

POLARIZATION - RECONCILIATION - RECONCILED DIVERSITY

6th NOVEMBER 2021

Dear **Friends** of *Together for Europe*,

I am very happy to have this wonderful opportunity to greet you! It is a great gift for me to know that we are companions on a journey, deeply committed to the ecumenical network "*Together for Europe*", which I very much respect. I join you with an attitude of profound listening, because I know I am entering a reality that God has been building up for more than 20 years. I am therefore grateful to be able to enter more and more into the heart of this experience.

I congratulate you for having chosen to address the issue of **polarization**, worked through to the point of **reconciled diversity**. In the title you already indicate a path that encourages us to refocus on our deepest identity. We are called to be "*apostles of dialogue*". Chiara explains that the root of this expression lies specifically in the God in whom we believe, who requires us to "*be a reflection of the Holy Trinity, where the three divine Persons are in eternal dialogue, eternally one and eternally distinct*".

I would like to thank **Gerhard** Pross who has so well described the phenomena that destabilize our societies, often paralyzing them. The suffering and wounded face of our world, which seems to find no way out of the challenges that assail it, is evident. Yet alongside this harsh reality, Gerhard's talk already indicates a possible path towards "newness", and I share his hope, the value he gives to the prophetic message that emerged at the very birth of *Together for Europe*, that is, to **face** reality in the light of our calling, to **read and understand** the signs of the times together and **act** accordingly.

Gratitude for the journey so far

We have come a long way, so my special appreciation goes first to those who have been working in the T4E network for many years, for their courage in entering "open spaces", not yet explored, but which led to getting to know the point of view of others. This is generally not an easy path, but it

allows us to purify and enrich our vision of things and guarantees sincere and ongoing dialogue to find direction, despite the insecurity and "fogginess" of the times we live in.

In her speech prepared for the Stuttgart 2007 event, Chiara affirmed: *"Jesus, who is light for the world, values what can be true in different points of view; He enlightens and highlights the common good and gives us the strength to pursue it"*.

To read and understand the signs of the times together

I think that meeting to "read and grasp the signs of the times together" is a fundamental step to get out of every form of polarization.

I have often experienced this directly.

Both in my youth in Galilee, in my hometown of Haifa, and then in subsequent contacts with Jewish and Muslim leaders, which increased in the United States and in Jerusalem, I have seen unexpected fruits ripen. These encounters, resulting from experiences of profound dialogue, listening, working together, and helping one another, have led more and more to overcoming prejudices, lessening fears, and activating a process of true mutual understanding.

This reminds me of another experience which was very significant for me, which made me realise how important reconciliation is and not being caught up in immediate prejudice. I was invited by a neighbour, in Jerusalem, with some other people. When we were talking, she discovered that I was Arab and she was Jewish, she was a Jewish neighbour. While we were having tea, she stood up and said: "But I can't have a Palestinian like you in my house, it's not possible. This is the first time a Palestinian has come to my house".

At that moment I felt inside: What can I do? Shall I get up, leave my other friends, and say: okay, go ahead, I'm leaving because my presence here is not welcome; it can cause conflict. And I felt so humiliated because it was not only directed at me but at all my people.

2

For a culture of communion, Chiara's theme read by Bruna Tomasi, Stuttgart, 12 May 2007.

So, I said to myself: either you have the courage at this moment to overcome this feeling, or you will never believe in peace. And so, I stayed there, we continued the conversation, all the others spoke, and at a certain point I said to her: "I'm here because I believe that if we get to know each other, and if we love each other, I'm sure we can relate differently and that it's possible to at least become friends".

This visit broke down a very big wall that she had had within her for many years, and she said: "If I have met you, it means that there are many others like you who believe in peace, so I want to be part of this journey".

And so we went ahead.

Therefore, the friendship that binds us is a ferment of reconciliation that lasts and has an increasingly widespread impact, and these spaces for meeting and dialogue therefore become an essential training ground, as Gerhard suggested, to weave 'close-meshed networks' and to understand the urgent needs in the societies in which we live.

Step by step - major events and local groups

The trump card of T4E is to have tried to implement, step by step, with concrete experiences, what was understood from the beginning as a design and as a "prophecy".

Undoubtedly the major events such as those held in Stuttgart and Munich, were significant milestones and gave many people the opportunity to join you on the journey. But the big and small steps taken on a daily basis to get to know and reciprocally appreciate the diversity of gifts were equally significant.

It is also wonderful today to hear the contributions offered by the various countries. They are an important part of the program because they testify to great creativity and a serious commitment to create a true "togetherness *for*" in the places where we live.

Active local work is a sign of a generous love lived by many, and despite the challenges, it indicates the effort of each one to look "beyond" the boundaries of their home or of their Movement and Community, to build pieces of a new society.

Acting for universal fraternity

This action bears the imprint of the high ideals that Jesus entrusted to humanity.

