Church leaders meet with presidents of European institutions

Conference of European Churches – Office of Communications
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Human dignity and tolerance key values in building Europe

“To promote human dignity and human rights as well as tolerance must be key in the European integration process. This was the comment of Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, President of the Conference of European Churches in his intervention at a meeting of religious leaders with the Presidents of the three Institutions of the European Union, President Barroso (European Commission), Chancellor Merkel (President of the European Council) and President Pöttering (European Parliament). The high-level meeting on 15 May 2007 was the third of its kind, organised upon the initiative of the President of the European Commission.

Bishop Huber, representing the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), underlined the universality and the unconditionality of human dignity. Dignity had to be attributed to every human being, created in the image of God. It is therefore a common task of the religious communities as well of the European institutions to strive to enable every human being to participate in society.

The meeting stressed both the need for a theological reflection on human dignity and the need to make human dignity the overarching value to be applied to concrete areas of European policy, such as migration, development policy and the 7th research framework programme.

Chancellor Merkel in her contributions emphasised that politics depends on preconditions which it cannot generate itself. For this reason, the dialogue with the religious communities as an important player in civil society and a contributor to the value basis of European societies is so important. She expects the “open, transparent and regular dialogue” between the religious communities and the European institutions to continue under future EU presidencies. President Pöttering echoed the need for more permanent contact points in order to ensure the common preparation of and the follow-up to high-level meetings as this.

The Right Reverend Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, highlighted the importance of religious education in schools, which provides for “religious literacy, growth in spiritual awareness and ethical clarity”.

Bishop Klein, representing the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Romania, addressed the meeting as a representative of a new member state of the European Union and of a region which has a long-standing tradition in the peaceful coexistence and interaction of various religions and ethnic and religious communities. Tolerance must be more than just living next to each other; it must include “the acceptance of the otherness of the other”. As one of the hosts of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in September 2007, he
referred to the Charta Oecumenica as an important instrument to strengthen the dialogue of churches from all over Europe and across different cultures.

Andres Pöder, Lutheran Archbishop from Estonia, underlined the common search for truth and the common good and the active engagement in reconciliation processes as key elements for a Europe of tomorrow.

Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, speaking in the name of the Orthodox representatives to the European Union, emphasised the implementation of human rights and religious freedom, especially for minority communities in Europe and in Turkey in particular.

It was recognised that there might be different perceptions as to how human dignity and tolerance translate into particular policy areas. The meeting concluded with a consensus among participants from the religious communities as well as from the European institutions that human dignity and tolerance are pillars upon which a Europe united in diversity and upon which Europe’s relations to other parts of the world have to be built. Strengthening the quest for human dignity and for tolerance remains a common task and challenge of the religious communities as well as of the European institutions and their member states.

Participants in the meeting from CEC and CEC member churches were: Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont (CEC President), Rüdiger Noll (Associated General Secretary and Director), the Right Reverend Richard Chartres (Bishop of London), Bishop Dr Wolfgang Huber (EKD), Archbishop Andres Pöder (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church), Bishop Christoph Klein (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania), H.B. Archbishop Chrysosthomos of Nea Justiniana and All Cyprus, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France (Ecumenical Patriarchate), H.E. Bishop Athanasios of Achaia (Church of Greece), H.E. Hilarion of Vienna and Austria (Russian Orthodox Church).

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The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 125 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 associated organisations. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg.

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