

Introduction. In spite of its relatively straightforward character, Catholic Social Teaching does not seem to be a straightforward topic in Eastern Europe, especially when we try to think through the common vocation and character of a unified Europe. The reasons for this uneasiness are complex and can be traced back partly to the oppression of the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Europe during the communist era.¹

Our own Foundation Communicantes – dialogue with the Church of Central and Eastern Europe – can serve as an example. Since 1974, Communicantes pursues two different yet related goals. First of all, its founder, Jan Bakker s.s.s., wanted to create a conversation, a dialogue, a discussion between the Church in East and in West, so that they could meet and learn about each other's very dissimilar fates. To do so, Bakker had to break through the *cordon sanitaire* that fenced off the persecuted Church of Eastern Europe from the rest of the world Church. Furthermore, the Sacramentine father from Nijmegen had given himself the task to communicate the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council to Eastern Europe. Father Bakker's goals were only partially achieved, when he died in 1983. If we look at the introduction of the Vatican Council in Eastern Europe, we can see that this transformation process is not finished yet. Whereas, for example, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* had been available in Ukraine for already some time, the official translation of the Vatican constitutions, declarations and decrees only appeared in print in October 2014.²

A dialogue, a discussion, a conversation about theological and practical issues is now easier than ever before, but it has always been complicated. Before 1990, the Church wanted to avoid any internal discussion and so its leaders opted for a united front and only very reluctantly and in a very limited way engaged themselves in intellectual and practical reform experiments. There were good and bad reasons for doing so. One reason was quite pragmatic. Changes were expected to lead to internal divisions, which could be exploited by the communist rulers as to harm the Church. A second reason was more of a psychological nature: fear of and resistance to change itself. Sometimes quite rightly, but more often not, the Netherlands Roman Catholic Church was singled out as a show case of what change might bring about. A third reason was more pragmatic: the ghettoization of the Church during the era of communism. The Church had been excluded from the public sphere and that made many innovations a purely theoretical matter and therefore rather superfluous.

This all created a specific, never-yield-an-inch mentality that, after 1990, proved difficult to change. Experiment and everything Western remained suspect. Greater awareness and interest in the Catholic Social Teaching (= CST) – especially when it was being encouraged by believers from Western Europe – suffered from this.

Crisis in Europe – Europe in crisis. Europe as it was, Europe as it is, Europe as it will be in the future – Europe was always a cause for doubt, suspicion and concern, but, indeed, in an exceptional and even worrisome degree today. In 2015, this much is certain: a spiral of negativity connects the countries of Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Europe, both inside and outside the European Union (= EU). And it does not really matter what the cultural-historical origin of the country in question is: traditionally Catholic, Protestant or very much secularised. A clear anti-European sentiment or rather anti-European resentment abounds. Remarkably, a loose coalition of anti-European and anti-American left- and right-wingers, disenchanted Christians and otherwise politically disinterested Europeans has come about. Here, it is important to remind us of two recent events: the crisis in Ukraine and of Pope Francis' visit to Strasbourg in November 2014.

While at first it seemed as if the war in eastern Ukraine and the ensuing confrontation between Europe and Russia would strengthen European unity and underline a common European identity, in reality, the war and the Russian-European standoff further increased doubts, suspicion and concern. On the anti-European side there was something "deeper" feeding a feeling of disenchantment. In fact, there were quite a few Europeans who believed – and some continue to do so – that there is a conservative Orthodox revival taking place in Russia, which is holding up a devout, accusatory and inspiring mirror to the morally corrupted and decadent West. And although perhaps we did indeed fail to do so in the West ourselves, this belief is not consistent with Russia's empirical or ideological reality. A mere four percent of the more than nearly twelve million registered Muscovites go to church at Easter. Furthermore, the Russian Orthodox Church raises its critical voice almost exclusively to point out

¹ Here, the Greek Catholic ("Uniate") Church should be included. This is a collection of traditionally Orthodox Churches, which in the past accepted the supreme authority of the Pope of Rome, e.g. in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and especially in Ukraine. The most eye-catching details are the liturgical praxis and married priests.

