

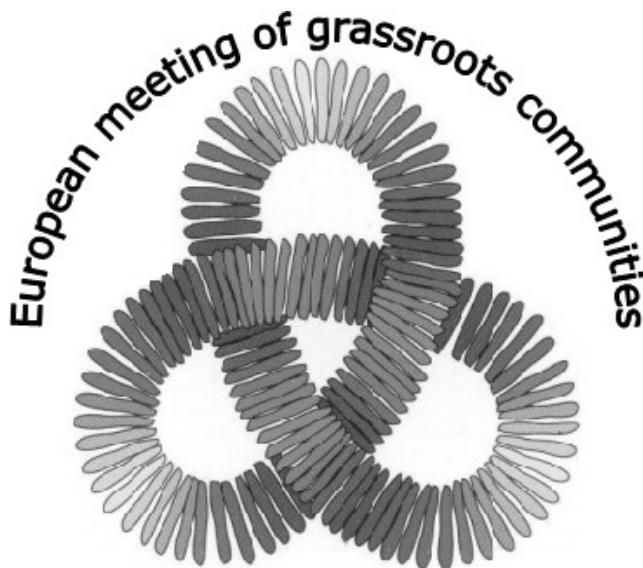
X° European meeting of grassroots communities



CCB - Europe

Communautés Chrésiennes de Base

Collectif Européen des Communautés de Base
Grassroots European Communities Collective
Christlichen Basisgemeinschaften in Europa
Comunidades Cristianas de base de Europa
Comunità Cristiane di Base in Europa
Christelijke Basisgroepen - en Bewegingen in Europa



***X° European meeting
of grassroots communities***

21,22 and 23 september 2018

Rimini - Italy

***"Committed Christians for a more just
world, and for a poor Church"***

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X° European meeting of grassroots communities
21,22 and 23 september 2018 – Rimini, Italy

Program

friday

16,00 - welcome and opening exhibition space

19,30 - dinner

21,30 - brief presentation of the countries/regions participating

- Prayer / evening song

- welcome greeting with a brief presentation of the countries/regions attendees

- conviviality and entertainment to get to know each other better: songs, dances and tastings ...

saturday

9,00 - presentation and introduction of the works

- prayer / common song

9,15 - conference: prof. Riccardo Petrella

questions will be collected at the end (only in writing)

10,00 - coffe break

10,30 - Testimonies from different countries and groups

11,30 - discussion: answer to questions

13,00 - lunch

14,30 – laboratories – 1° session

16,00 - break

16,30 – laboratories – 2° session

18,00 – writing of "Dazebao" with phrases/reflection of the works done in the laboratories

18,30 – break

19,00 - lunch

21,00 – evening: free visit to the historic center of Rimini

sunday

9,00 - Eucharistic Celebration - by the Cassano (Naples) community
- opening prayer

9,15 - **friendly dialogue** "face to face" with a neighbor

9,45 - **"writing the panels" writing panels with friendly dialogue phrases**

10,00 - continues the celebration

12,00 - lunch

farewell and departure

Presentation - Austria

Grassroots communities in Austria

Grassroots communities in Austria were founded after Vatican II in 1970, like the majority of European Grassroots communities. The aim was to live according to the Church of the origins.

Communities were considered a place of hope and an “alternative society”. The slogan of one of the communities in Vienna was: “Share, celebrate and protect life!” (We are very good at celebrating, as well as sharing, I think.)

Close and friendly relations between communities are essential to us, as well as rejoicing together, comforting and supporting one another (even financially), reading the Bible, discussing theological, political and environmental issues, supporting social projects – in this moment especially for refugees – and helping twin communities in the so called “Third World”. A grassroots community in Vienna (Endresstraße) runs a therapeutic center for people with hemiparesis and a school.

Grassroots communities usually meet on a monthly basis for a binding “community night” dedicated to a topic with an organizational session and an agape. In some communities, certain groups have closer contacts and meet more often.

Once a year many Grassroots Communities spend a week together, outside Vienna, where they address a topic, go on excursions and have much time to talk.

Like in other communities, founding members are ageing and younger members are usually lacking.

Some communities, especially in Western Austria, no longer exist or, at least, are not in touch with us. As far as we know, there is a Grassroots Community in Innsbruck.

Unlike communities from other countries, many Austrian Grassroots communities are part of a parish. They are involved in the events of the Parish: they help to organize celebrations, for example, (there is often no priest in these parishes), to prepare people to the First Communion and the Confirmation, to coordinate groups of kids, young people and elderly people, and to organize social work, etc.

Members of the grassroots communities in and around Vienna meet approximately every 6 weeks to share ideas and experiences and to plan an annual event. In fact, an event for all grassroots communities’ members (and everyone else interested) is held every year around a topic that we hope is relevant to the life of our communities.

Presentation - French-speaking Belgium

Grassroots communities in French-speaking Belgium

There are still around thirty grassroots communities in Wallonia and in Brussels, but these groups are ageing. Some communities have disappeared over the last few years and several founding members have passed away. Each group counts approximately 10 to 30 members who meet once or twice a month for a celebration; on these occasions they share ideas about different topics and discuss them with members of other communities. In some regions, community members gather regularly for festivals or events. Other communities, though, are more independent and do not necessarily keep in touch with others.

In the Tournai dioceses, the communities were somehow officialized after they joined the “Community Commission” in the Labouring World Church (CEMO in French.) A small staff coordinates and deals with a number of administrative, communicative and representative issues in different fields. The staff promotes the creation of links between communities by organizing annual meetings, publishing a quarterly magazine and managing the website. However, the small number of people involved, as well as the lack of innovation and busy agendas minimise the efficiency of the coordination group. That’s why meetings are becoming increasingly occasional. We usually keep in touch by email.

The last meeting took place last October to organize an event entitled: “Back to the Origins”). This event will take place on April 15th, 2018 and will be dedicated to “voluntary simplicity”, a topic that will also be discussed at the next European meeting. Different communities have already addressed this topic to prepare to the forthcoming meeting.

The latest great event of this sort was held in Brussels in September 2015, with more than 50 participants. It was about “liberalism and freedom” (to read articles about this topic see CEM 109, page 31-49, on our website). In our communities we also discussed other topics: *Homosexuality and faith*, *What is sacred is fraternity*, *Resilience*, *Environmental Awareness*.

