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The Christian Identity in the Pluralistic Europe:

Introduction

It is for me a real honour and pleasure to have been invited to the European Forum of National Laity Committees in Bratislava on "Religion and Diversity in Europe" and to share with you some of my ideas concerning the "Christian identity in the pluralistic Europe".

Europe is at the cross roads between past, present and future. We are confronted with a number of (internal and external) challenges to the underlying values of the European model of socio-economic cohesion, cultural and regional diversity. In other words, we experience a confrontation between the actual European confusing (political, economic, cultural and institutional) reality and the lack of a long term vision ("Where there is no vision, people perish"). Therefore it is my conviction that the Christian identity, inspiration and testimony are more than needed in strengthening the specificities of pluralistic Europe.

I have divided my contribution in two parts. In a first part I will briefly deal with Europe in its historical and current context as a civilization, a socio-economic model and a unique integration process in which the Christian identity and vision have been (and still are) an inspiring factor. In a second part I'll try to apply this general European context to education; i.e. what is the Christian identity in (higher) education and intercultural education in pluralistic Europe?

PART ONE: EUROPE: a civilization, a socio-economic model and a unique integration process

1. Historical context

History illustrates that Europe is a dynamic and evolving entity with many faces, multiple identities and diversified cooperation forms. Europe is a 2.000 year civilization with a multiplicity of cultures; it is also a socio-economic model and a unique integration process. The whole European history is characterized by forms and attempts of economic, political,

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military and cultural cooperation, which attempted equilibrium between integration and diversity within certain contours. Europe is however in the first place a community of shared values, a diversified but coherent societal model shaped by vague geographical frontiers, fundamental values of freedom, solidarity and respect for the other, its common cultural heritage and shared historical experiences.

Christianity has shaped Europe's identity and destiny and history is part of it. Therefore Christians have also a responsibility in the actual process of European integration and in defining/strengthening Europe's role in the globalization world.

Let me start with a reference to Paul Valéry. The French poet and philosopher stresses the Europe of the spirit: a Europe which has made humanism its foundation, rooted in Christianity. He described the common characteristics in his *"Homo Europaeus"*, shaped by the legacies of Rome, Athens and Jerusalem. This means in effect that Europe is a world of historical references and memories shared by all Europeans.

In his book *"The Origins of European civilisation"* Hendrik Brugmans identified two major elements of European civilisation: the active participation to the many spiritual heritages and a series of historical experiences from the Roman Empire onwards. He distinguished three phases: the Empire of Constantine: the first Europe which is Mediterranean (Saint Augustine); Medieval or Christian Europe and Europe of the Nation state; a fourth Europe is now taking shape. We should however not forget that the Mediterranean area has been the cradle of European civilization, the Europe of culture and ideas, the genius loci. It is in the broader space of today's Europe that the original virtue of the spirit of humanism and Christianity, namely democracy, dialogue, respect for the rights and the harmonious development should be understood, sharing a common heritage and rooted in Christian values.

In short, Europe presents multi faces, multiple identities, multiple expressions and experiences. They are presented by myths, historical figures, patrons, political and moral leaders, founding fathers. In this process Christianity constitutes a force for unity and solidarity in and outside Europe.

2. Present Europe: What is Europe today?

For understanding today's pluralistic Europe, its concept, ideas, roots, identity and future we refer to some quotations:

➢ *"On ne tombe pas amoureux d'un grand marché"* (J. Delors)
➢ *"The vocation of Europe is not to impose but to inspire"* (V. Havel)
➢ *"The European Dream emphasizes community relationships over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over accumulation of wealth, sustainable development over unlimited material growth, deep play over unrelenting toil, universal human rights and the rights of nature over property rights, and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power. It is powerful because it dares to suggest a new history, with an attention to quality of life, sustainability, peace and harmony."* (J. Rifkin, The European Dream, 2004)
➢ *"Europe is not any longer an abstract concept, neither is it a mere geographical, difficult confining area. It is a culture circle/environment, a community. Now it is on the way to become an ordered society, with citizens who take up civil responsibility for the whole, although this is not yet clear for many. Transition times as ours are*

characterized by extra-chaos. The hope is focuses on a change in continuity. But a radical change." (Hendrik Brugmans, 1968)

