



Annual Report 2014 of the Foundation Communicantes

A Word from Our President

Last year, in the Communicantes *Annual Report 2013*, I very much insisted on the many difficulties, which Europe was experiencing.

A war was raging in Ukraine and we still were in the aftermath of the bank crisis. Harsh criticism of the European Union from right wing and left wing political parties was flanked by an enormous lack of European self-awareness among mainstream politicians as well as ordinary citizens.

And let us not forget the recent and tragic events in Paris and Copenhagen. They pose yet another challenge to a *truly* open and dialogue oriented Europe. It is sad to say that one year onwards, the overall situation of Europe is worse than it was.

On the other hand, this rather unfortunate state of affairs shows that Communicantes was right to put Catholic social thinking and teaching, reconciliation in Europe at the centre of its activities. More than ever, it is necessary to promote a positive role for Roman Catholics, Christians and other believers in Europe.

Even if this role in the public sphere is rather modest, it isn't less necessary.

Leaving Europe to the many wolves which are more than happy to tear up our continent in ideological and geographical bits and fragments isn't a real option. It might promote a national and maybe even some religious fervour here and there, but eventually it will harm Europe. It will weaken the specific and valuable contribution of Europe to the world.

Looking at our best achievements and talents we must take pride in our Christian faith and European heritage. Coupled with sound common sense, this could provide an antidote to the demoralising effect of critics, who solely focus on our shortcomings and mistakes.

In the coming years, Communicantes will look at what we are best at as Christians. We will investigate how religious, Christian, Catholic identity contributes to Europe from the point of view of social thinking and teaching. Given the circumstances, this is a challenging task.

Professor Nico Schreurs.

Contents

<i>A Word from Our President</i>	1	<i>Christian Identity in the 21st Century</i>	5
<i>The Tough Work of</i>		<i>Projects 2014</i>	6
<i>Peace and Reconciliation in Ukraine</i>	2	<i>About Communicantes</i>	8

The Tough Work of Peace and Reconciliation

'Prostir Hidnosti' on a Mission in Ukraine

In the centre of the Eastern Ukrainian terrorist stronghold Donetsk, girls in black jumpsuits are dancing and give the Nazi salute. They make tangible what they think is going on in the rest of Ukraine. It's the weekend of 4 October 2014.

Paradoxically, the 'fascist' metropolis of Lviv in the far west of the country is an oasis of quiet peace. The huge monument of the Soviet victory over German fascism is standing in all its might and glory. In the centre of the city people do speak Russian and nobody seems to care. Anti-Russian sentiment is limited to the walls of the Russian consulate, which have been decorated with the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag.

The contrast with Donetsk is not just optical. While in Eastern Ukraine stereotypes and hatred are being preached openly, idealists in Lviv started the painstaking work of peace and reconciliation.

With a death toll of 4,000, more than 9,000 wounded and nearly 800,000 displaced persons at the beginning of October 2014, the war in the Donbass region has created a humanitarian crisis. As a consequence, almost every Ukrainian now knows someone who has been touched by the conflict.

Not much imagination is needed to understand that many Ukrainians suffer from trauma, hatred, anger, depression and fear. Also, a sense of helplessness and abandonment is being reinforced by accusation and insinuation. A *clash of civilization*-like frame was cast over those Ukrainians, who wanted their country to move towards Europe.

As a consequence, Russian Orthodox church leaders have been levelling accusations at the indigenous Orthodox Churches and the Greek-Catholic Church (Orthodox by tradition but unit-

Danish Carl Plesner (left) discusses the Lviv shaming ceremony of 26 January 2014: Berkut police officers were forced to ask forgiveness to a crowd of angry bystanders in the city centre. To his right: colleague Olena Hantsyak-Kaskiv



ed with the Pope of Rome). They have been 'identified' as the ideological force behind alleged or real anti-Russian sentiment, chauvinism and anti-Semitism—the latter allegations have been consistently refuted by Jewish leaders.

Ukraine is literally torn apart. Amazingly, this is the direct result of the Euromaidan – an initially peaceful and small-scale pro-European protest in the city centre of the capital Kiev.

How can enemies become friends again? Are there any messengers of peace, reconciliation or forgiveness?

After the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovich, Danish Carl Plesner teamed up with Olena Hantsyak-Kaskiv to put their efforts in the NGO *Prostir Hidnosti* (Dignity Space). It was their explicit aim to foster reconciliation in Ukrainian society. 'Fighting for peace', thus Olena Hantsyak, is the aim of this Danish-Ukrainian cooperation, which received the blessing of the Greek Catholic Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk.

While Hantsyak herself became active at the Euromaidan in Kiev, Plesner is a professional mediator whose employers include the Danish police. Through the international network *Center for Nonviolent Communication*, he became involved in Ukraine.

