment of forgiveness in the spirit of the Gospel. In an atmosphere of lively sincerity, the mutual asking for forgiveness and heartfelt forgiveness was a profound and moving exchange. It was an inner renewal that took place in all participants. Repentance gave new life, forgiveness was received. It was the first time I had ever witnessed anything like this.

And then the moment came when the deep fellowship we had experienced at the leadership level was to be transferred to the members of the individual movements and communities.

WALTER KRIECHBAUM (*YMCA Munich*) wrote:

“

For me, the *Meeting of Leaders* in Rothenburg in 2000 remains a moment - surprisingly gifted by God - on the path of togetherness. Surprising, unplanned, gracious — with a profound effect, that only the living Holy Spirit could give. Looking back, it often seems like we walked a smooth path together. But the unexpected intervention of the Holy Spirit had a dimension of challenge. I felt some things were being contested that day. I remember that in Rothenburg, after the morning with CHIARA LUBICH, Bishop WILCKENS and KEITH WARRINGTON²⁹, there was quite a struggle in the meeting of the prayer and discussion group leaders during lunchtime. Should we change the afternoon program or not? According to the plan, discussion and prayer groups were scheduled, which tradi-

²⁹ KEITH WARRINGTON, long-time director of *Youth With A Mission* Germany.

tionally had great significance at the *Meetings of leaders*. That was the question at issue. As I recall, it was an extremely tense discussion process until the decision was made: We would meet again in plenary session. This then turned into a moving and - for all of us - surprising event of reconciliation. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, concrete requests for forgiveness between congregations, churches and ministries became possible, tears of emotion were shed, wounds were healed and forgiveness was granted. Two hours of the Holy Spirit's immediate work, unplanned and with a common struggle to understand what God's time with us is. Looking back, I believe that the path to togetherness requires careful, patient struggle and listening.

I want to emphasize once again that this path, that we have experienced, always involves a struggle: How do we perceive God's action and how can we give a form to it? I often experienced this as a spiritual struggle, connected with listening and slowing down the conversation.

The event in Rothenburg had a tremendous impact. The powerful experience of that afternoon was seen as a kind of healing of the wounds of history. It led to a previously unimaginable openness towards one another, which paved the way for the subsequent process of friendship and ultimately made it possible. It also became clear: For CHIARA LUBICH this was not just a one-off event but the beginning of something lasting and new. The motif of the "score" was joined by the motif of "betrothal". It seemed that from now on, she also considered the rehearsal and joint performance of an ecumenical "symphony" to be possible.

An important consequence of this "engagement" was: In the period between Ottmaring 1999, Rothenburg 2000 and Munich 2001,

there were increased encounters between individual centers and communities with the aim of getting to know and understand each other better. (For us in Schoenstatt, it remained a vivid memory that GOTTLOB HESS, HERBERT LAUENROTH and BR. GÜNTHER RATTEY visited us at that time to “test” us, as we later summarized, for a certain ecumenical “accessibility” that might make it advisable (or not!) to invite us to prepare for the Munich meeting in 2001.

Munich – “Together – how else?” – December 8, 2001

After the *Meeting of Leaders* in Rothenburg, a team of members from Protestant, Catholic and Free Church movements was formed, which was soon joined by the *Schoenstatt Movement*. It explored the question of how the future common path might look like.

The preparatory meetings were already experienced as a profound experience of unity by all participants, which found expression (among other things) in the way they listened to one another. In the following testimony, FATHER HEINRICH WALTER³⁰ (*Schoenstatt*) describes his experience in a striking way:

“ I still remember the day and can vividly picture the gathering when this first touched me deeply. It was in the “upper room” at the YMCA in Munich. We were preparing for an event. The aim was to discover our riches and share them among ourselves. In a second round of storytelling, HELMUT NICKLAS (*YMCA Munich*) encouraged us to name someone whose contribution had made us feel the Holy Spirit’s presence in

³⁰ FR. HEINRICH WALTER, Catholic priest and Schoenstatt Father, Superior General of the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Fathers and thus also Chairman of the General Presidium of *the International Schoenstatt Movement* (2003-2015).

a special way. The moment I felt the Holy Spirit's presence in someone else; something happened to me that changed how I saw our togetherness. Something new happened that I had never experienced before. This new commonality is one of the foundations of our *Together for Europe*. Later, I observed that this is the door through which everyone who joins us must walk. Talking about it and explaining it didn't help much; it could only be done through concrete experience. It was sometimes a difficult path to accompany someone through this door.

From listening, reflecting and perceiving together, the idea arose to organize a "Day of Togetherness." Inspired by the experiences in Rothenburg, we invited people to a first large meeting in Munich on December 8, 2001, under the title "Together – how else?"

Two key findings emerged from the wealth of preliminary considerations: Munich should be given a deliberately ecumenical character in terms of both content and form. For this reason, two prominent locations were chosen for the meetings: St. Matthew Church at Sendlinger Tor (seat of the Protestant bishop of Bavaria) and the Frauenkirche (ladies church), the unmistakable landmark of Munich's city center (seat of the archbishop and symbol of Catholic Bavaria). On the morning of December 8, 2001, around 800 leaders of various Christian communities and movements met in the Protestant Bishop's Church of St. Matthew and in the afternoon of the same day, other members of the communities joined them for a meeting in the Cathedral of Our Lady, the Frauenkirche. There was a total of approximately 5,000 participants. The main topics were presented on the Protestant side by a lecture given by New Testament scholar and (emeritus) Lutheran regional bishop ULRICH WILCKENS and on the Catholic side by the president of the worldwide Focolare Movement, CHIARA LUBICH.

We have printed both speeches in abbreviated form in the appendix. (See page 237 and 241.)

For many of us, it was astonishing that CHIARA LUBICH and ULRICH WILCKENS, despite their differences in choice of words, emphasized the same central content of faith. One spoke of Jesus forsaken, the other of Jesus crucified. Even though the differences in language and theological thinking were unmistakable, a deep, simultaneous unity was nevertheless felt by all. In response to what he had heard, HELMUT NICKLAS asked whether we might not want to form a “covenant of mutual love” with one another, thus initiating the next decisive step on the path of togetherness. This proposal was gladly taken up by CHIARA LUBICH and FR. MICHAEL MARMANN, and thus the “covenant of mutual love” came into being, which continues to shape the *Together movement* to this day. THOMAS RÖMER³¹ (*YMCA Munich*), who was responsible for organizing the meeting, EDITH WENGER³² (*Teen Challenge*) and GABRI FALLACARA (*Focolare Movement*) report on how they experienced the event:

“

THOMAS RÖMER: The morning was marked by the great joy of meeting each other. And there were two presentations. First, Protestant Bishop ULRICH WILCKENS spoke about Jesus Christ crucified. Then CHIARA LUBICH, founder of the *Focolare Movement*, spoke about Jesus, the forsaken one.

The harmony between these two messages deeply moved the entire assembly. After the two presentations, the

³¹ THOMAS RÖMER, retired Protestant pastor, director of *the Matthäusdienste* in Munich; member of the steering committee of *the YMCA Munich* and responsible for the community of co-workers (2001-2021), member of the steering team of *the Meeting of Leaders* (2002-2022). He is a member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

³² EDITH WENGER, pastor of the Pentecostal Church (BFP), social therapist, long-time director of the *Teen Challenge* drug rehabilitation center in Metzdorf.

planned program for the morning included: “PASTOR FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF³³, *GGE - Spiritual Community Renewal in the Protestant Church* in Germany, FATHER MICHAEL MARMANN, *Schoenstatt Movement*, FRANCES RUPPERT³⁴, *Cursillo*, GERHARD PROSS, *YMCA Esslingen*, HELMUT NICKLAS, *YMCA Munich* – Summary of what we heard.”

Together with MARIANNE SCHNEPPE³⁵ from the *Focolare Movement*, I moderated this meeting. That is why I saw how the above-mentioned people briefly exchanged ideas with CHIARA LUBICH. HELMUT NICKLAS took the floor and suggested that we now pray and make a “covenant of mutual love.”

At that moment, we remembered Jesus’ new commandment and said decisively: „Yes, Jesus, we hear your commandment that we should love one another as you have loved us. And we are ready to do so. Help us through your Holy Spirit to live what is your commission and what you called us to do.” This determination was our response to Jesus among us, to his sacrifice on the cross, in view of his abandonment.



EDITH WENGER: I witnessed the meeting in 2001 ... at St. Matthew’s Church. It was the first large meeting where Protestant and Catholic communities came together. Some representatives of free churches were also present. For me, as a Pentecostal

³³ FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF, retired Protestant pastor, long-time pastor in Kaufering, chairman of the *Spiritual Community Renewal in the Protestant Church* (GGE) (1988-2004), initiator of the “Versöhnungswege” (Paths of Reconciliation) campaign. He was one of the co-initiators of *Together for Europe*.

³⁴ FRANCES RUPPERT, long-time spokesperson for the *Cursillo Movement*.

³⁵ MARIANNE SCHNEPPE, *Focolare* member, long-time spokesperson for the *Focolare Movement* in Germany at the *Ecumenical Life Center in Ottmaring* (near Augsburg), elected member of the international center of the *Focolare Movement* in Rocca di Papa/Rome (2008-2016).

pastor from a free church, the question at this meeting was: “What will be the center? Where can we meet?”

The Protestant regional bishop PROF. ULRICH WILCKENS and the founder of the *Focolare Movement*, CHIARA LUBICH, spoke there. They succeeded — in a harmonious and extraordinary way — in painting a picture of Christ, the crucified one, before our eyes.

I experienced that Christ, the crucified one, is in our midst. When I perceived this, I could no longer remain in my observer position, thinking, “What is happening here? Can I even participate?” I had the inner impression that I must and want to take a step forward and join in this togetherness, where Jesus Christ is the center.

I very clearly felt I wanted to be here. I want to belong here. This is where the Kingdom of God is happening.

This was followed by spiritual inspiration, the decision that we wanted to enter in the “covenant of love” together.

I don’t remember the exact wording of this prayer, but I do remember that everyone in the church joined hands and recited this prayer together.

“

GABRI FALLACARA: In Munich, in the morning in the Evangelical Lutheran Matthew-Church, in front of eight hundred leaders of communities and movements, the Evangelical Lutheran regional bishop ULRICH WILCKENS spoke, affirming: “*The cry of Jesus abandoned on the cross is the cry of humanity today.*” He emphasized that Christian unity is necessary to bear effective witness to Christ in Germany’s increasingly secularized society.

CHIARA presented the spirituality of the community, which grows out of the charism of unity, as the basis for fellowship

among the movements and concluded: „If we (movements, communities, various groups) love one another and try to realize this unity, which is now possible, we can already present ourselves to the world as one in a certain way, almost as an expression of the soul of the Church in the future.“

This “covenant of mutual love” is one of the essential founding moments for the entire *Together for Europe* movement. The mutual promise to respect, love and help one another, wherever possible, was not only a “basic document” or the founding document for a new organization, but is in a certain sense till today the “lifeblood” of a unity in diversity that grew out of the events on the cross. We continually renew this covenant in remembrance of Jesus’ commandment: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, so that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35), and we pray:

“Jesus, we say yes to your commandment and renew our covenant of mutual love on this day. We want to love one another as you have loved us. We ask you to strengthen our love through the Holy Spirit and be among us as you have promised. Work in us and through us as we work together for your kingdom.”

In the afternoon, CHIARA LUBICH spoke impressively on the topic of “New Evangelization and the Art of Loving.” She based her talk on a presentation by POPE JOHN PAUL II, quoting 10 of his most important principles on new evangelization and referring to the Pope frequently during her speech. Many held their breath inwardly. What would the many Protestants think of such a Pope-centered message? Then HELMUT NICKLAS went to the microphone and asked: “What can we say to that? Let’s just say ‘Yes!’, like Mary.” The tension was relieved and everyone was able to say “Yes” with great joy, especially

because the content was very much in line with what was important to the Protestant communities.

JOHANNES FRIEDRICH³⁶, the Evangelical Lutheran bishop of Munich, remarked afterwards: “*Anyone who experienced this afternoon cannot say that the Holy Spirit is less powerful today than He was at the time of the apostles.*”

There are several reasons why December 8, 2001, is of particular significance in the history of *Together for Europe*. On the one hand, the motto “Together - how else?” was provocative, because it went further than the ecumenical semantics that had been customary up to that point; on the other hand, the ecumenical “turning point” after “Pentecost 98” was taken up by the more Catholic groups precisely because of the Marian motif. In addition, the large participation of members of *the Focolare Movement* (several hundred in the morning; several thousand in the afternoon) gave the “ecumenical” starting signal a certain weight, which encouraged people to attend the events in Stuttgart.

Overall, it can be said about the three steps of the actual founding phase of “*Together for Europe*”: They confirmed CHIARA LUBICH’s faithful “intuition” of a heavenly composition insofar as they not only had an unpredictable logical content, but also – in retrospect – a temporal “economic” efficiency that could not be constructed either but was a gift. One is inclined to think of a sentence by POPE JOHN XXIII, according to which “accelerations in time” are sometimes accompanied by “accelerations in grace.” It seems that for the dynamics of any spiritual movement, and especially that of *Together for Europe*,

³⁶ DR. JOHANNES FRIEDRICH (1948-2025), regional bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (1999-2011) and leading bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) (2005-2011).

a certain proportion of divine preparation and human action is indispensable.

Chapter 3

The network takes shape

On the way to Stuttgart I Congress and the associated Europe Day

On the morning of December 9, 2001, CHIARA LUBICH invited Protestant representatives to reflect on the previous day and to venture a look into the future. When the Protestants asked HELMUT NICKLAS, FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF and GERHARD PROSS, what role the rather small communities they represented could and should play in the future, CHIARA replied: *“It doesn’t matter how many people belong to a movement. What counts is the charism of the movement.”* She invited the Protestant leaders to Rome to get to know each other better and to discover together how the future of cooperation between communities and movements could be shaped.

Inspired by the words of Scripture, *“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16), the idea was born to give “visibility” to our togetherness. In the background was a meeting between ROMANO PRODI,³⁷ the President of the European Commission, and CHIARA LUBICH. When asked about the effectiveness of the Christian faith in politics, PRODI said to CHIARA LUBICH, in essence: How can I pursue Christian policies, if you as Christians do not show your values and convictions? This prompted CHIARA LUBICH to reflect on this with us and motivate us to organize an event for Europe.

³⁷ ROMANO PRODI, economist and politician (initially DC, then L’Ulivo, from 2007 PD), Italian Prime Minister (1996-1998) and (2006-2008), President of the European Commission (1999-2004).

Together we were convinced that there was an urgent need to raise awareness of Europe's Christian roots and to strengthen and highlight the "Christian soul of Europe."

This led to a two-day meeting in Rome at the end of May 2002³⁸. GABRI FALLACARA reports on this and tells how the idea of *Together for Europe* was born during this meeting:

“ On the first day, we met at the International Focolare Center in Rocca di Papa and the next day in Rome at the house of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Trastevere. At lunchtime, I was in a restaurant in Piazza San Callisto with other Focolare members. We had just sat down when my cell phone rang. It was CHIARA, who wanted to talk to me. I remember the "zeal" and "energy" with which she said, "I've had an idea," and began to explain to me that it was necessary to "do something together" with the movements of the different churches. She spoke of *Together for Europe* and asked me if I could imagine the stadium in Berlin as a suitable venue. She was thinking of a large-scale event. That same afternoon, CHIARA proposed the idea to the whole group, and *Together for Europe* was born.

Although the idea met with open interest among our Protestant friends, they had reservations about simply going along with this form of decision-making. HELMUT NICKLAS made it clear that in Protestant communities and movements deci-

³⁸ Representing the Protestant side at this meeting were HELMUT NICKLAS (*YMCA Munich*), FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF (*Evangelical Church/GGE*), THOMAS RÖMER (*YMCA Munich*) and GERHARD PROSS (*YMCA Esslingen/meeting of leaders*). The Catholic side was represented by CHIARA LUBICH and GABRI FALLACARA (*Focolare*), ANDREA RICCARDI (*Sant'Egidio*), FR. MICHAEL MARMANN (*Schoenstatt*), FRANCES RUPPERT (*Cursillo*) and SALVATORE MARTINEZ (*Rinnovamento nello Spirito*), among others.

sions are not made by a single leader but require consultation with other leaders and a communal decision.

After returning from Rome, an intensive discussion began within the Protestant and Free Church communities and movements about the idea of a large-scale event under the theme *of Together for Europe*.

At the same time, they were moved by a contribution from the previous *Meeting of Leaders*, which had challenged them to take on responsibility beyond the scope of their own community or movement. There they had also clearly heard the call “*God is gathering his people,*” which for them meant gathering the “*temporary people of God.*” For this reason, they had been thinking more along the lines of a congress of the co-workers and members involved in *the Meeting of Leaders*. At the next meeting in spring there was an opportunity to reach a common conviction and decision in a synodal process. In consultation between the *Focolare Movement* in Rome, the *Community of Sant’Egidio*, the *Schoenstatt Movement*, *Cursillo*³⁹ and the Protestant and Free Church communities and movements represented at *the Meeting of Leaders*, the result was: We are moving towards a double event that will be inter-twined. The plan was to hold a two-day congress for co-workers and a large-scale event the following day. The Co-workers’ congress was later given the title “*Discovering and Sharing the riches*” and the large-scale event was titled “*Together for Europe.*”

³⁹ *Cursillos de Cristiandad* is a movement of Spanish origin within the Roman Catholic Church.

External realization – Development of a structure for Togetherness

This decision marked the beginning of an intensive preparation process. Supported by the contacts that had been established, a moderate but overall viable organizational structure emerged. However, because there was no blueprint for such an event, those responsible had to proceed cautiously at various levels.

On the one hand, an eight-member steering committee⁴⁰ met approximately every three months for two days in Rome together with several other leaders to prepare. It borders on a miracle that all these highly committed leaders with their busy schedules found the time for these meetings several times a year, or rather, it shows the high priority that everyone gave to this impetus, which they understood as God's guidance. At the same time, teams were formed to advance both the program for the Co-workers Congress and that for the Europe Day.

On the other hand, an intensive process began among the movements. Forums and panel discussions were planned for the Congress, which were prepared by at least three communities of different denominations and spiritualities (e.g. charismatic meets liturgical, pietistic meets Taizé spirituality, *Schoenstatt* meets evangelicals, unity spirituality meets missionary groups, etc.). That is why it was important for us to visit each other, to immerse ourselves in each other's movements, spiritualities and denominations on site, and to build bridges across theological and other divides with a willingness and desire to make friends.

⁴⁰ CHIARA LUBICH (*Focolare Movement*), HELMUT NICKLAS (*YMCA Munich*), ANDREA RICCARDI (*Sant'Egidio*), MICHAEL MARMANN (*Schoenstatt Movement*), FRANCES RUPPERT (*Cursillo*), FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF (*GGE*), GERHARD PROSS (*Meeting of Leaders*), ULRICH PARZANY (*YMCA Germany*).

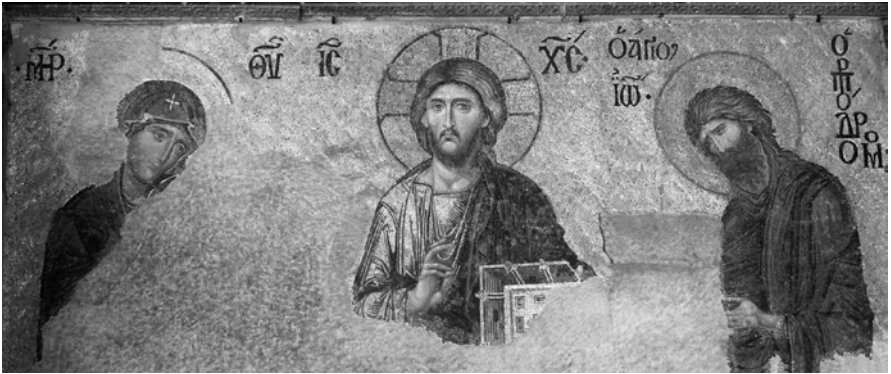
Finally organizational teams were formed to take responsibility for invitations to the event, both within the movements and regarding key figures in the public and church spheres. They were also responsible for providing the necessary translations, hall design, musical and artistic programs and the required technology.

All levels were constantly in contact with each other and worked together with a high degree of transparency, which is why, for example, informal contacts, i.e. ongoing dialogue and exchanges of life experiences, often set the direction during the entire founding phase.

Inner development – guiding motifs

Jesus at the center

CHIARA LUBICH repeatedly emphasized that in all planning and action, Jesus must be at the center of all considerations and preparations. This gave our Protestant and Free Church brothers and sisters a common foundation, which was important to them. As different as we were in some areas of our thinking and acting, in Jesus we found the central focus. We experienced: the clearer we formulated the center of our faith, the more openly we were able to deal with our differences. Remembering Jesus as the center formed the solid basis for our togetherness — as it had already done on December 8, 2001, in Munich (see above). It was the natural center, because this spiritual orientation was palpable among all those responsible. Despite of all differences in individual areas of their respective spiritualities – some of them were obvious – they all shared a palpable connection to Christ, which was not based on theological insights but had its roots in a lived “Christ-intimacy” (FR. JOSEPH KENTENICH, *Schoenstatt Movement*) and in knowing their own personal “being in Christ.”



Deesis, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul: Christ as ruler and judge in the middle, flanked by Mary and John the Baptist, who do intercession prayer for humanity..

The image of the Deesis from Hagia Sofia (Istanbul) became a model for us for this inner connection to our common center. We entitled it “Turning towards.” It shows JOHN THE BAPTIST on one side, MARY, the mother of Jesus, on the other side and Jesus in the middle. The last one of the Old Covenant and the first one of the New Covenant, both turn to Jesus. In doing so, they also turn to each other. This image became a key to our togetherness. Jesus is our center. We turn to Jesus and thus also to each other, as it is through Jesus. Like JOHN THE BAPTIST and MARY, we remain in our traditional places, we can retain our identity and still have fellowship with each other.

Listening to the Word of God

The clear reference to our common center led us - as a logical step - to listen together to the Word of God. For the Protestant and Free Church movements, this listening to Scripture, whose “rediscovery” at the beginning of the 16th century led to their existence in the first place, is the essential foundation of their faith. We saw it as a special providence that the Holy Scriptures also have an enormously high

value for the Catholic movements involved. Therefore, we were able to come together on the Bible as a common foundation. CARDINAL WALTER KASPER⁴¹ later said at the 2008 Ecumenical Award ceremony, “*The denominations have separated over the Bible, and we must also come together again over the Bible.*” That is why inspiration from the Word of God has always been and continues to be of great importance in our encounters.

When Jesus is at the center and people listen to Scripture together, shared times of prayer are the natural consequence. They are the space where different spiritual influences find expression. Through songs of praise (which later also shaped the 2004 Congress in Stuttgart in a special way), an atmosphere of worship was created, which in turn led to listening to God’s voice. Many people will remember ALBERT FREY’S⁴² song “Do you see the Lamb?” in a very special way, because it was experienced as a moment of the highest, most awe-inspiring worship. Although our prayer was intended to be a response to what we had perceived from listening to Scripture, we also wanted to be alert to God’s current speaking. However, it was not only the more charismatic way of listening that came into play, but also other forms, such as the “search for traces” as an experience of *the Schoenstatt Movement* or the exchange of perceptions of the signs of the times, which helped us to detect them. FR. LOTHAR PENNERS (*Schoenstatt*) wrote about this experience:

⁴¹ CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, professor of Catholic theology in Münster and Tübingen, diocesan bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart (1989-1999), president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (2001-2010). On October 31, 1999, he was one of the signatories of the Joint Declaration of Lutherans and Catholics on the Doctrine of Justification in Augsburg.

⁴² ALBERT FREY and ANDREA ADAMS-FREY; songwriters, singers, worship leaders, music producers and authors. They lead worship seminars and worship conferences.



I clearly remember a statement by HELMUT NICKLAS about the charismatic experience, which in a sense goes deeper than the doctrinal and legal positions of the individual churches. This charismatic experience does not directly address the positions mentioned, but it can facilitate a reflective understanding, for example, in questions of the Eucharist or the spiritual office. For the sake of togetherness, it is worth noting that the charismatically influenced prayer times had a three folded effect: On the one hand, they created a supernatural atmosphere that fostered acceptance and openness to the experience of “presence,” i.e. of the living God and his current work; secondly, a corresponding willingness to listen to his voice in the Word of Scripture and in the signs of the times; and finally, a willingness to accept “otherness,” the sometimes very different characteristics of individual groups, i.e. to communicate and cooperate.

Friendship and solidarity

The deep bond formed through listening and praying together gave rise to the desire and realization that, as Jesus’ friends (John 15:14), we should live and nurture friendship and solidarity among ourselves and with others.

In addition to the encounters at the leadership level, this happened in a special way during the preparation of the forums and panel discussions for the co-worker’s congress, which we had entitled “Discovering and Sharing Riches.” Our concern was to make the spiritual treasures, existing in the various movements and communities, recognizable and experiential in our togetherness. We immersed ourselves in each other’s spirituality and got to know it from within.

Every community an expression of God's grace

Our aim was to change our perspective, away from (theological) reservations and prejudices towards a search for the grace, the charism that the Holy Spirit had brought forth in each community. We visited each other, convinced that every community is an expression of God's grace. Instead of seeking separation and distinction, we wanted to recognize the mystery of God in the other movement. This changed our attitude. In the learning program of the Holy Spirit, we learned to recognize and respect God's handwriting in the otherness of the others. Our faith became richer, deeper and broader. In retrospect, it became clear that this change in inner attitude, which first took place among the leaders of the movements and communities, was one of the decisive steps for the entire path of togetherness.

At the same time, we were able to experience that it was not necessary to deny our own identity in this process. On the contrary, our loyalty to our own traditions and the clarity of our own charisms were even strengthened. Spiritual movements, who could not have imagined meeting each other some years ago, set out together on this journey and joyfully experienced that the Holy Spirit did not level out their differences but helped them to discover each other as brothers and sisters, redeemed and saved by Jesus Christ.

Whoever knows the explosive power of established traditions, which have shaped the different groups, can imagine how many barriers had to be overcome along the way. But by engaging in this process, we experienced how the Holy Spirit encouraged us to cross barriers — even when they were extremely challenging. We found biblical guidance, help and encouragement in the experience of Peter, as described in the Acts of the Apostles.⁴³

⁴³ Acts 10 recounts Peter's encounter with the centurion CORNELIUS.

Peter could have invoked tradition and Holy Scripture with good reason. But the Holy Spirit compelled him to overcome previous boundaries and called on him to slaughter and eat unclean animals, which his Jewish tradition did not allow: “*What God has made clean, you must not call unclean*” (Acts 10:15).

Hearing, that some theologically extremely questionable things seem to be sanctified by God, challenged us to transcend our previous borders and — despite our reservations — visit the “houses” of others. We were determined to allow the Holy Spirit to take us by the hand and lead us to the other one. If we had not felt the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit together and recognized the love for Jesus and for Holy Scripture in the other one, we would not have been able to walk this path, so deep were our theological defensive reflexes.

But because by listening to God we gained the conviction that “*God is gathering his people*” and because we had received the promise “*Behold, now is the time of grace, behold, now is the day of salvation!*” (2 Corinthians 6:2) as specifically given for this, our time, we were sure that we were in a special time of grace, a *kairos* for the unity of the people of God. In retrospect, we can confess with amazement: Yes, God had indeed given a time of grace for the becoming one of his people.

From the “small cloud of witnesses” let us listen to Fr. HEINRICH WALTER for the *Schoenstatt Movement*, WALTER KRIECHBAUM for the *YMCA Munich*, MARIA WIENKEN⁴⁴ for the *Focolare Movement* and Free Church Pastor UDO KNÖFEL⁴⁵:

⁴⁴ MARIA WIENKEN, Focolare member, long-time collaborator and later co-director at Centro “Uno” (Ecumenical Secretariat of the Focolare Movement), member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe* since 2021.

⁴⁵ UDO KNÖFEL, free church pastor, founder of the *Evangelical Free Church in Sohland/Spree* (1990), musician (trumpeter, Carl Maria von Weber University of Music, Dresden).



FR. HEINRICH WALTER: In *Together for Europe*, I experienced a kind of friendship I had never known before. Many others had similar experiences and shared them with each other. This gave rise to a common path.

For me, the relationship with WALTER HEIDENREICH⁴⁶ (FCJG *Lüdenscheid*) was a special experience. We were like an unlikely pair of brothers whom God had brought together. There was a disarming openness, because we were attentive to each other's charism. I would describe the process as follows:

We all come with the experience that God, through the Holy Spirit, spoke to a group of Christians in a particular place at a particular time. Each group has been given a special charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit, completely fresh, completely originating from the deeper sources of Christianity. That was the reason why we understood each other despite all our differences. For me, our togetherness began when I started to perceive the charism in the others and took it seriously as a gift from God.



WALTER KRIECHBAUM: I am convinced that the entire journey we went together has also been a journey of gaining and continually renewing trust in one another by seeking and discovering Christ in others and in the unfamiliar. We had an opportunity to do this in Bad Blankenburg at a meeting that took place in a protected setting away from the public eye. The invitation came from HARTMUT STEEB⁴⁷, the General Secre-

⁴⁶ WALTER HEIDENREICH, founder and president of *the Free Christian Youth Community* (FCJG) in Lüdenscheid and head of the mission branch *HELP international e.V.*

⁴⁷ HARTMUT STEEB, Secretary General of the German Evangelical Alliance (1988-2019), co-initiator of the evangelism work *ProChrist*, the church holiday festival *SPRING*, and

tary of the *Evangelical Alliance Germany*, and GERHARD PROSS on behalf of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*. Members of both steering teams met for a fraternal and confidential discussion. I still remember how a culture of listening to one another emerged at this meeting.

This encounter still impresses me today. I associate the keyword “risk” with this encounter. In my eyes, it was a risk to set out on a path towards one another despite our great differences. Unity in diversity always involves risk. The love, that Jesus speaks of, always ventures anew towards others, who may at first be strangers. I sensed such steps were taken in Bad Blankenburg. A wide range of spiritual influences and vocations was alive among us there. For example, I sat next to the then Secretary General of the Gnadauer Association. We listened to each other and learned to appreciate each other – in Christ. Listening, gaining trust in one another, discovering Christ in others — I remember this as an element on this path of togetherness. Of course, I doubt that I understood everything the brothers and sisters from other communities and ministries presented. But sensing the living Jesus Christ at work in them connected me to them.

Perceiving these opened doors to one another, paved the way to experiences that were initially strange and allowed gratitude and respect to mature in view of Jesus` actions in another brother or sister. For me, „sensing” was followed by „understanding.” Unity, connected and reconciled diversity, remain in my eyes a constant process of risk-taking and maturation — for the sake of Jesus` love and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



MARIA WIENKEN: I was always impressed by how - despite the great diversity of the communities involved - the practical organization of an event such as Stuttgart 2004 always focused on the essentials: "the unity among us, the mystery of Jesus at the center. He should shine in Europe." At the Centro "Uno" for Christian Unity (the ecumenical secretariat of the Focolare Movement in Rocca di Papa, Rome), where I worked with others, we sought out contacts with communities and movements of different churches in various European countries, to inform and invite as many people as possible.

In September 2003, I was able to accompany ALDO FONS STEDILE⁴⁸ to Leonberg (Stuttgart) for one of the first meetings of the German preparation team. FONS acted as a "link" between CHIARA LUBICH and this team. What impressed me most was how everyone listened to each other: with great attention and visible goodwill. Each idea was expressed only once. If someone took it up, it was explored in depth. If not, it was not repeated.

There were also very concrete questions, such as financing the event. There was a risk that debts would remain and that the communities would have to pay for them. FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF expressed concern that he might have to take out a mortgage on his house. But CHIARA LUBICH assured him that the *Focolare Movement* would take on possible debts. (In fact, debts did arise, which were then borne by various communities, with the *Focolare Movement* assuming the largest share). After this meeting in Leonberg, I wrote to CHIARA LUBICH:

⁴⁸ ALDO FONS STEDILE (1925-2013), Focolare member and priest, co-founder and long-time co-director of the *Ecumenical Life Center Ottmaring* (near Augsburg), belonged to CHIARA LUBICH's closest circle of collaborators.

“This is not just an event being prepared, the foundations for Christian unity are being laid here. The presence of God is so strongly felt that He Himself is the cornerstone of unity.”

At the Centro “Uno,” we made a special effort to inform Orthodox communities and movements. The Orthodox theologian HEIKKI HUTTUNEN⁴⁹ took part in one of the preparatory meetings in Rocca di Papa, which took place about every three months. We maintained contact with *Syndesmos* (a pan-Orthodox umbrella organization for many Orthodox student associations). The meeting on January 10-11, 2004 (Baak, Holland) with six European leaders (France, Belgium, Albania, Holland) and three from Lebanon from *Mouvement Jeunesse Orthodoxe* was unforgettable. We met with them to report to them in detail on the preparations for May 8 and to dispel reservations about the Protestant and Free Churches. CHRISTOPHE D’ALOISIO⁵⁰, then president of *Syndesmos*, summed up his impressions after two days of in-depth exchange in this way:

“It is important to come together, otherwise our witness as Christians is too weak. We are convinced that we must unite with you on this occasion (May 8 in Stuttgart). Your love for Christ attracts us. And your friends will also be our friends.”

Christophe recalled that 2004 marked the 950th anniversary of the so-called “schism” between West and East and that Stuttgart could be a “new signal.”

After Stuttgart 2004, CHRISTOPHE D’ALOISIO, as president of *Syndesmos*, became a member of the Steering committee

⁴⁹ HEIKKI HUTTUNEN, Orthodox priest, former president of the international Orthodox youth organization *Syndesmos*.

⁵⁰ CHRISTOPHE D’ALOISIO, Orthodox priest, president of the Orthodox youth organization *Syndesmos*, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe* for several years.

for several years. In his contributions he repeatedly expressed the special spiritual richness and depth of the eastern “lung” of Europe.

Preparations in Rocca di Papa for the event in Stuttgart became increasingly intense. CHIARA LUBICH took part in the working meetings and expressed her ideas. Once, there was a proposal to erect a large cross on the stage. CHIARA hesitated: *“Friends and interested people who are not Christians will also be coming. We should be careful with external signs so as not to scare them away.”* And so, no cross was erected on the stage. On another occasion, the discussions turned into a heated debate. During a break, CHIARA said to the Focolare members: *“I am prepared to lose everything, the important thing is that this journey of community continues.”*

During this time, I had the opportunity to get to know HELMUT NICKLAS and his wife HILDEGARD better. I was impressed by his wisdom, clarity and his courage, with which he was able to simplify many things and get to the heart of the matter. I wrote down some of his expressions in a diary at that time. The sentence that still accompanies me today and has greatly strengthened my personal faith, came during the search for financial support for our projects: *“Where the Holy Spirit is, the Heavenly Father opens his hands!”* How often have I been able to experience this!

For me personally, the path of togetherness has confirmed that God’s name today is „unity” and that an encounter with God takes place where people can experience this unity in His name. I understood my calling to live out Jesus’ prayer „that they may all be one” in a new and much deeper way.



UDO KNÖFEL: My wife ILONA and I attended the Meeting of Leaders at the Bernhäuser Forst conference center for the first time in the spring of 2003. We have fond memories of the warm welcome we received from BROTHER GÜNTHER RATTEY. After our first conversation, we already felt lovingly accepted as brothers and sisters in faith with our spirituality. As members of a free church, we had never experienced such friendliness before.

At the meeting for “newcomers”, we met Father MICHAEL MARMANN, then Superior General of *the Schoenstatt Movement*. He spoke about his special relationship with MARY and the saints. It was interesting but also challenging. His kind, gentle manner quickly made it clear to us how valuable and sacred his beliefs were to him. In the subsequent discussion, he answered our questions honestly and openly. Among other things, he said, almost apologetically: “*I always receive answers to my prayers when I call on MARY or one of the saints to intercede with God.*” Even though we personally from our perspective would not readily agree with many of his statements, there was no question for us – here we encountered a man of God in whom Jesus Christ lives and who serves God with great sincerity. We had similar experiences repeatedly in many other encounters with Catholic brothers and sisters. We now have many friendly relationships with them. As a result, when someone makes sweeping judgments about the Catholic Church today, we feel personally attacked in a sense and try to put things back into perspective.

In 2004, the event *Together for Europe* took place in Stuttgart. As a congregation, we actively participated in the preparation and implementation of the panel discussion on “Evangelization”. One of the preparatory meetings took

place at our church in Sohland. A colorful mix of brothers and sisters from various spiritual backgrounds visited us, ranging from the YMCA to friends of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church, Youth with a Mission* and the *Schoenstatt Movement*.

It was simply wonderful to experience such a diversity of different spiritualities. The wide range of gifts helped us to develop a panel discussion that was beneficial for all participants.

In addition to group work, we took a trip to Herrnhut and followed in the footsteps of Count NIKOLAUS VON ZINZENDORF. This helped us get to know each other even better. We were amazed at our sometimes considerably different theological convictions and at the paths God had led us on so far. Despite all our differences, we were able to discover Jesus Christ in each other.

Chapter 4

The Stuttgart I Congress – May 6-7, 2004

Discovering and sharing the riches

On May 6 and 7, 2004, around 2,000 people from 170 very different spiritual communities and movements from over 30 countries met at the Liederhalle in Stuttgart. They belonged to the Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox churches and to free churches. The invitations were not sent out according to a strategic plan with the aim of ensuring that certain groups were represented, but were passed on from person to person, from movement to movement. As mentioned above, their spiritual backgrounds could not have been more diverse, ranging from charismatic, pietistic or evangelical to Marian or liturgical. But what had already become apparent in the run-up to the Congress through the encounters between the participants could now be experienced once again.

Discovering and sharing our riches

At the event something happened that hardly anyone would have thought possible: under the motto “Discovering and sharing riches”, the movements, so different in character, met with great openness towards one another, tried to understand each other in their differences and were prepared to embark on a common path and face the considerable challenges associated with it.

ALBERT FREY and ANDREA ADAMS-FREY and their band provided musical accompaniment for the Congress. Overall responsibility was shared by GERHARD PROSS (leader of the Meeting of Leaders),

SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE⁵¹ (*prioress of the Christ Brotherhood community Selbitz*), MARIANNE SCHNEPPE (*Focolare Movement*) and THOMAS RÖMER (*YMCA Munich*).

Two themes dominated the content. On the one hand, there were reflections on the fundamental mission and significance of the spiritual movements by CHIARA LUBICH, MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO⁵² (President of the *Community of Sant'Egidio*) and GERHARD PROSS. On the other hand, encouraging reports on the growing cooperation between the movements and biblical reflections by FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF (*GGE*), SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE, FR. MICHAEL MARMANN, THOMAS RÖMER, FR. HEINRICH WALTER, and MARIANNE SCHNEPPE formed the focus of the content. In the afternoons, around 30 forums and panel discussions awaited the participants. It is not possible to go into detail here about the richness of remarkable content presented in the plenary sessions, forums and panel discussions. However, we would like to refer you to the detailed documentation on the *Together for Europe* website, www.together4europe.org.

The forums and panel discussions, each of which had been prepared by at least three different communities, offered all participants the opportunity to get to know each other better and more deeply and to set out together on a journey with a specific theme in mind. In addition, there was a supporting program that provided opportunities for more personal interaction, a celebration of encounter and a particularly impressive closing evening that formed a bridge to Europe Day.

⁵¹ SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE (1952-2020), prioress of *the Christ Brotherhood community in Selbitz* (2000-2018), Protestant pastor, member of the Synod of the Bavarian Regional Church (2002-2006). She was a member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe* from the very beginning.

⁵² PROF. DR. MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO, historian, professor of 19th and 20th century history at the University of Rome III, president of *the Community of Sant'Egidio* (since 2003), appointed by POPE FRANCIS as historical consultant to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (2022).

In his speech at the beginning of the congress, GERHARD PROSS spoke about the role of spiritual movements in the present days. Using a passage from 1 Peter⁵³, he impressively and vividly demonstrated to the movement's collaborators their significance as God's people. (See page 247)

Following this, MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO, drawing on history, emphatically pointed out to the participants in his lecture on the theme "What God wants to say to his people and to the world through the movements" which responsibility this entails for the people of God and that it is waiting to be realized in the near and distant future. (See page 257.)

Summary of the Forums



FR. HEINRICH WALTER

The first question for all of us would be: Have you grown tired from working on the forums? ... Neither have we! When work does not make us tired but alive, it is related to the fact, that on the one hand the grace of God was at work and on the other hand deeper layers of our own soul were touched. We were completely absorbed in this forum work with our innermost being, with what defines us. We felt that when we were together this afternoon. I was deeply touched by this energy that was palpable among the 70-80 representatives from the forums, this liveliness and this power of concentration - to summarize the essential experiences.

⁵³ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9).*

I will now mention a few more images relating to the whole and the atmosphere that came to me this afternoon as I observed.

The first is: We have experienced probation and confirmation on a large scale, what we have already practiced on a small scale before. We practiced walking together for a whole year of preparation. We have decided to seek what unites us in this community and not what divides us. As a result, everyone has grown and has not become smaller. In doing so, we have experienced: God is guiding us.

Secondly, we experienced ourselves as God's orchestra with instruments we had not known before and in which other instruments we do not yet know will play in the future. It is a great thing that we, as God's huge orchestra, are allowed to play a symphony for our society and our churches. We experienced that this togetherness in the orchestra does not weaken us, it strengthens us. Being perceived by others makes us really strong and it strengthens our own originality.

There is a third thing I would like to say: we have experienced a culture of appreciation. There was a palpable sense of reverence, a language of the heart, in which Catholics spoke in such a way that Protestants and members of free churches could understand them, and vice versa. A great symbol: this morning, Protestants explained to us what it is like with Mary. We have always spoken of great riches and there is still much to discover, as was discussed this afternoon. We have only just begun to discover each other and to search for this wealth. And we have felt that this culture of appreciation is a safe space of encouragement for what every individual and each group does. In this process of appreciation,

much transformation has been gifted to us over these two days.

This afternoon, at the end of our workshop focusing on society, the words were spoken: "We were together in a workshop of hope – hope for our churches, hope for our country, hope for Europe."

This afternoon, a need was palpable: we need projects, cooperation in projects that are concrete and practical. There was talk of whether one movement could take the other by the hand and show how they do it, because we can learn from each other. In this project work, two things were discussed most: First, the family. One phrase was used: "In the broken society in which we live, we want to be true fathers and mothers." Society is crying out for this. A second area could be the city. There was talk about it this morning: loving our cities in Europe as Jesus loved Jerusalem. And giving our souls to this love for the city.

One final remark: At lunchtime today, I met a professor in the pedestrian zone and asked him what he thought about the whole event. He said: This is my first time attending such a meeting and I am increasingly getting the impression that this is a milestone for the churches in our country. If someone who has only just gotten a taste of it says that, then you and we can imagine how those who have been dreaming about it for years feel. When I see these workshops and what could be felt this afternoon in terms of strength, energy and the will to achieve concrete results, I have no fears about the future of Christians in our country or the future of Europe.

Question from GERHARD PROSS: "Father HEINRICH WALTER, this afternoon has touched you very deeply. Could you say a few words about

that?” *“We believed in these forums for a year — that they would take place and that they would be good. When you feel at the end of the event that more has been achieved than you had hoped for, your eyes fill with tears and you feel with your heart, and that was a great gift for me this afternoon. And it is good to stand by your emotions”.*

A brief glimpse into the internal dynamics

A passage from GERHARD PROSS’ opening speech at the beginning of the Congress may give a little insight into the inner dynamics of the development:



At the birth of this Congress, we as leaders perceived that God was calling his people together. (...) Some call it “searching for signs,” others call it “listening to the voice of God”. Based on our perception and listening, we are convinced that we are living in a special time of grace for our togetherness (2 Corinthians 6:2). We hear God’s calling with great urgency. That is why I am convinced that these days in Stuttgart have a prophetic dimension: the call into togetherness! God himself is calling and gathering his people. It is a time of grace for the ecumenism of hearts. It is a time of grace for the ecumenism of hearts, especially here in Stuttgart, at a time when the ecumenism of churches must overcome many hurdles and there is a certain amount of resignation. In the realm of spiritual movements, denominational differences play a subordinate role.

The joy at the great richness of content reflected in many contributions to the Congress and the gratitude for the others who enabled manifold encounters was one thing. However, the decisive factor was:

Gathering in prayer and singing around our common center was a place of deepest encounter. Even though the worship was strange to some of us, everyone was able to engage with it.

There was a special moment when the presence of the Risen One was almost tangible. When ALBERT FREY began to sing the song “Do you see the Lamb...”, it was as if the presence of the Holy Spirit seized us all at that moment, not with flames of fire above our heads, but with burning hearts. Many told afterwards how they had experienced something like a new Pentecost at that moment.

The joint journey of preparations, listening to one another and mutual awareness had brought us together, and praying and singing together allowed us to experience a new, profound unity as a gift. We experienced ecumenism of the hearts, or still better, ecumenism of the spirit, because we recognized Christ in one another — even in our very different forms of piety.

The conclusion – a very special evening

The closing evening focused on the connection between the unity of God’s people and its impact on society, specifically in Europe. It formed a bridge to Europe Day and can be considered one of the highlights of the entire Congress.

Once again, a special moment arose when we renewed the covenant of mutual love that we had made with each other in Munich in 2001. At the beginning, each participant received three different colored threads. Now, in a small action, every three people were to tie a “triple cord” together to symbolically express the covenant.

That evening, around 50 bishops from different churches, who had registered for the following Europe Day, joined the Congress participants. They proved to be the most creative and tied their threads together into a single large ribbon that connected all the bishops. The

program did not include any speeches for the bishops, but this special moment called for a few words of emphasis. Spontaneously, SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE and GERHARD PROSS, who were leading the evening, decided to invite CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, President of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, and BISHOP CHRISTIAN KRAUSE, President of the Lutheran World Federation, onto the stage to address the Congress with a few short sentences. “*I have a dream,*” they began almost simultaneously, and CARDINAL WALTER KASPER continued: “*and today it has become reality, or rather, it is beginning to become reality: the dream of the one Church of Jesus Christ, which you can already see realized here.*”

The wave of enthusiasm over the obvious commonality between the bishops and the spiritual movements in their longing for unity of the Body of Christ, which swept through the Liederhalle at that moment, had a prelude that made it clear to everyone: something more than just two bishops giving speeches was happening here.

All the bishops had come to the Liederhalle together by bus, but due to traffic jam they only arrived after the official start of the evening.

