

Globethics Repository



The new CEC : the churches' engagement with a changing Europe

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository.
More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy
of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Book
DOI	10.58863/20.500.12424/166538
Publisher	Globethics.net;Conference of European Churches (CEC)
Rights	Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 Generic deed (CC BY-NC-ND 2.5);2015 Globethics.net with CEC
Download date	2026-09-19 17:44:47
Item License	https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166538

The New CEC

The Churches' Engagement
with a Changing Europe

Editor: Guy Liagre



The New CEC

*The Churches' Engagement
with a Changing Europe*

The New CEC

The Churches' Engagement with a Changing Europe

Guy Liagre (Editor)

Edition CEC at Globethics.net

Director: Prof. Dr. Christoph Stückelberger. Founder and Executive Director of Globethics.net

Series Editor: Rev. Dr Guy Liagre, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches CEC

Globethics.net CEC Flash 1

Guy Liagre (ed.),

The New CEC: The Churches' Engagement with a Changing Europe

Geneva: Globethics.net, 2015

DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/166538

ISBN 978-2-88931-072-2 (online version)

ISBN 978-2-88931-071-5 (print version)

© 2015 Globethics.net with CEC

Managing Editor: Ignace Haaz

Globethics.net

Head Office

150 route de Ferney

1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

Website:

www.globethics.net/publications

Email: publications@globethics.net

Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Ecumenical Centre

Rue Joseph II, 174

1000 Brussels, Belgium

Website: www.ceceurope.org

Email: eeg@cec-kek.be

All web links in this text have been verified as of September 2015.

This book can be downloaded for free from the Globethics.net Library, the leading global online library on ethics: www.globethics.net.

© *The Copyright is the Creative Commons Copyright 2.5.* This means: Globethics.net grants the right to download and print the electronic version, to distribute and to transmit the work for free, under three conditions: 1) Attribution: The user must attribute the bibliographical data as mentioned above and must make clear the license terms of this work; 2) Non-commercial. The user may not use this work for commercial purposes or sell it; 3) No change of text. The user may not alter, transform, or build upon this work. Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights. Globethics.net can give permission to waive these conditions, especially for reprint and sale in other continents and languages.

Table of Contents

1 Foreword.....	7
------------------------	----------

Rt Rev. Christopher Hill, President of CEC

2 Introduction.....	11
----------------------------	-----------

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre, General Secretary of CEC

3 The Role of Churches Engaging with a Changing Europe.....	13
--	-----------

Mr Herman Van Rompuy, former President of the European Council

4 Identity and Changes: The Theological Responses by the Churches in a Changing Europe and the CEC.....	21
--	-----------

H.E. Metropolitan Joseph, Romanian Orthodox Church

5 Churches at the Crossroads: Christian Faith in Europe as a Residue or as a Potential	25
---	-----------

*The Most Rev. Dr Joris Vercammen, Old Catholic Church
of the Netherlands*

6 The Churches Engaging with a Changing Europe: The Political Challenges	33
---	-----------

The Most Rev. Anders Wejryd, Church of Sweden

FOREWORD

Rt Rev. Christopher Hill
DD, KCVO

President of the Conference of European Churches



It is my privilege to welcome you to this short volume celebrating the launch of the new Conference of European Churches. A spirited and collegial gathering took place on 4 December 2014 in Brussels to honour CEC's distinguished history and to look forward—together—to the renewal of our shared ecumenical life in Europe.

Through the words and images that follow we share with you this important moment in the history of CEC.

The theme before us is the churches' engagement with a changing Europe. The year 2014 saw change in the presidencies of the European Commission and the European Council. It also saw the finalizing of the renewal and transition of the Conference of European Churches from Geneva to Brussels under a new structure. In the midst of these transitions for both Europe and CEC, we also look back and commemorate. The anniversaries of the 1914 outbreak of World War I, the November 1938 initiation of anti-Jewish measures in Nazi Germany, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 all give us much to reflect upon in terms of European division and reconciliation.

It is important that the churches recognise that we ourselves played a part in—or allowed ourselves to be used in—the cause of rival nationalisms and European disunity. Events in history recent and not-so-recent remind us of our complicated place in Europe and its history. The churches down the centuries have sadly played their part in divisions in Europe, especially when politicians and uncritical patriotism have annexed particular churches to extreme nationalism.

Many commentators have noted that Europe slid, almost unconsciously, into World War I. Far off events in Serbia seemed a local atrocity, but behind the build up to the invasion of Belgium and France lay long-term pressures and forces: a naval arms race between Britain and Germany; mutual suspicion between France, Germany, and Russia. And there was the web of secret treaties that eventually drew all the major powers into the theatre of war.

One hundred years after the start of World War I, we now see, after a number of years of economic depression and pressure on the Euro, the eruption of real danger to world peace in the near civil war in the Ukraine. There *are* parallels between World War I and the Ukraine, though I hope we are more aware of the global consequences of unilateral action.

For CEC the recent and ongoing situation in Ukraine is not marginal. Ancient divisions of Europe into east and west long predate the Russian Revolution. In fact, they go back to the schism between eastern and western Christianity made definitive in 1054. Kiev was part of that story, too. Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the 10th century sent ambassadors to sample western (Latin) Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Eastern Orthodoxy. After their visit to Constantinople they chose Orthodoxy. Kiev was the place of the first baptisms in Russ. Understandably, Moscow and the Moscow Patriarchate passionately feel that the Ukraine is part of Russia.

