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and the war in Ukraine. What do the Churches contribute to peace and
reconciliation?" at the Foundation Communicantes, Tilburg, 4 April 2015

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1. "Ubuntu" Ukrainian style – the long road ahead
What can Churches do to promote peace and reconciliation in Ukraine?
Frans Hoppenbrouwers, Communicantes

Tilburg, 10 April 2015. *Recently, the Foundation Communicantes and the chair "Orthodoxy and Peace Building" of the Free University of Amsterdam organised a public event about how Churches can contribute to peace and reconciliation in Ukraine. While the conflict in Eastern Ukraine is still very much alive, four speakers had been invited to shed their light on the topic of peace and reconciliation.*

Communicantes president Professor Nico Schreurs pointed out that a desire to discuss peace and reconciliation, while the Ukrainian crisis is still far from resolved, is by no means premature. Nico Schreurs referred to how Robert Schumann, one of the founding fathers of Europe, had started drawing up his programme of reconciliation between archenemies France and Germany no later than in 1942. At that time the outcome of the Second World War was still very much unknown.

In his word of welcome, Professor Schreurs carefully distinguished reconciliation from forgiveness. And, in doing so, he accurately described the rather difficult situation the Churches in Ukraine find themselves in. Schreurs argued "that reconciliation can only be achieved, if both parties agree to plan a common future, which is no longer burdened by past experiences." Furthermore, Nico Schreurs underlined the fact that any "appeal for reconciliation remains non-consequential, if it does not highlight the conditions under which reconciliation will take effect or contain an action plan which leads to the establishment of real and viable reconciliation."

Unfortunately, these criteria have not been met yet. In the present situation, a common vision of the past is absent, while the future of the country is largely unclear. There exists no widely accepted or practical idea about what the new, democratic Ukraine should look like, which makes much discussion about reconciliation rather ethereal.

Does this leave the Churches empty-handed? By no means, if we are to believe Professor Schreurs. Referring to Ukrainian Greek Catholic Bishop Borys Gudziak, Schreurs emphasised that Churches as "Ukrainian organisations, which do not coincide with the State and therefore need not to agitate against insurrection and rebellion, should stand up against violence, against revenge and choose peace and reconciliation as their path as well as take the first steps towards that goal."

A troubled past and present

In Ukraine, like in most countries of Eastern Europe, the after-effects of fifty to seventy years of communist repression can still be felt on a daily basis. They determine to a large extent the way in which society and individuals function. "Communist society was authoritarian and paternalistic", Cinta Depondt of the Netherlands peace organisation PAX summarised.

Depondt described some of her experiences in Ukraine. Mutual trust between State and citizens is largely absent. And while individuals treat each other with great distrust, dialogue is generally considered to be an argument between conflicting parties and a compromise above all a sign of weakness. Also, Depondt drew the attention to the socialist social engineering, which created a violent political culture and society. This coupled with strict State control of the public and private sphere, its ideological monopoly on truth and history led to a very specific

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interpretation of the initially peaceful Euromaidan protest in Kyiv, which started in November 2013.

Euromaidan was nothing less than a conspiracy, many Ukrainians (and Russians) decided for themselves. After all, in a context of inescapable political control and manipulation, the notion of self-aware, free citizens, who spontaneously turn out in protest was simply inconceivable. A large scale event of that magnitude could only have been organised by the State, State like entities or self-serving individuals.

Therefore, in a situation in which many people still do not believe that they can change the society they live in, peace organisation PAX wants to lend a helping hand. Civil society is in need of support, because it can contribute greatly to peace and reconcilitation in Ukraine. Furthermore, the almighty authoritarian-ruled State and State violence need to be demolished. In Ukraine, PAX aims at spreading the skills necessary for dialogue and at smoothing the relation between Government and citizens.