Since their reserved seats were in the front section, they had to walk to their seats across the hall, passing through all the participants. As they did so, spontaneous enthusiastic applause came up. Many sensed that this was a special moment, because: what belongs together was coming together: the bishops and the people of God, the church leadership and the spiritual movements. One could sense that this would have an impact on the future. Ministry and movements, or as Pope JOHN PAUL II had put it, the Petrine and Marian dimension of the Church came together and worked in their own way. This touched and changed hearts.

For some leaders of the movements, that evening marked the beginning of a long-standing partnership and friendship with Bishop CHRISTIAN KRAUSE, CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, CARDINAL MILOSLAV

Vlk⁵⁴ and other bishops, which found very subtle expressions in many encounters, spontaneous phone calls and uncomplicated emails.

⁵⁴ MIROSLAV CARDINAL VLK (1932-2017), Archbishop of Prague (1991-2010), President of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (1993-2001), appointed Cardinal (1994), Moderator of Bishops associated with the *Focolare Movement* (from 1994), worked as a window cleaner in Prague for 8 years (1978-1989) because he was forbidden from exercising any priestly activity.

Chapter 5

The first Europe Day – May 8, 2004

“May hope be at home in Europe!”

It was a special hour of God with His people that was revealed during the days in Stuttgart. One co-worker put it this way:

“ The days in Stuttgart were the most beautiful and intense of my life so far. This is thanks to the miracle of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our midst; this presence was so intense that I have only experienced it a few times in my life.

The spiritual intensity that he experienced so joyfully not only characterized the fraternal togetherness during the Congress, where one might have expected it due to the many previous encounters, but also continued in the same way on the following Europe Day. It also made this day appear in a special light.

“An unprecedented event” – Report from the magazine MARIAPOLI

At this point, we give the floor to the magazine of *the Focolare Movement*, MARIAPOLI, with its report on the event, which described the impressions of the members on Europe Day:

“ On the anniversary of the end of World War II and a few days after ten new nations joined the European Union, the city of Stuttgart opened its doors to an unprecedented event.

On May 8, Stuttgart became the beating heart of Europe. Nine thousand people crowded into the Schleyer Hall,

coming from all corners of the continent as representatives of more than 170 Christian movements, communities and groups: Catholics, Evangelicals, Free Churches, Anglicans, and Orthodox Christians, all together protagonists of a great ecumenical event.

The event was broadcast via satellite and Internet - whole or partly - by more than 60 television stations throughout the world.

The 163 simultaneous meetings in many European cities, which were connected live to Stuttgart, received a special response: from the Capitol in Rome to the Aula Magna of UNESCO in Paris to the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Geneva. More than 100,000 people took part in the event at the same time.

The anthem prepared for the occasion marked the start of the event. An explosion of lights, colors and music alternated on stage to show the most beautiful face of Europe, "the land of hope," as the song says.

Pastor FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF and CHIARA LUBICH explained the meaning and origin of the day. They expressed their desire that, in addition to political Europe, a Europe of the spirit might also emerge, because, as they said: *"We are sure that through the development of the spiritual aspect of Europe, the countries that comprise it will achieve greater cohesion among themselves."* Spiritual movements can have a significant contribution to this. They concluded with the words: *"We are convinced that if the gifts of the spirit of the various movements and Christian communities are better recognized and appreciated by Europeans through initiatives such as today's event, it will be possible to make a real contribution to enrich our continent spiritually, make it more united and more open."*

Numerous messages of greetings for this day came from European political and church leaders, including the current President of the European Union, Irish Prime Minister BERTIE AHERN, German President JOHANNES RAU, Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW I of Constantinople, Archbishop of Canterbury ROWAN WILLIAMS, King ALBERT OF BELGIUM, Ms. VAIRA FREIBERGA, President of Latvia, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. SAMUEL KOBIA, and many others.

The message conveyed by Pope JOHN PAUL II, read by Archbishop STANISŁAW RYLKO, was an urgent call to continue the path of communion. *"The Christians gathered in Stuttgart, who belong to many religious movements", he said, "testify that the Gospel overcomes selfish nationalism and sees Europe as a family of people, rich in cultural diversity and historical experience, but united in a common destiny. Europe needs this awareness in order to participate in the great events to which history has called it"*.

These words of JOHN PAUL II were taken up in the speech by ANDREA RICCARDI, founder of the *Community of Sant'Egidio* and one of the organizers of the event. *"The Europe of the spirit," he said, "begins when you open your heart to the Gospel, or rather, when you find your heart and begin to live no longer for yourself. (...). Europe of the spirit has no borders and is connected to all people, but especially to the victims of war, the mother of all poverty. Europe's message to the world should be peace."*

The elegant stage design and the various artistic performances linked the different moments of the program. Thus, on May 8, the Schleyer Hall was not only an exhibition of the true and the good, but also of the beautiful, as someone remarked.

The President of the European Commission, ROMANO PRODI, was greeted with loud applause as he explained the Union's grand political project and declared that it can only endure in long term if it is supported by a strong soul, if it has a spirit, that according to PRODI, can be decisively promoted by Christian movements and communities.

His speech was interrupted by applause. *"We who work in the institutions,"* said PRODI, *"and you who live out the diverse responses that arise from your charisms, we together must build Europe. It breathes with two lungs, but lives with one heart."*

"The people of God are gathered here," said ULRICH PARZANY⁵⁵, Protestant pastor and secretary general of the German YMCA. He continued: *"The people of God, in all churches and Christian communities, will be like a grassroots movement that can shape humanity in lively, credible and various ways."*

And the audience in the Schleyer Hall witnessed this reality: young people and adults, men and women, who took the culture of peace and fraternity seriously. A culture of fraternity begins with reconciliation, as Pastor FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF said, and which is illustrated by the various initiatives to heal the wounds of World War II.

CHIARA LUBICH called for a culture of fraternity in her address. *"The love that Jesus brought,"* she said, *"is essential for Europe"*

⁵⁵ ULRICH PARZANY, retired Protestant pastor, youth pastor and director of the Weigle House in Essen (1967-1984), secretary general of *the YMCA Germany* (1984-2005), evangelist and director of the evangelistic association *ProChrist* (1991-2013), chairman of the supporting association for the preparation and implementation of the *Christival* missionary youth congresses.

to become a family of nations: the 'common European home'."

"This love," CHIARA continued, "reaches its perfection in reciprocity and expresses the power of Christianity, because it attracts the presence of Jesus." According to CHIARA, the movements give hope and are a concrete response to the challenges of today's world, *"because God himself acts in them".*

The event was covered in the local and European press. Several press conferences were held in both Rome and Stuttgart. Many radio and television stations broadcast reports, interviews and in-depth reports. Newspapers in various European countries reported on the event. All of them had one thing in common: the spirit of Europe lives in Christian movements and communities.

In the afternoon, the celebration continued. Three European cities were connected via live broadcast: Paris, Budapest and Den Bosch in the Netherlands.

Like an overflowing river, 200 young people came onto the stage from different points in the hall. It was time to hear their vision of Europe. Their dream is an open, fraternal, dynamic and coherent Europe that responds to the needs of other continents.

The central part of the day was reserved for the presentation of the various movements. There were a number of testimonies: the love from the Gospel that creates unity; that heals families; that leads people to share their goods; that helps the needy; that reaches out to all those close to them; that brings generations together in community; that frees young people from the dangers of drugs and hedon-

ism; calling men and women to place themselves entirely at the service of humanity.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER and the Lutheran Regional Bishop of Bavaria, JOHANNES FRIEDRICH, spoke about the richness that openness to charisms can bring to Christian churches. *"The Church needs the movements,"* said KASPER, *"just as the movements need the Church."*

"I hope," said Bishop FRIEDRICH, *"that the fellowship of communities present here, as we have experienced it, will be more visible and more ecumenical in local parishes, because this day will give inspiration to ecumenism between our churches."*

The highlight of the event was the closing message. On stage, along with the organizers, were representatives of the participating movements and groups who contributed to the event. The words of those who read the message were accompanied by silence. The commitment was reinforced by prolonged applause.

Afterwards, bishops and leaders of various churches expressed their commitment by reciting Jesus' Prayer for unity in unison.

HELMUT NICKLAS from *the YMCA*, who moderated this moment, exclaimed: *"In this prayer we see the call to continue this community of life"* and invited all those present to join hands and make a pact of mutual love: *"May hope be at home in Europe!"* was his impressive wish at the end and highlight of the day. This closing sentence was confirmed with thunderous applause from all 10,000 participants.

GERHARD PROSS, one of the initiators of "Stuttgart 2004," said: *"It was great: the leaders of the movements, together with the bishops, gave a testimony of unity. Where will this lead us? In*

Stuttgart, we experienced the ecumenism of hearts. Great, great!”

The sounds of the anthem fill the arena. Boys and girls take to the stage for the final choreography. They carry the flags of the European countries, which together form a single blue banner bearing the 12 stars of a united Europe.

Joy, emotion and the awareness of having participated in a historic event are the feelings that flow through the crowd in the festively decorated Schleyer Hall.

From the main contributions of that day

It would go beyond the scope of this book to reproduce all the speeches, statements and other contributions made on that day. We have printed some of them in Part II. For others, we refer you to the *Together for Europe* website, www.together4europe.org. Nevertheless, we have collected a small selection of some of the theses and sentences from the speeches to give at least some impressions of the content of the day.

On the significance of the day (CHIARA LUBICH)

- We are convinced that a deepening of spiritual life also strengthens cohesion among nations.
- God intervenes by repeatedly bestowing special graces, gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Each of these movements have their own charism and realize evangelical love in many forms, which are all extremely useful, indeed necessary, for shaping the “Europe of the Spirit.”
- If the gifts of the Spirit, which are characteristic of the various Christian movements, become better known and appreciated by

Europeans (...) they can contribute to making our continent spiritually richer, more united and more open.

- In a united Europe, diversity must be preserved.

On the significance of the day (FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF)

- In December 2001, we formed a covenant of hearts for mutual love and respect, which is now bearing good fruit. BISHOP ULRICH WILCKENS reminded us at the time that atheism and the associated decline in values are also a consequence of the schism in the Church. Could it not also be the other way round, that the growing unity and love among Christians is giving new strength to the Christian faith?
- As Christians from different churches and communities, we would like to present today to our fellow European citizens the gifts God has entrusted to us for the good of Europe.

On Europe: History and Spirit (ANDREA RICCARDI)

- Europe's heritage is diverse, both in religious and historical terms.
- Europe is one and plural.
- Reflection on Europe must begin with Auschwitz.
- The great dream at the dawn of the year 2000 must be: peace in Europe means world peace. Just as war in Europe meant world war, so today peace in Europe must become world peace.
- The great risk is that Europe will be shaped solely by interests and economy. And that is a world not worth living and dying for.
- Our Europe is often without a heart.
- The heart is reborn when one receives the gift of God's word, the gift of the Gospel.
- To live for Christ means to live for everyone. The Europe of the Spirit begins, when a person opens their heart to the word of God,

when they rediscover their heart and begin to live no longer for themselves.

- Europe cannot live for itself. It is not a comfortable island. The great south of the world, Africa, sits like poor Lazarus at the door of rich Europe.
- This Africa shares a common destiny with us — we will either live together or perish together.

Brother- and Sisterhood (CHIARA LUBICH)

- I dream that one day people will realize that they are created to live together as brothers and sisters.
- that fraternity ... will be part of the daily routine for businesspeople and a guiding principle for politicians.
- The one who proclaimed the fraternity of all people before anyone else and gives us the opportunity to realize it is Jesus.
- The means Jesus offers us to realize this worldwide fraternity is love; a new, great love that is different from what we normally know. For Jesus brought the way of loving in heaven to earth.
- Furthermore, this love requires us to take the first step. For the love that Jesus brought to earth is selfless.
- The love Jesus brought is indispensable for Europe, if it is to be a “Europe of the Spirit” and thus become the “common European home”, a family of nations.
- May the Holy Spirit help us all, wherever we are, to create ever greater “spaces of fraternity” by living the love Jesus brought us from heaven.
- Striving for a united Europe to achieve a united world: this could, therefore, be one of the contributions at the conclusion of our meeting in Stuttgart.

Europe needs Christ (ULRICH PARZANY)

- Jesus guarantees the inviolable dignity of each individual human being.
- God created every human being in his image and thereby endowed them with inviolable dignity.
- Europe needs the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, if it wants to have a human future.
- Jesus creates community and overcomes division.
- The people of Europe need a new experience of God's love and justice to be able to love. That is why they need the message of Jesus Christ, in whom the living God encounters us.
- I lament that God has not even found a place in the preamble to the European Constitution, but instead the "prevalence of reason" has been elevated to the status of a measure. If human reason does not listen to the voice of its creator, the merciful and holy God, it will bring about the destruction of man and human community in self-aggrandizing excess and arrogance.

The Unity of Europe (ROMANO PRODI)

What should our political action look like in these dramatic times?

1. Understand society by starting with the smallest and weakest. There are enormous contradictions between Europe and the southern hemisphere. If the countries of the South get out of control, Europe will also face difficult times.
2. Recognizing the rights of others.
3. Reconciliation. This is a gentle word, but one that carries the strongest power within.
4. Overcoming fear.

Christianity reminds us that the remedy for fear is faith. At this moment of great European reunification, Christians are called to con-

tribute intelligently, committedly and creatively so that Europe does not become a fortress, but rather a political actor with a soul, which understands peace and justice as its identity and vocation. You are an essential part of this soul. Together we are building Europe: we through our work in the institutions, you by living out the diverse responses that arise from your charisms.

Highlights from other contributions

“ THOMAS RÖMER: Jesus fears God. But it is a new kind of fear of God that we find in Jesus. It has no longer anything to do with fear. It is a familiar fear of God that comes from the experience of love. This familiar fear of God sets us free and dispels the fear of man.

“ Minister President ERWIN TEUFEL⁵⁶: Europe was built on three hills: the Greek Agora, the Roman Capitol, and Jerusalem, on Golgotha.

“ ROMANO PRODI: The history of Europe cannot be understood without the history of Christianity. The great founding fathers of Europe were devout Christians who were guided by their faith in their work for Europe. ...

I extend a warm welcome to our friends from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Malta, and Cyprus. You are joining a union in which — precisely because it is a union of minorities — no

⁵⁶ ERWIN TEUFEL, German politician (CDU), Minister President of the State of Baden-Württemberg from 1991 to 2005.

one can consider themselves superior or inferior to anyone else.



CARDINAL WALTER KASPER: I came because of the topic of Europe, and I am here now because of the people I have met here.

...

This meeting is a great moment for ecumenism, a milestone for the churches. ...

We need a Europe of hearts, and hearts are not filled with money, but with values, and ultimately with God. ...

It is high time that Christians speak up, that young Christians speak up and say, we are here and remind people of Europe's Christian roots. Because otherwise, Europe cannot really succeed. Secondly, it is of great importance for ecumenism. At the moment, on the level of official ecumenism everything is somewhat slowed down, and it is important that the movements form a network among themselves.



REGIONAL BISHOP JOHANNES FRIEDRICH: It is the spiritual movements that can make Europe something that goes beyond the Europe of economics and institutions, a living Europe, a Europe with a soul. ...

The communities have given an important impetus to a Christian Europe. Here it becomes clear that Europe has not only been shaped by Christianity in the past, but that Europe can be found only in and with Christ.

Ecumenical challenges

A small incident deserves special mention. Queen FABIOLA OF BELGIUM was asked to pray the “Lord’s Prayer” together with the audience at the closing ceremony of Europe Day.

As she was accustomed to doing in her personal prayers, she naturally wove a Hail MARY into the prayer. For some Protestants, this was beyond their limit of tolerance, and they expressed their displeasure during the closing reflection among the co-workers. But to their great astonishment, HELMUT NICKLAS said to them: *“Fortunately, she prayed in accordance with her piety and did not pretend to be someone she is not. We want reconciliation between different groups, not a levelling down to the lowest common denominator.”* This was a landmark statement for the togetherness of the movements.

How challenging this common path can sometimes be for one’s own group and how difficult it is to repeatedly engage in it and to bring oneself to accept others as brothers and sisters is also clear in the testimony of Pastor UDO KNÖFEL (*Evangelical Free Church of Sohland*):

“ When we think back to Stuttgart 2004, we are still impressed by the great diversity of the body of Jesus Christ. Of course, there were also some critical contributions at that time. From today’s perspective, we don’t necessarily think that’s a bad thing. It is important to question things when you yourself look at them quite differently. After all, the unity of God’s people is not about uniformity, but about reconciled diversity.

Personally, I was particularly challenged by a statement made by CHIARA LUBICH, the founder of the Roman Catholic *Focolare Movement*. In her lecture, she spoke of the brotherhood of all people, including those of other religions. This did

not fit into my spiritual context at all. "Is this about mixing religions?" flashed through my mind. At that time, I learned that we Christians sometimes associate something completely different with one and the same word. Of course, this can lead to irritation, misunderstandings and rejection. Reaching out to one another, engaging in conversation, listening, and questioning opinions are important things on the path to unity.

Over the years, we became increasingly convinced that, to grow in unity with Christians of other denominations, one must have a certain spiritual maturity, otherwise any other opinion challenges one's own faith and can quickly be perceived as an attack.

Brothers and sisters with different spirituality broaden our spiritual horizons, stimulate reflection and become a valuable enrichment. I am always surprised by the almost limitless diversity with which one can read, interpret and live the Word of God. This has led us to continually rethinking our own convictions, which has broadened our spiritual horizons and, of course, has had and continues to have an impact on our service in the Kingdom of God. Our own opinions and perspectives are only fragments of the whole (1 Corinthians 13:9). It is so important to meet each other, get to know each other and engage in an exchange that is inspiring for both sides.

Only together, in reconciled diversity, can we be salt and light of our time and bear credible witness. We should always treat with respect and interest what is sacred to others.

Some practical implications:

Perhaps I can put it this way: out of the narrow-minded thinking of a free church we were led to a broader perspective. Numerous spiritual leaders from other denominations

served in our church or at interdenominational events. Many of the ideas we gained at *the Meeting of Leaders* flowed into our “*Upper Lusatian Network of Spiritual Leaders*” in a blessed way.

Since we got to know each other in a special way at *the Meeting of Leaders*, we became aware of the importance of meeting local leaders of the various churches and ministries in advance, when we expanded our church activities to Löbau, to get to know each other and discuss our plans with them. Today, we have friendly relationships with all Christians, so that we can serve the city together in the “*Evangelical Alliance*,” in the quarterly “Prayer for Löbau” and at special events.

A crucial foundation is the so-called second calling, which means receiving a calling from God for one’s own ministry and another for the unity of the body of Christ.

In recent years, especially through encounters with Catholic brothers and sisters and the high value they place on their celebration of the Eucharist, our understanding of the Lord’s Supper has expanded as follows:

For us, the Lord’s Supper was simply a memorial meal (Luke 22:19b / 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Our understanding was that we commemorate the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became human for our salvation. With Jesus, we are buried in baptism and risen with Him to new life. Thus, in Holy Communion, we also commemorate our baptism and new life in the Lord. Before Holy Communion, we therefore have a time of praise and worship.

Through our encounters with our Catholic and Lutheran brothers and sisters, we became aware of the significance of the real presence of Jesus in bread and wine, and since

then we have celebrated Holy Communion differently: in the awareness of His presence, the celebration of the meal becomes a sacred moment to which we invite others very consciously.

In recent years, we have repeatedly experienced how different styles of piety with their specific theological emphases have inspired and encouraged us. Conversely, we have been able to serve with our gifts (e.g., in the areas of evangelization, praise, life in the Spirit). Among many other encounters, we will never forget an invitation from *the Focolare Movement* to Castel Gandolfo.

An elder of our church once said, *„Never again back to the theological narrowness and one-sidedness of those days.“*

A letter full of joy and gratitude

Following Stuttgart I, the two main organizers, SEVERIN SCHMID and GERHARD PROSS, wrote a letter to the communities and movements expressing their gratitude for the days in Stuttgart and asking about their fruits and consequences for the future. Here are some excerpts from that letter:

“

We continue to look back on the days in Stuttgart with joy, gratitude and amazement. We were able to experience a true time of grace together, a time of God’s grace for the cooperation of spiritual communities and movements, which led to cooperation with the churches and, together with them, for our society. These days have sparked enormous hope both for the cooperation of churches and movements and for our society. Rarely we have been so deeply

convinced that we are fully in tune with what God considers important for our time. Wasn't that precisely the profound mystery of this wonderful "Togetherness" in Stuttgart? God is writing history and we are privileged to be part of it.

Many are now asking, unmistakably, what happens next? Everyone senses that it must continue. We would like to share a few thoughts on this.

The new way of thinking and the new attitude have already begun. We were able to discover much of the richness that God has placed in other movements and have formed a covenant of love with one another. If we live this new way of thinking and this new attitude in the future, then for me this is an enormously powerful expression of what can continue in everyday life.

We seek togetherness. In a very practical way, we want to live the covenant of love we have made. Now it will be important for each community to explore the forms and possibilities that this covenant holds for them, without overburdening ourselves. It will be important for us to sense what concrete steps of togetherness are needed at the local, regional or national level. Encounters with other communities, cooperation between two or more communities for specific tasks and events. It will not be a matter of acting for the sake of it, but of remaining attentive and perceptive, with each community sensing and recognizing the concrete steps which are now appropriate for them.

In addition to the highlight in Stuttgart, it will now also be important to get to know the other movements better. This also means that we need to talk to each other in areas where clarification is needed. The world of thought and language is often very different, and while we want to focus on

what we have in common, we do not want to ignore the open questions but rather talk to each other with love and openness.

Chapter 6

Inside views – very authentic and touching

Listening, living, acting together

Like many others, we asked SEVERIN SCHMID (*Focolare Movement*) to write down his impressions of the journey in Together for Europe from the beginning in Stuttgart I to Stuttgart II. Originally, we thought of “weaving” these impressions into the overall text in some way. But we feel that his text is so “coherent” that we got the impression that much of what makes it so appealing would be lost if we took it apart. We see this appeal in his original style, but above all in the fact that he often captures the atmosphere of friendship and the mood that dominated this period of cooperation in a very authentic and touching way. We are therefore including his text in full here:

Listening, living, acting together A story

Preliminary remarks

Communities: This story refers to all movements, communities and ministries from the Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Free Church spheres that have embarked on the path of togetherness over time and have formed the “covenant.”

Covenant: On December 8, 2001, seven hundred representatives from fifty communities gathered at the Protestant St. Matthew Church in Munich and formed a covenant of mutual love in the spirit of Jesus: *“A new commandment I give unto you: Love one another! As I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know*

that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Charism: This refers to the gift of grace that the Holy Spirit bestows upon the founder of a community or order. Such charism works for the good of humanity. It can be recognized by how a community lives and what it accomplishes.

Names and terms: The people in the story are briefly introduced and then referred to only by their first names. This reflects the friendship that has grown between them through their covenant.

"Together for Europe" is the name given to the network between communities to make a spiritual contribution to the unity of Europe.

Europe Day is the working title for the major event *"Together for Europe"* in 2004.

Stuttgart 2004 is the name for both events together: Europe Day on May 8 and the Congress *"Discovering and Sharing Riches Together"* on May 6 and 7, 2004.

On the move, but where to?

The Alitalia plane flies over the snow-covered Alpine peaks towards Rome. The sun is still low in the sky, and its shadows clearly outline the contours of the giant mountains. It is May 28, 2002.

The plane took off early in the morning from Munich. On board are FRANCES RUPPERT, chairperson of the *Cursillo* Secretariat worldwide, HELMUT NICKLAS and THOMAS RÖMER from *the YMCA Munich*, Pastor FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF from the *Protestant Spiritual Community Renewal*, MARIANNE SCHNEPPE and I from the *Focolare Movement in the Ecumenical Life Center Ottmaring* near Augsburg.

We are excited to see what awaits us. Every time we have come together so far, something unexpected has happened. It is as if we are drawn into an adventure by a loving hand. The experiences have

shaken us up, thrown us off course a little, and at the same time filled us with a joy we had rarely experienced before.

GERHARD PROSS is waiting for us at Rome's Fiumicino airport. He is from the *Esslingen YMCA* and head of the so-called "*Meeting of Leaders*", which brings together around a hundred leading members of predominantly Protestant groups. He flew to Rome from Stuttgart.

Soon, Schoenstatt Father HEINRICH WALTER joins us. He lives in Vallendar and boarded the plane in Frankfurt-Hahn.

The journey continues in a minibus to Rocca di Papa. The town is in the Alban Hills, southeast of Rome.

The hour-long drive passes almost unnoticed. Our shared experience has changed us and made us friends. As we talk about it, our memories reveal new things that had previously gone unnoticed.

"Actually, I couldn't have been there on October 31, 1999," says GERHARD. This first meeting took place in the middle of a seminar lasting several days, which he himself was leading. But friends from the YMCA and from the Association for Common Life in Ottmaring wouldn't leave him alone. They were convinced: "You can't miss this!"

That evening, about fifty Protestant and Catholic members of various communities had gathered in Ottmaring and experienced such a deep bond with one another that they felt a new path had begun for them, a path "in togetherness." But how to find this path?

"The score is written in heaven!" This sentence by CHIARA LUBICH became their program. So, when they meet again in the future, it will be to listen together to what comes from the Holy Spirit. He leads to togetherness, to unity.

As they said goodbye, GERHARD invited CHIARA, the founder of the *Focolare Movement*, to the annual conference of the "*Meeting of Leaders*". He was surprised that she accepted without hesitation, and four months later they met in Rothenburg on Tauber River.

There, something unusual happened among the approx. hundred leaders of communities from Protestant, Free Church and Catholic backgrounds. In her speech, CHIARA spoke about love according to the Gospel. Unexpectedly, a profound wave of reconciliation began. People asked for forgiveness for their complicity in rejection or division and received it. Some gave this assurance personally; others did so on behalf of their own church or the community to which they belong.

The purified relationships paved the way for another event: the covenant of mutual love in the spirit of Jesus' new commandment.

This covenant was concluded a year later by seven hundred representatives from fifty communities on December 8, 2001, in the Protestant St. Matthew Church in Munich.

Why the covenant?

The minibus turns into a parklike area and finally stops in front of the building, which consists of a one-story, a two-story, and a three-story section. The facades are clad in brown bricks, and the white painted window frames lend a sense of light and freshness to the whole building.

CHIARA, accompanied by several representatives of her General Council, warmly welcomes the German guests to the *Focolare Movement's* headquarters. You can see that she is happy to see them again and that she too is excited to see what will happen next.

Those who take the Covenant seriously want to get to know their covenant partners. It was, therefore, agreed in advance that this would be the main purpose of the visit. The charisma, the gift that each community has received from God and with which it serves the people of God and society, should shine forth.

Guests and hosts sit together for a long time. They tell each other how their communities came into being, which words of the Gospel

have particularly shaped their history, and the experiences through which they have understood their task and their service.

They listen to each other with amazement.

Towards evening, FRIEDRICH asks the question that is close to the hearts of those who have travelled from Germany. It is the second reason for the trip to Rome. "In Munich, we made the covenant not only among ourselves as individuals, but also in the name of the communities. What does that mean? How can we live in mutual love among communities?"

A thoughtful mood spreads. After a while, CHIARA stands up and suggests doing something together for Europe. She believes that charisms strengthen the spiritual foundation of society. If the public learns about this, it could awaken new hope in people and politicians, who are committed to Christian values, would receive support in their efforts.

The proposal is not well received. It seems beyond the feasibility and coverage of the present movements.

And so, the first day ends.

Another Europe is possible!

The next morning, the tour continues to Trastevere, Rome's most authentic district. In the past, working-class families and marginalized groups lived here, including the first Christians.

In Piazza Sant'Egidio, we find the cradle of the community of the same name. In the hall where the Mozambique peace agreement was negotiated and signed a few years earlier, we meet ANDREA RICCARDI, the founder of *Sant'Egidio*. He and his friends played a key role in the agreement.

He accompanies us to the canteen, where *Sant'Egidio* offers free hot meals to the homeless. Those in need also receive medical treatment and advice on a wide range of issues.

From there, ANDREA takes us to the nearby Tiber Island to the Basilica of San Bartolomeo, where the community has set up a memorial for martyrs of the twentieth century.

In the afternoon, SALVATORE MARTINEZ joins us. He is the president of *Rinnovamento dello Spirito*, a Catholic charismatic renewal movement in Italy.

FRIEDRICH repeats the question from the previous day: "How can the covenant also be lived among communities?"

ANDREA gives our visit a political note thanks to his friendship with the needy and his commitment to peace. He takes up CHIARA'S suggestion and supports it.

Is it because we now have a better understanding of the gifts that are at work in the other communities and can therefore foresee new possibilities that cooperation will bring? In any case, the conversation is gaining momentum.

"Have we actually realized," asks Father MICHAEL MARMANN, Chairman of the General Presidium of the *Schoenstatt Movement*, "that our communities are spread throughout all the countries of Europe? Together they form a network that spans the entire continent. This is no coincidence; it is a responsibility that must be upheld."

THOMAS recalls that the "*Meeting of Leaders*" heard the prophetic words "God is gathering his people" several times. It was understood as encouragement to look beyond oneself and set out on a journey with others.

FATHER HEINRICH refers to POPE JOHN PAUL II, who told Catholic movements at Pentecost 1998 that they were the Holy Spirit's answer to many of today's challenges. "But people must be able to learn about this

answer”, says FATHER HEINRICH, and he asks: “Could now be the moment to step out together to the public?”

MARIANNE points out that among those who have joined the covenant, there are also politically oriented groups. She mentions *Movimento Politico per l’unità*, the *New Society Movement*, and *Offensive Junger Christen* (Offensive of Young Christians).

“People need an open commitment to Christ, and that is much stronger when we can show our brotherly and sisterly solidarity,” FRANCES is convinced.

Towards the evening, after lively discussions and patient, sympathetic listening, they agree: Each of them will suggest to their community at home to participate in a major event in Germany in 2004, which aims to show the people of Europe how charisms work for the good of humanity.

We take part in the evening prayer of *Sant’Egidio* in Santa Maria in Trastevere. The church is packed with people. ANDREA introduces his friends who have travelled from Germany and tells them about the decision they had just made. He receives enthusiastic applause. We feel that this spontaneous expression of approval confirms that we are in harmony with the heavenly score.

Afterwards, on the way to dinner in a pizzeria, our gaze falls on a poster on a house wall with the sentence: “Un’altra Europa è possibile!” - “Another Europe is possible!” We pose for a group photo next to it. Heaven apparently does not lack a sense of humor.

None of those present can act without the approval of their movement’s leadership committee. The fact that all the communities then registered their participation in a very short time is a further evidence to us that we are playing the right notes so far.

Visiting

Immediately after the reconciliation at the “*Meeting of Leaders*” in March 2000, and increasingly since the 2001 covenant, members of one community began to visit other communities.

FRIEDRICH fills two large buses with Protestant charismatics from the *Spiritual Renewal Movement* and drives them from Kaufering to Rome. They visit the Catholic charismatics of SALVATORE, the *Community of Sant’Egidio* and the *Focolare Movement*. These encounters trigger amazement, respect and affection on both sides. Prejudices collapse like houses of cards. One Protestant pastor, for example, says that he has “reconciled himself with the Catholic Church.” He is deeply touched by the warmth with which he is welcomed as a Protestant.

FATHER HEINRICH recalls how he and others from Schoenstatt visited the FCJG, the *Free Christian Youth Community*, in Lüdenscheid: “We were curious to see how the free church community would react to us, because MARY, the mother of Jesus, plays an important role in our spirituality.”

What they saw and heard in Lüdenscheid was strange to them, but on the other hand, they were amazed at how radically the FCJG bases its decisions on the Gospel. When the Schoenstatt group attended the evening service in the packed prayer house, the FCJG prayed for them with raised hands and took up a collection for their social works. “That touched us deeply and at the same time liberated us,” said HEINRICH, “because it triggered a deep joy.”

There are many such visits. They are like pilgrimages to holy places where God’s love can be felt through his charisms. They are places where the Gospel lives. It makes no difference whether the community is large or small, whether it is widespread or lives in one place only; decisive is the charism.

Truly an adventure

The idea of a large event “for Europe” in 2004 is well received, both in Germany and in Italy. Many people sign up to participate. Some are moved, because the large event fulfils something they have long desired. It sounds as if the proposal sets something in motion that was already expected.

In February 2003, the communities of the covenant receive a letter. It is signed by the organizers of the event “Together – how else,” at which the covenant was made. The letter states: “We feel the responsibility to continue together, in accordance with Jesus’ command: *‘Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven’* (Mt 5:16).” The letter ends with a short notice invitation to a meeting to discuss the next steps.

Instead of the fifty leaders from twenty communities who had registered, ninety leaders from thirty communities ultimately accepted the invitation. At the end of the meeting, they solemnly renewed the covenant.

The leaders are attracted by the coming together of charisms, which is first and foremost a spiritual journey. It obviously leads to an adventure, a „divine adventure.“ The large event is only one stage of this journey.

The invitation: simple, short and clear

It is June 1, 2003. Forty people gather at the Caritas JOHANNES ZINKE residential home in Berlin-Marienfelde. Among them are Italians and Germans, Protestant Christians, Free Church members and Catholics. They belong to eleven communities: *the Ottmaring Brotherhood of Common Life, the Selbitz Community of Christ’s Brotherhood, Cursillo, the Esslingen YMCA, the Munich YMCA, the YMCA Association, the*

FCJG Lüdenscheid, the Focolare Movement, the GGE - Spiritual Community Renewal in the Protestant Church, the Sant'Egidio Community, and the Schoenstatt Movement.

They report how much interest is growing among their members in seeing something new, since they are asking many questions. Those gathered in Berlin want to answer some of them together.

"Why is this togetherness so important to you?" is one of the most frequently asked questions. The joint answer: "In our togetherness, we experience that we accept each other in our diversity. That is why we experience it as an important enrichment. Precisely in the diversity of gifts, we experience God's work in a special way."

"What connects us with the other communities?", many want to know. "We are connected, for example, by our love for the Word of God in Scripture, our faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior, our efforts to follow Jesus, and our service to people, especially those in need. The covenant also motivates us to live Jesus' New Commandment among ourselves. United in his name, we again and repeatedly experience that Jesus is in our midst (cf. Mt 18:20).

HELMUT, who is acting as moderator today, takes the floor: "I believe: Everything needed to be told before we make the final decision concerning Europe Day has now been said. So, are we in agreement?" Everyone applauds. "Then we have decided," HELMUT states and continues: "From now on, there will be no more hesitation; from now on, we will only think about how to do it. I invite you to stand up, shake hands and ask God: 'Protect us and grant us wisdom and the power of your Spirit at all times!'"

After everyone has sat down again HELMUT explains: "We haven't written any invitation letters yet, because we wanted to wait for this moment of solemn decision. But now we can get started."

The first four letters are ready to be signed. They are addressed to the President of the European Commission, ROMANO PRODI, the German

Federal President, JOHANNES RAU, the Prefect of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, and the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, KONRAD RAISER. CHIARA, HELMUT, ANDREA, and FRIEDRICH sign them on behalf of everyone.

The letters say:

"The aim of our event is to make a spiritual contribution to the unity of our continent.

The movements are already forming networks that connect different countries. The community among them should now be strengthened and their charisms be made visible. Then the movements can contribute even more effectively to the good of the continent."

After these moving moments, SISTER ANNA-MARIA from the *Selbitz Community of the Brotherhood of Christ* suggests praying the prayer "Come, Creator Spirit!" during the preparation period for Europe Day with the members of all communities. The idea is approved and SISTER ANNA-MARIA herself will take care of its implementation.

Over the course of the next hour, the participants gather their initial ideas for the program.

There are 341 days left until May 8, 2004. This is not much time for such an undertaking. Now leadership is needed for further preparation and implementation. The assembly appoints a „circle“ to take over the leadership. Here are the names in alphabetical order: ANDREA, CHIARA, FRANCES, FRIEDRICH, GERHARD, HELMUT, and MICHAEL. Later, the following are added: MARIE-THÈRESE and GÉRARD DE ROBERTY⁵⁷ from *Equipes Notre-Dame*⁵⁸ from France, as well as NICKY GUMBEL⁵⁹, Anglican

⁵⁷ MARIE-THÈRESE and GÉRARD DE ROBERTY, former leaders of the *Equipes Notre-Dame* (E.N.D.) movement in France.

⁵⁸ *Equipes Notre-Dame* (abbreviated E.N.D.) is an international association of believers in the Catholic Church and is particularly dedicated to married couples.

⁵⁹ NICHOLAS (NICKY) GLYN PAUL GUMBEL, Anglican priest, took over the *Alpha courses* developed at Holy Trinity Brompton Church in 1990, a basic introduction to the Christian faith, developed them further and ensured their worldwide distribution; senior pastor of

and co-founder of the Alpha Course. Nine communities are thus represented in the „circle.“

The “circle” meets

At the end of October, the “circle” meets at the *Rocca di Papa* center. It is the first time that nine communities, each with their own structure and different goals, are working together on such a large undertaking. There is no model they can follow. Gradually it is becoming clear how they organize their work and what criteria they adhere to. Their approach is not really comparable to that of a company, but rather to the free interplay of sun, rain, wind, animals and plants that create a wonderful landscape.

The rectangular row of tables with rounded corners fills Hall A. There is a joyful bustle of arrivals around and everyone is greeted warmly. They take their time doing so. Only gradually the loving commotion calms down, and the first guests take their seats. There is no seating plan.

While FRIEDRICH looks for a free chair, he sees CHIARA, who invites him to sit next to her. As a Protestant pastor, he embodies church order for her, a Catholic.

A certain awkwardness spreads. The program is printed out in front of everyone, but no one knows who should start. Among friends, there is no hierarchy at first.

Then HELMUT stands up and appoints CHIARA as president of the “circle”: “You shall lead us!” Everyone agrees, the tension eases and CHIARA ask FRIEDRICH to pray with us.

Even before the work begins, GERHARD stands up and says, “HELMUT is an important person for me and for many in Germany. He can speak

for the Protestant and Free Church communities. He has our full confidence.”

If the shape of the table is meant to suggest the kind of cooperation that is beginning now around it, then the rectangle stands for order, without which cooperation is laborious and time-consuming. The rounded edges, on the other hand, which give a feeling of closeness and family, are reminiscent of the covenant in which all are brothers and sisters.

The circle wants to make decisions unanimously, thus ruling out voting. This can take more time and require considerable sacrifice: abandoning one’s own good ideas if others do not share them; following the reasons given for a counterproposal until the end; really wanting to understand the other side without stopping at a hasty judgment.

They repeatedly make such efforts. And this happens under an additional complicating condition: translation via headphones. Translations are provided in German, Italian, French and English. Listening to translation is tiring, attention wanes more quickly and misunderstandings can easily arise.

Every community has its own established terms. They often express profound spiritual experiences or insights that are part of the charism. Outsiders, who are unfamiliar with the background, can only wonder but cannot understand. In preparation for the first meeting of the “circle”, the translators wrote a letter, in which they wrote: “We would be grateful if you could send us the terms and phrases specific to your community in advance. This will make our translation work easier and facilitate communication among you.”

The rectangular rounded table seats 29 people. First, there are the nine people appointed to the “circle.” In front of each of them is a movable table microphone. They all brought a colleague with them who will later implement the decisions. MARIANNE and I are also there as secretaries. Seven chairs are available for advisors who are called

by the “circle” for specific tasks or questions. Number seven is symbolic, because occasionally a second row of chairs with advisors fills the room completely. Sometimes other participants follow the meeting via loudspeakers in an adjacent room.

GRAZIELLA and LIONELLO sit in the remaining two chairs. They maintain contact with the *Focolare communities* worldwide. Through the monthly video conference, which CHIARA has been using for several years to inform their members about important events, they know about the covenant and the path that the communities in Europe have taken. This has led to a beginning of cooperation of charisms, also outside our continent. So, the “whole world” is listening to what is happening here in Hall A.

One of the important questions at the top of the agenda is: When we talk about Europe, which Europe do we mean?

Some of the participating groups are also represented in European countries outside the EU. Therefore, we can say that “our” Europe does not stop at the EU borders but includes the entire continent.

It is also immediately clear that our understanding of unity in Europe means a community in diversity. In other words: not standardization or levelling of differences.

In addition, we dream of Europe that lives in brotherhood with all the inhabitants of the earth, without excluding anyone, in justice and peace. In other words, Europe assumes its shared responsibility for the welfare of all humanity.

Nights in Castel Gandolfo

In the evening, we travel from Rocca di Papa back to Castel Gandolfo. The town is built along the rim of a volcanic crater and at the bottom lies the almost circular Lake Albano. Dinner and our rooms are waiting for us at the *Focolare Movement's* meeting center.

After dinner, some of us sit together in a cozy circle with a good glass of local red wine.

"We demand a lot from each other", THOMAS remarks. "We certainly don't lack difficulties", MICHAEL agrees, adding, "But we hold on to the covenant!"

HEINRICH interjects: "We sometimes move between Babel and Pentecost. There are circumstances where we don't understand each other at all." And with a mischievous smile, he explains: "I then feel like I'm at the Tower of Babel, when God confused the language of mankind. But then suddenly everything is clear again. It's like at Pentecost, when everyone heard the apostles speaking in their own tongue."

There are also questions to each other: "What did you mean when you said...?" "Did I understand you correctly...?" We also need these evenings for such reassurances.

Occasionally, hurt feelings arise during the day's conversations. Someone has reacted strongly, because they misunderstood the other person. In such cases, it is good for the community to ask for forgiveness. That way, we can start the new day without burden.

From Europe for the world

This evening, one topic from the afternoon keeps coming up. We therefore return to it again and again.

The question was: What kind of major event do we want in Stuttgart? At first, opinions were widely divided.

The news from GRAZIELLA and LIONELLO that the communities in other parts of the world are asking for the Europe Day to be broadcasted simultaneously worldwide has brought some clarification: the program must therefore be "television friendly." However, this word, which suddenly hangs in the air, causes concern and uncertainty.

We need experts to explain the challenges in technology for such a program in 2004. We are renting two satellites, among other things, that fact says a lot.

In terms of program design, "suitable for television" initially means short speeches and variety.

Are we able to put together such a program? Are there enough artists and experts among our members?

No one wants to compromise on content. So, if we go ahead with this, songs, dance, music, pantomimes, choirs, short films and choreographies cannot just be there to fill gaps, entertain or create atmosphere. Rather, they must also convey the message of togetherness.

ULRICH PARZANY arrived just in time for this evening. He listens to us attentively for a long time. Then he tells us about his experiences with the large evangelistic events ProChrist⁶⁰. They encourage us to take the „television-friendly“ route.

Unity in diversity

While preparations for Europe Day are in full swing, GERHARD, MARIANNE, THOMAS and SISTER ANNA-MARIA are still busy with a second "construction site," the preparation for the Congress "Discovering and Sharing Riches Together."

When the prophetic word "Gather my people!" was addressed to the "Meeting of Leaders" in moments of prayer and the participants understood that the time had come for them to go beyond the boundaries of their circle, they decided to organize a Congress for

⁶⁰ *ProChrist* is an interdenominational evangelism movement of Christians from different churches and congregations. Since 1993, it has focused on Christian evangelism events lasting several days.

about 2,000 members of communities from German-speaking countries in the spring of 2004.

This decision was made three months before the meeting in Rome that gave rise to Together for Europe.

GERHARD now proposes that the Congress should take place immediately before Europe Day. On the two days, May 6 and 7, participants can meet other communities and get to know them. The Congress thus creates an important prerequisite for the common witness on Europe Day.

The Covenant forms the ground on which a wide variety of activities, undertakings and events can grow. However, not all Covenant partners can participate in everything; this depends on the charism of the respective community. The question is: Does the project correspond to the mission that the community has received from God?

The Togetherness counts

MARIANNE and I travelled to Rocca di Papa the day before the second meeting of the "circle". Today, the day before, those who are working at the center of *the Focolare Movement* to prepare for Europe Day are coming together. As the nature of the event has been decided as "television-friendly" now, CHIARA would like to hear their suggestions for the design of such a program.

The group has collected many ideas, some of which are feasible, suitable in terms of content and appropriate from an artistic point of view. One could have gained the impression that these elements alone would be enough to fill a considerable part of Europe Day.

MARIANNE and I are overwhelmed by the number of suggestions. How will the "circle" feel about this abundance? Will other communities have enough space in the program?

With a mixture of unease and anxiety, we leave the room behind CHIARA. We want to talk to her about our concerns. But she is still engaged in conversation with others. Shortly before the exit, she turns around and - we have not yet addressed her - she says to us in a serious tone: "You must know that I am prepared to put all our suggestions on hold and do without them. What matters to me is working together." We understand that she is placing herself and her own movement at the service of working together.

In the entrance hall of the center, we meet HELMUT, who has just arrived. We tell him what has just happened. He listens attentively and after a short silence he says: „Yes, CHIARA has this attitude! Everything will be fine.“

Visit to the Vatican

The following afternoon, we are driving to Rome in several cars through Via Appia Nuova. Passing the Circus Maximus, we arrive at the Bocca della Verità, follow the Tiber upstream from there and cross it at Castel Sant'Angelo. We get out at Via della Conciliazione and walk two minutes towards St. Peter's Basilica to the Bar Universal. There we order an espresso and have just enough time to decide who will introduce the group to the cardinal.

As we leave the bar to the right there is the entrance to number 5, the seat of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. On the second floor, the prefect, CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, has already opened the door and is waiting for us with his welcoming smile.

He greets everyone with a handshake. Then he asks in surprise, "What brings you together?" We obviously don't strike him as a unified group. We briefly recount our shared history.

"Incidentally, the Togetherness of Charisms is celebrating its fourth birthday today, October 31!" MARIANNE mentions.

The cardinal is astonished; he was not aware that the “Signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” which he co-signed exactly four years ago in Augsburg, had triggered such a reaction.

ANDREA recounts how he listened to the interview with CARDINAL CASSIDY⁶¹ in the car on the short drive from Augsburg to Ottmaring after the celebrations. When asked by the journalist, “What happens now with ecumenism after the signing?”, CASSIDY replied, “The church leaders have done their part for now, now it’s the turn of the church people.”

ANDREA, has a keen sense for interpreting the signs of the times as a history professor, then said at the conclusion of the event in Ottmaring: “Our response to the challenge that CASSIDY presents to us, is that we walk together the path which the heavenly score will show us.”

WALTER KASPER listens attentively. “Your story is encouraging. I am glad to hear that the signing of the document has produced such hopeful fruit.”

The cardinal explains to us how he himself lives ecumenism. He says it is a way of relating with Christians in the spirit of the Gospel. He calls it the ecumenism of life or the ecumenism of friendship. This is where he places his hope for the unity of the churches.

