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**Toespraak over Prophetic Pastoral Care op het Europees
Congres “profetic pastoral care and counseling”**

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In order to have a good look upon the Church in Belgium, one has to know how Belgium is composed. Three basic entities, cultural, social and politic, form a complex society and therefore also a complex Church. Living in the Wallon part is not the same as living in the Flandres. On top of that it is good to remember that in the south there is even a German speaking territory, not to speak of Brussels which is a cosmopolitan city.

The relationship with public life, with the regional and federal government is also complex. One could say that there is a clear seperation between State and Church, although this seperation is not equal in every sector of life. As a Church we depend very much on the state, as most of the property we use as a church belongs to the State or to the cities and villages. Parish priests are payed by the government, there is in the educational sector an parity between state and catholic schools, and social services are sustained by government aid. Of course, each of these have a back side of the medal too. In issues of social and ethical order the Church tries to voice its opinion. It has become very difficult to reason about ethics and politics from a Church point of view, as the media have become a decision making factor in whatever contributes to the mentality of the people. Secularisation has become a program handled by the media and by some leaders in this country.

The Church is very prominently present in the streetpicture and the landscape of Belgium, but at this point in history, there are forces trying to take a hold of these places which signify Gods' presence among us, trying to turn them over to cultural temples, meeting places and things of the kind.

This all shows that we are, as a Church, called to do some ropedancing in order not to loose our prophetic presence.

In the situation of a Church which looses interest in the wider society, where full time workers are hard to find, we invest in the formation of lay people. We know that God is at the search of people, He desperately wants to show his love to the people. We invest in de formation of lay people in order to give them the necessary tools to express their Faith in the reality of today. Only in this way they will be able to take up responsibilities in the future in a way proper to the needs of people and in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

Prophecy is broadening mind and vision. Prophets in the Church are missionaries, here and elsewhere. Opening perspective to the Church in the whole World is a sign of a broad mind and an open spirit. Missionaries have engaged in other cultures, in the context of other religious believes, collaborating for the good of the people. In our days being a missionary in our own country calls for this openness to the people around us who lost contact with our Church, but aslo with all believing practices. This is what we are working on, making of our Church in Belgium a missionary church.

A prophet in our Church, aside so many others who gave their life to poor and handicapped and far-away people, was certainly Father Damiaan De Veuster, Father Damian, whose canonisation is due on October 11th in Rome.

The openness to people, joined by the missionary spirit learns us how to deal with the migrants that enter every day in our country. They are our friends, they deserve our company, assistance and protection within the law of this country. But, the Church has also a duty to call the attention of our political leaders when it concerns the attitude of the government towards these people. Basis in this that they are equally human beings with us, and in Christian terms, they are sons and daughters of the same Father in Heaven.

Our prophetic presence in the Church expresses itself in the service we give to many needy people. This is done through institutions, like hospitals, Psychiatric clinics, homes for the aged, schools for the handicapped and many more. At the same time so many Christian volunteers are standby at these institutes, but, so many more are unseen visitors at lonely people's homes, so many dedicate their time to service of the needy, organising food services daily, taking handicapped in their home to release the family from this burden and so many other practices.

A prophetic role is taken up by catholic education. Schools in our country are for the great majority catholic. Boards and teachers dedicate themselves to the integral education of the Young, preparing a future for the country where it is good living together. An exponent of this endeavor for schools and education is the website Thomas of the faculty of theology. It offers insights and materials about Faith and Church to enable searching people to learn about the gospel and to offer tools and words to those who intend to express their Faith to others.

The great challenge to all I said above is the Christian identity of all these institutions, initiatives and activities by the Church. Most of our energy goes to thinking and activating the gospel identity within a deeply secularised World. It is this concern which gives us the strength to stand up and speak out for our Faith, simply because we feel supported by so many people searching together and expressing together the need for a concrete way of expressing the gospel message. We have lots of reasons to be concerned about the future, but we have no reason at all to be discouraged or pessimistic, as we are totally convinced that the Church is not ours. We are only poor administrators, or better still, weak and humble workers in the vineyard who feel that we are fully trusted by the Master.