➢ *"If a new European order is to be adequate for the promotion of the authentic common good, it must recognise and safeguard the values that constitute the most precious heritage of European humanism. Multiple are the cultural roots that have contributed to reinforce these values: from the spirit of Greece to that of Roman law and virtue, from the contributions of the Latin, Celtic, Germanic, Slav and Finno-Ugric peoples, to those of the Jewish culture and the Islamic world. These different factors found in the Judeo-Christian tradition the power that harmonised, consolidated and promoted them."* (From the message of Pope John Paul II to the Congress "Towards a European Constitution" organised by the European Federation of Catholic Universities, 20 June 2003)

Definition and basic principles

Present Europe (EU) can be defined as a new political entity, a global actor and a commercial force in the World with its own currency; it is a (mix of) intergovernmental and supranational union of 27 European countries and nearly 500 mlj citizens …a *sui generis* institution; it is an autonomous entity somewhere in between an international organization and an association of States.

But in the first place it is a Model of Society based on a number of inspiring principles which were introduced by the Founding Fathers. The European motto is Unity in diversity - *In varietate Concordia.* Major inherent objectives are: Peace, Unity and equality, Fundamental freedoms, Safety and Security, Economic and Social Solidarity, Respect of national and regional identities, Inclusiveness and Preservation of European cultural heritage.

Internal and external challenges

Today this unique model of integration is stressed by a number of internal and external challenges which put the whole project at risk and undermine its foundations and credibility. Shaping factors of this increasing confusing context are seemingly paradoxical debates related to:

➢ Convergence vs. diversity: cohesive forces of community building and disintegrative forces
➢ Widening vs. deepening: further enlargement, institutional rebuilding and decision-making process
➢ Globalization (in economic, political and cultural terms) vs. individualization, marketization and commercialisation of human relations
➢ Multiculturality and interculturality in relation to diversity, dialogue and mutual leaning and listening
➢ Stereotype behaviour/ (in)tolerance and indifference
➢ Exclusive or inclusive Europe in relation to migration, (cross-)border cooperation
➢ Respect for human rights and request for human security

Identity-building: European identity and national/regional identities

Given this complex global and European state of minds and affairs identity-building (**European identity, national/regional/local and personal identities**) becomes crucial. Identity-building (the sense of self-awareness of "belonging") is not a constant and invariable

process, but changes over time according to criteria such as birth, family, language, religion, territory, etc. This process has turned more complex and more disturbed by the growing individualisation, intolerant and distrustful behaviour as well as by the vagueness of the moral norms within society. In short, identity building is becoming more a relational concept in present times, less static; therefore the need for the Christian values to be outspoken and to reaffirm Christian identity in open dialogue.

This is certainly true for a European identity. The recent scientific and political debate show different models on how (European) identification can be built and what are the policy consequences:

a) Europe of culture or "family of nations": Communitarians believe that a polity can only be stable if anchored in a common history and culture. They emphasise that European identity has emerged from common movements in religion and philosophy, politics, science and the arts. Therefore, they tend to exclude Turkey and argue a stronger awareness of the Christian (or Judeo-Christian) tradition. "United in diversity" is taken to refer to Europe as a "family of nations". On this basis, EU borders have to be quickly defined. This may lead to a form of "Euro-nationalism" and exclusionary policies within European societies.

b) Europe of citizens or "constitutional patriotism": Liberals and republicans argue for a common political culture, or civic identity, based on universal principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law etc. expressed in the framework of a common public sphere and political participation (or "constitutional patriotism", a term coined by the German scholar Jürgen Habermas). According to Habermas, in a liberal democracy, citizens should not be identified with a common cultural identity, but with some constitutional principles that fully guarantee their rights and freedoms. They believe that cultural identities, religious beliefs etc. should be confined to the private sphere. For them, European identity will emerge from common political and civic practices, civil society organisations and strong EU institutions. "United in diversity", according to this view, means that the citizens share the same political and civic values, while at the same time adhering to different cultural practices. The limits of the community should be a question of politics, not culture.

c) Europe as space of encounters: Constructivists believe that a "European identity" could emerge as a consequence of intensified civic, political and cultural exchanges and cooperation. As identities undergo constant change, "European identity" would be encompassing multiple meanings and identifications and would be constantly redefined through relationships with others. "United in Diversity" would mean the participation in collective political and cultural practices. It would be wrong and impossible to fix EU borders.

