**INAUGURAL ADDRESS**

**on October 8th, 2025**

**of H.E. Msgr. Gintaras Grušas**

Archbishop of Vilnius and President of the CCEE

at the **PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE CCEE**

***«How to be Missionary Disciples in a Secularized Europe»***

Fàtima, 7-10 October 2025

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**Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,**

**Dear guests,**

I’m glad to express to all of you the most heartfelt welcome to our 2025 Plenary Assembly, entitled: «***How to be Missionary Disciples in a Secularized Europe***».

Unfortunately once again our assembly is taking place while the world is still affected by **many ongoing conflicts and wars, particularly in Ukraine and in the Holy Land**. In this sad context of lack of peace, our thoughts are directed especially to those suffering because of “*perverse abuse of power and vested interests, which are condemning defenceless people to suffer all forms of brutal violence*” (Letter of Pope Francis to Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, President of the CCEE, 15 March 2022). This is how Pope Francis, in his Letter to us for the European Catholic Social Days on 15 March 2022, called the threat that is looming over humanity, particularly once again over Europe.

The sufferings of the weakest and the innocent are also ours as Church. We should never grow weary in the endeavor of coming to their aid in every way, and calling upon God and man for peace. We continue to pray that “*those who hold the fate of nations will leave no stone unturned to stop the war and open a constructive dialogue to end the immense humanitarian tragedy that it is causing*” (*idem*).

I’d like to firstly give our grateful thanks to H.E. Msgr. **José ORNELAS CARVALHO, SCI**, Bishop of Leiria-Fátima and President of the Portoghese Bishops’ Conference, for his invitation and warm welcome these days. Thanks also for the kind words in the initial greeting. I’d like to thank also **Rev. Carlos Manuel PEDROSA CABECINHAS**, Rector of the Shrine of Fatima, for his welcome and his warm greetings. Without forgetting **Fr. Manuel BARBOSA, SCI**, and all the staff for helping in organizing our meeting.

[+ the greeting to the chargé d’affaire of the nunciature in Portugal …]

This year 2025 is uniquely marked by the transition of pontificates, following the passing of the **late Pope Francis**, thus beginning the new Pontificate of **Pope Leo XIV**, elected on the 8th of May. The closeness of “Pope Prevost” can still be felt, remembering his presence with us in the last plenary assembly in Belgrade as prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and his talk on the evangelizing and missionary dimensions of the Church in Europe. Pope Leo renewed his nearness to us during the audience he granted to the CCEE Presidency following his election as Pope on the 28th of June. **“You have my support”**, stated Pope Leo XIV, after listening carefully to our presentation of the CCEE’s ongoing commitments and activities, including ecumenical dialogue, synodal efforts, the focus on evangelization in Europe as well as the commitment to peace.

We are grateful to Pope Leo XIV also for signing his first apostolic exhortation, ***DILEXI TE*** (“*I have loved you*”), on love for the poor, on October 4th, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. This document, which is in continuity with Pope Francis’s fourth and last encyclical, *Dilexit nos*, will be published tomorrow, while we are gathered here together.

The guaranteed support of Pope Leo XIV will soon be also accompanied by the presence of the **newly appointed Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, H.E. Msgr. Filippo IANNONE,** **O.Carm.**, who will take up his new post next week on October 15th. In the CCEE’s letter of congratulations to the new prefect, we made sure to invite him to our assembly, welcoming the start of his new mission and looking forward to our collaboration.

This year also brought to us another new face of papal representation, in the person of **H.E. Archbishop Bernardito C. AUZA, OP**, Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union, whom I cordially greet and thank for his presence.

Cordial greetings also to **H.E. Msgr. Mariano CROCIATA**, President of the COMECE, to **Msgr. Marco GANCI**, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and to **Msgr. Michael LANDAU**, President of Caritas Europa, with **Mrs. Maria Nyman**, General Secretary: Thank you all for your work at the European institutions and for what you will kindly share with us about the European situation.

Since our last plenary assembly of June 2024, **ten brothers** **in the Episcopate** have ended their service as Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences and, consequently, their term as members of CCEE.

We thank them for their commitment and friendship. And we welcome the new presidents:

- H.E. Msgr. **Petko Valov**, new president for **Bulgaria**,  
successor to H.E. **Christo Proykov**.

- H.E. Msgr. **Erik Varden**, new president for the **Nordic Countries**, successor to H.E. **Czesław Kozon**.

- H.E. Msgr. **John Keenan**, new president for **Scotland**,  
successor to H.E. **Hugh Gilbert**.

- H.E. Msgr. **Charles Morerod, op**, new president for **Switzerland**, successor to H.E. **Felix Gmür**.

- H.E. Msgr. **Zbigņevs Stankevičs**, new president for **Latvia**, successor to H.E. **Viktors Stulpins**.