Since summer 2017, some members from different communities have been involved, as much as possible, in the reception and support of migrants.

As not everyone uses the internet, the quarterly magazine Walking Communities (“CEM” in French) published by different groups of the “Pavés” network (www.paves-reseau.be) is the only way to communicate: the printed version is delivered to around 600 households and the digital one to our friends abroad. It seems to be widely appreciated outside our

groups too.

We try to regularly update our website , where you can also find the past issues of the magazine as well as modified ecclesiastical prayers.

Our website is currently being updated.

<https://sites.google.com/site/ccbwabru/>

Presentation - French

French Communities 2016-2018

Currently the basic Communities are 8 adherent (cotisantes) with national association, which makes approximately a hundred people. They are varied: some of them are instituted in association, have bonds with Christian institutional structures like the parishes, or of the Christian various movements or not. They are growing old.

They gave each other a minimum of national structure: the national association of correspondents (ANCCB) ensures a coordination between them. It organized these last years two national meetings: These meetings gathered each one forty people (the preceding meetings had gathered between 60 and 80 people).

National meetings

- A national meeting November 11, and 12 2016 on the topic of fraternity

- A national meeting November 10, and 11 2017 on the topic of the equality.

News of communities

The Community of the Archet-Bondy, in the Paris area, is an association which comprises a community of life (three people) and a ' think tank ' which meets once a month.

The Community off the Surgeon, in the area of Lyon, a core of about fifteen active people counts, of which people having various handicaps.

Characteristics of the basic Christian Communities :

The Communities :

*on can speak without being judged.

*on division our everyday lifes and one seeks together how to resist oppressions.

*on helps itself and one learns how to live in fraternity.

*la community is opened with any person in research.

Christian women

*la fraternity which is lived inside our communities would like to be a Good News for today, in the continuity of that of the first Christian communities "See as they like".

*la community makes report of Jesus by dividing the bread and the wine.

Basic

*la community endeavours to be a democratic place of decision.

*chacun of its members, according to its possibilities, at the place where it saw, division what it has and what it is so that men and women live beyond any exclusion.

*c' is from **base** that our communities work out a theology for today

Presentation – Italy

Italian Grassroots Communities - CdB

History and organization

The Christian base communities (CdB) were born spontaneously in the sixties and seventies (400) between Catholic groups in the wake of Vatican II, in fidelity to the Gospel and Referring to the struggles of the oppressed the CdB have tried to help make "other" - that is more evangelical and credible - the Roman Catholic Church.

In these 40 years, the Italian CdB have followed different paths in trying to live the faith by building new ways of being church, initiating a common path marked by national meetings of discussion and study where they built the wealth of **key points** that characterize them.

The "Who We are" of existing Italian CdBs (forty) is in the life of the movement they have built and that they continue to build together with others who have joined over time.

The path of Italian CdBs as a "collective subject" has so far been characterized by their recognition in a national link between communities and autonomous groups in search for different ways of being a church "other": women and men at the school of Jesus without fathers or masters in a dynamic of reappropriation/reinterpretation of the Christian message in our time.

In harmony with how many, individuals and movements, try to experiment new ways of fidelity to the Gospel even in an ecumenical perspective, they have taken towards the institutional Church an autonomous ability to

judge without giving up to talk to it.

The Italian CdBs have built over the years a movement / link, which, responding to the signs of the times, lives in the precariousness of research, always ready to be questioned starting from the rich heritage of accumulated experiences along their common path.

Cohherently with this choice, without constituting a unitary institutionalized structure, they are endowed themselves of a "light" organization that operates through: a national autoconvocate Link formed by representatives of the Communities supported by a permanent national technical secretariat, rotating, which carry out the resolutions of Link.

The CdB organized annually since 1971 **Meetings and National Seminars**, and actively participate in the European Collective of CBC.

The last national meeting of the CdBs was the Seminar **"Blessed are atheists because they encounter God"** held Rimini, 8-10 December 2017.

To all this intertwines the independent research of **women's groups**, present in some communities, which organize annually a national meeting.

Number, meetings, links, practices and commitments

Presence and quantity

Currently, the Cdb in Italy are about 40 with a diffusion no longer generalized throughout the national territory; but with a presence still significant, especially in some regions where more than one are active. In total, the members are about 600 with a very different size from that of S.Paolo in Rome (about 150) to the smallest (10 members).

However, all communities are "open" and then, being the "member" is an act of their own freedom.

Reunions and meetings

The situation in individual communities is very different: from once a week to once a month. The comparison and the meeting at the collective level between the CdB, is realized, annually, through national meetings.

Connections

For over 40 years exists a **"National Connection"** self-convoked and a **"Technical Secretariat"** that carries out ordinary activities: convocations, meetings organization, web site management (<http://www.cdbitalia.org/>; <http://www.cdbitalia.it/gruppi-donne/>), press relations ...

There are links at regional level, even with other groups and basic entities.

Our practices

Celebration, biblical study, catechesis with children; social engagement activities as well as parties together, are the prevalent activities

The Eucharist: almost all communities celebrate the Eucharist; but not every and every Sunday. The majority entrusts the conduct of

celebration to individuals or to the group that prepares the biblical readings of the day, while some hold the "presidency" of the Eucharist with the priest.

Other celebrations: a majority celebrates baptism and the "feast of communion"; in some even the wedding and the funeral.

Our commitments: some communities organize permanent social activities: Italian language school for immigrants; "Palestinian Relief", welcome and dialogue ...

Things That Work: *organically*: the "National Connection"; the website and the FB page; *substantively*: annual meetings and thematic seminars *at strategic level*: the "CdB Women Group and not only"

things that ... can be improved: exchanges between the Communities

EUROPEAN MEETING: *Expectations and Participation*

The Italian CDBs consider the relations between European Communities very important are committed to the success of the Xth meeting, in Italy after 32 years.

Italian CDBs evaluate of great - and also strategic - utility the European links and networks : Eglise et Liberté, IMWAC (We Are Church), G.N.C. (Council 50), and national (Redes cristianas, Parvis, Paves, etc.).