3. Christian vision to pluralistic Europe

What are the building blocks of the Christian vision to pluralistic Europe? I distinguish 3 major basic components:
  - ➢ Basic point of departure: Diversity in unity: it implies commitment (institutional, political, social, etc) and acceptance of the principle of subsidiarity; it certainly means respect for the other, for diversity, human dignity etc.
  - ➢ Common conviction is based on:
    - a distinction between religion and politics and between the temporal and the spiritual, recognizing the transversal nature of our existence

- the realization of the common good
- faith ànd social engagement

➢ Modesty: there is no ready made answer to the changing process: Still it implies that Churches are an actor in the social debate; Christianity is important for Europe's future and Christians have a role to play in the development of European institutions and policies.

The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) has been rather active in reaffirming the contribution of the Christian identity to the EU integration process; stressing the European values of hope, trust and solidarity. In their statement "Building a Spiritual Bridge of Unity between Peoples" on 9 May 1997, enlargement was seen as a concrete opportunity to promote and realise throughout the whole of Europe fundamental values such as freedom, justice, peace and prosperity both within and outside its own borders. Furthermore, in "Let's Open our hearts" (December 2002) the COMECE defined enlargement as the realization of the European common good and the "Europeanisation" of the European Union trough a "community of solidarity" based on economic and political integration.

Very illustrative of the importance of the Christian inspiration to the launching of the European integration has been the vision proposed in the **Robert Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950.** It was based on the founding principles of peace, cooperation on voluntary basis, a long historical basis and concrete measures through solidar actions and shared responsibility:
➢ Objective: world peace (inside and outside Europe)
➢ Basic principle: freedom (rule of law, guided integration, respect for human rights)
➢ Working method: (internal and external) solidarity is a valuable method in multi-level governance

Actual (Treaty) Situation:

In the Preamble of the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty it is finally said after a harsh debate concerning a reference to God said: *"Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law';*

Article 51 deals with the **Status of churches and non-confessional organisations and reads as follows:**
"1. The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States.
2. The Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.
3. Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations."

The Christian vision implies a challenge ànd a responsibility for Christians in the ongoing process of integration sui generis:
➢ Basic point of departure is the commitment to universal values of freedom, peace, solidarity, common good and the respect for the other
➢ Criteria:
  - Christian vision of man: human dignity in all its dimensions and conditions (internal and external peace; political and economic solidarity)

- At the service of mankind: European integration process in universal perspective (against the individualism of states or collective egoism of the EU)
➢ Responsibility:
-Peace-keeping and interreligious dialogue
- Freedom: education to integral human development
- European solidarity based on mutual trust

CONCLUSION: The process of the European integration process is a political project beyond mere economics, inspired and shaped by Christianity. Its goals are:
1. Recognising multiple faced identities and cosmopolitan citizenship.
2. Humanising Globalisation
3. Revalorising the role of cultures in Europe
4. Moving from multiculturalism to interculturalism: stimulating intercultural dialogue

These goals needs to be realized in a structural/institutional EU multi-governance setting in which the focus is on the Europe of dialogues (economic; political, social, civil, cultural) towards (interregional, intergenerational and interpersonal) solidarity and on the EU as a soft power in the global and local economic, political, social and cultural landscape.

PART TWO: EDUCATION: Christian identity in education and intercultural education in pluralistic Europe

In the second part I would like to briefly comment on the relevance of the Christian identity and values in (higher) education and intercultural education. (*"Education together in catholic schools",* Congregation of Catholic Education, September 2007)

1. Role of Education: its crucial role

Education is a dynamic process of learning that creates added value and forms the person. It is to transmit possibilities and opportunities with conviction, intuition and motivation. It is always a meeting with the other, henceforth the role of teachers as key agents for change and the need to accompany and respect their role in the educational landscape. Educational commitment can be experienced in the teachers' eyes. "Educate is to lighten a fire".

The first tasks of the school is to form young people to become responsible citizens, providing them with information, knowledge, competences, skills and an open behaviour, in line with fundamental values such as peace and tolerance of diversity, etc. Key competences refer to knowledge, skills and attitudes that serve personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship. These include the traditional competences but also the more transversal ones such as learning to learn, social and civic competences, cultural awareness and expressions.

In this context the reference to Edgar Morin, the French sociologist, is obligatory. He proposes 4 objectives in the transmission of knowledge and the activities of teaching:
➢ to form a well developed mind (better than a too full mind)
➢ to teach the human condition
➢ to educate to live: learning does not mean only the acquisition of knowledge, techniques and productive modes, but also an interest in the relations with the other and with one self
➢ to learn the dignity of the citizen

The conditions for such an education and learning are, according to me, the following:

➢ The development, not only of any analytical mind, but also a synthetic and creative capacity
➢ The formation of general and specific knowledge, in particular thinking and acting with respect for diversity and differences
➢ An education to listening, tolerance, comprehension, responsibility and respect for other cultures and people
➢ A general knowledge acquisition with an open and critical spirit in a historical perspective; but conscious of a number of basic values
➢ Pedagogy of interculturality in order to create formal and informal spaces of encounter.