He compares the role of church communities today with the importance that monasteries had for Europe in the Middle Ages. They were centers of spiritual life and places where values such as democracy and solidarity, which have their roots in Christianity, could develop.

⁶¹ EDWARD IDRIS CARDINAL CASSIDY, Prefect of the then Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican and today’s Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (1989-2001). He made a significant contribution to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification on October 13, 1999, in Augsburg and signed the document on behalf of the Catholic Church.

As we say goodbye, the cardinal says, "I gladly accept your invitation to Europe Day and the Congress in Stuttgart. But I'm coming to listen, not to speak!"

It is already dark by the time we are back on Via di Conciliazione. The walk to the center of Trastevere takes twenty minutes. There we reserved a table with our friends at the trattoria „Gli Amici.“ It is run by the *Sant'Egidio community*. People with disabilities serve the guests there and create a pleasant family atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable.

Exchange at the beginning

The "circle" meets for the third and last time before Europe Day. As it has become custom, the meeting begins with some reports of the participants about their experiences with togetherness or whatever else is on their minds.

"I am convinced," says GERHARD, looking back on the past months, "what we are doing has to do with 'Kairos', with what God wants from us today. Now is the time of togetherness, of unity. I am happy and feel it is a blessing to be called to work on this."

FRANCES remembers how CHIARA asked each person individually at the meeting at *Sant'Egidio*: "Are you in? Will you participate?" FRANCES hesitated at first, because she knew she couldn't contribute very much. But her heart was completely in it. So, she said "yes" and then felt great joy. "Exactly because of our different vocations, we can give each other a lot for our spiritual life, for our own community and for building up the Kingdom of God."

HEINRICH: "In personal conversations, I have heard from one person or another what they appreciate about me and also what still alienates them. In our togetherness I notice more clearly what the charisma of Schoenstatt does, but I also see the whole body of Christ at work."

According to MARIANNE, it was unprecedented in the preparation for Stuttgart 2004 that numerous representatives of the participating communities were constantly involved in planning and program design. Every suggestion was taken up and considered. "The process took a lot of time, but it resulted in growing in mutual appreciation and complete trust in one another. We shared joys and burdens."

"We have learned," adds FRIEDRICH, "that we can tolerate the differences between our denominations, if we accept each other as brothers and sisters before God. Praying together, serving one another and experiencing the fulfilment of the Holy Spirit has strengthened our certainty that God is at work, overcoming the barriers that people have erected between each other."

THOMAS recounts his experience with the creation of the closing message for Europe Day: „HELMUT asked me to help draft a message. We had many discussions and really worked hard. Our draft was one of those that failed to convince. For me, it was an important learning experience in working together. Yes, there is a lot of work involved. But even if it doesn't meet with approval, it's not in vain. It gives you the opportunity to let go of everything that is your own, so that now the score in heaven can come through. It is not about asserting one's own good, but about love being ready to let go of everything. In other places, I have also experienced that others, from other communities, have encouraged me not to let go of my own ideas, but to hold on to them and to contribute. Working together is an adventurous game of mutual love."

The message

On Europe Day, the communities want to send a message to the people of Europe. That was clear from the beginning. The Berlin meeting already set the tone for this. A note summarizes: "We do not want to

make demands, but to bear witness on how God is close to people today through the ministry of charisms. We offer this ministry. In addition, we want to describe the path to a creative and fruitful unity in diversity: this is the path we have been led to follow. The prophetic voice of young people should be heard; it is the voice of hope and confidence. Fully aware of the past, we look to the present and the future.”

With this guideline, a group got together and soon presented a draft. However, it failed to convince the “circle.” Another group set to work: the same result.

Today, on the last day the “circle” meets before Stuttgart, the third draft is presented. It fares no better than its predecessors.

In the evening, before we travel back home, a message must be approved. So, what to do?

CHIARA announces a break and asks the other eight members of the “circle” to join her in an adjoining room. It is just big enough for them, the translators, and MICHELE ZANZUCCHI, a journalist who is to help formulate the text.

CHIARA invites each person in turn to express their thoughts, convictions or testimonies that they believe must be included in the message. MICHELE takes notes and then reads aloud what he has written. First, the person who spoke confirms or corrects what has been written. Then anyone with objections speaks up. In this case, the point is discussed and a solution is found both sides are satisfied.

CHIARA leads the discussion and gives everyone a chance to speak but does not add anything of her own. In the end, there are eight contributions in MICHELE’S notebook. He now arranges the text modules so that they can be turned into a message. After a few minutes, he reads out the result. There are no objections to the content. The nine are amazed: the message is ready! And in just one hour!

Full of joy, they call the others together. MICHELE now reads the text to them as well. The applause leaves no doubt: everyone approves the message.

Even before Europe Day, the 150 communities participating in the event have received the message and agreed to it. It is therefore the message from all of them what will be read in four languages on May 8, 2004, in the Hanns-Martin-Schleyer-Halle! It expresses their conviction, which is based on many experiences and daily dedication. It states what is already reality.

A letter

In the meantime, more than 200 communities have joined the covenant. The decision to hold a second *Together for Europe* event in 2007 has been made. The "circle" has grown larger. Now CHRISTOPHE D'ALOISIO, head of *Syndesmos*, an Orthodox association of youth movements and GÉRARD TESTARD⁶² from *Fondacio*⁶³ have also joined.

On June 30, 2005, CHIARA wrote a letter to the Steering committee, as the "circle" is now called. She wrote:

Dear friends,

(...) I would like to say something to you now that you are thinking about a second *Together for Europe*. We all agree that "Stuttgart 2004" was a success to the glory of God. But to whom do we owe this success?

Certainly, our months of preparation were important. But above all, it was the success of Jesus' presence among us. We had repeatedly

⁶² GÉRARD TESTARD, France, former president of *Fondacio*, current president of *Efesía*, long-time member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe* (until 2022).

⁶³ The *Fondacio* association was founded in Poitiers (France) in 1974 as result of the apostolic dynamism of the laity, which was awakened by the Second Vatican Council and in the spirit of the Charismatic Renewal.

assured each other that we wanted to live in such a way as to make His presence among us possible. He among us brought about the miracle of Stuttgart, not us. And even now, before we begin our work, it is important that He is among us. This is important for the simple reason that we do not yet know how to proceed. He must guide us." (...)

CHIARA

CHIARA can no longer leave her apartment. Through ELI FOLONARI, who lives together with her, she accompanies the preparations for "Stuttgart 2007," encouraging and supporting them with suggestions and ideas.

She prepares a speech for the event in Stuttgart and explains why she is doing so: "In 2004, I spoke about fraternity and unity. Now I want to give the 'key' to it."

This 'key' is Jesus, who cries out on the cross: „*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Mt 27:46) She herself is no longer able to give the speech, so it is read out on her behalf.

Chapter 7

The Stuttgart II Congress – May 10-11, 2007

„Together on the Way“

After Stuttgart I and Europe Day the process of friendship and mutual familiarization was not yet completed. Rather countless encounters took place among the communities and movements. The unity of hearts was deepened, joint actions were tried out and bridges were built.

Experiencing new dimensions

The relationship between movement and office also took on new dimensions. For example, in summer 2004 the bishops in the spirituality of *the Focolare Movement* invited some leaders of the movements to their annual meeting in Rolle, Switzerland, on Lake Geneva. FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF, HELMUT NICKLAS, GERHARD PROSS, THOMAS RÖMER, and SEVERIN SCHMID accepted this invitation and experienced a very special encounter. CARDINAL MILOSLAV VLK from Prague, the leader of this bishops' meeting, describes it in his words: *“I felt as never before — I already experienced much in unity, but here I must say I experienced a deep, deep unity across all boundaries. ... This atmosphere of unity, with Jesus at the center, led us to embrace each other, truly like brothers in a family.”*

Overall, there was reflection on many different levels about the Movement *Together for Europe*, which was expressed (among other places) in the book “Affection”⁶⁴, where it says:

⁶⁴ Edited by FRIEDRICH ASCHOFF, BR. FRANZISKUS JOEST, FR. MICHAEL MARMANN.

“When people turn to Christ, they also begin to turn to one another. The Spirit-inspired new beginnings in life show great diversity but prove to be new approaches to the common center: Jesus Christ. This process runs through the entire history of the movement ‘Together – how else?’” (From the foreword)

“Where Christ is the center of attention and worship, Christians no longer need to separate themselves from one another. Despite all their different traditions and theologies, they can come together to worship Him and complement one another with their diverse gifts and tasks.” (Cover page)

Moved and encouraged by the experiences during and after Stuttgart I, consideration was given to whether another Congress together with a second Europe Day should follow.

CHIARA LUBICH invited the initiators to a meeting in Switzerland to discuss this idea and gain clarity on how to proceed. In one of her speeches there she addressed an essential point for the future shape of *Together for Europe*. She pointed out that everyone needs a second calling to complement their first vocation to walk the common path.

As much as it is important to remain faithful to the first calling, to live and serve it, for *Together for Europe* a second calling is needed the more. This second calling is about the specific contribution of each movement to the common whole and expresses its individual charism in serving the togetherness with it.

Many of the present initiators agreed with this formulation, as they personally experienced precisely this process during the development of the network: the second vocation enabled them to fill all the initiatives with life.

At the end of these days, it was agreed to invite everyone back to Stuttgart again. The Congress “Miteinander auf dem Weg” (Together on the Way) on May 10 and 11, 2007, and Europe Day on May 12, 2007, were tackled. In terms of purpose, structure and organization

the proven model (of Stuttgart I) was followed. But fortunately, the network had grown in the meantime and 250 communities and movements participated in the preparation and implementation.

The Congress gained great interest. Around 3,000 participants did not want to miss this next step on the journey together. The hall was again packed with 8,000 to 9,000 participants at the subsequent Europe Day.

Living and understanding unity

The focus of the Congress was on reflecting the nature and development of the newly gained unity - not only emotionally, but also spiritually and with a deeper understanding. Three complementary keynote speeches helped the participants to do so.

BROTHER FRANZISKUS JOEST⁶⁵ (*Jesus Brotherhood Gnadenthal*) made it clear in his contribution “Unity in the Triune God – Reconciled Diversity Among Us”: Unity and diversity are equally rooted in God Himself.

SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE (*Christ Brotherhood Community Selbitz*) spoke about “Spiritual Riches in the Lives of the Movements”. She illustrated how differently we are shaped by our respective traditions and which richness lies therein.

FR. LOTHAR PENNERS (*Schoenstatt*) had the theme “Understanding Spiritual Riches – The Inner and Outer Aspects of Our Spiritualities”. He explained: spirit and form are interdependent, and the spirit cannot be found in its pure form, but only in its respective form.

⁶⁵ BR. DR. FRANZISKUS JOEST, doctor of Protestant theology, long-time prior of the brotherhood branch of the Jesus Brotherhood Gnadenthal.

We reproduce the three lectures in Part II under Texts and Reflections in slightly abridged form⁶⁶ and refer to the documentation of the Congress for the complete texts of all speeches.⁶⁷

Highlights from some of the contributions

In addition to these three fundamental presentations, highlights from other contributions shine light on some of the diversity which the theme of the Congress meant for us - “Together on the way”.

BR. GÜNTHER RATTEY (*Brotherhood of the Cross*), one of the founding fathers of *the Meeting of Leaders*, spoke about “Key experiences at *the Meeting of Leaders*” and explained, among other things:

“ How can we succeed in becoming one? ... This requires certain attitudes: to lay down the secret crowns and real honors (that many of us bring with us from our involvement) to be fully human and Christian, brother or sister with others. ... But this means to practice humility, that we learn to listen to others and that we care about what God has given them.

CARDINAL WALTER KASPER gave a “simple” answer to the question “Can spiritual movements enrich the life of the Church?” and at the same time expressed a wish to the spiritual movements:

“ My answer is very simple: spiritual movements can enrich the life of the Church, firstly by being spiritual and secondly by being movements. ...

⁶⁶ See page 263.

⁶⁷ Together on the Way. Documentation of the Congress for Leaders and Staff of Christian Movements, Organizations, and Initiatives. Publisher: CVJM Esslingen, Gerhard Pross, ISBN 978-3-00-022045-6.

I hope and wish you can remain young and maintain your charismatic impetus. You must. You are still at the beginning and far from the end. Remain spiritual, remain young, remain in motion. Remain a young spiritual movement. The Church needs you, and you need the Church.

Auxiliary Bishop THOMAS RENZ⁶⁸, who has been participating *in the Meeting of Leaders* for many years and accompanies *Together for Europe*, described what he “takes away” from this Congress:

“ ... where we truly allow ourselves to be loved by God, this love has a purifying power that enables us to encounter one another not with arrogance but with humility — yesterday it was described as “in the spirit of the foot washing.” ... And the third thing I take away is: the Holy Spirit takes away our fear and gives us courage to help to shape this new Europe out of faith. ... In 1950, Federal President THEODOR HEUSS said: “Europe emerged from three hills at that time: the Acropolis, the Capitol, and Golgotha.” If these are the three hills on which Europe was built at that time, then we must take care, that today’s new Europe is not based solely on Hellenistic antiquity and the Roman understanding of the state, but that the third hill, Golgotha, also remains in view.

⁶⁸ AUXILIARY BISHOP THOMAS MARIA RENZ, Auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart (since 1997), member of the ADVENIAT Commission and the Commission for International Church Affairs of the German Bishops’ Conference, member of the supporting group of *the Christian Convent Germany* (CCD) and one of the initiators of *Germany Prays*.

MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO hinted at this in his contribution, which was then elaborated on by ANDREA RICCARDI in his speech on Europe Day: Europe, rise up!

“ We believe: Europe is necessary, perhaps even more today than in the past. But Europe needs the proposal of a new culture, the culture of coexistence between different people. ... If we do not stand together, the countries of Europe will become a “quantité négligeable” (a negligible quantity). Then our values and our identities will dissolve in the currents of globalization. This will be a loss for the whole world and for civilization. It is an illusion to believe that one can maneuver their own ship separately from the others through global history. If there is no genuine European unity, then the European countries will no longer exist in the world. ... Our movements and communities have a message of love for life to share, especially when life is weak and defenseless.

MARKUS MÜLLER⁶⁹, director of *Chrischona International* from Switzerland, left a lasting impression with his presentation on hope at the congress. His thesis was: “*We need places of hope, truth and mercy.*” And GERHARD PROSS called to the participants, as if it was a call from God for *Together for Europe*: “*Rise up, people of God! Carry the life which I have entrusted you into this society! Dare to step out of your niche! Wake up, people of God!*”

⁶⁹ DR. MARKUS MÜLLER, retired Protestant pastor, doctorate in special education, secretary at the YMCA Munich (1989-2001), director of the Pilgrim Mission St. Chrischona (2001-2012), pastor of a retirement home near Winterthur (2012-2023).

Prayer at the end of the day

The day ended with a prayer led by SR. ANNA MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE. She invited the participants to express their desire and longing for unity through a gesture of devotion, repentance, forgiveness and supplication to the Holy Spirit. To this end, she called all the leaders of the movements and communities to the front on stage and said:



“You have brought a stone with you, or you will find one here in front of the stage. You can take it with you. We want to stack these stones together on the stage.

Where people have experienced God, they have often set a sign of remembrance. We want to do that now by erecting the stones. For example, when each tribe of Israel moved into its own territory, they erected an altar of stones at the Jordan River. This altar was a witness between all the tribes and their descendants that they wanted to serve Yahweh alone and no other god. It was to be remembered forever that all the people had a share in the Lord and belonged to him (Joshua 22:26-29).

Our movements and our communities are places where God is present. Every community has a stone. The stone is a sign: God has called and built our movement. Every movement is an important building block in the Kingdom of God. We place the stones together. Each community remains itself in its own form and with its own mission. Yet in our diversity, we know that God in Jesus Christ has called us to be together in love. He brought us together. He gives us His presence in our togetherness; that is His promise. Our togetherness is not our action, not our work. Our togetherness has

come about under His guidance and leadership. We lay the stones together and thereby say

YES to the Triune God, to life in unity and diversity.

YES to the covenant in love (humility, gentleness and generosity).

YES to our mission for the life of the people in Europe.

We place the stones together and thank the Triune God for calling us for togetherness. We call Kyrie Eleison and ask Him to cleanse us from guilt and heal our wounds. We lay the stones together and entrust our togetherness to God, that He may fill us with the Holy Spirit and let us together become a sign of hope and love in Europe.”

Chapter 8

The 2nd Europe Day – May 12, 2007

„Europe, rise up!“

The participants on Europe Day were welcomed with a message in four languages. Well known personalities⁷⁰ from public life expressed their greetings in it. Many of them were also participating in Europe Day.

As on the first Europe Day, a rich cultural program was organized. There were presentations and lectures, and a variety of testimonies were given about the effects of spiritual movements.

Neither CHIARA LUBICH nor HELMUT NICKLAS were able to be with us in person. However, CHIARA sent a message that was read by BRUNA TOMASI⁷¹ (*Focolare Movement*). It was entitled “The cry of abandonment” and referred in its core statements to the abandonment of Jesus on the cross. She sent the following message to those gathered: “To-

⁷⁰ JOSÉ MANUEL BARROSO, President of the European Commission, GÜNTHER H. OETTINGER, Minister President of the State of Baden-Württemberg, HORST KÖHLER, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, ANGELA MERKEL, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, MARY McALEESE, President of Ireland, BERTIE AHERN, Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, JAQUES DELORS, President of the European Commission 1985-1995, JÁN FIGEL, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture and Youth, BARTHOLOMEW I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, ROWAN CANTUAR, Archbishop of Canterbury, CARDINAL TARCISIO BERTONE, Vatican Secretary of State, CARDINAL PÉTER ERDŐ, President of the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences, THOMAS WIPF, President of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, SAMUEL KOBİA, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, CARDINAL KARL LEHMANN, Chairman of the German Bishops’ Conference, Bishop JOHANNES FRIEDRICH, Presiding Bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Bishops, INGOLF ELLSSEL, President of the European Pentecostal Movement, NERSÈS BÉDROS XIX, Patriarch of Cilicia, Head of the Armenian Catholic Church, CARLOS AMIGO CARDINAL VALLEJO, Archbishop of Seville/Spain, FRANK OTFRIED JULY, Regional Bishop of the Evangelical Regional Church in Württemberg, GEBHARD FÜRST, Bishop of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart.

⁷¹ BRUNA TOMASI, Focolare member, one of CHIARA LUBICH’S close collaborators.

day I would like to bring this cry of abandonment by God closer to all of you.” (See page 285.)

A prophetic call

However, two particularly noteworthy inputs should be highlighted: First the message from “Stuttgart II” with its “7fold Yes,” which has served as a guide and guideline for the Together movement since then. And the almost prophetic speech by ANDREA RICCARDI (*Sant’Egidio*) under the headline “Europe, rise up!” which moved many. You can find excerpts from it in Part II of this book.

“Europe, rise up!” – a prophetic call

Perhaps we do not see because we are walking with our eyes down-cast. In the Gospel, we meet a bent woman who could not straighten up in any way. Jesus saw her and healed her: she stood up and praised God (Luke 13:10ff). Often, we do not see the vision since we are bent over our everyday lives, over ourselves, over our own neighbors. Let us be healed and let us stand up so that we can finally see!

When I see the people gathered here, it is a vision: European women and men united. The vision is a united Europe — a European way of being German, French, Italian, Spanish, Austrian, Polish, Romanian, British... Those I do not mention, please forgive me.

When institutions are frozen, processes are delayed, politicians hesitate, when one group blames another for the delay - we European Christians must summon courage to promote a common European sentiment, that can dwell in our hearts and minds. We say: there is a lack of prophets. But must we ourselves not be prophetic people?

We will be prophets, if we nourish ourselves with the word of God and not with the chatter and clamor of empty debates. Those who listen to the word can live as prophets.

Being Christians together for Europe, dear friends, has prophetic significance. A prophetic people are also able to evoke a common and unifying sentiment, that becomes a living current among our European fellow citizens, whether they are Christians or non-Christians, believers or non-believers. Must we not add this decisive European prophecy to the tasks and services of our movements? Must we not feel ourselves to be European Christians in a prophetic way? Must we not be prophetic people?

... We must all come under the mantle of the prophet and be a people of European Christians, a prophetic people through various traditions, charisms, spiritualities and churches, but all with the ability to draw Europeans towards a common destiny and involve them in it. We have a common destiny. We must communicate this to our fellow citizens as a conviction, a vision and a new passion.

... Separated, however, we will scatter and lose our way and lose what we stand for. The fear of losing our national environment slows down unification. But over time, the richness of our national structures will also be lost if they remain as they are. They will develop into provinces and then into besieged ghettos. United, as Europeans united in diversity, we will be a friendly and solid force in today's world: a source of humanity.

We must nurture a passion for Europe and the unifying force among our fellow European citizens. This is not a vague passion. Being European is becoming a vocation in the world.

... As Europe we will be united and happy, when we look at Africa with compassion. Africa shares a common destiny with us: either we live together or we will perish together. After the Second World War, a great African and a great Christian, the Senegalese SENGHOR, spoke

of the Eurafrica horizon: Europe and Africa together. Europe will be united to the extent that it is able to live with Africa.

After this meeting, *Together for Europe* must become a movement of feelings and ideas in European countries, so that Europe looks to Africa, so that it nourishes its soul with humanity, so that a stream of passion for unity sweeps away the rigid and the boundaries. Together for Europe, dear friends, is not a beautiful rally, but expresses a destiny that we feel is our calling as Christians, an opportunity for our fellow citizens, a gift for the whole world. It is a deep current in history. And this current will ultimately be thrilling and moving.

The 7-fold “YES to Europe”

Like the Covenant of Love, which has been of crucial importance for the journey together since its inception, a 7-fold “YES to Europe” was pronounced by all participants at the conclusion of Europe Day.

ROMANO PRODI urged those gathered to give Europe a strong soul, to ensure the successful continuation of the Union. With this seven-fold “YES to Europe,” *Together for Europe* expressed its view of the path that could give Europe’s soul the strength needed.

United by the bond of mutual love we say:

YES to life.

We commit ourselves to protecting the inviolable dignity of the human person in all stages of its development, from conception to natural death.

YES to marriage and family.

They are the foundation for a society based on solidarity and sustainability.

YES to creation.

We advocate for the protection of nature and the environment. We have received them as gifts from God and want to preserve them for future generations.

YES to the economy

that is geared to the needs of individuals and humanity as whole.

YES to solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged near and far. They are our brothers and sisters. We ask our governments and the European Union to take decisive action on behalf of the poor and the development of disadvantaged countries.

YES to peace.

We are committed to understanding, reconciliation and dialogue in conflict situations. Without peace the world has no future.

YES to responsibility for our society,

especially for children and young people. We work to ensure that cities and communities find solidarity among people of different origins, cultures and backgrounds through the participation of all.

Two small, but characteristic incidents should be mentioned here. After Europe Day, CARDINAL MILOSLAV VLK said: *“I am deeply impressed by the social impact of spiritual movements. I would have very much liked my president [of the Czech Republic] had been here. It would have shown him and given him a picture of the positive influence the Christian faith can have on our society.”*

Several African participants said: *“We need ‘Togetherness for Africa’.”* And NERSÈS BÉDROS XIX⁷², Patriarch of Cilicia, head of the Armenian Catholic Church, approached SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE and GERHARD PROSS at dinner and said: *“We urgently need such togetherness in Lebanon. In Lebanon, we must also invite the different religions to join us. I ask you to come to us and support us and moderate such a congress.”*

⁷² NERSÈS BÉDROS XIX (1940-2015), elected Patriarch of Cilicia of the Armenians (official title) with seat in the Bzommar monastery near Beirut (October 7, 1999), enthroned as NERSÈS BÉDROS XIX (October 24, 1999).

Chapter 9

The Stuttgart I and II Congresses – An Attempt at Interpretation

Perceptions from the spiritual process

Immediately after Stuttgart II, GERHARD PROSS shared a summary of his perceptions of Stuttgart I and Stuttgart II in a letter to those responsible and ventured an interpretation by pointing to the prophetic dimension he saw in the events. We quote some excerpts from this letter:

In my opinion, both Stuttgart I and Stuttgart II had a prophetic dimension: At Stuttgart I, it was the promise from 2 Corinthians 6:2: *“Behold, now is the time of grace...”* a time of grace for the people of God to become one. For Stuttgart II we heard the prophetic call, *“Comfort, comfort my people.”* (Isaiah 40:1 ff). God turns to us and speaks his word, *“Arise, people of God in Europe!”* Stuttgart II leads to mission.

I would like to summarize my perception in five points, without being able to take up all the impetuses even remotely.

Unity is alive

This was my strongest impression already at the Congress. From the first moment of the Congress to the end of Europe Day this was palpable and tangible. Our history, mutual visits and cooperation, the preparation of the forums, etc. have borne rich fruits. As those responsible, we experienced the family atmosphere, mutual understanding, love for one another, and support in a particularly intense way.

This unity also includes the cooperation between movement and office, the trusting cooperation between those responsible for the

communities and the bishops. The speeches of the bishops, especially those of CARDINAL KASPER, CARDINAL VLK, and BISHOP HUBER, were experienced as important milestones by many.

Our mission

MARKUS MÜLLER's speech impressively opened hearts for Europe: Europe needs places of hope, truth, mercy and education (of the heart). The other speeches at the Congress and on Europe Day, especially the one of ANDREA RICCARDI, underlined this challenge. The five areas of life at Europe Day gave a vivid testimony on how much this commitment is already alive in the hot spots of our society. And the final message with the "7fold Yes" gave us a mission that we must live out now.

The spiritual richness

Amid a time that once again seeks stability and orientation and that longs for spirituality in a new way, God has entrusted spiritual movements with a true wealth of spirituality. During the evenings of prayer we were able to "immerse" ourselves in this and SR. ANNA-MARIA and Father LOTHAR PENNERS provided us with help to understand.

The prophetic dimension

"In the name of Jesus, rise up, Europe!" MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO called out to us. *"Rise up, people of God,"* we heard this call from God repeatedly during these days. We are called to hear his call, to grasp it in faith and to rise up as the people of God, away from resignation and indifference, and to courageously bring our voice and strength into our society. ...

Togetherness continues

"The score is written in heaven," CHIARA LUBICH told us on October 31, 1999, at the beginning of our Togetherness. It is important to listen to the next bar in this symphony. *"We are organizing a Togetherness for Africa,"* participants from various African countries spontaneously said to each other. *"We need a Togetherness for Lebanon,"* said Patriarch NERSÈS BÉDROS XIX on the evening of Europe Day, *"and I ask you to support me in this."* We want to listen anew to what the next steps in Togetherness might look like: in cities and regions, in countries and in Europe ...

We can bring the light of the Gospel into our society; it will shine the brightest in the darkest places (BISHOP HUBER'S image of the tunnel). *"Our night knows no darkness,"* said CHIARA LUBICH. Even in her preliminary reflections she expressed the wish of clarity that *"every movement, through a special light given by the Holy Spirit to it, illuminates a particular aspect of the darkness in the world."*

"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad," we read in Psalm 126. With this joy and jubilation, we can go forth, often enough with tears in our eyes, yet knowing that the harvest will be rich.

Chapter 10

Together on the Way

Developments and stages

On our *journey together*, fundamental internal and external structures crystallized over time. They were like railings on this path, giving us support and helping us to keep our eyes on the task, direction and goal. There were also stages where, we were able to “rest” in the presence of God or were strengthened by others to continue our way - despite the amount of work that was sometimes involved.

Structural developments

After “Stuttgart II,” the Steering committee worked on the foundations of *Together for Europe*⁷³. These were ceremoniously signed by a European Supporting committee in Rome in 2008. This created a foundation and established a European Supporting committee that would play an important role in the multiplication of *Together for Europe*. It was also to be the link between the Steering committee and the movements and communities, as well as the national coordination teams, that were being formed. Meanwhile national Together committees have developed in various countries. In Germany, we called it the Coordination Team, while in Switzerland they came up with the name Tracking Group.

Later, the European Supporting committee met annually⁷⁴, thus forming an essential pillar of the development of *Together for Europe*

⁷³ This information can be found on the website www.together4europe.org.

⁷⁴ Schoenstatt/Germany (2010); Munich (2011); Sassone/Switzerland (2012); Paris (2013); Planina/Slovenia (2014); Nieuwkuijk/Holland (2015); Castel Gandolfo/Italy (2016).

alongside the Steering committee and the national committees. This structural development also included clarification about the previously rather informal leadership of the Steering committee. Without a doubt, CHIARA LUBICH was “primus inter pares” (first among equals) in the founding phase. Together with HELMUT NICKLAS, who was - so to speak - the architect of *Together for Europe*, she was the main initiator. After her time, a certain vacuum remained in terms of leadership. GÉRARD TESTARD (*Efesía*⁷⁵) then made the proposal in 2014 to appoint a leader. As a result, GERHARD PROSS (*CVJM Esslingen*) was appointed leader or moderator. At the same time, there was a change in the role of secretary. DIEGO GOLLER⁷⁶ (*Focolare Movement*) took over this role from SEVERIN SCHMID, who had held it from the beginning. He describes the atmosphere within the leadership circle when he participated for the first time:

“ The view from the floor of a packed Schleyer Hall in Stuttgart on May 8, 2004, was overwhelming. The colorful crowd of Christian movements and communities was a magnificent testimony to the togetherness of church leaders and politicians: a shared, hopeful journey had begun with enthusiasm.

Nine years later, I attended a meeting of the Steering committee of the ecumenical network in Paris for the first time. The meeting also covered organizational matters, and the joint discussion made me realize that these people (most of whom were still unknown to me) were just as committed

⁷⁵ *Efesía* is a French spiritual movement within the Church that meets regularly in small local “brotherhoods” to carry out missions aimed at building and living brotherhood in the world, embodying charity, and living the mission of the Gospel. The founder and leader is GÉRARD TESTARD.

⁷⁶ DIEGO GOLLER, Focolare, co-director of the *Ecumenical Life Center Ottmaring*, secretary general of the Ecumenical Secretariat of the *Focolare Movement* Centro “Uno,” member of the supporting group of *Together for Europe*.

to the joint project as they were to their own movements. A kind of „second calling“ was clearly noticeable in them. Suddenly, someone mentioned a personal problem. I was impressed by the immediate attention that was given to this matter, even though it was not on the agenda. A deep, honest conversation developed. I could sense how deep and strong the relationship between them was, which made such freedom and honesty possible.

ECUMENISM AWARD 2008 from the UNITA DEI CHRISTIANI Foundation – Stuttgart, November 15, 2008

The strong impetus towards unity of the people of God, that emanated from *Together for Europe*, did not remain unnoticed by others. The initiative UNITA DEI CHRISTIANI⁷⁷, which awards the Ecumenism Prize every two years for special services to ecumenism, selected *Together for Europe* as the winner in 2008. After a solemn service in the Stiftskirche in Stuttgart, led by REGIONAL BISHOP FRANK OTFRIED JULY⁷⁸ and CARDINAL WALTER KASPER, we were presented with the 2008 Ecumenism Prize at the subsequent ceremony. CARDINAL WALTER KASPER praised the work of *Together for Europe* and said, among other things:

“*It gives me hope that the spiritual communities can counter the smart-aleck skeptics with concrete, successful examples. They live a life of brotherhood and sisterhood and thus form a transnational and interdenominational network today. In this way, they are seeds, and often only tender seedlings, which, according to the Gospel, can grow into a large tree and a greater unity.*

The communities are primarily striving for a spirituality based on the Bible. We separated over the Bible, and according to the last Synod of Bishops, we must also come together

⁷⁷ UNITA DIE CHRISTIANI was founded as an association in the Ochsenhausen monastery (2001). Its goal is to build bridges by promoting ecumenical projects, initiatives and institutions, so that Christians can progress on their path to “unity in reconciled diversity” and their hope can overcome the pain of separation.

⁷⁸ REGIONAL BISHOP DR. H.C. FRANK OTFRIED JULY, Regional Bishop of the Evangelical Regional Church in Württemberg (2005-2022), one of the Vice-Presidents of the Lutheran World Federation (2010-2017), Chairman of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (2005-2021).

again over the Bible. The ecumenical movement began as prayer- and bible study groups; it can only have a future in the 21st century as such. We must return to our beginnings and draw new strength from them."

National *Together* Meeting – Würzburg, November 7, 2009

Over time it became clear to us that smaller, more national meetings would have to accompany the major central events to further spread and deepen the cause of *Together for Europe*. Therefore, eleven national *Together* Meetings were held in Europe⁷⁹ and at nine other locations on other continents in 2009.

The German meeting took place in the Cathedral in Würzburg with 1,500 participants. At the Ecumenism Award ceremony in November 2008, GERHARD PROSS had already invited people to the meeting in Würzburg with the following words:

“ As a next step, we have planned national meetings of *Together for Europe* for 2009, but from a European perspective and with European guests. Our national *Together* meeting will take place on November 7, 2009, in Würzburg.

What will be the focus? I would like to briefly recall how I began our time together: “*May hope be at home in Europe.*” (H. NICKLAS 2004) “*Europe needs places of hope, truth and mercy.*” (M. MÜLLER) The keyword “hope” runs like a thread through our *Togetherness*. Hope emanates from our *Togetherness*

- for ourselves

⁷⁹ Meetings were held in Budapest, Moscow, Sofia, Bratislava, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Loppiano (Italy), Würzburg, Rotsellar (Belgium), Paris and Ballycastle (Ireland).

- for our communities
- for our churches
- for our country and for Europe.

I am convinced that every committed community is such a place of hope.

Now, some of us may think: Where is hope considering the crises of our time? Our community, a place of hope, with all the problems lying ahead and that we carry with us.

Hope remains alive, precisely where it proves its worth in small ways. Therefore, every place of committed communal life is a place of hope. When we come together, a broad horizon of hope opens.

CARDINAL VLK once put it this way: *"We need places of hope in Europe, but we also need events of hope. We have experienced that today."* That was the experience of Stuttgart. That is the experience of *Together for Europe*.

It is important to emphasize that hope does not lie within us. It lies in Jesus Christ, who leads us on the path of togetherness and who himself is our future and our hope.

This hope is especially important in times of turmoil. Whether it is the financial crisis or whatever the next crisis may be called, our hope lies in Christ and is continually brought to life in togetherness.

In Würzburg we want to invite members of the European Supporting committee and Steering committee to speak to us. Then we want to exchange our experiences in specific working groups on the various fields we formulated in the Stuttgart Message: Our yes to Europe, politics, family, the poor, unity among the people of God.

I expect that we will take very concrete steps forward, that our „yes“ will once again become visible, and everyone will

then have new hope to live their „yes“ more strongly in their area of influence.

In addition to contributions from Germany, speakers from Italy, France and Poland also shaped the meeting. Within Germany, an important bridge was built.

HARTMUT STEEB, then Secretary General of the *Evangelical Alliance Germany*, was among the participants at this meeting and promised that the *Evangelical Alliance* would be involved in *Together for Europe* in the future. Until then, theological concerns about the Catholic Church had been so great that cooperation seemed impossible.

The decisive course was set during a “conversation among friends” from October 24 to 26, 2006. Members of the board of the *Evangelical Alliance Germany* met with representatives from the leadership team of *Together for Europe* for a three-day meeting at the Evangelical Alliance House in Bad Blankenburg, Thuringia.

By listening to each other, barriers were broken down and we were able to recognize Christ in each other, despite all our theological differences. It has become possible to build bridges that are still unthinkable in some parts of the world today.

At the Ecumenical Church Congress - Munich, May 12-16, 2010

We participated very intensively in the Ecumenical Church Congress in Munich in 2010. For one day, we filled the ice rink to share our experiences of unity with the interested audience. ANDREA RICCARDI gave a lecture on the topic “Hope needs vision – the social contribution of Christian movements for Europe” and under the heading “Unity is possible – experiences of Togetherness for the future of the Church” we spoke with Bishops FRANK OTFRIED JULY (Protestant) and JOACHIM REINELT⁸⁰ (Catholic) about their perceptions at the events in Stuttgart.

“Hopeful Paths in Ecumenism” was the title of a panel discussion⁸¹ where movements and churches were engaged in dialogue. *“When the day comes, when the walls between churches come down, we will be prepared, because we live as Christians who have learned to love one another,”* said MARIA VOCE⁸² (*Focolare Movement*). This statement was met with loud applause, surpassed only by the applause for GERHARD PROSS’ bold vision:

“*My wish would be to proclaim 2017 a 'holy year of remission'. Every 50th year in Israel should be a year of remission, in which debts are forgiven. After 500 years of conflict, we should use this date of Martin Luthers posting of the theses as a year of forgiveness and reconciliation. The Pope and the President of the Lutheran World Federation, accompanied*

⁸⁰ BISHOP JOACHIM FRIEDRICH REINELT, Roman Catholic Bishop of Dresden-Meissen (1988-2012).

⁸¹ with SIEGFRIED GROSSMANN, President of the Association of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany, Regional Bishop FRIEDRICH, Bishop RADKOVSKÝ from Pilsen, GERHARD PROSS, MARIA VOCE, President of the *Focolare Movement*.

⁸² DR. MARIA VOCE (2008-2021), successor to CHIARA LUBICH.

by the General Secretary of the ÖRK (Ecumenical Council of Churches) and the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, should come together to Wittenberg to nail theses on Christian unity to the Schlosskirche (castle church). An ecumenism of the reconciled would open up hope and a future.”

MARTIN STEINBEREITHNER⁸³ (*Community Sword of the Spirit*) spoke at the closing event in the ice rink about the experience of friendship as one of the essential elements on the path to *togetherness*. In a speech about the Old Testament story of “David and Jonathan,” he highlighted the motif of friendship and built a bridge to our experiences and attitudes in the togetherness of spiritual movements. His speech touched our hearts, because he emphatically showed us that Jonathan loved David’s life “*as his own life.*”⁸⁴

Five keys to unity

Before the meeting, we reflected on our experiences of unity and formulated “5 keys to unity”. At the end of the meeting these keys were symbolically presented to the bishops with a touch of humor and introduced to the interested audience by THOMAS RÖMER and EDITH WENGER:

The path of *Together for Europe* shows us that unity is possible. We want to highlight five key experiences from recent years.

⁸³ DR. MARTIN STEINBEREITHNER, Director of Communication and Development at *The Servants of the Word* community (USA).

⁸⁴ See 1 Samuel 18:1. The full text of the speech see page 287.

Key 1: Jesus Christ at the center.

Jesus says in the Gospel: *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"* (Matthew 18:20). This is a key phrase for us. Jesus Christ at the center. Actually, this is a simple discovery. People in other movements, communities and churches also live with Jesus. They live with the Gospel and experience the risen Jesus in their midst. We have encountered other communities and got to know them. In personal encounters we have discovered Jesus Christ in others. He connects us.

Key 2: The covenant of mutual love.

The covenant of mutual love was the beginning of our journey together. It is a decision for one another. With Jesus at the center, his commandment is also effective among us. *"Love one another! As I have loved you. So, you also should love one another"* (John 13:34). We have decided to live this commandment of Jesus and have promised each other to love. We recognize different theological views and forms of spirituality among us. But they should no longer divide us. For what unites us is more than what divides us: Jesus Christ and his commandment unite us. We give priority to this. This creates a space to talk about and negotiate all our differences.

EDITH WENGER: Today, when I look back on those years, I ask myself: *"Where did this covenant of love become practical? Did I experience love in action?"* Yes, it became concrete. I would like to give two examples. First, my own experience. I had experienced many disappointments and hurts through my history with the Catholic Church. I reacted to this with rejection and exclusion. Through the love, especially of Catholic brothers and sisters from the *Focolare Movement*, I

was deeply unsettled but also touched. Their love prepared and enabled the path of reconciliation in me.

Another aspect where I experienced love in action was at our meeting in Würzburg last November. Here, this love became tangible for people who come from a completely different background. I was at the meeting with a group from our *Teen Challenge* community. The people who live with us do not come from a middle-class background. Church life is very alien to some of them. So, it is not easy for them to find their place at such meetings. It was very surprising for me: when we reflected on the meeting and I asked: "How was it for you?" The unanimous answer was "beautiful!". They didn't remember much about the presentations and contents. But their experience with the people was very present. They said: "We perceived something that is unusual for us. Many people approached us in a friendly manner, we felt accepted and had the sense of belonging. We felt love! We don't usually experience it so intensely."

For me, it was confirmation: what we have accomplished in Munich and what has taken shape in our communities can be noticed and experienced in a positive way. Love in action is a message that people on the margins of society also understand.

Key 3: The Word of God.

We learn how other communities deal with the Bible. The Bible, the Word of God, has also found a home in the other community, and this Word of God makes the other community my home. The Word of God is a key to togetherness. We experience differences in the expression of faith, in tradition and denomination and even a whole lot of unfamiliar things in our interaction with other movements and communities. But the Word of God creates unity and connects us. We want to hear the word of God together and live according to it. In *our*

Togetherness we see the answers of the Gospel to the pressing questions of our time more clearly. We are involved in various hot spots of our society and seek cooperation wherever possible.

THOMAS RÖMER: It is important to visit other communities. There we learn how other communities deal with the Bible. That is how I got to know the *Sant'Egidio* community. They celebrate evening prayer every day. There, the Bible is read and interpreted for everyday life. The Word of God is the root of their life. The Word of God is a key for living together.

Key 4: Reconciliation overcomes boundaries.

At the beginning of our *Togetherness*, we were given the experience of reconciliation, as if God had given us the “universal key” and we began to open doors. It was at our *Meeting of Leaders* in 2000. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we were taken into the gift of reconciliation. Walls fell, trenches were filled in and deep reconciliation took place. We forgave one another and were also able to receive forgiveness.

We experienced this reconciliation among ourselves as a miracle. Our common path is threatened by many experiences from a history of divisions, misunderstandings, sin and hurt. Reconciliation leads us out of this history of conflict and separation: where we and our churches have sinned against one another, we are asking for forgiveness and forgive each other. We should not omit this step of reconciliation. At the beginning of every relationship - including the relationship between churches - there must be a willingness to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.

EDITH WENGER: I felt as if God had given us the „universal key” here and we began to open doors. My impression was: previously everyone lived in their own „room” – familiar, protected, confined and isolated. Now we have discovered that we are allowed to live not only

in a „room“, but in a „house.“ It was breathtaking – suddenly discovering the house “Europe „ – doors opened to Italy, France, England and other countries. Reconciliation comes from the heart of God. This process is not stage-managed, not demanded. I am fascinated and excited about the riches we are discovering together in God’s house.

**Key 5: Changed attitudes –
discovering and sharing the “riches.”**

We began to visit other communities and groups and discovered their “richness.” Our attitude was the important thing: not to examine “where the other group is lacking,” but “where their richness and complementarity lie.”

Discovering richness in all its abundance, appreciating the otherness of others as enrichment — this attitude requires a willingness to put aside one’s own interests and serve one another in humility. One community does not need to cover everything in the kingdom of God. *„Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others”* (1 Peter 4:10). We learned to look from the perspective of others. It became important for us to treat each other as friends and siblings, not as functionaries. We want to continue the path of friendship. We live what can be lived in friendship. Where friendship reaches its limits, we acknowledge those limits. In our cooperation with other churches, we respect existing boundaries but work as friends to overcome them.

“A shiver of awe” – two personal impressions

Report by SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA⁸⁵



The *Together for Europe* gathering at the Ecumenical Church Congress in Munich’s ice rink was a church congress in itself: so many different people, communities, movements, denominations – and they all contributed to making the entire day a powerful testimony of unity and reconciliation.

For me, these were my first steps in *Together for Europe*. My community (*Christ Brotherhood Community Selbitz*) has been part of the network from the very beginning. But for me, the start couldn’t have been more challenging, because within a very short time, GÜNTER PFAUTH⁸⁶ (*CVJM Munich*) and I were faced with the task of organizing and managing the entire day of *Together for Europe* at the Church Congress, with its panel discussions, games, roundtable discussions, breaks, music, procedures, and participants. In other words, we were suddenly right in the middle of *Together for Europe* and had to make sure that everything ran smoothly on, off and behind the stage.

Even today, I still feel a shiver of awe in my heart when I think about the preparations. Not because it was an incredible amount of work, but because we were almost always met with a friendly, welcoming spirit from the communities and movements, which always signaled: “We can do it! And we’re happy to do it!” The joy of working together on the common goal was palpable.

⁸⁵ SR. PD DR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA, sister of the *Christusbruderschaft Selbitz* community, historian, private lecturer, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

⁸⁶ GÜNTER PFAUTH, Senior Advisor at the *YMCA Munich* (2001-2009).

And then, after a good 2,000 emails and many conversations, the time had come. The day was here, and now we had to decide whether everything would work out. It was stressful and wonderful at the same time. And that's why it took me several days to fully appreciate what happened in the ice rink in 2010: we worked hand in hand, the messages were powerful – and behind every message, behind every contribution, there was a person who, with great strength and equal ease, brought their own charisma to the whole. All in all, it was an incredible breeding ground for the hope that cooperation is possible on both large and small scale; and that in joint, unpretentious and focused action, something shines through that transcends us all.

I still marvel at how powerful this event was. And: whenever I am in Munich and run into GÜNTER, we remember moments we shared in planning, in despair, in joy. This shared journey remains. Quite clearly, we together experienced something that is at the heart of *Together for Europe*: the powerful complementarity of our individual gifts. In them, suddenly and inexplicably something shines through what Jesus prayed for us all in his great prayer for unity (John 17). This experience remains my eternal „wow“ and a powerful driving force for my involvement in *Together for Europe*.

Report by REBEKKA MANNAL⁸⁷

REBEKKA MANNAL (*YMCA Esslingen*), was a participant and co-worker on the path of *togetherness* and wrote the following after editing the texts of *Together for Europe*:

“ These days, as I work on the texts and images of *Together for Europe*, I feel as if I am privileged to be completing a valuable course of study at the university of ecumenism of hearts.

And time and again, as I study the texts and summarize the core messages, I am so moved that I almost cry. I am moved by God’s special work among us. I am moved by these messages which are so contrary to life in our society and have such life-giving potential.

What has become particularly important to me?

The ecumenism of hearts is God’s work; *Togetherness* is emerging and growing solely through His work. “*That they may all be one*” is a deep desire of Jesus.

An attitude of humility, acceptance and love towards one another; an attitude that is contrary to our society. Placing one’s own on the “altar” and recognizing the richness in others.

An attitude of service, not selfishness, but a calling to love people in every conceivable way.

Another attitude of humility in relation to the concept of truth: “*None of us is right; only one right applies here: the right of Christ*” (HELMUT NICKLAS). Or: “*For us, truth is a person, not a dogma...*” (GERHARD PROSS).