Presentation – Netherlands

The Grassroot Communities in the Netherlands

Base (*Grassroot*) communities such as we now know in Europe have been developed especially since the Second Vatican Council. The freedom of the children of God was celebrated and the role of the laity was emphasized more than before. Lay people became empowered and many went to study theology. There grew a new relationship between priests and laity, a relationship where equality came first. Hierarchy as a top-down organization was replaced by communities that need leaders who should be chosen by their own believers, part of the People of God.

In those years the Netherlands had a progressive episcopate that convened the national Pastoral Council in 1966. Laypeople were leading the meetings and the bishops participated with their own mandate. For example, a request could be approved to allow priests married in the Netherlands.

In 1966, the first basic communities also emerged. One of these is the Dominicus Community in Amsterdam to which we belong. In 1978, a 90 communities founded the *Grassroots Communities Movement Netherlands (BBN)*. They all developed into ecumenical communities. We can distinguish two groups. One wanted to change the church by starting with themselves and their lives as a community. Pastoral care was an important element in their reality. The other developed with a more pronounced political dimension and agenda.

The grassroots communities emphasized their independence, but, as a result, they often lived as ‘separate islands’. The BBN brought unity mainly in political actions. Many grassroots communities therefore ended their membership of the BBN and continued independently. The few that remained dissolved the BBN in 2017.

The Mariënborg Association, which has made our participation in this *Incontro* of the CCB in Rimini possible, is not a grassroots community itself, but many of its members belong to one of the about forty basic groups in the Netherlands. Mariënborg wants to encourage believers to become more aware of their calling to exercise the general priesthood, individually and in community.

Thanks to the support the Dominicus Community received from people like Edward Schillebeeckx, the community became the largest free religious community and still is. In 1980 they went on to appoint a female theologian in the Liturgical Team those who preside the eucharist. In the nineties when by the intervention of Rome all new bishops in the Netherlands were very conservative, the Diocese of Haarlem forced the Dominicus Community to continue as an independent church. It became member of the Amsterdam Council of Churches. She became the model for the booklet *Church and Ministry* that the Dutch Province of the Dominicans published in 2007 and that was distributed worldwide on internet.

In 2011, thanks to a donation from a female religious congregation, we were able to set up a foundation under the name *Ondersteuning Kleine Geloofsgemeenschappen (OKG, Support Small Faith Communities)* with the aim of providing financial support to communities in order to strengthen their vitality by promoting the expertise of their leaders. We intend to reverse the trend of isolation and wasting away of the communities into a new dynamic. We believe that they will become the bricks with which the Spirit wants to build her church in the 21st century. That is why we also promote the dialogue between the communities so that they can learn from each other's experience without having to give up their

independence. In this way, the Christian communities in the first centuries have also grown into a new Jesus Movement in the Western world.

We would also like to see the rising of this dialogue among the grassroots communities in the different countries and therefore we plead for active support of this dialogue by the CCB Europe in every country. Only a sufficiently large number of strong grassroots communities can be a light on the lampstand for their environment and therefore the salt for spreading the gospel in their society.

A method to achieve this can be reached by following the example of the OKG Foundation: developing a national website with a map showing the different grassroots communities in their country. People will know so the places where they come together to celebrate the gospel and give it concrete shape in personal and social life. And hopefully, this knowledge will help their growing in numbers and strength.

Perhaps even in other countries there are also religious communities that can make local initiatives like the OKG possible.

Marleen Wijdeveld en Isaac Wüst

Presentation - Spain

Grassroots Communities (*Comunidades Cristianas Populares*) in Spain

The approximate number of Grassroots Communities

230 people from 25 Spanish cities took part in the Spanish Grassroots Communities' meeting, held in Malaga in November 2017, entitled "Hope without certainties and unconditional love".

These figures show that there are around 100 communities across Spain and around 1000 members. As the average age stands at approximately 65, our communities are ageing, and members are decreasing. Despite a low generational turnover and straitened circumstances, we still desire to build a new world and a new Church.

Grassroots communities' commitment

For the Grassroots Communities, faith in the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth

represents a commitment to transform our society from the inside, a society that has become more laicized and secularized society in the postmodern age of the 21st century. New movements and new points of view arose in our society. Our commitment in political, union and civic negotiations moved a step forward towards a new, more participative movement that strives to achieve real democracy.

Many members of our communities joined the following causes: the fight against poverty, feminism, environmental awareness, the protection of nature and the environment. The list goes on: solidarity with the Third and Fourth World, the reception of refugees and migrants, the anti-austerity movement *Movimiento 15-M* in Spain and new political parties, the *Círculos de espiritualidad* (Spirituality Clubs) of *Podemos* political party, ethical banks, support to the protests (“Mareas”) in favour of education, health, public services, retirement policies, the *Círculos del Silencio* (Silence clubs), denouncement of CIEs (Immigrants Detention Centers), support to the “*Stop Desahucios*” network (Stop Evictions)... These are all the measures taken in response to the concerns of our society.

As for the Church, we keep on holding local and national Grassroots Communities’ meetings, alternated with Study and Meditation days. Our communities are part of *Foros cristianos locales*, as well as *Colectivo de Mujeres y Teologías*, *Congreso de Teología* and especially *Redes Cristianas*, a network of approximately 200 Spanish communities. A new group has recently been formed to study and discuss new emerging models. This group with its respective blog, comprises more than 100 people among grassroots communities’ members, scientists, ecohumanists, no-globals, believers and non-believers. These people are building a new utopia and new humanization processes.

Grassroots communities’ approach

Over history, our communities have been guided by a long consideration of the foundations and aims on which the internal consistency of our actions is based. These foundations have been renewed over the last more than forty years, thanks to National Meetings and Study days.

The experience of faith that we have been accumulating in our communities over the years, went through a very radical change. We’ve been swept away by a cultural tsunami and surrounded by a huge wave of scientific, ecohumanist, social and religious elements. This generated new emerging models.