Cinta Depondt also underlined the European dimension of the Ukrainian crisis, which revolves around shared European values like human dignity, truth and respect of diversity. These are not merely "things" that need to be implemented in Ukraine, but they need maintenance and care inside of the European Union as well. Comparing the War in Yugoslavia (1991-1995) and the present conflict, Depondt called the former "a local crisis with European implications" – the latter "a European crisis with local implications".

Some questions were raised. For example, does the Ukrainian concept of dignity coincide with ours? And, if we talk about inescapable issues like corruption, perhaps the Churches themselves – which still retain a considerable level of trust among the population at large – are in need of some reform themselves?

At the grass root level

Dr Lidiya Lozova of the Saint Clement Centre for Cultural Interaction and Dialogue (Kyiv) shared some of her experiences in the Paraskeva parish in Lishnya, a village fifty kilometres to the west of Kyiv. This parish belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, but escapes the stereotypical black and white divide between a "Russian" Church on the one hand and a "Ukrainian" Church on the other. For example: during the Presidency of the ousted Viktor Yanukovych, the locals did not let themselves be intimidated to vote for the President's Regions Party.

It took parish priest Filaret fifteen years of hard work to establish a flourishing community, which was affected by the Ukrainian crisis nevertheless. Father Filaret did not condemn parishioners for taking a stand against the Yanukovych regime, then, after all, already in the New Testament Saint Paul claimed his civil rights. Problems started later, thus Lidiya Lozova, when parishioners became divided over the question whether they should also pray for the victims of the protests, who fell on the side of the Government.

Since the outbreak of the war, the Paraskeva parish organised humanitarian aid for Ukrainian soldiers and is actively involved in the care for refugees of different confessions as well as the families of soldiers who were wounded or killed. The parish also engages in active ecumenical contacts with Christian communities in countries like France (Taizé) and Italy (Comunione e Liberazione).

Because the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate does not want to provoke anyone outside of the Church or to divide its believers on the issue of war and peace, it is now keeping silent, Lidiya Lozova argued.

Church politics

The Euromaidan protest was an important social and religious event, Dr Cyril Hovorun contended. There Churches and civil society threw off the shackles of the totalitarian post-communist State. It is for this reason, that the protracted Ukrainian crisis should essentially be viewed as a conflict between civil society and authoritarian State. In a way, this was the coming about of a Ukrainian "Ubuntu", Cyril Hovorun joked. "Ubuntu" is the Bantu word for human kindness, the openness and benevolence towards others.

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Hovorun, a priest-monk of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, drew a comparison between the attitude of most South African Christian Churches towards the apartheid regime and the attitude of the local Christian Churches towards the crisis in Ukraine. While Churches had been instrumental in maintaining an unjust status quo, they became a cause of change as well. Here, Hovorun reminded his audience of how his Church continued to support the contested ex-President Yanukovych and even compared him with Jesus Christ in February 2014.

Meanwhile father Cyril felt sorry that Ukraine still lacks someone who could equal the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

A major difference with South Africa, however, is the lack of sympathy coming from Churches from abroad, Hovorun lamented. For this reason, many believers feel very much disappointed about inter-Church solidarity. The Vatican as well as the World Council of Churches have refused to identify the main cause of the Ukrainian conflict, that is, the Russian intervention in Eastern Ukraine.

Hovorun deplored the legal and political language of recent Church statements, which are by the way extremely rare. Churches speak as if they are political institutions. Valuing good relationships with the Russian Orthodox Church higher than truth, Churches and church bodies remain bystanders and refrain from pointing out victims and perpetrators.

Drawing a comparison with Popes Benedict XV (1914-1922) and Pius XII (1939-1958), father Cyril greatly regretted the "neutral" stance of the Vatican and especially the way in which Pope Francis had copied the Russian propaganda when he labelled the Ukrainian conflict as a "civil war".

Obviously, father Cyril Hovorun identified a great need for reconciliation. He distinguished three different levels: one, victims and perpetrators of the Yanukovych regime: two, victims and perpetrators of the war in Eastern Ukraine; three, the victims of the propaganda war, which started in 2013 already.

