

Europe is challenged

Meeting of Friends, Vienna - Nov. 2017 – Gerhard Proß

Introduction:

From its inception the mandate of „Together for Europe“ was to work for the unity of the people of God. We can only marvel at the fruits that have matured over the years. Since we have already spoken about this, I will now focus on the second mandate: the social dimension of "Together for Europe".

The Congress and Rally which took place in Munich in 2016 have changed TfE

- The timing of terror attacks and Brexit as we prepared for Munich highlighted our role
- TfE was experienced as a prophetic sign for Europe.
- TfE have been collaborating for 15 years, but it has never felt as important as today to talk about our ‚Yes‘ to Europe. We felt a special urgency when we were in Munich.
- May Europe not miss the boat, but wake up in time (unlike the English young people who suddenly realized after the vote that they were deprived of future opportunities).

Our answer as TfE

In what follows, I would like to highlight some of the basics of TfE, which were discussed at the Steering committee.

I. Basic convictions

Unity is possible. This reflects one of the basic convictions of TfE. Within our spiritual movements and communities we were able to experience the extraordinary action of the Holy Spirit who makes us one. We experienced that our unity has an impact on the churches.

At the T4E Congress in 2007 Br Francis stated that "**Unity and diversity have the same origin**" [1] . And Piero Coda said something very similar: "If God is Trinity, unity and diversity are not only not a contradiction, but also of the very same origin." [2] From the very beginning, we defined ourselves by using an image of unity which explicitly acknowledges and affirms the diversity given to us by God. The unity in the spirit does not imply a leveling out of differences, is not "uniformity", not a melting pot where differences are lost, but unity in diversity.

Unity in reconciled diversity.

Because of the many divisions between individuals Churches and peoples a reconciliation of opposites is necessary in order to reach a reconciled unity in diversity. Since we came together as TfE, reconciliation experiences and political reconciliation (Fürst, Castell, Friedrich Aschoff and others) have had a decisive influence on us. Guilt is being addressed, forgiveness is being granted and this removes stumbling blocs along the path towards the future, because it removes what poisoned our relationships. This is how a stranger, a person who is different no longer poses a threat but becomes a gift. We are reconciled in diversity and experience the richness of diversity.

"Too much uniformity endangers unity" (P. Heinrich)

Smoothing over differences endangers identity and can put down unity in diversity. This applies not only to the ecclesial but also to the political sphere.

Jesus in the midst

„Jesus in our midst“ who unites us has characterized our working together from the beginning. He gives us strength and hope for unity in reconciled diversity, because Jesus Christ has reconciled the world with God.

"There is no alternative but to move forward together".

Christians from our communities and movements who move ahead together confirm the EU constitution. There is no alternative but to move forward together. We emphasized this at the start of our 2016 message.

II. Politics - a learning curve

From the outset, those spiritual communities and movements who took part in T4E said ‚Yes‘ to Europe. This entailed a Europe that stretches from the Urals to Portugal, from the North Cape to Sicily. But from the outset, it was a ‚Yes‘ to a EU which would be an instrument of peace. Our TtE is a yes that is lived by us. It means a creative yes. A prophetic yes.

However, TtE has no links to a specific political party. Our political convictions differ. Also among us there could be a climate which leaves no space for other political convictions. Especially the refugee crisis has contributed to a variety of expressions in terms of political convictions.

However saying YES to one another, being ready to listen to each other and walking alongside one another go deeper than any political conviction. We remain friends! To remain friends is the real labour of love, which forms the basis for our political engagement.

We must learn to make space for the conviction of others, make space to listen to them and try to understand them. In the past we learnt to appreciate the gifts of other denominations and spiritualities which no longer posed a threat to us but became an enrichment. We need to learn the same on a political level. Could it be that we are now asked, i.e. that Europe is now being asked, to transfer our ecclesial reconciliation experience onto a political sphere?

In the same way that the icon which represents "affection" (Deesis - Hagia Sofia) has helped us in the past to reconcile our theological positions perhaps it might now inspire us again with respect to our political convictions. In the same way that John the Baptist and Mary each take their place, so can each one of us keep their identity and take their place, but by turning to Jesus which also means turning towards each other.

How to use your freedom and fear of freedom.

This topic was part of Herbert Lauenroth's address in Munich last year. Quote from Vaclav Havel: "Fear of Freedom". "We were like prisoners who had grown accustomed to prison ... and did not know how to deal with freedom. We were like prisoners who were desperate because they continuously had to take their own decisions and take on responsibility."

In other words, "We were overstrained by freedom" – and this is when people want their walls and borders back.

In politics, reason is regarded as the highest authority [3]. Prophetic vision and discernment inspired by Revelation, are something very different to reason.