During the first major event in Stuttgart in 2004 Chiara strongly declared: *"It was Jesus who proclaimed universal fraternity and gave us the way to achieve it. By revealing to us the fatherhood of God, Jesus broke down the walls that separate the 'equal' from the 'different', friends from enemies. And he freed each person from so many kinds of subordination and slavery, from every unjust relationship, thus accomplishing an authentic revolution, one that is existential, cultural and political"*.

And she continued with words that encourage us today too: *"This love, which reaches perfection in reciprocity, expresses the power of Christianity because it attracts on this earth the very presence of Jesus among us men and women"*.

Getting to know each other to love one another and be reconciled

In the heart of **those** who began *Together for Europe*, many of whom are now in Heaven, was this desire: to get to **know each other, to love one another and be reconciled**.

They wanted to offer **their charisms to Europe**, in a vibrant **network** of Movements and Communities spread throughout the entire Continent. They wanted **politicians**, sometimes disappointed and bewildered, who met this European Christian people, to find the strength, incentive, and courage to change systems and laws in favour of the common good and the good of every citizen. They wanted the so-called "sleeping giant", the laity, to wake up and rediscover their vocation as protagonists of the "change of age". But perhaps the most beautiful and precious thing they discovered, like a new calling, was to give Europe the presence of **Jesus**, Jesus present in their mutual love. And from deeds that were often small and simple, important projects and decisions were born.

They therefore wished to testify to the presence in Europe of *"... a people of God"*, as the co-founder of the network, Helmut Nicklas of the YMCA said in Stuttgart 2004, *"a people of God, which has been living out this union, this cooperation for some time, this communion ... in which there is the joy of living"*.

Under the impulse of the Spirit, the initiators understood that "going **out**" is a **sign of the times**; that caring for one's own charism and one's community is not enough, even if it remains essential. More is needed: to mature a new culture as a medicine for the polarized world, the only one that can guarantee the future, the **culture of being Together**.

It is a **lifestyle nourished** by the Words of the Gospel, which **develops** by being the first to love and **flourishes** in mutual love, where **Jesus in the midst becomes a continuous source of strength and light, so that His prayer may be fulfilled: "May they all be one "(Jn. 17:21).**

Fr. Marmann of Schoenstatt, another co-founder of T4E, clearly saw in *"this process taking place in Europe ... a clear sign of the times"*, the voice of God, concluding: *"Christianity should not be just a religious superstructure, but should engage the whole person"*.

I know that the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE) and the World Council of Churches (**WCC**) count on the collaboration of *Together for Europe* in view of upcoming European events.

The friendship between Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, evident for some time now, with deeds, programs, initiatives, common documents for the protection of creation and fraternity among peoples, reminds Europe that it should breathe with two lungs, as John Paul II already desired, so as not to lose the immense joint heritage of East and West.

The path of synodality which Pope Francis has started in the Catholic Church, in dialogue with everyone, is another opportunity not to be missed to enable collaboration.

Together with you, I entrust these expectations to God, so that He may guide our response.

Finally, to conclude: Reconciled Diversity

This is a beautiful term and particularly dear to me.

It also marked my vocation, my desire to give my life for unity.

The experience I had as a child, which you have just heard, of giving Arab bread, baked by my mother, to children who had not treated me well, gave me a lesson for my whole life: that is, that love overcomes hatred, that I didn't have to change people or respond with the same tone, but I had to win out by loving, even with a heroic gesture, as it was for me at that moment ... This re-established peace within me and also with these friends of mine, because then we became friends, we helped each other to learn each other's language, we never failed on any Jewish or Christian religious holiday to give each other good wishes. And from then on, in that neighbourhood, an oasis of peace was born, at least in a small way.

And with the charism of unity, I learned the value of encounter and forgiveness.

"Reconciled diversity". I thought that this reality in which we believe, because we have already experienced it, could mark the new step of T4E for the years to come. It could indicate the program on which to focus our living and acting today.

It is not naivety, because the differences are not ignored, they are recognized. But knowing how to see the point of view of others, entering different cultural approaches with respect, or into ways of reasoning, habits, and models foreign to us, does not confuse us, rather it enriches us. And in the circulation of love, God manifests himself.

At a time when we are urged by emergencies to show mutual care and care for creation; now that world leaders seem to find the impulse to converge, as was the case at the recent G20 in Rome, and to listen, as now in Glasgow, to the appeal of young people for the protection of the planet, I would say that it is the right moment, a sign of the times, to continue with renewed confidence on the path we have taken. The spirituality of communion-fellowship trains us to do this.

"However many neighbours you meet in your day, from sunrise to sunset - you see Jesus in them all". These are Chiara's words that increasingly direct my way of seeing:

"If your eye is simple, God sees in it. (...) Therefore, look at each person while loving, and to love is to give. But the gift calls for a gift and you will be loved in return".

Thank you, dear Friends of *Together for Europe*, May God among us strengthen us in our extraordinary vocation and give us new drive and courage in our daily commitment for the good of our Churches, of Europe and of the world.