The writings of Lenaers, Spong, Hick, José María Vigil and, more recently, María López Vigil during the grassroots communities’ meeting in Malaga at first caused a deep and painful dismay to our communities. However, we

trusted the new post-religious and supra-religious attitude that brought us great relief and gave us renewed strength. Many communities got rid of the theistic and heteronomous model of traditional theology. These communities gradually transformed their faith in Jesus of Nazareth thanks to a new theological narrative which is more up to date, more in line with scientific progress, in harmony with a secular spirituality based on a humanist ethic and in favour of the quality of humanity.

We dispelled the ancient myths of the Bible rooted in traditional theology. We started a long journey in the desert, as exiles, and at the same time we are building a new post-religious and post-theistic theological model, based on the early actions of Jesus of Nazareth.

Santiago Villamayor, a member of the Saragozza Community, declares: “For us The Bible is a huge metaphor. It's not true in itself but it has the ability to set us free. Creation, Sin, Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection and Eternal Life are not scenes from an historical epic. These represent the existential features of human life and of fraternity's calling”.

<http://www.redescristianas.net/catalogo-presentaciones/comunidades-cristianas-populares/>

Presentation - Basque Country

Grassroots communities in the Basque Country

Grassroots communities (Kristay Elkarte Herritarrak in Basque) appeared in the Basque Country (Euskal Herria) in the provinces of Biscaglia, Guipuzcoa, Alava and Baiona in 1975. In 1977 communities became permanent and structured. We live our faith by always keeping in mind the difficult context of our country, that is under the administration of both Spain and France; we bear in mind our Christian faith that sets us free by honoring our ecclesiastical, social, cultural and political commitments.

The financial crisis and its repercussions, poverty, migrants and refugees, social exclusion, political conflicts, individual and collective human rights, peace, social and political prisoners, the right of choice for the Basque Country, the renewal of the Church thanks to a liberating faith.... These are all the topics at the heart of our thoughts and activities during 2016-2018 (April).

Current situation in the Basque Country

Members of Grassroots communities are fewer and fewer (for age reasons) and it is still necessary to intensify our activities and to build stronger links with Herria 2000 Eliza and with the Order of priests of the Basque Country. That is why we are committed to meditating, engaging and undertaking permanent actions in all our dioceses. The release of the bimonthly magazine Herria 2000 Eliza, which is now 40 years old, is an example of our commitment.

Our aim is to strengthen the grassroots Christian movement. The movement has around 70 members in total.

The scope of our communities

Annual meetings and assemblies were held to meditate and to take action on some urgent issues. In particular, this year we have been working on the following aspects:

- We have been dealing with the crisis of the Basque Church, given the conservative attitude of bishops and the laicization process, etc.
- From the point of view of the whole community of the Euskal Herria people, we have been dealing with the issues of Basque prisoners, the right of choice, economy related to poverty, social rights and peace attained through justice
- We are adapting our role as community and as a grassroots movement to the Basque society.

From 2016 to 2018 we have been turning our engagement into tangible actions, thanks to articles and projects:

- We have supported Basque prisoners who were taken away and lost across the region, on Spanish and French territory. They were far from their people and their family too. We have tried to protect and helped them claim their own rights.
- We have joined and taken part in the Baiona demonstration during the ETA disarmament of April 2017.
- We have joined and taken part in the important annual event held in January for the release of Basque prisoners.
- We keep on denouncing torture which is still used, and we call on bishops for its abolition.
- We have organized prayer sessions and reached agreements to manage the situation of political and social prisoners
- We have organized events for the protection of human rights and against imprisonment.

On our last meeting, held in March this year, we made several commitments in terms of human, political, economic, cultural and environmental rights, as well as commitments to renew our Church, as people of God.

We try to go hand in hand with other members of our people, we show solidarity to all victims and work together to attain peace and to put an end to injustice, which is the source of countless conflicts and suffering.

Starting from Euskal Herria and from the European situation, we are building a united path guided by freedom, equality, justice and peace.

As grassroots communities, together with the Order of Basque Priests and with Herria 2000 Eliza, we have always tried, throughout history, to search for true peace for our people by supporting those who suffer from the consequences of an unfair economy, from political conflicts and from the denial of their rights. We urgently and constantly call for hope coming from the Gospel of He who came “to proclaim good news to the poor [...], to proclaim freedom for the prisoners [...], to set the oppressed free”.

Looking ahead

The gradual fall in the number of members and the difficulties in ensuring greater continuity by involving young people are the obstacles on our way to become stronger, as Church and as faithful.

We need to find a new path in a renewed Church and find new ways to live faith and spirituality in a more laic and post-religious society. Hope and the capacity to act for the sake of our people, for a new world, for a Church like the one of Pope Francis, support us and make us continue our quest by maintaining links with other communities and other groups in the Basque Country, in Spain and in Europe. We also keep on helping poor people living in this world.

Euskal herria / Basque Country, April 2018

www.herriaeliza.com

Presentation – Switzerland

Grassroots communities in Switzerland

The Grassroots communities’ movement in Switzerland comprises five

French-speaking communities (Geneva and Nyon) and four German-speaking communities (Küssnacht, Lucerne and St Gallen). Communities' members are aware of the signs of the times, are socially involved, live spirituality in their everyday life and support different charities.

The first grassroots communities were founded around 1973 in France and in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. In 1980, they appeared in the German part of Switzerland. The root causes for their creation were: the Vatican Council, the theology of liberation and the new grassroots communities in Latin America. Since 1995, the Swiss grassroots communities have gradually become smaller, have disappeared or have changed.

Today, German-speaking groups comprise 5 to 10 people meeting every 15 days. French-speaking communities, instead, count 10 to 50 members meeting once a month for a celebration and sometimes organizing meditation nights. These occasions are an opportunity to pray, sing, share our experiences and communicate with one another. Together, we try to live our daily life by the teaching and the life of Jesus Christ. These meditations enable us to focus our attention on some issues or personal challenges. They also strengthen mutual trust in terms of justice and peace. We consider ourselves as part of the Church and we also shape it to a certain extent, because we firmly believe that the Christian faith is basically the power of change.

In Switzerland, the grassroots' communities rely on a simple structure: a Swiss coordinator, a person in charge for French-speaking Switzerland and an annual meeting with the 9 groups. This is what enables the Swiss communities to survive, strengthen and fraternize.