Equally understandably, western Ukraine, which came under the influence of Poland and Lithuania, looked more to the west, especially after the Union of Brest-Litovsk (Lvov) when large parts of the

9 Foreword

Ukrainian Church came into communion with Rome, while continuing their Orthodox liturgy, spirituality and structures. It is also largely forgotten that after the Russian Revolution, Kiev and the Crimea were the centres of White Russian and Cossack and Tartar resistance to the Red Army until the early 1920s. And before the Armistice of 1918 the German Army gave logistical support to the White Russians in Kiev.

In between World War I and today's unrest in Ukraine lie the building up and eventual collapse of the Berlin Wall and Soviet Union. These roots are deep, too. The conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, a 1919 peace treaty between Germany and the allied powers, were so punitive as to create the conditions for a second world war. A generation later, the world remembered the lessons of Versailles. But the end of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union was so sudden that it left an *uncritical, single* super power. Should the west have taken more care of the new Russia a quarter of a century ago?

But the churches have *also* been part of the story of European reconciliation.

The founders of the European Institutions had a consciously Christian philosophy. It is important that this 'Christian soul' of Europe is not forgotten amid the necessary bureaucracy and economic mechanisms of the EU and wider Europe today. CEC has played its part in this story of reconciliation—during the Cold War in bringing eastern and western church leaders together; at the time of the terrorism and suppression in Northern Ireland; the war in Bosnia. Throughout our history, reconciliation has been at the centre of the CEC agenda.

We look now to this history to shape and inform our future commitments. The year 2014 was a significant one for the Conference of European Churches. It finalised its renewal and transition from Geneva to Brussels, looked forward to rich collaboration with member denominations and organisations in partnership, and worked

toward programs and projects that recommit CEC to a mission of reconciliation, justice, and Christian unity.

The threats to Europe's peace are different in 2014, but the need for the churches to understand the complications of their own history and of the nations remains the same as ever. We stand as the CEC, now renewed and reformed, to continue our role under the mandate given by the Lord of the Church: Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they will be called the Children of God. (Matt: 5.9)

INTRODUCTION

Rev. Dr Guy Liagre

General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches



The great European adventure is not a recent phenomenon. It reaches deep into European history, spanning centuries and bringing together the stories of many people, cultures, and societies. Our contemporary efforts to build Europe have grown from these deep roots. As a consequence, European history is not the history of a single idea or single tradition; on the contrary it is a history that allowed several ideas to emerge.

What then is the distinguishing feature of European history, and, consequently, its destiny? Philosopher Karl Popper would answer critical reason, pluralism, and tolerance. To this we have to add Christian roots. From an historical and cultural point of view—as was underlined by the founders of the European Union—Christian Europe has nothing to do with a confessional Europe. The European ideals were not confessional in their identity, rather they were Christian-oriented. This is why in the aftermath of World War II the founding

fathers of the European Union had the courage to envision Europe in a new way.

For more than 50 years the Conference of European Churches has been a platform for dialogue and encounter for the churches of Europe. We are now at a moment of transition where we imagine anew what this platform will look like and what it will mean for the churches of Europe. All changes, even the most longed for, are not easy; for what we leave behind is part of ourselves, part of what we already know, part of our traditions.

This short volume holds just a few of the voices and ideas that will contribute to the renewal and reimagining of the Conference of European Churches. The contributions are political and theological, reflective and prescriptive, critical and hopeful. In each, you will find seeds for your own reflections on the future of CEC and our mission in Europe.

This moment is nostalgic, but also celebratory. The future is necessarily uncertain for CEC, for the fellowship of churches that define it, and for the Europe that unites us. In this uncertainty we see profound opportunity to renew our commitment to Europe as a whole, but most importantly to help the European churches to renew their spiritual life, to strengthen their common witness and service, and to promote the unity of the Church and peace in the world.

THE ROLE OF CHURCHES ENGAGING WITH A CHANGING EUROPE

Mr Herman Van Rompuy¹

Former President of the European Council



The title of my speech contains two concepts: ‘a changing Europe’ and ‘the Role of Churches’. The link is the word ‘engaging’.

What does ‘change’ mean and what kind of changes? Changes related to which period? Never in human history have so many changes happened in such a short space of time. Our views on life and death, on all aspects of family life (e.g., marriage, number of children), on education methods, on the ‘making of life’ (i.e., biological revolution), on authority, have changed completely. Labour, health, mobility, connectivity, the climate and the environment have undergone dramatic technological revolutions. We live in European societies totally different

¹ Herman Van Rompuy is a Belgian politician. He has served as Prime Minister of Belgium and was selected as the first full-time President of the European Council. He completed two terms as President, ending 30 November 2014.

from the previous ones. The balance of power in the world is also changing rapidly.

The economic weight of countries is now more important than military power. The EU has also shaped change by creating lasting peace and stability: three generations have already lived in peace.

Governments introduced 'the welfare state' with 25 per cent of GDP dedicated to social expenditure. The public sector as a whole is as big as 50 per cent of GDP (on average), making the state a central actor in all aspects of life.

These changes—along with many others—have a tremendous impact on the very nature of the men and women in Europe. One can even speak of a 'homo novus' (or nova). Not necessarily, though, of a more happy mankind—according to happiness barometers. People are often uncertain about who they are, where they come from, where they are going. Uncertain about their present (jobs) and their future (pensions). Uncertain people, concerned about their own survival in our highly competitive world and their well-being, tend to see others more as an enemy than as an ally.

Migration is often felt as a threat, socially and in relation to their identity. Populism and extremism enhance those negative sentiments and exploit them.