In the concluding discussion, of course, the question was raised as to what extent Churches are able to distinguish truth from falsehood in the ongoing Ukrainian conflict and, most appropriate at Easter, how truth can be established in clashes like these in the first place.

Religious and/or secular protest

The Euromaidan was an "inclusive" protest, Professor Heleen Zorgdrager of the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam explained. It was a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional event that kept the whole of Ukraine in its sway.

The protest on the Kyiv Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) was a turning point in several respects. Finally, people felt as if they themselves could bring about change and, as a consequence, the attitude of many citizens across the country changed from disinterest to active involvement.

It also changed the place that the Ukrainian Churches occupied in society until then. From organisations that were very much preoccupied with adjusting their goals and efforts to those of the State, they started to focus themselves more intensely on Ukrainian society itself and on the Ukrainians. At that moment at least, the Orthodox Churches departed from their traditional Byzantine conception of Church and State relations.

Thus, the protest created momentum for a revival of citizen initiatives, which became heavily involved in supplying humanitarian aid, first to the protesters at the Maidan and presently to the army and the victims of the war. Unfortunately, these citizen initiatives waged and still wage a battle on two fronts: against the damage caused by violence and war and against corruption, passiveness and ineffective administration. As a result, unfortunately, many activists have become psychologically and physically exhausted.

Heleen Zorgdrager, who is a visiting lecturer at the Ukrainian Catholic University for over ten years, lauded the unprecedented ecumenical cooperation, which was generated in the wake of the Euromaidan protest. In this context, she highlighted the role of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.

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Professor Zorgdrager presented an astute account of the role of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church at the Maidan square and thereafter. At Maidan this Church did not promote a political party, but wanted to give a testimony of truth. In the words of Bishop Boris Gudziak they supported "a pilgrimage from fear to dignity". This was by all means an extraordinary event.

More critically, however, Zorgdrager reviewed the way in which the over one hundred dead protesters of the Maidan are now being remembered, especially in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church.

The head of that Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, spoke of the "paschal sacrifice" of the so-called "heavenly hundred", who have become incorporated into an Orthodox theological context in which they remain until today. Professor Zorgdrager found this rather persuasive and normative narrative exclusivist with respect to the Muslims, Jews, Roman Catholics, Protestants, agnostics, non-believers who also participated in the protests. Furthermore, this narrative seemingly emphasises a culture of blood and sacrifice and seems to sacralise war and nation in the process.

Conclusion

How easy is it to create chaos, to destroy and to sow hatred, either by words or by deeds? How difficult is it to counter the ill effects of war and violence?

The case of Ukraine and many examples before that have shown how important it is to insist on the work of peace and reconciliation and to continue on that path. Having said this, there exists the danger that moral indignation and sympathy for one's fellow man lead to assuming a bond between individuals, peoples and countries, which is not really there. Because these sentiments appeal to something which is both common and essential to most men – a sense of undivided and unlimited oneness – notions of peace and reconciliation seem somehow self-evident or immune to criticism. Well, they are not and they should not.

Peace and reconciliation require a continuous, intensive and painstaking work of seeking a fundamental truth, which aims at healing wounds inflicted on the one hand and at preventing future conflict on the other. This requires a clear and shared vision of the past and of the future, which is for various reasons not always obvious. This is not only true for Ukrainian society at large but for the Churches in Ukraine as well.

A very recent illustration of such a lack of clairvoyance is a law, which was approved by Ukrainian Parliament on 9 April 2015. Aiming among other things at legalising "fighters for independence in the twentieth century", it indiscriminately applies to democrats and moral heroes, to fascists, anti-democrats, anti-Semites and other lowlifes. Clearly, the road to "Ubuntu" Ukrainian style is long and winding.

In view of lasting peace and reconciliation, hopefully, the Churches will continue to bring victims and perpetrators together and to intensify their effort to promote a common understanding of Ukraine's history and of its future, among individual believers as well as in society as a whole. It is a religious duty – an act of courage and therefore meritorious.

