



## Wellbeing of digitalized societies and workplaces

### European Conference Strasbourg (France)

10th - 12th March 2022

Thank you, Albrecht, for your introduction. And thank you, facilitating members of the CALL Network, to have gathered us here today – some of us physically, some of us virtually, but all of us as part of the European Ecumenical movement and thus as brothers and sisters in Christ. Sisters and brothers in Christ no matter in what shape or form we have chosen to be present. Just like God’s love knows no borders, our fellowship knows no borders.

So dear sisters and brothers in Christ. Welcome to this conference – welcome to three days of exchange, discernment, and fellowship. I am delighted that I have been given this opportunity to address you with a few words of appreciation and introduction from the General Secretariat of the Conference of European Churches in Brussels.

Let me begin by apologising for my two-dimensional, digital presence. The introduction to the conference which is about to take its beginning speaks of “the digitalization which is changing life and work in our societies”. And it continues “In fact digitalization has become part of our daily life shaping it more than we realize”. Speaking to you remotely, on a screen, via cables or satellites (who knows, really?) is - in its own way - a manifestation of the life changing digitalisation we experience.

So, I am with you, yet I am not with you. Due to commitments in Brussels both before and after this afternoon’s address, I hesitantly opted for remote participation. This is not optimal. Being acquainted with and for many of us experienced in the ecumenical movement, we know the value of physical presence: The coffee, the meals, the little informal exchanges in corners and corridors. In many ways the backbone of the ecumenical movement.

For those of you who are physically present in Strasbourg and part of the conference the next few days: Enjoy...! Enjoy meals, coffee, chats in the corridor... And for those of you who – like me for various good reasons - cannot be present in a physical manner in Strasbourg but who are following the sessions via a webcam and a screen – enjoy, too...! Digitalisation has given you the opportunity to participate in a conference you would otherwise not have been able to follow. It is a fact that since early 2020 we have seen ecumenism reaching a wider audience than ever before.

So, is digitalisation a blessing or a curse? Well, probably as with so many other aspects of the life we live and share: It is a bit of both. But as human beings, we are requested to understand and navigate both the challenges and the opportunities of digitalisation.

And that very request is the reason for you, for us, being together here in Strasbourg for three days: insights, discernment, reflection. Today, tomorrow and Saturday will equip us as participants to better understand and navigate our new digital reality.

Or as the invitation and programme says: "The 2022 "Church Action on Labour and Life" conference in Strasbourg wants to stimulate ethical reflection by pluri-perspective discussions".

"Ethical" is a key word here. We are gathered with a particular task as committed and concerned Christians. It is no coincidence that the 2022 "Church Action on Labour and Life" conference meets in Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe and regularly the seat of the European Parliament. The programme reflects this. The topic at stake, it says, "will be related to theological positions and through this, offer ethical discussion between ourselves and with Members of the European Parliament".

So, if people should ask, why do we meet in Strasbourg today, our answer would be that as Christians we have a message for society and for decision makers. It is our conviction that we have an obligation to share that message to fulfil our role as followers of Christ, engaging and assisting with our particular – and some would say peculiar - sense and wisdom. We raise our voice in a society that without some sort of guidance and direction, without a fundamental understanding of good and bad, makes little sense and shows little wisdom.

The ecumenical movement can claim a long tradition of engaging with society. We are part of a long tradition of churches committing to being part of an ongoing societal discourse on history, presence, and future. The Church encompasses it all from the beginning to the end. From Alpha to Omega. From Genesis to the Book of Revelation. "The Lord is our rock, our fortress and our deliverer" as the psalmist recounts.

However, as the world changes, posing new challenges, meeting us with contexts and trials that we had never foreseen, we must relentlessly engage with new issues and topics and find our way through theological and ethical discernment and reflection.

Experience tells us that theological and ethical discernment and reflection is done better in fellowship – in our case, an ecumenical fellowship. The Conference of European Churches is such an ecumenical fellowship and would like to offer itself – based on "the Lord as our rock and refuge" - as a platform for theological reflection on matters relating to church, state and society. We play our part, but we also rely on you, playing your part.

Theological reflection and discernment should never be restricted to a Brussels bubble. Neither to a Strasbourg bubble for that sake. We encourage to crack open the resources available in the many layers and corners of European Christianity. The Conference of European Churches wish to gather and to facilitate the skills and knowledge inherent in our constituency, in Member Churches, National Councils of Churches and our related Organisations and networks in Partnership.

We wish to constitute a theological, ecumenical organisation of reflection and discernment, one which is equipped with skills to navigate European political decision making, offering access to the European Institutions in Brussels, Strasbourg and beyond. The Conference of European Churches in this way sees itself as a shared platform for joint theologically informed engagement between church and society.

During the coming days, you who are gathered physically and digitally in Strasbourg will take on the task of theological discernment and reflection regarding European citizens' "Wellbeing in digitalized societies and workplaces". In this way, you will demonstrate to our common European Institutions and policy makers how Christian traditions from our shared continent constructively add to the building of healthy and holistic societies, equipped for the future of digitalisation in an ethically and theologically justifiable manner.

We must not let the insights you gain over the coming 72 hours go to waste. We are partners in a European Eco-System of theological discernment and reflection, and we need one another to fulfil our tasks as followers of Christ and as churches in our respective societies. Together, let us make the most out of it to the benefit of European citizens, to the benefit of European societies, to the benefit of Europe.

With these words I wish you a fruitful and constructive conference.

Thank you.

Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen  
General Secretary  
Conference of European Churches

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