Yes, times have changed. Many of these evolutions are irreversible. But we can sometimes frame them, correct them and use them. We have to 'engage'. *Il faut 'épouser son temps'*. We can only change some changes when we are involved in our societies. Churches have to find their own way. As factors of power, even as cultural vectors, they have become less relevant.

All this happened in a time frame of two generations. Culture has evolved even faster than technology!

Objectively, we have never had it so good, even if poverty is on the rise. Even the poor of today have a better life than their predecessors decades ago.

People pretend that they live in the present (*hic et nunc*; 'enjoy' is a key word), but actually they cannot live without perspectives. We all need hope, hope of a better life in many aspects. This uncertainty, this 'Angst' is translated into a much more volatile electoral behaviour, in a fragmented political landscape. Politicians try to answer by raising expectations of 'change' (a very vague concept). Mostly, their electorate become disappointed after a while and look for 'other and better' options, creating a vicious circle of disappointed expectations. National politicians have lost many tools for implementing change in this globalized world and have already transferred national sovereignty to the Eurozone and the EU. But political leaders give the impression that they are still fully in charge and if they fail, it's the fault of 'Brussels'. The tools they still have (in the socio-economic field, e.g. labour market reforms) are used reluctantly because real reforms are unpopular. The reforms that did not take place before 2008 in most countries are at the root of the problems in the Eurozone. We are now the victims of earlier 'malgoverno'. Governments are not powerless but refuse too often to use their power. A paradoxical evolution, as paradoxical as a tendency to look inward at a time of globalisation, including globalisation of mass media and of culture (e.g. global 'stars').

During the five years of my mandate I had to steer (with many others) the Eurozone and to take away the existential threat to the Euro. We succeeded and avoided the worst. It took time for leaders to acknowledge the reality of a common currency. It necessitates more discipline and rigor on the one hand and more solidarity on the other. Putting your house in order is very demanding and unpopular. Helping others the same.

Responsibility and solidarity are under pressure, even if both types of countries - creditors and debtors - have no other choice, interdependent as they are. We delivered and succeeded but it was a painful process.

I will not elaborate on the many causes of the banking and Eurozone crisis: let me only repeat that many mistakes were made before 2008, which had to be corrected afterwards. This adjustment was painful in a few countries, if not in all. The already high unemployment levels

increased and poverty and inequality expanded significantly. The ‘price’ could have been lower if profound reforms were taken together with socially correcting measures, especially on the national level. Here the question arises: how solidary does a society want to be? How much taxpayers’ money are we ready to spend on solidarity? Are the ‘ins’ (having a job, mostly with fixed contracts) solidary with the ‘outs’ (unemployed or with flexible job contracts)?

Fiscal consolidation makes choices—tough choices—inevitable: short-term vs. long-term, consumption vs. investment, economy vs. ecology, creativity vs. solidarity). Those choices have to be made by mostly weak governments and in a volatile electoral climate. But many of them are courageous. Sacrifices and efforts are better accepted when they are perceived as balanced and just. But I personally think that even in those conditions, resistance to ‘change’ will be high.

Churches have to be on the moral side, caring for the weak and poor, the people without a home, a shelter or a country. Emphasising solidarity. But they also have to take into account the broader picture, as politicians have to do. If we are ‘engaged’ in Europe, we have to be fully engaged, not only partially. Making a balance between ‘ethical idealism and political realism’ (Cardinal Ratzinger).

A caring Church will sometimes be on the popular side if they are opposed to inequality but sometimes they will feel rather isolated defending the right of migrants. A responsible Church also needs—as I said—a view on the economy, going further than condemning on ethical grounds the excesses of capitalism (which we saw in the banking crisis) or the power of commerce and money in our world.

This overall approach is part of our ‘in-der-Welt-sein’, in living in the world as it is and trying to make it better; ‘piecemeal social engineering’, as Karl Popper said. Churches don’t want to be part of party-political debates and I understand their reluctance after a history of being too close to political power. But you have to reflect on how far you want to go in involvement in modern societies, of course being fully aware of the fact

that your positions are not so decisive anymore, or at least less decisive than they used to be.

Values have to be embodied. They may not be disconnected from reality. At the same time, there is a strong need for authenticity: your words have to be followed by your deeds. The times of lecturing are over because even believers saw too much hypocrisy. The paedophilia crisis was a dramatic example.

People are so overwhelmed today by all kinds of information going in all kinds of directions and so often confronted with lies, that there is a longing for authenticity. Jesus Christ was the greatest example. He was killed. The hero of Christianity is a man who died innocently on a cross. Our 'hero' is unique in the history of religions. He put the bar too high for most of us, if not all. Fortunately he also preached compassion. But his sincerity and courage inspired more than 80 generations. The people of today are uncertain, and yet they don't find 'consolation' in religion. They are seeking authenticity but Jesus is not their hero or their God.

Churches are in crisis because faith is in crisis. But this may not discourage us or prevent us 'doing good' and engaging. We have to be engaged in the present (micro and macro; local and global), in the longer term and in 'the light of eternity' (*sub specie aeternitatis*). We are working without a foreseeable reward. "God's will must truly be our own". This spiritual dimension and inspiration makes all our endeavours even more worthwhile.

Let me finally say a few words on the European Union.

It has also to draw lessons from what happened in the last years.

I will reiterate what I said in May when I received the Charlemagne prize. Isn't it striking that the European Union seems somehow more popular today outside its borders than within?

More and more, we see how the very opportunities and liberties that we Europeans hold, and that others are striving for, are being called into question.

This indeed is the crucial challenge: the way people perceive and relate to the Union.

