

THIRD EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY
Sibiu, Romania
4 – 9 September 2007

Assembly Message – Saturday, 8th September 2007

The light of Christ shines upon all!

We, Christian pilgrims from all over Europe and beyond, witness to the transforming power of this light, which is stronger than darkness, and we proclaim it as all-embracing hope for our Churches, for all of Europe and for the entire world.

In the name of our Triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have assembled in the city of Sibiu, Romania (4th-9th September 2007). This third European Ecumenical Assembly was marked especially by the richness of Orthodox spirituality and tradition. We recall and renew the serious commitments we already made in Basel and Graz and we regret that, up to now, we have failed to fulfil some of them. However, our confidence in the transforming energy of the light of Christ is stronger than the darkness of resignation, fatalism, fear and indifference.

Our third European Ecumenical Assembly began in 2006 in Rome and continued in 2007 in Wittenberg. This ecumenical pilgrimage involved many regional meetings and those of Orthodox Churches in Rhodes and young people in St. Maurice*. We welcome with joy the young people's commitment and the contribution they made to the Assembly. Assisted and motivated by the *Charta Oecumenica*, our Assembly pursued the work started in earlier assemblies and has been an occasion for an exchange of gifts and of mutual enrichment.

We are not alone on this pilgrimage. Christ is with us and within the cloud of witnesses (*Heb 12:1*), the contemporary martyrs accompany us: the witness of their life and death inspires us individually and corporately. In communion with them, we commit ourselves to let the light of the transfigured Christ shine through our own witness deeply rooted in prayer and love. This is our humble response to the sacrifice of their lives.

The light of Christ in the Church

The light of Christ leads us to live for others and in communion with one another. Our witness to hope and unity for Europe and for the world will be credible only if we continue our journey towards visible unity. Unity is not uniformity. There is

enormous value in experiencing afresh that *koinonia* and exchanging those spiritual gifts that energised the ecumenical movement from its beginning.

In Sibiu we again felt the painful wound of division between our Churches. This even concerns our understanding of the Church and its unity. The distinct historical and cultural developments in Eastern and Western Christianity have contributed to these differences, and understanding them requires our urgent attention and ongoing dialogue.

We are convinced that the wider Christian family has to deal with doctrinal questions, and it must also seek a broad consensus about moral values derived from the Gospel and a credible Christian lifestyle that joyfully witnesses to the light of Christ in our challenging modern secular world, in private as well as in public life.

Our Christian spirituality is a precious treasure: once opened, it reveals the variety of its riches and opens our hearts to the beauty of the face of Jesus and to the strength of prayer. Only if we are closer to our Lord Jesus Christ, can we become closer to one another and experience true *koinonia*. We cannot but share these riches with all men and women who are seeking light in this continent. Spiritual men and women begin with their own conversion and this leads to the transformation of the world. Our witness to the light of Christ is a faithful commitment to listen, live and share our stories of life and hope, which have shaped us as followers of Christ.

Recommendation One: We recommend renewing our mission as individual believers and as Churches to proclaim Christ as the Light and the Saviour of the world;

Recommendation Two: We recommend continuing the discussion on mutual recognition of baptism, taking into account the important achievements on this topic in several countries and being aware that the question is deeply linked to an understanding of eucharist, ministry and ecclesiology in general;

Recommendation Three: We recommend finding ways of experiencing the activities which can unite us: prayer for each other and for unity, ecumenical pilgrimages, theological formation and study in common, social and diaconal initiatives, cultural projects, supporting society life based on Christian values;

Recommendation Four: We recommend the full participation of the whole people of God in the lives of our Churches and, at this Assembly in particular, note the appeal of young people, the elderly, ethnic minorities, and disabled people.

The light of Christ for Europe

We consider that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (*Gen 1:27*) and deserves the same degree of respect and love, despite

differences of belief, culture, age, gender, or ethnic origin¹. Being aware that our common roots lie much deeper than our divisions, while looking for renewal and unity and the role of the Churches in today's European society, we focussed on our encounter with people of other religions. Aware in particular of our unique relationship with the Jewish peoples as people of the Covenant, we reject all forms of contemporary anti-Semitism and, with them, will foster Europe as a continent free of every form of violence. There have been periods in our European history of harsh conflicts but there have also been periods of peaceful co-existence among people of all religions. In our day there is no alternative to dialogue: not compromise, but a dialogue of life where we can speak the truth in love. We all need to learn more about all religions, and the recommendations of *Charta Oecumenica* should be developed further. We appeal to our fellow Christians and all who believe in God to respect other people's right to religious freedom, and express our solidarity with Christian communities who live in the Middle East, Iraq, and elsewhere in the world as religious minorities and feel that their very existence is under threat.