For practical political work, however, we use our reason. There is a need for reflection, **dialogue** and **discussion**. There is a need to **"negotiate"**[4] the future of Europe.

Questions as to what the European Union might look like are not only legitimate but there is a need to ask them. Whilst basically saying ‚Yes‘ to Europe, we need to **ask some fundamental**

questions (i.e. about EU regulations and bureaucracy, the lack of reference to God, Freemason cartels, ideological manipulation, etc.). Asking fundamental questions should then lead to change.

However in spite of asking these (justified) questions, our questioning should not lead to the EU being infringed because we see it as a unique instrument of peace. On the basis of their Christian faith the founding fathers decided 60 years ago to take steps towards reconciliation. They recognized that friendship is the key to moving ahead together and they formed the economic community hoping by doing so to consolidate peace and prosperity.

Whilst being open to all political convictions and whilst being aware that a learning process is under way (also among us), we are also asked **to exercise differentiation of spirits. There must be room for political opposites, but there is also a need to oppose demons.** If they come to the fore we most certainly have to voice our convictions and take up our positions.

I would like to throw out some challenges to the world of politics:

a) To learn how to listen to each other

We must learn how to listen to each other - also in politics. We want to take note of opposing political opinions and understand them.

- What has been learnt on a spiritual level still needs to be put into practice on a political level.
- The reconciliation of opposites is important.

Respecting the position of others is essential.

There are those **among us who are critical of the EU.** This is politically OK. But are they allowed to express their convictions? Are we willing to listen to each other?

Are we ready **to just listen to the opposing political opinions?** Can those opinions be voiced without them being immediately "**demonized**"?

(b) Reconciled diversity. The reconciliation of opposites is important. What can a **reconciliation of different positions** look like? Diversity of cultures considered as **enriching.**

- **North and South:**
Roman and German political economy
- **East and West – Fear and disregard of the East ...** lead us to fearing the East, fearing that we might get run over by **liberalism** which in their view does not agree with Christian principles.
Reconciliation instead of demonization

c) Differentiation of Spirits: There must be room for contradictory political positions, but there is also a need to oppose demons. We say **No to nationalism and populism.**

III. The mission of Tfe

a) To live togetherness

We are Christians from different denominations and with different spiritualities but share a common basic experience. This is one of the keys to the future. Among us people from different nationalities and different cultures are working and acting together. I see great opportunities and envisage areas for further future common activities. Has the time now come for people from Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern Europe to visit each other and begin to form friendships? Shouldn't we invite representatives of other countries to our national meetings?

b) Prayer is part of our mission**Europe needs our prayer!**

We do **not** want to deprive Europe-and **especially those in position of responsibility** in the EU of our prayers.

Prayer brings about changes - it changes us - it changes the **atmosphere** in our countries and in Europe, it changes people's **hearts**.

At this point we want to **gratefully acknowledge various prayer initiatives**.

I would especially like to recall prayer services on **24th March 2017** in Rome and in 57 other European cities. Is it just by **chance** that the atmosphere **has changed** or is it due to the **effect of prayer** as well as to many other contributing elements?

Europe needs our prayer!**c) Discernment**

- At a time when **old demons** seem to rise up again, those demons who have led Europe many a time into a **catastrophe**, we say No to nationalisms and a strong **Yes to the Gospel, to reconciliation and to love**
- At a time when **egoism** seems to prevail, we say "**Yes**" to a **culture of relationships and covenants**.
- At a time when **populism** seems to spread, we say No to simplifications and to shallow solutions. We say Yes to truth and humility (sincerity, patience).

(d) Our prophetic mission

In Munich, some of us stated very firmly that **our ,Togetherness' contains a prophetic message**.

The culture of ,Togetherness' for Europe is our prophetic message.

(e) Promotion of a culture of ,Togetherness' in Europe

After having fought for European unity over decades **Jean Monnet [5]** repeatedly said, "**If I had only known at the beginning what I know now, I would have begun by promoting a European culture and not a European economy.**" [6] Monnet was one of the founding fathers of Europe, the Schumann Plan was drawn up by him.

Dear friends of TFE, I am always being asked about concrete actions, about the next step. Of course, concrete actions are needed as well national and regional meetings. It also needs large congresses like those in Stuttgart and Munich. **But doesn't our real mission rather lie much more in creating a culture of „European Togetherness“ which is based on Christianity?**

By listening deeply to one another, by trying to understand together which steps to take, a message for Europe has arisen.

Unity is possible! "There is no alternative to ,Together in Europe'! [7]"

Together we shared this message with everyone in Munich.

I am convinced that we have been entrusted with a message of a culture of ,togetherness' in Europe. Deliberately I am picking up the points we made as the steering committee last year in Castel Gandolfo and I am summarizing them in five points.