² Communicantes' project manager Paul Wennekes had given the first incentive to this endeavour almost ten years earlier.

moral issues that mainly exist outside the borders of the Russian Federation. Thus, this Church seems to act rather as a mouthpiece for the Kremlin than as a genuine moral force.³

Offering a message of hope and encouragement, Pope Francis has pointed out that Europe is in need of some zest. At the European Parliament, on 25 November 2014, he admonished those present that “Despite a larger and stronger Union, Europe seems to give the impression of being somewhat elderly and haggard, feeling less and less a protagonist in a world which frequently regards it with aloofness, mistrust and even, at times, suspicion.” Of course, this call of Pope Francis to a more youthful and dynamic, innovative and inspirational Europe was addressed to Members of Parliament of different faiths, political beliefs and walks of life. However, the Pope’s words should also be taken to heart by the faithful as well. A better and vital Europe isn’t just about “them” – it is also about “us”. We too can do better and more.

In this short presentation about Europe and CST in Eastern Europe three questions are being dealt with:

1. How do the Churches of Eastern Europe perceive secularised / secularising Europe?
2. Is this perception of an all-persuasive, domineering Europe adequate?
3. Do the answers to the first two questions reveal perhaps priorities and challenges in the realm of CST?

Towards the end of this text, we briefly dwell upon the application of CST in Eastern Europe. We will look more closely at the tension that exists between religious sentiment and faith on the one side and rational action on the other. Both can be perceived as different types of self-secularisation.

Question 1: How do the Churches of Eastern Europe perceive secularised / secularising Europe? The EU, sometimes referred to as a “peace project”, could never count on the full-hearted support of the Roman Catholic Church of Eastern Europe, not before the fall of the Berlin wall, shortly thereafter or now, after the Ukrainian crisis. After all, it was from the West that waves of theological, philosophical and moral relativism, political liberalism, individualism and several other “isms” were rolling into Eastern Europe and threatened to drag believers and non-believers alike with them. In the 1990s, Roman Catholic church leaders and believers in Eastern Europe were more or less “forced” by Pope John Paul II to take the road to Brussels and to Strasbourg. Despite his profound criticism of Western culture, which he labelled a “culture of death”, it was this Pope who unremittingly emphasised Europe’s vocation and cultural and spiritual unity and encouraged the faithful to build up Europe, also as a political entity. His successors, Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have shown a similar positive, critical attitude.

The attitude within the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Europe is at least ambivalent and oscillating between the extremes of complete rejection and critical approval. Thus, leading Roman Catholic Church leaders have expressed themselves accordingly, as the following examples will show.

1. No later than 15 August 1995, at the Marian pilgrimage site Jasna Góra, Cardinal Józef Glemp discussed the “dressage of citizens” in the West and the “inevitable pressure to wear jeans”. Referring to the onslaught on the family through abortion, sex education at school, contraception and family planning, feminist ideology and the distancing of the Church from the political domain, the Polish Cardinal distinguished “trends to exploit and to weaken the country and to establish mechanisms of self-weakening”.
2. In 1998, Slovak Bishop Rudolf Baláž of Banská Bystrica explained his concerns in a more concise manner: “We do not go to Europe to lose our faith!”
3. More recently, the Archbishop of Vilnius, Gintaras Grušas denounced undesirable pressure coming from the EU. During a solemn ceremony at the Lithuanian Parliament in 2013, which marked the birth of the anti-communist independence movement Sąjūdis twenty-five years earlier, Grušas said: “We are seeing more and more legal products that bear the European trademark and destroy the foundations of our independence. These attempts to penetrate our legal system are Trojan horses, which mainly aim to undermine the core of Lithuania – the institution of the family which is recorded in our constitution as the basis of our society and nation”. In a subtle yet clear manner the Archbishop compared the EU to the Soviet Union.

³ Perhaps the Russian Orthodox-Roman Catholic rapprochement several years ago contributed to the misunderstanding of the realities of the ROC. These meetings, first in Lithuania (2011/2012) and later in Poland (2012), were meant as visible signs of historic reconciliation and a so-called “ecumenism of charity”, which aims at a common understanding and approach of various pressing moral issues.