How is it possible that people now see Europe as a reason they feel powerless and without a say—whereas it was precisely conceived to make them stronger and regain a grip on their own history?

In response to this feeling, some call for ‘more’ Europe and some for ‘less’—some even want a bit of both, depending on the issue. Hence perhaps the mix of reluctance and expectation, a mix that was also at work in last week’s European elections.

These are vast questions of course. But I would like in particular to make one underestimated point.

It is about the way our Union is above all experienced by people as a space and hardly ever as a place. Let me explain. Space and place are really not the same thing.

A place—*ein Ort*—brings protection, stability and belonging. It is *ein Heim*, where people feel at home. A space on the other hand—*ein Raum*—opens up movement and possibilities. It is about direction, speed and time.

As human beings, we need both. A space in which to fly, and a nest we can call ours. We are very simple creatures!

With Europe, the focus has always been on space. Think about it.

From the very start, the typical action was to remove borders, for goods, workers, investment, to let people and companies move, take initiatives, seize opportunities. Even today—in fields as diverse as energy, telecoms or the digital economy—it is still about bringing down borders, creating this big common space.

But we’ve never really thought of Europe as a home, a shelter, and today we are paying a price for that. For decades it worked well. The open borders brought huge opportunities, for working, trading and studying abroad. And the impact of all the opening was mostly cushioned—by economic growth, and by the welfare states, set up in parallel.

For instance in my own region, Flanders, in the thirteen years between my entering high school and my leaving university, prosperity doubled.

19 The Role of Churches Engaging with a Changing Europe

Poland, to take another example, which was as rich per capita as Ukraine when the Iron Curtain fell, is now at least three times richer.

Crucially, the division of labour through all these years was that Europe opened, and national governments protected. Nobody expected otherwise.

But things have changed. Globalisation has put the welfare states under strain. The crisis forced European Union institutions into a new role.

The result is a dramatic and rapid shift: whereas for decades Europe had been all about opening, liberating, unlocking, emancipating, empowering... today it is suddenly seen as meddling, judging, prescribing, dictating, correcting, even punishing... Europe, the great 'opener' of opportunities is now perceived by many as an unwelcome 'intruder', the friend of freedom and space is seen as a threat to protection and place. We need to get the balance right. It is essential for the Union to be on the protecting side as well.

It is urgent for the Union not to be seen as only benefiting businesses, but also employees; not only the 'movers', but also the 'stayers'; not only those with diplomas and language skills, but all citizens; and people not only as consumers, who like cheap products and a wide choice, but also as workers, who can see in others, competitors for their jobs.

How can we get this balance right? When it comes to protection, people expect two things from the European Union.

First, for problems that individual countries are clearly not big enough to fight on their own, that the Union steps in. Second, where national authorities are best-placed to provide care, that the Union does *not* get in the way.

Where people *really* want Europe to defend their interests and keep threats at bay, is on global and cross-border issues.

Like reckless financial speculation, which is why we are building a banking union and closing the net on international tax evasion. Or threats like internet abuse, social dumping, gas oligarchs—all issues where Europe stands its ground, and is stepping up its efforts.

Protecting does not mean retreating behind our borders. It does not mean commercial protectionism either. Part of it is precisely working with other countries abroad, to solve problems—like instability, lawlessness, or illegal immigration. This is Europe at work as a protector—on issues where its size makes a real difference. Scale matters. But there are other cases, where precisely *because* of its scale, the Union must tread softly.

And to me, overall, the citizen's message to the Union *IS* clear: be stronger outside, be more caring inside.

But feeling at home in the Union will also require a sense of that little extra, that *supplément d'âme* which characterises Europe. Beyond striving for peace, prosperity or power, it is also about culture, identity, destiny...

When I was sixteen years old, I remember reading a definition of culture quoted in an essay by Paul-Henri Spaak—he said—“*is what remains, once you have forgotten all the rest.*” Once you reach the core. That hard core of European civilisation—you will find it anywhere on our continent.

But Europe is also a certain idea of “*der Mensch*”, or the person. As Arthur Koestler wrote: a person is infinitely more than one million divided by one million. Each person counts. This is the core value of our great civilisation, worthy of protection; this is Europe's message to the world.

Thank you! Thank you very much.

IDENTITY AND CHANGES THE THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES BY THE CHURCHES IN A CHANGING EUROPE AND THE CEC

H.E. Metropolitan Joseph

Romanian Orthodox Church²



From time immemorial, the Christian Church has been confronted with the challenges of the world. The situation in which the churches find themselves today in Europe, therefore, should not find them lacking. Christians have the secular experience of the evangelical response to ethical and theological questions that they encounter in a world that is not Christian.

² His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph was ordained a priest in 1993 and became Metropolitan of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis of Western and Southern Europe in 2001. He has been a member of the CEC Governing Board and the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church since 2012.

The most important thing is to not be afraid, to not develop an inferiority complex in relation to contemporary problems; to be conscious that, with Christ and the Holy Spirit abiding in us, we have the ability to bear all challenges, in particular those of a theological nature.

The theological challenges that Christians currently encounter are essentially focused on the two fundamental points of all faith and of all Christian reflection:

First, Christians and the churches have to relearn how to speak about Christ from their own experience of faith. To answer the question of the identity of Christ (who is Jesus?)—a question that arises again and again in each era—it is not sufficient to have a good biblical and theological background and even, for the Orthodox in particular, a solid patristic culture. It is not enough to repeat dogmatic formulas that everyone is supposed to already know in a contemporary Europe. Certainly, it is necessary to reaffirm the assertions of the seven Ecumenical Councils, something the Orthodox generally do. But it is not enough.