⁸⁷ DR. REBEKKA MANNAL, oncologist, long-time volunteer at *YMCA Esslingen*.

These are just a few important key points. Many other things also appealed to me, e.g., some testimonies which show us God's tangible action. I am moved to see how God uses movements to bring about unity.

A sign of hope – Brussels, May 12, 2012

On May 12, 2012, the third European event of *Together for Europe* took place in Brussels, following events in Stuttgart in 2004 and 2007. At the same time, members of over 300 Christian movements and communities went on the streets and squares in 152 cities, where they had prepared activities and events. A great potential for hope and a lively network became visible that spread across the entire continent. Many thousands of people of different languages, cultures, mentalities and denominations across national borders have connected with one another. Their common vision: a Europe of solidarity, peace, reconciliation, justice and brotherhood.

In his speech, ANDREA RICCARDI addressed the causes of hopelessness in Europe. *“There is one source of the crisis: ... the loneliness of Europeans. ... Europe's greatest misery is the lack of hope.”* He explained how hope arises through communities and movements.

THOMAS RÖMER pointed to the foundation of this hope and the basis of our actions. *“Together for Europe — this is an invitation to live with the Gospel of Jesus, and a hope that we can build our common life in Europe on the foundation of these Christian roots.”* The responses to this message (see page 293) highlighted the strong desire of many people: the Christian foundation of Europe should be strengthened in this sense, and its soul should be nourished with fresh sustenance.

MARIA VOCE highlighted how *Together for Europe* promotes a culture of community.

“It involves numerous citizens in order to awaken a concrete sense of togetherness. They contribute their specific professional, family and cultural skills in the 1,000 opportunities of everyday life and in all areas of society, offering solutions to the various challenges of our time.”

HERMAN VAN ROMPUY⁸⁸, former President of the European Council, emphasized in his video message the importance of otherness, “*of the other, of the people we call our neighbours. What would a European society, a European home, be, if it did not have ‘the other one’ as its foundation?*”

But the cultural side was not to be overlooked either. Singer JUDY BAILEY⁸⁹ and her band took us on a lively journey with their songs of faith. Young people impressively brought the “7fold YES” (which was adopted in Stuttgart 2007) to life with their contributions.

In a closing statement, the Steering committee summarized the common conviction in the manifesto “Together for Europe 2012”:

“We together want to live this Europe. A Europe of hope, a Europe based on Christian values, a Europe that gives future to young people.

⁸⁸ HERMAN ACHILLE GRAAF VAN ROMPUY, Belgian politician, Prime Minister and Head of Government (2008-2009), first permanent President of the European Council for two terms (2009-2014).

⁸⁹ JUDY BAILEY, singer, composer and musician of Christian pop music, grew up in Barbados and now lives in Germany.

The joy of this impressive day and the great response in 152 cities across the continent was dampened only by the fact that political Europe hardly participated in it. Obviously, leading figures like ROMANO PRODI, who had ensured a large participation of politicians in 2004 and 2007, were absent. The contents of this event have been published in a small book entitled “A Sign of Hope”⁹⁰.

The European St. Ulrich Prize 2014 – Dillingen, May 3, 2014

On May 3, 2014, *Together for Europe* received the European St. Ulrich Prize in Dillingen on Danube, which was awarded every two years by the European ST. ULRICH FOUNDATION in Dillingen until 2022. In other years it had been received by such well-known personalities as LECH WAŁĘSA, ROMAN HERZOG and HELMUT KOHL. The foundation’s mission is “*to promote European unity in the Christian-Western tradition in the spirit of St. Ulrich.*”

By awarding the prize to *Together for Europe* in 2014, for the first time a network rather than an individual or community had been honored. Its special commitment to unity, not only among churches and movements but also in society, had prompted the foundation’s board to choose this award winner. District Administrator LEO SCHRELL, Mayor FRANK KUNZ and City Pastor WOLFGANG SCHNECK presented the European St. Ulrich Prize. The text of the certificate reads:

⁹⁰ A sign of hope. Brussels, May 12, 2012, edited by GERHARD PROSS, ISBN 978-3-87996-982-2.

EUROPEAN ST. ULRICH FOUNDATION

The commitment of the international network *"Together for Europe"* is guided by an image of unity in reconciled diversity. The Christian communities and movements do not seek to level denominational and national identities, but rather to discover them as a treasure to be promoted. Through steps of reconciliation and friendship across the most diverse boundaries, they are building bridges in Europe. This has given rise to a movement of hope that is shaped by the spirit of the Gospel and inspires people throughout Europe to work for the good of our society.

In recognition of these special achievements, the European St. Ulrich Foundation is awarding the 2014 European St. Ulrich Prize to the international network „Together for Europe.“

Those attending the award ceremony experienced a festive service in the basilica in Dillingen, which was filled to the last seat. In his laudatory speech, Cardinal JOAO CARDINAL BRÁZ DE AVIZ⁹¹ expressed his joy at the growing cooperation between the churches:

“*I am delighted to see the growing cooperation in my church between historically influential and younger charisms and new beginnings, and I am very grateful for the ecumenical witness of 'Together for Europe', which repeatedly creates spaces for fraternal encounter and mutual love between the churches, thus opening up new and hopeful approaches to what still divides us. ... It seems to me that "Together for*

⁹¹ JOAO CARDINAL BRÁZ DE AVIZ, Brazil, Archbishop of Brasilia (2012-2025), President of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life at the Vatican.

Europe” is one of the most lasting responses to these longings and searches in the cities of our late modern age – and so this initiative is quite rightly being honored here today with the prestigious European St. Ulrich Prize. For me, this award is also a renewed invitation and encouragement to all of us to remain faithful to the great longing of our God: “ut omnes unum sint” – “that they may all be one” (John 17:21).“

When accepting the award, GERHARD PROSS emphasized the alignment between the goals of the network and the European St. Ulrich Foundation, saying:

“ „The goals of the foundation and of the network are significantly aligned. While many people’s views of Europe is shaped by national states, the foundation and the network emphasize a more comprehensive picture of Europe.“

Following the celebrations, more than 100 leaders from the communities took the opportunity to exchange ideas and reflect on the next steps in *Together for Europe*. It was unanimously decided that the next major event would be held in Munich.

Chapter 11

In the run-up to the Reformation anniversary

Overcoming Barriers

At the 2010 Ecumenical Church Congress in Munich, we told BISHOP JOHANNES FRIEDRICH, among other things, about our experiences of reconciliation at *the Meeting of Leaders* in 2000. He listened to us with interest, but at the same time made it clear that although he had no such experiences himself, he would be happy to invite us to his office in November 2010 for a more in-depth exchange of ideas. There he welcomed our small ecumenical team with the words: “*Now I know what you were talking about with your experiences of reconciliation.*”

He then told us about the act of reconciliation between the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonites, which had taken place in Stuttgart in the fall of 2010. Years of dialogue reached their goal at that meeting when the delegates of the Lutheran World Federation asked the representatives of the Mennonites for forgiveness for the sins of past centuries. They commemorated the martyrs of the Mennonites during the Reformation, their condemnation and expulsion, and asked for forgiveness.

BISHOP FRIEDRICH told us, visibly moved, about this poignant moment when the delegates spontaneously fell to their knees. Because our experience at *the Meeting of Leaders* and his at the Lutheran World Federation were very similar, a deep understanding grew between us.

Sensitized by his experience in Stuttgart, BISHOP FRIEDRICH expressed his regret that he perceived a skeptical attitude towards the Catholic Church among some of his colleagues. Of course, they were

engaged in ecumenical dialogue and strove for friendliness, but outside of official meetings, a distant attitude was repeatedly evident.

We promised him that we would visit one or two Protestant and Catholic bishops to talk to them about our experiences of reconciliation.

Visits to Protestant and Catholic bishops

One of the first people we asked for a meeting was ARCHBISHOP ROBERT ZOLLITSCH⁹², who was then chairman of the German Bishops' Conference. He invited us to Freiburg at the beginning of 2011. To our delight, he was receptive to our concerns.

We also asked NIKOLAUS SCHNEIDER⁹³, then chair of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany) Council, for a meeting. Here too doors opened and we as an ecumenical team were invited to Düsseldorf for talks in March 2011. It was a very open but also critical encounter with a surprising outcome.

After talking about the Way of *Together for Europe* and reporting on our process of unity, we asked FR. SCHNEIDER whether our positive experiences might not give the chance to celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 together with the Catholic Church, thereby sending a clear signal of unity. "*Give me one good reason why I should celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation together with the Catholic Church,*" he replied. And since GERHARD PROSS had not entered this conversation unprepared he was able to give him five reasons in a nutshell.

⁹² ARCHBISHOP DR. ROBERT ZOLLITSCH, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Freiburg (2003-2014), Chairman of the German Bishops' Conference (2008-2014).

⁹³ PRESIDING BISHOP DR. H. C. NIKOLAUS SCHNEIDER, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland (2003-2013), Chairman of the Council of the EKD and thus highest representative of the Evangelical Church in Germany (2010-2014).

PRESIDENT SCHNEIDER was surprised by these arguments and became very thoughtful, because they seemed to open real perspectives for him. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the conversation had to end at this point, but he promised to invite us to the EKD headquarters in Hanover in summer to continue the discussion.

During our visit in summer, we met an open-minded discussion partner who was happy to continue the conversation with us. The door for further dialogue was open.

SR. ANNA-MARIA AUSDER WIESCHE, GERHARD PROSS, and REGIONAL BISHOP FRIEDRICH accepted the invitation to our second conversation with ARCHBISHOP ZOLLITSCH in Freiburg. During this meeting, he suggested that we at *Together for Europe* should invite for an ecumenical bishops' meeting in view of the celebrations for the anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. He agreed to attend. We tried to motivate him to send the invitation himself, but he said that the initiative was in good hands with us.

Invitation to an ecumenical bishops' meeting

After his clear vote we set out to find a suitable location and date. We found a suitable conference center in Stuttgart and were able to invite people to an ecumenical bishops' meeting in May 2013. In the invitation we referred to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and explained:

“ The year 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of MARTIN LUTHER'S posting of his theses. Our common journey since the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification encourages us to propose to celebrate this anniversary not only denominationally but also ecumenically. To this end, we could draw on the experiences we have gained in our cooperation with dif-

ferent communities. It is our hope that the year 2017 – which reminds us not only of a spiritual awakening, but also of much suffering – will be a year of reconciliation and deeper community.

Representatives of our network have already held talks with Archbishop ZOLLITSCH and retired Regional Bishop FRIEDRICH to discuss preparations for 2017. Both are interested in an exchange between the bishops and our communities. President SCHNEIDER also agreed to such an approach. In continuation of these discussions, we are inviting you today to an ecumenical bishops' meeting with representatives of spiritual movements from May 23-24, 2013.

Like the meeting with the GERMAN EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE, it was important to us to have this meeting in a protected environment, away from the public and the press. Our wish was that it is characterized by an atmosphere of openness and trust. We wanted to create the right frame for it out of our experience and our culture of cooperation.

Until the last moment, it was uncertain whether the meeting would really take place, because some of the Catholic bishops were initially very hesitant. We heard from them: “We would first have to agree on a common line among us as Catholic bishops.” But our approach was precisely a different one. We wanted an open encounter, to listen to one another and in common prayer, to sense which doors might open.

Archbishop ZOLLITSCH kept his word and was one of the first to register, and CARDINAL MILOSLAV VLK from Prague also agreed immediately. Finally, to our great joy, the bishops' meeting took place in May 2013.

The Ecumenical Bishops' meeting

Finally, 20 bishops and 10 representatives of *Together for Europe* came together in the meeting. It was an encounter with valuable thoughts on ecumenism and open exchange among one another. BISHOP GERHARD FEIGE⁹⁴, ecumenical representative of the Catholic Church, spoke in his address about the Second Vatican Council, saying that it initiated a shift “*from the Counter-Reformation to the Co-Reformation.*” METROPOLITAN SERAFIM JOANTA⁹⁵ of the Romanian Orthodox Church referred to the atmosphere of trust when he said: in such a spirit of brotherhood a common celebration of the Eucharist should actually be possible, “*but we all bear the bonds of our churches.*”

Before the evening break we invited everyone to join in prayer with a devotional led by BR. FRANZISKUS (*Jesus Brotherhood Gnadenthal*). The theme was “affection” and in addition to joint prayer we heard a reflection on the picture of the “Deesis” from Hagia Sofia, which had become so important on our journey.

During this devotion time the atmosphere changed significantly. The message of the picture — and our central concern — to show affection to others as well as to Jesus seemed to have touched people’s hearts. There were great openness and willingness to take practical steps together afterwards.

The question arose, what these steps might look like and how they could be realized. We asked: “How would the Reformation commem-

⁹⁴ GERHARD FEIGE, Roman Catholic Bishop of Magdeburg (2005-2023), Chairman of the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops’ Conference, member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

⁹⁵ METROPOLITAN SERAFIM JOANTA, teacher at the Orthodox Theological Institute “St. Serge” in Paris (1985-1990), Auxiliary Bishop of Sibiu/Romania (1990-1994), Romanian Orthodox Archbishop and Metropolitan for Germany, Central and Northern Europe.

oration have to be organized that you as the Catholic Church could participate?”

It soon became clear that the more the anniversary focused on honoring MARTIN LUTHER, the more difficult it would be to celebrate together. If, on the other hand, the focus would be on rediscovering the gospel of grace, a joint celebration would seem possible. PRESIDENT SCHNEIDER took up this idea and proposed celebrating a Christ festival. If Jesus Christ and the Gospel were at the center of this anniversary, Catholics could celebrate alongside without any problems, BISHOP FEIGE replied. The ice was broken and a common line began to emerge. A wealth of personal statements by the bishops revealed their ecumenical attitude and their desire for further steps towards unity.

In the follow-up discussion we reaffirmed our agreement to not issue a press statement, despite the great momentum and groundbreaking openness to a joint commemoration of the Reformation. The purpose of the meeting had been fulfilled by the emergence of a common vision. Now, everything else was the task of the relevant bodies and nothing should be anticipated in any way.

Chapter 12

The Munich Congress 2016 – June 20-July 2, 2016

„Encounter. Reconciliation. Future.“

As next big step in *Together for Europe* we planned another Congress and a major event in 2016. While finding a suitable location, we leaned towards Munich. The Co-worker’s Congress was to take place at Circus Krone. We did not want to hold the big event in a hall but rather present our issue in public in the center of the city. We finally decided on a rally at Stachus, Munich’s central square.

When the decision was made, we could not yet know that in 2016 both the main leaders of the major churches would come from Munich: CARDINAL REINHARD MARX⁹⁶, the chairman of the German Bishops’ Conference and REGIONAL BISHOP HEINRICH BEDFORD-STROHM⁹⁷, the chairman of the EKD Council. This “coincidence” could not have been planned.

In retrospect, we could see how this helped to unfold the concerns of *Together for Europe*, particularly the impetus for unity, in cooperation between the churches. We requested, we tried, we listened — and God brought us together.

⁹⁶ CARDINAL REINHARD MARX, Archbishop of Munich and Freising and Metropolitan of the associated ecclesiastical province, Cardinal Priest of San Corbiniano, President of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (2012-2018), Chairman of the German Bishops’ Conference (2014-2020).

⁹⁷ REGIONAL BISHOP PROF. DR. HEINRICH BEDFORD-STROHM, Professor of Systematic Theology (2004-2011), Regional Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria (2011-2023), Chairman of the Council of the EKD (2014-2021), Chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

Outline of a future form of church

When it came to organizing the days, we found open doors with the bishops. Particularly, CARDINAL MARX took a lot of time on several occasions to promote and organize the Congress and rally in conversation with us.

In the end, 1,700 staff and leaders accepted the invitation to the Congress and 5,000 participants gathered for the rally at Stachus in Munich. THOMAS RÖMER (*YMCA Munich*) opened the event with a reflection on the theme: “The Holy Spirit is at work in our time.”

The illustrated brochure “Together for Europe Munich 2016: Encounter. Reconciliation. Future”⁹⁸ provides comprehensive documentation of the Congress with its plenary events, forums and panel discussions, as well as “*an enchanting Congress evening at the circus Krone Building*” and the rally and therefore, there is no need to repeat them here. However, a few highlights are worth mentioning.

In a series of short presentations marked by courage, hope and confidence, a truly visionary look ahead was ventured, reflecting the experiences and insights of *Together for Europe*. Under the theme “Outlines of a Future Shape of the Church,” SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE, FR. LOTHAR PENNERS, BR. FRANZISKUS JOEST, GERHARD PROSS, HILDE KIEBOOM⁹⁹ and CARDINAL MILOSLAV VLK spoke about the “building blocks” of this new form: friendship, the togetherness of charisms, the “*communio*” (community) form of God’s people, places of hope, serving instead of ruling, and the network as an expression of the future.

⁹⁸ Available at: <https://miteinander-wie-sonst.org/materialien/>.

⁹⁹ DR. H. C. JOZEFA FRANCISKA MARIA BARONESS HILDE KIEBOOM, Vice-Chair of the *Community of Sant'Egidio*.

Europe at present

In his contribution “Reconciliation with the Future” MICHAEL HOCHSCHILD¹⁰⁰ presented a sociological interpretation of the present, where he identified the upheavals of our time and pointed out possible perspectives. He pointed to the loss of significance of institutions and the simultaneous increase in the creative power of social and spiritual movements. According to his findings, our society is disintegrating into ever smaller, self-contained units and no longer reaches the masses, but only certain groups. He stated:

“Therefore, the problem today is not a certain pluralism, as we have known it since modern society in the 18th/19th century, but a lack of clear structure. The current problem with pluralism is its formlessness! ... We must expect that the end of society (as we know it) has come and that new processes of a new socialization are still in their infancy. ... Today, we need to look ahead; in other words, we need to reconcile ourselves with the future.”

HERBERT LAUENROTH (*Focolare Movement*) entitled his presentation “Europe in the Age of Fear” and presented a contemporary analysis that got under the skin. He showed how fear was omnipresent in society. Even more poignant was his final image which he painted on the circus dome: with a picture of trapeze artists, he helped to dispel fear:

¹⁰⁰ PROF. DR. MICHEL HOCHSCHILD, sociologist, research director and professor of postmodern thought at Time-Lab Paris (Institut d’Etudes et de Recherches postmodernes), editor of the institute’s series “Time-Lab Studies”.

“Always taking the risk of trusting, letting go and reaching out again into the space of the future, like a jumper in midair. An artistic glimpse into that prophetic and ever-precarious, risky space between ‘grace and gravity’... in which the creature always holds and supports itself, in a sense ‘redeemed’ from itself and liberated towards the other.”

The analysis of the current social situation, which many found challenging, found its counterpoint in an evening of prayer, because prayer directed hearts and minds towards hopes and promises associated with God. Prophetic prayers were spoken and many participants felt hope was filling them, despite the challenges and fears that had been discussed that day.

Unity is possible – rally at Stachus

Right at the beginning, in his welcome address at the rally at Stachus, the Steering committee of *Together for Europe* placed the event in a broad context. In his opening speech, GERHARD PROSS emphasized that unity is possible, because Jesus, our common center, connects us far beyond all the differences between us:

“For 15 years, we have been experiencing, that reconciliation and unity are possible. We could hardly be more different in terms of denominations, spiritualities and cultures. And yet, in Jesus Christ, there is a center that is deeper than all differences. From this shared experience, we say today: 500 years of separation are enough. Unity is possible.”

MARIA VOCE (President of the *Focolare Movement*) placed her contribution directly under the theme “Unity is possible,” and MARCO

IMPAGLIAZZO (President of *Sant'Egidio*) spoke on the theme “No walls, but bridges.” Particularly impressive was the testimony of PROF. MIROSLAV VOLF¹⁰¹, Yale University, USA. He, as a Croatian, spoke about reconciliation based on his personal life story during the Balkan War. This was complemented by the report on the reconciliation between the Reformed Church and the Mennonites (PETER DETTWILER¹⁰², Reformed pastor, Zurich, with the General Secretary of the Mennonites, LARRY MILLER¹⁰³). In other statements, such as those on paths to reconciliation in Volgograd (Rev. HANS SCHOLZ¹⁰⁴ and SERGEJ ALTUCHOV¹⁰⁵, Volgograd), it became clear that reconciliation is the key to unity.

When FR. HEINRICH WALTER (*Schoenstatt Movement*) interviewed the two representatives of the major churches, CARDINAL REINHARD MARX and the Council Chairman of the Evangelical Church, REGIONAL BISHOP HEINRICH BEDFORD-STROHM, we were amazed and grateful to witness how centuries-old divisions had been overcome and the path of togetherness had been taken with a clear desire for the unity of God’s people.

¹⁰¹ PROF. DR. MIROSLAV VOLF, Croatian evangelical, Anglican professor of systematic theology at Yale University. Based on his experiences during the Croatian War, he has developed a theology of forgiveness and nonviolence.

¹⁰² PETER DETTWILER, retired pastor, former ecumenical representative of the Evangelical Reformed Church of the Canton of Zurich.

¹⁰³ LARRY MILLER, Mennonite pastor, general secretary of the Mennonite World Conference (1992-2012), secretary of the Global Christian Forum, a platform for interfaith dialogue (2012-2018).

¹⁰⁴ HANS SCHOLZ, retired Protestant pastor, head of the GGE service “Church and Israel,” organizer of reconciliation trips, especially to Ukraine.

¹⁰⁵ SERGEJ ALTUCHOV, pastor of a Protestant congregation in Volzhsky near Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad).

REGIONAL BISHOP HEINRICH BEDFORD-STROHM emphasized that the denominations have no other way than that of unity:

“Here are people who carry Christ in their hearts. Unity stands in front me. Christ can't help but to call us to unity. When both, CARDINAL MARX and I, speak of Christ, we are not speaking of a Catholic Christ or a Protestant Christ or an Orthodox Christ, but of the one Lord who, calls his Church to unity when we listen to him. And when we follow this call, we cannot help but carry this longing for the unity of the churches in our hearts.

That is what I have felt here today – all afternoon long, and that is why this afternoon is an afternoon of hope for me.

...

For the first time in history, we will celebrate a Reformation anniversary, a centenary, not for the sake of self-promotion, but in the spirit of unity that Martin Luther himself was concerned with. Martin Luther wanted to point to Christ. He wanted nothing else. And we want to celebrate a great feast of Christ and point to Christ anew today, and we can only do that together. I am delighted that CARDINAL MARX and I are in complete agreement on this point, completely of one mind. We assure you – I would just like to announce it – that we will celebrate this Reformation anniversary together.”

And CARDINAL REINHARD MARX replied:

“I want to underline what the Regional bishop said. My experience is that we are not actually separated. The word 'separation' is far too strong for me. We are different, but we must walk a common path. Together we must bear witness to Christ. That is important for the world.

If we bear witness to Christ together, to a God who showed and gives his mercy to the world in Jesus, then we can never use this God and this faith for our own purposes. Bearing witness to Christ together means inviting all people to discover God's mercy. For me, bearing witness to Christ together also means directing Jesus' gaze towards all people. Every human being is unique, and that is why human life is sacred and precious. From the first moment of existence to the last moment. And that is why the house of creation is not for the few, but for everyone. For me, that means bearing witness to Christ together in this world. And that is why I believe it is very important that we get moving together, you together with us, and that at the end of 2017 it may also become visible to the public:

These Christians can no longer be separated, they belong together."

This unmistakable sign of unity, which was presented to the participants by the two representatives of the major churches in Germany, was received with great gratitude and opened a door of hope.

When 1,500 cheerful and enthusiastic young people arrived later with their blue balloons, it became very "lively" at Stachus. They had celebrated a "Holy Spirit Night" with their own program the evening before. Now they were welcomed with great applause at the rally, and they also organized the program at Stachus in the evening with lots of music.

Reconciliation opens the future

“Encounter. Reconciliation. Future.” - That was the title we had given to Congress and the rally, adding emphatically: “500 years of separation are enough!” We wanted to take another step, an act of reconciliation.

Reconciliation was the beginning of *Together for Europe*. Our journey began with the profound experience of reconciliation at *the Meeting of Leaders* in 2000. Over the years, this has further spread and further. Now it was our concern to carry out to the public what had been given in the protected space of *the Meeting of Leaders*.

Our desire was to roll out a “red carpet” for the churches, on which they could walk the path of reconciliation and take the steps that were within their competence.

In advance, we had held various individual discussions with CARDINAL KURT KOCH¹⁰⁶, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, REGIONAL BISHOP FRANK OTFRIED JULY, Vice-President of the Lutheran World Federation and METROPOLITAN SERAFIM JOANTA, Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan for Germany, Central and Northern Europe. To coordinate this important act well, however, a joint preparatory meeting was important to all those involved. And it was a great joy for us to see how important the matter was to the participating bishops. Their struggle for a balance between canon law and the message of the heart was palpable.

This act of reconciliation was the central event at the *Together for Europe* rally on July 2, 2016, at Stachus. The presentations and testi-

¹⁰⁶ KURT CARDINAL KOCH, honorary professor at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Lucerne (1989-1995), Bishop of Basel (1996-2010), Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (2010-2023).

monies on the theme of “reconciliation”, given up to that point, paved the way for this highlight of the rally. Here in Munich, a gate was to be opened, the gate of reconciliation.

Moderated by SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE and GERHARD PROSS, CARDINAL KOCH, REGIONAL BISHOP JULY, and METROPOLITAN SERAFIM took the stage. After their words of introduction, they took the historic step of public reconciliation. In an act of prayer, they asked each other for forgiveness on behalf of their churches, praying, among other things: *“We have divided the body of Christ ... we are truly sorry. In your presence, we ask each other for forgiveness.”*

Following the prayer, REGIONAL BISHOP JULY emphasized the mutual request for forgiveness once again with the words: *“We will now also embrace each other as bishops. We do this today as a sign that we ask each other for forgiveness and that forgiveness is granted to us. And so, a sign of reconciliation among us should become visibly alive today in Munich, which will continue to accompany us in the future as we seek the path of unity. Let us never forget this sign together. May God grant it.”*

With this public step towards reconciliation, the bishops, representing their churches, opened the door wide to the future, for which we had hoped for. We all sensed what a magnificent event was taking place at that moment. That is why it did not end with the embrace on stage.

Inspired by the symbolic action of the bishops, it immediately spread to the 5,000 participants at the rally. In an impressive act of reconciliation among the denominations, many of the participants embraced each other and asked each other for forgiveness on behalf of their churches. Reconciliation opens the future. Symbolically, a gate was opened on stage and many children and young people jumped through it, dancing and singing.

Afterwards, ANNETTE and GERHARD KEHL¹⁰⁷ (*Jordan Foundation Kempten*) had distributed keys to all 5,000 participants at Stachus as a symbol of reconciliation for a successful future. One participant from Russia reacted spontaneously and announced on stage: “*I will try to hand this key to President Vladimir Putin.*”

A shared commitment

The memorable day in Munich concluded with a joint message and commitment from all participants. We quote the key statements from this message here:¹⁰⁸ (see page 297.)

- There is no alternative to cooperation
- The Gospel – a source of hope
- Europe – a culture of respect and appreciation
- Unity is possible – overcoming divisions
- We live by the gospel of Jesus Christ and bear witness to it.
- We walk the path of reconciliation.
- We treat people of other worldviews and religions with respect.
- We are committed to promoting humanity and peace in the world.
- We have a vision of Togetherness in Europe.
- We trust in the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰⁷ ANNETTE and GERHARD KEHL, founders and directors of the *Jordan Foundation* in Kempten. Organizers of major Christian events.

¹⁰⁸ The original can be found in Part II, see page 297.

Chapter 13

Together for Europe – in a changing Europe

The wind is changing in Europe and worldwide

The first Europe Day of *Together for Europe* in Stuttgart in 2004 took place just a few days after 10 countries, mainly from Central and Eastern Europe, joined the EU. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain between East and West in Europe led to an atmosphere of openness and a spirit of optimism, which was also reflected in the accession of Eastern European countries to the EU. But by Munich 2016 at the latest, it was obvious that the wind had turned.

In the same week when the Congress took place in Munich, the UK voted to leave the EU. In addition, the overall political climate has changed. Instead of a new era of cooperation, the focus shifted back to isolationism and national self-interest. During his election campaign in mid-2016, DONALD TRUMP summed up his entire political platform with the slogan “America First.” In his inaugural address on January 20, 2017, he announced that from now on, a new vision would govern the US: “America First.” National egoism and autocratic governments in Hungary, Turkey and Russia became increasingly prominent. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the fighting in Donbass showed that violence and war were suddenly once again considered legal means of asserting one’s own interests.

Social change took a different direction — the tide had turned.

Tensions and conflict replaced the cooperation that had followed the German reunification. The Iron Curtain was now replaced by an invisible curtain that threatened to divide East and West within Europe once again. Suddenly, people no longer understood each other.

The problems arising from globalization increasingly came to the forefront. In America, but also in England and other European countries, the ethical changes associated with social-liberal politics were increasingly debated in a polarizing manner. Efforts to use sensitive language (political correctness) with the aim of not discriminating anyone were perceived as patronizing and a ban on free speech by many. Resistance formed up. The differences became more.

This political climate was exacerbated by the wave of refugees from Syria in 2015. Right-wing extremist movements emerged in many European countries, including the most populous countries in the EU: France, Italy and Germany. Discord over refugee policy and increasing violence towards unpopular politicians and political movements characterized the atmosphere.

The covid pandemic further exacerbated the conflict. A climate of aggression developed, starting with family and friends, among neighbours and colleagues, but also in society in general, which was particularly reflected in the media.

This naturally had an impact on the path of *Together for Europe*. The years after 2016 reflected these changes. The period up to 2016 was essentially characterized by bridge-building between Christian movements and churches and as described above, bore rich fruits of unity. But now our attention is drawn more strongly to the social and political situation. This gave rise to new challenges, which are described below.

Meeting of the Supporting committee in Castel Gandolfo 2016 – To which Europe do we say “yes”?

At the meeting of the European Supporting committee of *Together for Europe* in November 2016 in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, we already addressed the changes outlined above and asked ourselves: “Which Europe do we say yes to?”

We came to the joint conclusion that in our understanding, Europe is more than just the EU. When we talk about Europe, we mean the entire continent, from the far west to the Urals in the east. That is why friends from Ukraine and Russia also attended our meetings. We discussed the vagueness of the term “Europe” and concluded that *Together for Europe* has both in view, the whole of Europe and the EU. This became clear in many of the speeches. Despite some critical questions about its current form and policies, there was a clear expression of the common will to stand by the EU as a decisive instrument for 75 years of peace.

However, in accordance with our charism of unity, we are committed to promoting the togetherness of diverse cultures, languages and nations throughout the continent.

The presentations by SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA and FR. LOTHAR PENNERS from the intensive work of the European Supporting committee in 2016 are particularly noteworthy. As a historian, SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA showed how much Europe’s path was shaped for centuries by negotiation and the balance of different forces, before the national states emerged.¹⁰⁹ FR. LOTHAR PENNERS drew attention to the question of Europe’s calling, referring to FR. KENTENICH in his presentation.¹¹⁰ As a result of an intensive joint process in the paper

¹⁰⁹ For the complete text, see page 299.

¹¹⁰ For the complete text, see page 305.

„To which Europe do we say yes?“¹¹¹ came out. We will list the main points only here. When we say yes to Europe, we associate it with a Europe

- ... of encounters and dialogue.
- ... of reconciliation
- ... of mercy and humanity
- ... of unity in diversity
- ... without selfishness and divisions
- ... of togetherness of East and West
- ... with special responsibility for Africa
- ... of cooperation between generations

Building bridges – The Supporting committee sets off for Eastern Europe

To send a signal in these times, we deliberately have chosen Vienna, - which has traditionally always been a gateway to the East - as location for our Supporting committee meeting in 2017. We specifically invited friends from Central and Eastern Europe. The focus was on encounters, dialogue and listening to one another.

What we had hoped for happened: the gateway to the East opened. In the following years, various exchange trips were undertaken and the Supporting committee deliberately met in Central and Eastern European countries: in Prague in 2018 and in Timisoara, Romania, in 2023.

¹¹¹ For the complete text, see page 311.

Supporting committee meeting in Vienna in 2017 – Europe Day on May 9 is born

At the 2017 Supporting committee meeting in Vienna, we took up the question “To which Europe do we say yes?” and explored in depth.¹¹² We looked back on 18 years of *Together for Europe* and marveled at the many fruits that had grown during these years. This review also showed clearly: *Together for Europe* had found a common appeal in those countries and regions, where National committees (coordination teams) had been established.

At the same time, meetings with politicians were held with discussions on the topic of Europe with a view to East and West. Many encounters made it clear to us that we should also deepen our journey to the East.

JEFF FOUNTAIN¹¹³ gave a passionate speech and suggested *Together for Europe* for May 9 - which is celebrated as Europe Day in some places - to breathe life into it and organize events to mark the occasion. This idea fell on fertile ground, and we invited the movements to plan special events for May 9. Together we wrote:

“ We seek encounter. Togetherness thrives on friendships between people from different Christian movements and communities. That is why we want to visit each other across borders. We asked communities across Europe to visit each other.

¹¹² For the complete text "Our yes to Europe" see page 313.

¹¹³ JEFF FOUNTAIN, Director of *Youth With A Mission* (YWAM) Europe (1990-2009), Director of the Schuman Center for European Studies, co-initiator of the Hope for Europe movement, organizer of the annual State of Europe Forum, which takes place around Europe Day on May 9 in the capital of the country currently holding the EU Council Presidency..

We recognized May 9 as Europe Day. We proposed to celebrate Together for Europe on this day with imagination and creativity in various cities and regions. It should be a joyful celebration with elements of prayer, dialogue and encounter.

A prayer for Europe will accompany this initiative for May 9. A newly developed prayer novena, translated into various languages, will be made available on the website to all interested parties.

National coordination teams of Together for Europe. In many countries and regions already coordination teams of Together for Europe are there. We encourage such teams to be formed in other countries, wherever possible. This will promote the variety within Together for Europe and facilitate cooperation.”

These ideas have been implemented in many ways. On the one hand, through trips to Eastern Europe (see below). On the other hand, through the establishment of more coordination teams in the countries. And above all, through the Europe Day celebrations that have been taking place regularly in many countries, cities and regions since then. The prayer journey to May 9 created a veritable prayer rug in and for Europe.

SR. M. LIOBA RUPRECHT¹¹⁴, member of the International Leadership of *the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary*¹¹⁵, writes:

“

Prayer and work belong together! Action becomes fruitful when it is backed by prayer. On that Saturday afternoon at

¹¹⁴ SR. M. LIOBA RUPRECHT, Schoenstatt Sister of Mary, member of the General Leadership, member of the Leadership Committee of *Together for Europe*.

¹¹⁵ *Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary*, founded in 1926, Secular Institute of pontifical right (1976), active worldwide, approx. 1,440 members.

the Congress at Stachus in Munich in 2016, the thought came to my heart: "You will continue to pray for these Christians gathered here, young and old. ..." I have been doing so ever since. Every day I pray with Mary, the mother of Jesus, "for all those who are committed to Christianity in Europe." She repeatedly calls out to everyone: "*Do whatever he tells you*" (John 2:5).

"*Europe needs our prayers,*" was the cantus firmus that GERHARD PROSS repeated at every meeting of the Supporting committee and he brought together three initiators. They met for the first time after Christmas in 2018: a Protestant leader of the *Adoramus Community*¹¹⁶, ORTWIN SCHWEITZER¹¹⁷, a Protestant sister from the *Selbitz Brotherhood Community*, SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA, and a Catholic *Schönstatt Sister of Mary*, SR. M. LIOBA RUPRECHT. Both sisters are part of the European Steering committee.

We were a special team, coming from different prayer traditions and are therefore able to enrich each other. The first prayer journey of 2019 began: starting on March 25, the communities of the network joined together in "Prayer for Europe." Each week, a different country provided reflections, testimonies and intercessions.

At the next Supporting committee meeting in Augsburg individual participants encouraged us: „Keep going!“

¹¹⁶ The *Adoramus Community* was founded in 1990 by ORTWIN SCHWEITZER. A prayer movement (Adoramus = we worship) that belongs to the charismatic movement within the Church.

¹¹⁷ ORTWIN SCHWEITZER (1937-2022), high school teacher, long-time head of the house group department in the Office for Missionary Services of the Protestant Regional Church in Württemberg, founder of the *Adoramus Community* (1990), the *Church in Awakening Association* (1994), and the interdenominational prayer movement *Wächterruf* (2000).

ILONA TOTH¹¹⁸ connected various players for the weeks before Europe Day 2020. For the following year, DIEGO GOLLER encouraged several groups in Italy and France. In Porto in 2021, the idea was sparked: we could concentrate the prayer for Europe on nine days before May 9, similar like the apostles, who prayed in the Upper Room between the Ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. THOMAS RÖMER and SR. M. LIoba RUPRECHT joined forces. Since then, they have created a template for prayer every year, based on the seven Yes' and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. All 47 countries of Europe are divided into nine days and „taken into prayer.“

DIEGO GOLLER (*Focolare Movement*) recalls:

“ At the beginning of November 2017, the Supporting committee of *Together for Europe* met in Vienna. In a plenary session ideas were freely exchanged. Two people stood up, one after the other. Both had not agreed on this before, they were not sitting next to each other, and they came from different countries: JEFF FOUNTAIN from Amsterdam and GIUSEPPE DEL COIRO¹¹⁹ from Rome. Both argued: *Together for Europe* should launch initiatives of all kinds throughout Europe on a fixed date every year. In this way *Together for Europe* could become visible and tangible throughout Europe. The proposal received full approval from the participants and it became a tradition to hold a European festival around May 9. In my view, the

¹¹⁸ ILONA TOTH, Focolare member, co-responsible for *the Focolare Movement* in Hungary (2000-2012), member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

¹¹⁹ GIUSEPPE DEL COIRO, member of the leadership team of the *Comunità della Quinta Dimensione* community, Rome (Italy), member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

work of the Spirit was overwhelming; a piece of the score in heaven suddenly became clear, unplanned.

ILONA TOTH from Hungary (*Focolare Movement*) reports from the perspective of Eastern Europe:

“

I was born and raised in a satellite state of the Soviet Union, in a society full of slogans, such as “Workers of the world, unite!”. Amidst the oppressive ruling ideology and Catholic upbringing, my personal journey was not without obstacles. But God reached me through people who tried to put the words of the Gospel into practice.

When I learned about the *Together for Europe* initiative, this circle expanded and became populated by people from different nations, churches, communities and movements. 2017 brought something new for me.

In the same year, we met with the Supporting committee of *Together for Europe* in Vienna, the historical and cultural heart of Central Europe, and were personally welcomed by the archbishop to an ecumenical prayer in the majestic St. Stephen’s Cathedral. The central theme of the conference was East-West dialogue; for the first time, a group of Ukrainians was also present. They strengthened our conviction that *Together for Europe* is a prophetic message, as it creates a culture of togetherness in the service of the European people. Furthermore, it can develop into a platform for dialogue and even a school for intra-European dialogue.

Supporting committee meeting in Prague 2018 – Immerging into the social reality of Czechia

Prague, capital of the Czech Republic, a country at the heart of Europe's historical and cultural crossroads, was the next stop after Vienna for the annual meeting of the Supporting committee of *Together for Europe* from November 15-17, 2018. 170 representatives from 21 nations and 53 communities and movements from different churches gathered there.

All participants from Central and Eastern Europe shared a common desire: to face up to the difficulties, prejudices and fears that were particularly prevalent in the member states of the European Union and beyond. The small groups, which formed an essential part of the meeting, provided numerous opportunities for personal exchange and confrontation with current political and spiritual challenges. During the plenary sessions, theologian and philosopher TOMÁŠ HALÍK, a friend of VACLAV HAVEL, politician PAVEL FISCHER, and historian JAROSLAV ŠEBEK, a member of the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, provided high-level thematic input. The uniqueness of the Czech Republic, and Prague in particular, which has often been at the forefront of the historical, cultural and political processes of our continent in the past, formed the backdrop for this new stage of *Together for Europe*. In addition to striving for the unity of the Body of Christ, it repeatedly advocates mutual respect and dialogue between different cultural and political identities.

In the run-up to the meeting, JIŘI KRATOCHVIL¹²⁰ from Prague, an expert on dialogue between different European cultures, was asked

¹²⁰ JIŘI KRATOCHVIL, born in 1953, studied economics in Prague, worked for many years in the finance departments of various state-owned companies, helped rebuild Caritas after the fall of communism; worked in Prague as a translator for the Czech Bishops' Conference.

three questions in preparation for the meeting. His answers impressively illustrate the broad historical context in which *Together for Europe* operate, and we reproduce them here in full.

The next meeting of the Supporting committee of *Together for Europe* will take place in Prague, the land of the “Hussites,” the “Prague Spring,” and the “Velvet Revolution.” The great history of the Czech people will form the framework for dialogue among the participants. How can we gain a deeper understanding of this history?

It is an eventful history, marked by great idealistic and spiritual upheavals, by the search for justice and truth, but one that often ended in great disillusionment. This was particularly the case with the three events mentioned above: the Hussite movement flared up after the death of the priest JAN HUS, who was burned at the stake in 1415 and was considered a martyr for the truth by his followers. Unfortunately, the ensuing wars, which were no longer about truth but about power, completely devastated the country. The same was true many centuries later, in 1968, when the main protagonists of the “Prague Spring,” with the enthusiastic support of the entire nation, something that had never happened before, wanted to establish a socialist regime with a “human face” that would be free from the lies and atrocities of the recent past. Unfortunately, this hope was crushed by the tracks of tanks and gave way to a general resignation, that even the heroic sacrifice of JAN PALACH (a student who burned himself alive in protest) could not stop.

And then, in 1989, the “Velvet Revolution” came which many of us still remember well; it was summed up in the words of its main protagonist, VACLAV HAVEL: “*Love and truth must prevail over lies and hatred.*” However, no one suspected that such a long struggle would

follow: the intellectual fruits of the first few months, which had been so strongly felt at the rallies in the streets and squares, became increasingly scarce as they were replaced by the pragmatism of a “technology of power.”

The flag of the President of the Czech Republic bears the inscription „truth prevails.” However, the original version – „God’s truth prevails” – was changed. But we are certain that at the end of history, His truth will prevail. Perhaps it will have to suffer many defeats first, as history (not only Czech history) teaches us, but that does not release us from the duty to always stand on His side, on the side of His truth.

***Together for Europe* wants to contribute to promoting unity between Eastern and Western Europe. Which role does the Czech Republic play in this?**

Due to its turbulent religious history, the Czech Republic is a very secularized country. Most of its population does not want to identify with any church. But that does not mean that it is atheistic; surprisingly, the number of people who describe themselves as atheists is steadily declining. Among the people, among young people, and among intellectuals, there is a strong sensitivity to spiritual and cultural values. This was evident, for example, in the warm welcome that the academic community of Prague gave to POPE BENEDICT XVI in 2009. Perhaps it was this encounter that prompted the Pope to establish a “courtyard of the nations” as a space for dialogue with the “secularized” world.

Searching together for possible forms of this dialogue could be a task for *Together for Europe* since we are united Christians of different churches. Secularized lay people with different characteristics and traits can be found throughout Europe. Czechia could become a small „workshop” for encountering them.

Looking to the future of Europe: Which further challenges are emerging on the path to the desired goal of unity?

This is a very difficult question. The answer seems not easy but at the same time logical to me. It is said that every nation – and this also applies to a continent – lives from the ideas from which it originated. One only needs to recall from where the Europe rose in which we live today: Jerusalem (faith), Athens (reason), and Rome (law). Its cultural, spiritual and material greatness and richness have grown on this secure foundation. Today, we are facing a situation of mass migration like that at the beginning of the Medieval: the greatest challenge is to be able to live with the otherness of the new arrivals, who will certainly be many, because the migration flows will continue not only for political and economic reasons, but above all for climate reasons.

We must not delude ourselves: Europe, as we know it, will disappear sooner or later, not least because of declining birth rates. We Christians must form the „creative minority“ and return to the strong roots of our tradition and to all the true values that have emerged from it, without, however, closing ourselves off to new impetus. On this spiritual foundation we can seek new unity for a new Europe, with the grace of God, for which we must pray always.

Trips to Ukraine.

WALTER and ANNEMARIE KRIECHBAUM (*YMCA Munich*) (and others too) undertook numerous trips to Central and Eastern Europe. They tell us how Eastern Europe was laid on their hearts and how their attitude toward the “East” broadened:

“ It becomes clear to us: actively living *Together for Europe* also means crossing borders within Europe and living reconciliation. Eastern Europe is close to our hearts, this vast and diverse cultural area with its rich history, both in spiritual terms and in terms of the treasure of its many peoples and their traditions.¹²¹

Encounter – listen – perceive

The encounters between East and West in Europe revealed completely different perceptions and perspectives on current events and spiritual processes. Therefore, dialogue and listening to one another were immensely important to us. We were challenged by this, because many people from the East felt that their culture and experiences were not being seen, but that Europe was dominated by the West. To avoid this danger, it was first and foremost important to listen and try to understand. That is why we were immersed deeply in the reality and perceptions of the local area during our trips. Before the meetings of the Supporting committee in Prague and Timișoara, we made a preparatory trip to each place.

HERBERT LAUENROTH (*Focolare Movement*) showed us the way in his presentations on the theme of “Emmaus competence”, based on

¹²¹ Two detailed reports of their travels can be found in Part II on page 317.

Luke 24. His ideas always included a reference to the necessity of dialogue with the unknown, which we meet on our path, which accompanies us for a while. And he spoke about the question of borders, the space at and within the borders, and about the accompaniment of the unrecognized Jesus in the encounter of the Emmaus story. Like a common thread, they were a guiding principle in this phase of *Togetherness*.

At the 2019 Supporting committee meeting in Ottmaring/Augsburg, for example, he said:

“ The core of the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35) is obvious: Christ reveals himself in the middle, in the break, in the fallow space between ... the disciples entangled in their panicked flight. So, he reveals Himself – and this is crucial for our further reflections! – literally “ON the border.” The Emmaus story tells the story of all of us in the heart of Europe, at the scenes of internal and external borders. The path the disciples walk, first alone, then with the risen Lord, tells of the transformation of this border... from the narrowness, the feeling of diffuse, blind fears, to the vastness of a new horizon of experience, a new hope.” ¹²²

20 years of *Together for Europe* – We celebrate in Augsburg/Ottmaring

In 2019, there were three memorable anniversaries that brought us to Germany: the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 20th anniversary of the signing of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” and, on the same day, the first meeting of the leaders

¹²² The complete text of this article can be found in Part II on page 323.

from movements and communities in Ottmaring. In the presence of personalities from the church, politics and culture, the famous Golden Hall of Augsburg City Hall was filled with 250 members from 55 Christian communities and movements of various churches from 25 European countries.