Question 2: Is this perception of an all-persuasive, domineering Europe adequate? Europe moves like a distant storm cloud in front of the sun, so it seems. Yet if we look more closely, it becomes obvious that the uneasiness that believers in Eastern Europe felt and still feel should not be credited to Europe or the EU alone. It is a misconception to think that a successful and healthy transformation of post-communist society was frustrated by negative influences from Europe alone. Of course, this is not to say that negative influences are not there. They surely exist. In addition to external causes, there are other reasons why the transition from communism to post-communism remains problematic. They need to be taken into consideration as well.

Five internal causes are described below: materialism/individualism, lack of trust and of social cohesion, exaggerated nationalism and sterile nostalgia. In contrast, they represent important challenges from the point of view of CST.

1. Among the people at large, there exists in Eastern Europe a clear desire to have a slice of Europe's material prosperity, while the non-material foundations of that prosperity are not well-viewed, depreciated or even unknown: from the level of the welfare state as such to that of the EU as a legislative body. Both concepts can count on intellectual and emotional resistance. Not only they somehow remind not few Eastern Europeans of the all-pervasive and omnipotent communist state (with its desire to control even the most intimate details of its citizens' private lives), but also of the paternalistic and literally *demoralising* effect of that desire to control. Also, the claim is made that an Eastern European welfare state – in the context of a neo-liberal world economy – is a lost cause anyhow and therefore not worthy of pursuit.

According to sociological surveys, a mentality prevails of merely following private interest and leaving the common good to the care of other men and of God. On the day-to-day level, the idea that there exists a shared responsibility for the common good is by no means founded on solid ground. Many will just grab what they can get and will try to grab as much as possible. Sometimes Eastern Europeans argue that materialism is much more wide-spread in Eastern than in Western Europe. The origin undoubtedly is the communist economy of scarcity, which was unable even to provide the most basic necessities.

2. This immediately brings the specific Eastern European post-communist mentality towards the public domain to our attention. Mutual trust between state and citizens is under great pressure. Because the state is more of a distrustful overseer rather than a servant of the people, citizens play the role of unhappy consumers, which is mirrored in undesirable behaviour, for example: tax evasion, an extensive black and grey economy, corruption and theft from the state.

Equally worrying is the cynical attitude towards politicians, public figures, businessmen, civil activists or those who volunteer or do paid work in the non-profit sector. All are out on individual gain – not at all working for the public interest. This near-nihilistic attitude could be observed surrounding the Euromaidan, the initially peaceful pro-European protest in Ukraine (2013-2014). Because the state is being regarded as an all-encompassing power, it was impossible for many Russians and Ukrainians to imagine that independent, self-confident citizens took to the streets to defend a common cause and at their own risk. Therefore, they drew the most obvious conclusion: the Euromaidan was an artificial event, viz. a foreign conspiracy.

3. Furthermore, social cohesion in the post-communist countries is severely affected both by mutual distrust among citizens. Dialogue is being conceived as a debate with winners and losers, and “the winner takes it all” without even the slightest desire to somehow accommodate the claims of those who lose. If someone says beforehand that he aims at reaching compromise, this is regarded as a sign of weakness. A lack of work motivation, paternalism and authoritarian styles of parenting and teaching are among other things the outcome of that mind-set. The Church, by the way, is equally affected by this mentality. A Roman Catholic Archbishop somewhere in Eastern Europe once told how he had to learn to assert his authority in a blunt fashion, because a spirit of encouragement, debate and dialogue was simply absent and thus ineffective.
4. In the second half of the 1980s, when Soviet communist party leader Mikhail Gorbachev wanted to reform communism, questions surrounding national identity became more and more acute. The Roman Catholic Church in countries like Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia and Ukraine regarded itself as the bearer and keeper of an unaffected and wholesome national mentality. Especially in ecclesiastical circles the hope existed that a healthy mix of religion and nationalism – both were persecuted by communism – could underpin post-communist society with a new political-religious-national moral foundation. The Church would become “teacher and mother” and would inform the secular world about what it should consider the common good or not. In spite of a clear national and religious revival in the early 1990s, the Church failed to assert this self-ascribed role as safeguard of the nation.