Our contemporaries, particularly those we encounter in the European space, no longer react to being exposed to doctrines and systems of ideas. The true way of responding to the theological challenges concerning the identity of Jesus Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the relationship with the Father, is to respond based on our own experience. We can only proclaim the Christ that we know personally, something that the early Christians did for that matter. We have to pray to the Lord that He might give us the audacity to speak of Him as we know Him: a Living One, the Living One, who changes our lives, who answers our prayers, who is present in His Church and in the world through His Holy Spirit; the Resurrected One, who exorcised death and gave the world eternal life. Let us dare to affirm the Incarnation, not as a religious theory or doctrine, but as a fact. Indeed, our contemporaries are sensible to facts, to that which is lived, to experience, and moreover to an experience accessible to them.

The second theological challenge is that of anthropology, the “theology of man” as some of our theologians say. Here too, we must

show audacity, courage, and a valid self-assurance. Let us dare affirm and explain, grounded in theological contemporary works (in particular the diffusion of the writings of Saint Maximus the Confessor), let us affirm that man is not merely an evolved animal; let us affirm that he cannot be reduced to a single psychosomatic dimension; let us confess the presence of God in the man created in His image and meant to resemble Him. Man as a “living thing in the process of being deified”, according to the expression of Saint Gregory de Naziansus, taken up by contemporary Orthodox theologians (such as Pannayotis Nellas), is an altogether different thing than a super primate! Nevertheless, the affirmation is not enough; we have to competently explain how and why the human sciences, despite their exceptional contribution to man’s knowledge, do not exhaust the reality of the latter, simply because they are silent on the presence of the energies of the Holy Spirit (the initial “breath”) in the human being; and, with Saint Irenaeus, it will be interesting to show that the whole human being—body and soul—can participate in the life of the Holy Spirit. From there, let us show that there is an entire theology of the culture of science that stems from the pneumatology of man.

A vision of man that is purely Christological is not sufficient, since Christ is always present, particularly in man, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. An essential way to answer the anthropological challenges of our time consists in developing a real theology of the created human person. All questions tied to ethics can be grasped, even those that are the most provocative and paradoxical, starting from the revelation of man that we find in the Word of God and in the tradition of the apostles and the fathers. We would need to have the time to say that this anthropological challenge has its echo in the cosmic themes about which Christians are called to make their voice heard.

A third theological challenge could and should be the way we relate to the world we live in. The eschatological dimension of Christians and of the Church in general is fundamental for any Christian theology. Each individual Christian and the Church as a whole must assume in the most coherent manner possible the disposition of the pilgrim, which means that

we live in this world, but we live for another world/but in the perspective of another one.

In this context of constant change, in the midst of which Christians are called to show their adaptability and their prophetic, inexhaustible resources, the CEC has an important position. Indeed, the CEC is one of the inter-Christian authorities thanks to which Christians learn to cultivate common positions. And the latter cannot find such positions, in the theological domain as in the ethical, except by going deeper into the biblical and ecclesial tradition—and above all, by a true experience of Christ through the Holy Spirit. The strength of CEC cannot be found anywhere but in the mystical spirituality. All Christians have to be able to proclaim Jesus Christ as they have met Him; they necessarily proclaim the same Jesus Christ, as Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We have to encourage ourselves, the members of the CEC, to be first and foremost men and women of prayer; we have to believe that it is the experience of prayer that springs forth the charisma to respond to the contemporary questions we face. The Holy Spirit will inspire in us how to speak, how to witness, how to formulate the theological word for our time!

CHURCHES AT THE CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN FAITH IN EUROPE AS A RESIDUE OR AS A POTENTIAL

The Most Rev. Dr Joris Vercammen³

Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands



I am honored to be invited to reflect on the role of the Conference of European Churches, as it starts in a new shape, I would like to share with you some ideas about the Christian faith in Europe and its future. It is my conviction that churches have to play a crucial role in our continent and that their contribution will be applauded by a wide variety of people, believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians. But the condition is that churches will show their solidarity with the European longing for unity. Europe challenges the churches. The potential of the Christian Faith depends on the responses of the churches to that longing.

³ The Most Rev. Dr Joris Vercammen is Primate and Archbishop of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands. He was consecrated Archbishop of Utrecht on 1 July 2000 and has served on the World Council of Churches Central Committee since 2006.

5.1 Christian Faith in Europe

Europe is like a big house, with many doors and rooms, in which everybody is talking at the same time in fifty languages. Europe is a complex phenomenon. Sociological surveys show us the “patch-work pattern” of a religious and moral pluralism, which seems to be a main characteristic of European culture. Despite this diversity, all European societies seem to be going through a common process concerning their religious and moral consciousness. It is the process of secularization.

In making ‘the immanent frame’ the leading principle for shaping culture, the secularization process has caused faith to become problematic for a lot of people. This has brought a sense of disorientation and uncertainty to a large part of the European population.⁴

As Pope Francis told the old-catholic Bishops Conference, Europe is “confused about its own identity and vocation” and captive of “a profound spiritual crisis affecting individuals and societies.” “There is a thirst for God. There is a profound desire to recover a sense of purpose in life. There is an urgent need for a convincing witness to the truth and values of the Gospel.”⁵

There is indeed a clear demand for identity, a quest for symbols by which people can recognise themselves, and a need for traditions which are shared and which will lead to sharing. Within this context, religion still appears to many people to be an important reservoir of values which can help them to respond to this demand. Firstly, for a small elite, this has constituted an intense experience of being born again, experienced within the evangelical movement. But secondly, for the majority of Europeans, Christianity *no longer has any* influence on private life; it survives (only) as a strong point of attachment when religious symbols are needed for the

⁴ See: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2007, p. 539 ff.

