



CCEE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

Rome, 23-26 September 2021



CARDINAL MARC OUELLET

Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops

**Address by the Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops
to the CCEE 2021**

Dear Brothers in the episcopacy,

The event that is bringing us together celebrates the memory of 50 years of episcopal communion in the wake of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, given that the CCEE was born in particular thanks to the stimulus of Council Decree *Christus Dominus*: “*As legitimate successors of the Apostles and members of the episcopal college, bishops should realize that they are bound together and should manifest a concern for all the churches*”(CD 6). To this end, the establishment of Bishops’ Conferences was promoted and regulated so that when “*experience has been shared and views exchanged, there will emerge a holy union of energies in the service of the common good of the churches*” (CD 37).

The joyful anniversary of this half century of communion and episcopal cooperation in Europe gives reason for gratitude and a new stimulus, providing us with an opportunity to acquire, from the fundamental meaning of the last Council, a direction to expand our vision beyond problems specific to Europe, towards the horizon of the Church’s universal mission. Pope Francis’s entire papacy is a paraphrase of the Council’s missionary nature, which we can see reflected, among other things, in the two main Encyclicals: *Laudato si* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

The novelty of these great messages that incarnate the incitement of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, consists in proclaiming the Gospel as a compass for navigating current global challenges, which all the men and women of our times are involved in. It is not only a question of defining a common field of action for peoples of different faiths, but of offering a universal human vision that unfolds, starting from the Spirit that urges the Church towards dialogue, encounter, solidarity, compassion, to the announcement of a Truth that burns in her depths and will give no respite until everyone has been reached by the Gospel.

In the context of nations and the horizon of the Church’s universal mission, Europe is a specific and unique reality in view of the centuries-old Christian

tradition that has shaped its culture and institutions. No other continent can claim to offer a comparable legacy in terms of its Christian past and the missionary experience that arose from it. In spite of conflicts over the course of centuries, in spite of the secularisation and atheism present in its territory, there is still in Europe a breeding ground for faith that is always alive and capable of a new flourishing of communion and mission.

Humanity, to which these pontifical documents are addressed, is immersed in a fundamental anthropological problem: the one concerning human dignity, proclaimed and upheld as a principle, but then trampled on in the actual facts. Inequalities, power games at the expense of those who are least protected, a different treatment depending on geographical latitudes, often contradict this vision of man that is so often invoked but then disregarded in the operational consequences that should consistently arise from it. It is precisely the concept of dignity of the person, which contains within it those of equality and fraternity (see FT 106/107), that Europe has specifically adopted in its legal systems. Its painful experiences during the world wars have ensured that the consciousness of human dignity is now an indissoluble part of its cultural legacy.

For this reason Church ministers in Europe should be conscious of the contribution the Christians of this continent can make to mankind, indicating the deep root of such dignity, offering the view of man, image of God, that peaks in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ and offers a horizon of transcendent hope and fraternity for the whole of mankind.

Inspired by a greater consciousness of human dignity, thanks to the truth of Incarnation, Christian Europe should put forward again with originality the way of thinking that contemplates in itself faith and reason within structured and not separate dynamism. This way of thinking has not yet, indeed, produced a ripe fruit in the area of anthropology, because of a deficit in Trinitarian ontology that the Christian tradition is late in bringing to maturity. But, providentially, there are emerging seeds on the continent of this Trinitarian thought, which is freeing and involving¹, and that should take shape not only as the cultural strength of Christian Europe, but as its specific missionary responsibility towards mankind.

The challenge we European Bishops are faced with is therefore that of offering our faithful, and the suffering humanity of our times, an understanding of man originating precisely from the Trinitarian mystery in its entire broad formulation; a vision filled with hope that so far has been almost held back or concealed out of little enthusiasm for the enlightening power of God's word.

May our growing episcopal communion, which we celebrate with joy and gratitude, also reinforce the communion of churches, as well as the awareness that the missionary calling of Christian Europe entails a powerful cultural and

¹ See Piero CODA et alii, *MANIFESTO. Dizionario Dinamico di Ontologia Trinitaria*, Ed. Città Nuova, 2021.

theological dimension that we Bishops should encourage, stimulate and confirm. Our evangelising mission will thus be able to bring forth a new attractive culture, made of social and political friendship, artistic and educational creativity and also multiple passionate vocations for universal fraternity.

+ Cardinal Marc Ouellet