

Transatlantic Christian Council: Welfare state may lead to disbelief

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Founding conference of Transatlantic Christian Council, 4 December 2013 in Brussels. Photo RD.

The network is finally here. After months of preparation, the TCC (Transatlantic Christian Council) held its first conference on Wednesday in Brussels, with the aim of enabling Christian thinkers from both continents to get to know each other better.

"Speakers too moderate about free market"

Frits Bolkestein has known for a long time that religion is much more important in America than in Europe. This is the "biggest difference" between the two continents. But he did not dare to make a definitive statement on the cause of this.

Yet on Wednesday, at the founding conference of the Transatlantic Christian Council (TCC), he did attempt to explain this. After the Second World War, Europeans got used to a welfare state. "That led to the spoiled citizen. It could be that spoiling leads to unbelief. But I don't know that for sure either."

The former VVD leader and Eurocommissioner had been asked to speak about "post-secular times". But he could not do much with this concept, he said. The Netherlands is a largely secularised country and it will remain so, he said. "Society will develop the way it does now. Nothing will follow that secular phase, in my opinion."

The American Dutchman Jeff Fountain of the Schuman Centre asked Bolkestein whether new spiritual currents might take hold after the secular era and whether Christianity might revive. Bolkestein: "That is possible, but I do not see it. For the time being, the secular era is the final phase."

The TCC was founded to give Christians and conservatives a common platform to share their ideas on small government, the free market and the strong family. The starting point is that Europe and North America share the same values. No wonder therefore that there were participants from both continents. As the conference was held in Brussels, officials from NATO and the European Commission also attended.

The loss of the family as a cornerstone of society was widely deplored. "John O'Sullivan of the Danube Institute in Budapest said: "You can only compensate for this with a lot of rules. But increasing the number of rules is not what fits with the TCC's vision of small government.

According to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the protection of the family is a task of the government. But John Fonte of the Hudson Institute noted with regret that governments do little in this area.

Marriage

A lot of poverty can be explained by the malfunctioning of the family, says Jennifer Marshall of The Heritage Foundation in Washington. "In 80 per cent of cases, children living in poverty do not have a father in the house. If there is one area where it appears that marriage is in the public interest, it is here."

Equally serious concerns appeared to be in the area of human rights. Traditionally, these offered individuals and groups protection from an overly meddlesome government. But Sophia Kuby of European Dignity Watch questioned whether it was still useful to invoke them. "This field seems to have been hijacked today by the anti-discrimination crowd. They want to use human rights to break into civil society. Those two approaches are irreconcilable."

Seen in this way, human rights touch on the theme of political correctness. Today it is fashionable to ask for recognition of diversity (for example for different sexual orientations), John Fonte observed. "But as soon as the government starts to enforce this through education, this has nothing to do with respect for spontaneous variation. This coercion is simply cultural Marxism."

This coercion on schools has led to a greater need for homeschooling in America. Marshall: "Both religious and non-religious parents participate in this. In recent years, great strides have been made in this regard."

Marie Smith lobbies worldwide for the protection of life. This is the basis of all rights, she said. "Without a right to life, other rights have no meaning." She strongly opposed the claim that abortion is a human right. "That is not in any treaty. Hillary Clinton can repeat that this is a fundamental right of women, but that's just not true."

However, the threat to the right to life also has a positive side, Smith knew. "The fight for this connects people of different religions."

Original sin

Frits Bolkestein wondered why the West hardly takes any notice of the fact that Christianity is "by far the most persecuted faith". "That is because of the loss of faith in one's own civilisation. After centuries of teaching about original sin, people are overloaded with guilt, but no longer believe in forgiveness. Then they doubt themselves."

In Europe itself, direct persecution of Christians does not occur, but there are hundreds of cases of vandalism and discrimination to report, said Martin Kugler of the Observatory of Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Vienna. "Intolerance sometimes also comes in the form of deliberate legal restrictions. Think of the British equality laws, which require adoption agencies to also offer children to gay couples, as a result of which Roman Catholic institutions have had to close their doors."

"Conference at crucial moment".

Bartosz Gradecki, a Pole, is interested in anything to do with the combination of the free market and Christian faith. Via the Acton Institute in Washington, USA, he heard about the conference of the Transatlantic Christian Council in Brussels yesterday.

He noticed that most of the speakers were "quite moderate" about the free market. "They mainly emphasised the problems. I myself am a radical advocate of the free market. They could have been a bit more positive for me."

"Christians are not alone in struggle"

Former US Congressman Bill Redmond is involved with the Colson Centre and came to the TCC conference for that reason.

This conference came at a "crucial moment in history", he says.

He takes a small booklet with the American Declaration of Independence out of his pocket. "This talks about inalienable rights. The right to life is one of them. If that is taken away, the whole charter of human rights is about to collapse. The government should know that."

Room rental to homosexual couple

Rose and Hazelmary Bull thought they were on their own last week. They were fined by England's highest court for refusing a homosexual couple a double room in their guest house.

At the conference, they encountered much support. "We do not know why God has chosen us to go through this. There are attempts to banish Christians to the margins. It is encouraging to know that we are not alone."