⁵ Pope Francis in his speech to the International Old-Catholic Bishops Conference, October 30, 2014.

expression of their cultural identity. This Christian faith: is it residual or potential? And—eventually—what are the conditions in order to make it potential?

5.2 Europe Needs Ideals

No society can be built without values on which it can be based. No society can be sustained without an utopia. This utopia is always about unity and about what the content of this unity is, in other words: what this unity means to the members of the society itself and to the world outside this particular society. Values are the concrete cornerstones of the community that has to be built, in order to make common life possible. The same is true on a higher level, for the community of communities Europe is called to be. The diversity in Europe is great and therefore the need to reconciliation and unity is huge. Therefore I am convinced that either ‘Europe’ remains a peace-project and a way to reconciliation, or it does not make any sense.

Faith is not identical to values and ethical direction, but faith is the source of values. It is because ‘faith’ has to do with the truth about the meaning of human beings and their lives. Much has been given to our cultures by the Christian faith, especially because of its stimulating effect on ethical and social thought. Perhaps those values are not recognized anymore as issued from the Christian faith and lifestyle, but they are strong convictions that are alive in our European context. And that is exactly the goal of Christian faith: that it would transform society.

Therefore: although religious communities are minorities within a secular Europe, it cannot mean that the religious life should be enclosed in the private domain of the individual convictions. The solidarity of religious communities with their societies will be shown by their critical questioning of all attempts to reduce people to manageable beings that can be manipulated as needed. There is something to discover within every person that is important for the whole of the community. And for the person itself the experience that their own life is based on a ‘giving’ is

fundamental and opens up the possibility of taking responsibility and meaningful action “that announces the presence of the fundamental giving on which the world rests,” as Rowan Williams puts it.⁶ This the fundamental contribution Christians have to make to the society. This ideal opens up ‘the utopia’ of a peaceful and unified Europe.

5.2 Churches in Europe

In this respect it is obvious that neither the Churches nor the CEC could be confined to a role of lobbying for particular interests. When that would be the case, churches would lose their calling to be sources of life-giving values to the European society. Churches are at the service of the society in order to contribute to its human quality, social cohesion and social welfare. Although there is a lot of suspicion on the side of the European institutions concerning the role churches and religious communities could play within the European context, there is also the expectation that those communities would offer the essentials fundamental perspectives that are needed. Naturally all churches experience a degree of marginalization in a “changing Europe, which no longer finds meaning in a predominantly Christian frame of reference,” as Mary Tanner says.⁷ But, she continues: “Many people lack a clear sense of direction, are confused by competing ideals and values, and feel powerless and alienated (...) these issues have to be addressed in a deeper engagement and solidarity with people.”

But: the perspectives that people are looking for are not given by emphasizing confessional identities, which in most cases have little to do with the inspiration the secular society is looking for. My conviction is that we all have to undergo a process of conversion in order to be able to put into perspective our confessional identities. Perhaps the term ‘identity’ itself is a problematic one, in any case a critical attitude towards it seems to be needed.

⁶ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*. London, 2012, p. 6.

⁷ Mary Tanner, The *raison d’être* of the Church. In: James Barnett (ed.) *A Theology for Europe. The Churches and the European Institutions. (Religions and Discourse. Volume 28)*, Bern, 2005, p. 245.

In fact 'identity' is a very modern concept. It has not only to do with what is especially true for an individual, a grouping or a society, but it is often expressed in terms of what makes me or us differ from others. This means that this concept as it is used, highlights the differences among people to the most particular detail. The consequence is that diversity is accentuated in a way that provokes a high degree of competition because of the exclusiveness that is claimed by each particular instance. This kind of attitude makes 'diversity' the enemy of unity.

Since we have already concluded that every particular human being lives from the 'giving' that is the source of their life, it is logical to say—by consequence—that every person is a gift to others. In this perspective 'diversity' becomes a gift as well, and is not in competition with 'unity'.

These insights are fundamental for churches to accept one another as partners and co-searchers on the way to unity. As Mary Tanner observed at the celebration of the Meissen-Agreement, only a short time after the downfall of the Berlin Wall: "There was the sense that here was now an opportunity to build a new Europe and the churches had a definitive part to play. In the midst of dramatic changes Christians together had a new opportunity to show a model of belonging to one another in which Europe might recognize possibilities for its own unity."⁸ Europe challenges national identities because those stress particularities not as a gift to others but as a defense against the otherness and an argument against sharing and building wider community. This touches the heart of the social and cultural values on which the European project is based. This means for the churches, and in particular for the established churches, that they 'can be trapped in an institutional shape that no longer relates to the realities of political life'⁹ In any case, one can hardly say that it would accord to the European project. But this is not only true for the large established churches. The small and free ones may be trapped into their fears to lose particular shape if they would open themselves for

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 246.

contributing in one or another way to what at some moment must appear: ‘the Church of Europe’.

5.3 Christian Faith: Potential?

To be credible in this context, the traditional churches have to fulfil three conditions.¹⁰ The first consists of achieving a sufficient level of unity among themselves. The second is maintain the dialogue with a culture of lay and secular inspiration, with its values of equality and democracy and the role played by the sciences and technical development. However, within this so-called “secular culture” all kinds of religious phenomena are more alive than ever. Therefore the third condition for being taken seriously as a contributor to the humanisation of European society is to show the ability and readiness to participate in the multi-religious dialogue that must guarantee peace and solidarity to all Europeans, including the “new” ones.

