

The Christian Academic Circle's
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Manifesto

Serving human person and community

In the current state of crisis in Europe and the world – the crisis that entails financial, economic, social and, most of all, moral issues – Croatia also has its fair share of serious problems. The crisis is, in fact, even deeper in our society due to the general sense of frustration, anguish, and fear, which has remained since the Croatian war of independence (1991-1995). The injustices and failures that have characterized the economy and social life during the transitional period have also had an impact.

Yet, in our moment in history, Croatia also has many good prospects and possibilities. At this crossroad between the present and the future, it is up to Croatia as a democratic country and all its citizens to establish their priorities, identify their major problems, and find appropriate methods to resolve them. In the European context, the country is to fulfil its own goals as well as its legitimate European interests. Croatia and its democratic institutions are facing a period of consolidation and adjustment of national life as it heads towards European and global integration, whereby Croatia will have to protect and promote a richer and more versatile development for its own identity and conditions of existence.

The sheer size of this historical task demands cooperation, solidarity, and the joining of all national and civil forces, including their elites in all spheres of life. This task also demands a considerable reduction and averting of harmful divisions that exist within Croatian society.

Therefore, we, as a civil association put forward this manifesto to the Croatian public, with the purpose of joining all the movements and forces within our society that have been working on its development and progress in trying to reach its full maturity as a democracy for the good of all Croatian citizens, in all areas of life and public activity, so as to eradicate the evils which prevent the progress of the Croatian nation.

Thus, being aware of the need to achieve a closer cooperation, solidarity, and unity of all democratic forces in Croatian public life, with this manifesto we wish to raise a few questions and contribute to their resolution, personally and together.

I. A concise diagnosis of the current state of affairs.

1. The Full-blown Crisis

The modern human being has stepped into the new world which he himself had created, with the prevalence of short-term solutions, and unpredictability. Scientific, technological and especially the information technology discoveries, together with their practical intervention into today's society, encroach deeply into the life of humankind, so much so that their destiny is inseparably connected with them.

Through the accomplishments of our civilization – spiritual, scientific, cultural and technological –, the 20th century was indeed great and in many ways cannot be compared to previous centuries. However, it was also one of the darkest periods in human history – wars, revolutions and totalitarian regimes, communist, fascist and national-socialist ones – shattered the lives of hundreds of millions. The Croatian people have shown a determined resistance to all totalitarian regimes. The 20th century was, in fact, the era of the biggest number of martyrs in Croatia, including the Christian ones.

On the other hand, the capitalistic world revealed the dark seamy side of its neo-liberal concept of freedom and democracy in the last three decades of the 20th century – with its unequal and unjust distribution of goods and with the prevalence of special money interests of a small number of those groups and individuals in developed countries who live in abundance and squander. That world not only joined the the dictatorships and Communist totalitarianism (e. g. in China), but also continued to produce stagnation, inequality, the destruction of the environment, poverty, and misery. The capitalistic world also allowed for the illnesses and famine of a great number of people in a series of regions and countries. Great social inequalities and injustice are a world problem and they even exist in highly developed countries.

These and other economic and developing inequalities, including those that exist between the rich and the poor parts of the world, remain the unsolved problem of our time and the unfulfilled promise of the rich towards the poor. To this list of inequalities, which create the tragic and unacceptable divisions in today's world, one should add cultural underdevelopment, lack of education, illiteracy, and insufficient or almost non-existing health care and care for the environment.

The basis for the current social, economic and financial troubles that are shaking the world is a deep spiritual crisis, the crisis of humanity and its basic values. Such a crisis requests the gathering of all democratic forces and of those who show great care for the whole of humanity, to whom the utmost value is the human person – her welfare, dignity, and life that is humane and worthy of every human being.

2. *The problems of globalisation*

The contemporary processes of globalisation, the collapses of social systems, the contributions of information technology and electronics, as well as the overall progress of technology, have left a strong mark on the mentality and life of modern people. Globalisation includes both positive and negative processes. It enlivens trading and the movement of capital, including the economy. It connects different countries and continents, shapes the networks of economic enterprises, reinforces efficiency, and brings about the possibility of global communication, the latter being particularly shaped by the Internet. The processes of globalisation enable the spread of information throughout the world and thus raise people's awareness of the many contemporary planetary problems, such as the warming of the Earth's atmosphere and troubles of humans in all places in the world.

