

■ **EVANGELICAL CHURCH** Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia

■ **IGLESIA EVANGÉLICA** Berlín-Brandeburgo-Alta Lusacia silesia

**Bishop Dr Dr h.c. Markus Dröge**

***Statement: The Need for Europe***

*Congress: Peace With No Borders. Religions and Cultures in Dialogue*

*Madrid, 15-17 September 2019*

*Community of Sant' Egidio*

*Panel 4 - The Need for Europe*

*Monday, 16 September 2019, 10:00 a.m.*

Círculo de Bellas Artes, Sala Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Marqués de Casa Riera, nº 2

I.

I come from Berlin. In this year in November we will celebrate 30 years since the peaceful revolution and the fall of the Berlin wall. Located in Europa between West and East the unification and the reconciliation of Europe are very important for us. We have a lot of partnership relations with churches in West- and East-Europe. And so my question is: What is the contribution – or better: what should be the contribution – of the churches to the project of Europe in the actual situation?

I would like to start my contribution to this meeting by mentioning a famous German philosopher and sociologist and a famous German theologian.

The philosopher and sociologist in question is Jürgen Habermas. According to Jürgen Habermas<sup>1</sup>, the meaning and the task of Europe from it`s historical experience is to keep alive a

---

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas. Hat die Konstitutionalisierung des Völkerrechts noch eine Chance? (Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?), in: Der gespaltene Westen (The Divided West). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2004, 113-193.

vision of peace for the world, non-violently looking for a path towards peace. This vision for world peace, following the tradition of enlightenment, includes three aspects:

1. World peace is tied to human rights.
2. The path towards peace excludes the legitimisation of violence.
3. The United Nations as well as their institutions and agreements have to be respected.<sup>2</sup>

By and by, discourse shall create pacified regions by negotiations and agreements. He considers that the task of Europe is to establish such a pacified region as an example for the world.

## II.

The German theologian I want to mention is Jürgen Moltmann. With his *Theology of Hope* he has motivated world-wide Christianity to advocate justice, peace and Integrity of Creation since the 1960s. Jürgen Moltmann regards the situation of Europe to be very critical. Already in 2005 he wrote in a poetic diction:

“Democracy and human rights spread from Europe to the world, liberality and socialism spread from Europe to the world. The scientific and technical civilisation spreads from Europe to the world. The sparks of hope for a common future in the world of peoples came from Europe. And today? Will there come nothing more?”<sup>3</sup>

“... The fires of enthusiasm have gone out. ... Scepticism and melancholy spread and make Europe look old and grey. ... The great passions for a better future have vanished.”<sup>4</sup>

However, we should not give up hope for Europe:

“If Europe now wants to find a future and shall bear a meaning for the world, this continent with its culture, its politics, its economy and its social order will have to be born again and brought to life again from the spirit of its initial hope.”<sup>5</sup>

And he finishes with a positive outlook: “From the spirit of this hope, Europe will be born again and will find its shape for the world”.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Habermas. Zur Legitimation durch Menschenrechte (Remarks on Legitimation through Human Rights), in: id., Die postnationale Konstellation (The Postnational Constellation). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1998, 170-192.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Moltmann. Göttliches Geheimnis (Divine Mystery). Die Wiedergeburt Europas aus dem Geist der Hoffnung und der weite Raum der Zukunft (The Renaissance of Europe from the Spirit of Hope and the Large Space of the Future), in: zeitchichen, 7/2005, 20-22, here: 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>5</sup> L.c.

### III.

I think that Jürgen Habermas and Jürgen Moltmann preserve a deep insight. They remind Europe of the hopes contained in the European tradition and of unredeemed promises. The fact remains that many people think, we still do not have a new and connecting tale for the future Europe that can motivate people to look forward with hope and promote peace. If it is so, we have to keep alive the old promises of hope. That is biblical wisdom! We evoke the promises and pray to God in order that He should remember those promises und reveal to us new paths to peace and justice.

And what is the task of the Church?

I would like to illustrate the contribution of the Christian churches in Europe by reminding you of a document of hope European Christianity formulated in 2001: the *Charta Oecumenica*. European churches of different confessions formulated this charter. They recorded a joint objective and combined it with a set of agreements.<sup>7</sup> What are the most significant requirements of the *Charta Oecumenica*? I mention five points:

#### *1. Participating in the Building of Europe*

By signing the charter, the European churches have committed themselves to encourage “an integration of the European continent” and to “heighten Europe's sense of responsibility of the whole of humanity, particularly for the poor all over the world” (Guideline 7).

#### *2. Reminding Ourselves of the History of Guilt as an Element of European Culture*

The charter emphasises the history of guilt of European Christianity. It especially mentions the schisms, hostilities and wars as well as the abuse of the faith and the churches in favour of political interests that have massively affected the credibility of the Christian witness (Guideline 3). As a result, the Church of Jesus Christ has to preserve the culture of memory as a part of the culture of Europe.

#### *3. Committing Ourselves to the Equal Dignity of All People and to the Interreligious Dialogue*

By signing the charter, the European churches have committed themselves to “resist any attempt to misuse religion and the church for ethnic or nationalist purposes” (Guideline 7). The churches claim their task is “to serve together the course of reconciliation among

---

<sup>6</sup> L.c., 22.

<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the *Charta Oecumenica* is the “first oecumenical document of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Bishop Dr Walter Klaiber, retd., former bishop of the *United Methodist Church* in Germany).

peoples and cultures” (Guideline 8). They advocate “the absolutely equal value of all human beings” (Guideline 8). They want to “enhance Christian-Islamic dialogue at all levels”, “to conduct” themselves “towards Muslims with respect” and “to work together with Muslims on matters of common concern” (Guideline 11). They know that “the plurality of religious and non-confessional beliefs and ways of life has become a feature of European culture” (Guideline 12).

#### 4. *Standing up for Refugees and Migrants*

By signing the charter, the European churches have expressed their joint intention to contribute to “giving migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers a humane reception in Europe” (Guideline 8).

#### 5. *Committing Ourselves to the Environment as the Creation of God*

By signing the charter, the churches together have committed themselves to advocating the Integrity of Creation, because they alarmingly notice “natural resources being exploited without regard for their intrinsic value or consideration of their limits, and without regard for the well-being of future generations” (Guideline 9). The Church of Jesus Christ stands up for God's creation, also and particularly for the sake of people in other parts of the world who have to suffer from the disastrous climate change much more than we in Europe have to.

The document *Charta Oecumenica* is 18 years old. But I think now is the historical situation to remember the European Christianity of these guidelines, in a situation where there are also nationalistic voices to be heard in European churches.

## IV.

What is the “Need for Europe”?

Europe has a special tradition of hope that has not found its final expression yet. Europe has to introduce this tradition as its contribution to a peaceful future of the whole human family. Europe is able to and should move forward by attempting to create peace within its own region. For this purpose, the European project has to be emphatically continued. The churches have to contribute to this project with their mission, their ethics und their spiritual life.