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**Ecumenical service held in Königswinter Protestant Church
on 28th April 2004**

Address given by Reverend Georg Kalckert to the representatives of the ESCU

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Responsible, bold and uncomfortable” is the title of your chosen theme.

I would like to add a few potentially stimulating and correlative thoughts from the standpoint of the churches in whose name we are gathered here.

In the church of today there is an almost insuperable fundamental split, an internal kind of schism between religious mysticism on the one hand and politics on the other.

It would appear that we have to choose all the time - between standing up piously for God or devoting ourselves godlessly to humanitarian values in society.

At a more profound level, however, both the godly and the ungodly are laid up in the same hospital, albeit on different wards. This diagnosis is a logical consequence ensuing from Christian belief, in that this belief actually leads both into a state of crisis, the godly and ungodly alike. For belief expects no less of us than this – to bring together religious introversion and political extroversion, indeed to integrate them into one whole. Charles Peguy summed this up in his classic quote,

“Everything starts with mysticism and ends with politics.”

The fundamental split today between mysticism and politics is very dangerous because it rents asunder that which inseparably belongs together.

Indeed, if not the Christians, who else would be called to hold together that which cannot be separated?

The Belgian founder of the Young Christian Workers Movement, Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, gave a vivid picture to illustrate the great extent to which intensely mystic inwardness and political openness belong together in Christian understanding. In his view, a desire to redeem a few individual fish is to no avail if the fish water has become poisoned and contaminated.

If this is the case then it is not only the individual fish, but also the fish water itself that must become subject to Christian thought and action. If we are really concerned about the life chances and opportunities of individuals, then this concern cannot be perceived in sociological and political naivety. The life of the individual is profoundly characterised by its social surroundings – the fish live and die in the water!

This statement works both ways. If we care out of a sense of political responsibility about better standards of living in our society, then it will be our prime concern to stand up for the individual in order to help this individual to stand.

It is rare to see a genuine conversion in an individual which is not accompanied by a reform in social structures - in cases where these structures are oppressing and imprisoning the individual. Having said that, it is equally rare to see a genuine reform of social structures which is not accompanied by the redemption of individuals.

Karl Marx is virtually unrivalled in the clarity of his perception of this – he is an unsuspecting witness. In his verdict on the revolution he emphasised - the quote is somewhat severe but authentic - that “the crap starts all over again” if “human relations” do not change as well.

The dignity of the individual cannot be passed on; the dignity and the rights of individuals must be protected.

And this should be the substance of an unmistakable call interjected by the Christians against the general trend of de-individualisation, in other words being “bold and uncomfortable”.

It is not rare these days to see an individual come under malicious suspicion and be forced into a corner by opinion polls and the media. There can be no real renewal of society, however, without a genuine strengthening of the individual. Of course, this should not be taken to mean a liberal or individualistic reference to self but rather a responsible attempt at showing solidarity with and for one another.

Mysticism without any political commitment for the common good, politics without any fundamental obligation to people-centred deeds – neither attitude is an option for the Christian. The Christian will have to struggle constantly to unite both realities or fail to live up to that name.

Amen

The address was followed by a reading taken from the gospel according to Saint Matthew:
“Jesus said to His disciples,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”

[Rendition of the address based on the manuscript dated 28.04.2004, edited by Prof. Walter Paul (A) / ESCU]