At the same time, globalisation contributes to the erosion of national and cultural identities. It weakens the richness of cultural diversity; it exhausts all endeavours in trying to overcome superficial stereotypes, and brings about cultural uniformity. It stimulates the financiering of the economy and the economization of politics, and by insisting on deregulation, globalisation encourages the economic and social decline of the smaller and less efficient groups and societies.

To be sure, there are ideas that accompany globalisation, among them the ideas about democracy, equality amongst all people, human rights, freedom, and the rule of law. Such ideas have contributed to the progress of many societies and their liberation. Yet, in other places globalisation has caused unemployment, oppression, and the exclusion of the weak across different societies; it has contributed to the impoverishment of one part of humankind economically, socially, and in terms of their sense of humanity. Despite its significant contributions to the betterment of the world, globalisation has thus played a part in the rise of many inequalities. In its neo-liberal incursion, under the leadership of the bigger and more powerful elites, and with the competition shaped by inequalities, globalisation has created an even deeper division between the bigger and smaller nations, between the rich and the poor.

In addition to such economic and social developments, one ought not to forget the political processes. Indeed, despite the greater cooperation between the many countries of the world – to which the modern world is forced or otherwise could risk the destruction of the planet – the political events and international relations are strongly influenced by competing financial, economic, geo-strategic, and political interests. We are also facing growing violence, international terrorism, and organised crime; witnessing the power of fanaticism, integrism, and fundamentalism, which cause animosity between different religious groups and movements thus creating a general atmosphere of insecurity, often threatening with aggression, or looking for war and reckless aggression as a solution to inter-

national disagreements. However, while some suggest that we are witnessing today a war between civilizations, we want point out not only the vital need for their peaceful encounters but also note the encouraging signs of their convergence.

3. The Demise of Working towards the Common Good

The aforementioned negative processes and developments, and the post-effects of the neo-liberal aspects of globalisation, are incompatible with the common good as the supreme goal of the state and society for which one should strive in each country and in the world as a whole. They are especially visible in politics, which should express public interest and not be subjected to economic considerations and private interests. The negative processes and developments discussed above are also reflected in unjust laws that result in a privileged position of the bigger, more powerful nations and financial capital. Such developments especially include some of the following phenomena, which one finds in Croatia as well:

1. putting individual interests – whether those of certain political parties or other interest groups – above public interest and common good;
2. the disregard and insufficient support for building a lawful and social state, especially ignoring the European democratic spirit within institutions of public interest – from the highest to the lowest institutions;
3. the great social injustices and economic inequalities between people and different social classes which are not the fruit of honest work;
4. the tolerance of different forms of corruption and bribery, ranging from the conflict of interests to the extortion and exploitation of public services and positions for private purposes and interests, even tolerance of the socially and morally unacceptable privileges that are regulated by law;
5. the acceptance of high unemployment rates and the lack of prospect for young people, especially the quiet acquiescence of the permanent departure – or the brain drain – of the young and highly educated population. All of that contributes to the cultural impoverishment of the country and its demographic collapse;
6. enticing to excessive spending, living above the means, and creating the dependence of debt and even the debtors' slavery;
7. the reckless destruction of non-renewable natural resources and the dilapidation and contamination of many other resources;
8. reducing the rights of employees, especially workers with lower income, and irregular salary payment or even their full cessation;
9. insufficient care of the state for the socially vulnerable sectors of the population, especially for children, the young people, women, workers, and retirees and, more generally, the great social injustices and economic disparity between different social classes.

10. toleration of the arrogance of the elite – those in different branches of power and political parties – and the closed character of public services, bureaucracy, and insensibility for the rights, needs, and problems of its citizens;
11. the promotion of exaggerated individualism, relativism, and nihilism as well as social anomie and irresponsibility;
12. widespread lawlessness and violence, especially amongst young people, and organised crime;
13. the establishment of the feeling of insecurity amongst citizens, the sense that they are not protected by the police, courts, and lawyers, which abets many of them to take 'justice' into their own hands;
14. lightly taken neo-liberal solutions in economy, as well as advocacy of the indispensability of deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of almost all sectors in society, especially the health and educational sector as guarantors of equality and solidarity;
15. the absence of recognition and disregard of the legitimate national interests in politics and economy, particularly of cultural identity; the insufficient protection and promotion of those interests and identity in relation to the larger world, without a narrow-minded nationalism or closed-mindedness but also without subordination;
16. the lack of self-criticism amongst the members of clergy, the consistent concealment of one's own mistakes, the use of authority to shield oneself from the world, the claims to an exclusive right to the truth, and the insufficient knowledge of some fundamental and profound problems of the modern humans.