Less concerned about themselves and more about their common mission and witness within the European societies, that is the way for offering Christian faith more potential. Speaking about the role of the CEC, I would like to mention the following points:

- (a) The CEC shall be aware of the responsibility of Christians in developing the ‘utopia’ that Europe needs in order to guarantee the human quality of its society. Working together with other religions and religious communities is required. In this secularized society all believers are allies. The CEC has to challenge all churches to take an active role in this.
- (b) The CEC is the convener of the churches in order to respond to social needs and ethical questions that emerge within the European society. CEC shall organize the churches’ contribution in this respect

¹⁰ Cf. R. Frieling, The ecumenical movement in Europe: Challenges and Conflicts. *Concilium* (2004/2) p. 57-66.

by establishing networks of reflection and action. To give one example: how will churches think about the poverty gap between the south and the north? It cannot be that new barriers would appear between European regions because of unwillingness to share resources. The work of the former Church and Society Commission can be of orientation for the future as well.

(c) In the collaboration for a more humane European society will emerge the question of the unity among Christians. We are not credible if we don't take real and concrete steps in order to show more unity. Reflection and discussion about dogmatic issues must take place within this challenging context of a continent that is looking for unity. Our unity is our mission for this continent! It is the role of CEC to confront churches with critical questions about their unity. The goal of the 'visible unity' must be kept alive as the only meaningful perspective in the long term. CEC shall contribute to the shaping of 'the church of Europe'.

(d) In those places in Europe where (ethnic) conflicts emerge, the role of CEC is to invite the Christians of those countries or regions to take part in peace-building processes. We are not credible if Christians don't commit themselves to peaceful solutions for those conflicts.

In conclusion the potential of Christian faith will depend on the degree to which we are able to realize these challenges, that are not new but worth to be mentioned over and over. I would like to conclude with the Charta Oecumenica: "With the Gospel, we want to stand up for the dignity of the human person created in God's image and, as churches together, contribute towards reconciling peoples and cultures."¹¹ I couldn't have said it better!

¹¹The Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops Conferences, *Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*. Geneva/St. Gallen, 2001, introduction.

THE CHURCHES ENGAGING WITH A CHANGING EUROPE THE POLITICAL CHALLENGES

The Most Rev. Anders Wejryd¹²

Church of Sweden



Reasonable people react slowly. Extremists are quick. It obviously takes time for the many that enjoy the fruits of open societies, free movement, judiciary systems honouring international law and human rights, religious and political freedom to see what is at stake when nationalism, sentimentality and xenophobia mix with varying doses of fascism. That F-

word is feared, partly because it has become empty as it has been used against anything which one despised, and partly because it worries us to admit that maybe this is really serious. I think it is and I think churches can make some difference.

¹² The Most Rev. Anders Wejryd was elected Archbishop of Uppsala and Primate of the Church of Sweden in 2006 and served in this capacity until 2014. He is the current World Council of Churches President for Europe.

Right and left are not where they used to be. West European and Nordic churches which defended the present in olden days, fighting change, because change threatened what the church had been co-builder of, are now sometimes identified as threats to what is established. The majority of church-goers used to vote to the right. In my country, and we are not unique, it is now the opposite. It is both society and church that have changed. Today's societies are surely not only products of what the church has taught—and when churches are not part of the establishment as much as before they often rediscover the radicality of the prophets and of Jesus. Being careful with nature used to be a conservative position. Now that position is more often found among greens and even among social democrats. Churches had reasons to fear collectivism. Now many mean that we have reasons to fear individualism. No party used to say that growth and economical success was the ultimate goal, they were usually seen as means. Now even conservative parties, who used to be very skeptical of that, can say it. We surely see a changing political landscape.

There are reasons for the rise and success of xenophobia and nationalism. Many of them are quite logical. It is neither my task to list and give examples (so many others do that) nor to despise voters. Unemployment and structural changes are ruining the lives of many. What used to be virtues, not least for men, is not even asked for any more. “And what will happen with our lands when all these others come in, like they have done and do in some European countries?” is asked, mainly in countries where not many newcomers have come. And the traditional political parties are not at their best in all of Europe presently. Maybe there is a reason why economy has become such a central issue for all parties and made means an end? Maybe it is because the ideas worth striving for are not expressed even less carried out?

When we as churches are to face the political challenges in a changing Europe I think we do well if we try to fetch the water deep down in the well. Our traditions are, for example, not only expressed in traditional answers to ethical questions. The reasons for traditional answers were

surely there when they were first given—but all answers are given at a given time, to real people living at that given time. We cannot stand on the sideline repeating what has been said. We have to wrestle together and find the main directions from which we can orient ourselves and others. And we are probably wise if we allow different churches and different voices to talk tentatively—not always as if they or we had the final answers. Looking for main directions I want to read two well-known passages:

*1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,
2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of
the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the
waters.³ Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was
light.⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated
the light from the darkness.⁵ God called the light Day, and the
darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was
morning, the first day. Gen 1:1-5*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and
the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God.³ All
things came into being through him, and without him not one thing
came into being. What has come into being⁴ in him was life, and
the life was the light of all people.⁵ The light shines in the
darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-5*

The first text we associate with all things created. Earth, universe, all beings, *et cetera*. The second one more with the believers. But why? Is there reasons for that? They are both universal and together they help us to keep the Trinity together—Wind, Spirit; Word, Son and the Father as the creator and upholder of it all.