- H.E. Msgr. **Teodoro Kontidis, sj**, new president for **Greece**, successor to H.E. **Pétros Stefánou**.

- H. Em. **Card. Jean-Marc Aveline**, new president for **France**, successor to H.E. **Éric de Moulins-Beaufort**.

- H.E. Msgr. **Josef Nuzík**, new president for the **Czech Republic**, successor to H.E. **Jan Graubner**.

- H.E. Msgr. **János Székely**, new president for **Hungary**,  
successor to H.E. **András Veres**.

- H.E. Msgr. **Làszló Böcskei**, new president for **Romania**, successor to His Beatitude **Card. Lucian Mureșan**, who sadly passed away two weeks ago on 25th September, at the age of 94. May the Lord, the Good Shepherd, grant him eternal repose in His heavenly Kingdom.

A first year in **the new CCEE offices in Rome** has passed. With the new headquarters, the new Secretariat team also spent its first Roman year. General Secretary **Fr. Antonio AMMIRATI**, elected at the last CCEE Assembly, leads the team, supported by **Fr. Charbel BTEICH**, from the Maronite Archdiocese of Cyprus, appointed a year ago as Vice General Secretary. At the same time, **Mrs. Monika KLIMENTOVA**, from the Czech Republic, was also appointed as Press Officer. From Switzerland, **Mrs. Antonella DE GREGORIO** continues to manage the accounting, adopting a remote-first hybrid approach. Additionally, **Mr. David TOPPING**, from Scotland, who moved with the Secretariat from St. Gallen to Rome, continues to work as CCEE Assistant, along with two new assistants, **Ms. Angelica PETEAN**, from Turin, and **Sr. Angela Marie CASTELLANI**, from the Franciscan Sisters of the Eucharist.

Unfortunately, last March, a burst water pipe in the *Palazzo della Pigna* caused **flooding**, starting from the floors above the CCEE offices. This partially flooded our offices as well, ruining the ceilings and walls, along with much of the furniture and some equipment. However, the entire CCEE archive remained safe, thank God, since it was stored in the undamaged rooms.

Nonetheless, the Secretariat's work continued normally, making the two intact meeting room (*Sala San Gallo*) available for use.

Restoration and improvement work is still ongoing, partially covered by insurance. We hope that it will be completed towards the end of November.

The CCEE headquarters in Rome are the new *home in Rome for all the European Bishops.* This first year had the unique atmosphere of the **Jubilee of Hope 2025**. The propitious context of the Jubilee has further highlighted one of the fruits of the transfer of our headquarters to Rome: the facilitation of meetings among us European bishops and with the Holy Father and the Vatican dicasteries. **This *home* helps create a place conducive to episcopal discernment and fosters the role of the European continental body during the Implementation Phase of the Synod on Synodality**. Not to mention the other fruits of communion, formation, and renewal in many aspects.

In the **synodal commitment at the continental level** we are working together with our peer continental bodies: **SECAM, CELAM, FABC**.

For the Implementation Phase of the Synod, the **European Continental Synodal Team** has been composed from the delegates you designated from each of our bishops’ conferences. To coordinate their work, a **six-member Synodal Task Force** was created, that includes the two CCEE Vice-Presidents, Their Eminences **Cardinal Nemet and Cardinal Hollerich**.

The members of this task force are: Professor **Klára CSISZÁR**, from Romania, theologian at the Catholic University of Linz; Professor Father **Christoph THEOBALD, SJ**, from France, theologian at the "Centre Sèvres" in Paris; Professor **Giuseppina DE SIMONE**, from Italy, philosopher and theologian at the Theological Faculty of Southern Italy; Sister **Anna Mirijam KASCHNER, CPS**, from Germany, General Secretary of the Nordic Countries; Mrs. **Helena JEPPESEN-SPUHLER**, from Switzerland, and Deacon **Geert DE CUBBER** from Belgium.

Among other important ongoing commitments, I would also like to mention the **Signing of the updated *Charta Oecumenica***.

As you already know, the year 2026 will mark the 25th anniversary of the *Charta Oecumenica* document, fruit of the joint venture of the CCEE and the CEC (Conference of European Churches), signed together on 22 April 2001 in Strasbourg, aiming to provide guidelines for the growing cooperation among the churches in Europe. The document was promoted through the work of the CCEE-CEC Joint Committee, which has been meeting annually since 1972.

In preparation for the anniversary of this historic signing, a working group was commissioned by the current Joint Committee delegation to update the text of the *Charta* on the basis of a continental-wide consultation among the churches in Europe, taking into consideration the new challenges that have arisen over the last 25 years and that the churches around our continent are now called to work together to confront.

The Official Signing Ceremony of the new *Charta Oecumenica* was scheduled to take place in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 27April 2025, the second Sunday of Easter. But the event was postponed due to the passing of the late Pope Francis.

