On December 6-7, the second congress of the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) was held in Brussels and both James Skillen and Stanley Carlson-Thies were invited to address the assembly. The ECPM is a network of Christian organizations across Europe, particularly from Eastern Europe, some of which are political parties and some social service organizations or think tanks. About 100 participants from more than 20 countries met in the European Parliament for their meetings.

The primary focus of attention at this congress was a draft vision statement, “A Christian-Social Contribution to Europe,” which is to serve as a guide for ECPM’s growing alliance. Excerpts from the latest working draft are included below (the full text can be found at www.ecpm.info). Following those excerpts is the concluding summary from Skillen’s speech, addressing the draft document.

A Christian-Social Contribution to Europe

We have come together in the ECPM to strengthen and promote a Christian perspective on democracy. In our continent and its respective nations, we face growing problems for which neither the individualistic conservative-liberal approach nor the technocratic social-democratic approach can give an adequate response.

There is a general distrust in political institutions and their work. Europe is confronted with growing tensions between different religious and ethnic groups. We see decreasing solidarity between European nations at a time when we need solidarity to deal with our social and environmental problems. . . .

As members of the ECPM we believe that Jesus Christ calls us to follow Him in every area of our lives, including the realm of politics. . . . The Christian-democratic tradition of thought, in our understanding of it, takes its bearings from Christian convictions about the person, society, and political authority. According to these, the fundamental worth of each human being is derived from being made in the image of God. True human fulfillment is understood as responsible freedom in relation to others and creation, and is found in the development of individuals in society.
A society should create and nurture a spirit which respects the freedom and integrity of social and cultural institutions such as the family, school, religious organizations, and representatives of employees and employers, thereby serving to equip citizens to pursue the common good together.

The fundamental role of political authority is to ensure justice in the public realm and to create conditions conducive to the common good. The exercise of power by the State must always be equitable and limited, and should be directed to promoting just relations among individuals, associations, communities, and other groups, while also respecting their proper independence.

Although bearers of political authority have the responsibility of encouraging the good, and rectifying injustice, it is beyond the competence of government to remedy every social ill, and indeed it is the duty of government not to undertake tasks that are the responsibility of family, church, or other spheres of authority where this could be properly fulfilled. . . .

No party or grouping may claim special legal privileges. Christian-democratic thinking strongly rejects secularism as a public ideology and the ECPM warns against the damage that fundamentalist secularism can inflict on society. But neither do we seek a governing role for any single church denomination. We recognize the role of the Christian faith in shaping the liberties that our continent enjoys. Nevertheless, we affirm that Christian faith also requires the State to acknowledge the rights of religious and cultural minorities and to treat them equitably in public policy. Full freedom of religion and expression of thought for individuals, communities, and organizations must be a priority within Europe and in European foreign policy.

With regard to the economy, democratic responsibility implies that the economy should not be controlled either by the State or by business and finance but should build up the contribution and mutual responsibilities of everyone. Economic activity should serve people rather than dominate them. The full personal, social, and ecological implications of national and international market activity need to be recognized and not only private or accounting calculations that do not take these implications fully into account. Our emphasis is therefore on the State’s concern with justice and right structures and not only on economic performance.

[Brief paragraphs then follow on social justice, respect for life, priority of the family, reconciliation, active compassion, wise stewardship, and empowerment.]

**Conclusion from Skillen’s Address**

The urgency of Christian political service both in your countries and in other parts of the world could not be more apparent. The special calling and place of Christian-democratic politics in Europe and throughout the global village can, I believe, be articulated in the eight theses I have presented in the course of commenting on your draft vision statement.
1. Christian-democratic politics should bear witness to the Creator and Redeemer of the world by the way its promoters work to do justice to every neighbor.

2. Christian political service recognizes God-given norms that hold humans accountable in public as well as in private life.

3. It recognizes and treats every person in the world as someone made in the image of God—as someone with the same dignity that every other person has—and thus, among other things, should uphold religious freedom for all.

4. Christian-democratic movements should have a global perspective, motivated to cooperate across national boundaries for the common good of all.

5. They are committed to government’s protection of the diverse structure of society, upholding the variety of vocations and spheres of responsibility that humans exercise.

6. They are committed to economic justice as a condition of market freedom.

7. Christian-democratic political service recognizes the special responsibility of government to protect the innocent from aggression and to seek reconciliation in the midst of conflict. Retributive and restorative justice calls governments themselves to humility and repentance.

8. Christian political movements should be distinguished by the way they demonstrate environmental stewardship in their statecraft, working to be caretakers of creation rather than sovereign masters of this world.

As you go forward in your efforts here in Europe may God give you wisdom, patience, and endurance. We will be watching and eagerly learning from you. Go forward in peace and in the strength of the Lord of peace.

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