5. The Church evidently fostered a feeling of nostalgia for its pre-war history, which obscured and still obscures a clear vision of contemporary solutions.

A brief interlude. Before the five post-communist characteristics described above will be translated into action points, we ought to take a closer look at the developments in the Central and Eastern European region since 1990.

Whoever travelled to Eastern Europe twenty-five years ago entered an entirely different world. Next to great material needs, there were cultural and language barriers to overcome as well as a general sense of mistrust and insecurity. Thus, it could happen that when a journalist asked a priest about his personal motives, he was met with great suspicion. "Why do you want to know all that?" the priest asked his interlocutor as if he were a KGB informer. In this respect Eastern Europe is on a tipping point. New generations have grown up. Teenagers and those in their twenties now have no direct knowledge or recollection of the communist past that once was. In Kiev, for example, tourists can chat with students and young professionals on a tramcar or trolleybus. Only five years ago this was quite impossible due to language issues and perhaps also due to a fear of contact. Whoever lost his way somewhere in Eastern Europe would not find it back easily.

The priest of the early 1990s and the young adults and students of today illustrate how East and West are growing together in political and social terms, in terms of mentality and of mutual understanding. This development is not in all respects a change for the better. Communism and post-communism as well as political liberalism and economic neoliberalism, yielded – what an unexpected and unpleasant surprise! – quite similar results. Egotism, individualism, materialism, lack of interest in public affairs, political populism and anti-Europeanism are examples of this change. This is why the past twenty-five have been far from easy.

There is, however, another intrinsic reason. After suffering persecution until death, the Roman Catholic faithful (and not only they) emerged broken but self-conscious from the catacombs. Whereas believers were faced with the almost impossible task to rebuild the Church, literally from the ground up, the Church managed to make a comeback from a position of weakness, which was characterised by secrecy, self-censorship, self-limitation, begging, bargaining and compromise. In a cleansing fire faith, conscience and intellect became hardened steel. This was an adequate survival modus back then. Nowadays, sometimes that metal must be flexible or even break under pressure, like crumple zones or a bimetal in a turn light switch. Redefining its mission, the Church is going through a learning process. When should it be unbreakable, crumple or bend?

Question 3: Do the answers to the first two questions reveal perhaps priorities and challenges in the realm of CST? In reverse order...:

1. Nostalgia must be removed from active conscience and become part of the history books. The past – including the rich Roman Catholic past when everyone more or less adhered to the same faith and took of his hat for the parish priest and the heroic resistance that created a sanctuary for faith to survive during communism – may offer inspiration, it does not provide viable models for the Church of today.
2. A related issue is post-communist nationalism, to which also the Roman Catholic Church will need to relate. After all, Roman Catholic theology advocates an inclusive approach to other nations, other faiths and their believers, dissenters and even nonbelievers, but this open attitude was obscured more than once by mixing it with a closed and exclusivist national discourse that seemed to carry the greatest weight. This undesirable prioritisation harms peace and reconciliation in Europe.

When looking at the history of the First and Second World War and the communist era, how come that stereotyping, denial and making the past look prettier than it was are always present dangers? And isn't it a downright shame that in 2015 so many ethnic Romanians, Hungarians and Slovaks – whether they are Roman Catholics or not – feel awkward to sit together, remember or discuss the World Wars that so dramatically shaped and reshaped Central Europe? Did the role of local church leaders and believers before or during the Holocaust remain perhaps a bit too vague? Why are the white pages, which were certainly there, often being magnified, while the black pages of partisan war, collaboration, inter-ethnic hatred and murder and anti-Semitism are often being covered in a mere perfunctory manner? Furthermore, shouldn't religious freedom extend to groups and associations that were never native or are experienced as alien?

Especially, in countries where Catholicism prevails, the Church bears great responsibility for establishing historic truth, dialogue, irenic research and genuine initiatives of reconciliation.

