

CIVILISTIC MANIFESTO
EXTRACT OF THE "CIVILISTIC MANIFESTO".

Extract of the "Civilistic Manifesto" by the author: Prof. Olaf baron van Boetzelaer, President of the Civilistic League

THE VALUE OF VALUES

Principled as opposed to unprincipled government

The spiritual and moral ethos of our age is distinguished by a number of well-defined characteristics, which in turn have been projected on to the style of government adopted by our leaders. In this modern era, the spirit of the times is very clearly reflected in the political thinking of the government, and also in political thinking about government. Most of our statesmen would agree with the nineteenth century British prime minister, who once said: "I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?". What, then, are these spiritually-defining characteristics?

A. Individualism.

This line of reasoning is dominated by egocentric considerations: "I think, I have the right, I want, so therefore ..." This "I" mentality does little or nothing to promote feelings and thoughts based on spiritual and emotional ties with others. This is certainly the case with regard to feelings based on common nationality: love of country, national spirit, "patriotism". It is also becoming more and more the case with family ties, both in the narrower and the wider sense. We are all aware that in these modern times the position of the family -- as a coherent, caring basic unit of society, with a clear hierarchical structure -- is coming under ever increasing pressure from a whole range of external influences. Not least of external influences is the increasing predominance of the "I" mentality referred to, which is prevailing over solidarity, and more distant family relations have been eroded even more strongly. We are now far removed from the old bible concept of a 'clan spirit'. National awareness, previously known as patriotism, is also a mere shadow of what it once was. And whilst it cannot be denied that a number of these developments have helped to make our lives easier and more comfortable, we must not lose sight of the negative effect on social cohesion and social control. In our present day philosophy, individualism is running out of control and is threatening to lead to the atomization of society.

B. Secularization.

Religious convictions have been strongly eroded, religious knowledge is becoming less and less widespread and the relevance of the Christian faith as a guideline for social and economic relationships has been largely undermined (except in overtly Christian circles). The number of practicing churchgoers, certainly in the Netherlands but also in other countries, has reached a historic low and is continuing to fall still further. Of course, faith or none-faith is each one's personal decision and having a religion does not necessarily make someone a better person. Only, the ethical code inherent to religion has evaporated, for many together with the erosion of the faith, without other values and norms filling the void.

C. Criminalisation

Regrettably, all categories of crime -- including the most terrible -- have increased considerably in recent years. As a result, there is not only a greater subjective feeling of insecurity within society, but there is also a greater objective chance that we will actually become the victims of crime.

D. Multi-culturalism.

Concepts such as "our country", "our people", "our language", "our history" -- concepts in which we could and should be proud -- are now regarded as "politically incorrect" and are dismissed as old-fashioned and nationalistic. All cultures are regarded as equal, the (desirable) domination of Dutch culture within the Netherlands is viewed in a new and less favourable light, tolerance and multiform are considered to be the highest values. Of course there are a number of independent thinkers such as

Bolkestein, Paul Scheffer (of the Wiardi-Beckman Institute, in his essay "The Multi Cultural Drama") and the late G.B.J. Hiltermann — who have put and who continue to put the opposite point of view.

E. The growth of materialism and technocracy.

Central in a many people's thoughts and minds is the desire to secure financial and economic advantage, the idea of "having" rather than "being". Everything -- or almost everything -- must be sacrificed to this sacred goal. Moreover, it is a goal where "the ends always justify the means". And who better to implement this dubious philosophy than the faceless technocrats, unprincipled managers who think first and foremost in terms of money and the glamour of their organization?