2.   Interval programme: the new Ukrainian icon

During the interval Mariana Gräfin von Westarp of the Symbolum Sacrum Foundation gave an interesting presentation. She guided our audience through the world of the new Ukrainian icon. Please, check out the Symbolum Sacrum website with many artists and many of their works. (See section 3.)

3.   Speakers

– Cinta Depondt is Senior Programme Officer "Eastern Europe and Eurasia" of the peace organisation PAX in Utrecht, the Netherlands. See the PAX-website.
– Mariana Gräfin von Westarp, Bonn, Germany, is a specialist of modern religious art and founder of the Symbolum Sacrum Foundation. See symbolum-sacrum.org.
– Dr Cyril Hovorun is a theologian, priest monk, former vice-president of the external affairs department of the UOC-MP, former fellow at Yale and Associate Dean at the Sankt Ignatios

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Academy, Sweden. After registration, many of Hovorun's publications are free to consult at yale.academia.edu.
– Dr Lidiya Lozova is project manager of the Saint Clement Centre for Cultural Interaction and Dialogue (Kyiv) and active parishioner at the UOC-MP Paraskeva parish in Lishnya near Kyiv. Check out the Saint Clement Centre website.
– Dr Nico Schreurs is President of the Foundation Communicantes. He was Professor of Systematic Theology of the Theological Faculty Tilburg of the Catholic University Brabant (now University of Tilburg).
– Dr Heleen Zorgdrager is Professor of Systematic Theology and Gender Studies of the Protestant Theological University Amsterdam and visiting lecturer at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. See the PThU-website.

4.   "The Churches and the war in Ukraine" in the press

– Geert van Dartel, "'Pilgrimage from fear to dignity' – Oekraïne", at: KVO-website (6 April 2015)
– "Publieksdag in Tilburg over 'De kerken en de oorlog in Oekraïne'" [Public Day about the Churches and the war in Ukraine], in: *Reformatorisch Dagblad* at: RD-website (7 April 2015)
– Cinta Depondt, "Oekraïense kerken zoekend op weg naar vrede en verzoening" [Ukrainian Churches looking for the road towards peace and reconciliation], in: *Friesch Dagblad* (8 April 2015). Download the pdf-file at the PAX-website
– Cinta Depondt was invited to the national network "Radio 5" programme "Incense and Peppermint" (Wierook en Pepermunt) to discuss the situation of the Churches in Ukraine, at the NPO-website at 12:40 min. (Saturday 11 April 2015, 18:12 PM)
– Lidiya Lozova, "The Church and Reconciliation. Grassroots Initiatives. The Experience of a Parish", in: *Perspectief* at KVO-website (May 2015)
– Roman Nazarenko, "Європейські богослови аналізували роль Церков у суспільних процесах в Україні" [European theologians analysed the role of Churches in the social processes in Ukrain], at the RISU-website (15 April 2015)

5.   Links to the Foundation Communicantes

– Foundation Communicantes:

website: communicantes.nl
on Facebook: facebook.com/pages/Stichting-Communicantes

6.   Church Statistics (Rating-survey April 2015)

– Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate   38 %
– UOC – Moscow Patriarchate   19,5 %
– Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church   8 %
– Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church   1 %
– Protestants   1 %
– Roman Catholic Church   1 %

7.   Timetable of the Ukrainian Crisis (November 2013-present)

– 21 November 2013- 24 February 2014	Protesters want President Viktor Yanukovych to reconsider his refusal to sign the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. Peaceful protest in Kyiv ends in extreme violence.
– 21 February	President Yanukovych flees from Ukraine
– 23 February	Start of the Crimean crisis
– 18 March	Official annexation of the Republic of Crimea by the Russian Federation
– April 2014-present	War in Donbass
– 1 September	Minsk summit 1
– 11/12 February 2015	Minsk summit 2