Our organization supports several "political" initiatives:

Our lives and our commitment are guided by the message of a liberating God and by the privileged relationship with poor people. Nonetheless, these poor people are almost totally absent from our groups.

Website: <http://www.ccb.geneve-environs.ch/>

Conference

scheme of the speech

Why and how to prevent the establishment of a "new" ever more unequal world society?

The intervention will be structured in four moments.

Moment 1

Premise: I will try to debunk two widely spread ideas in all environments.

First idea: as the impoverished ones of today are much richer than the impoverished ones of 1800 and even more than those of 1300, "poverty" is considerably decreased in the world and the social inequalities have been reduced. Furthermore, it is said that the "new global society" that is emerging will reduce even further inequality after the current phase of "transition crisis".

Of course, it is admitted, there will always be the poor. A society "without the poor" is against nature. Inequalities between individuals, social groups and peoples are part of nature.

Second idea: the main factor of reduction and eradication of impoverishment and exclusion it is economic development that strongly depends on technological development. The more a society is enriched, thanks to new technologies, the more it is possible to allow everyone to have access to basic goods and services, essential and irreplaceable for life, at an affordable price.

Moment 2

I will then go on to describe the structural factors of impoverishment and inequality in the world.

I'll put concisely the emphasis on commercialization and monetization of life, on the privatization and financialization of basic goods and services, on the militarization of the world and the privatization of political power. In a general situation of technologization warrior and imperial imposed by the dominant oligarchies.

Moment 3

Hypothesis on possible scenarios of evolution in the next thirty years

worldwide. I will resume the scenarios identified in the document "The boldness in the name of humanity" derived from the book "In the name of humanity".

Moment 4

It will be the time of the proposals compared to two issues:

Q1. What priority actions can and must be promoted at local and global levels and by whom?

I'll take two particularly characteristic cases: the repeal of the private right to patent the living (to become the owner of life) the creation of a Security Council of the Public Worldwide Common goods;

Q2. How to mobilize citizens and peoples to the implementation of priority actions? I will also take two cases: the radical change of the financial system today dominant starting from local communities; the struggle for disarmament and peace centered on moving citizens.

Riccardo Petrella

Conference - annexes

12 reasons why poverty is illegal

1. No one is born poor, nor chooses to be one.
2. One becomes poor. Poverty is a social construct
3. It is not a poor society that “produces” poverty
4. Exclusion leads to impoverishment
5. Being a structural process, impoverishment is collective
6. Impoverishment stems from a society that does not believe in the rights to life and to citizenship for all, nor in the collective political responsibility to guarantee access to those rights to all individuals on Earth
7. Impoverishment processes occur in unfair societies
8. Fighting against poverty (impoverishment) means, first of all, fighting against unequal, unfair and predatory wealth (enrichment)
9. “The planet of the impoverished” has become increasingly populated due to the erosion and the commercialization of the common good that has been carried out since the 1970s
10. Policies implemented over the past forty years in order to reduce and eradicate poverty failed because they tackled symptoms (curative measures) rather than causes (resolution measures)
11. Nowadays, poverty is one of the most advanced forms of slavery because it is based on the “theft of humanity and future”
12. In order to free our society from impoverishment, we must “outlaw” those laws, institutions and practices that are creating and fostering impoverishment processes

see also: <https://docplayer.it/11670806-Le-fabbriche-della-poverta.html>

Testimony – Belgium Wallonia and Brussels

Voluntary Simplicity

During the year 2017-2018, the grassroots communities of French-speaking Belgium had chosen the above theme, and spent an entire day on April 15, 2018 exchanging views with a young sociologist familiar with the subject, Émeline De Bouver, author of the book *Moins de biens, plus de liens*.¹ In a survey addressed to a dozen communities, it appeared that the word 'poverty' was problematic for some, even taken in its more global, more 'spiritual' sense, such as the reference to the 'poor of Yahweh' or to the 'Beatitudes' of the Gospels. The words 'simplicity' or 'sobriety' seemed better suited to some people's lifestyle objectives, be they young or old. We tried to clarify what it meant in practice and what conclusions could be drawn. Of course, this approach does not mean that we reject other approaches, be they social, ecclesial, economic, etc.: we believe they can be complement each other..

The movement of Voluntary Simplicity goes back very far in antiquity, but it is especially in the years 1960 and 1970 that it got its name and became structured in the United States, in connection with the reflections on *reversing economic growth* and the excesses of a *consumer-oriented society*: Hannah Arendt's criticism of the latter has given impetus to the movement, and today Pierre Rhabi is undoubtedly the best known French-speaking representative of the movement. The slogan that characterizes it most clearly may well be Gandhi's sentence : "*To live simply so that others may simply live.*"

What struck us in our thinking and our efforts to put into practice voluntary simplicity is that by voluntarily reducing our consumption habits will have consequences on all aspects of our life and could give it a new sense.

The first consequence relates to *our time management*. Consuming more makes us almost automatically aspire and desire for more. Thus, we must keep a high salary and often work very hard to achieve this, and repay any loans we may have. In addition, we seek in unrestrained consumption a

¹ More about this day is in our Bulletin CEM, June 2018, pages 33-44, or www.paves-reseau.be/revue.php?id=1547 (and on other articles mentioned in the footnotes)

way to fill a void. We always consume more and it becomes a vicious circle. Choosing simplicity invites us to be less dependent on money and material comfort so as to achieve free time for other things.

Concretely, in this perspective, a series of collective actions have been developing over several years to revive the dynamics of proximity, barter, exchange and giving, and at the same time promoting greater respect for the planet: this is the second consequence of the choice of simplicity in relation to *our solidarities and our networks of exchange*. In French, we speak about GAC (Group of Common purchases), SEL (Local Exchange Services), repair-Café and other types of Workshops...

The movement of voluntary simplicity therefore proposes more coherence, establish priorities, and define a way forward over time. We also realized during our day of reflection that such coherence would affect all the other areas of our commitments:

- Economic: push for reversal of growth, as the earth has only limited resources;
- Social: focus on those close to us (family, neighbors...);
- Cultural and educational: what must we transmit, a financial legacy or values that will endure over future generations?
- Existential: reassess our desires, our wishes, our needs.