Light is important in both texts. Light is good—and separated from darkness. And in the text from John: “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.” *And the life was the light of all people!* We have a theology of life to share! And

when we take part in the deliberations of our time we should fetch water from this well of life. Life, which is the light. The right of life is central for us—and for many others. When there is life there are still options and responsibilities. And responsibilities make us human and mature. Why don't we lift that up more clearly?

We mainly seem to do it in discussions on abortion and euthanasia. And all of us who really have taken part in such deliberations and dialogues know that very general clear cut answers are not sufficient. Let us also make the issues of right to life issues of migration, development, unemployment, education, health care, social standards, climate change, justice and so on!

To me it is not natural why certain issues are widely accepted as ethical or political issues, which religions are accepted to have a say about, and others are not. The accepted ones seem to be pertaining family, roles of men and women, and issues about the role and freedom of religion in society. But economic justice, criminal justice and punishment, health, rights of minorities, equality and so on are not seen as natural for the church to get involved in. Some may say that this is because theology is not to become political ideology and the church should not steer a country. Of course they are right. In a European context we should indeed embrace the idea of the secular state; so far theocracy has always led astray; but in that democratic, secular state churches and individual Christians should take part, deliberate and speak out, not least in tentative ways. The declarative way in which churches so often have spoken has seriously reduced our credibility and relevance.

Maybe CEC has an important role here as broker, a broker between society and church but also a broker between churches. CEC is in the position to expand, and the risk with expanding is always that CEC becomes an office and not churches together. As the European discourse is becoming more and more shared, churches could be greatly helped by each other's work on issues of today and tomorrow.

We might appreciate the safe-haven-model of Church. We could be left in peace, not being so questioned by those who do not understand.

That is what I fear. It is often the world which keeps the church sane. I am afraid that the safe-haven model is an egoistic model and a model which effectively marginalizes the church. The church must be, to borrow an old WCC-expression: A Church for Others. But: Churches can only be churches for others if they are grounded in an ongoing, central, deep inner life. What would we otherwise have to add?

With the move to Brussels I guess CEC is where it has to be and where CEC has the best chances of affecting European politics and realities. But Europe is more than the European Communion. The term Europe was not widely used before the Enlightenment. Before that it was more common to speak about Christendom. And then we are quickly all the way to Georgia, just to take one example. Still Europe ends far further east than we normally think. The renaissance and what followed upon it did not affect those areas as it did western and central Europe. We often talk past each other when understandings and experiences are so different but for the sake of peace and justice we have a calling to build and repair the Common European House. To us: church, people, Europe is more than the EU.

For CEC to remember this, in all its advocacy work is, I think, an important task for CEC, and obviously more and more so as tensions in Europe are becoming more visible. Churches can be and are forces that push for justice and motivate societies to take steps to equality, dialogue and justice in order to strengthen social cohesion and avoid conflicts and outbreaks of violence. Our tragic historical experience is that churches normally have been of little help in European wars. Then they become parts of their nations and their rhetoric. But as prevention before and alleviation during—and also in reconciliation processes churches and other faith groups are of utter importance.

With our concept of the Trinity we know that God is not only with the believers of our sort but with all humankind and creation. We know that God influences and governs in other ways too. The church is necessary for us and probably for God, but God is not limited to the church.

When the concept of Human Rights is challenged we have an immense theological well to scoop from. Human Rights have often been unproblematic because we have been used to live with people of similar backgrounds. That is changing now and the foundation of Human Rights needs respect for Life as something given to humanity, that life is something greater than what we ourselves can pick and choose among. Then religious convictions are important, maybe necessary helpers.

If I then, at the end, go back to the EU, I would like to note the large international development work that the EU is committed to. I think CEC has a responsibility in that also, reminding the European Communion that the world is larger—and that the rest of the world can be partners, not only recipients whose priorities are decided by the donors. Speaking generally, like this, can always be questioned, but those who are in this field of work know that I am talking about important issues for the international ecumenical bodies.

So finally: Let us dare to use our wells, let us be more present in ongoing debates speaking tentatively, not *ex cathedra*, and let us remind ourselves that Europe is larger than the EU—and the world is even greater.

I often come back to the Golden Rule as a very useful tool, which opens for cooperation with people of other faiths or no faith. Let us use it and stretch it!

We can bring in:

- Long term historical perspective, based in the Golden Rule, stretched out in time; history and future. We remember how devastating wars have been, for example.
- International perspectives, based in the Golden Rule, stretched out in geography.

We do this and are helped to do this because we are helped to uphold the Golden Rule through the knowledge that we can only love because of God, who through Christ loves us, offers salvation to mankind and who continuously lets the sun shine over both good and evil and over those who love and those who despise God.



*H.E. Metropolitan Joseph, The Most Rev. Dr Joris Vercammen
and The Most Rev. Anders Wejryd.*



The New CEC

The Churches' Engagement
with a Changing Europe

Editor: Guy Liagre

is the General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches. He is a pastor and past-President of the United Protestant Church of Belgium. He received theological training at the Protestant Theological Faculty in Brussels and completed a doctorate in modern church history. He has been active in a variety of ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives including the Belgian Council of Religious Leaders, World Methodist Council, World Communion of Reformed Churches.

In 2014 the Conference of European Churches celebrated a historic merger with the Church and Society Commission, bringing together two of the oldest and broadest ecumenical organisations in Europe. Now at this turning point, in the midst of an ever-changing Europe, CEC must articulate a new vision for its future. In a series of inspiring and relevant essays, leaders from the church and the world of European politics offer insight into what it means to be a Conference of European Churches in 21st century Europe.