BISHOP CHRISTIAN KRAUSE, co-signatory of the Joint Declaration on Justification, took us through the exciting process behind this Joint Declaration. He made clear which personal discussions between him and POPE JOHN PAUL II, who was deeply committed to this declaration, were necessary to make it a reality.

We had turned back to our roots to look to the future. At the end of our meeting, we distributed small packages with flower seeds to everybody as a symbolic sign for the seeds of Togetherness to grow.

Supporting committee meeting in Porto 2022 – “Stepping into the gap”

There was a particularly impressive moment at the 2022 Supporting committee meeting in Porto. Under the prophetic words of Ezekiel, *“And I sought for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I might not destroy it, but I found none,”* (Ezek. 22:30), we heard the call to step into the cracks in society. We were also moved by the crack in Europe created by Russia’s invasion in Ukraine. During a time of prayer towards the end of the meeting, a woman from Russia came forward and expressed her helplessness about this war and asked for forgiveness. At the same time, a woman from Ukraine came forward. Her cry for justice still rings in our ears. In prayer, a team including the entire Supporting committee stood behind the two women and thus also stepped into this rift. *“This moment of prayer alone made it worthwhile to come to*

Porto,” commented KLAUS HENNING¹²³, a long-standing member of the Supporting committee.

We are ready to step into the rifts in our societies. This shared conviction accompanied us after this meeting. The Friends of *the Schoenstatt Movement* took this motto and made it their theme for the year: “In the rifts, you [God] create space.” For us in *Together for Europe* too this experience became a motto that has accompanied us ever since and was deepened at the next Supporting committee meeting.

Supporting committee meeting in Timișoara, Romania, 2023 – “Called to unity”

The focus on Europe in West and East continued in the following years and determined the meetings of the European Supporting committee. Timișoara was one of the European Capital of Culture in 2023. The local Catholic bishop, JÓZSEF-CSABA PÁL¹²⁴, who had already participated in *Together for Europe* 2016 in Munich as a priest, together with the local spiritual movements took the opportunity to invite the European Supporting committee to Timișoara. 200 participants from 25 countries and 50 movements took part in the meeting.

We were amazed when we could immerse ourselves in the rich and diverse culture of this region of Europe. Shaped by an eventful history, different ethnic groups, cultures and denominations live together peacefully in Timișoara and the surrounding region, Banat. Through its history and the testimonies of young people and families, priests and bishops, Timișoara revealed itself as a model of Europe

¹²³ PROF. DR. KLAUS HENNING, cyberneticist and information scientist, holder of the Chair of Information Management in Mechanical Engineering and Director of the Center for Learning and Knowledge Management at RWTH Aachen University (1985-2009), long-standing member of the Supporting committee of *Together for Europe*.

¹²⁴ JÓZSEF-CSABA PÁL, Roman Catholic Bishop of Timișoara.

in miniature to us. We experienced a mature ecumenical coexistence between Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic bishops, inspired by the local Catholic bishop of Timișoara, JÓZSEF-CSABA PÁL. It seemed to us as if we were encountering the image of a hopeful future Europe. Dialogue and listening to one another characterized this conference.

Already in the preparatory meeting with Metropolitan IOAN SELEJAN¹²⁵, he opened our eyes to the East-West relationship. He pointed out that many trained engineers and doctors migrated to the West, while many people there only felt that welfare recipients from Romania came who were a burden on the social welfare system in Germany. And the (German) mayor of the city, DOMINIC FRITZ¹²⁶, used his own story to show us how vibrant and colorful the image of Eastern Europe is, which he himself had previously painted as gray.

Influenced by the war in Ukraine and because Hamas' attack on Israel immediately before the meeting, the topic of peace played an important role in the presentations and discussion rounds. MARGARET KARAM¹²⁷ (*Focolare Movement*), herself a Palestinian, vividly shared in her presentation how the pursuit of peace has played an essential role in her life since early childhood and continues to shape it today through active peace efforts. A prayer for peace, in which MATTHIAS LEINEWEBER¹²⁸ and FRANÇOIS DELOOZ¹²⁹ from the *Commu-*

¹²⁵ METROPOLITAN DR. DR. IOAN SELEJAN, Bishop of Covasna and Harghita (1994-2014), Archbishop of Timișoara and Metropolitan of Banat.

¹²⁶ DOMINIC FRITZ, German citizen, Mayor of Timișoara, President of the liberal party Uniunea Salvați România (USR).

¹²⁷ MARGARET KARAM, President of the *Focolare Movement*, Roman Catholic Palestinian, studied Jewish Studies, long-time co-responsible for the *Focolare Movement* in the Holy Land, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

¹²⁸ DR. MATTHIAS LEINEWEBER, Catholic priest, school chaplain in Würzburg, spiritual advisor to the *Community of Sant'Egidio* in Germany, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

¹²⁹ FRANÇOIS DELOOZ, Liège, head of the *Community of Sant'Egidio* in Belgium, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

nity of Sant'Egidio led us, underlined the importance of this theme in Timișoara.

One of the defining moments of the meeting in Timișoara was the speech on the political responsibility of Christians by the former Prime Minister of Slovakia, EDUARD HEGER¹³⁰. “*Knock on the doors of politicians,*” he urged us. “*They need to meet you.*” The door to the political area was opened wide again by him and other participating politicians.

In his presentation on the future shape of the Church, HERBERT LAUENROTH used a quote from CHIARA LUBICH in which she spoke of a new, network-like shape of the Church, which she called “*chiese volanti,*” “*flying,*” “*mobile*” churches free from special milieu ties. In his closing remarks, GERHARD PROSS compared this theme of interconnected small spiritual units (which are decentralized and can therefore be effective in many places) with the image of the energy transition¹³¹. To make it happen, many small solar panels and wind turbines need to be connected to each other as a network. But it cannot succeed if the power grid is not extended or if the energy sources are not connected to each other. *Together for Europe* forms a network of friends of Europe, a network of God’s people on our continent, and has joined together in a covenant. Now is the time to live this solidarity.

At the end of the conference in Timișoara, the Supporting committee once again wrote a message. It expressed our willingness to live this bond and to strive – with all our strength - for peaceful unity of cultures and nations and deep unity of the God’s people. That is why we wrote:

¹³⁰ EDUARD HEGER, Slovakian politician, Prime Minister of Slovakia (2021-2023).

¹³¹ See Part II on page 333.

- Together we testify that God has called and united us.
- Together we believe that God is the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth.
- Together we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, who continually grants us the Pentecostal miracle of hearing and mutual understanding.¹³²

JESÚS MORÁN¹³³ (*Focolare Movement*) describes the essence of our togetherness beautifully when he says (among other things): from the very beginning, since he first heard about the movement, he had the impression that *Together for Europe* was inspired by God and not by human ideas.

My experience in *Together for Europe*

Ever since CHIARA LUBICH told us, members of *the Focolare Movement*, about *Together for Europe*, I felt that it was an inspiration from above. The collaboration between Christians of different denominations, especially Christians from lay movements that emerged during the last century, seemed to me to be an extraordinary prophecy that could reawaken the spiritual roots of Europe based on the Gospel. And not only that. When *Together for Europe* was founded, I was responsible for the *Focolare Movement* in Mexico, and I worked hard to create something similar in that country: a “Together for Mexico”

¹³² For the full text see Part II, page 331.

¹³³ JESÚS MORÁN, Focolare, priest from Spain, philosopher and theologian, co-responsible for *the Focolare Movement* in South and Central America, co-president of *the Focolare Movement*, member of the steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

that still exists and brings together many associations with different initiatives for the evangelization of the Mexican people.

As co-president of *the Focolare Movement*, I had the opportunity to participate closely in the meetings of the Steering committee and in the annual meetings in various cities in Europe. These moments were an extraordinary spiritual enrichment for me. I was particularly uplifted by the testimonies of the brothers and sisters from different churches who lived the Gospel, their unclouded faith, their courage to love, and their countercultural power in a highly secularized society. The fellowship I experienced was a source of joy that has stayed with me ever since.

I am convinced that *Together for Europe* must fulfill a special task at this historic moment. While many ethical and spiritual reference points, which have done the most to promote human dignity on the continent, are breaking away or weakening, this “creative and cognitive minority” is emerging, capable of putting the best of its cultural resources in the service of humanity, highlighting its transcendent but deeply human roots. Only from this community a transfigured humanism can emerge as a pledge for comprehensive redemption; a humanism marked by ecumenical hospitality (in the broadest sense of the word), which only the humanity of Christ can foster.

In my experience, *Together for Europe* is a space of community and unity in which values such as peace, harmony beyond all divisions, freedom and fraternity become concrete and real. I believe that Europe today needs a breath of fresh air, a new, joyful and far-sighted stimulus that will have an impact on private and social life, on everyday life and history. *Together for Europe* can make an important contribution to it.

A renewed political dimension

Two years earlier we already had various meetings with the *Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy* (I.A.O.). Like *Together for Europe*, the I.A.O., and particularly its initiator, KOSTAS MYGDALIS¹³⁴, is concerned about the Christian heritage in Europe, that should not be forgotten. But Europe, and in this case specifically the EU, should be built on this foundation. Therefore, a joint declaration on Christian values in Europe was issued at a conference in Thessaloniki, Greece, before the European elections in May 2024, together with the *Conference of European Churches* (CEC) and the *Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU* (COMECE). Even though we of *Together for Europe* as co-signatories of this declaration felt like an “irregular verb” within the framework of the major churches, our participation was nevertheless significantly important at this level.

Participating in this conference opened the door to the political area once again. Where opportunity arises, we are happy to take it up. But it is important for us to emphasize, that our place assigned by God, is in the pre-political sphere. We would be denying our calling to unity and reconciliation, if we became involved in party politics or allowed ourselves to be co-opted by a particular political direction.

GERHARD PROSS expressed this unequivocally in his presentation at the event with the following words:

“ The fundamental competence of the Christian faith is urgently needed regarding the challenges that Europe and the world are facing. It brings forgiveness and reconciliation to the current climate of polarization.

¹³⁴ DR. KOSTAS MYGDALIS, theologian, architect, advisor to the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (I.A.O).

Its strongest impetus is love, which leads to cooperation rather than confrontation. Love respects others instead of demonizing them. Faith stands for truth in a time of disinformation and manipulation. People of faith are committed to peace, which has suddenly become so fragile again. Faith brings hope in a time of resignation, powerlessness and helplessness.

That is why we want to strengthen Europe's Christian roots so that the fruits do not wither away: not with dominance or domination, because we do not want to impose faith on anyone, but rather contribute it as a serving factor for the future of our continent.

We are committed to the coexistence of cultures to counteract separation, polarization, fragmentation and national egoism with coexistence. We build bridges of coexistence.

At the same time, it is a fundamental concern of ours that the Christian faith should not be banished from public life. Our faith gives us hope and courage to shape the future and overcome fear, hatred and fragmentation.¹³⁵

As a network of four affiliated organizations, we set out together and out our encounters various initiatives came up, such as the search for a common calendar for Eastern and Western churches to celebrate Easter together, or the 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, which (among other things) laid the foundation for a Christian Europe. Together, we visited POPE FRANCIS and PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW to promote these initiatives and found open doors. But we also experienced the difficulties of a long tradition that cannot be changed easily.

¹³⁵ The complete presentation can be found in Part II on page 337.

We of *Together for Europe* gave even greater importance to May 9, Europe Day, and in 2024 we organized a digital meeting on the Christian roots of Europe together with EDUARD HEGER and JEFF FOUNTAIN. On May 9, 2025, we initiated an event in the European Parliament to mark the 75th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, which laid the foundation for today's EU. ROBERT SCHUMAN, then French Foreign Minister, changed Europe and made peace possible with a courageous three-minute speech. In his opening speech, GERHARD PROSS quoted this declaration, which begins with the striking sentence: "*World peace cannot be preserved without creative efforts commensurate with the level of the threat ... that any war between France and Germany is not only unthinkable, but materially impossible.*" He continued:

“ Peace was anything but a given at that time. In 1950, the ruins of World War II were still clearly visible in many European cities, and new tensions were already emerging, dividing the world into East and West. Germany and France referred to each other as “arch enemies.” How could a peaceful future be achieved under such circumstances? ROBERT SCHUMAN and KONRAD ADENAUER chose the path of reconciliation. Together with Italian Prime Minister DE GASPERI¹³⁶, they were committed to rebuilding Europe based on Christian faith. Seventy-five years of peace are the fruit of this joint endeavor. Arch enemies became friends. Today, we want to make this aware and celebrate it.

¹³⁶ ALCIDE DE GASPERI (1881-1954), Italian Prime Minister (1945-1953), one of the founding fathers of the European Community.

In an inspiring presentation, JEFF FOUNTAIN recalled this process of reconciliation and its Christian roots, which hardly anyone was aware of. Together with EU parliamentarians¹³⁷ and representatives of the churches, but above all with young people on the podium and their hopes for Europe, this event received an amazing response. Young people from Slovakia and Rome particularly impressed at this event and voted in favor of repeating such events.

Since we recognized prayer for Europe as our call and therefore consider it as one of our central tasks, we invited everyone to an hour of prayer in the European Chapel, located directly next to the European Parliament, following the event there. In the crowded chapel, everyone felt this prayer for Europe was a very special moment. The music played by SEBASTIAN and LUKAS ROTH from the *Immanuel Community*, had already provided a dignified setting for the event in the Parliament and now led us deep into prayer in the European Chapel. That same evening, MEP ANTONELLE SBERNA wrote to us¹³⁸ :

“

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to participate in today's event marking the 75th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. It was an honor to take part in a moment of such depth and significance for the future of our common European home... Your work with *Together for Europe* continues to be a powerful and hopeful sign that this vocation is alive and shared across borders.

¹³⁷ MEPs MIRIAM LEXMANN, ANTONELLA ZERNA, CRISTINA GUARDA, and LEOLUCA ORLANDO, as well as Prof. ALBERTO LO PRESTI (*Focolare Movement*) and Fr. MANUEL BARRIOS (*COMECE*), MP IOAN VULPESKU, President of the I.A.O., and PETER PAVLOVIC (*CEC*).

¹³⁸ ANTONELLE SBERNA, Italian politician from Fratelli d'Italia, Member of the European Parliament (European Conservatives and Reformists Party), Vice-President of the European Parliament.

We note that the focus of *Together for Europe*, which has significantly shifted towards the social sphere since 2016, will continue to be urgently needed in the future. In a society where centrifugal forces are increasing, divisions are becoming stronger and many people only move within their own “bubbles”, cross-border cooperation is urgently needed. In a Europe that has almost cut itself off from its Christian roots and is surprised that the fruits are withering away, it will once again be important to bring in the Christian heritage in a spirit of service.

Chapter 14

25 Years of *Together for Europe*

An exciting journey is not yet over

The path of the spiritual communities and movements that started an exciting journey together in *Together for Europe* was a very open path with many magic moments of unity. We were able to harvest many fruits while the people of God became one on this path.

Since we together have been looking at the “heavenly score” from the beginning, it was important for us to pause after 25 years and ask and listen again to where our path should lead in the future. That is why the European Steering committee of *Together for Europe* met for a retreat in Vallendar-Schoenstatt in April 2024. We explicitly decided for the help of an external facilitator to be open in our “search for clues” for the next steps. Once again, we reassured ourselves:



We are called to unity and reconciliation in the tensions and divisions of our society and the people of God. Our specific characteristics is the cooperation of charisms of various movements that gives signs of hope in difficult times.

Various working groups were formed to share the challenges of the next path of the journey on several shoulders. One working group is to accompany the national teams; another one is to continue building the network; a third one for finances; a working group on politics; and one for contact with the Orthodox world, etc. The previous team of four (executive) with GERHARD PROSS as moderator, DIEGO GOLLER as secretary, MARIA WIENKEN and SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA

was now joined by FR. RAFAEL RIEGER¹³⁹ (*Schoenstatt Movement*) and MATTHIAS BÜHLMANN¹⁴⁰ (*Vineyard-DACH*). Looking ahead, a larger event was envisioned for the coming years. As we all felt the hope and dynamism in this retreat and were inspired by it and by our shared perspective, the next meeting of the European Supporting committee in Graz was organized under the theme “Called to Hope.”

On October 31, 2024, exactly 25 years after the signing of the Joint Declaration on Justification in Augsburg and the first ecumenical meeting of spiritual movements afterwards, we celebrated 25 years *of Together for Europe* there. GERHARD PROSS, a witness to the beginning and to our shared history, summarized some of the highlights of our journey together in a moving speech entitled “Moments of Grace in *Together for Europe*.” Many moments of grace came to mind which we experienced in recent years.

Another witness, former Bishop CHRISTIAN KRAUSE, president of the Lutheran World Federation in 1999, co-signatory of the “Joint Declaration on Justification” at that time and since then a companion of *Together for Europe*, emphasized on the importance of the network in a touching video message. His message (which he recorded shortly before his death) sounded like a testament: “*The charism of unity, Jesus at the center. These are the pillars. That is enough.*”

It remains unforgettable how we joined together in singing the hymn “Holy God, we praise you”, overwhelmed by this story of grace.

¹³⁹ RAFAEL RIEGER, Schoenstatt Father, Provincial of the European Province of the Schoenstatt Fathers, member of the Steering committee of *Together for Europe*.

¹⁴⁰ DR. MATTHIAS BÜHLMANN, pastor of the Vineyard Church in Bern, member of the leadership team of Vineyard DACH, the joint movement of the Vineyards in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The *Vineyard Movement* is a charismatic renewal and church planting movement.

Then Bishop WILHELM KRAUTWASCHL¹⁴¹ opened the festive reception and cut the “birthday cake” together with GERHARD PROSS.

The presentations in the plenary sessions of the meeting deepened our understanding of the fundamental call to unity and reconciliation, which unfolds in the interaction of the different charisms, given to the respective movements. THOMAS RÖMER emphasized: the harmony of charisms creates a polyphonic symphony of unity.¹⁴²

Unity means more than just union, JESÚS MORÁN clarified. Unity is based on a positive view of diversity. Union (as exemplified in the EU) is often characterized by the struggle for legitimate interests and for compromise. Regarding Europe, it is important to consider the different mentalities - like Romanic, Germanic and Slavic, as well as the various forms of governments and cultural traditions – positively as enrichment and complementarity.

FR. RAFFAEL RIEGER, Provincial of the Pan-European Province of *the Schoenstatt Fathers*¹⁴³, used a typical feature of the *Schoenstatt Movement* with its federative autonomy of individual groups to explain the potential for productive cooperation in the spirit of freedom, not on imposed obligations.

¹⁴¹ BISHOP WILHELM KRAUTWASCHL, Austria, Roman Catholic diocesan bishop of the Diocese of Graz-Sebgau.

¹⁴² For the full text see page 207.

¹⁴³ *Schoenstatt Fathers*, founded in 1965 as the Pars motrix et centralis of *the Schoenstatt Movement*, secular institute of pontifical right, incardination right for priestly members, approx. 440 members worldwide.



With his statement, that there is something like an unbreakable closeness of Jesus Christ to the reality of Europe, THOMAS RÖMER encouraged the gathering and showed them an impressive painting¹⁴⁴ entitled “The Face of the Crucified over Europe”. This picture shows Christ with a crown of thorns on the background of an outlined map of Europe. He thus vividly emphasized that Jesus has not withdrawn from Europe. Europe cannot be conceived without Christ.

This image touched many of us and shows the whole tension in which we are acting and existing: in the powerlessness of the crucified. FATHER LOTHAR PENNERS commented:

¹⁴⁴ Painted by HANNA RÖMER in December 2023 after the supporting group meeting in Timișoara.

“ We could understand this idea of the Crucified One not leaving Europe as a pointed thesis: the “*Gratia Christi*”, bestowed upon Europe, connected itself in deep roots with “Europe” and its fateful significance for the entire world; the effects of which are still ongoing. A rediscovery of Europe from its indivisible roots could be significant for all cultures.¹⁴⁵

As always, the meeting of the Supporting committee was characterized by encounters, working groups, prayers and immersion in the history of the city and the region. But the social and political dimensions were not neglected either, including a panel discussion with former Prime Ministers EDUARD HEGER (Slovakia) and ALOIZ PETERLE¹⁴⁶ (Slovenia).

In review, we can see that 25 years of *Together for Europe* has produced a “creative resultant” in three ways: *Together for Europe* has changed individuals. It also has changed the various communities and movements in the sense of „expansion of the heart” (SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE). And finally, it has enabled cooperation (that could previously be hardly imagined) with rich fruits of unity for the Church and society.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Fr. JOSEPH KENTENICH’s idea of a (conditional!) “salvific mission of the West.”

¹⁴⁶ ALOIZ PETERLE, party leader of the Christian Party of Slovenia (1989-2000), Prime Minister of Slovenia (1990-1992), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1993-1994 and 2000), Member of the European Parliament (2004-2019).

Closing words

GERHARD PROSS

This book describes some of the great moments of unity that *Together for Europe* has been blessed with over the past 25 years. We can only marvel in gratitude at the gift of unity that has been placed in our hands on this journey. We set out together, because we had heard God's call very clearly: "Gather my people!" Listening to the "heavenly score" has guided us and we were allowed to experience some of the sounds of the heavenly symphony. One tune that reached our hearts and ears is:

Unity is possible.

It became the headline for one of our Congresses. We were able to recognize the fruits of unity. They began in personal lives with the "expansion of the heart" and the change of attitudes. They spread to spiritual communities and movements and had an impact on the churches. Entire "worlds" came together for which a collaboration had been unimaginable years before. These fruits also had an impact on society. Politicians were encouraged to build on the Christian foundation of Europe.

Hope has been born.

At a time, when churches are struggling with huge declines and an enormous loss of significance, a word from the prophet Isaiah repeatedly pointed us in the right direction: "*Forget the former things; do not dwell in the past. See, I am doing a new thing; now it springs up, do you not perceive it?*" (Isaiah 43:18f)

In the cooperation of the many spiritual communities and movements, something of the new lights up that God is allowing to grow in our time. Looking back on our journey, we are filled with gratitude that leads to praise God. We can only marvel at what has been given to us and at the time of grace into which we have been led.

Looking ahead, in the Steering Committee in 2024 we formulated our common conviction in the following sentences: *“We are called to unity and reconciliation in the tensions and divisions of our society and among the people of God. Our specificity: the togetherness of the charisms of various movements gives signs of hope in difficult times.”*

We know that it is still a long way to go to achieve the goal of unity. Despite the huge steps taken by the churches and the many ecumenical efforts and for which we were able to contribute in some small way, there is still an important path before us. We want to remain faithful to our charism of unity and continue to work towards it. We do not want to slacken in our efforts to preserve *“unity in the Spirit”* (Ephesians 4:3) and continue taking courageous steps and help to facilitate encounters. By listening to one another, understanding one another and listening to the Word of God, we want to live unity according to Jesus’ prayer in the Gospel of John: *“That they may all be one, so that the world may believe”* (John 17:21).

As described above, the social climate has changed. In a society of increasing centrifugal forces, where self-interest and divisions are becoming stronger and an atmosphere of opposition prevails, our charism of togetherness will be even more necessary. Where new divides are being created and new walls are being built, cross-border cooperation is urgently needed. We do not want to slacken in our efforts to build bridges and stand up for a culture of togetherness.

The door to the political area has reopened

The door to the political area has reopened and perhaps we should become more involved in this area during the next phase. In a Europe, that is increasingly forgetting its Christian roots, putting the Christian heritage into effect in a serving attitude is very important.

A culture of Togetherness

We consciously want to contribute to a culture of Togetherness and stand in the cracks of our churches and our society. Our gaze is directed towards Jesus, who entered the deepest tensions of this world on the cross. Our participation is oriented towards Him, not towards power, but towards the power of love. With Jesus at the center and united by the covenant of mutual love, we move forward to the next stage. In this way we want to be salt and light and follow Jesus' call: *“Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16).

PART II

Texts and Reflections

The Togetherness of Charisms

A contribution to “Great Moments of Unity”

THOMAS RÖMER

Together for Europe is a common journey of many very different communities and movements. They emerged in recent decades through different people in different countries in different churches. All of them have their own unique mission.

■ A charismatic era

MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO said at the Congress in Stuttgart in 2004:

“ *The movements are different, they have different roots, spiritualities, histories and ages; but they are all children of a single charismatic era. When you see them in daily life, you might notice differences, but when you look at them together, you discover a single plan: the Gospel enters with sympathy into the streets of a world that seems to have left God behind... We are not the best, we are all small and sinful, but we are bearers of a gift of the Gospel that calls everyone not to live for themselves, but for the one who died and rose again for all. And living for Christ means living for all. Love is at the heart of this charismatic era.*”

■ The Holy Spirit's response to the challenges of the times

POPE JOHN PAUL II had already addressed the members of ecclesial movements and new communities on May 30, 1998, concluding his seventh point by saying:

“ *There is a great need for active Christian communities! And here are the movements and the new ecclesial communities. They are the Holy Spirit's response to this critical challenge at the end of the millennium. You are this response given by Providence.*”¹⁴⁷

The common path of *Together for Europe* was a journey of discovery for many members of the communities and movements. They visited each other and looked for the charism of the other community and movement. What grace has God placed in this movement? This changed their perspective, away from divisions among us, away from critical questions, towards the grace of God in the other community.

■ Every community and movement – a special charism

CHIARA LUBICH spoke about every community and every movement, who has been entrusted with a special charism, because each one arose from an impetus of the Holy Spirit. This was an eye-opener. It is important to not only perceive what is immediately visible - the different modes of action, the special mission, the style of piety and the

¹⁴⁷ “What a need is there for living Christian communities! And so, here are the movements and new ecclesial communities: they are the response, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to this dramatic challenge at the end of the millennium. You are this providential response.” (Translation in the text with Google Translate) Source: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1998/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980530_riflessioni.html.

different commitment of the other movement - but to also discover the grace, the charism, the work of the Spirit of God at work in the other community. And that opens a perspective of perceiving the other with his charism as a complement and enrichment of one's own charism, and even more, of understanding and accepting one's own charism anew in the light of the others.

When the Spirit of God is at work, there is also the experience of unity in diversity. With all our differences, we live in the space opened by the prayer of Jesus, "that we may all be one" (John 17:21).

The point now is that charisms harmonize. The Holy Spirit leads us into togetherness, so that a symphony can be heard. It is a time of grace for the people of God to become one.

■ Unity and diversity

HELMUT NICKLAS told the staff of *the Munich YMCA* in the run-up to the first major Congress and Europe Day in Stuttgart in 2004:

“ *What have we experienced? We have sensed that there are ... a whole series of movements that are basically related to us. What kind of kinship is it? It is love for Jesus; it is the experience that the Gospel liberates, that it has a great impact and leads to people in need. It is "love for God, love for the gospel and love for people."*

He expressed the hope that the leaders of the communities would set out together and realize: *"If our diversity has led to divisions, it was not God's intention. But if our diversity documents the richness of God, then let us be joyfully diverse, but with the one confession ... there is one Lord and there is one faith."*

■ The Togetherness of charisms

This hope became concrete and real on the path of togetherness. *Togetherness for Europe* experiences itself as a togetherness of charisms, and this togetherness is itself a gift, a charism in the challenges of our time. It shows the way to life in reconciled diversity.

Two personal reports, given at the 2024 European Supporting committee meeting in Seggau (near Graz), show how the charism of the other one was discovered during the encounter.

PHILIPP BARTHEL¹⁴⁸ from *YMCA Munich* reported on his encounter with the *Schoenstatt Movement* (abridged version):



For me, getting to know and experiencing Schoenstatt is one of the key personal experiences in Together for Europe and shapes my perception of ecumenism overall.

In preparation for the 2016 event in Munich, I had my first conscious encounter with Schoenstatt brothers and sisters ... which was my first deeper encounter with a Catholic movement.

As part of preparing a workshop, the Schoenstatt brothers and sisters drew up a model that dealt with pedagogy. The human being was at the center of this model. I was shocked for a moment. In a Christian context, I am used to Jesus or the cross always being at the center. But here it was the human being. I quickly understood that Christ also and especially lives at the center for you from Schoenstatt. I appreciate this charism of the Schoenstatt brothers and sisters: they want to see people as God sees them.

¹⁴⁸ DR. PHILIPP BARTHEL, volunteer at the YMCA Munich.

I sense that the Schoenstatt people are willing to walk long paths together, to allow themselves to be called and have a deep desire to help one another to come into their personal vocation.

The spirituality: the sanctuary (small chapel), the spirituality of covenant with its Marian character, Father KENTENICH – all this was very foreign to me during my first encounters and of course remains strange to a certain extent. I do not perceive this spirituality as something abstract; it is not detached from reality. I notice how your faith becomes concrete in your lives, how it is a natural part of your lives through this spirituality, through the covenant of love with MARY, etc. You are not unworldly, you have a great interest in people, you critically examine yourselves and you love the Triune God.

I am very grateful that I was able to get to know you over the last few years and hope that I will be able to do so even more.

Fr. HANS-MARTIN SAMIETZ¹⁴⁹ from the *Schoenstatt Movement* reported on his encounter with the *YMCA Munich* and asked: *“How do I see the charism of the YMCA?”*

“ For me, the YMCA expresses the early Christian calling for today: *“Christ lives in me. As long as I live in this world, I live in faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20).

Hardly any other Christian association expresses the radical nature of this calling, as I have perceived it in many

¹⁴⁹ HANS-MARTIN SAMIETZ, Schoenstatt Father, Youth Advisor, Member of the Steering Committee of *Together for Europe*.

YMCA members. Many of them stand on two feet firmly planted in the Word of God: one foot in the emotional grasp of Christ and the other one in worldly cleverness. Based on Galatians 2:20, this means that they see their calling as “living in this (and no other) world,” and they feel carried by the world-overcoming and world-perfecting power of the risen Christ.

... I would summarize the charism of many, especially leading members of various YMCAs, as firm, free and full of Christ. It seems to me: there is nothing more self-evident than belonging to Christ and “*putting on the new self*” (Galatians 3:27) in what they naturally want to live for.

In the YMCA, I see to what effect the grace of baptism can move believers: to prepare the world for Christ in a relaxed and determined manner.

Despite this Christ-centeredness, there is also a certain world-cleverness in the YMCA, which I mentioned earlier. I am amazed how the forces of human organizational skills in the YMCA have created a vessel that brings the fires of different Christian vocations together in such a way, that every individual retains the originality of his or her calling, yet a thoroughly inspired body is created, that also speaks of Christ as a whole. ...

In the work of the YMCA, I have seen that power shining through for today, which must have been at work in the early Christian communities, as I began to imagine it, especially after reading the letters of Paul.

■ Overview of the participating communities and movements

Already in 2004 at the first Congress in Stuttgart, more than 170 communities and movements were represented. At that time, all the participating groups were listed for an overview. It shows that *Together for Europe* is a network of spiritual movements, communities, institutions and initiatives in the Protestant, Catholic and Free Church spheres. There are also encounters with communities from the Orthodox world.

To provide some orientation about these different communities, ten categories were formed, to which the various groups were assigned. Four movements with a worldwide presence were then presented separately: the *Schoenstatt Movement*, the *YMCA*, the *Community of Sant'Egidio* and the *Focolare Movement*.

This distinction was certainly only a makeshift, but it shows the breadth of the involved communities and movements and the richness of their charisms.

- Fraternities and communities, third orders and secular institutes
- YMCA movement
- Charismatic Renewal
- Marriage and family initiatives
- Evangelization and mission communities
- Focolare Movement
- Social Diaconia
- Life Centers
- Networks
- New Communities
- Sant'Egidio
- Schoenstatt Movement
- City initiatives
- Therapeutic communities

Discovering the charism of other communities and movements often leads to a deeper understanding of one's own charism.

The charisms of the movements

Some contributions compiled for “Great Moments of Unity”

The Schoenstatt Movement

LOTHAR PENNERS

It's founding dates to the time around World War I and is thus one of the older “newer” movements within the Catholic Church. Its founder, FR. JOSEPH KENTENICH (1883-1968), was a Pallottine. Within his community, the beginnings of what became the “Apostolic Movement of Schoenstatt” later developed. From the outset, it had a special focus on education: with spiritual emphases (covenant spirituality, belief in Divine providence, sanctification of everyday life) and an ideal concept of holistic education based on values (“Personal ideal”).

In both directions, the “movement” developed a life of its own oriented towards the charism of MARY – but in a consciously sought dialogue with the ecclesiastical-spiritual and particularly in pedagogical trends of the time.

The *Schoenstatt Movement* achieved a certain breakthrough in the Catholic sphere between the two world wars (not least in the women's and priests' movements). From the outset, FR. KENTENICH's fundamental opposition to the Third Reich led to his imprisonment in Dachau concentration camp for three years. In that time he prepared for the internationalization of his foundation. A canonical visitation brought about by the German Bishops' Conference led to a conflict with the pre-conciliar church leadership (Ordinariate of Trier; “Holy Office,”

Rome) and resulted in a 14-year separation of Fr. KENTENICH from his community, which he spent in the USA.

The *Schoenstatt Movement* is working on all continents and has approx. 20.000 members in Germany. In addition, numerous friends and pilgrims feel connected to the Marian shrines of their centers.

Organizationally, it consists of six "world communities" established under canon law, called "Institutes"; closer circles of life for all "states of life," called "Federations"; and diocesan apostolic circles, called "Leagues."

All subgroups of *the Schoenstatt Movement*, although legally autonomous, strive for federative cooperation in the transmission of the faith out of inner solidarity and with a minimum of fixed external obligations.

Enabled by its federative structure and the cooperation with all dynamic forces of the Christian spectrum, the *Schoenstatt Movement* has taken a positive view of the coexistence of different charisms in the service of evangelization ever since its inception.

Pedagogy of freedom and attachment is a special charism of *the Schoenstatt Movement*.

The YMCA movement

THOMAS RÖMER

■ The beginnings

The beginnings of *the YMCA movement* (YMCA = Young Men's Christian Association) dates to the mid-19th century. During the industrialization period, masses of young men flocked to the cities of Europe, because they could not find suitable employment opportunities in the countryside. This led to religious uprooting. The Christian faith, in which they had grown up, was lost in this process. An excess of work awaited them in the cities. There was practically no time left for themselves. The result was also a moral uprooting in their lives: the little free time they had was filled with alcohol, sex, etc.

GEORGE WILLIAMS¹⁵⁰ (1821-1905) was one of these young men. His life was changed by a personal conversion to Jesus Christ. He then invited others in the large dormitories of his trading office to read the Bible and pray with him. Personal faith, prayer and the Bible became the basis of their lives and actions.

In June 1844, these young men around GEORGE WILLIAMS founded the first YMCA - *Young Men's Christian Association* in London. By founding their association, they wanted to bring Christian men together for joint spiritual meetings and make them aware of their social responsibility. An association became a worldwide movement. GEORGE WILLIAMS and his companions found imitators.

In 1855, on the sidelines of the World Exhibition in Paris, ninety-nine young men from nine nations, who belonged to such Christian associ-

¹⁵⁰ GEORGE WILLIAMS (1821-1905) was the founder of the YMCA in London in 1844 and initiator of the worldwide YMCA movement.

ations of young men, came together. Despite the differences between their associations, they had one thing in common: Jesus Christ was of paramount importance in their lives, and they wanted young people all over the world to get to know Jesus Christ and place their lives under his influence.

They summed this up in a statement that remains the foundation, the mission statement of *the YMCA* throughout the world, until today: the “Paris Basis.” It states: *“The purpose of the Young Men’s Christian Associations is to unite young men who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their God and Savior according to the Holy Scriptures, to be his disciples in their faith and life, and to strive together to spread the kingdom of their Master among young men.”*

Today, the YMCA is represented in more than 120 countries around the world. Approximately 60 million members belong to this movement. The YMCA, which began as an association of young men, is now open to all: men and women, boys and girls from all nations, denominations and social classes, who form the worldwide community of *the YMCA*.

■ Three founding charisms of *the YMCA movement*

From the beginning, three charisms were alive in the *YMCA movement*:

Evangelization – to open access to Christian faith for young people. The aim is to open access to faith in Jesus Christ for young men, the young generation. All events, activities and programs should bring and testify to the love of Christ.

Youthwork – Today in the YMCA, full-time staff and volunteers are involved in various projects and age-specific programs, primarily for children, teenagers, young adults and families. These include children’s and youth groups, open door youth work in youth centers, sports

activities, youth events, multi-day camps, and much more. Sport plays an important role. Basketball was invented at *the YMCA* in the USA.

The *YMCA* has always seen its work as contributing to a humane city and society. In the beginning of the *YMCA movement* in London, it was the fight against long working hours. These campaigns were successful. Educational programs were set up to provide young men with intellectual and spiritual education during their newly gained free time.

Ecumenism – serving Christian unity. From the very beginning, the *YMCA* was ecumenical. The 12 founding members belonged to four different churches.¹⁵¹ As early as 1855, the World Alliance of *YMCAs* adopted the biblical motto from John 17: “*That they may all be one.*”

The ecumenical movement of the 20th century is closely linked to individuals from the *YMCA* in its beginnings. One notable figure is JOHN MOTT¹⁵², born in 1865, who belonged to *the YMCA* in America, where he served full-time. In 1910, he led the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, which gave a decisive impetus to the beginning of the ecumenical movement in the 20th century. The World Council of Churches used the Paris Basis as a template for the formulation of its own Basis. In 1946, JOHN MOTT received the Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to the ecumenical movement and his work in international missionary service.

■ Different shapes of *the YMCA*

In some areas of *the YMCA movement* and its work, the Christian roots are no longer strong and conscious. The *YMCA* worldwide is in some

¹⁵¹ SIEGFRIED FISCHER: *The Greatness of Small Beginnings*, p. 76.

¹⁵² JOHN MOTT (1865-1955), American Methodist, long-time leader of the worldwide *YMCA* and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his ecumenical work together with EMILY GREENE BALCH (1946).

way similar like Europe — both have forgotten their Christian roots but still live off the fruits of this tree.

Some YMCAs have become well-organized sports clubs. Others are good at social work in the service of the younger generation.

But in other areas, there has been a spiritual renewal of *the YMCA* in recent decades, a rediscovery of the Christian roots of *the YMCA movement*. On various continents, there are mission networks focusing on the Christian aspect of the *YMCA*.

In Germany, influenced by the charismatic renewal, some YMCAs have formed binding communities over the last 50 years. These are Christian communities of men and women in *the YMCA* who take responsibility, shape and support the work of *the YMCA*. There are special meetings – mostly of volunteers - for training, exchange, Bible study and prayer. This has led to renewal and new beginnings in *the YMCA*. It also happened in *the YMCA Munich* and *Esslingen*, which are particularly involved in *Together for Europe*, together with other YMCAs.

The Community of Sant'Egidio

MATTHIAS LEINWEBER

Sant'Egidio is a Christian community, founded by ANDREA RICCARDI in 1968 in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council at a high school in the center of Rome. Over the years, a network of communities has developed in over 70 countries around the world, with a special focus on the peripheries and marginalized people.

POPE FRANCIS has described the charism of *Sant'Egidio* with three "P's": preghiera, poveri, pace – prayer, the poor, peace. Prayer is based on listening to the Word of God. It is the first work of the community, accompanying personal and community life and giving it direction. In Rome and throughout the world, it is also a place of encounter and hospitality for anyone who wants to hear the word of God and bring their requests to the Lord.

The poor are brothers and sisters and friends of the community. This friendship with all those in need – the elderly, the homeless, migrants, people with disabilities, prisoners, street children, and children from the peripheries – is a characteristic feature of the life of the members of *Sant'Egidio* on the various continents. The poor are not people to be cared for, but friends and part of one's own family, who are looked after in times of need.

Knowing that war is the father of all poverty has led the community to work for peace. This means preserving peace where it is threatened, rebuilding it and promoting dialogue where it no longer seems possible. Peace work is lived as the responsibility of all Christians and is part of a comprehensive commitment to reconciliation and the building of fraternity, which is also expressed in ecumenical engagement and interreligious dialogue in the „spirit of Assisi.“ Prayer, friendship with the poor, and commitment to peace are the charism of the community.

The Focolare Movement

MARIANNE SCHNEPPE

The *Focolare Movement* was founded in 1943 in Trent, Italy, and is now present in more than 180 countries. Its founder is CHIARA LUBICH.

Contemplating and living the Word of God was the foundation of the emerging *Focolare Movement* and remains so till today. For a specific period, a Bible verse is chosen, which will be studied deeply and provides guidance, the “Word of Life.”

The goal of *the Focolare Movement* is to strengthen the spirit of brotherhood and unity in Church and society, in accordance with Jesus’ request “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). Love as the foundation and center of life shapes their spirituality, from which several concrete initiatives have grown. Love does not stop at difficulties, suffering and pain. Thus, Jesus in his abandonment on the cross receives special attention.

There are numerous ways of belonging to *the Focolare Movement*, from binding forms of life in small communities to free collaboration in a group to occasional participation in initiatives and events. There are family circles, youth groups and activities, meeting places for those involved and interested in politics, society, the church, and the arts, summer meetings for young and old, conferences and congresses on contemporary issues. In addition to its commitment to ecumenism, the *Focolare Movement* is also committed to interreligious dialogue, among other things. People without a religious background find access through the common commitment to peace and social justice.

Unity is the special charism of the *Focolare Movement*.

Charismatic Renewal in the established Churches

SWEN SCHÖNHEIT¹⁵³

■ “Forgetting the Spirit” in the Church ...

In 1945, when German Protestantism was seeking a new beginning after the disaster of the Third Reich, Swiss theologian EMIL BRUNNER¹⁵⁴ found clear words: *“We are a poor Christianity – despite our wealth of Bible, sermons, teaching, theology, literature, church works and organizations – because we are poor in the Holy Spirit.” The church is poor in terms of the powers of the Holy Spirit, “as they appear to us in the image of the New Testament community.”*

Two decades later, the Berlin theologian OTTO DILSCHNEIDER spoke of the *„spiritual forgetfulness of theology.”* The church should no longer regard Pentecost as an appendage to the history of salvation: *„We can no longer go back behind Pentecost. ... The confession of the Holy Spirit is the gateway to the realm of our Christian faith and its beliefs.”* He was in line with his teacher KARL BARTH¹⁵⁵ in this, who even in the year of his death (1968), was still reflecting on *„the possibility of a theology of the 3rd article, that is of the Holy Spirit as dominant and decisive.”* *„What about dream about with regard to the future of theology”* must aim in this direction, but *„I will not live to see this future.”*

¹⁵³ SWEN SCHÖNHEIT, retired Protestant pastor and first chairman of GGE Germany.

¹⁵⁴ EMIL BRUNNER (1889-1966) was a Swiss Protestant Reformed theologian and professor of systematic and practical theology at the University of Zurich.

¹⁵⁵ KARL BARTH (1886-1968) was a Swiss Protestant Reformed theologian. With his commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans (1919/1922), he founded dialectical theology. In 1934, he played a key role in drafting the Barmer Theological Declaration, co-founded the Confessing Church, and called for resistance against National Socialism. Professor of theology from 1921 in Göttingen, later in Münster and Bonn.

■ ... and a new longing for the Spirit

"We are experiencing a period in the Church which is in a special way marked by the Holy Spirit." This was the conviction of POPE PAUL VI (1963-1978). At his first World congress in 1975, he described the charismatic movement in the Catholic Church as *"an opportunity for the Church and the world."* Similarly, POPE JOHN PAUL II (1978-2005) expressed the *"desire that a Pentecostal spirituality spread throughout the Church, manifested in a new zeal for prayer, holiness, community life and proclamation."* At a meeting of the new lay movements at Pentecost in 1998, he called on his Church: *"Accept the charismas, that the Spirit continually gives us, with gratitude and obedience!"*

The Catholic charismatic movement considers itself as a response to a prayer. POPE JOHN XXIII (1958-1963) called his Church to pray on the occasion of the Second Vatican Council: *"Lord, renew your signs and wonders in our days, as in a new Pentecost."* But already at the beginning of the 20th century, POPE LEO XIII (1878-1903), inspired by letters from the Italian nun ELENA GUERRA¹⁵⁶, proclaimed a nine-day prayer (novena) to the Holy Spirit for the period from Ascension to Pentecost. On New Year's Day 1901, he invoked the Holy Spirit upon the new century with the ancient hymn *"Veni Creator Spiritus."*

■ Movements – not a new church

While the Pentecostal movement, which began in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century and reached Germany in 1907, became a church of its own, the charismatic movement reached the traditional

¹⁵⁶ ELENA GUERRA (1835–1914) was an Italian nun and founder of the Oblates of the Holy Spirit. She is considered an important figure in the renewal of the Catholic Church through the Holy Spirit and was given the honorary title "Apostle of the Holy Spirit." She was canonized in 2004.

denominations in the 1960s. The *Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church* (internationally known as "CHARIS") traces its beginnings to a spiritual awakening among students at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh (USA) in 1967. It was priests in particular who experienced the new work of the Holy Spirit during missions abroad and then brought it to Germany, where relative quickly numerous prayer groups and communities sprang up under their leadership.

Within the Lutheran Church, similar spiritual experiences occurred almost simultaneously, brought to Germany by Protestant pastors from the USA. The *Ecumenical Life Center for Christian Unity* at Craheim Castle played a central role in this. Within the EKD, the *Spiritual Community Renewal (GGE)* was formed in 1979. At the same time, there was increased openness to charismatic experiences in the GDR through retreats and "church weeks."

Numerous congregations of the Baptist and Methodist Churches also opened themselves up to the impetus of „renewal.“ WOLFRAM KOPFERMANN¹⁵⁷ (Hamburg), who was responsible for the *Spiritual Community Renewal* until 1988, expressed the concrete expectation „that God wants to give this country a new beginning.“ Regarding to his church, he stated: „Revival is not a special form of church, but is church according to the heart of God, that is normal church.“ And in 1989, the Bavarian regional bishop JOHANNES HANSELMANN wrote: „I am grateful that this renewal movement ... is seeking a home in our churches and will hopefully find it more and more.“

¹⁵⁷ WOLFRAM KOPFERMANN (1938-2018), Protestant pastor at St. Petri's Main Church in Hamburg (1974-1988), leader of the *Spiritual Community Renewal in the Protestant Church* in Germany (1978-1988), left the Evangelical Lutheran Church (1988), founder and leader of the *Anskar Church* (1988-2008).

■ A breath of fresh air in old churches

The charismatic movement gave hope for renewal to an entire generation even within existing churches and denominations. The key experience of “renewal in the Spirit,” the discovery of charisms such as speaking in tongues, prophetic speech, healing, and deliverance gave new impetus to countless groups and congregations. This was accompanied by a culture of “praise” and the courage to try new forms of worship. A conscious reliance on God’s power found expression in blessing services and healing rooms. This was accompanied by a new missionary awakening, which led to the development of “faith courses”, enabling the charismatic movement to bring many people to a new or first encounter with Christ: “surrendering one’s life to Jesus Christ” as a fundamental Christian experience.