From this perspective, we had to revisit that fundamental *question of the 'meaning of our life'* differently, and avoid reducing it to a 'personal development' issue. To try to overcome the old distinctions between *spirituality and commitment*, between prayer and action, voluntary simplicity puts us on the path of a '*spiritual activism*' that broadens individual existence, as it is rooted in a conception of the human embedded in something that surpasses it (life, the universe, the divine, the Kingdom of God, Nature...). And the fact of being part of a Whole greater than oneself puts the human being in a network of relations and decentralizes him from himself : a sacred dimension?

Many links could certainly be made between all this and an '*integral ecology*' – not in the sense used by some Frenchmen, but this is besides the point – and in particular with Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. And thus also with the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi and beyond, with the image of simplicity given by Jesus himself and recommended to his disciples. Something to further enrich our reflection...

Testimony - Austria

Politics and poverty

*He hath put down the mighty from their seat
And hath exalted the humble and meek
He hath filled the hungry with good things
And the rich ha hath sent empty away
Luke 1,52-53*

We all believe and hope so, but in times like these a lot of faith and hope are needed, and God needs our hearts, minds and hands to do that as well. At the same time, the right-wing and populist politicians and governments in many countries in Europe and around the world do not make things easier for us.

My examples mainly refer to Austria, but I think the problems in other countries are quite comparable.

First of all, I have to say in advance that the Austrian social and health service is still very good. But since December 2017 we have a right-wing/populist coalition (ÖVP and FPÖ) and in less than one year and even during the election campaign before, this has already done much to change that and make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

One of their main strategies is to unsettle the population, to spread fear for the standard of living, security and future prospects, blaming the welfare state, the refugees and migrants and the so-called "good people". The refugees and immigrants would take the jobs, too much money was being spent on them, they were a wicked threat to the Christian West and in general they were dangerous and the poor Austrians were not safe from them anywhere.

As far as jobs are concerned:

The asylum seekers, who often wait years for their decision, may not accept paid work at all.

If they are allowed to work then they usually only get jobs that the Austrians do not want anyway.

The Austrian pension system is based on benefits collected by state insurance, that is, to pay the pensions of the elderly, one needs the contributions of the young. As in many industrialized countries, the Austrian population is ageing, so it is very important that new young workers, who of course are also taxpayers, are added.

We urgently need skilled workers and well-educated people. Of course,

there are many among refugees and migrants, and there are many gifted and willing young people who could be well educated.

But what does it look like now?

During 2015 and 2016, Austria accepted, welcomed and cared for far many more refugees compared to its population than most other EU states, but now they only talk about the Fortress Europe, flirt with the fascistoid Visegrád countries, there are hardly any positive asylum decisions, many people are deported, even if they are already well integrated and successful in education. For example, people who came as unaccompanied minors several years ago, speak good German and attend apprenticeships or technical schools have been deported. This is especially true for Afghans, because Kabul is ever so safe. But there were even Christian Iranians among them, because not all converts from Islam are executed anymore - Iranian prisons are not necessarily survived.

One institution responsible for integration is called AMS (Public Employment Service). It provides work, language courses, further education, not only for refugees, but also for all Austrian unemployed, especially, older, adolescent, disabled, women who want to work after a break, etc., so mainly no wealthy people.

Already this year, the government has cut subsidies for AMS by 30%, next year it will be another 200 million euros less. The fewer unemployed people are qualified and placed, the more the state spends on unemployment benefits, minimum income and health care. The "savings" bring nothing to the state, the impact on those affected are catastrophic. Still further austerity tests: long-term unemployed should receive only minimum income, instead of emergency aid, which is also little more than minimum income, but it the time counts for your pension and you don't have to wait for it until (almost) all your money and possessions are used up.

There is also a new law stating that minimum benefit recipients who do not have a compulsory schooling exam or a B1 German exam will receive about one third less money. This also affects many Austrians. A considerable proportion of Austrians who are also affected by these measures, are the main voters of the populist FPÖ, but as long as it goes against the refugees, they seem not to notice.

There are hospitals and rehabilitation centers in Austria that mainly treat accidents at work. These have so far been funded by employer contributions. Now they do not have to pay anymore, and at first it looked as if these facilities had to close. But after many protests this should be avoided. But nobody really knows where the money should come from. Thank God, there are of course protests and some things could still be

prevented. It is to be hoped that not all plans of this government will come true.

This government also has strange views on women. It seems they should belong to the domestic hearth, especially the poorer ones. We do have female ministers in the government. A big achievement of the government is allegedly child benefit. So far, you have received a childcare subsidy, now families can deduct an amount from the tax per child. Those who earn little and therefore pay no tax, don't get anything, not even single parents. For the single parents a solution is allegedly being looked for.

If a wife earns little and now has to pay for childcare if she goes out to work, she tends to stay at home and take care of the children herself. It was also planned that the state would cut the funds given to the counties for kindergartens, but it looks as if this could just be prevented.

Even NGOs and art projects that campaign for women lose subsidies, but the little Muslim girls in the kindergartens may no longer wear headscarves, probably because of the emancipation?

Even those who think they are benefiting from this government are losing. People who are less happy and satisfied are also poor. They are dissatisfied, they are constantly living in fear that something could be taken away from them, when the poorest get something they believe they are missing something, they are suspicious and out of touch - that is not a quality of life.

After all, the wealth of a society also consists of its diversity and variety, of many opinions, ways of life and relationships. That should not be threatened by people whose ideas of variety end with pizza or kebab at the very most.

Fortunately, there is this diversity, and there are many who live it, who are ready to commit and fight for it. Because we know that we are not alone, hope and faith are not so difficult for us.

Rotraut Lakmaier - Machstraße, Vienna

Testimony – Switzerland

No longer to the detriment of others

POVERTY AND MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS:

About the Responsible Business Initiative

“Why are the majority of resource-rich countries so poor?” This question was asked in 2011 by Joseph Stiglitz, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. Why are the majority of resource-rich countries so poor? Why is Zambia, a natural heaven with one of the highest revenues in the world thanks to leather extraction and production (almost every business or technology today needs leather) one of the poorest countries on Earth? Given the demand and the price of leather, Zambia should be a wealthy country. However, for many Southern countries, natural resources turned out to be a curse rather than a blessing.