Hantsyak and Plesner are idealists in a society of which the social fabric has been disrupted by communism. 'People treat others as a threat to their own interests and in Western Ukraine people are traditionally battle-minded,' Plesner has noticed. 'Everyone has his enemy. Some hate Russians, others Poles, Jews or communists.'

'This highlights our painful history,' Olena explains. 'People lack trust. But now Ukrainians have reached a point where they must abandon these stereotypes.'



Lviv: monument of the so-called 'Great Patriotic War' – the Soviet victory over fascism

Good tools or skills to make that happen prove scarce. 'Ukrainians are not ready to discuss much or to make compromises, if they feel they don't have to,' the Danish mediator elaborates. 'Shaming, blaming, physical and psychological violence are common disciplinary tools. If you are different, you will be disgraced or called to order by force.'

A compelling example was a shaming ceremony in Lviv on 26 February 2014. Kneeling on a stage and accompanied by a Greek Catholic priest who at least tried to calm down the crowd with prayer, some fifty officers of the hated riot police *Berkut* were forced to ask forgiveness for their participation or of their colleagues in the violent crack-down on anti-government protesters in Kiev. Meanwhile,



Meeting of Berkut police officers with Maidan protesters in May 2014.

the over-excited public shouted ‘shame, shame’ and worse.

‘What cameras could not capture was the intimidation that preceded the ceremony,’ Plesner explains. ‘Police officers, their spouses and children received visits from anti-government activists, who threatened them with their lives. It was a horrific experience for many of them.’

This violence is a short-cut to reconciliation and its effects are indiscriminately negative and long-lasting, the Danish mediator argues.

‘It shows how flawed the Euro-maidan trauma has been dealt with. New wounds are being inflicted and the distance grows bigger. Corrective violence leads to depression, anxiety and anger. It is a simple truth. You can learn someone in thirty minutes how to shoot an automatic weapon, but repairing the damage will take years of hard work.’

Is it possible to achieve reconciliation in a sensible manner? Hantsyak and Plesner are determined.

A first meeting between Euromaidan activists and Berkut took place in May 2014 in Kiev, where in January and February at least 110 activists and 26 police-

men were killed. At the invitation of *Prostir Hidnosti* they came together to create better mutual understanding.

‘It was challenging,’ Plesner confesses. ‘The participants were invited to step into the shoes of their opponents and to answer tough questions. For example: “What did you feel when you threw a Molotov cocktail at the police and saw it explode?” In turn, the Berkut officers had to share what was going through their heads at that same moment. Another question was “What did you want to achieve with your actions? ...and did you succeed?”’

‘Whether they should have acted differently,’ Plesner asks himself. ‘That question remained unanswered, but by looking closer at personal motives and feelings they became better aware of the negative impact of their actions not only on their opponents but on themselves as well.’

There are many hurdles to take. ‘Good intentions are by no means lacking, but using prayer as sole remedy is not a real solution either,’ Plesner explains a common misunderstanding in church circles. ‘I have nothing against prayer, but priests here teach that you need to be *okay* with God first and that the rest will fol-

low automatically. It works the other way around, I think. First, you reconcile with your fellow man and then with God.'

Another complication is that in the present situation to many Ukrainians talking doesn't make much sense. 'What is all that talking good for, now so many people are suffering', they complain. Plesner: 'I tend to disagree. My inspiration is the South-African Archbishop Desmond Tutu who was a member of the *Truth and Reconciliation Com-*

mission. Tutu said that if he had to give one million people his undivided attention, he had no choice but to do so.'

It is Carl Plesner's dream that Ukrainians will become mediators themselves. Pointing at the picture with Berkut police officers and Maidan activists from May 2014: 'I want to see that same picture, but without the Danish guy.'

Communicantes' Mission '2.0'

Christian Identity in Europe in the 21st Century

The Second Vatican Council, which ended its deliberation on 8 December 1965, was, of course, a 'watershed moment' for the Roman Catholic Church as we still know it today.

The council's objective was to be ecumenical both in intent and in impact, that is, the Fathers of the Council did not want to limit their discussions to the inner working of the Church itself. With an equally keen interest they looked at the 'world outside' of the Church. By doing so, the Fathers sought to understand the Church's connectedness to the world, not merely by discussing it within the context of its own theological paradigms but also by inviting the world outside to come in, so that it could explain itself in its own words.

Accordingly, the council redefined the Church's relation to other Christian Churches and confessions (in *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*) and to the world religions, notably Judaism (*Nostra Aetate*). *Dignitatis Humanae* discussed fundamental notions of religious freedom, while the Church's pastoral outreach to the secular world

was dealt with extensively in *Gaudium et Spes*.

The Roman Catholic Church wanted to move from a closed, condemning and anathematising Church to a fundamentally open and dialogue-oriented Church. Well aware of the dangers of the modern age, the council felt confident enough to take up the challenges it was facing.

