



Annual Report 2017 of the Foundation Communicantes

A Word from Our President

The year 2017 was a fruitful one for our foundation Communicantes. It was engaged in various dialogue programs with partners, and participated in several important encounters with participants from all parts of Europe. You can read more about this in the Activities Report. Meanwhile, our own partner consultation confirmed me in my conviction that Communicantes can still play a valuable role in promoting dialogue and cooperation.

The need to strengthen dialogue and the important role for the Church in Europe was underlined by Pope Francis in his address to the participants of the congress (Re)Thinking Europe, organized by the Holy See and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union, in October 2017.

Pope Francis told his audience that *Christians are called to promote political dialogue..., to restore dignity to politics and to view politics as a lofty service to the common good...* More importantly, Pope Francis explained, *The first and perhaps*

the greatest contribution that Christians can make to today's Europe is to remind her that she is not a mass of statistics or institutions, but is made up of people... To acknowledge that others are persons means to value what unites us to them. To be a person connects us with others; it makes us a community. The second contribution, Pope Francis continued, is to help recover the sense of belonging to a community. It is not by chance that the founders of the European project chose that very word to identify the new political subject coming into being.

Often, we refer to European values. The values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are, however, under pressure in our European societies. It is up to us to prolong the debate about these values in our countries and institutions involving citizens at all levels of responsibility.

Victor Scheffers

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A Europe of Dialogues and Conversations

Old Ideals for an Old Continent

Are we suffering in Europe from the phenomenon that French church historian Pierre Chaunu in *Les temps des Réformes* (1975) called ‘le défi du monde plein’? Are we indeed being challenged by the awareness of a *world that is too full of people*?

The symptoms are similar to those that were attributed by Chaunu to the Late Middle Ages: demographic decline, introversion and anxiety as well as intensified creativity. Dropping birth rates and increasing life expectancy all over Europe tell us that sometime soon we will be facing a profound demographic crisis. And nobody knows the outcome. Also, migration inside of Europe and from the

outside is fuelling feelings of uncertainty. And on top of that, a third industrial – digital – revolution is speeding up our lives and is fundamentally reshaping the way we work, learn, socialise, behave, feel, and even the way we love.

Light is needed, because the mood in Europe is dark. The efficacy of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the welfare state are being called into question. Trust has given way to uncertainty.

This kind of fear isn’t something new either. Discussing the fortune of being well-off in Dutch 17th century society, Simon Schama eloquently portrayed this anxiety. In *The Embarrassment of Riches* (1987), the British historian explained the unease of the Dutch with a quote from John Calvin: ‘Let those who have abundance remember that they are surrounded with thorns, and let them take great care not to be pricked by them.’ The most dreaded thorn was losing eternal salvation, for example by priding oneself on earthly wealth.

Today, thorns are not so much what we inflict on ourselves, but more what others just might do to us. Thus, many Europeans rather put their faith in the hands of a *good tzar*, who will deliver them from the evils they fear most.

Surely, our continent is abandoning the optimism that transpired in Francis Fukuyama’s visionary essay *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). After the fall of communism, Fukuyama assumed, we would witness the universalization of Western liberal democracy and we would all live happily ever after. Back in the 1990s, genuine optimism fuelled

AFTER EUROPE



IVAN KRASTEVA

In his recent essay ‘After Europe’ Bulgarian philosopher Ivan Krastev hinted at the demise of the one Europe

the integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union, but gradually great hopes and expectations turned into suspicion, especially after 9/11. Fukuyama was proven wrong.

Also, it became clear that the reality of European reforms in the future member states in the late 1990s and early 2000s differed greatly from the official reports describing those reforms. Turning a blind eye on superficial reform, the region was fitted into the European Union, hoping that somehow, someday all will end well.

Obviously and quite naively, we Europeans, we believed that our own specific sets of values, our own beliefs, our own economic insights and our own democracy were self-fulfilling prophecies, *perpetuum mobiles*. Europeans saw themselves in the same rosy light, but Western Europeans perhaps even more.

In his recent and captivating essay *After Europe*, Bulgarian philosopher Ivan Krastev highlighted the disenchantment we all went through.

United in good times and in bad times, we seem to live a trans-European marriage of convenience. We do not take much interest in the lives of our fellow Europeans and today, no less than 30 years ago, we Europeans remain strangers to one and another. Similarly, we are strangers to ourselves and to our abundant European heritage.

We live on the same continent, but we remain disparate people with dissimilar histories. What we do share, however, are histories of forced unifications and of violent ruptures. They partly explain why the reassembly of mainland Europe progresses with such great difficulty. A

careful rereading of those histories seems very much needed.