Corporations’ high profits are not simply the result of their hard work. They are instead the consequence of the “theft” committed by these companies. Multinational corporations – working in the construction industry or selling oil and gas – control the market thanks to their economic power and their political influence on a local and regional level. They often get away with environmental crimes and human rights violations.

Political authorities fall under the influence of multinationals. Corruption is pervasive and politicians cover up for each other. In Africa, in particular, business linked to raw materials triggers several violent actions whose funding leads to power struggles.

Destroyed landscapes, polluted air and water is all we have left, after the dismantlement of these activities. This leads to dramatic consequences in the long run. Local inhabitants are becoming displaced and are losing their livelihood. Those who try to defend themselves are often threatened and led to commit crimes.

In a nutshell, corporations make profit outside of the country where they do business. However, “the filth” produced by their business stays inside of the country!

Three years ago, a broad coalition of human rights and environmental organizations launched an initiative to encourage multinationals to take on their own responsibilities. Under this initiative, Switzerland-based firms will be liable for human rights abuses and environmental violations. Good intentions and voluntary participation of companies are no longer sufficient. Several multinationals, including Swiss ones, carry out devastating business practices. The “Responsible Business

Initiative” claims what follows: enough with inhumane working conditions in textile factories, enough with child labor on cocoa plantations, enough with illnesses spreading among the workers of the “Made in Switzerland” construction sector because of environmental damage

In addition to this main initiative, a smaller one has been launched by a part of the Church. It’s called “The Church for the Responsible Business Initiative”. As members of the Church, we join this initiative because it is based on values like dignity, justice and the protection of the Creation.

Our faith in Jesus Christ calls for our involvement in achieving justice and as member of the Church, we must take action where basic human rights are trampled.

We follow Pope Francis and, like him, we propose an economic system based on the statement “The current economy kills” instead of “Our economy could still be optimized”. We also share a strong biblical tradition, according to which we don’t accept injustice and we don’t tolerate the turnover of some companies being 20 times higher than the GDP of the countries where these companies do business.

Year after year, some corporations cut trees in tropical forests in Greece and forty football fields are built every minute. Not only do companies cut trees and exterminate plants and animals, but they also eradicate essential elements of the life, the culture and the soul of an entire population.

In the Scriptures, some episodes tell the story of the “small” who bravely counters the “powerful”. Some good examples are the two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, who refused to obey the Pharaoh’s order to kill (Ex 1, 15-17) or a shepherd, David, who beat the heroic fighter Goliath.

Puah and Shiphrah as well as David didn’t stand a chance, but they ran the risk and they succeeded. The same happened with activists driving flying boats against whaling or for the members of the association “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” who fought against a military dictatorship. All of them believed in the power of sacrifice: we can make the difference! Something can change.

We believe what follows: all the living things are animated by the same breath of life and are deeply intertwined with one another. This is a responsible interdependence that multinational corporations must consider. Us, me, we are all responsible when it comes to building a world where everyone can have what they need. We dream of a world where no one lives to the detriment of others, where the rain is sweet again, where the world is in awe, where fears are dispelled and where children can dream about their future.

Jacqueline Keune, Grassroots community of Northern Lucerne

Testimony - France

Migration and reception by the French Grassroots communities

Context of the testimony by Achet Bondy (Paris suburbs)

As activists of the Solidarity Association (Association de Solidarité) and members of the Ligue of Human Rights, we abhor the events that have recently occurred:

1. The shameful treatment of migrants in Paris;
2. The disheartening issue, kept hidden, of how unaccompanied minors are treated in France
3. Arrest and imprisonment in “Immigrants Detention Centers” (CIE)
4. The outrageous arrest of those who cannot apply for asylum immediately and benefit from protection as laid down in International and French Law, due to the extremely high figure of applicants within the reception system. Many people are given notice to leave the country.
5. Proceedings started against people who help migrants because of:
 - The obsessive fear of European states to be invaded
 - A migration policy, so to speak, that is actually just a set of police acts.

We are filled with shame.

To better explain this aspect, I would like to share an unacceptable example of imprisonment in the “Immigrants Detention Center” of Paris – Vincennes.

*“K.D”, a 42-year-old Cameroonian, has been imprisoned for 14 days ...
... Until the flight and transfer from the detention center is planned...If it will ever be.*

>>>> [this story will be told during the testimony]

The implementation of more severe criteria for the stay of foreigners is tangible; illegal migrants coming from Africa or the Middle East are returned at all costs, especially those crossing Italy and Spain: illegal migrants from neighboring countries must not be accepted.... What they’ve been through during their journey doesn’t matter! That’s why even migrants with the right documents to enter a Schengen-Area country are imprisoned (like K.D.). This proves, if proof was ever needed, that a common European policy towards foreigners no longer exists. Every man for himself! Increasingly out of touch with one’s own humanity!

Young unaccompanied migrants: the perspective of an Association in Nantes working with them.

The main issue is accommodation. There is an increasing number of unaccompanied minors or families with children and newborns who are living on the street or in illegal houses. They are frequently evicted and left on the street again, looking for another shelter. Associations do their best to find food for them as well as mattresses for the night and all they need to survive.

The members of the Association in Nantes feel reassured as an increasing number of citizens come together to join this cause:

- People living in an apartment building in Rezé, a town near Nantes, have founded a support committee to help a family from Dagestan living in their same building
- Several people offer their help to local organizations and to the police.
- Some students' parents and teachers take action when they are encouraged to do so, or they take the initiative and organize charity buffets.
- Associations of facilities' owners voluntarily take shifts to receive young people in their facilities.
- Lastly, all the members of the Network "Education without Borders" (Réseau education Sans Frontières) are actively involved in helping families or unaccompanied young migrants.

By and large, the new asylum regulation will make things even harder. Testimony of a retired woman who became the voluntary tutor of a young migrant.

M. S. was born in 1999. Country of origin: Mali....

... a complaint/appeal has been lodged.

>>>>>[this story will be told during the testimony]

If the judge rules in his favor, his future will be bright: he is a trained house painter... He will have a good chance of starting a new life in France or in Mali.

Otherwise, what can he do if the cruelty of his step-father prevents him from going back to his village? Or if he has nobody outside of this village who can take care of him? If he has no education or training to secure a good job?