2. Vision of Catholic higher education

We now look closer at Catholic higher education. Its vision is well stated in the Apostolic Constitution Ex Corde Ecclesiae (1990): *"Every Catholic university, as a university, is an academic community which, in rigorous and critical fashion, assists in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities."*

A very interesting Work Document in this perspective was *«Globalisation and Catholic higher education. Hopes and challenges»*. It was published in 2004 as a follow-up of an international conference, jointly organized in Rome by the International Federation of Catholic Universities and the Congregation for Catholic Education. Two objectives were said to be vital for Catholic University:

a. The promotion of a humanising vision: It is related to community-building, genuine participation in that community and a sense of inclusion and seeking justice for all in a world of change, differing cultures, values and commitments. The legacy and worth of Christian values (such as family, human dignity, justice, solidarity, charity, hope, respect for human life in all its aspects, respect for difference and diversity) offer unique resources and important responses to the various challenges of education in contemporary globalization.

b. The focus on an integral human development: Catholic higher education has a special responsibility for transmitting knowledge and developing research as well as for forming persons in solid and integrated human development. It is a site of permanent learning and a place of disciplinary and interdisciplinary excellence in which a truly humanizing form of higher education is present, open to the spiritual dimension of the truth.

3. Distinctive contribution of Catholic Education: identity and mission

Within this vision Catholic education is faced with a tension between the search for academic quality and progress and the maintenance of catholic identity as well as the keeping of its specific contribution. The major challenge is to resist to the utilitarian and market approach of learning. The dominant market version of education, seen as a commodity for consumption, is confronted with the vision of an enhancing human development process. This is firmly grounded in commonly shared values and lived experiences and testimonies. Education is not only an individual quest, but also a commitment to solidarity within the new emerging European and global realities. Solidarity combines a sense of justice with active compassion.

It combines rigorous intellectual inquiry with personal contact and commitment. This of course requires a courageous attitude towards the defence of one's own identity in order not to renounce to the specific added dimension of catholic education. The need is for an integration of the Christian vision in the academic life of the Catholic university.

The Catholic university has a distinctive identity and mission: to offer its service to the search *"for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society"*. A Catholic university contributes to this mission with its own purpose of *"the Ministry of Hope in the service of others"*.

The education which is promoted in Catholic universities is therefore the result of the interaction among three elements, namely social issues, expressed by the Church's social teaching, the nature of the university, expressed in the ethos of the institution (Service to the church, society and the university community), and the forms of pedagogy or learning and teaching, illustrated in the personal life experience. In short, an appropriate pedagogy for Christian education addresses three major issues:

> ➢ the concern for wider social and humanitarian norms of justice, hope, peace, equity and social inclusion offered by the Church and the society;

> ➢ the opportunities offered by the university or the education institution through the ethos of participation;

> ➢ Personal life experience of each person.

Such a Christian pedagogy is set within a spiritual space of learning. The recognition of spirituality at the heart of learning and thinking in Catholic universities implies concrete places for individual and community prayer, silence, liturgy, encounter and dialogue.

4. An Educational Agenda for Action for strengthening Christian values in education.

The Educational Agenda for Action aims at strengthening the Christian values in education, in general principles as well as in concrete actions. Three priority domains of actions can be identified:

  - Formation of integral human development. This means among others to sstrengthen the human person in order to develop a culture of peace, solidarity, charity, justice, etc. throughout the world, with particular attention to the poorest; to focus on the Christian spirituality in curricular and extra curricular activities

  - Transmission of knowledge and search for truth. This means to stimulate dialogues and exchanges of knowledge, to reinforce Christian values in education to truth by integrating faith and life with professional competence, with specific focus on human rights, democracy, sustainable peace, poverty alleviation, etc., and by addressing the current challenges of globalization to societies and the Church, in the light of the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church.

  - Serving community within and outside Catholic universities. This means to encourage the Catholic academic community to take its own responsibility, to become agents for change in the academic, cultural and scientific world, to stress intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as an important vehicle for mutual understanding of shared values and principles and the attainment of the common good; to stimulate pastoral action in the university communities.