F. Consensus culture.

This culture — which at first sight would appear to be incompatible with the individualism referred to above -- involves the perpetuation of meetings and discussions for as long as is necessary to reach a compromise agreement, in which all parties to a given problem can find some elements of satisfaction. This is the so called "win-win" situation. In these circumstances there is no undisputed leader, whose task is to hear the arguments of both sides and then take a final, balanced decision. On the contrary, the main task of the so-called modern leader is to create a broad platform of support for the general acceptance of any decisions reached by means of consensus. The negative aspect of this type of decision making process is that it is very difficult to take effective or radical action to solve even the most blatant abuses. In this sense, consensus solutions are often false solutions, impotent political compromises, which attempt to mix fire with water. Moreover, in order to reach such meaningless compromises a great deal of time and energy is wasted. In addition, it is also quite common that certain parties to particular agreements seek to sabotage the measures agreed through the machinery of the central government, either by not carrying out the said measures or by carrying them out so flexibly, as to ensure a dilution of their intended effect. For example, the heavily criticized WAO (Work Incapacity Law) compromise of a few years ago did nothing to prevent the number of persons unfit for work rising towards the one million mark. Social organizations boycott the implementation law and offer shelter to asylum seekers, who have exhausted all official channels.

G. Crisis in education.

"Critical" educators try to estrange their pupils from the values and basic tenets of our Western civilization, which partly have Christianity, partly "common sense" and partly the evolution of our opinions as their sources. Among other things are put into question: parental authority, respect for people who are older or who have specific responsibilities, the logical corollary that no society can do without a certain authority as well as the evidence that not the same value should be attached to everybody's opinion. A disparaging attitude is demonstrated towards honesty, diligence, a sense of responsibility for the society and courtesy, without which no society is viable. No wonder crime statistics went up. Sometimes a destructive attitude is furthered towards our Western civilization, authority as such and a guilt-complex with respect to the historic role of the Western world.

H. Crisis of politics

Political parties have the vocation of being transmission channels for the political aspirations of the people based upon a coherent "helicopter-view" of society. Nowadays, because of the loss of an ideological or anyway distinctive identity, they live up less and less to this vocation. The parties shed off their "ideological feathers" and state that the time of the "great narratives" is over. Besides that, the individualistic and hedonist spirit of the age ("Zeitgeist") brings about that citizens have become more calculating in function of their perceived self-interest, they withdraw into "cocooning" and are less and less disposed to engaged themselves politically inspired by a coherent over-all vision of society. This being the case, the political parties are increasingly being used as "career-vehicles" whereas the most treasured quality seems to be telegenic.

The present Purple Cabinet (liberals with social democrats) very well reflects reflects the spirit of this age, as outlined above. It unites free-thinking liberals and social democrats, who have both shed their ideological feathers, so that in this instance fire and water can combine. It is technocratic and

pragmatic, rather than visionary. It stimulates further growth of individualism within society (now referred to as “self-determination”), by encouraging both husband and wife to become economically independent units through participation in the labour market. To an important degree, it has granted homosexual relationships legal equality with heterosexual relationships. It gives priority to (supposed) economic interest above and environmental and welfare matters (cf. the so called Betuwe line). By focusing on economic considerations and by working to rigid time tables, it has depersonalized health service. Since it is obliged to work on the basis of compromise agreements, it has not been able to stand the tide of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers. It has been equally unable to take firm and determined action against the criminal community and has failed to reduce both the large-scale trading of drugs within the Netherlands and the export of chemical stimulants abroad. It has great difficulty in criticizing bad behavior on the part of its citizens. For example, if young Dutch holiday makers cause trouble on a large scale during their vacations in Southern Europe, not a single government minister will say a word against them.

As the Civilistic League, we must in a certain sense articulate a political philosophy designed to challenge and change the prevailing spirit of the age. Amongst other things, this will involve promoting solidarity instead of the solitary, putting the needs of the environment before the wishes of the concrete-worshipping planners, placing human interest and care for others before mere money making, taken an iron hard-line with criminality, drugs and drink abuse, promoting the “small is beautiful” philosophy against the soulless anonymity of mega corporations. This will not happen without a coherent social ideology, which can appeal in a real and relevant manner to the man and woman in the street. Moreover, this ideology must not only be designed to appeal to religiously-inspired voters, but also to those who have a more open view on recent developments in society and who are currently more politically inclined towards liberalism and social democracy.