- 3./4. More social cohesion, a realistic view of the realities of today and a culture of hope and of trust is needed: at the level of parenting, education, politics and society as a whole. Hope and trust pos-

tulate the cultivation of an open dialogue and discussion, mutual respect when fundamentally different views co-exist, respect for the individual and individual emotions and opinions. This unfortunately is not exactly the strength of post-communist society and here the Church plays a positive as well as a negative role. The Church, however, can set a good example by practicing constructive and inclusive cooperation, mutual trust and subsidiarity on the inside and by encouraging the development of the common good whenever this is possible on the outside. The pastoral outreach of the Church seems crucial here as well. Care for the common good is not just about advocating ideals, rules and regulations. It should be prevented that practical-existential needs ever disappear from view: the individual with his worries and problems is central and the Church should not be afraid to get its feet dirty.

In the past, the Foundation Communicantes supported new forms of pastoral ministry: in homes and hospitals, in the army and police; in short, in all those places where the Church was not allowed to go under communist rule. It was fairly easy to obtain grant money for pastoral care projects and to send someone to study pastoral-theology. It was, however, quite another thing for someone to acquire an activist and open mentality (call it an evangelical and missionary disposition). A truly humanistic and realistic attitude towards the believers and nonbelievers alike requires more than merely praying or delivering a pious sermon. Divorce, drugs, alcohol-related domestic violence, poverty and other social issues are sometimes more painful in Eastern than in Western Europe. All the same, life's challenges – which indeed have a clear religious dimension – are not being dealt with adequately with prayer or sermon alone.

Here, the Church in Eastern Europe still looks fragile, as does the whole of the post-communist society.

5. Discussions about the welfare state and the actual shape of the EU should not be oversimplified or framed as a choice between communism on the one hand and (neo) liberalism on the other.

With a keen awareness of the ills and evils of the world it lives in, the Roman Catholic Church ought to focus its efforts on a realistic and fair assessment of the welfare state and of the EU. "Peace project Europe" is not entirely faulty or evil and, therefore, it is a matter of fairness to promote and to support the good that dwells in it. Incremental improvements in a society that simultaneously benefit the whole person as well as the common good are always to be preferred above radical change. And if the Church lends its ear to utopian ideals, the purpose must be, first and foremost, to test its beliefs and ideals and to refute more adequately what ought to be rejected. For example, the insights of the *Acton Institute* (which advertises a free market ideology in Eastern Europe) should be rejected. With its call for a free economy and radical end to the welfare state, this think tank from the US evidently fits into the category of utopianism.

The full title of this article is "Catholic Social Teaching in Eastern Europe. Faith and action as types of self-secularisation in the context of the one Europe". It refers to how this core of Roman Catholic thinking is sometimes perceived in Eastern Europe:

1. As a product of Western, action-prone, secularised Christianity.
2. As something that may perhaps apply to Western democracies but not to post-communist countries with their own specific (pre-)history.
3. As something that does not fit spirituality, national sentiment or outlook of Eastern Europe.

Isn't this unfortunate? After all, the Roman Catholic Church has something great on offer. It is well disposed to give adequate and nuanced answers to the social problems of today. They are in between of a privatised, rationalistic (Protestant) alternative on the one hand and an empty, statist, spiritualised (Orthodox) answer on the other. The Protestant option, which consists of blessing concrete political or scientific options as Christian, is certainly rejected. Meanwhile, the Orthodox view, in which the world with its problems is left to the powers that be (state) exerts some appeal, because it fits by and large the practical and theoretical awkwardness of the Roman Catholic Church in post-communist society. A hard nut needs to be cracked here, because the Orthodox approach remains very close to the role it was allowed to play by the communist state: an inward-looking institution which was subjected to the goals of the state and which was doomed to disappear as a social force. Should we label this choice not to deal with society in all its dimensions as a choice for "self-secularisation" as well?

There is a clear learning curve for the Roman Catholic Church to embrace. It must rationally, realistically analyse and think about the current needs and problems of the society of which it is inescapably a part, for better and for worse. Here, it is of the utmost importance to integrate the core elements of the Catholic Social Teaching (subsidiarity, solidarity, common good and human person).