But there are similarities as well. Not only we look alike, we share a common cultural heritage, we live within the same geographical confines and many of us grew up under the same ancestral *sacred canopy*. It explains why we Europeans

come across like family members. Our weaknesses are well known and we amply criticise them, because we just

cannot do without one another.

We are one but we are not the same and we get to carry each other's burdens, if we like it or not. The worries of today need to be addressed in concert.

Europe of dialogues and conversations remains as relevant as ever. Can there be any doubt?

In the given context believers too should connect among themselves, celebrate, think and work, even if their efforts do not relate directly to a concrete goal rationality or strategic action. And even more, once we escape this rationality, perhaps we will generate new spaces for open and potentially creative dialogues and conversations. Thus, we can leave our everyday delusions and our frustration, griefs and fears behind.

The bandwidth of exchange should be as wide as possible, with an open agenda and with many different voices. Clearly, *exclusionism* will frustrate any honest and enriching dialogue.

Of equal importance is the presence of believers in public debates and in the public realm. German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, for example, very much emphasised religion as a place where a

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and we get to carry each other's
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'The School of Athens' by Rafael, Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican: Aristotle stretching out his hand and Plato pointing upwards symbolising the study of man and world and the supernatural

meaningful, foundational dialogue is being conducted; one that can have a wider meaning for society as a whole.

This is especially the case today. Given the great scarcity of inspiring sources of meaning in secularised and post-communist societies, such a dialogue has become vital. After all, often liberal secular states lack the resources to fuel normative conversations in society or simply refrain from doing so. And even if governments occasionally lend an ear to the wishes of church leaders, those bequests hamper the development of a bottom-up, truly deliberative, democratic and open society.

Religion can provide innovative impulses to conversations in the public domain, to political discussion and legislation. It can and must cognitively challenge society, politics and law making.

If well-argued, these resources can become a remedy to evils that are affecting modern society: decreasing solidarity, a desire for easy and superficial solutions, the dominance of the market-place, the influence of big business and instrumen-

tal rationality. Meanwhile, it is essential that the language of faith is adequately translated into the language of the *agora*. There can be no doubt: the Gospel is not a social action manual, but wanting to replace the language of the public realm with the language of faith will reduce the latter to insignificance.

The more things change, the more they stay the same, French journalist Alphonse Karr once wrote. If we look at the growing awareness of the complexity and sentiments surrounding Europe, there seems to be veracity in that. The one Europe remains a task, a duty, a mission to fulfil. Good maintenance work is needed: debate, dialogue and conversation; critical but constructive, open yet deliberate.

The old Europe needs to rediscover its old ideals to find its way to the future. And we, Catholics, Christians, believers ought not to be afraid or settle for mediocrity, when we put out into the deep and let down our nets for a catch.

Frans Hoppenbrouwers

Communicantes in 2017

Activities Report

The foundation Communicantes is in the process of readjusting its activities around the themes peace, reconciliation and dialogue. We started this process in 2016 and continued all through 2017.

To this effect we organised at the beginning of June 2017 a partner consultation. Enabling our partners to meet with partners, who otherwise perhaps would never have met, was an excellent practical example of dialogue in itself. Also, Communicantes engaged in concrete and practical dialogue activities and assisted those of partner organisations or grant recipients.

Partner consultation

Bringing together some 10 partners from Belarus, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Ukraine in the Netherlands in mid-June, we wanted to investigate, how and to what purpose Communicantes should continue its mission of a facilitator of dialogue in Central and Eastern Europe and between the Central and Eastern European region and the Netherlands.

In short, we tried to establish more precisely if there is still a role left for a small organisation as ours to play?

The outcome of our meeting was positive, but, having said that, perhaps not for all the good reasons. One of the principal motives to still engage in dialogue is the fact that after almost 30 years of European integration, the many divisions in Europe have not disappeared by themselves or have grown even deeper.

Often divisions are determined by old antagonisms, for example the logic of ww2 or of the Cold War with its crude mergers and violent brake-ups. Often too,

these discontinuities are more about ruptures between subregions of Central and Eastern Europe.

Our partners emphasised that varying countries have varying outlooks on Europe just as different confessions have different relations to the world. East and West speak different languages and live from different mentalities, which we must learn to understand. In this context, a lack of Catholic leadership was felt. What does it mean to be a Catholic, when Europe resorts to nationalism and tribalism once again?

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

Activities

On Saturday 4 February we held our annual Communicantes contact day. This year's theme was 'Albania. Transforming a Country'. Speakers were Luigj Mila, Director van Justitia et Pax Albania, the Dutch Ambassador in Tirana Mrs. Dewi van de Weerd, her Albanian colleague in the Hague Mrs. Adia Sakiqi and Rev. Esther Struikmans. We discussed the importance of faith-based efforts to help building a just and tolerant post-communist society.