And what would be the main planks of this ethical and idealistic creed, which must stand against the unprincipled pragmatism of technocratic “management”?

I. There is an immutable and transcendent moral standard, which is independent of both time and place. This standard must continue to be upheld and must be used to direct the social life of the community. Both principally and historically for the Civilistic League, this can only mean continuing to explicitly express and promote the social values and standard contained within the Gospel. Even for non-Christians, these values and standards should be regarded as the authoritative basis of our civilization.

II. Men and women not only have rights but also obligations as members of the civil communities in which they live: town, province, country, even the European Union. This means that the community can offer its members solidarity. But it means equally that the community can -- and must -- make its own demands of these same members. Consequently, it is the duty of a humane society to deal firmly with those who misuse their humanitarian privileges, even more so those who behave in a criminal manner.

III. Men and women also have rights and obligations as members of their own natural community; family. Consequently, the government must on the one hand do everything it can to help families, while at the same time making these families and their more distant relatives aware of their obligations towards each other. In a wider sense, it is also possible to argue that all our material, cultural and spiritual achievements/possessions represent an inheritance passed down to us by our forebears and that we all have a duty to protect and further develop this inheritance. In this way a link is formed between past, present and future generations.

IV. Men and women also have rights as employed persons. In particular, they have the right to be rewarded for their labours, at a level in accordance with the qualitative character and importance of their work. Nevertheless, it is necessary and appropriate to carry out further social dialogue with regards to the relative weighing of salaries. Why should a football-player earn millions, when geriatric

nurses earn so little?

V. Religion, Christian values and spiritual values in general are of great relevance for mankind and for society, and should consequently be defended and promoted by the government. This implies that the actions and activities of the government will not be “valueless”, which of course, is also in keeping with its duty to maintain the transcendent moral code (see point I above).

VI. The trend towards individualism and the atomization of society must be reversed. Spiritless collectivism must be replaced by a concept of mutual solidarity, based on well-defined and naturally developing geographical communities (town, province, country, European Union), on the natural communities of family and relatives and on the work community formed by employers and employees.

Geographical and historical communities have a value in their own right and each member of such a community is subject to a series of rights and obligations. In this context, subsidiarity should be the guiding principle: this means that there should be as much downwards devolution of power to lower levels as possible, consistent with the effective organization and management of the stated objective.

Family is the cornerstone of society and ideally relationships within the community should take the family as their example.

In the working community, an organic structure must be devised, which will allow effective cooperation between management, labour and capital, so that polarization between these elements can be avoided. It is also time for reassessment and revision of the “corporate idea”, centered around the theme “unity in diversity”.

VII. Personalism: in line with the theses above-cited a person has the vocation to perfect himself and to fully develop his talents.

VIII. Meritocracy – advancement based on merit – must be promoted. Key positions must be occupied by the most able people, the spiritual elite, which must follow its calling to serve the general good without respect of persons and without the expectation of earning vast amounts of money.

IX. The government must uphold the law and must implement in full all legally taken decisions, if necessary calling upon the support of the police and the judiciary system. The Dutch “culture of tolerance” must be brought to an end. The state government must take swift and effective action, if subsidiary government or executive organizations are seen to be sabotaging properly agreed decisions, as has in the past been the case with the implementation law regarding asylum policy and the WAO (Work Incapacity Law). The current explosion of crime, which is partly international in character, requires the introduction of a series of draconian counter-measures and sanctions and of course: international cooperation.

X. Saving the environment requires drastic, strong measures which should be enforced stringently. Ecological durability must prevail over short-sighted acts motivated purely by financial profit.

Professor Olaf baron van Boetzelaer

Brugge, 18 August 2000

On 02-02-2002 the Civilistic League was founded as a think-tank and political active group in The Netherlands and Belgium, with Olaf van Boetzelaer as president.