Inspired by the Charismatic Movement, countless prayer groups, communities and initiatives have sprung up in the established churches since the 1980s. At the same time, hundreds of new, often denominationally independent congregations were founded. This enabled numerous conversions of people outside the church, an increasing integration of believers with a migrant background, but also led to considerable „transfer growth“. In any case, the church landscape in this country has become much more diverse and open.

Protestant communities and the Community of the Christ Brotherhood Selbitz

SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA

Protestant communities mostly emerged since the Second World War. This marked the beginning of a long road to their ecclesiastical recognition, which was decisively promoted in 1979. From the perspective of the established church, the question had to be clarified if the Protestant religious communities were based on the biblical message and Reformation teachings. In 1979, this question received its first positive answer: that year, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) designated them as “places of grace” where believers were given the opportunity to develop and deepen their spiritual and personal identity. This marked a turning point in the relationship between Protestant orders and the church. Following this line, the EKD emphasized in 2007 that communities and thus Protestant orders should be promoted as a “treasure of the Protestant Church.” From there, it was only a small step to recognizing the communities as a social form of the Protestant Church, as is the case currently.

In Germany, there are about 21 Protestant communities in which sisters and brothers live according to the three evangelical counsels: poverty, celibacy and obedience. They are united in the *Conference of Protestant Communities (KevK)*. In addition, there is the *Meeting of Spiritual Communities (TGG)*, which are family communities or have both a celibate and a family branch. Thus, there are a total of about 60 Protestant communities and communes.

The *Christusbruderschaft Selbitz (community of the Christ brotherhood Selbitz)* was founded in 1949 by HANNA and WALTER HÜMMER¹⁵⁸. The

¹⁵⁸ HANNA (1910–1977) and WALTER HÜMMER (1909–1972), a Protestant pastor, founded

religious community has its headquarters in Selbitz (Upper Franconia) and various convents in eastern Germany (Wittenberg, Leipzig, Petersberg/near Halle) and in Bavaria (Offenhausen).

"You are God's dwelling place among men" (Revelation 21:3) has been an important guiding principle of the community since its inception. After the death of the founders, the community split in 1984, with some of the brothers and sisters going on to form the *Falkenstein Brotherhood of Christ*. In Selbitz, new structures were created, prayer times were changed and in 1999 the community adopted a rule that applies to the sisters, the brothers, and also to the brothers and sisters in the tertiary community.

Like most Protestant communities, the *Community of the Christ Brotherhood Selbitz* has had an ecumenical character since its foundation. WALTER HÜMMER named Jesus' prayer for unity from John 17 as the basis and center of all encounters between the denominations and within Protestantism. Here, he said, the "ecumenical heartbeat" can be felt, that connects them all.

„Christ at the center“ is, so to speak, the fundamental concern of the Christ Brotherhood. SR. ANNA-MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE incorporated the idea of unity into the Rule of the Christ Brotherhood: *„Know that you are one! Through the reconciliation that Christ achieved on the cross, you are one with your sisters and brothers. You are also one with all those who believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized, in the Protestant Church, indeed in all churches of the ecumenical movement. (...) Let Jesus' prayer for unity of his body burn within you. Avoid what disturbs unity and, where you can, work for what promotes unity. Endure the pain where division is still there today but never be satisfied with division. Christ wants us to be one with each other, just as he is one with the Father.“* (Rule of the CCB, 12).

the *Community of Christ Brotherhood Selbitz* in Schwarzenbach on Saale on January 1, 1949, and led it for decades.

Charism and Office

A contribution to “Great Moments of Unity”

LOTHAR PENNERS

In the course of its history, *Together for Europe* increasingly understood itself as a coming together of “charisms”.

Essential to this self-understanding of “movements” – especially in the Catholic sphere, but not only there – was the fact that POPE JOHN PAUL II, on the occasion “Pentecost 98,” assigned the newer “movements” to the charismatic wing of the Church, stating that the newer movements represented a response of the Holy Spirit to the current challenges of faith.

In Protestant circles, spiritual communities had emerged – for example within the *YMCA movement* – that did not consider themselves to be “associations” of the national church, but rather “more” as independent initiatives of Christians, who developed an intense faith life and were concerned with bearing witness to the outside world. In this case “more” means: the communities connected in *Together for Europe* as a network see themselves not as risen from the tradition of the state churches and on their behalf, but inspired or initiated “from above”, but from free initiatives and spiritual impulses “from below”.

Together for Europe sees itself as a network of charisms. This self-image insofar seems entirely justified as the spiritual communities involved do not assume that the working personalities are particularly charismatic or must be gifted in a special way. Rather the “charismatic” aspect lies in the nature of the origins of their movements through the Spirit of God, which arose in “*manifestations of the Spirit and power*” (1 Corinthians 2:4) and sometimes in astonishing ways. They themselves are now striving to not only “administer” their origins, but

to develop them further, to relieve them in “creative fidelity” and pass on them.

For several years, the distinction between the “Petrine” function and the “Marian” embodiment of the Church played a central role in the effort to find one’s place in the assignment opened by POPE JOHN PAUL II.

Their charismatic vocation is embodied in “MARY” as the archetype of the charismatic person, gifted solely by the sovereign grace of the Spirit of God, through whom the world can experience the presence of the Savior. Because the essence of personal election and sanctification has its origin in the grace of God, it stands to reason that charisms are found especially in Marianism, for the office in the Church is temporal, but grace and truth are eternal.¹⁵⁹

If we examine this distinction more closely, we recognize two formative lines and traditions in the New Testament: one originating with John and another shaped by Paul.

Looking at John’s proclamation in the New Testament, one recognizes many moments of human and friendly closeness between the disciples and the Word of the Father made flesh. These are expressed, for example, in the questions about Jesus’ “dwelling” and “remaining” in communion with “Him” and the “Word of Life.” It is characteristic here that for John it is a reciprocal relationship:

- of love for one another – as loved by Jesus.
- of unity in discipleship – so that the world may believe.
- of majesty – in humiliation.
- unity – in truth, as the mutual testimony of “Father” and “Son”.

¹⁵⁹ These ideas are based on the work of theologian HANS URS VON BALTHASAR. See: Balthasar, Hans Urs, *Herrlichkeit. Eine theologische Ästhetik (Glory: A Theological Aesthetic)*, Vol. I. *Schau der Gestalt (Vision of Form)*, Einsiedeln 1961, p. 229, on archetypal experience; the Church and the Christian: Petrine, Pauline, Johannine, and Marian traditions, p. 337ff.

This quickly reveals obvious parallels to events in life which were already evident in the founding phase of the *Together for Europe* network. Here we should mention the moment of becoming friends; the mutual visits to discover where the other one “lives”; the covenant of mutual love that is permanently renewed; the mutual love of Jesus in others; the “looking upon him whom they have pierced”.

Looking to *Together for Europe* from the proclamation of Paul, we should note, on the one hand, the impetus that came from „Europe“ to the spiritual movements when Commission President PRODI asked them to help bringing about the unity of the continent (cf. „A Macedonian stood there and begged him, ‚Come over and help us!’“ (Acts 16:9). On the other hand, Paul was deeply rooted in the crucified Christ (cf. „For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.“ (1 Corinthians 2:2) His call to preach to the „Gentiles“ and the calling to all to be one body on the one hand, and his preaching, reflection and order of charisms (cf. 1 Corinthians 12) on the other hand, as well as the apostle’s mediation between the different cultural spheres of Judaism, Hellenism and Rome, and the visionary power to „unite all things in Christ“ so that God might be all in all — all of this can be found in the internal and external structure of the *Together for Europe* network.

Spiritual struggle

A contribution to “Great Moments of Unity”

WALTER KRIECHBAUM

The path we have experienced always involves a struggle on how to perceive God’s works and how to give shape to what we have heard. I often experienced this as a spiritual struggle, connected with listening and slowing down the conversation.

In my understanding, there are two further additional essential aspects. Wrestling with the next steps and listening to the current impetuses of the Holy Spirit requires an inner willingness from all of those involved to reveal their own, thoroughly meaningful ideas in an attitude of humility, to make them available and, if necessary, to let them go. This attitude has often paved the way for a common and unanimous approach.

On the international path of *Together for Europe*, the meaning of languages has become increasingly important to me. Especially in difficult or personal phases of conversations, careful effort is required to speak in such a way that it can be accurately translated into other languages. However, care is also needed in translation so that not only the words are conveyed, but also the hidden message.

I remember, for example, a meeting where I listened to the French translation at one point. In the face of my French-speaking counterpart I could see that something was wrong. Indeed, something from the discussions had not been conveyed or had been misunderstood. We had to slow down, make corrections and find our way back to the same point in the communication. Togetherness and unity thrive on care and effort, especially when it comes to other nations and

languages. In numerous occasions I have seen that this is precisely where a testimony of love opens paths to one another.

■ The journey is part of the destination

The paths we have taken here and there are part of the goal. Perhaps this is also a kind of "design type" of *Togetherness*.

An example: the paths taken to prepare the forums for Co-workers congress Stuttgart I in 2004 were already a living experience of the theme "Discovering and sharing richness". The encounters, the getting to know each other, the consultations for our forum already became part of the goal and had their own rewards. In addition to the concrete preparations, the growing openness towards each other, the deeper discovery of the charism of another community, and personal openness gave rise to relationships that have blossomed into lasting friendships.

I am convinced that one of the secrets of this experience was that we did not "instrumentalize" the preparation phase regarding the forum topic. Instead, "discovering each other" became our main motivation. This was a key experience, perhaps not for all forums, but certainly for many. Hence my addition to the type of events: the journey together is part of the goal. In my view, understanding and embracing the common journey as part of the goal contains an essential "gene" of *Together for Europe*.

Togetherness is not an action alliance. At its core, for me *Together for Europe* is a network of Christian communities, movements and initiatives that have recognized each other in Jesus Christ with the manifold gifts of God and have united in alliance in Jesus and for Jesus' sake. This gives rise to many complementary elements, mutual encouragement, numerous creative forces, etc. That is why, for me, the path that can repeatedly be taken is an expression of a network

of connectedness for Jesus' sake. This is part of the goal of reconciling diversity in lived unity.

Incidentally, on the way to the Co-workers congress in Munich in 2016, the journey itself was sometimes part of the destination.

■ Daring to trust – discovering Christ in others

I am convinced that our entire journey together has also been a journey of gaining and continually renewing trust in one another by seeking and discovering Christ in others and in the unfamiliar.

There was an opportunity to do so in Bad Blankenburg at a meeting that took place rather secretly. Leaders from various ministries and associations, spiritual movements and networks gathered. They sought fraternal and confidential conversation. Leaders from the German Evangelical Alliance were also present. I still remember how the culture of listening to one another developed at this meeting. Today I am still impressed by this encounter, and I associate the keyword "risk" with it.

In my eyes, it was a risk to set out on a path of togetherness despite great differences. Unity in diversity always involves risk. The love that Jesus speaks about, always ventures anew towards others, who may initially be strangers.

I sensed such steps in Bad Blankenburg. A wide range of spiritual influences and vocations was alive among us. For example, I sat next to the then Secretary General of the Gnadauer Association. We listened to each other and learned to appreciate each other – in Christ. Listening, gaining trust in one another, discovering Christ in the other – I remember this as an element on this path of *Togetherness*. Of course, I doubt that I understood everything that brothers and sisters from other communities and ministries presented. But sensing the living Jesus Christ at work in them connected me with them.

Perceiving these opened doors to one another, paved the way to experiences that were initially foreign, and allowed gratitude and respect to mature in the face of Jesus' actions in another brother or sister. For me, „feeling“ was followed by „understanding“. Unity, connected and reconciled diversity, remains in my eyes a constant process of risk-taking and maturation — for the sake of Jesus' love and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Unity and Diversity – Necessary witness for a post-Christian Society

ULRICH WILCKENS

Munich, December 8, 2001, St. Matthew's Church

Dear sisters and brothers! When Christians believe today, they must believe from the center of their faith, from their living connection with Jesus Christ. When people believe today, they must have an open ear for all the people around them. For those who are called to faith are also called to witness. We have learned that God needs us together for such witness. He needs us all, as different as we are. I may assume that we can all agree wholeheartedly on this.

But let us now think about this more carefully: Why is it absolute necessary that we achieve ecumenical unity in concrete cooperation? Why can only a common witness to Jesus Christ, in which all Christians agree, be effective in our time and world?

Let us begin with what we take for granted, so that it can be heard anew today. The reason for all that we believe, for which we are called to be witnesses, and the reason for all that we have in common is Christ Himself. In His earthly farewell prayer to His Father — summarizing His entire mission — He prayed earnestly — it is literally His very last prayer on earth — that all may be one, so that the world may believe. The goal that He has established since His farewell prayer as the holy will of the triune God, is for all times and thus also for our present: Christians must stand together. For it is important to be His witnesses.

Churches that have excluded each other from the one true community of Jesus' disciples must do everything today, everything, to overcome this state of separation. "*Is Christ divided?*"¹⁶⁰ asks the Apos-

¹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:13.

tle Paul his congregation in Corinth, which had been dealing with fierce factional difficulties.

He asks the same question to us, Protestants and Catholics. We come from a long history of mutual demarcation and exclusion. Protestantism here, Catholicism there. But Jesus himself is neither Catholic nor Protestant. He is the one Lord of his one church. The necessity for us to bear witness to him together therefore lies essentially in him himself and is therefore always a matter for the Holy Spirit.

Today, there are many people who experience profound, hopeless loneliness. In this loneliness, perhaps only one question arises: "Is your whole life perhaps meaningless? As meaningless as it is sure that one day you will be no longer here, buried underground, and then everything will be over."

Our testimony should come from listening to people who are not Christians, what they really feel, think and experience. What else can stand at the center but Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ, who himself preached and lived that God, despite all godlessness of this world, stands above the world and will remain as the Almighty and ultimate Lord of all, that this God in His power is nothing other than heartfelt, self-sacrificing love for all people. The ultimate power, the kingship of Jesus, is the almighty reign of this love of God. It is this love that saves life, catches those who fall, comforts the desperate, dries tears, and brings life to its fullness.

Your last hope, dear brother, dear sister, in the situation you have described, please place your last hope in this God who is love! You may not believe that something like this exists. Many of your experiences in your own world speak against it. How much bitterness is there over disappointed love! But here is an address where you will never be disappointed. This love is eternal. That was the message of Jesus.

It was not only what He had to say, but also what He lived. That is why, at the end of His life, He did not ascend to some throne. He

did not stand in the center of a huge show broadcast by all the television stations as the celebrated star, but He did the opposite. He went where poverty and hopelessness and the lives of countless people had reached their absolute extreme, their absolute reality. He hung on that cross, having been literally stripped naked beforehand, exposed to the cold and the heat — both of which were present at the time — defenseless, surrounded by a crowd of people who all knew that this was the end. They reviled and blasphemed Him. He had to endure this in His soul!

On the cross, He reviewed what He had proclaimed about the kingship of God, about the God of love. Then He died. But with a prayer, and I think that is the most relevant prayer for modern people today: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He says: “I am forsaken by love.” There is no hope left.

Where there is no more hope, He called upon God as His God. This contradiction is the center of Christian life. From this moment on, everything great that has ever been created in the name of Christianity in terms of healing, comfort and enlivening of life, arises. For His God did not abandon Him. The God of love intervened. The crucified one, who left himself completely to hopelessness, to the misery of the people for whom His love is meant, He was exalted to the highest height. This sacrifice, this concretization of God’s love in our midst, has triumphed.

This is what the Church celebrates at Easter. It is this message that gives rise to the call for unity, for the commonality of all. For if one comes to this Jesus, to the crucified one, whom God’s love raised up and led to victory, one comes to His arms, wide open to all humanity. That is why He wants a testimony from us, a testimony of Him through us, that is as wide open as His arms are open.

I think, to conclude, that God, who always has hidden intentions in how He directs history ... foresaw what would become of our world,

especially our world in the so-called West. He foresaw this fall into a new godlessness, into what we call secularization. He foresaw all this... and the movement towards unity and commonality among all churches comes, I think, from this view on the development of the world in the 21st century, of humanity, a history that also reaches far into our churches. We must not exclude ourselves from this at all. This "Zeitgeist" (spirit of the time) of hidden, deepest godlessness also penetrates the heart of our churches. That is why He should unite us, because only unitedly we can bear witness to this world with this concentrated experience of no longer having God, but only human beings.

That is why, I think, one must never say that the ecumenical movement is something beautiful for the church. Certainly, it is beautiful. It is always beautiful when we experience that we have something in common. But this is not something that is, so to speak, self-contained; it has a goal. He brings us together so that we can bear witness together in a world of pluralism, in which only a unified witness can be heard at all. That is why He calls all those, who know that faith relates to personal witness from their communities, to join this ecumenical movement today.

The Cooperation of Christian Movements and Communities: its impact on Churches and Society

Munich, December 8, 2001, St. Matthew's Church

CHIARA LUBICH

■ 1. Spiritual movements have existed from the beginning

Today I am particularly pleased to explore the question of our most interest with you here: How does God reveal Himself today in the new beginnings, movements, spiritual communities and ministries that He is bringing up in our churches?

Let us first ask ourselves: Are the movements which we see now in the various churches, so to speak, inventions of the Holy Spirit only for this time? The answer is clearly no. From the beginnings of Christianity, there have always been communities. We know the reason for this: Christianity is present in the world through people who live their faith and the Word of God.

■ 2. Appreciation of movements by the Church today

Now, some of you might say to me: We understand that the movements are indispensable for the Church. But what prompted you today to advocate so emphatically for community among them? To address this question, a preliminary remark is necessary: movements, at least Catholic ones, have only recently received greater attention, since JOHN PAUL II felt the desire to publicly acknowledge their contribution.

It was Pentecost Saturday 1998. In Rome's St. Peter's Square, the Pope had commemorated the first Pentecost event in front of 300-400,000 people from more than 60 new spiritual communities. What had happened 2000 years ago in Jerusalem, said the Pope, had happened again that evening in that square. *„Whenever the Spirit takes the initiative, He causes astonishment (...)"*, said the Pope. *„He sanctifies and guides the people of God not only through the sacraments and the ministry of the Church (...). Rather, He also distributes special graces among the faithful (...), which serve the renewal and stronger spread of the Church (...). You who are gathered here are the visible proof of this outpouring of the Spirit."* The Pope went on to say that the Catholic Church is based on two aspects that are equally essential (coessenziali): the so-called „institutional" and „charismatic" aspects. He described our movements as *„meaningful expressions of the charismatic dimension of the Church."*

■ 3. Ecumenical Spirituality

But now the question arises: how can we, weak and repeatedly failing human beings, respond to this plan of God, who wants His Church to be a living, constantly growing community? It is obvious that for this community to come into being, to take Jesus' new commandment to heart would be sufficient itself. Perhaps it will be helpful if I share a gift of the Holy Spirit with you that brings about community in an even more decisive and clear-cut way: the so-called "spirituality of unity". It is lived not only by Catholics, but by Christians of various churches and therefore many consider it to be "ecumenical spirituality". This spirituality is based on two essential aspects: the mystery of unity and the mystery of Jesus crucified and forsaken.

The meaningful word "unity" appears in the Gospel of John in Jesus' high priestly prayer, which is His testament: *"Father ... may they*

all be one" (John 17:21). Here He prays for the unity of all baptized people, with God and among themselves. But unity, as per Jesus' understanding, is a mystery and not easy to achieve. One must understand how to live for it and what steps are necessary when it is broken. The Holy Spirit has opened the way to unity for us: In the Holy Spirit, He revealed to us the crucified Jesus who cries out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matthew 27:46)

But why is Jesus, precisely in this aspect of being forsaken by God, the key to unity? I will try to make myself clear on this point. We know that Jesus took on human nature with all its sufferings, limitations and traumatic experiences. He made all these sufferings, limitations and traumas His own and even became "sin", as Paul says (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now on the cross, He feels all these realities and utters this cry.

But He endured this terrible impression of abandonment, of separation from the Father, to reunite all people with God. They were separated from Him by sin and are now also reunited with one another.

The forsaken Jesus is of great importance for understanding true unity. More than that, He is the „royal road“ that leads to unity. But how can one walk this path?

■ 4. The forsaken Jesus as the way to unity

Each of us has painful experiences in our lives that are in some way like the sufferings of Jesus. Who among us has not experienced the feeling of being separated from God when darkness envelops our inner being? Who has not experienced doubt, inner restlessness and agitation like Jesus, who doubted on the cross and asked "Why?". So, when we encounter such pain, we think of Him. This suffering reminds us of Him; it is an aspect of His presence.

How can we respond to this? Let us do as Jesus did, who did not remain in pain. He added the words to His cry: „*Father, into Your hands*

I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46) and thus surrendered Himself completely to the Father who had previously abandoned Him. Let us also break through the crust of pain and overcome this trial in a certain way by saying: In this difficult, painful situation, I want to love You, abandoned Jesus. Let us then as well be attentive to loving and responding to what God wants from us in the next moment. We will experience that pain often transforms into joy in a wonderful way: it is the Risen One who gains space in us with the gifts of His Spirit.

■ 5. What are the effects of such a life?

As believers of different churches who await the full and visible communion of the whole Church, we feel regarding ecumenism, that we can make an existential contribution with our lives, out of love for the forsaken Jesus. It is important to realize that we are already connected to one another because of the many elements we have in common (baptism, Holy Scripture, the first councils, the creed, and the common spirituality of unity). Thus, we feel that we are traveling together on a path full of hope and confidence. The joy of this cannot be described; it must be experienced. Who can separate us from the love of Christ when He has bound us together in this way?

Through this life of community, which becomes a witness in and for the world, the name of God regains its relevance as it echoes in our streets, in our homes, in schools, in our workplaces, in public spaces, where life is often frozen in materialism and various secularizing tendencies. This is precisely for what the Holy Spirit has called us and enabled us to do so in a special way.

What should distinguish us from the world is not so much our prayer, penance, ceremonies, fasting and devotion, but rather our mutual love and unity among ourselves.

Jesus himself said: *"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:35) and *"May they all be one, so that the world may believe"* (John 17:21).

Dear brothers and sisters, in conclusion, I would like to express just one wish: Let us not part today without having made a pact in our hearts, a covenant of mutual love based on the Gospel. This will be a source of comfort and joy for our Father in heaven, which will move Him to show us further fruitful paths to unity, for it is His kingdom that is at stake. Dear brothers and sisters may Jesus always be in our midst!

The role of spiritual movements

Congress “Discovering and sharing the riches”, Stuttgart, May 6-7, 2004

GERHARD PROSS

„But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...” (1 Peter 2:9) – what a powerful word of God has just been brought before our eyes. For the first listeners these words were truly provocative. ... Peter transfers the dignity of the Old Testament people of God ... to the young Christians from the Gentiles, who have just been baptized. And now we hear these words for ourselves ... We are the people of God – with all the attributes we have just heard from 1 Peter.

How often this very term occupied our minds during our preparation: “people of God”. God calls his people together. We heard this impetus repeatedly and now it has become reality. We are here, and with us the people of God have come together. We are the people of God!

Of course, the people of God are much, much greater. There is no question about that. I very much hope that we will be amazed by this and that we will understand our mission as spiritual movements even more deeply during these days – as part of the people of God. Now I would like to take four steps with you:

■ 1. You are a holy people - a people who have become His special possession

With almost every term I take from this short text, I realize how I am treading on thin ice. It is immediately apparent how differently the

word “holy” is understood, for example. It triggers something completely different for Catholic brothers and sisters than it does for Protestant or Free Church believers. May I venture to do so anyway? ...

I would like to try to illustrate one aspect of this word using the temple utensils. These are not holy because they are made of different, better materials. They became holy because they were cleansed and consecrated for temple service, made available exclusively for this service.

To be holy means ... to be set aside for God, made available exclusively to HIM, consecrated to HIM. Belonging to HIM – the people of the Property. ... This is God’s deep intention for us as spiritual movements: to be holy = to belong to HIM, to be HIS property, to reflect His nature. Did not all our founding fathers and mothers hear this call and respond to it with their whole lives? This gave rise to communities and movements ... We are all called to this. Everyone in their own movement.

Let us say anew during these days: Jesus, we belong to you — to you first.

Heavenly Father, we have heard your call, and we place our whole lives at your disposal and at the disposal of your intentions. We accept your calling that you may set us aside for your purposes – entirely for your service – to belong entirely to you as your property – in the community into which you have placed us.

This is how God has built His kingdom throughout the centuries: He seeks men and women who make themselves completely available to HIM...

■ 2. Spiritual movements – another dimension of the Church

Spiritual movements are not about the hierarchical, comprehensive structure of the church. No, the dimension I am talking about takes place in centers, in communities.

Plantings of God which - like a strawberry field - are connected to each other like a network, and yet each center is planted directly into the divine soil.

Sometimes there are special times. One of these times was towards the end of World War II. Completely independently of each other, new spiritual communities and movements arose in Italy, France and Germany, for example. *Taizé* in France, the *Focolare Movement* in Italy, the *Christ Brotherhood in Selbitz*, and the *Sisters of Mary* in Darmstadt, to name just a few of these new foundations.

It was the same impetus from God that called men and women to a deeper dedication of their lives and to a celibate life. For the Protestant world, which had lived without monasteries for over 400 years, something completely new arose from this impetus of God: the communities.

Twenty years later, we can recognize another impetus from God in the charismatic renewal that broke out almost simultaneously in all churches worldwide. Many of the communities present here today arose from this impetus. ...

... At all times, God has renewed (renews) his Church. Today, He is calling countless spiritual communities and movements to renew His Church. It is His call to clarity, to transparency, to holiness.

Many of us were deeply moved by the words of Pope JOHN PAUL II to the spiritual movements in St. Peter's Square on Pentecost 1998. The Pope spoke of two dimensions of the Church that are equally essential (co-essentiale) for the Church:

One is the hierarchical dimension of the Church, the ministry, the comprehensive structure and everything that goes with it. The pope spoke of the Petrine structure of the Church.

The other dimension ... is the charismatic dimension of the Church. With this dimension he described spiritual movements. He used the term "Marian dimension" for it. Some of the charismatic movements would speak about the apostolic/prophetic dimension and mean the same thing.

... Isn't the emergence of spiritual movements very often similar like what happened to MARY? In the beginning, there was a call from God, a word from God, a call to a specific mission. The word was often incomprehensible – the founders asked questions like Mary: How can this be? They responded to God's call: "*Let it be done to me according to your word.*" (Luke 1:38) Then the Holy Spirit was able to do his work in them. Something new, begotten by the Holy Spirit, was born. ...

I would like to try to break down the big word "co-essentiality" of the ministry and the movements to the local level.

At the beginning of my ministry at *the YMCA in Esslingen*, the then dean KLAUS SCHEFFBUCH¹⁶¹ gave me a picture of the town church in Esslingen and pointed out the two towers. The right tower is the YMCA tower. On Sunday mornings, the trumpet choir plays up there, and in the past, there were Scout groups meeting there, which is why it is called the YMCA tower. Because the two towers are in danger of falling apart, a bridge was built between them centuries ago – so they support each other.

Co-essential: office and movement in cooperation. We need bridges so that neither tower loses its stability.

¹⁶¹ KLAUS SCHEFFBUCH, retired Protestant pastor, dean of the Esslingen church district (1977-1999), member of the Württemberg Regional Synod (1972-1995).

But my friend KLAUS SCHEFFBUCH found it a little difficult to accept that they are completely equal, and as if he was shocked by his own statement, he added with a smile that the church tower is, of course, the higher one.

Some ministers may have felt the same way about the Pope's words and find it difficult to accept equality. However, the secret of successful unity lies in mutual submission, in marriage, in communities, in the cooperation of movements, in the cooperation of movements and churches.

The Pope's words acknowledge the spiritual movements, but how often do we experience the other side, which also belonged to Mary: scolding and shame. Who believed Mary back then?

It is not always easy for founders, because they often break new ground. Some have a prophetic existence. Sometimes they clash with the church hierarchy, which cannot cope with their work. They are misunderstood, accused, suspected — or even exiled.

Which of the founders and leaders could not tell a tale or two about this? Particularly I am thinking of CHIARA LUBICH, Fr. KENTENICH, but also WILHELM BLÄSING¹⁶², and many others. Sometimes, of course, it is also our enormous sense of mission that causes us to rub people the wrong way.

Mary did not run through Nazareth shouting: Listen everyone – I am special – I am carrying the Son of God. Jesus himself also behaved completely different. He was the Son of God, yet he did not talk about it publicly. Although he had the authority and power of God within him, he did not use it for himself. We learn about the "lion's strength" of the Son of God in the "lamb's nature".

¹⁶² WILHELM BLÄSING, Secretary General of the *YMCA Munich* (1961-1972) and the *YMCA Stuttgart* (1977-1983), founder of the *YMCA Association*, one of the initiators of the *Meeting of leaders*.

As spiritual movements, we are called to do our ministry in the manner of Jesus. Are we willing to follow HIM and live in His „lamb-like nature“? Are we willing to expose ourselves repeatedly to being misunderstood and misjudged?

■ 3. You are a royal priesthood

Again, such a word that leads me on thin ice. Can and may I grant priesthood to all of us? How do Protestant ears hear this, and how do Catholic ears hear it?

The spiritual movements: a people of kings and priests. ... I imagine a beautiful old church, whose architectural style also expresses something of the mystery of the house of God, and I ask myself: where is the place for spiritual movements?

I receive a twofold answer to this question: The place is outside these church walls. Spiritual movements go out to the people. They are outside with the people. They are an expression of Jesus' mission in the world. ... We have the best message in the world to pass on: God's love for people. This is an expression of the royal side: the side of responsibility for people and for our society. We do not retreat behind the pious walls of our communities but work together to shape our society. ...

The other place is the sanctuary — the priestly space. This is certainly hard to imagine for our Orthodox brothers and sisters, yet I am deeply convinced of our priestly place. ... As Christians, we have direct access to Jesus Christ and, in Jesus, access to the heavenly Father. As priests, we may take up the needs of the people and turn to Jesus in worship, bringing them to HIM, worshipping standing before HIM – in all the different forms and spiritualities. Deep down inside, knowing the secret of adoration: looking at HIM, only HIM ... (and) coming from

there bringing God's blessing to people. Entering in their everyday lives, their worries and needs.

Our place is completely outside with the people and in the sanctuary. Priests according to the order of MELCHIZEDEK¹⁶³. The Letter to Hebrews describes the mystery of Jesus' priesthood.¹⁶⁴ You are the royal priesthood; the Letter of Peter tells us.

■ 4. Now is the time

„Behold, now is the time of grace, behold, now is the day of salvation.“ (1 Corinthians 6:2) ... I am convinced that God is giving us a special time of grace now, so that His people together can gather, a time of grace for the miracle of unity, a time of grace for the body of Christ to grow together.

Are we not already experiencing a great deal of this time of grace these days? It is a time of grace for togetherness. It is a time of grace for the ecumenism of hearts ... especially at a time when the ecumenism of the churches has many hurdles to overcome and there is a certain amount of resignation. In the realm of spiritual movements, denominational differences play a subordinate role.

I feel immense joy at this new way of thinking, this new attitude. May I just say it this way: I am completely thrilled by what Jesus has

¹⁶³ For the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is entirely in line with Old Testament thinking, it is an important question whether Jesus was a priest, because he was not descended from Aaron and therefore, according to the prevailing logic, could not be a priest. And it shows us Jesus in a unique way as the one high priest who redeemed us once and for all with his own suffering and death.

¹⁶⁴ The Letter to the Hebrews resolves the conflict by calling Jesus a *priest according to the order of MELCHIZEDEK* (Hebrews 5:10), that royal priest of Salem to whom Abraham gave a tenth. *He had neither father nor mother*, writes the Letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 7:3) – there is no proper evidence of his genealogy, his succession, etc., and yet Jesus is our true High Priest – precisely according to the order of MELCHIZEDEK. For me, this is an image of the priesthood of all believers.

given to us, both during the entire preparation process and now at the Congress. We rejoice in the gifts of others – we discover them as riches and do not need to distance ourselves from them or see them as competition.

... We look at what unites us. HE himself, Jesus Christ, is the unifier. When we have HIM, the crucified and risen One, as our center, then lasting unity is possible. For unity already exists; it is already a reality in Jesus Christ: Unity is not an achievement of human beings, but a gift from God; it is grace.

If we come from the center Jesus Christ, we can also live with the distortions that can be found in every movement. These distortions do exist, and we do not have to hide them, but we also do not have to act as judges over others.

And yet there is also the other side – even in our midst: the pain of separation – we are part of the historical separation. The wounds that have been inflicted on each other and have not yet healed – even among us. The division between us.

We still have a way to go. May the Holy Spirit... touch our hearts during these days and show us ways to heal the pain, to bring about reconciliation, so that unity becomes even more sustainable.

And I want to cry out: Kyrie-Eleison. Lord, have mercy on us, on the history and scandal of separation on so many levels. Lord, have mercy on us too, where prejudices and fixed ideas still lie dormant within us, hurting others.

The body of Christ still presents a terrible picture: I am personally repeatedly touched by this image of the divided face of Jesus. The body of Christ is divided, limbs are amputated. ...

Can we imagine something of the Father's pain at the state of the body of Christ ...?

And yet, at the same time, we can already look ahead, because it is a time of grace: a time of grace in which the body can grow

together, a time of grace in which severed limbs can grow back together into one body.

... HE is already gathering his people from the ends of the earth. As we pray in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and in the Eucharist: "As the bread and wine, from many grains and grapes, gathered from the fields and mountains, became one, so at the end of days you will gather your people from the ends of the earth into your kingdom."

Behold, now is the time of grace — a time of grace for togetherness. Let us rise and seize this moment of grace. The time of grace for His people to become one.

We are his people! Therefore, let us live as holy people: belonging entirely to HIM. As priestly people: seeking first and foremost HIS glory and worshipping him. As royal people who take responsibility for others, who use the gifts they have received and reach out to those in need. As a reconciled people who seek unity and embrace unity for the glory of God and the good of humanity.

What God wants to say to His people and to the world through the movements

Congress “Discovering and sharing the riches”, Stuttgart, May 6-7, 2004

MARCO IMPAGLIAZZO

■ The legacy of the 20th century in Europe

The 20th century began as the century of Europe: a century of democracy and human rights, a century of scientific and economic progress. Unfortunately, within a few decades Europe underwent a great decline ...

After World War II, some of Europe’s finest men committed themselves to advancing the process of European integration, the many fruits of which we can see today. Certainly, more than forty years after the war, Europe was still divided by a sad and dramatic line of demarcation between East and West, known as the Iron Curtain. After 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, new hopes arose across the continent, but we also know that many of them were lost.

Yet in the 20th century, which was defined as a century that had „left God behind”, Christians were active. ... This beautiful and terrible century had a great need for the Gospel and for love. ... In a world that had „left God behind”, the charismatic aspect of the life of the Church has blossomed again in the form of movements and new communities.

■ **The movements, a flower of the Spirit within Europe of borders and wars**

The 20th century bears the hallmarks of a charismatic era ... This era has not come to an end, for many new horizons are opening; it has reached maturity. Many movements arose in the 20th century. ... This charismatic era has enriched and diversified the life of the Church and led to an expansion of the family and thus to an exchange of greater love.

The movements are different, they have different roots, spiritual histories, and ages; yet they are all children of a single great charismatic era. When you see them in action in everyday life, you might notice differences, but when you look at them together, you discover a single plan: the Church sympathetically enters the streets of a world that seems to have left God behind. ...

In the century that has “left God behind”, men and women who are like everyone else, have made God the heart of their lives. Through them —not through social, political or institutional forms — God enters life. They bear witness to God’s philanthropy, means that God is a friend of human beings. ... They live by passing on what they are living. This is sometimes irresistible, not because of the strength of their own power and social influence, but because they speak the language of everyone, a contemporary language and pass on God’s friendship to people. ...

In a century of great mobilizations, of great political passions and their decline, our people have grown, consisting of different families, speaking many languages: people who live among all nations, who are close to everyone and in contact with them, who have one great passion: the passion of the Gospel.

■ Charity and solidarity

In the 20th century, wealth has grown, but the number of poor people in the world is increasing. Through the spread of information, we come into direct contact with the poor worlds of the South and their misery. All this is a great challenge to the charity of Christians. ... There has been a growing awareness in the movements that they are sources of love in a difficult world, where a large part of the population lives in poverty and where there are more and more poor people in rich countries. An irresistible dynamic in the existence of the movements: charity towards this world of poverty and suffering. The Letter of James speaks about this: *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead"* (James 2:26). Works of solidarity are a spiritual expression of the body, of the movement or community: they spring from the logic of charity that animates the whole life.

■ Prayer and commitment to the poor

Spiritual movements or movements of engagement? The experience of movements is that the connection between lived communion, prayer, evangelization and solidarity with the poor is fundamental. Everything is love, and love knows no boundaries, even if it finds different forms of expression. There is a comprehensive closeness between spirituality and solidarity that liberates the oppressed and the poor: spirituality, prayer and solidarity are never separate from each other.

■ Europe of the Spirit and Solidarity

... The orientation of charity means: a Church for all, which embraces everyone through the proclamation of the Gospel, but which at the same time loves the poor in a special way. There are poor people in

our midst whom we can encounter directly. But in today's world there is another dimension that was not developed in previous centuries but has undergone great development today thanks to the means of communication: it is the poor in the large regions of poverty that are spreading in the southern hemisphere. The images of them and their voices reach us and challenge us. They too appeal to our charity ...

■ Christian movements and peace

There is a new and more far-reaching dimension of charity, and we must also take the risk of this charity with the inventiveness the Spirit can give us: we can do more for peace! ...

There is a charity of peace that is not reserved for specialists but is a strength of Christians who do not forget that the Lord has left them the heritage of that peace which the world cannot give. We must understand that we possess a power of peace, a weak power (in the sense that it is not clothed with the power of this world), a power of charity. Christians are not condemned to remain silent in the face of evil, violence and war; they must not limit themselves to lamenting conflicts and writing appeals. In charity, they can create peace, for love understands everything, forgives everything, and hopes for everything.

We must be more persistent in charity and know that everything that is lived in love is not lost. Charity is the sign of this era: love towards the poor, love for peace, charity in works, charity among movements, charity in the Church. Relationships among the various movements and new communities are also an area that calls for charity. Charity among movements is proving to be an area of great growth for the movements as well; there can be unpredictable new developments, as we are seeing these days in Stuttgart.

■ **A dream for Europe: “Eurafrica”**

The gift of the Gospel and lived charity are setting feelings and new gestures in motion in the heart of Europe. Our continent must not live for itself, bent over its problems ... The great south of the world, and Africa in particular, is knocking on Europe’s doors. The presence of many immigrants is an eloquent sign. That is why we dream that Europe will open itself with love and a sense of responsibility to the poorest countries in the world. For us Christians, Europe must not live for itself, and Africa, the Africa of wars and millions of people in difficulty, is the first continent we encounter on our journey. Africa shares a common destiny with us, and we must live it together for everyone to be happier.

Unity in the Triune God – Reconciled diversity among us

Congress “Together on the Way,” Stuttgart, May 10-11, 2007

BR. FRANZISKUS JOEST

What is true community and how can it be kept alive? This is the question that concerns many people in this age of ecumenism and European integration. How can people with different characters live together in such a way that everyone can develop their gifts, that no one is suppressed, and yet how can the unity - for which we are longing - be achieved among us?

■ The essence of the Church is Trinitarian

Let us hear a few words from the Epistle to the Ephesians: *“I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with patience. Bear with one another in love, and strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you are also called to one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”* (Ephesians 4:1-6)

It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the mystery of the triune and trinitarian God. For as a Christian church, we can learn from the archetype of community, from God Himself, as He made Himself historically tangible to His apostles. The doctrine of the Trinity is not an invention of the church, but the result of encountering Jesus Christ, reflecting on concrete experiences with Him, and worship. But it is a mystery. Not a riddle, mind you, but a mystery. For a riddle can be solved, and then

everything is quite simple. A mystery must be dealt with; it can be celebrated, worshipped, approached. That is exactly what we want to try to do now. So, we will consider how God encountered the apostles in Jesus and then ask what that means for our image of God and our image of humanity.

■ The Triune and Trinitarian God

„*God is love.*“ (1 John 4:8, 16) This does not mean that God has love, nor does it mean that God loves. It means that too. But “God is love” – that is more. It is a statement of essence. It can only mean that God is love with and without His creation, with and without the world, with and without human beings. God is love quite apart from everything we know and everything around us, also quite apart from ourselves: God is love always, forever, before time and in eternity. God in and of Himself, God alone, is love. – God alone?

... God is love from the beginning. How and whom does He love? We can only guess at what it means when Jesus speaks of God as His Father, when He addresses Him in prayer as “Abba”, when He speaks of Himself as the “Son”, when He even says, “*Before Abraham was, I am!*” (John 8:58)

“Before Abraham was, I am” – this means that there is an eternal “you” in God Himself. That there are, so to speak, two poles facing each other, so that one can give himself to the other. In God Himself, it happens that God gives Himself to the other, to the one who stands opposite Him. The Son receives Himself entirely from the father ... In this gesture of complete self-giving, God is God. For God is love.

... Everything that He (the Son) has and is, He has and is from the Father. But it has probably been true for all eternity that “*He did not consider it robbery to be like God,*” as the Letter to the Philippians then says (Philippians 2:6), i.e., that He does not hold on to the life He has

received from the Father, does not draw it to Himself, does not cling to it and enjoy it for Himself. Instead, He owes His life to the Father, He owes Himself to the Father, He gives Himself to the Father by giving Himself back to Him completely and utterly. ... and in this giving of Himself, He is wholly God, and it is precisely in this that He is one in being with the Father. For God is love.

But we recognize that this love does not end in self-indulgence between two people but rather wants to open and share and communicate the joy of giving and receiving gifts, because the Father and Son give their love to the Holy Spirit, who in turn reciprocates by giving Himself completely. For the Spirit proceeds from the Father. He is sent to us through the Son, but He too, does not take what He tells us from His own, but glorifies the Father and the Son. And in this gesture of self-giving, the Spirit, too, is wholly God, one in essence with the other persons of the Godhead. ... For God is love.

This insight has far-reaching consequences. GIBBERT GRESHAKE¹⁶⁵ expresses it this way: unity and diversity have the same origin. In less philosophical terms, this means that unity does not lie behind diversity, but within it. ...

■ Human beings - as the image of God - are relationship

This, in turn, has decisive implications for our view of humanity and for the question of unity and diversity among us and in the community of Jesus Christ. For ... (the) love of God is so vast that the entire cosmos has room in it. And so, the one-triune love pours itself into creation and communicates itself to creatures. Now we understand why "human beings" were created in the plural from the outset, and we understand why human beings could not be created from the beginning

¹⁶⁵ GIBBERT GRESHAKE, Catholic theologian, professor emeritus of dogmatic theology.

as serial copies like identical clones but were created from the outset in the exciting diversity of man and woman and can only be human in this way. ... We are to be ... the image of God together, and God is love. Particularly, we are created in the Son, as the Letter to the Colossians says: *"In Him all things were created, ... and all things consist of Him."* (Colossians 1:16f), and so are we. Thus, we bear his image, we are beings who receive and owe our existence to our Creator, and thus also to one another. In this freely given, freely received, and freely reciprocated devotion of ourselves to one another and to God, we are the image of God in the Son.

This is a goal that is rooted in our creatureliness. But in between stands what the Bible calls the Fall. This means that, according to the basic Trinitarian reality, fulfilled humanity is no longer unbrokenly available to us. It must be revealed to us by God; God must reveal Himself to us. It must be imprinted on our hearts, and only he who has been renewed by God can receive it.

As human beings, we are constituted as relational beings by our very nature. ... And this applies to all people, regardless of how religious they are. But to live in complete devotion to God and to one another, we need renewal through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ redeemed us for this purpose. Through Him, we are introduced into the life of the triune God and find our way back to the original dignity of our humanity. We may know this, desire it, and consciously place ourselves in it. We should seize it and allow ourselves to be seized by it. ...

■ The unity of the Church is already given in God

Applied to our initial question, this means first that the Church of Jesus Christ is an all-encompassing, universal unity. "I believe in one, holy, catholic (meaning all-encompassing), and apostolic Church", as we say in the Creed.

If we look again at the text from Ephesians at the beginning, Paul says there: *“Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit”* – and now a surprising word comes – *“in the bond of peace.”* We really must stumble over this! Paul speaks of this unity not as something to be created, but as something to be maintained. That means it is already given! It has already been created; someone else has already taken care of that. The unity of the church is there. Our part can only and ever be to preserve it.

But let us continue: The last verse of the passage quoted says: *“One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”* And now that is the statement: “all” is represented in the Church. If two members are represented, then those are two different members. And with that we have another characteristic of the Church that often causes the greatest difficulty for us. Two members are always two different members. And a big number of members are many different members. God obviously wants a diversity in the Church, because God himself is diverse in Himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When Paul says at the beginning, *“Walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called by God,”* then, if it is God’s calling, it can only be a calling to diversity, to unity in diversity, to a diverse unity. For this is the nature of God Himself. From the beginning, Jesus Christ rejoiced in diversity, and so he called twelve very different men as disciples and had women too following him. And the churches the New Testament is showing us are also very different. The church in Jerusalem had very different characteristics and structures than the churches in Corinth and Ephesus – and in Rome, things looked different again. There were different ways of life, even the leadership structures were not uniform, and there were even differences in teaching.

Diversity is always in God’s will, for he Himself is a God who lives and loves diversity. Division is always problematic, there is no question about that, and it is certainly not God’s will. But unity in diversity and

diversity in unity – that is God’s way, a way on which there is still much to learn. Perhaps God has even allowed denominational differences. Why not?

... A harmony with everything being the same kills all questions; it even kills life. But difference and contrast allow us to ask questions and penetrate more deeply into the mystery of the Church, into the mystery of truth, into the mystery of God. That is a good thing! All our knowledge and actions are fragmentary, dependent on mutual complementarity. And the more different fragments, different pieces complement each other, the more beautiful, colorful and complete the picture becomes. God already knows the whole picture, and he is leading it to its completion, leading the Church to perfect unity in his kingdom. Certainly, diversity can also become a cause of malice and lead to enmity. That is why God wants reconciliation, a reconciled diversity that remains open to God’s work in the other.

