

**The Second Consultation of Theological Faculties in Europe:
Graz, Austria 6-9 July 2006**

Final Statement

1. Representatives of Theological Institutions and Churches from 23 different countries gathered at the Mariatrost Education centre in Graz from the 6th - 9th of July 2006 to continue the work of the 2002 Consultation of Theological Faculties and Educational Institutions in Europe. This was at the invitation of the Conference of European Churches together with the faculty of theology of the university of Graz. The title of the Conference was 'The challenges of Theology in a Pluralistic Europe.'

2. There was generous welcome and support for the Conference from the Vice Rector of the University Friedrich M Zimmerman, the Dean of the Catholic Theological faculty, Rainer Bucher; and greetings from Episcopal Vicar, Prelate Heinrich Schnuderl of Graz; Superintendent Hermann Miklas, Chairman of the Ecumenical forum of Christian Churches in Styria; and Metropolitan Michael Staikos of Austria.

3. The consultation then heard from Ján Figel', the EU Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture, and Multilingualism on '**The challenges for Higher Education from the European Union Perspective and the EU responses.**' This very challenging address was followed by a similarly stimulating address from Georg Winckler, President of the European University Association on '**The Contributions of Universities to a Europe of Knowledge.**' Both speakers stressed the importance of theology within the EU University framework. They emphasised the urgency of the task before the consultation of developing and overseeing the cooperation of the theological faculties and institutions for the sake of Church, state and society.

4. Three plenary addresses from H.E. Bishop Wolfgang Huber, Council chair of the EKD, H.E. Alois Kothgasser, Archbishop of Salzburg and H.E. Metropolitan Daniel of Moldavia and Bukovina prepared the consultation for lively discussion of '**The challenges of theology in a pluralist Europe from an ecumenical perspective.**' Their contribution, with its emphasis on the importance of theology to church leadership fed into our own workgroup discussions held after initial presentations on different 'Core Values for theological faculties in Europe responding to the evolving needs of Churches and Society.' These discussions were then substantiated by a further plenary session entitled 'The challenges of the Bologna Process for the theological faculties and Churches in Europe.'

5. Another plenary session provided detailed information on the following existing Conferences and networks whose work is complementary and important to the Graz process and vice-versa:-

The Graz Process
Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Theologie
The European Society for Catholic Theology
The European Forum of Orthodox Schools of Theology.
The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe
Theological and Religious Education in Multicultural Europe (TRES)
The World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions

6. The consultation was grateful to all those who addressed it and so helped it to discern its future direction and purpose on behalf of all those institutions and Churches that it represents.

7. It was immediately evident that significant progress has been made in the four years since the first consultation. A genuine spirit of cooperation was noted and is evident in the plethora

of conferences and committees that already exist, yet there remains a clear desire to create something concrete that will build upon, and where necessary, link the work that has already been done so that we can continue to move forward together in a united but diverse European body. Many universities in Europe are already part of the Bologna process. It was suggested that there is some similarity between the ecumenical objectives of the Graz process and the multi-national aims of Bologna in that both are trying to encourage unity in diversity. We would want to work to strengthen the good points and play our part in attempting to resolve the remaining tensions.

8. The consultation was unanimous over the place of theology as a bridge between Society, Academy and Church. Theology does not only serve the churches, and Christian communities, it also makes a vital contribution in the social and political arena, helping people to understand human nature and all of creation. Theology is adept at thinking through the consequences of plurality and multi-culturalism and has an important role to play in helping society adapt to the changing nature of Europe through immigration. It was felt that as a result of its long history and ecumenical context, Europe has a particularly valuable contribution to make to current world-wide pluralistic religious debates which may help to counter the growth of religious fundamentalism.

9. The whole consultation engendered a justifiable pride and confidence in theology as an academic discipline. There are however still questions that can provoke intense discussion amongst us. The relationship between Church and Faculty, questions about what to teach and how to teach for example, the importance of research, interdisciplinary studies, theology versus religious studies, and how the faculties and the Church understand and respond to modernity or post-modernity.

10. Thus there is still work to be done if we are to continue to make progress, and many challenges lie before us, some of which we list below:-

a) The question of regulation and accreditation is as yet unclear. This is true for those courses leading to ordination, as well as for those leading to alternative employment. This has caused real consternation for some students who have already participated in an exchange programme.

b) Whether or not this can be facilitated by establishing common core-values through the Bologna process and agreeing the role of research based education is as yet unclear. Students training for ordination enter theological education at different ages and have many different levels of knowledge. This impacts on the theological and formational training that the Church needs the universities and faculties to provide. There is also in many countries a need to attract more students to the study of theology.

c) To ensure that ecumenical theology is taught throughout Europe so that there is a greater awareness of the recent progress made.

11. Further progress must be made to further the vision, aims, and objectives that have emerged out of the two consultations. We would therefore like to make the following concrete proposals:-

- a. That a permanent body be established called the Conference of Theological Formation, Faculties, and Colleges in Europe, based at Graz.
- b. That a Web site be created to promote the work of the new body and to facilitate further dialogue.
- c. That a planning committee be established to oversee the work of proposals a and b.

- d. That meanwhile, the representatives of the academic institutions be encouraged to take the work of this consultation back to their home countries and promote the work of the consultation in particular by encouraging students and lecturers to participate in the exchange programme.
- e. That similarly, the Churches in Europe be positively encouraged with regard to the work of the new body to play their part in developing the link between themselves and academic theology.

In bringing these proposals, the consultation would also like to express its thanks to its hosts, and to all those who helped to make this event such a success.

Graz 8th July 2006.