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**THE 3<sup>RD</sup> CONSULTATION OF THEOLOGICAL FACULTIES IN EUROPE  
7TH – 10TH JULY 2010, GRAZ, AUSTRIA**

*“Jeopardised or in demand?  
Academic Theology in Europe between Education, Science and Research”*

**FINAL STATEMENT**

1. Representatives of theological faculties and Church theological institutes from 22 different countries met from 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> July 2010 in the Catholic-Theological Faculty of the Karl-Franzens University of Graz. The consultation was organized by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) jointly with the Catholic-Theological Faculty. The gathering built upon the previous two meetings in 2002 and 2006, and continued their concern to establish a network between European theological faculties of different Christian confessions, and further cooperation in the areas of theological education and research.
2. The participants were welcomed by Prof. Dr Hans-Ferdinand Angel, Dean of the Faculty, and the Rev Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita, Acting General Secretary of CEC. The consultation included three keynote addresses, plenary presentations, reports on theological networks and initiatives, and discussion in four working groups. The conference took place in the context of morning and evening prayers.
3. The consultation demonstrated the rich interweaving of University, church, state and society. The first day included a tour of the churches, seminaries and state buildings of Graz. The second day concluded with a reception by the Governor of Styria and a representative of the Senate in the staterooms of Graz Burg. The afternoon of the third day took place in public session in the University Aula. Greetings were addressed to the conference by Prof. Dr Alfred Gutschelhofer, Rector of the Karl-Franzens University of Graz, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, President of the Conference of European Churches, Bishop Egon Kapellari, Bishop of the Diocese of Graz-Seckau, Metropolitan Michael of Austria, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Austria, and Superintendent Hermann Miklas of the Evangelical Church in Styria. The day concluded with a reception hosted by the Mayor of Graz in the townhall.
4. The three keynote addresses were given by Church leaders. The first keynote address, from an Orthodox perspective, was by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, President of CEC. He argued that Theology could not be replaced by Religious Studies. Rather, theology was consistent with the humanities, and made emphatic use of them. Theology had a major role to play in the University in countering stereotypes, demonstrating ways of dealing with religious conflict, and working out its own unique specificity in dialogue with other disciplines. The second keynote was given by Bishop Michael Bünker, General Secretary of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). He argued that the education provided by theological faculties was essential and complemented practical ministerial training. Both should include the theological and communicative dimensions

that were essential for ministry. The third keynote speech was delivered by Cardinal Karl Lehmann, Bishop of Mainz. His theme was the essential relationship between theology, reason and faith. Reason included both listening and asking questions, and a thinking faith was necessary to interpret the gospel in a way that a pluralistic world could hear and receive.

5. The consultation also included addresses by Magistra Sabine Pendl, Head of the Office for International Relations, University of Graz, and DDr Horst Pirker, Chairman of the Styria Media Group. Both addresses presented outside perspectives and expectations on theology. Sabine Pendl emphasized the importance of the international exchange of teachers and students for the enrichment of theology. DDr Pirker called upon theologians to allow themselves to be challenged by contemporary problems and to take up the opportunities that the modern media offer.
6. There were presentations of strategic perspectives, theological initiatives, and significant networks of theological education:
  - Perspective of a Vice Rector on research in European universities
  - A strategy for encouraging effective research in the Catholic Faculty at Graz
  - An international research project on The Bible and Women
  - The adaptation of a faculty's teaching in an applied direction (Ljubjana)
  - European Theological Education in worldwide Ecumenical Perspective
  - Interreligious learning: The project of TRES (Teaching Religion in a multicultural European Society)
  - ESWTR (European Society for Women in Theological Research)
  - EFOST (European Forum of Orthodox Schools of Theology)
  - WOCATI (World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions)
7. Representatives of the conference gave short statements regarding the state of theological faculties in various regions of Europe. The diversity of patterns of theological education can be appreciated through different answers to the following questions i. What kind of institution? University theology faculty or church theological institute ii. Who pays? State or church iii. Who is being taught? Ordinands or lay Christians or any student iv. What is taught? Common theology or denominationally specific theology v. How taught? From a Religious Studies or Confessional standpoint vi. How many years? Two to six vii. Who appoints lecturers? Church or State.
8. The working groups also discussed the issues relating to theological education and research, and gave brief presentations of their conclusions. As a result of these contributions a number of interrelated trends were noted.
  - a. In some parts of Europe there is a stable number of students wishing to study theology. In most areas, though, there is a decrease in student numbers, especially those training for the ordained ministry in the churches. Because of increased financial pressures on Universities, many theological faculties have been reduced in size, merged or even closed.
  - b. In a number of faculties there is a movement in the curriculum and in the approach from Theology to Religious Studies. Christianity is studied from an external perspective rather than from a confessional one.
  - c. The move to Religious Studies is in part a response to a decrease in student numbers, in part a reflection of an interest in the religious pluralism of Europe. However, the inevitable result is a decrease in the number of faculty in traditional theological disciplines. We recognize that Theology and Religious Studies can be complementary disciplines in a faculty.
  - d. A number of churches prefer to send candidates for ordination to church theological institutes rather than theological faculties. They often desire training that is more practical and spiritual and do not necessarily feel that this can be offered by theological faculties. Because of financial