Applied to politics and church politics, this would mean subsidiarity, federalism and round table discussions. I can only hint at this. It means that the smaller units are recognized, acknowledged and preserved in their identity-forming character, while at the same time they do not isolate themselves, but rather integrate themselves into the larger whole, serving it with their gifts.

■ Preserving the unity of the Church – through love in the spirit of foot washing

How can this be achieved? Only in the way we have learned from the triune God and as Jesus has shown us. At that time, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (John 13). This expresses the innermost essence of God. And we sense that Jesus’ words, *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,”* expresses the essence of God; that the Son is wholly God precisely in that He gives Himself, surrenders Himself,

“gives his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). We sense that in the Upper Room, when He asks His disciples who is greater, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves, He grants them insight into His innermost, eternal nature. *“I am among you as one who serves”* (Luke 22:27) – that is who He is, and that is God’s revelation.

... And He says to the disciples: *“Kings rule over their peoples, and their rulers are called benefactors. But you are not to be like that!”* (Luke 22:25f) This *“But you are not to be like that!”* is a key verse. It is about the character of God’s people.

„I have given you an example,” He says during the foot washing, *„so that you may do as I have done to you. ... If you know this, you are blessed if you do it!”* (John 13:13, 15) This is the new commandment that distinguishes the new people of God from the rest of the world: *„... that you love one another as I have loved you.”* For by this the world will *„know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:34f) If I may insert a little anecdote here: An old man of God who lived not far from here once quoted this word of Jesus to me and said, *„Yes, Brother Francis, you cannot love over each other, you can only love among each another.”* This humorous play on words makes clear what Jesus’ attitude is all about.

■ The virtues of unity

Paul ... gives us a key to how we can love one another: humility, gentleness, generosity. These show us the way in which we can deal with each other in our diversity and tensions. I would like to mention just one more virtue here.

Humility means focusing on what is low. Jesus deliberately took up this idea in the Beatitudes and lived it Himself: *“Blessed are those who know themselves to be poor and lowly before God.”* The flip side of this basic attitude of knowing oneself to be lowly before God is high

regard for one's brothers and sisters. The two belong together when the New Testament speaks of humility. *"Let each of you look not at your own interests, but to the interests of others"* (Philippians 2:3). And that means be gentle in times of tension! When things start to get heated, when someone absolutely refuses to see reason, then practice gentleness! And that means, once again, that there will be tensions. The New Testament knows this, and it knows it, because it was already the case in the Church at that time, starting in Jerusalem. The Council of the Apostles was full of tensions. They are part of the path to unity. Tension-free harmony is fake or boring. So, it is not a matter of suppressing tensions or preventing them from arising in the first place, but, as Paul says, of practicing gentleness during tensions.

This has nothing to do with timidity. ... Humility can also mean standing up for the truth and sticking your neck out. There are tensions that can no longer be bridged. Unity also has limits, and those limits have a name: Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Striving for unity that pushes Him aside or wants to bypass Him is wrong, because only Jesus introduces us to the life of the triune God.

... But in everything, it is about the attitude of serving my brothers and sisters — with my gift or with what they need. It is the courage not to put myself first — I don't have to be right; I can even be wrong. Humility, truly a royal road, namely the way of King Jesus Christ: He walked this path to the cross. ... It is the Way of the Cross on which the unity of Jesus Christ Himself was created, and it is the only way on which we Christians can preserve unity.

Certainly, it is His way, it is His manner, and it is also His work among us – and yet these virtues do not simply fall into our laps. Here we can see again the two sides of unity: the one side that has long been given in God, as these virtues are the essence of God. ...

Therefore, the unity of the Church is not something we have to create, but it is there because God is above all, in all, and through all.

– And yet it wants to be preserved and proven by us humans with zeal and commitment, and that is the other side. In many cases, this requires conscious conversion, the purification of our memory in relation to our history, so that the bitterness we have inherited can be overcome. This is how this unity arises, in which the divine and the human come together, cooperate, interpenetrate, and become one. And this brings us back to the essence and precious mystery of the Church of Jesus Christ on this earth, namely the precious mystery that here on earth in the Church, the divine and the human are already vitally connected, vitally interpenetrated and become one – with the great goal of eternity, in which God will be all in all and we will be perfect in him.

Spiritual Richness in the Life of the Movements

Congress “Together on the Way,” Stuttgart, May 10-11, 2007

SR. ANNA MARIA AUS DER WIESCHE

„Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Play to the glory of his name! Glorify him with praise! Say to God: How wonderful are your works! Your enemies must bow before your great power. Let the whole world worship you, let them sing your name.” (Psalm 66:1-2) Israel, God’s chosen people among the nations, calls the whole world to sing God’s praises. The Israelites know: not only should we praise the Lord, but the whole world should worship Him. This is Israel’s calling to invite the whole world to glorify the name of God.

Yesterday evening, in our various prayers, we experienced a small excerpt from the singing of all nations, at least of some European nations... in the songs of *Taizé*, in the praises of *Vineyard*, *JMS*, the *CVJMs* and *Siloah*, in the prayers of the Orthodox sisters and brothers, in the Word of Life of *the Focolare*, in the liturgies of *Sant’Egidio* and *Schoenstatt*, in the psalm singing of the communities.

■ Change of heart

We grew up in a certain country in Europe. We carry the history of our country within us, the difficult and the beautiful, the painful and the rich. Within this country, we belong to a particular denomination or free church. We are shaped by their tradition and history.

Also personally, we have experienced a particular calling from God and have joined a movement or group. We feel at home in the way God is praised in our group. For us, heaven has opened here and

here we have experienced something of God's mysterious closeness. God continues to guide us in our becoming. He continually walks with us on a path of renewal of the heart, as individuals and as communities. He challenges our assumptions and prejudices.

A charismatic person comes to a community that celebrates a fixed liturgy. A voice reels off in their mind, saying: This is all stiff and empty, the Holy Spirit has no room here. A Protestant Christian comes to an Orthodox service and experiences how the Orthodox Christians kiss the icons with tenderness. A voice interferes in his thoughts: it is forbidden to glorify God in images. A Catholic attends a Protestant service and sorely misses the Eucharist. A voice speaks within him: this is not a complete church service; the most important thing is missing...

At first, we reject the unknown. Historical conventions and old prejudices are like yardsticks in our hands, keeping us in the role of detached observers.

■ Discoveries

Wherever we abandon this role and engage with one another in a concrete way on our path of togetherness, something shines forth from *the "riches of glory"* that God has given us and continues to give us (Ephesians 1:18). We recognize how many aspects in our spiritualities we have in common, even if they are presented and weighed differently.

God has chosen communities to hallow His name. God desires His people to worship Him. Those who worship look to God and, through Him, to the world. In worship, we are brought to the presence of God. Communities shaped by the Orthodox Church pay particular attention to the holiness of God. The awe that permeates their spirituality is healing for our society, where often nothing is sacred anymore.

Movements that have emerged from or are inspired by the charismatic renewal draw us to worshipping God in the Holy Spirit. The newly created songs open our hearts for God's acting at present. In joint worship, a space is created for listening to the prophetic words of the Holy Spirit.

God has chosen communities to trust in the power of His Word. God desires that His people seek and find Him in His Word. Every movement among us has come into being because we have been touched by the Word of God. Various words of the Gospel are the birth words of our communities. ...

Each one ... lives daily from the Gospel ... we are all called to be witnesses of our hope. Our society with all its flood of words hungers for words that are full of life.

God has chosen communities to live in mutual love. Our society longs for healing places where communal life can flourish. Loneliness, broken relationships and an inability to reconcile are diminishing the zest for life in our countries. All our movements ... should be like a seed of love, where reconciliation is practiced and God's love can be experienced in a concrete way. We are questioned on how we deal with conflicts, how we live our differences. Some communities open their homes for seekers and those wounded in relationships so that they can share in community life and find healing.

God has chosen communities to turn to the poor and needy. God desires that all his people find Him in the poor. *"Whatever you did for one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me,"* says Jesus Christ¹⁶⁶. Our society, which is dominated by consumerism and profit-seeking, pushes the poor to the margins. Some of us care in a special way for the elderly, the homeless, drug addicts, and children. They and other communities open our eyes to the poor in Europe and

¹⁶⁶ See Matthew 25:40.

to Europe's mission in Asia and Africa. Some members of our communities live together with people who suffer from hunger, poverty and AIDS, and bring hope through their presence.

God has chosen communities to celebrate Christ's devotion in bread and wine. God desires that His people recognize his devoted love in the breaking of bread. Since their founding, many communities have been deeply touched by the mystery of the Eucharist or the Holy Supper. In the breaking of bread, we encounter the risen Christ. He shares his life with us; in Him we are one. In our society, we have a deep longing for devotion and at the same time fear of losing our identity in the process. Jesus Christ ... entices us to take the risk of love: *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15:13) Some of us have discovered the deep, reconciling power of Holy Communion, especially in times of crisis within our own community.

God has chosen communities to give space to His presence. Many baptized people in European countries have lost access to churches, are longing for meaning in life, but do no longer know where to seek. God has awakened places in communities where living spirituality is celebrated. Many communities open their prayer times to other people.

They provide a space where others can perceive God's quiet presence and find their own prayer. Like a place of spiritual renewal for the Church, some movements see their calling precisely in prayer. This is only a small sketch of the richness of spiritualities that God has given to the movements.

■ Learning community

We are places of God's presence, signs of his love in the world — but all this is fragmentary, since we know our own guilt and vulnerability.

We are and remain learning communities. In a debate with a woman about the right place of worship, Jesus teaches that it is not a specific place connected with right worship, but *“those who worship God in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:24).

Gifted with the Spirit of life through Jesus, we are led into truth. Jesus asks the woman in the Gospel about her husband. Jesus leads her into the truth about her relationships with men. Spirituality does not separate us from the reality of our lives but is rooted in the depths of our lives. The Spirit of God reveals sin, brings clarity, and opens the way to truth. True spirituality is rooted in the reality of life.

We do not need to uphold a holy image before God and before one another. Our longing, our poverty, even our sinfulness are the places where God likes to build, create and work. When we as communities do no longer want to appear to be more than we are, then God’s Spirit can fill all the space and shape His togetherness among us.

If we become true to our own spirituality and can recognize the richness of other movements, then we sense that we belong together in our diversity. *“And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor, glory and power, forever and ever.”* (Revelation 5:13) The seer John sees into the heaven of God: he sees the church of all peoples and nations, from all tribes and languages, gathered before the throne of God.

They sing the new song. The Lamb — a symbol of the crucified and risen Christ — has opened the book of history. Only He could open the seven seals that concealed the contents of the book.

History is in the hands of Jesus Christ, including European history. It is up to us to worship the Lamb together. And those who worship the Lamb lay down their own crowns of power and vanity. All praise and

all power belong to the one who gave Himself away in love, without violence. With His life, He opened the way of salvation and reconciliation for the world and for Europe through His devotion.

Europe has often been a source of violence and destruction. Let us remember the history of the two world wars and the Shoah. There would be no healing of Europe's history, if there was no forgiveness for guilt. The sacrifice of the Lamb reaches into the deepest darkness of European history.

Let us sing the new song with our different spiritualities and contribute to European society with our diverse gifts. Let us work together to make Europe a place of God's kindness.

Understanding Spiritual Richness – The inner and outer Aspects of our Spiritualities

Congress „Together on the Way,“ Stuttgart, May 10-11, 2007

LOTHAR PENNERS

In the prologue to the Gospel of John, we read: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Of His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only one who is God and rests at the heart of the Father has brought us the message.”* (John 1:14, 16, 17)

■ **To understand Christian spiritualities is to understand: Jesus Christ is the source; spiritualities are merely vessels.**

During these days, we are once again able to share spiritual riches with one another. But he can only be considered as: *“From his fullness we have all received.”* Every gift of grace participates in the fullness of the messianic spirit of Christ. Jesus is the source; spiritualities are merely vessels that receive the living water of God and the Lamb and are allowed to pass it on, both inwardly and outwardly. *“Jesus Christ is the Word in the flesh, the sun in the cloud, the light in the fire, the honey in the wax, the candle in the lantern.”* (BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX)

Jesus is the source, spiritualities are the vessels which do not work in a mechanical way; rather: *“Whoever believes in me, rivers of living water will flow from within him”* (John 7:38). Within us flows a source that is greater than ourselves and seeks a way to become effective and fruitful.

Every spirituality has an inner and an outer side; it has its own gift of grace and develops an original style, especially in their own typical forms of life.

SR. ANNA-MARIA has just shown us a spectrum of effective gifts of grace among us. As the people of God, who know that we are called to unity, we are not only made up of individuals, but also of families of faith, each with their own styles and traditions. Together we set out to respond to the God of life and history, in this hour of faith and of our continent.

We often experience the gifts of grace as enriching, but sometimes find the ways of life unfamiliar, if not incomprehensible and cumbersome.

I would like to add another aspect to the aforementioned "changes of heart" and "discoveries" (in line with the spirit of our learning community) and say that every spirituality has an inner and an outer side. Encountering another spiritual group is like encountering an unknown person: they come as they are, in their unmistakable appearance, which reveals something to the outside world. In the behavior of another person, I encounter - in a communicative exterior - an unmistakable "you" with its originality and inner life.

It is similar when encountering other spiritual groups: we sense communicative life, but we also encounter concrete forms of life: every spirituality has an inner and an outer side; they relate to each other like "spirit" and "form."

Our journey together invites us to recognize the original gift of grace in the forms of life and in its tendency towards original embodiment.

For concrete encounters, however, the following may generally apply: The spiritual vitality of a particular community, like original life in general, can usually be experienced as enriching, especially when we ourselves are "alive" and therefore receptive to life that commu-

nicates itself to us and, depending on its power and originality, has a contagious effect.

Whereas the forms, the concrete expressions of life, sometimes seem unfamiliar, strange, perhaps even unwieldy, if not incomprehensible. Our perception of certain ways of life may sometimes even lead to a reaction: We would never do that. According to our understanding of being Christian, we would prefer a different practice.

We are already familiar with such reactions from the different characteristics of our denominations: the more tradition-steeped world of Orthodoxy; the sometimes strongly pronounced legal and organizational obligations within the Catholic Church; and the ideal of Protestant Christianity to leave as much as possible to the presence of the Spirit and to grant maximum freedom.

To what has always been given we must add: our newer spiritual communities and movements also have their characteristic ways of life, which are not always easily accessible from the outset:

Let us take the example of speaking in tongues in the charismatic movement; the strikingly strong willingness to follow some founding persons; sometimes provocative ways of (re)deciding on faith in evangelization; some forms of public proclamation; the faithful reproduction of Marian chapel, as is the case in the *Schoenstatt Movement*, and much more.

■ **Overall, ways of life are an expression, a means and a protection of a spiritual and mental attitude.**

But first let us hear a word that breaks a lance for “well-fitting,” mature ways of life in the human and Christian spheres.

“*What is a person without the form that shapes him... and yet makes him supple, free from all uncertainty, free from himself... What is he without that? What is he without the way of*

life he has chosen for his life and into which he pours his life so that it becomes the soul of this form and the form becomes the expression of his soul; not a foreign form, but one given from within and freely chosen ...

Whoever breaks this form ... decays while still alive into something expressionless and barren, is dry wood of which the Gospel says it will be collected and burned. However, to live in its original form, it must have been recognized. "One must have an eye of the soul that is able to perceive the forms of existence with reverence." (HANS URS VON BALTHASAR)

There are both aesthetic forms and forms of life that seem to fit like a glove. After just having a few bars of music in our ears, why do we have the feeling: This can only be Mozart! Probably because spiritual vibration has been adequately translated into musicality — and not just selectively, but in the sense of an unmistakable style.

Forms of life are important, but they are of secondary importance to the spirit and the gifts of grace.

Let us explore the relationship between spirit and form, between inner and outer, for a moment! To do this, I would like to refer to a formula that I picked up years ago from FATHER KENTENICH, the founder of *the Schoenstatt Movement*. FATHER KENTENICH believes that the way of life is the expression, means and protection of a corresponding spiritual and mental attitude. ... Here is an example: someone raises their hands in praise, and the attitude of letting God be great comes out in the raising of the hands and, in fact, comes back to himself. ... we humans (are) beings of body and soul ... The body is the primal action and the elementary expression of the soul.

But form is also a way. Religious feelings may often not yet be fully awakened or strong. Singing along in praise is also a way of finding one's way into the attitude.

Likewise, forms are a certain protection, as we all know. Observing prayer times, a certain order in religious life, can cause us to pray at all.

■ **Where the Holy Spirit and his love shine through our ways of life, the beauty of Christianity emerges, allowing the body of Christ to shine in the many trivialities of a superficial everyday culture.**

In our togetherness, it is now important that we learn to read and understand different forms of life in their expressive character. *“One would need to have the eye of the soul...”* is what the text just said. It is precisely in this context that SAINT-EXUPÉRY’S words apply: *“One sees clearly only with the heart...”*

Some forms only reveal themselves to us in a certain fraternal sympathy. And it is a gift that we have been able to experience this among ourselves many times in recent years. Fraternal sympathy, which perceives the living origin and source of richness in forms, senses the original spirit, the original gift of the Spirit, in forms. ...

The richness we learn to share with one another is also a richness of forms. This does not rule out a certain degree of incomprehensibility in individual cases. But with our richness of forms, which we can observe in its entirety, we are given many opportunities for inner growth and for bearing witness to the outside world. The newly developed ways of life, which have been “invented” beyond denominational traditions, also represent, to a certain extent, an adaptation to changed circumstances beyond the traditional forms existing in our denominations.

When we come together here as newer communities and movements, ... we may ... recognize a certain commonality beyond specific individual expressions of life. We all probably agree ...: Combine spirit and form in such a way that spirit and life are always decisive over law and organization. (FR. JOSEPH KENTENICH)

When I look around here, it seems to me that this applies to all of us as a matter of course. This is also because it expresses nothing other than the spirit of the Gospel or the spirit of the New Testament. It reflects the sovereignty of Jesus, who melted together the many individual precepts of the Mosaic Law to continue the history of the covenant: *"It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh is of no avail..."* (John 6:63). *"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."* (John 4:24).

... Where the Holy Spirit, his love shines from our ways of life, the divine inside within an often-mundane outside, there arises that beauty of Christianity which allows the body of Christ to shine in the many trivialities of the leveling culture of our mass societies. Ultimately, this reflects something of the Incarnation, that is the becoming flesh of Jesus Christ himself from the Virgin MARY, who was the receptive vessel and human instrument of His incarnation. The formation of the Christian spirit, properly understood, may participate in the mystery of the Incarnation.

Let us give thanks during these days for the richness of life and for the opportunity to learn to understand our established ways of life more deeply. In the joy about God gathering His people into a living interior that becomes fruitful in a manifold witness to the outside world.

The cry of abandonment by God

Europe Day, Stuttgart, May 12, 2007, presented by BRUNA TOMASI

CHIARA LUBICH

(...) Some great mystics of past centuries, but also theologians of various churches in recent decades, have drawn the attention of Christianity to Jesus' abandonment on the cross.

The Evangelical Lutheran theologian HERMANN BEZZEL writes: *"This abandonment by God (...) has transformed the misery of my distance from God into joy: the world has been reconciled with God, the foreign land has become home, the desert has become a green valley, the distance from God has become closeness to God."*¹⁶⁷

I would like to share this cry of abandonment by God with all of you today. Wasn't there such deep darkness over Jesus at the ninth hour that it surpasses all our ideas of darkness?

Are not all those who are hungry, desperate, sad and disappointed similar like Him?

Is His image not recognizable in every painful separation between sisters and brothers, between churches, between parts of humanity that face each other in ideologically hardened fronts? Is not the figure of Jesus, who – in the words of Paul – became "sin" for us, revealed in many of humanity's wounds?

Each one of us must suffer pains in our lives that are a little bit like those of Jesus: Who does not feel somehow separated from God when darkness descends upon the soul? Who has not experienced doubts, fears and temptations similar like those of Jesus, who doubted, was

¹⁶⁷ HERMANN BEZZEL, *Die Worte am Kreuz (The Words on the Cross)*, Ernst Franz Publishing House, Metzingen 1967.

confused, and asked the question "Why?" on the cross? When we experience such suffering, such pain, it is important to remember Him who made all this His own: pain and suffering are, as it were, a form of His presence, a sharing in His pain. Let us do as Jesus did, who did not allow Himself to be blocked by pain, but added the words to that cry: *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"* (Luke 23:26).

Like him, we too can go through the pain and overcome the trial by saying: "In this, forsaken Jesus, I show you my love, I love You, this pain reminds me of You, it is an expression of You, it is Your face."

When we have taken this inner step and in the next moment love the brother or sister next to us and do what God wants us to do, we will in most cases experience how pain is transformed into joy, in a kind of divine alchemy. Through love for the forsaken Jesus, the gifts of his Spirit will blossom in us.

Thus, for us too, the night will be a passage to the light of the resurrection that will enlighten us. A new culture, a culture of community, will emerge. (...)

(...) Jesus in his abandonment, the crucified one of today, radiates the light of the risen one and makes us generous in sharing our gifts.

In 2004, we took a step towards greater fraternity – among ourselves and among all people. Now it is time to take a step deeper: love for Jesus crucified and forsaken. In this way, we can respond to the cry of humanity today and, mindful of his "cry" through which He redeemed the world, create the family around us that the world is waiting for.

Love as the Key to Becoming One

MARTIN STEINBEREITHNER

Ecumenical Church Congress, Munich, May 12-16, 2010

„Jonathan loved David as his own life“ (1 Samuel 18:1)

David has just saved Israel from disgrace by slaying the Philistine, and his name is on everyone's lips. The king himself wants to see him and decides to give him a position in the royal house: David has made it; his success is being celebrated by all. Jonathan, the king's son and heir to the throne, would have every reason to be jealous, because now this rising star is coming to the royals, and who knows where his deeds will lead him. But far from it: Jonathan takes David into his heart and "loves him as his own life". Was it David's charisma that also captivated Jonathan? Was it his rough, youthful manner that impressed him? Or was the Spirit of God himself at work to unite the hearts of these two? We do not know, we can only guess. ... but the relationship between these two develops into a proverbial friendship.

Allow me to reflect a little on this friendship with you, because I believe we can learn a great deal from it for our own relationships and for the unity of churches and movements.

David and Jonathan come from two different families; one insignificant but chosen by God, the other powerful but rejected by God because of Saul's disobedience. Everything is set up for conflict, jealousy and hatred to flare up between these two houses. In fact, Saul soon realizes that David is "undermining" him and that the hearts of the people are turning to David, so he decides to kill him. Jonathan could agree, or at least look away when his potential rival is removed; but no, he intercedes for David: *"Why should you sin now and shed innocent blood by killing David without cause?"*

Saul listened to Jonathan and swore: *"As the Lord lives, David shall not be put to death"* (1 Samuel 19:6). But soon Saul hardens his heart again and threatens David. Once more, Jonathan intervenes, knowing that he may incur his father's wrath. Indeed, his father was angry and threw a spear at him (1 Samuel 20:33). But Jonathan went and warned his friend David, and the two strengthened their covenant.

The two meet a third time: now there is open warfare between David and Saul, and the latter has put a price on his head. David must hide and Jonathan seeks him out: *"He strengthened David's trust in God."*

He said to him: *"Do not be afraid; my father Saul will not get his hands on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."* (1 Samuel 23:16-17) In other words, Jonathan encourages David in his calling, even though it puts himself in danger.

What can motivate a person to be so selfless? Why is Jonathan not concerned about his own position but about that of his friend? Scripture tells us: because he loved David *"as his own life"*. The covenant of love between the two gives Jonathan the strength not to consider his own position as a thief, but to humble himself and esteem the other higher than himself. In this way, he helps David to find his calling and to become who he is meant to be before God. But at what cost? It costs his relationship with his biological father and, ultimately, his life.

When we speak of the covenant of love, I hope we do not only think of it in moments like those in the ice rink or the Hanns-Martin-Schleyer Hall, because it is sometimes easy to do so in the spotlight and with a thousand others around. But the covenant of love, which is meant to lead to unity, must and will cost us something.

First: it is easier to support a brother or sister as long as they are weak and we are strong; if our work bears fruit, we are happy to share some of that fruit with others from time to time. But what if the work of

the other one suddenly seems to be full of anointing, while we seem to be struggling in vain? Are we still able to love and support the other one just so selflessly? Or does our love grow cold out of sheer jealousy?

Or what happens when not my brother's reputation only is attacked, but my own good name is endangered as soon as I stand up for my brother? Does the covenant of love still hold?

I think many of us passed the first test well when our brother ROLAND WERNER¹⁶⁸ came under fire and many stood by his side. But there will be other opportunities.

"Love as the key to becoming one": it is clear, the unity of the churches requires the theological work of commissions and committees. However, I do not believe that visible unity will come about through them alone. I dare say that the altar fellowship of our churches depends on the martyrdom fellowship of our brothers and sisters. Are we prepared to bear witness, together with one another and for one another, if necessary, with our lives?

There are many examples of men and women who valued friendship with other Christians more than their reputation: in the 1970s, DAVID DU PLESSIS, a Pentecostal from South Africa, traveled to Rome to meet PAUL VI. About fifteen years ago, CHARLES COLSON, former assistant to RICHARD NIXON and founder of *Prison Fellowship*, initiated the signing of the declaration "Catholics and Evangelicals Together" — his Catholic friend RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS had convinced him that cooperation with Catholics was possible. FATHER BLAHNITZY, founder of the *Oasis Movement* in Poland, was known for inviting *Campus for Christ* staff¹⁶⁹ to

¹⁶⁸ PROF. DR. ROLAND WERNER, linguist, evangelical theologian, co-founder and leader of *the Jesus Community* (1981-2013), leader of the ecumenical community *Christus-Treff* (CT) in Marburg, Jerusalem, and Berlin; Secretary General of the YMCA Association in Germany (2011-2015).

¹⁶⁹ CAMPUS FOR CHRIST is a non-denominational missionary movement. It is a member of Campus Crusade for Christ International (CCCI, now CRU). The European branch is called Agape Europe. CCCI was founded in 1951 at the University of California, Los

train leaders of his Catholic movement in the years before the fall of the Berlin Wall... the list is endless. All these people have in common that through personal friendship they were able to overcome their prejudices and build bridges to brothers and sisters of other denominations. And in all cases, they were resented by their own churches, slandered, shunned, and ostracized.

As we continue reading in the first and second book of Samuel, we see that David is deeply affected by Jonathan's death. He even seeks out a surviving relative and honors him by bringing him to his house. In doing so, he not only honors Jonathan's memory, but also teaches his own children and friends to honor Jonathan's children and grandchildren. The friendship with Jonathan was a covenant that was to be passed on to future generations. Likewise, our ecumenical friendships must not stop with us: what HELMUT and CHIARA began must continue and multiply with us and our "children".

We are all aware of the political and spiritual context in which this Church Congress is taking place. Our churches in Germany, indeed in Europe, are going through a period of great purification and of challenge. Especially when sin and misconduct become apparent, it is advisable (according to good PR principles) to distance us from others, so that we too, do not fall into disrepute. But the Bible teaches us different principles: *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity"* (Proverbs 17:17); *"Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A threefold cord is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:12). The covenant of love to which God invites us is not simply a political alliance that helps us to advance our cause more efficiently. It is a relationship that endures even when our brothers and sisters have messed up and have no one to remain loyal to them.

Angeles, USA, by businessman BILL BRIGHT. Its stated goal is to win people for a life with God through word and deed.

„Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own life. He took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David“ (1 Samuel 18:4). I love this image: Jonathan takes off his robe and puts it on David: what is mine is yours. My spiritual goods, my possessions, my relationships and my reputation — all of this is at your disposal. I love you as I love my own life, and our covenant may cost me everything, even my „last shirt“. May God enable us for such deep love and give us the grace to remain in this love. So unity can become possible. Amen.

Building on a Secure Foundation – the Christian Faith in Europe

Together for Europe, Brussels, May 12, 2012

THOMAS RÖMER

Europe is a beautiful continent. I enjoy living as a European and I am glad that we can work together for a humane Europe where we live together in peace.

1. As Christian communities and movements we live from an inspiration, from the Gospel, as Jesus shows us. His words and His life fascinate us and give us a foundation on which we can build our life together.

Before us, many people in Europe have lived according to the Christian faith. BENEDICT OF NURSIA, FRANCIS OF ASSISI, ELIZABETH OF THURINGIA, and many others. Their examples encourage us. They trusted in Jesus Christ and lived according to the Gospel, which was brought to Europe from Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. Throughout Europe's eventful history, they have shown us a community and a "culture of mutuality" which values and respects our fellow human beings. They experienced their own weakness, yet the Gospel encouraged them to act responsibly and in solidarity.

Our aim today is to recall the values of the Gospel and to take a fresh look at them – especially against the backdrop of the current crisis in Europe, which calls for a new determination in thought and action.

The Gospel shows us freedom, mercy and love as the basis of human coexistence.

2. People always found freedom in Jesus. That fascinates us. He did not judge people according to their origin or ancestry or according to what they had - or had not - done. He did not write off even those who had become guilty. He granted them forgiveness of their sins and thus gave them a reconciled future. Reconciliation does not cover up the past, but brings it to light, especially injustice, which is brought to light and spoken about. Through forgiveness, the disastrous past loses its power to poison the present and the future. To live together in freedom today, we all need the willingness to forgive others, the willingness to reconcile. Forgiveness creates a new togetherness, a togetherness that is literally redeemed from the "structures of sin", of evil, of all culpable entanglements. This applies to individuals, families, cities and to the coexistence of states and nations too. Reconciliation makes us free for one another, free also to share our goods. This freedom is the basis for human coexistence, a freedom that comes from forgiveness.

3. This coexistence should be determined by mercy. Jesus says: *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matthew 5:7) Jesus lives this way. He cares for the weak, the sick, the poor, and the children. He takes the needs of his fellow human beings to heart and cares for them.

We want mercy to determine our culture and our coexistence, including European politics and economics. Mercy should also shape the way we deal with money. Then society will not revolve around money, but will focus on our fellow human beings, and money can be what it is meant to be: a gift. The needs of our fellow human beings should touch our hearts and move us to help. We are committed to this – in all our limitations, but with the confidence that great things can grow from modest beginnings.

4. Jesus says, *“Love one another as I have loved you.”*¹⁷⁰ He calls this the new commandment. We want to live by this. We want to treat our fellow human beings with respect and sympathy. But love is even more than that. Love is the fulfillment and meaning of all commandments, especially the Ten Commandments of God. The churches in Europe have always reminded us of this. They are part of Europe’s cultural heritage. Love is more than a feeling; it is very concrete; it consists of deeds.

- To love means to honor and respect the generation before us.¹⁷¹
- To love means to promote and protect life, to say yes to life in every phase of its development and not to kill.¹⁷²
- To love means to love one’s spouse and remain faithful to him or her.¹⁷³
- Love means respecting the property of others. It means using your own money and assets wisely so that they help others.¹⁷⁴
- Love means honoring the truth, not lying to or slandering others, but speaking well of them.¹⁷⁵

5. Jesus lives this concrete love. He is the source from which we can draw freedom, mercy and love. On the night before his death on the cross, he tells his friends what his death means. He says: This is happening *“for you”*¹⁷⁶. It is an expression of God’s love for us human beings. His death brings this love into the God-forsakenness of human beings. Where the love of Jesus arrives and people open themselves to Him, He gives forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy and freedom.

¹⁷⁰ See John 13:34 and John 15:12-13, 17.

¹⁷¹ *Honor your father and mother.* (Exodus 20:12).

¹⁷² *You shall not murder.* (Exodus 20:13).

¹⁷³ *You shall not commit adultery.* (Exodus 20:14).

¹⁷⁴ *You shall not steal.* (Exodus 20:15).

¹⁷⁵ *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.* (Exodus 20:16).

¹⁷⁶ See Luke 22:19-20.

This love has even conquered death. This is the Gospel that Europe has heard since the time of the Apostles: Jesus Christ is risen. We want to live with Him — in the heart of Europe — and listen to His words and act upon them. The culture of life should guide us; freedom, mercy and love should shape our lives in Europe. That is what we stand for. *Together for Europe* — that is the invitation to live with the Gospel of Jesus and a hope: that we can build our common life in Europe on the foundation of these Christian values.

Together for Europe: Encounter. Reconciliation. Future.

Our message, Munich, July 2, 2016

■ There is no alternative to Togetherness

“United in diversity.” This European hope is more relevant today than ever. Europe must not become a “fortress” and erect new borders to separate people from one another. There is no alternative to living together. Living together in reconciled diversity is possible.

■ The Gospel – a source of hope

Jesus Christ prayed for unity and gave His life for it. This is what the Gospel tells us, which has been a formative force for culture in Europe for 2000 years. Jesus Christ teaches us boundless love for all people. He shows us the way of mercy and reconciliation: we can ask for forgiveness and forgive one another. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a powerful source from which we can draw hope for the future.

■ Europe – a culture of respect and appreciation

The terrible experiences of two World wars have taught us that peace is a precious gift that we must preserve. Our future should be shaped by a culture of respect and appreciation for others, including foreigners.

■ Unity is possible – overcoming divisions

We ask all Christians to overcome divisions, especially those in responsible positions in the churches. Divisions have caused suffering, violence and injustice and have diminished the credibility of the Gospel. As Christians, we want to be reconciled with one another and live in full communion.

■ Our commitment

- **We live** by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and bear witness to it in word and deed.
- **We walk** the path of reconciliation and help our communities, churches, peoples and cultures to live „united in diversity“.
- **We treat** people of other worldviews and religions with respect and seek open dialogue.
- **We are** committed to promoting humanity and peace in the world.
- **We have** a vision of togetherness in Europe that is stronger than any fear or selfishness.
- **We trust** in the Holy Spirit, who constantly renews and enlivens the world.

Which Europe do I say yes to?

Meeting of Supporting Committees, Castel Gandolfo, November 11-12, 2016

SR. NICOLE GROCHOWINA

I say “yes” to a Europe that remembers and that allows itself to be inspired by its memories to shape its future in a constructive and reconciled way.

A Europe that remembers – what does that mean? For me, this has three levels. Firstly, it means remembering times and circumstances when the European dream of togetherness was not only alive, but also clearly recognized and understood as necessary.

Secondly, it means a Europe remembering how disastrous it is when this very coexistence is abandoned and an entire continent spiral out of control, because then conflicts lead to devastating wars.

And thirdly, it is about a Europe remembering that the dream of togetherness lay in ruins amidst of this collapse, this downfall, this thousandfold death, but at the same time could be revived several times. I believe it could be revived, because it is so deeply ingrained in Europe’s destiny – so deeply that today we are all guilty if we ignore clumsy actions on our continent, fueled by nationalism and hatred, that seek to undermine this dream once again.

What do these three points mean in detail? Let us have a look at history: around the year 1500, central Europe in particular looked like a patchwork quilt, with some 350 small and medium-sized territories jostling for position. This resulted in minor and major armed conflicts. The imperial reform of 1495 changed this. Not only was a supreme court introduced, but the individual territories also developed a form of statehood that sought to resolve conflicts not through war, but through

a legally secure system of appeal. This ensured stability. And even more happened: stability in the empire also meant that trade routes could be reestablished or strengthened now. The same applied to economic relations; cities now exported expensive cloth, regions distinguished themselves in ore mining, and a trade network and, to a lesser extent, a postal network now crisscrossed the Old Empire.

At the same time, talk of freedom spread throughout the empire. This talk was based on the insight that defeating this unwieldy Old Empire with its 350 princes, counts, and dukes could only succeed if there were few internal conflicts and the empire spoke with one voice. This meant: the territories and the emperor of the empire had to come together if this was to succeed – and the territories had to maintain peace among themselves and increasingly settle their conflicts in court, if they wanted to preserve peace and defend themselves against attacks from outside.

It is important to me that Europe remembers this early modern heritage, because the Old Empire made an important attempt to maintain and live unity in a large part of Europe. “Negotiating” in a conciliatory atmosphere for the sake of freedom and peace was the watchword of the time. It was, therefore, a question of a balance that was supported by cooperation – and that was only seriously disrupted when it was terminated by one or more sides; in other words: when several states no longer wanted to participate in this policy of negotiation.

The war during the Reformation era and the Thirty Years’ War, which began in 1618 and spread across Europe, showed how quickly this could lead to imbalance and dramatic consequences. But today, Europe should remember this policy of negotiation for the sake of internal and external freedom.

This brings me to the second point, which has already been hinted at: the balance based on negotiation was and is fragile, was and is brittle, and needed and needs to be nurtured. This care includes

remembrance, which is aware of the negotiations, but at the same time recognizes that any imbalance must be identified at an early stage and then be rebalanced, if the dream of a united Europe is to live and breathe, and if the freedom that has been a unifying force throughout European history, is to be preserved.

Memory teaches us that it becomes fragile when individual, territorial, and today's more national interests are brought to the fore; when the efforts of negotiation and reconciliation are abandoned and the idea of one's own greatness takes over. This is precisely what ultimately brought down the Old Empire and necessitated a reorganization of large parts of Europe at the beginning of the 19th century, because at that time, the national shirt was suddenly closer than the European suit. At that time, when NAPOLEON swept through Europe and disrupted the fragile coexistence of European states, a large part of the European idea of negotiation died, because it can only counter growing national and nationalist strength if there is unity.

The memory of the fragility of the European house, which thrives on compromise, reconciliation and negotiation, must therefore be nurtured in a way that does not paralyze us. Rather, it should serve as a reminder not to slacken in our efforts to live together on this continent.

And finally, I say "yes" to a Europe that also remembers the miracle that goes hand in hand with the dream of unity and its fragility. The miracle is that no - however devastating - war has been able to destroy this dream throughout the ages. Time and again in history, Europe has reached a point where the foundations for joint action have been laid anew. When, after the religious war of 1546/7, EMPEROR CHARLES V wanted to consolidate all power in his hands at the Diet of Augsburg in 1548, he could not succeed even though the Protestant troops had been destroyed. Therefore, one message of these post-war conflicts was: such power should not exist. In the end, this even led to an uprising of the princes, which culminated in the Peace of

Augsburg in 1555, where it was legally established that the Catholic Church and the Protestant party should now be recognized under imperial law. Negotiations on a legal basis were, therefore, back on the agenda, even if this did not last and wars broke out again in the following years.

And it was precisely then that the miracle of restoration was repeated. This is represented by the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which ended a 30-year war in Europe. Now the Reformed Church was also recognized under imperial law, European guarantor powers helped to maintain peace, freedom of property and conscience were restored and protected, compensation was agreed upon, and a peace treaty between all parties was made possible. What now began was the longest period of peace Europe had ever experienced. The negotiations for freedom and peace, the struggle for balance, and the realization that the field of Europe could only be cultivated together and that the farmers needed reconciliation lasted a long time.

The last devastating wars to date, which originated in Europe and Germany and raged not only across the European continent but across the entire world, were the First and Second World Wars. Anyone who still wanted to believe in the European idea of negotiation, freedom and balance could only be a dreamer after that. And yet this dream proved to be "indestructible", as demonstrated not least by the reconstruction of Germany and its integration into the European confederation of states. That was and is a real miracle.

And so, the realization remains: in the end, Europe can only function through cooperation that grows out of the power of reconciliation and memory, and thus out of the knowledge that we in Europe are all dependent on each other. This is always true. Nationalist rhetoric and war, driven by nationalist fantasies of omnipotence, may slow this

down. But they will not prevail – even if they lay the entire continent in ruins; Europe has this reminder.

And this memory comes with this mission: those who remember must trust in negotiation for the sake of freedom and balance and thus take Europe's service to unity and reconciliation seriously, here on the continent and beyond. There is no other way. Indecision on this issue strengthens unhealthy nationalism. And that is why it is important to clearly call all to order who jeopardize the balance and thus fail to fulfill their responsibility for the continent.

But remembering means even more than that because: European history is also a history of guilt, expressed not only in wars but also in forgetting. Forgotten are countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina e.g., which lie directly on the EU border today; they were the scene of war and now receive little help from Europe. Countries such as Bosnia remind Europe to keep the memory of guilt alive and to derive a path of reconciliation and assistance from it. Europe's treatment of Africa in history and the present is therefore a second trail that should be followed under these circumstances – and of course further examples could be cited.

So, I say „yes“ to a Europe that remembers the dream of negotiation, freedom and balance; and that also remembers the miracle that has repeatedly befallen this continent throughout history, so that after devastating wars, reconciliation has always taken place, and a new beginning has been possible. For me, this shines a light on a promise and a mission for Europe to earn unity and reconciliation through remembrance. I believe that this is precisely why God keeps the memory alive and has repeatedly ensured the miracle of a new beginning. And this memory must and should also include guilt, because the dream of negotiation, freedom and balance must not and should not stop at the borders of Europe.

Europe/the Occident as understood by Father Joseph Kentenich

Meeting of Supporting Committee, Castel Gandolfo, November 11-12, 2016

LOTHAR PENNERS

In view of the situation on our continent after Brexit (and after Munich 2016), we as the *Together for Europe* network are increasingly questioning the role and indeed the significance of Europe. Our perhaps still rather intuitive view would like to see more reflective clarity about the importance of Europe – the Western world – in the current and possibly future world constellation. Admittedly, this is a rather global question, for which, thank God, I do not have to provide an answer, but for which I would like to refer to FATHER KENTENICH, the founder of the *Schoenstatt Movement*, and – I hope – may do so.

Among other things, he offers a kind of basic thesis on the originality and destiny of the European continent. This belongs in the context of his providential search for points of orientation within the framework of universal salvation history against the backdrop of the radical turning point in history in which we find ourselves.

There is a central thesis for this, which can be summarized as follows:

There is such a thing as a – conditional – salvific mission of Europe or the Western world.

In this context (as in general), “salvation history” means that there is a connection between history and salvation, or that “salvation” has a historical dimension; indeed, “salvation” comes “from” history. From a Christian perspective, this means that we humans cannot achieve or be given the wholeness of our humanity without the incarnation,

death and resurrection of Jesus, even that cannot be separated from His and our historical destiny. This is without prejudice to the fact that the incarnation of the eternal Word and His history points beyond the historical dimension.

The connection between “salvation” and “history” in Judaism can be seen, for example, in the confession of the Psalter: “*You have established a memorial of your wonders*” (Psalm 111:4).

The thesis of a salvific mission of the West ultimately refers to the context of a typology and theology of religions and the question of their respective understanding of salvation.

Regarding Europe and the Western world, it should be noted that we can only speak of a “conditional” mission: God could have chosen a different path. The question of the factual validity of this thesis, therefore, refers us back to history.

FATHER KENTENICH develops his understanding of the role of Europe in four individual theses and an outlook on future perspectives.

I will refer to the individual theses and explain them partly with one or two perspectives on the general discussion. (This is also to avoid the impression that FATHER KENTENICH is promoting a “sole means of salvation” thesis that one only needs to “believe” in).

Thesis 1: Due to the tendency of its peoples towards global trade and world conquest, the West has been given the task of spreading the message of the Gospel.

This aspect can be called the global missionary aspect of the mission.

In this regard, it should simply be noted that FATHER KENTENICH’s observation about Europe’s openness to the world has also been noted by others and linked to the continent’s maritime character (ALBERT MIRGELER) and its continuous proximity to the coast: No other continent has a landmass as fragmented as Europe – in contrast to Africa, Asia, and to

a certain extent the Americas! In this regard, it is also clear that it was no coincidence that ancient Greece with its Aegean islands became the birthplace of the Western mentality and its specific openness to the world.

2nd thesis: This missionary task has overall lagged behind the mediation of the “Western” civilizational “export” of science, economics and technology.

In other words, the West has, in a sense, passed on its secularized achievements — without the biblical faith as the source of a creation-based autonomy of individual cultural sectors.

FATHER KENTENICH’S statement can be meaningfully placed in the context of the debate on secularization in theology and beyond. Years ago, TH. VAN LEEUWEN, World Council of Churches, argued in this direction and put forward the thesis that Western secularism bears a lasting responsibility for having often detached cultures of the non-Western world from their original relationship to transcendence by opening them up to Western-style civilizational progress.

3rd thesis: The West has consistently passed on Christian religiousness in Western forms.

For Catholicism, it means that the Church has largely conveyed itself via the Latin form of the Roman tradition throughout the world.

However, the issue raised here involves more than just the question of liturgical forms. It also concerns questions of ways of thinking, ways of life and forms of government. For this reason, the question may also be relevant — albeit in a less acute form — for Protestant Christianity and its practices regarding evangelization, church structure and church government.

What overall emerges are questions of inculturation and intellectual-spiritual colonialism, indeed of colonialism in general, whose historical balance sheet has probably not yet been drawn up.

4th thesis: Western spirituality is characterized by a specific worldliness in relation to both, the Christian East, and particularly the religions of the Far East.

One could also speak of a more vital connection between nature and grace, the world and God, the finite and the infinite. Expressed in the terminology of (neo-)Platonism and Aristotelianism: of divine primary causality and created secondary causality, of the transparency of the divine in the finiteness of creation.

I would like to make three comments on this in the form of brief, sketchy notes. The first relates to differences in religious art between the Christian West and the Christian East.

Anyone who compares the world of icons with the development of Western painting can gain an initial insight into the differences in mentality: although the human-creature is not absorbed by the divine in the world of icons either, the differentiation in the realm of creature is much greater, especially in so-called religious art. (This remark is not intended to suggest that there have not also been developments in the art of the Christian East that are conditioned by intellectual history ...)

With the second comment, I would like to convey FATHER KENTENICH'S view of the Far Eastern religions in his own words:

"The whole ... depth of this kind of mission (meaning J. KENTENICH'S view of the Western world's mission in the history of salvation – L. P.) will hardly have dawned on us ... Anyone who has had the opportunity to observe the modern world and explore the intellectual currents between the East and the West will find that the Christian West is now on the way to coming to terms with the great classical religions of the

*East. In this context, see the salvation of the salvific history, the Christian mission of the West. What the ancient, classical Asian religions have to say to us is in complete contrast ... to the Christian, Western mission. The Western mission as Christian mission always knows a personal God ... who personally bends down to the human person, while Asian religions, when it comes to the image of God and the image of man, see everything as purely impersonal. And we sense it; we can largely grasp with our hands how these Eastern religions are reaching out to measure themselves against the West ... And when we now ask what we have done so far to do justice to this mission, we can only give one answer: we have ... taken Christianity seriously down to its very roots.*¹⁷⁷

As a third comment, I would like to quote HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, who wants Eastern religiosity to be understood as a relativization of world positivity.

“We must briefly characterize this religiosity (especially of Asian origin – L. P.). As man’s elementary attempt at religion towards God, it is primarily a path of renunciation of the world – for this transitory, temporal, spatial existence, subject to fate, is certainly not God! – a path of deformation to find the infinite absolute in a formless state.