In this context of general principles some concrete actions can be proposed

- As to vision and mission (e.g. strengthen testimonies of authentic Christian education and private life experiences in curriculum building, education to globalization and responsible citizenship for all, lifelong learning, Christian pedagogy, etc.; disseminate and put into practice the *Social Doctrine of the Church*; etc.)

- As to organizational structure and institutional development (e.g. promote networking between universities according to geographical and thematic issues; strengthen the community of teachers and students within the university and provide service to the secular community that surrounds it; promote exchanges of students, professors and administrators among Catholic universities around the world; etc.)

- **As to means and approaches** (e.g. focus on sharing experiences, cooperation and working together; create centres which offer introductory courses to future professors of Catholic universities, develop inter-religious dialogue; renew the links with the social partners; cooperate with civil society; etc.)

5. Christian identity and Intercultural education in pluralistic Europe: Intercultural education and religious pluralism present interfaith, intercultural and interdisciplinary challenges in pluralistic Europe.

The importance of contextual factors: Important is to recall the major characteristics of the socio-cultural transformations which are challenging intercultural education and religious pluralism in Europe:
- The process of secularisation which takes place throughout the world: religion becomes a private matter and is being marginalized.
- (neo-) liberalism: a society based exclusively on markets and laws leads to a commodification, marketization and monitarization of societies and human relations.
- Existence of multi-cultural societies: the recognition of this multi-culturality implies the need for a different language, new concepts and approaches and for pedagogy to learn to dialogue and to manage diversity. Briefly a new humanism and a new culture for education are required.
- The growing complexity of our societies leads to growing uncertainties and human (economic, social, political, etc) insecurity. This existential situation of instability produces a crisis of the sense of belonging at social level (i.e. growing individualism, the principle of the predominance of "I", individual and collective egoism) as much as at the cultural level (i.e. cultural relativism, attitudes of indifference, neglect and intolerance).

The ongoing interaction between these societal characteristics has led to an increasing pluralism, to the need to read the signs of our time and quickly changing societies, and to respond to the challenges of our fragmented post-modern culture. In this perspective it is not obvious to "Vivre le plural dans les societiés multi-culturelles".

What is needed?
- A value orientation and a community of shared values, i.e. a vision based on universal values which support and guide concrete action
- An integral human development and the acceptance of education as a common good: and an educational approach which places the individual as person at the centre of a pedagogy to learn to do; let's call it a personalistic approach.
- An identification of a common platform of values which makes authentic intercultural dialogue and intercultural communication possible

- An equality of respect and opportunities
- A strong identity to be understood in its social context
- Innovative pedagogical projects
- Sharing best practices in a positive and pro-active manner
- A dialectics of thinking and acting to active citizenship

Christian identity and Intercultural education

The link between the Christian identity and intercultural education lies in the search for purpose and in the service for hope, trust and solidarity. The specificity of intercultural education is constituted of learning processes which lead to know other cultures and construct a behaviour of accessibility, openness and dialogue: its first objective is the promotion of capacities of constructive conviviality in a multi-form cultural, economic and social environment: This implies not only the acceptance and respect of diversity, but also the recognition of his/her cultural identity in a daily research of dialogue, comprehension and collaboration in a prospect of mutual enrichment. In other words, a personalistic, humanistic and Christian reading of intercultural education is suggested. In intercultural education the challenge of learning to comprehension is answered on cognitive, affective, family as well as on religious level.

As a consequence the Christian identity in education to (help to) life together in solidary differences in pluralistic Europe requires a strong engagement and commitment of education:
- ➢ Education to reciprocity: it means to promote an attitude to convive and collaborate with others and to confirm the worth of each person
- ➢ Education to complexity: it means to learn beyond one's own particularisms and to search for the universal values and the permanent basis of continuous change. The school is seen as the space of socialization between universalism and relativism.
- ➢ Education to a respectful interpersonal communication
- ➢ Education to manage conflicts: this means to learn to manage conflicts in a civil way so that these are not destructive but constructive in their reaction
- ➢ Education to a conviviality of differences: the pedagogy of intercultural education needs to promote initiatives, respect and protection of common values
- ➢ Education to peace: it means not only to favour capacities of mutual respect, assertive communication, good management of conflicts, convivial acceptance of difference, but also a more global education to values inherent to peace such as truth, freedom, justice and solidarity.

Many thanks for your attention