pressures the time required for ordination training has been reduced in some churches. The move to Religious Studies and a lack of communication between theological faculties and the churches is in danger of encouraging these trends.

- e. In relation to research, the process of applying for European grants is extremely complex and time-consuming. Applications in theology are often reviewed by non-theologians, who frequently view them with suspicion. A number of participants emphasized the need to frame applications in terms of a Religious Studies approach.
9. The consultation agreed a number of proposals and recommendations:
- a. There was an urgent need to make the case for the importance of theology in the context of universities in Europe. The case for theology taking its place amongst the humanities (and indeed the sciences) needs to be made by University teachers, church leaders and Christians with influence on the authorities. Reasons for the ongoing significance of theology include the rich history of theology in the Universities from their birth, the growing importance of religion in European and world politics, and the postmodern critique of any claim to an ultimately non-confessional worldview.
  - b. It is proposed that a substantive reference document/declaration on the relevance and role of theology and theological faculties in the context of European Universities be worked out together by CEC and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences in cooperation with the Graz process. This could be presented to EU bodies in Brussels so as to strengthen and to underline the role and presence of theological faculties in the public space of European Universities.
  - c. We ask CEC to explore whether it would be possible to set up a central resource for helping theological faculties to apply successfully for research grants from European funds.
  - d. We encourage theological faculties to consider research projects that will build bridges from scripture and tradition to the vital issues that the church and society face today. We encourage the church to consider giving greater priority to the funding of theological research in a climate where funding for research in classical theology is increasingly hard to find.
  - e. We urge the continuing development and tuning of theological programs so that students and faculties are able to move more freely within Europe.
  - f. We strongly support a continuation of the Graz process. We urge that the Graz process website publishes documents and information in both English and German. It should function as an interactive portal for exchange of information between theological faculties and church theological institutions.
  - g. Within the Graz process we ask for the creation of a permanent committee with appropriate representation of Christian denominations and geographical regions, and including a gender balance.
  - h. We ask the committee to investigate the possibility of a European platform for theological research in a multi-denominational and multi-lingual setting.
  - i. We ask the participants of the consultation to inform their faculties of the fruits of the Graz process and encourage greater interest.
10. The participants were grateful for the unique opportunity to meet such a diverse set of representatives of the churches and theological faculties in Europe. They enjoyed many rich experiences and conversations, along with a stimulating program. They were particularly thankful to the City of Graz, the Styrian Government, and the Catholic-Theological Faculty for their generous hospitality. They warmly thank the organizers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> consultation of July 7-10, 2010 in Graz. They also recognize that it could not have taken place without the vision and commitment of Viorel Ionita and Hans-Ferdinand Angel.