As we meet Christ in our needy sisters and brothers (*Mt 25:44-45*), together enlightened by the Light of Christ, we Christians, according to biblical injunctions to the unity of humanity (*Gen 1.26-27*), commit ourselves to repent for the sin of exclusion; deepen our understanding of 'otherness'; defend the dignity and rights of every human being, and ensure protection to those in need of it; share the light of Christ which others bring to Europe; call upon European states to stop unjustifiable administrative detention of migrants, make every effort to ensure regular immigration, the integration of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, uphold the value of family unity and combat trafficking in human beings and exploitation of trafficked persons. We call on Churches to increase their pastoral care of vulnerable immigrants.

Recommendation Five: We recommend that our Churches should recognise that Christian immigrants are not just the recipients of religious care but that they can play a full and active role in the life of the Church and of society; offer better pastoral care for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees; and promote the rights of ethnic minorities in Europe, particularly the Roma people.

Many of us are thankful that we have experienced profound changes in Europe in recent decades. Europe is more than the European Union. As Christians we share the responsibility for shaping Europe as a continent of peace, solidarity, participation and sustainability. We appreciate the commitment of the European Institutions, including the EU, Council of Europe, and the OSCE, to an open, transparent and regular dialogue with the Churches of Europe. Europe's highest political representatives honoured us with their presence and thus expressed

¹ At this point during the reading of the Message to the Assembly, a phrase "From conception to natural death" was offered verbally which was subsequently translated as "From birth to natural death - From the beginning of life until natural death. None of these phrases form a part of the official text of the message.

strong interest in our work. We have to face the challenge to bring spiritual strengths into this dialogue. Europe was initially a political project to secure peace and it now needs to become a Europe of the peoples, more than an economic space.

Recommendation Six: We recommend developing the *Charta Oecumenica* as a stimulating guideline for our ecumenical journey in Europe.

The light of Christ for the whole world

The Word of God disquiets us and our European culture: those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again! Christians must be free from fear and insatiable avarice that make us live for ourselves, powerless, narrow-minded and closed. The Word of God invites us to avoid squandering the precious heritage of those who for the last sixty years have worked for peace and unity in Europe. Peace is an extraordinary and precious gift. Entire countries aspire to peace. Entire peoples are waiting to be delivered from violence and terror. We urgently commit ourselves to renewed efforts towards these ends. We reject war as a tool for resolving conflict, promote non-violent means for conflict resolution, and are concerned about military re-armament. Violence and terrorism in the name of religion are a denial of religion.

The Light of Christ shines on the term 'justice', linking it to divine mercy. Thus enlightened it escapes any ambiguous pretence. Throughout the world and even in Europe the current process of radical market globalisation is deepening the division of human society between winners and losers, harms the value of countless people, has catastrophic ecological implications and precisely in view of climate change is not compatible with sustaining the future of our planet.

Recommendation Seven: We urge all European Christians to give strong support to the *Millennium Development Goals* of the United Nations as an urgent practical step towards the alleviation of poverty.

Recommendation Eight: We recommend that a consultative process, addressing European responsibility for ecological justice, facing the threat of climate change; European responsibility for the just shaping of globalisation; the rights of Roma people and other European ethnic minorities, be initiated by CCEE and CEC, with the Churches in Europe and with Churches of other continents.

Today more than ever, we acknowledge that Africa, a continent already intertwined with our own history and future, experiences levels of poverty about which we cannot remain indifferent and inactive. The wounds of Africa touched the heart of our Assembly.

Recommendation Nine: We recommend backing initiatives for debt cancellation and the promotion of fair trade.

Through sincere and objective dialogue, we contribute to and promote the creation of a renewed Europe, where unchangeable Christian principles and moral values, derived directly from the Gospel, serve as a witness and promote active engagement in European society. Our task is to promote these principles and values, not only in private but also in public life. We will cooperate with people of other religions who share our concern for creating a Europe of values that also prospers politically and economically.

Concerned about God's creation, we pray for a greater sensitivity and respect for its wonderful diversity. We work against its shameless exploitation, from which the "whole creation awaits its redemption," (*Rom 8:22*) and commit ourselves to working for reconciliation between humanity and nature.

Recommendation Ten: We recommend that the period from the 1st September to the 4th of October be dedicated to prayer for the protection of Creation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles that reverse our contribution to climate change.

Paying tribute to all who contributed to this journey, particularly the young *oikumene*, who urged this assembly to be courageous in living the Gospel, we unite in prayer:

O Christ, the True Light, which illumines and sanctifies every human being coming into this world, shine on us the light of your presence, that in it we may behold the unapproachable light, and guide our paths for the work of your commandments. Save us and lead us into your eternal kingdom. For you are our Creator, Provider and Giver of all that is good. Our hope is in you and to you we give glory, now and forever. Amen.