IV. A culture of „Togetherness in Europe“

We say „Yes“ to a Europe....

1. ... of reconciliation

Because of the miracle of reconciliation after the catastrophe of World Wars I & II a new Europe has emerged. We receive the power of reconciliation from our Christian faith which enables a healing of historical wounds and a „Togetherness“ in diversity.

2. ...of unity in diversity

We recognize that we are enriched by diversity. Multiplicity and diversity have the same roots. Both need to balance each other out. Diversity and unity are a reality among us.

- We are glad about those who are different and their charisms
- Our hope lies in the fraternity of nations
- We advocate a federal Europe. We treat different backgrounds and perspectives with respect and appreciation.

In TfE, charisms work together for unity in diversity. This interplay of charisms serves the unity of the people of God and the unity of Europe.

Our hope for and our message to Europe is diversity in reconciled unity.

3. ...of encounter, dialogue and peace

Mutual understanding grows from encounters. This is one of our basic experiences of TfE. We are seeking dialogue with everyone. We say „Yes“ to a Europe that seeks dialogue and chooses to negotiate different interests.

The process of the unification of Europe and the EU also gave us 70 years of peace. Anyone who over-emphasizes national interests will evoke the nationalist demons and will lead the way to the destruction of Europe. Our „Yes“ to Europe and to the EU is valid, despite some legitimate criticism.

We are committed to encounter and encourage an open political **dialogue that promotes a peaceful Europe.**

4. ... of mercy and humanity

Christianity has shaped the history of Europe. It is a faith that is open to the world. Humanity and mercy flow from Jesus Christ, crucified and forsaken and have shaped the continent. It manifests itself in an unconditional „Yes“ to life, „Yes“ to marriage and family - a family gives an example as to what it means to live as brothers and sisters and Europe longs for this! Mercy shows itself by welcoming the poor and needy in our midst.

In its essence **the European soul** is rooted in the Jewish / Christian faith. Europe is more than the Euro, more than a market economy. We therefore advocate a Europe based on Christianity, where openness and tolerance are the norm. Those who think differently and live by a different faith are welcome. This is how the ‚Soul‘ of Europe is being strengthened.

5. We say „Yes“ to a Europe which over the course of history has been **called by God** [8]: to foster the collaboration between heaven and earth, to impregnate the world with faith, because heaven and earth have met in the Crucified One. Our mission for Europe also entails responsibility for Africa and the Middle East.

Dear friends of Europe,
the living God has entrusted a lot to our ‚Togetherness‘.

- He gave us the foundation for our“ Togetherness“.
- We can learn from each other and understand each others political convictions.
- Above all, however, we have been given a culture of „Togetherness“, which we collectively expressed last year in the 5 points I have just summarized. This is how we express and live our ‚Yes‘ to Europe.

We need to raise **awareness of the urgency** of our ‚Yes‘ to Europe **within** our movements. We, as spiritual movements, should not miss out on **publicly expressing** our ‚Yes‘ to Europe.

01.11.2017 Gerhard Proß

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¹ „Walking together [Miteinander auf dem Weg]“ ISBN 978-3-00-022045-6 Talks by Br. Franziskus Joest at the congress TFE 2007 Stuttgart, p. 21, etc

² The Christian Culture in a Europe that is one [Christliche Kultur in einem Europa] –Hanspeter Heinz (Publisher). Verlag Neue Stadt p. 33

³ „In worldly matters and in matters concerning human beings, human beings employ their reason and need no other light but reason. This is why God doesn’t teach us through scripture how to build houses, make clothes, get married, how to conduct a war or other similar things. Natural light is sufficient in those matters. But is differment when we are dealing with the things of God, those that he wants us to do to please him, those that help our salvation, those that concern our stubborn nature and our blindness. Our nature seems to be unable to fathom them even though it assumes it can. The conclusions drawn by it are wrong and false, In zeitlichen.“ Martin Luther, quoted in: Kurt Aland, Lutherlexikon, Berlin 1956, Pages 392/393 (No. 1498).

⁴ Sr. Nicole Grochowina at the TFE meeting at Castel Gandolfo 2016

⁵ www.wikipedia - **Jean Omer Marie Gabriel Monnet** (* [9. November 1888](#) in [Cognac, France](#); † [16. March 1979](#)) was a French entrepreneur who paved the way to facilitate the striving towards European Unity without ever having been electedan MP. Monnet counts as one of the founding fathers of the European Union and is being regarded as the ‚Father of Europe‘.

⁶ Christian Culture in the One Europa –Hanspeter Heinz (Publisher). Neue Stadt p. 71

⁷ Final message of Together for Europe 2.7.2017, Stachus, Munich

⁸ P. Lothar Penners T4E. Steering Committee 2016 in Castel Gandolfo with reference to Father Kentenich