M.S. may end up on the street in the hands of illegal traffickers.

Supportive people who decide to help him could be found guilty of the "crime of solidarity".

Workshops

Workshop - Italy

For a church that is poor in power

edited by the grassroot community of "San Paolo" - Rome

What is the power of the church today? What tools it is exercised with?

How to build a poor church without power?

A reflection on a poor church can not stop at the economic aspect alone, it requires going further and touching the fundamental knot: that of the power of the church.

The church will never be poor until it is stripped of its power: the one based on the control of consciences. This is the true power of the church, the one for which political powers fear it and seek its support, granting it privileges from which they expect returns in terms of electoral consensus. Important instruments of these exchanges of "favors and privileges" are today the concordats between the church and the different national states

The essential tool for controlling consciences is fear. No other tool is just as effective. It is then explained why a subject, like that of sexuality, has become so central, with an incredibly detailed case series of prohibitions. It is primarily through sexuality that the catholic church has exercised and exercises its power of control over consciences. A powerful weapon that is used throughout the life of people, from boys and girls to older people; almost everything is wrong: no to masturbation, no to sexual union between two unmarried persons, no to any form of contraception, no to homosexual relationships.

The dream of Jesus to create a community of faith, which freely adhered to his proposal of love, with which to share the journey for the construction of the kingdom of God, thus dies between prohibitions and threats of eternal punishment for a breakdown, a weakness, a fantasy, maybe release. Thus diverting attention from true sin: betrayal, deception, lack of respect for people, violence.

The proposal of faith creates disciples, conscious and responsible followers, fear creates subjects, which ensure the maintenance of power.

The church, selling off the Gospel message and looking for privileges has yielded and yields to the temptation to obtain for fear and not for freedom, from a position of power and not of service, the love and subjection of those who call "sons".

Is it possible to dream and build a church that is poor and without power? A

church that abandones concordat privileges? A church that finds its only strength in the Gospel?

Workshop - France

Church 2030

- By what evangelical values are our commitments made?
 - Do we feel in phase or out of step with the Church, her organization, her speeches, her practices?
 - What Church testimonies do we propose to build for 2030
-

Workshop - Spain

Globalization and Frontiers

>>>> No text available

Workshop - Italy

The Cry of the Earth, the Cry of the Poor

by the grassroot community of Cassano , Naples- Italy

>>>> No text available

Workshop - Belgium Wallonia and Brussels

Voluntary simplicity

(see the homonymous Testimony page 17)

Questions to help in Workshop

1. How do you feel about the idea of simplicity?
 - familiar / foreign;
 - comfortable / rather uncomfortable;

- enthusiastic / rather skeptical;
- joyful / sad;
- frustrated / filled;
- braked / on track

Why ?

2. In your opinion, what connects the simple life approach to the question of social justice and solidarity?
 - What would possibly keep it away?
 - To what do we have to be vigilant when we try to live simply so that we do not move away from a process of justice? Or is it impossible?
 - Does the citation attributed to Gandhi translated into reality : *"To live simply so that others may simply live"*
3. What is difficult for you in the idea of simply living? What are you afraid of? What is a hindrance to going further in the process? What would help you to dive more drastically?

Pierre Collet - ccb Nivelles

Workshop - Italy

Poverty, the eyes of women: thoughts and practices

by the Women's Groups of grassrrot community "Viottoli" - Pinerolo

>>>> No text available

Workshop - Switzerland

Read the Bible, read the life.

A biblical dialogue about poverty in everyday life.

We will propose in Rimini a passage of the Gospel in different languages so that each and everyone can read and hear in his own language.

After exchanging our opinions on the text we will ask ourselves where the word of God touches, reinforces and challenges our daily life.

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Index

Program

2° of cover

Presentations

• Austria	1
• Belgium (<i>french_speaking</i>)	2
• France	3
• Italy	4
• Holland	6
• Spain	8
• Basque Country	10
• Switzerland (<i>French and German speaking</i>)	12

Conference

prof. Riccardo Petrella	14
Conference - annexe	16

Testimonies

- Voluntary simplicity (<i>Belgium f</i>)	17
- Politics and poverty (<i>Austria</i>)	19
- Poverty and Multinationals: The Initiative for responsible multinationals (<i>Switzerland d</i>)	22
- Immigration and reception (<i>France</i>)	24

Workshops

26-28

- For a church that is poor in power (*CBC san Paolo, Roma - IT*)
- Church 2030 (*France*)
- Globalization and refugees (*Spain*)
- Ecology (*Italy*)
- Voluntary simplicity (*Belgium f*)
- Poverty, the eyes of women: thoughts and practices (*Women's grassroot community "Viottoli" - Pinerolo*)
- Read the Bible, read life. A biblical dialogue on everyday poverty (*German-speaking Switzerland*)

List of participants

Index

3° of cover

European meetings of Grassroots Communities

4° of cover

European Meetings of Grassroots Communities from Amsterdam 1983 to Rimini 2018

1. ***The Faith of Liberation in Europe.*** Amsterdam, May 12-15, 1983
2. ***Christian faith: commitment to liberation; the CCBs in comparison with theology of liberation and European theology.***
Turin, April 24-28, 1985
3. ***Evangelization and new mechanisms of oppression and marginalization in Europe.*** Bilbao, 8-11 October 1987
4. ***Social justice in 1992 in Europe*** - Paris, 26-29 July 1991
5. ***Which paths for churches in a pluralistic society?***
Innsbruck, 5-7 November 1993
6. ***Which paths for Grassroots Communities in Europe today?*** Geneva, November 30-December 2, 1995
7. ***Meeting of delegates of the European Grassroots Communities.***
Edinburgh, 24-27 October 2003
8. ***Living the Faith Today.*** Vienna, 1-3 May 2009
9. ***The Gospel will make us free. Experiences, Commitments and Answers of Grassroots Communities against the neoliberal system.***
Buizingen, 19-21 September 2014
10. ***A church poor and of the poor for a fairer world.***
Rimini, 21-23 september 2018

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Note: The translations, where not indicated, have been realized by the students of the DIT - Department of Interpretation and Translation; University of Bologna - Forlì site

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