The event has been **rescheduled to be held in Rome on the afternoon of November 5th at the Abbey of the Three Fountains (Abbazia delle Tre Fontane) - Church of the Martyrdom of Saint Paul**. Furthermore, on the morning of **November 6th, at 10:00 a.m., there will be a special audience granted by Pope Leo XIV** to the participants in the *Charta* signing event.

The signing of the updated *Charta Oecumenica* marks the beginning of a joint process with the CEC **for the implementation and reception of the document** in our Bishops’ Conferences and in the Christian churches of Europe.

Our **ecumenical commitment in Europe** is an important contribution to the efforts of the Church universal for the unity of Christians.

An exemplary expression of this commitment will be the long-awaited **visit of Pope Leo XIV to Nicaea and Istanbul from November 27th to 30th, on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea.**

The CCEE has been in some way a precursor to this visit of the Pope through the visit we made to **Nicaea** and to **His Holiness the Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW I** at the headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in Fanar during the CCEE meeting of General Secretaries in Istanbul last June. The meeting, which was also attended by **H. Em. Card. Mario Grech**, Secretary General of the Synod, was held in a very friendly atmosphere. In his address, the Patriarch of Constantinople recalled the importance of the relationship between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Catholic Church and emphasized the uniqueness of his relationship with the late Pope Francis. He also affirmed his joy for the election of Pope Leo XIV, stating: “*We are confident that under his leadership the bonds between our two Churches will continue to deepen in truth and love*”, adding that he looks forward to the Holy Father’s visit this autumn.

**The Holy Father’s Journey will continue to Lebanon, from November 30th to December 2nd, in the spirit of peace**. This First Apostolic Journey to Lebanon is intended to revive the first announcement of peace made by Pope Leo XIV on the day of his election.

**Let us accompany the Holy Father with intense prayer, so that his visit to Turkey and to Lebanon may be successful and bear shining fruits of unity and peace.**

We gather here in Fátima, a place of grace and conversion, to reflect on one of the most urgent questions facing the Church in our continent: **how to live and witness as missionary disciples in a Europe that is becoming increasingly secularised**.

This theme touches the very core of our vocation as bishops and pastors. We stand in a time when faith is no longer the natural framework of society. The Gospel is often met with indifference, not hostility. Many of our contemporaries live comfortably without reference to God, yet quietly carry a longing for meaning, relationship, and hope. Beneath the surface of secularization lies not the absence of faith, but a profound spiritual hunger that the Church must learn to recognize and address with renewed sensitivity.

At the same time, the spread of **relativism and radical individualism** continues to reshape the moral and cultural landscape of Europe, weakening our sense of shared truth and eroding the bonds of community. These forces challenge the very foundations of solidarity and transcendence on which our Christian civilization was built, and they call us to propose once again the liberating truth of the Gospel as the source of authentic freedom and human flourishing.

To respond to this moment, we are called first to **listen**—to the Word of God, to one another, and to the experiences of our people. The synodal journey in which we are engaged is not simply an ecclesial process; it is a **missionary method**. It teaches us to walk together, to discern together, and to bear together the light of Christ into the realities of our time. Synodality helps us to rediscover the missionary nature of every baptized person and to form communities that radiate the joy of the Gospel.

To be missionary disciples today does not mean repeating old formulas, nor abandoning the Tradition that sustains us. It means **entering into dialogue with the culture of our time**—with its questions, wounds, and aspirations—and allowing the Gospel to illuminate them from within. It means witnessing with authenticity, through lives that reveal God’s mercy and the transforming power of grace. It means finding new ways to express eternal truths in a language that hearts can understand.

In these days together, I invite us to **reflect not only on the challenges that secularization poses, but also on the opportunities it offers**: the chance to purify our witness, to renew pastoral creativity, and to rediscover that the Church’s vitality does not come from social influence but from the living encounter with Christ.

I’d like to **thank in advance our two keynote speakers** who will help us reflect deeply on these themes, from a cultural, social and theological perspective: **Prof. Isabel CAPELOA GIL**, Rector of the Catholic University of Portugal; and **Prof. András MÁTÉ-TÓTH**, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Szeged in Hungary.

I thank them for accepting our invitation to contribute to enrich this important assembly and to help us, with their knowledge and experience, initiate fruitful processes of growth in missionary discipleship in our local churches.

Moreover, the **several sessions of debates** in group and in plenary will also allow us to unite our common ecclesial efforts more harmoniously, for a deeper episcopal communion among us.

In conclusion, I hope that our work, together with the various **liturgical moments: the Eucharistic celebrations, the Rosary and candlelight procession and the Divine Office**, will make our plenary assembly in this sacred Shrine of Fatima a cenacle of a renewed Pentecost, under the mantle of Mary, our Most Holy Mother, Our Lady of Fatima and of Europe.

Thank you!