

Rev. Stanislav ČEHOVNIK

Honourable assembly, most respected Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am happy that I, as a Slovenian, have the opportunity to convey to you the message from Carinthia where I live and which is my home. This is the most southern province of Austria, on the borders of which three cultural circles – Germanic, Latin and Slavic – meet and strive to live together in friendship.

Today, the question of the future of Europe engages our minds there more than ever because it is becoming less predictable than ever. One can see that it would be extremely one-sided to consider Europe and its future exclusively from an economic, or even social and political point of view. Jacques Delors said the other day that either Europe must have a soul or it would cease to exist. I would permit myself to appropriate his thought, but also to alter it a little by saying that Europe must have a deeply human soul. And we Christians are responsible that this soul be awake and alive, and not plunge into a dangerous, deadly sleep.

This is why it seems to me essential that the question about the contribution of Christianity should be put to the fore in the context of all the interpretations which stress economic problems and processes. We should constantly live Easter time, and therefore it is understandable that we call to mind those challenges which the Resurrected gave to His disciples: unity, love for one's neighbour, and proclamation of the good news.

The idea that all of us – as God's children – are brothers, is the bond which unifies Europe and can give it lasting peace. *Opus fraternitatis pax*. But we can enter the path of peace only if we consider a unity which is founded on Christianity and its moral principles rather than on human power. We must be astonished and appalled when we see how little unity there is in the neighbouring country of Bosnia, how few promises have been kept, even those negotiated with best of intentions, and see the consequences of fanaticism and of pursuit of power. The case of Northern Ireland is an example of the same problem, only in a different geographical location.

What can we, as the Church, do here? I think that it is not sufficient that only the West unites in peace. From the beginning, Christianity and its Church assumed the task of "building bridges" – for the sake of peace; of building bridges towards those countries in Eastern Europe which are not yet present in

European thinking, or which appear there only occasionally and marginally because they were forced to live under a different ideological power for so long. When we speak about Europe we must learn to see this great social and political reality as one whole.

In a noteworthy declaration of the Diocesan Council of Carinthia, which is a representative body for Catholics of the diocese Gurk-Klagenfurt, our bishop, Dr. Egon Kapellari, referring to the widely-discussed topic of the unification of Europe, said: "Christians should also work at the «building-site of Europe»." He also quoted the words of John Paul II that our European home extends from the Atlantic to the Urals, and from the North Pole to Sicily. "Thus" – he continued – "there is still a lot of work on this «building-site of Europe»."

Obviously, bridges need foundations on which they can be solidly built in order to resist floods. I would like to recall the words of Theodor Reuss, who was the first German President after the war. He said: "Europe is supported, as if by columns, by three mountains simultaneously: by the Acropolis in Athens, the Capitol in Rome, and the hill of Golgotha in Jerusalem." If the Acropolis is a symbol of culture, then Rome could be interpreted not only as historical tradition, but also as the Church whose origins could be found at a certain hill in Jerusalem. Golgotha, however, was not the final station. The resurrected Jesus gave His disciples an order to carry the good news and faith to the world. But he also gave them time so that they could learn to deal with their own past, which they were able to understand only after Pentecost. We, too, as Christians learn to understand and reflect upon the European past in order to shape the future from it. We must know how to forgive each other and forget. This is the essence of the Christian message, which is the only one which can be a source of lasting peace. We should be friends in order to give this Europe the strength to cope with its past. It is the condition which must of necessity be fulfilled if the danger is to be diverted. The disciples did not stop for long to follow with elated sight their Lord who ascended to Heaven. Very soon, angels sent them to the tasks assigned to them. We need not gaze enchantedly at the sky, we need rather action springing from faith and from the consciousness that we in Europe are responsible for the countries of the Third and the so-called Fourth World. For this, we need spirituality which would teach us anew to understand how important it is to share. It is not looking into the more or less glorious past that will help us, but a courageous glance into the future which will allow us to see the misery of mankind. Easter commands us to direct our eyes towards the future from the very heart of the present. For Jesus' disciples, the future was the place where the Holy Ghost was sent to them.

Today, much fear is being spread. There are different reasons for this, and most often related to the way people think about material things. Some of those fears cannot be ignored, but they must not become the norm for action either.

Christians in Europe must have the courage to let the Spirit of God guide them. The Spirit is always there where, instead of discrimination, love of neighbour is shown, where community interest has priority over individual interest, where there is room for ecumenical thought, and where other people are brothers in God.

Culture, art and economy have their value only when they draw their transcendence, their bond with God, from Christian faith. Only this, and nothing else, will save Europe and keep it alive. We must transform into the future what Christianity conveyed to us as a heritage. Every century had its great figures, men and women who, out of conviction, shaped other people. We must not only complain that also today we are desperately in need of such people. We should rather support those among us who are gifted with great spiritual energy and thanks to this can construct bridges between the results of scientific research and the mystery of faith. One should begin with small steps, and we must see the possibilities to do this. I come from a small country which is in the course of preparations for finding its place in the heart of Europe. And to date we have already attempted, precisely in the neighbouring countries of the Alps and Adriatic region, to realize together the attitude determined by Christian values.

“One never is a Christian, but one should be always becoming a Christian” – these words come from Kierkegaard. This means, according to the words of the Church, that we should seriously take *omnia instaurare in Christo*. This is the only way in which the future of Europe can be built. In many cities so-called European Houses have been founded today. They must not remain merely the impulses for thinking. Europe itself is a home where there should be room for all people; it is a common home where people help each other to love and to hope. Only in this way will Europe have a soul and will become not the power of authority, but the force which is able to unite because its basic values are peace, freedom, love and justice.

Translated by *Patrycja Mikulska*