



Communicantes Newsletter 2016/1 Winter

If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God...

– Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, 20

Dear friend of **Communicantes**, another year is over. It was quite eventful. Just look at the acts of terror in Paris in January and in November, the war in Syria and the refugee crisis that ensued or the lingering, almost frozen conflict in the eastern provinces of Ukraine. The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference took place in November in an effort to curb global climate change – a process of which nobody is quite sure what the outcome will be.

Twenty-five years after the end of communism, seventy years after World War II and one century after one of the bloodiest years of WWI, we are left with much confusion and questions about our near future. Apart from our day-to-day worries, we sometimes find ourselves overwhelmed with angst.

Symptoms of this confusion abound. Take a look at the section 'Sprachkritik' of the authoritative German language *Spiegel Online* of 12 January 2016. The most hated word of 2015 is 'do-gooder' and the key topic of 2015 was 'refugees'. If we glue the two together, we get a pretty good idea of the solutions that are now being suggested to solve many of the outstanding issues in Europe.

By and large, the solution is as follows. It is time to leave

good intentions and ideals behind, because empathy with weaker and less-fortunate than us is merely leading to parasitic behaviour by whom we want to help. In short, we best say farewell to political correctness and take care of our own interests.

Recently, in Germany and the Netherlands, a more intellectual discussion took off about the 'Gutmensch', goodman, good-woman, do-gooders – after the witty poem 'Gutmann und Gutweib' by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Not only do goodman and good-woman think that they are doing the right thing, no! These are people who are steeped in political correctness. They are acting sanctimoniously.

Here, unfortunately, Goethean wit is absent. Throwing out ideals without replacing them with nothing better than self-interest is definitely not the way to progress. Indeed, Europe's self-interest needs better care, but if it is of a purely material and egoistic nature, Europe will loose out in the long run.

2016 is the Year of Mercy. For sure, Pope Francis has given us as a difficult theme to meditate on during this Holy Year. In his bulla 'The Face of Mercy' of 11 April 2015, nr. 20, he distinguished human justice from divine mercy: 'If God

limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected.'

With all our limited powers and the flawed structures we live our lives in, but inspired by faith, we are encouraged to bridge the gap between divine mercy and human justice in our own life. We need to become more oriented towards mercy and less towards justice. Of course, this is easier said than done. It is neither straightforward nor simple. Discernment is needed, patience, a clear insight into human frailness as well as human resolve.

And let us always remember that there is nothing wrong with being a 'Gutmann' or a 'Gutweib', if it means tempering human justice with divine mercy.

On behalf of the board of **Communicantes** I wish you an inspired and blessed 2016,

Frans Hoppenbrouwers.

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