We ought to uncover the sources of and reasons for the problems and processes described above and work toward their prevention. That is where the Christian Academic Circle sees its role and recognizes its duty to act concretely, in cooperation with other voluntary associations and institutions in Croatia.

II. The affirmation of true values

1. For the rehabilitation of the human person

The first precondition of every true democracy and every honest, humanistic, and intelligent politics is a complete and consistent respect of every human being as a supreme value, regardless of sex, skin colour, nation, language, religion, belief, class, social position and political choice.

Indeed, the human person is the highest value in this world. Every human person is called to respect the common good of one's own society but nobody can be the instrument, but the aim. Society must respect the true goodness of every human being whilst the individual must respect the common good of society to which s/he belongs.

After the difficult and tragic experiences that have spanned the entire history of mankind, people of good will, of all beliefs and convictions who share a similar vision of the dignity and value of the human person, stand today before the historical task of its rehabilitation and affirmation. In order to respond concretely to that demanding challenge and to move forward to realising these human goals, it is important that there is a commitment from all significant spiritual, intellectual and other forces, as well as adequate political, social, economical, and technical resources.

Humanity needs a constant, real and permanent evolution in reassessing, renewing and rebuilding of all basic human values. This is especially important for our time, when the human person is still being devalued, humiliated and denied. We are not thinking here of any new or old ideology but rather of the indispensability of a 'new practice'— the concrete spiritual and social affirmation of, and the engagement for, one true humane world, a world that seeks a more complete and more fulfilled human life.

2. Concrete tasks

The Christian Academic Circle wants to propose that all people and communities in Croatia who have a positive attitude towards life and the human person, and this includes the Christian Academic Circle as well, have the following tasks:

1. To build the value of every human person and of human communities, to invest in ourselves and to encourage and help others in achieving that;
2. To strengthen the presence, commitment, cooperation and connection of such positive forces in Croatian society, and to take risks by entering the public life and dialogue when the important concerns are in question;
3. To cooperate with segments of civil society that equally or similarly strive for the basic human values such as respect, the protection of life and of family, motherhood and fatherhood, women, children, basic human rights, civil commitment, righteously paid work and natural and cultural heritage;

4. To work on respecting the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality in the Croatian society, on the state level and in church communities, and to raise the spirit of solidarity, especially towards those who are most needy and the least-fortunate ones;
5. To help the Roman Catholic Church become less preoccupied with defending its own position and authority, and subsequently focus more on serving every human being and the entire humanity.

Furthermore, it is extremely important to defend and support those who advocate:

1. The culture of life and the protection of the natural and human environment as well as irreplaceable natural treasures, especially water and the sea, in Croatia, Europe, and around the world;
2. The rights of disabled people, especially those with mental difficulties;
3. The greater social justice and equality amongst all citizens, and a greater affirmation of workers' rights;
4. The idea of work as a greater value than just economic gain, and the participation of workers in the running, ownership, and profit of a company in which they work;
5. The affirmation of personal civil responsibility and commitment;
6. The competence and excellence in work and quality and socially useful work;
7. Croatian patriotism and the will to live together with all people who love Croatia as their homeland, and the Croatian state as the place for the practice of democracy;
8. The rehabilitation of politics as an activity that serves public interest and the common good, as well as the shared responsibility to build a society and a state of equality for all Croatian citizens, particularly for the right of the Croatian people as a constitutive nation in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
9. A society of progress, in which education and the responsible upbringing of new generations will be the basis of knowledge and culture, as one of the greatest treasures in the Croatian society;
10. The careful and responsible examination of Croatia's past and present, in order to reach both the individual and collective understanding of everything that has shaped that past and present in a European context and especially in relation to neighbouring nations, as to create the foundations for reconciliation, peaceful coexistence and fruitful cooperation;
11. Europe as a community of citizens and nations, the rule of law, ethical and moral values and diversity of identities; the place for Croatian historical and cultural roots in a jointly held sovereignty of states within the Council of Europe and the European Union.

III. The Christian Academic Circle

1. What kind of a Circle?

The Christian Academic Circle was founded in 2002 in Zagreb, at the initiative of a group of the Croatian Christianly oriented intellectuals to help facilitate the independent and free inquiry into the most important questions of our time, in the light of Christian spirituality, evangelic spirit, integral humanism, and authentic personalism as a 'new practice' in human interrelations and social action.