Many of our activities in 2017 were a follow-up to initiatives that were initiated already the year before. We tightened our ties with *Pax Christi Internationalis*, the Institute of Eastern Christianity Studies

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Projects 2017

Europe

- Scholarships for theologians and laymen from Central and Eastern Europe to participate in various exchange networks such as:
 - * the *Argau Summer University* of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU
 - * the European Alliance of Catholic Women's Organisations *Andante*
 - * the European Society of Women in Theological Research
 - * the European Society for Catholic Theology
- a Theology after the Gulag (THAG) expert meeting in Amsterdam.

Belarus

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

Lithuania

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

Poland

- School of Peace, Wroclaw.

Romania

- Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious: training.

Ukraine

- University Chaplaincy of the Greek Catholic Church in Drohobych, Dubliany and Kiev
- 10th Ecumenical Social Week of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv.

The total amount of grants-in-aid was slightly less than € 40,000.

in Nijmegen and the chair *Orthodoxy and Peace Building in Europe* at the VU University Amsterdam.

Reconciliation in Ukraine

Following our April 2015 workshop *The Churches and the war in Ukraine*, Communicantes and the Institute of Eastern Christianity organised the workshop *Reconciliation – What's in a Word? Peace and Reconciliation Processes. Experiences and Perspectives*. Participants, both theologians and peace practitioners, from Ukraine, South Africa and the Netherlands convened in Beek-Ubbergen, March, 29-April, 1.

Aiming at increasing faith-based reconciliation potential, we wanted to bring together personal experiences, faith, insights, inspiration, theory and good practices. A follow-up event will take place in Kiev in July 2018.

A truly democratic culture

With *Pax Christi Internationalis* we have been examining, if and how we can reinvigorate a network of peace activism in Eastern Europe. We are aiming now at a meeting of contemporary witnesses and practitioners, which should take place in Warsaw in 2019. There, we will discuss what kind of democratic-political culture is needed to make peace grow today.

The chosen theme should be able to function as a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe. In anticipation, however, it will be of the greatest importance to grant *ownership* to the participants from Central and Eastern Europe.

Future prospects

2018 will be a decisive year for Communicantes. We will need to put the findings of our partner consultation into practice. Also, we will need to put together the necessary human and financial resources, without which any effort at dialogue



At the end of a long queue at the COMECE '(Re)thinking Europe' conference in Rome, Frans Hoppenbrouwers got a firm handshake from an unabated Pope Francis

and exchange will remain tentative and theoretical.

Promoting conversations and dialogues across the continent, we hope to better understand other Europeans and ourselves. Also, we hope to gain a better insight into our Christian mission in the plural societies of today, on an inspirational, theoretical and practical level.

Conferences and meetings

Frans Hoppenbrouwers of Communicantes participated or contributed to several workshops and conferences in the Netherlands and abroad, for example:

- *Reconciliation – What's in a Word? Peace and Reconciliation Processes. Experiences and Perspectives*, international workshop in Beek-Ubbergen, March, 29-April, 1.
- The 21th International Renovabis Conference *The Crisis as a Chance for Europe!. The Responsibility of the Churches* in Munich, September, 6-8.
- *(Re)thinking Europe – A Christian contribution to the future of the European*

project, a conference of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the EU, Rome, October, 26-29.

- Lecture 'Father Jan Bakker. Pusher and Mover of the Association of Seminary and Monastic Librarians', on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Vereniging voor het Theologisch Bibliothecariaat, Nijmegen, October, 31.
- International workshop *Confronting Denial* of the study group Theology after the Gulag in Amsterdam, December, 18.

Publications

- 'Drs. J.D. Bakker s.s.s., 1914-1982. Duwer en stuwer van de Vereniging van Seminarie- en Kloosterbibliothecarissen'.
- 'Populismus in den Niederlanden', in *Ost-West Europäische Perspektiven*, 18,3 (2017) p. 192-198.

These and many other publications are [available on our website](#).

Goal of Communicantes

Since 1974 Κοινωνοῦντες/Communicantes has been active as a facilitator between Churches and individual believers in Central, Eastern and Western Europe. Its aim always was and still is to promote two-way dialogues between partners in East and West that are mutually beneficial: intellectually, inspirationally and practically. Our network was and still is ecumenical, even multireligious. Our main activities are: funding projects, engaging in dialogue and exchange of persons, and public information. Communicantes is a Roman Catholic foundation.

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F. Hoppenbrouwers

Contact

A Stichting Communicantes
Gasthuisring 54
5041 DT Tilburg

T 013-5423782

E communicantes@xs4all.nl

W www.communicantes.nl

R 22.57.912

IBAN NL58INGB0002257912

BIC INGBNL2A

KVK 450.55.777

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