Compared to God, the world is unreality, a descent from eternal unity. In this scheme, the incarnation of God can only mean concession, condensation of God into the many, into the material, to bring the multiplicity back into the One. Not actually and ultimately a synthesis of the One and the many, but a gesture of the One towards the many to bring it home into the One.

¹⁷⁷ See LOTHAR PENNERS, *Pädagogik des Katholischen (Catholic Education)*, p. 240.

*The religious longing to return home to God drowns out all objections and concerns arising from a creaturely ontology; these may be raised in their place; they are not ultimately decisive. Opposing forces: the Bible, Hellas, Rome.*¹⁷⁸

Anyone who delves into the intellectual world of JOSEPH KENTENICH will notice that the founder of the *Schoenstatt Movement* explored the processes of life in their interrelationship between secular and religious ties and how this happens. In doing so, he takes psychological laws into account above all else. In a manner somewhat like the terminology of schools of depth psychology, he formulates some laws of "organic" transmission and transfer. For him, the core problem of religious, orderly worldliness is the question of the development and maturation of a natural and supernatural capacity for love.

I conclude with a forward-looking perspective. FATHER KENTENICH believes he can perceive something like model cases for the two fundamental missions in the history of Europe: evangelization of the world and the presence of God and everything divine in the world. One thinks here of the heyday of European Christianity among various peoples.

Assuming – according to KENTENICH'S option – that in the future there would be no individual cultural carriers for such a task, it could be that a Christian elite – across peoples and cultures – could have the task of forming islands of exemplary lived faith and Christian humanity – with an impact on the environment and the future.

It seems not forbidden to think of our communities and movements in this context!

¹⁷⁸ See HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Maximus Confessor. Cosmic Liturgy*, p. 36.

Which Europe do we say yes to?

Supporters' meeting, Castel Gandolfo, November 11-12, 2016

PAPER BY THE EUROPEAN SUPPORTING COMMITTEE

We say yes to EUROPE ...

■ ... of encounters and dialogue.

Mutual understanding grows out of encounter. This is one of our fundamental experiences in *Together for Europe*. We seek dialogue with everyone. We say yes to Europe that seeks dialogue and chooses the path of negotiation between different interests.

■ ... of reconciliation

After the catastrophe of the world wars, a new Europe emerged from the miracle of reconciliation. But Europe is fragile. The power of reconciliation that we receive from the Christian faith enables the healing of historical wounds and the coexistence of diverse peoples.

■ ... of mercy and humanity

The Christian faith has shaped the history of Europe. It is a cosmopolitan faith. Prayer and work (*ora et labora*) belong together. Humanity and mercy emanate from the crucified and forsaken Jesus Christ and shape the continent. This gives rise to a mission for Europe that is not yet complete.

■ ... of unity in diversity

Unity and diversity are equally important and must be kept in a good balance. We are committed to this unity in diversity for Europe. We advocate a federal organism. We treat different backgrounds and

perspectives with respect and appreciation. In *Together for Europe* charisms work together for unity in diversity. This interaction of charisms serves the unity of the people of God and the unity of Europe.

■ **... without selfishness and divisions**

We are aware of the fears in Europe, including the fear of the unknown. We want to take these fears seriously and at the same time work hard to prevent new divisions and national egoism. We want to promote identity and lead to unity in reconciled diversity.

■ **... of the coexistence of East and West**

Europe stretches from Portugal to the Urals and is therefore larger than the European Union (EU), which is a valuable instrument of peace and coexistence. Particularly in encounters in and with the East, the different developments must be considered.

■ **... with special responsibility for Africa**

Europe has a special relationship with Africa and therefore also a special responsibility. Exemplary relationships and projects encourage greater commitment. We also say yes to openness to migration.

■ **... of intergenerational cooperation**

We want intergenerational cooperation in Europe. This combines proven experience with courageous innovation.

Our Yes to Europe

Supporting committee meeting, Vienna, November 9-11, 2018

GERHARD PROSS

Since its inception 18 years ago, the unity of God's people was the fundamental mission of *Together for Europe*. The second fundamental mission is the social dimension of *Together for Europe*. In view of the current European crisis, this mission faces a new challenge: to live a constructive and sustainable coexistence in Europe amid the diversity of cultures and nations.

■ Unity is possible

*"Unity and diversity are equally fundamental"*¹⁷⁹ said BR. FRANZISKUS at the *Together for Europe* Congress in 2007. PIERO CODA¹⁸⁰ expresses a similar view: *"If God is Trinity, then unity and diversity are not only not contradictory, but equally fundamental."*¹⁸¹

“ From the beginning, we have been guided by an image of unity that explicitly recognizes and affirms the diversity given by God. Uniformity endangers identities and can therefore lead to a breakdown of unity in diversity. This applies to both the political and ecclesiastical spheres.

¹⁷⁹ "Miteinander auf dem Weg" (Together on the Way) ISBN 978-3-00-022045-6, BR. FRANZISKUS JOEST at the TtE Congress 2007 Stuttgart, p. 21.

¹⁸⁰ PIERO CODA, Roman Catholic priest, secretary of the International Theological Commission, professor of systematic theology and former rector of the Sophia Theological Institute in Loppiano (near Florence).

¹⁸¹ PIERO CODA in: Hanspeter Heinz [ed.], *Christian Culture in Europe*, p. 33.

■ Unity in reconciled diversity

Due to the many fractures in the lives of individuals, between churches and between peoples, reconciliation of differences is necessary to achieve a reconciled unity in diversity. This also applies to cultural diversity. Reconciliation instead of condemnation and separation is the order of the day. This opens for the future, because the poison of the past loses its effect. What is different and foreign thus loses its threat and becomes a gift. As reconciled people, we recognize the richness of life in diversity.

In everything, Jesus is the unifying center. He gives us the strength and hope for unity in reconciled diversity, for Jesus Christ has reconciled the world with God.

■ Living together as a prophetic sign

Our *Togetherness in Europe* is lived out in practical terms in our relationships with one another. We set out to visit others. The *Togetherness in Europe* gives rise to new relationships, creates reconciliation and a future. It allows something of God's nature to shine through by creating unity, i.e., it is a prophetic sign.

■ Prayer makes a change

Prayer is part of the mission of *Together for Europe*. We do not want to stop praying for Europe. Prayer changes. It changes us, the atmosphere in our country and in Europe, it changes people's hearts.

■ Our hope and our YES to Europe

We are committed to Europe, because we understand that this is God's mission for us. We say a decisive yes to a Europe of unity and diversity of cultures and nations. A positive image of Europe shines before our eyes. We are committed to a culture of togetherness based on the Christian faith. We express our hope for Europe in our yes.

■ We say yes to Europe of reconciliation.

A new Europe has emerged from the miracle of reconciliation after the catastrophe of the world wars. The power of reconciliation that we receive from the Christian faith enables the healing of historical wounds and a reconciled coexistence of diverse peoples.

■ We say yes to a Europe of unity in diversity.

We recognize diversity as a treasure. Diversity and difference are equally fundamental. It is important to maintain a good balance between both. We rejoice in others and their charisms. This interaction of charisms serves the unity of the people of God and the unity of Europe. We advocate a federal organism in Europe. We respect and value different backgrounds and perspectives.

■ We say yes to Europe of encounter, dialogue and peace.

Mutual understanding grows out of encounter. This is one of our fundamental experiences in *Together for Europe*. We say yes to Europe that seeks dialogue with all and chooses the path of negotiation between different interests. The process of European unification, and thus also of the EU, has brought us 70 years of peace. Whoever emphasizes

too much on national interests will summon the nationalist ghosts of the past and lead Europe to destruction. Who denies nationality also denies diversity and makes the emergence of a European community impossible. We encourage open dialogue for a Europe that lives together in peace.

■ **We say yes to Europe of mercy and humanity.**

The Christian faith has shaped the history of Europe. It is a cosmopolitan faith. Humanity and mercy emanate from Jesus Christ, who was crucified and abandoned, and have shaped the continent. Both are evident in the unconditional “yes to life” and in the “yes to marriage and family”, in the “yes to the poor and needy”.

Europe is more than the Euro, more than the market economy. That is why we are committed to building a Europe based on the Christian-Jewish heritage, with all openness and tolerance for those who think and believe differently. In this way, we strengthen the soul of Europe.

■ **We say yes to a Europe to which God has entrusted a calling throughout history¹⁸²**

The coexistence of heaven and earth, the coexistence of faith and worldly affairs; for in the crucified, heaven and earth meet. In this mission for Europe, we also recognize a responsibility towards Africa and the Middle East.

The living God has entrusted much to our coexistence. Therefore, we want to express our YES to Europe in our movements and in public.

¹⁸² FR. LOTHAR PENNERS at the European Supporting Committee 2016 in Castel Gandolfo with reference to FATHER KENTENICH.

Two reports from trips to Ukraine

WALTER AND ANNEMARIE KRIECHBAUM

When the Supporting committee of *Together for Europe* set out on its journey eastwards, this also led to increasing travel by individual members and groups of *Together for Europe* to Eastern Europe. Of two such trips we report here. One took place in 2017 and went to Lutsk in the Ukraine. The other one in 2019 went to Lviv and Uzhhorod.

■ 2017 Trip to Lutsk

Fourteen friends from Poland came to Munich for the 2016 Co-workers Congress and the subsequent rally at Stachus. They come from various spiritual movements and Christian communities in Poland.

In side meetings during the Congress we sat down with some of them and discussed what next steps could be taken for encounters between German and Polish movements – in line with the theme of the Co-workers Congress, “Encounter – Reconciliation – Future”. Since 2005, numerous relationships and friendships have been developed between us at *the YMCA Munich* and Polish movements through numerous visits at groups to Poland (*Focolare Movement, Schoenstatt Movement, Caritas, Baptists, Catholic priests*). Now we have 2016: a concern intensifies. As Germans and Poles we together want to travel to Ukraine to visit Christians and their communities and movements. We are experiencing how we can find the next steps together by listening to one another and to God’s guidance.

It is becoming clear to us that actively living *Together for Europe* also means crossing borders within Europe and living reconciliation. Eastern Europe is close to our hearts, this vast and diverse cultural area

with its rich history, both in spiritual terms and in terms of the treasure of its many peoples and their traditions.

In November 2016, we as a married couple travel to Ukraine together with six Polish friends, confront the cruel history of World War II, and experience the overwhelming hospitality of our Ukrainian hosts.

The following year, in 2017, we travel to Lutsk and the surrounding area with 15 people from our community in Munich and 20 Polish participants. Ukrainian hosts and friends joined us, including some from the *YMCA Lutsk*.

The rector of the Orthodox Academy, responsible for priest training, invites us to a conference on reconciliation. As a Lutheran pastor, I am asked to give the keynote address on reconciliation. A Greek Catholic woman also speaks. A Roman Catholic brother also contributes. A Lutheran pastor from Ukraine concludes the conference.

The rector's opening words are significant: *"I am truly deeply glad in my heart that we are able to meet in a spirit of unity. It is an opportunity to express our openness. This requires hope and courage."* With this Orthodox rector, we have experienced a crossing of boundaries. Poles and Germans have forgiven one another. We experienced: in Jesus Christ we share hope and courage to take steps towards one another.

Another impressive example: about 200 km inside of Ukraine, we stand on a huge burial ground in the middle of one of the largest battlefields of World War II. We pray and read psalms in three languages. Afterwards, our Polish friends signal to me that, as a Protestant and a German, I should now pray freely for the dead, pray for forgiveness and ask for peace for our peoples and for Europe. This is a surprising gesture for us. Tears of reconciliation flow on all sides.

We discover that ecumenical reconciliation means paying attention to the gifts of others and creating space for them to unfold. Words of reconciliation with forgiveness at their core have opened paths

to one another at numerous moments in encounters in Ukraine and allowed a network of trust to grow.

An Insert

JUDITH KAISER¹⁸³ from *the Esslingen YMCA* was one of the participants on the 2019 trip. Before we continue with ANNEMARIE and WALTER’S reports, her lively contribution gives us a small impression that these visits did not remain “one-day wonders” but continue to have an impact until this day.

“Come to Ukraine!” said a young Ukrainian woman completely unexpectedly, who had come to the 2018 Supporting Committee meeting in Prague together with four other people from Ukraine. “No matter how many want to come, we will make it possible,” she added.

And I thought: WOW! So spontaneous! So direct! So uncomplicated! That was a warm welcome to western Ukraine! I too wanted to go!

And the following year, it happened: in 2019, 15 people from Germany, members of five communities, traveled to Ukraine. And I was one of them. Clueless, but full of anticipation. It was such a formative and valuable time for me. It was especially the people there whom I got to know and who grew dear to my heart. Some of them became friends. Of course, we exchanged contact details at the end.

How good that we did so. Since Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine in 2022, these contacts have been

¹⁸³ JUDITH KAISER, long-time volunteer at the YMCA Esslingen, leader of the weekly prayer for Ukraine (since 2022).

strengthened again, and large prayer campaigns with and for Ukraine could be developed.

It was important to me to have a prayer that is continuous, that would not be time-consuming or binding, but that would reach many people. SR. BEATE SEIDEL from the *Christ Brotherhood community in Selbitz* had the same wish, so after the war began, we started a weekly Zoom prayer meeting together, which we continue to this day. It is especially valuable that some friends from Ukraine join us in prayer as often as possible.

■ Lviv and Uzhhorod 2019

Looking into each other's hearts is what we experience right from the start during an intensive exchange with a large group of the Focolare Movement in Lviv. South of the Carpathian Mountains, we meet numerous people in Christian communities (Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Free Church, Baptist).

Highlights are fraternal exchanges about our spiritual backgrounds, from East and West, participation in church services in the various communities, and a joint ecumenical prayer service in a large Roman Catholic church in Uzhhorod. Sightseeing and historical background help us to understand the lives and histories of our hosts more deeply.

We are impressed by the power of the liturgy and the prayers we witness. The praise of God has a special depth and radiance. The testimonies from the communist era give us a share in the faithfulness and steadfastness of our brothers and sisters.

We feel how the numerous encounters and testimonies, the shared meals, the questions we ask each other, and listening to one another allow mutual appreciation to flourish and trust to grow among us. Relationships grow which remain alive beyond the day.

We are gradually gaining an initial insight into the rich history of Ukraine as well as its current internal difficulties. How much suffering and hardship this country has gone through, and at the same time, what cultural richness characterizes Ukraine in its diversity! We encounter a diverse spiritual life. We are impressed by the network of relationships between priests and pastors, church leaders and those in responsible positions.

Eleven Ukrainian leaders are participating in the 2019 Supporting committee meeting in Ottmaring. We are experiencing how mutual giving and taking is developing between us. This includes discussions with critical and profound questions that brothers and sisters from the Eastern tradition ask us in the West. At the same time, we are able to deepen our experiences with them and among them.

The Covid years made visits almost impossible. But many relationships have continued via Zoom, email and WhatsApp.

The war since February 24, 2022, has affected all of us deeply. But it is precisely here that friendships and the network of relationships have been and continue to be able to provide a great deal of help: regular prayers, numerous aid deliveries, visits here and there, support for refugees from the war who now live among us.”

„ACROSS ALL BORDERS” – Perspectives of our community as *Together for Europe*

Supporting Committee meeting, Ottmaring, November 8, 2019

HERBERT LAUENROTH

The crisis in Europe is – perhaps – the crisis of its borders, whether they be political, social, intellectual or spiritual in nature. Borders have been described as the “paradox of modernity”; borders reveal a reality, but perhaps also the mystery of “*what connects us by separating us,*” as German social scientist MARIANNE GRONEMEYER succinctly puts it.

“What **connects** us by **separating** us”: As a first approximation, I would like to distinguish three ways of understanding this peculiar phenomenon of borders – initially regarding political borders – particularly in the three decades since 1989, the year of the celebrated opening of borders in Europe.

BEYOND ALL BORDERS is intended here as a slogan for the neo-liberal opening of borders since the fall of the Berlin Wall in course with globalization. Here, the “connecting” element dominates, the REMOVAL OF BORDERS as a leveling of all differences in view of the promise of unrestricted freedom of travel, the free movement of goods and its markets.

WITHIN ALL BORDERS refers to the nationalistic closing of borders as a reaction to this. Here, the “divisive” element dominates - DEMARCA-TION as an emphasis on differences. The great promise of freedom is now countered by a growing need for security, and this need is fueled by multiple fears, including the fear of losing one’s own identity and the fear of an uncertain future.

ACROSS/CROSSING ALL BORDERS, on the other hand, stands for the attempt to once again focus on the “divisive-connective” nature

of the border as experienced by border crossers who live in constant transition from here to there. At the same time, the term “a-cross/crossing” deliberately alludes to the Christian symbol of the cross. The crucified and risen Christ reveals the reality of these border crossers and brings the two sides of the border – all opposites – to fruition: *“He united the two parts (Jews and Gentiles) and tore down the dividing wall of hostility through his death. He abolished the law ... to make the two into one new man in his person. He established peace and reconciled both to God in one body through the cross. He killed the enmity in his person.”* (Ephesians 2:14-16)

This border-experience characterizes our European culture. Here, its “soul” reveals itself as an experience of a profound rupture, an existential brokenness, which despite all its drama, is at the same time identity-forming, especially in the Christian tradition.

The French theologian and cultural scientist MICHEL DE CERTEAU speaks of a “*founding rupture*” (“*rupture instauratrice*”), and the German Italian religious philosopher ROMANO GUARDINI¹⁸⁴, himself a European border crosser, speaks of the calling of human beings to “*be a living border*” and to make their home there:

“The meaning of human beings is to be living borders – and to take on and carry through this life of the border. By this he stands in the reality, is free from enchantments of false, one-sided images of God and humanity. ONE GAP: A BREAK TOWARDS BOTH SIDES.” (Emphasis added by me. H.L.)

In my opinion, this calling of human beings to “*be a living border*” is shown with extraordinary clarity in the Emmaus story in the Gospel of Luke. This familiar text has taken on a new radiance for me – espe-

¹⁸⁴ ROMANO GUARDINI (1885-1968), German Italian Roman Catholic priest, philosopher of religion, and theologian, professor at the universities of Breslau, Berlin, Tübingen, and Munich.

cially considering this question about the perspective of our common journey as *Together for Europe*.

The core of the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35) is obvious: Christ reveals himself in the middle, in the break, in the fallow space in between, the no man's land of the disciples entangled in their panicked flight. So, he reveals himself – and this is crucial for our further considerations! – literally ON the border.

The Emmaus story tells the story of all of us in the heart of Europe, at the scenes of internal and external borders. The path that the disciples walk, first alone, then with the risen Lord, tells of the transformation of this border. Just as the notorious death strip of separation, non-relationship, confrontation and indifference on the former German German border becomes a forward-looking “path of life”, so the path of the disciples leads out of confinement, out of the feeling of diffuse, blind fears, into the vastness of a new horizon of experience, a new hope.

Looking at Christ, who appears as a mediator in Luke's Gospel and thereby releases the disciples anew to their missionary task, we can distinguish two phases that are also characteristic of the Weg-Gemeinschaft des *Miteinander für Europa* (Journey Community of *Together for Europe*):

First, we recognized each other anew in Christ. This involved and continues to involve a willingness to receive our own gifts, our own charisma, anew in and from our encounter with others. An admonition from HELMUT NICKLAS in this regard is unforgettable to me: “*Together for Europe stands and falls with the willingness of each person not only to contribute their own gift, but also to receive this gift anew from the others!*” “Friendship” here grows only to the extent that we are willing to allow ourselves to be “alienated” by others again and again.

Today, for us as *Together for Europe*, the most significant moment in the Emmaus story is perhaps when the two disciples come to those

who remained in Jerusalem and – following the example of their Master – step together into the center, into the fracture, the rift of the world, the fracture of Europe, in order to exercise, like Christ, interpretive authority in view of an increasingly confusing history and present. In this way, orientation becomes possible again, granting new perspectives and promises.

For us, therefore, it is a matter of acquiring or practicing what I would like to call the specific EMMAUS COMPETENCE. This somewhat unwieldy term refers to the art of interpreting history, through which the risen Lord reveals himself to the two disciples in the Gospel of Luke: *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27).

Perhaps the cultural mission as *Together for Europe* starts precisely at this point of EMMAUS COMPETENCE: as a new view of the phenomena of our time, as a *“relecture”* of a *“postmodern condition”* (JEAN-FRANCOIS LYOTARD), which is characterized by the decline of the Great Narratives with their fixed images of God, humanity, and the world, and by increasing fragmentation, and has thus become virtually untellable.

In his view of history and the present, Christ once again reveals a broken center that is holy and healing in its brokenness. In this way, he teaches his two disciples, and us in them, the EMMAUS COMPETENCE. The English social philosopher GILLIAN ROSE and her compatriot, the theologian MICHAEL J. BARNES, have found a congenial formulation for this: they speak of *“negotiating the broken middle”*, that is: constantly renegotiating and balancing this center, which manifests itself in the space between cultures, in different narratives and perspectives.

Precisely in its *“brokenness”*, this middle has a special appeal for our late modern age, which – in post-Easter terms – is searching for the *“miracle of the wound”* in its aesthetic sensibilities and deepest religious longings. It therefore sees every break off in the light of what

is to come as a break-open or breakthrough – and, for example, in the much-invoked end of history, always as a new beginning.

“Jesus in the middle” becomes tangible as the figure of this “*broken middle*”, the crossed center, on the border, in the space between his disciples, as that “*pupil in the eye of God*” (according to the bold metaphor with which CHIARA LUBICH seeks to grasp this reality) “*through which God recognizes people, people recognize God*”, and finally we too perceive each other anew — like the disciples in the Emmaus story.

Dear friends! I am happy to leave this impressive metaphor to your further consideration, reflection, deepening and discussion — with the perhaps provocative or simply disconcerting question of whether *Together for Europe* is not precisely like this “pupil” that gives space to the presence of Christ among us — and thus gives Europe new decisive breakthroughs as insights.

From a cultural studies perspective, working *Together for Europe* resembles the so-called “disappearing mediators”, i.e., actors who take a back seat and act selflessly. They are first listeners, receivers and then speakers; first witnesses and then teachers who create spaces, interstitial spaces of encounter, dialogue, mutual acceptance and recognition, indeed spaces of de-hostility.

Incidentally, for prominent visionary leaders of our postmodern culture (such as FREDERIC JAMESON, ÉTIENNE BALIBAR, and SLAVOJ ŽIZEK), these “disappearing mediators” play a key role in shaping a culture that would once again be sustainable.

The author CAMILLE DE TOLEDO also advocates such a dynamic of mediation in last May’s issue of the renowned French magazine LE NOUVEAU MAGAZINE LITTÉRAIRE.¹⁸⁵ He calls for a new cultural project, a “*third*

¹⁸⁵ C. DE TOLEDO, “Le conte des trois Europe”, *Le Nouveau Magazine Littéraire* – 5/2018, 26-28.

narrative” for Europe. It could only be a narrative of the *“passe-frontière,”* the border crosser as translator, a response to the narrowness of the two European narratives — one marked by the internal market, economic and security stabilization, the other by smoldering regional, ethnic-religious conflicts.

In this powerful visionary text, marked by a deep passion for Europe, I find our *Together for Europe* directly addressed and challenged as a prophetic force – by a voice of the post-secular, Enlightenment-skeptical and, in religious terms, increasingly “musical” public; a testimony to which we should pay attention.

“A new political force must emerge, one that draws on a new sensitivity to the spaces between languages, cultures and people and allows it to take effect: a transnational force in Europe, the bearer of a culture that stands for what is to come, a culture of translation that carries the different times and their histories within, their experiences of suffering. Only this force will be able to remind our world of the vision of a comprehensive community. Without this promise, our continent would probably be lost.”

Finally, let us return once more to ROMANO GUARDINI, his image of the human being who lives from the *“mystery of the border”*:

“People of the border: by their very nature, they do not stand on one side or the other. They live in the border area. They experience the unrest of one sphere through the other – just as they are the ones who carry the poles of humanity, its entirety within themselves, and with it the possibility of inner division.”

In my opinion, we as *Together for Europe* must continue to expose ourselves to this creative unease and indeed do so even more intensely. To put it bluntly: perhaps *Together for Europe* is less about “crossing the threshold of hope” (to borrow the highly evocative title of POPE JOHN PAUL II’s book) and more about pausing on the threshold, so to speak, and being guardians of the threshold in this second

phase of our history as *Together for Europe*. In this space, the different European worlds – East and West, Church and world, mysticism and politics, holiness and beauty – could connect with one another and kept open for one another. In this way, spaces could be created in which the mystery, the paradox of the border, what “*connects us by separating us*”, could be experienced again.

Ultimately it is perhaps also about martyrdom, about the willingness to be „crucified” in a certain sense on this threshold of hope, as people — in GUARDINI’S words — who are at home on both sides of the divide, that rupture, that break, as disappearing mediators, witnesses and teachers of EMMAUS COMPETENCE, in the martyrdom of the middle. On the border. ACROSS ALL BORDERS.

„HOPE FOR EUROPE“ – A message from Timișoara

In November 2023, in precarious times for Europe, the European Supporting Committee of *Together for Europe* gathered in the European Capital of Culture, Timișoara. We are Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, Anglican and Free Church Christians from different countries and regions of Europe. We represent different Christian movements and communities.

The city of Timișoara has always been characterized by a desire for coexistence amid denominational and cultural diversity, and by a hope for peace. Timișoara is also known as the “City of Martyrs”, a name that commemorates all those women and men from various Christian churches who, empowered by the Gospel, rose against all forms of oppression and fought for human freedom.

The message of this place has inspired and encouraged us to stand up passionately for a Europe that lives from its Christian roots and thus becomes a continent of peace and brotherhood.

At a time of war and “turning point in history”, we — Christians and Europeans — once again turn our gaze to Christ, who is “our peace”, who “*broke down the dividing wall of hostility*” (Ephesians 2:14). The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of peace; it is vulnerable and fragile and must never be used as a means of power or a weapon, because otherwise we betray Christ.

We know that we are called to unity. For Jesus prays: “*Father, may they all be one!*” (John 17:20). We want to live out this calling in our churches and countries, cultures and denominations, as a cross-border alliance of mutual love in Christ (John 13:34).

Together we testify that God has called people in our time, in midst of Europe, through the Gospel and has united them in a common life and commitment to the Kingdom of God. This has given rise to many

Christian communities and movements. They testify to a new opportunity for the church(es) and society. They can decisively strengthen the hope for peaceful coexistence in Europe.

Together we believe that God, the Creator of heaven and earth, is the Lord of our lives and the Sovereign of history. We want to give space to his creative work in our actions and common commitment – as “contemporary witnesses” of his presence.

Together, we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the diversity of our origins, only He can repeatedly give us the Pentecostal miracle of hearing, speaking and mutual understanding. But in this, especially in times of disastrous disinformation, „fake news”, „hate speech” and „cancel culture”, a communication capable of truth and peacemaking emerges and establishes itself, a new narrative of *Together for Europe*; a togetherness founded in our communion with the triune God.

Conclusion of the 2023 Supporting Committee in Timișoara – a final message

Supporting committee meeting, Timișoara, November 16-18, 2023

GERHARD PROSS

We have gathered here in Timișoara under the theme “CALLED TO UNITY.” In this city we have experienced a hopeful unity between cultures and between denominations. Timișoara seems like a microcosmos of Europe in its diversity of cultures and denominations that have developed here over the centuries, and we have seen evidence of successful coexistence here in many testimonials. Here, a hopeful model for future togetherness in Europe shines brightly.

However, we are also aware of the tensions here. We perceive the centrifugal forces that seek to tear countries and cultures apart. Close to here, terrible wars are raging in Ukraine and the Holy Land.

Against this backdrop, we send a message of unity from Timisoara. We live this unity and we want to do everything in our power to make peaceful unity between cultures and nations and a deep unity among God’s people possible. That is why we have formulated:

- Together we testify that God has called us and united us.
- Together we believe that God is the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth.
- Together we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, who continually grants us the Pentecostal miracle of hearing and mutual understanding.

At the end of our meeting, two forward-looking thoughts from these days should be emphasized:

"In the cracks you create space". We heard this at the beginning of our meeting and as a deepening of what we experienced in Porto last year. Could this phrase also become an annual theme for us at *Together for Europe*? *"In the cracks you create space"?*

It is never pleasant to step into the crack. We are pulled from all sides. We are often misunderstood by both sides, because both sides consider standing in the middle as a betrayal of their cause.

"In the cracks you create space." God creates space for himself in the cracks. Jesus himself stepped into the deepest cracks in this world. We look at him hanging there on the cross — stretched out between heaven and earth. Jesus stepped into the deepest crack, the one between God and us humans — and he created space there, space for life. Through his death, he brought reconciliation for all of us.

Jesus entered the deepest tensions of this world. He hangs there on the cross, arms outstretched, in the tensions between people, between groups, denominations, nations, and wherever tensions arise. He descended into the deepest depths: "He descended into the realm of death", we confess in the Apostles' Creed. And there he created a space of life.

I have a picture of our garden in my mind. A plant is growing out of the crack, out of the crevice. New life, right out of the cracks of this world.

New life grows out of reconciliation. Reconciliation opens the future. We experienced this at the beginning of our journey together, which was marked by a profound experience of reconciliation between the denominations in 2000. We were able to pave the way for this at *Together for Europe 2016* in Munich: reconciliation between the denominations on the eve of 500 years of Reformation and thus also of 500 years of church division.

Unity and reconciliation are our fundamental calling, our DNA. In this way, we have an impact on churches, cultures and nations. With Jesus, we want to stand in the cracks of this world and expect God to give us new space, a space for life.

And a second thought from these days should be emphasized. We come from 25 countries in Europe. Together we made a covenant of mutual love yesterday. At the beginning of the *Together Movement*, CARDINAL MILOSLAV VLK said, “*We want to connect the fires of renewal in Europe.*” Someone from the Steering committee recently had an inner impression during prayer: the outlines of Europe were lit up, the cities and many houses of Christians of very different traditions. But suddenly, small and larger fires became visible everywhere. There were altars everywhere to the glory of God. God longs for these fires.

In his presentation, HERBERT LAUENROTH quoted CHIARA LUBICH with a new — network-like — form of church: she called it “*chiese volanti*”, “flying churches”, mobile churches freed from special milieu ties.

Perhaps I may illustrate this image of a network with a current image: the energy transition from many, many small wind and solar power plants will largely replace the large power plants with their environmental impact.

The image of the church is already changing. The large power plants are being supplemented and partially replaced by many, many small units that align themselves with the sun, that align their wind turbines with the wind of the Spirit.

It will be crucial that the many, many small and large fires, the PV systems and the wind turbines are connected to each other. The energy transition will not succeed if the grid is not expanded, if the energy sources are not connected to each other.

We form a network of friends of Europe, a network of God’s people on our continent. We have joined together in alliance and now is the time to live out this bond. We should not miss any opportunity to

get to know other movements, to visit them, to immerse ourselves in their spirituality and to get to know their charisma. We want to get to know the enormous wealth and treasures that lie in the cooperation between the movements. Let us use every trip, whether vacation or business trip, to visit our friends — or let us make a point of traveling to one community or another.

The future Church as a network of friends shined forth yesterday morning in a beautiful image when Bishop JÓZSEF-CSABA PÁL expressed the friendship with bishops from different Churches.

This year we have specially invited the younger generation of community leaders. Many have come. It is now up to you to continue to weave the network and fill it with life.

Let us illustrate this with a small symbol. Everyone will receive three strings of different colors. „*A threefold cord is not quickly broken*” (Ecclesiastes 4:12), we read in the Bible. Let us re-knit this net today! As a sign of the connection between our charisms and fire in Europe and as an expression of our willingness to step into the cracks in our society and our churches and to connect them. In this way, we place ourselves at Jesus' disposal, for he creates a new space, a space for life.

„Europe, be yourself!“ - An impetus to promote Christian values in the public sphere

International political conference, Thessaloniki, May 15-17, 2024

GERHARD PROSS

“Europe, be yourself!”

The basic impetus for the initiative *Together for Europe* was laid in a conversation between the then President of the European Commission, ROMANO PRODI, and the founder of the *Focolare Movement*, CHIARA LUBICH. PRODI asked CHIARA LUBICH how he could bring Christian values into politics, if Christians themselves did not raise their voices. CHIARA LUBICH then motivated us to organize a large event in Stuttgart in 2004 with 10,000 participants under the theme “*Together for Europe.*” At that time, as in similar large events in later years, we impressively demonstrated how much the Christian faith bears positive fruit for togetherness in Europe.

■ No roots, no fruit

This brings me to my first thought: our European values are based on the Christian faith. If we cut off the roots, we should not be surprised when the fruits wither.

That is why we are committed to Christian values. However, we are not a political organization. *Together for Europe* is a network of 300 Christian communities and movements from different denominations, with very different spiritualities and very different focuses. But the call

to togetherness and the desire for unity— both regarding the churches and with view on Europe — has brought us together.

We remain different; we do not want to be leveled — no “uniformity,” but rather a reconciled Togetherness of diversity. Diversity and unity are equally important to us.

Which values do we now represent together? At a large congress in Stuttgart in 2007 with 10,000 participants and in Brussels in 2012, we formulated a 7-fold YES.¹⁸⁶ We are not fighting against something, we are for Christian values.

The individual movements have very different focuses. For example, for the *Community of Sant'Egidio*, commitment to peace is a central concern, while the *Focolare Movement* places the pursuit of unity at the center of its efforts. Among many other movements, the YMCA and the *Schoenstatt Movement* see it as one of their important tasks to strengthen and support families, etc.

■ Christian values – banned from public life

As a second thought, I would like to address a challenge we face today: Christian faith and Christian values are increasingly being banned from public life.

It is undisputed that the Christian faith is tolerated for religious festivals and celebrations. But the basis from which these values are derived, the faith itself, is being questioned or is not allowed to be named as the fundamental foundation for these values. Secularism is increasingly taking hold and spreading as the prevailing principle. In doing so, we are cutting off the roots.

May I illustrate this with a simple example from my work as the head of a large youth organization?

¹⁸⁶ See page 125.

The *CVJM Esslingen* youth work has a profound impact on thousands of young people in our city. They learn tolerance, acceptance and love. The focus is on togetherness. People are empowered to take responsibility first for themselves, then as youth workers for others, and later for society.

Forty years ago, we also started an open-door program in socially disadvantaged areas of our city. One parliamentary group of the city council had concerns about whether the city should provide us with funding in the same way as it does for secular youth centers. If we as Christians did this work, then we would not be "neutral" but would be bringing our faith and values into it.

"That's right, we do bring them in", I said in dialogue with this party. But if God is excluded from secular youth centers, then – to put it bluntly – godless youth work is being carried out there. Should I use my taxes to finance godless youth work while my values are denied for public support?

We had good, open, and honest discussions, which ultimately led to a good working relationship. The city of Esslingen is very grateful for the high-quality youth work that we have been doing for decades in socially disadvantaged areas. But it required us to overcome the barrier of secular thinking for this work to find its place in the public sphere in the same way. This brings us right to the topic of our conference.

But here we are not dealing with local politics but with the national and European level. May I therefore point out a second area that is in danger of cutting off its Christian roots?

The German Constitution is currently celebrating its 75th anniversary. The preamble contains a simple but very decisive sentence: "*In responsibility before God ... etc.*" This simple sentence is crucially important. If we no longer answer to God in fundamental questions of life and legislation, then man becomes the measure of all things, becomes excessive and completely oversteps his bounds.

If we examine critical and challenging situations “*in responsibility before God*”, we may come to a different conclusion than we would without God. The question of protecting life, for example, is answered completely differently if I am accountable to God and know that God has reserved the decision about life and death for himself and that it is not merely a matter of weighing up the pros and cons on our part.

Incidentally, this is by no means a purely Christian perspective. Jews and Muslims also agree wholeheartedly with the phrase “*responsibility before God*”, even if they emphasize certain aspects differently. And even a staunchly atheist politician like GREGOR GYSI of the Left Party agrees. Despite his own atheism, GYSI considers religion to be important for modern societies. “*I don’t believe in God, but I don’t want a godless society either*” GYSI told the Berlin TAGESSPIEGEL newspaper. “*In fact, I fear it.*” He said: in society, there must be a generally binding morality as a “*standard in the mind.*” Capitalism cannot provide this, but the church can.¹⁸⁷

■ Europe needs the fundamental competence of the Christian faith

This brings me to my third thought. A week ago, on May 9, we celebrated Europe Day. *Together for Europe* has been campaigning for this for years and organizes events around May 9. As moderator of *Together for Europe*, I hosted an online event with JEFF FOUNTAIN, director of the *Schuman Center for European Studies* in Amsterdam, and EDUARD HEGER, former prime minister of Slovakia.

Fountain gave an impressive description of the beginning of modern Europe on May 9, 1950: “*On May 9, 1950, French Foreign Minister ROBERT SCHUMAN called a press conference to make an important announcement. In a speech lasting just three minutes, SCHUMAN pre-*

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/155979/21-04-2019/gregor-gysi-fuerchtet-sich-vor-gottloser-gesellschaft>.

sented a radical plan that laid the foundation for the European house in which 450 million Europeans now live together in peace."

SCHUMAN's plan was to unite the coal and steel industries of France and Germany, as well as any other nations that wished to join, under a supranational authority. This would make it impossible for any nation to build its own war machine.

"Forgiveness and reconciliation are a Christian commandment, even towards those who are currently regarded as enemies," SCHUMAN said.

On April 18, 1951, the treaty was finally ready to be signed. But before they met in Paris, SCHUMAN, ADENAUER, and Italian Prime Minister ALCIDE DE GASPERI gathered at a monastery near Koblenz for a prayer retreat. They wanted to ask for God's blessing for this important undertaking.

ADENAUER said to SCHUMAN at the time: *"I consider it a sign of providence that the entire burden of the tasks to be accomplished rests on the shoulders of men who, like you, me, and DE GASPERI, are filled with the desire to build the new edifice of Europe on Christian foundations."*

EDUARD HEGER, the former Prime Minister of Slovakia, took up these thoughts in a courageous personal statement and spoke of how the Christian faith is the hope of Europe.

I will conclude. The fundamental competence of the Christian faith is urgently needed in view of the challenges Europe and the world are facing. It brings forgiveness and reconciliation to the current climate of polarization. Its strongest impulse is love, which leads to cooperation rather than confrontation. Love respects others instead of demonizing them. It stands for truth in a time of disinformation and manipulation. People of faith are committed to peace, which has suddenly become so fragile again. Faith brings hope in a time of resignation, powerlessness and helplessness.

That is why we want to strengthen Europe's Christian roots so that the fruits do not wither away. Not as dominance or domination, we do not want to impose our faith on anyone but rather contribute it as a serving factor for the future of our continent.

We are committed to the coexistence of cultures to counteract separation, polarization, fragmentation and national egoism with togetherness. We build bridges of coexistence.

At the same time, it is a fundamental concern of ours that the Christian faith should not be banished from public life. Our faith gives us hope and courage to shape the future and overcome fear, hatred and fragmentation.

Closing remarks and outlook on 25 years of *Together for Europe*

LOTHAR PENNERS

Where does *Together for Europe* stand after 25 years? – With regard to the title: “Great Moments of Unity” we can say with gratitude: *Together for Europe* has been richly blessed with what POPE JOHN PAUL II called “mature communication” among the newer spiritual movements, in view of a deeper mutual recognition and the emergence of a living network.

If we take note of the developments of our time, the challenge for *Together for Europe* becomes even greater to tackle greater “commonality in evangelization” - as the Pope had given the movements along the way. In the future it will also be important to continuously paying closer attention to the signals that the “God of history” is sending us and to exchange ideas about them.

Together for Europe is a network united in the love of Jesus and his mission, which seeks to shape itself through diverse friendships, complementarity, and mutual encouragement, so that in mutual encounters, each other’s charisms may be helped to be developed together. The need of the younger generations to grow into this friendship must be supported. This development requires creative and courageous steps.

Connecting with one another as movements and communities happen in various ways. In the past, large events, congresses and rallies have been milestones for content orientation and a deeper perception of God’s manifold gifts in the movements. The impact of these events was directed inwardly into the network, but also outwardly into the churches and, to a modest extent, into the societies of the various countries involved. It is precisely the interaction between generations

that can be promoted at a larger event and help to deepen friendships and mutual discovery between the movements.

A larger event in near future should be considered, because the further development of the network requires ongoing and broadly shared perspectives. In view of the coexistence of generations, cultures, and languages in Europe, the integrative preparatory process for a larger event is just as important as the jointly developed event itself.

The further development of the *Together for Europe* network and the desire to become effective in political, social and ecumenical areas in a spirit of service are part of the horizon of a further phase of our togetherness.

This may require meetings in smaller circles, but on the other hand, it highlights the need for the movements connected within the network to develop and take responsibility for larger events from time to time, as described above, with broad participation from those who support the movements, thus opening them up to wider circles of interested parties. The major events of *Together for Europe* — from Stuttgart I to Munich 2016 — would have been unthinkable without the active and responsible cooperation of numerous members of the communities. One example of broad shared responsibility among many others is CHIARA LUBICH, who motivated the members of “her” *Focolare Movement* to make these major events their own “cause”.

It seems that both God’s call to “gather his people” and the situation in Europe almost 40 years after the fall of communism require a greater unity of charisms. Movements could particularly be in a position to bridge the gap between the spiritual isolation of people in technologized large societies and their social and religious socialization.

The core experience of reconciliation between movements and communities and the creative acceptance of diversity will enable a significant contribution to a culture of dialogue in society in the future, in view of polarization and fragmentation. The challenge for

movements will increasingly be to courageously and trustingly place themselves in rifts and fractures of various kinds and to strive for hope and peace precisely there.

Across the Christian spectrum, it can be observed that, on the part of the Roman Catholic Church, the holders of the Petrine office are more aware than before that they are not only to serve their church in doctrine and leadership, but also to contribute to peace and unity among the human family as a whole, as Popes FRANCIS and LEO XIV have done and continue to do.

The major denominational churches must recognize, among other things, that the free churches often show greater dynamism in evangelization, reaching beyond themselves into society as a whole and finding resonance there. Especially regarding the entire spectrum of Christian congregations and communities, the Spirit of God is working towards a greater unity of charisms.

Looking back on the fruitfulness of church unity in the event of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” in Ottmaring in 1999, we can keep an eye on further moments of God’s grace regarding the Western and Eastern schisms of the Church as a whole. Such moments of grace could possibly be contained in the coming jubilees, when one thinks of important councils such as Nicaea in 325, Ephesus in 431 and Constantinople in 381.

Theologically speaking, a possible common orientation could be to reflect on the consubstantiality of Christ with the infinity of God, his true incarnation and his holistic, divine-human union in the one figure of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Even small, concrete steps, such as efforts to find a common date for the celebration of Easter, encourage us to hope for a deeper unity of the Body of Christ. Jesus’ prayer for unity (John 17) allows us to sense the deep will of God the Father.

Together for Europe will have to adapt to and consider the changed global political situation compared to the decades after the fall of communism: the war situation in the east of the continent, the weakened consensus on values in the Western world, and the growing economic, social and cultural influence of the so-called emerging countries of the East and West.

Especially in view of the internal and external situation of our continent, we hear God's call for togetherness of charisms. This cooperation is called to serve a rediscovery and reorientation of Europe based on its Christian roots. A living faith in God brings the concerns of the world and of humanity before God. We are increasingly committed to creating spaces for worship, an experiential closeness to God, and a holistic sense of belonging for all people with whom we live.

III

A word of thanks

Our thanks go to the many people who have joined us on the path of togetherness and unity. Through their advice, active support, and above all, their personal experiences, many have contributed to the diversity of this book. Our thanks also go to many bishops. We found them being open-minded and open-hearted. Friendly relationships have developed with many of them through our shared concerns. We have experienced a successful cooperation between the Churches and movements. **CARDINAL WALTER KASPER** and **BISHOP CHRISTIAN KRAUSE**, who have accompanied us for 25 years, deserve to be specially mentioned here.

Special thanks go to **WOLFGANG KEMPER**, whose passion for language and content contributed significantly to the success of this project. He took on the role as editor and was an invaluable partner in the conception and creation of this book. **WALTER KRIECHBAUM** was also extremely valuable with his constructive ideas and collaboration. In addition, **P. GEROLD LANGSCH**, **MARIANNE CLAUSS** and **ANDREW PETTMAN** helped in translation and proofread the book and were a great help with their profound knowledge of language.

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All those involved carried out this work on voluntary basis out of inner conviction. Some invested weeks, other months of work.

¹⁸⁸ mariakiess.de.

The success of this book was only possible in this way. We would like to express our sincere thanks to them.

Finally we would like to thank God, who privileged us to hearing sounds of his „*heavenly score*“ and who has guided us on the path where we could experience of so many *Great Moments of Unity*.

Gerhard Pross and Lothar Penners

The authors

GERHARD PROSS, born in 1950, married, two adult children.

He trained as an industrial clerk and worked in this profession for several years. Theological training at the Johanneum in Wuppertal. He worked as a YMCA secretary in Kirchheim/Teck and as a youth worker in the church district of Tübingen. From 1984 to 2012, he was the General Secretary of the YMCA in Esslingen.

Gerhard Pross is the head of various Christian networks:

- From 1991 to 2016, he headed the “*Verbund*” within the AG of the YMCA Germany.
- From 1991 to 1999, he was chairman of the Board of trustees and from 1992 to 2004 a member of the Executive committee (general meeting) at the Johanneum in Wuppertal.
- He is a co-initiator (1999) and since 2014 moderator of *Together for Europe*.
- From 2000 to 2022 he led the Meeting of Leaders in Germany.
- He is one of the initiators of the *Christian Convent Germany* (CCD) and, he is one of the initiators and part of the leadership team of the Initiative *Germany Prays together*.
- He is an advisor to spiritual communities and a *speaker* at conferences.

LOTHAR PENNERS, born in 1942, Schoenstatt Father, Dr. theol. habil. Studied in Munich, Münster and Freiburg.

Ordained priest in 1970; doctorate under KLAUS HEMMERLE on Father KENTENICH's way of thinking („Eine Pädagogik des Katholischen“ [A Catholic Pedagogy], 1983).

Activities:

- in the formation of Schoenstatt Fathers; at the headquarters of the German Schoenstatt Movement (organizational work, „Department of Education,“ Central Council, publications).
- 1998 – 2008 Professor of theological borderline issues at the *VINCENT PALLOTTI University*, Vallendar.
- 2003 – 2015 Head of the *Schoenstatt Movement in Germany*
- Commitments, initiative groups: JOSEF KENTENICH Institute, „*Together for Europe*“, Political Evening Prayer at „Liebfrauenhöhe“ (Rottenburg).

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