The Circle wishes to be a new, visible and distinctive expression of group collaboration, to shape and deepen the spiritual, intellectual and social aspects of life. The Circle desires to build relationships through a self-reflexive consideration of one's own conscience, to bring to resolution to memories of the past, behaviours and relations between Christians themselves as well as their relationship with other non-Christian communities and people whose beliefs respect basic human values. *The Circle* wishes to bring the heritage of civil society into church life and the values of authentic Christianity into civil society.

Consequently, *The Circle* is open for:

- intellectuals who are Christians, young and old, who share the same values and advocate a better world and a more humane life, especially in Croatia;
- all the members of the academic community in Croatia, regardless of their worldviews, religious and political direction, who share similar basic values and concerns.

With this manifesto the Circle invites both Christian and non-Christian intellectuals to collaborate and to commit and focus on the things that bring us closer and connect us.

The Circle calls for contributions to its magazine, *Nova prisutnost* (The New Presence), which addresses spiritual, intellectual and social concerns and which is now entering its 7th year of publishing. The Circle is also calling for new suggestions and initiatives.

2. *What kind of Christianity?*

We are aware of the deformations and anomalies of the Christian world, which for centuries has been, and still sometimes is, more declarative and decorative rather than authentic, alive and realistic. We are also conscious of some utterly inhuman behaviours that often marked actions of certain nations and many of those who identified as Christians, which had brought great shame and harm to authentic Christianity throughout history. We thus firmly affirm our complete commitment to Jesus Christ, and to the spirit, and the word of the Second Vatican Council. In stating this, we think about the many bright examples of people from all parts of society, people past and present, whose lives were faithfully dedicated to the fundamentals of Christ's teaching about the supreme value and the sameness of love towards God and the humans.

For Christianity to be trustworthy, convincing, and faithful to the original message of Jesus Christ in this modern world, it is necessary that it frees itself of all historical legacies that have distanced it from the truth of its message in life and practice. This especially refers to all those who had sometimes lightly and superficially called upon Christianity but never lived in accordance with it. The ideology of love must finally be replaced with the practice of love, true respect and the universal affirmation of the human person – without any exceptions and exclusions.

Therefore, *the Circle* will support those actions that attempt:

1. to permanently build important dimensions of the Church as a spiritual community of love, goodness and merciful humanity, especially of the poor and neglected, a community of peacemaking, hope and joy, of openness to all human beings, ecumenism and dialogue with the contemporary world;
2. to pervade the Church as a community of God's people with the evangelic spirit and to fight for the equal rights of its members, regardless of sex and social status in accepting duties and responsibilities;
3. to develop faith in the freedom of the human conscience; to support democracy and civil society, regardless of their flaws, and to reject any religious exclusiveness such as fanaticism, fundamentalism, and integrism.
4. to change the world while we are changing ourselves, which includes a constant and permanent spiritual deepening and transfiguration of the human awareness of oneself, others and God;
5. to develop a spirit of dialogue, peace and reconciliation between every individual and every nation, without combativeness, discrimination, belittling or selfishness, all in the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect;

6. to espouse Christianity that is inspired with personalism, gathered in small and living communities, established on the affinity and closeness of people, that suits humanity and not states, nations, or religious traditions;
7. to abandon all collectivistic and ideological concepts of Christianity, because Christianity is not ideology or doctrine, it is the spirit and life and the essence of its message and carries with it its openness to every human person, every person within a society, and within a frame of its civil, church and religious communities;
8. to reject any kind of 'political Christianity' and the submission of Christianity to politics; to distance itself from the mentality that seeks political benefits and advantages in a society amongst Christians and inside Christian circles, from top to bottom;
9. to nurture joy, constructivism and hope, and a readiness to cooperate, listen, understand; to affirm friendship and love, free inquiry and the responsible expression of ideas about oneself and others, about the world and the entire natural and supernatural reality in openness and honesty so as to search for the truth, in everything and about everything.

Since there cannot be authentic Christianity without humanity and without love for every human being – because Christianity itself is based on the deepest love for every human being – we affirm the kind of Christianity that will work with all other spiritual and intellectual forces of humankind and be able to contribute to the building of a happier human being and a better and more humane world.

Zagreb-Split, February 28, 2009

THE CHRISTIAN ACADEMIC CIRCLE