While the core of our faith remained intact, the features of Catholic identity or self-awareness became less well-defined.

Of course, we firmly believe in our redemption through the life, crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is an irreplaceable component of that identity. Still, the growing involvement and self-awareness of the laity (key points of the council as well) provoked huge change. A parallel can be drawn with the flourishing of religious orders and movements following the Council of Trent in the 16th century. It was a landslide too.

Before the Vatican council, Christian identity was something similar to

continue on page 7 »»»»»

Projects 2014

Europe

- Scholarships for participants of various European networks:
 - * the *European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations* (Andante)
 - * a regional conference of the *European Society of Women in Theological Research* (ESWTR) in Gniezno, Poland
 - * the Argau Summer University of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE).
- Small scholarships for exchange and study trips.

Belarus

- Ecumenical volunteers' programme of the Greek Catholic Church in Vitebsk.

Hungary

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:
 - * scholarships for sisters.

Latvia

- Youth pastoral care programme of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Jesus (SJE).

Lithuania

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:
 - * informal training
 - * scholarships for sisters.
- Training and retreat centre Guronys of the sisters SJE.
- Psychological training course for

lay volunteers, religious and priests.

Moldova

- Psychological training course for lay volunteers, religious and priests.

Poland

- Dom Pokoju/House of Peace, Centre for interreligious dialogue, Wroclaw.

Romania

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:
 - * informal training
 - * secretarial costs.

Ukraine

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious:
 - * secretarial costs
 - * scholarships for sisters.
- Greek Catholic Church: equipping 75 priests serving regularly in Eastern Ukraine with the pastoral skills of ministering to people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The total amount of grants-in-aid was slightly over € 110,000.



Templeton Prize winner Tomáš Halík

ready-made clothes. Believers had no other choice than to dress themselves with what the Church at one given time had on offer and stick to it.

But because society was changing since the 1940s into a social, cultural and religious multiversum, many tailor-made identities have been developed. As a consequence, experiences and experiments were ambivalent.

Was a socially oriented religious identity being replaced by social action alone? Yes, more than once. Was an exclusively liturgical identity rather an expression of a Manichean mind set? Sometimes, yes.

With hindsight we see now that many experiments were less heterodox or revolutionary than they had been accused of 40 to 60 years ago. Probably, we

have grown more used to the fact that if tailor-made identities are contrasted with the core of our belief, with less fear or suspicion, they can indeed pass that test.

Nowadays, we like to think that diversity is not a weak spot or a flaw by definition. On the contrary. It is an aspect of our identity, which allows us to appreciate change in society and to give adequate responses.

In his 2011 essay *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, the acclaimed Czech theologian Tomáš Halík discusses the New Testament tax collector Zacchaeus (*Luke 19*). Zacchaeus, Halík argues, is not an outsider who is looking for something to believe in, read: an atheist or an agnostic. No, Zacchaeus exemplifies the never-ending search for God.

Like Zacchaeus who had just one encounter with Jesus, believers cannot grasp God in a single thought, emotion or experience. We need to be patient with God and with ourselves, so we may come to know Him better with time. If we do not find God readily available, we must persevere in our quest and enquire deeper. After all, if once found faith is not nurtured, it will become dull and fruitless.

Similarly, a meaningful Christian identity is something that we must discover and cultivate. Remarkably, Halík reserves a special place for reconciliation and peace. They are something typically Christian, he agrees.

**Constructief en wederzijds
Constructive Collaboration and
Mutual Understanding
Konstruktive und wechselseitige
Verständigung**

Goal of Communicantes

Since 1974, the foundation Communicantes has been working as a facilitator between church organisations and individuals in Central, Eastern and Western Europe. Its aim was – and still is – to promote a dialogue between partners in East and West, which is mutually beneficial: intellectually, inspirationally and practically. Communicantes is a Roman Catholic foundation, but our network is ecumenical, even multi-religious. Communicantes has been working towards its objective in different ways: funding projects, small-scale dialogue/exchange of persons and public information.

Board Members

Professor N. Schreurs, President
Father F. Kuster s.s.s., Secretary
H.A.A. van Bemmelen, Treasurer
G. van Dartel
Father B. Schols s.s.s.
J. Wortelboer

Staff

Advisor

Paul Wennekes

Communication and Projects

Frans Hoppenbrouwers

Contact

A Stichting Communicantes
Postbus 6016
5002 AA Tilburg

T 013-5423782

E communicantes@xs4all.nl

W www.communicantes.nl

R 22.57.912

IBAN NL58INGB0002257912

BIC INGBNL2A

KVK 450.55.777

Algemeen Nut
Beogende Instelling

ANBI

The road to
reconciliation:
Prostir Hidnosti

