How to deal responsibly with business, AI and capitalism:
The CAPP Germany and Netherlands 2024 Joint Conference

The rise of AI and the geopolitical tensions of today present important challenges to governments, business and society. This formed the starting point for the 3rd German-Dutch CAPP conference, which took place on 22 and 23 November 2024. As per tradition, it takes place one day in Germany and one day in the Netherlands. Speakers at this year's conference included Dr. Hubertine Underberg-Ruder (CEO of Underberg AG), Prof. Jeroen van den Hoven (professor of ethics and technology at the Technical University Delft) and Prof. Jan Peter Balkenende (former prime minister of the Netherlands and emeritus professor at the Erasmus University Rotterdam).

The two-day conference started in Kevelaer (Germany), a historic and well-known centre of veneration and pilgrimage to Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted. In a vivid tour of the various places of prayer, Father **Markus Polder** shared how this place of pilgrimage emerged from 1642 onward when the first chapel was built and consecrated after a merchant had heard for three times a voice instructing him to build a chapel. Kevelaer has currently two chapels and a basilica. The tour included a visit of the Chapel of Mercy, the Chapel of Candles and the Basilica, with room for prayer and a musical recital on the impressive organ of the Basilica.

The dinner was held in the Refectory of the Priest's House, where everyone was welcomed by **Sylvia Trimborn-Ley.** She conveyed the welcoming address of CAPP's immediate past president **Anna Maria Tarantola's**, which pointed at the grave ethical dimension for entrepreneurs and society with big data and artificial intelligence. This brings – in the words of Pope Francis – an 'epochal change'. Algorithms offer great options, but we risk being colonized by algorithms, which are monitored, measured and monetised by only a small group of developers. The Pope has invited us not to abandon ourselves with the obsession of power that the technology can offer, but to actively understand and judge the technological innovation by seizing the opportunities it offers. That is where the Social Doctrine of the Church can provide a valuable compass.

During the dinner, Dr. **Hubertine Underberg-Ruder**, CEO of Underberg AG (Switzerland), spoke about Christian entrepreneurship. Dr. Underberg-Ruder is the CEO of a company well-known in the German speaking world and beyond for its herb liquor. She shared how, for this company that exists for well over 150 years, they have gone through a process to redefine the company values. 'Semper Idem' has been the company's leading motto, reflecting its aim that the same high quality of liquor would always be available. In the process to revisit the company's values, they went beyond this key objective, and aimed to make the nature, sustainability and cultural dimensions – relevant for how the company operates today – more visible. Dr. Underberg-Ruder openly shared how she experienced the process, which involved consultation of staff throughout the company and how that interacted with her perspectives and values derived from Christian entrepreneurship.

The second day of the conference continued in Steyl and Tegelen (the Netherands). Steyl is a place known for its four monasteries and is referred to as a Monastery Village. Three of the monasteries have been founded by Saint Arnold Janssen. It was in the Holy Ghost monastery, that H. Mass was celebrated in the chapel that belongs to the motherhouse of the Pink Sisters.

After mass, the conference continued in Tegelen with a welcome address by **Servé Hermans**. **Mons. Everard de Jong** moderated the conference, starting with Prof. **Jeroen van Hoven** raising questions on how to deal with AI. He opened new perspectives on AI by showing how AI is increasingly impacting our lives, how AI is becoming more effective and powerful, but also how important it is to understand the limits of AI. This growing influence raises important questions of what functions AI should be able to have. Legislation is moving slowly in this area, although the European AI Act of 2024 has created an important standard. Still many (ethical) questions remain unanswered of how AI can be used. For instance, for assessing job applicants in a job interview for medical purposes, or in warfare. The answer, according to Prof. Van Hoven, should be found in an ethical discourse. Driven by values, we have to reflect on what role AI can have in our society.

Next, Prof. **Jan Peter Balkenende** gave an address on the role of responsibility for capitalism to be reconnected (again) to society. He started by reiterating the importance of values for societies. They have been drivers behind the successful Millenium Development Goals, and also for the current Sustainable Development Goals in pursuing the value that nobody should be left behind. Societal values have also been articulated in the Social Teachings of the Church, such as Rerum Novarum and Laudato Sì, reiterating among other things that the world is our common home.

Prof. Balkenende pointed at gaps in our efforts to move in these directions. First, the world order as we have known it in the last decades is becoming less stable. As is clear from the growing conflicts and wars, there is geopolitical fragmentation. Second, while serving the stakeholder interests and not merely shareholder interests is an important lever for societal development, this happens limitedly. Third, we don't succeed well at shifting our societal focus from the short run to the long(er) run. For instance, our primary indicators are still mostly annual and mostly economic, such as the GDP. Prof. Balkenende points at his book, co-authored by Govert Buijs, on 'Capitalism Reconnected', in which they present the result of a broad European stakeholder consultation on how to deal with capitalism. From that book he puts forward four principles to rethink how capitalism should be reconnected: (i) it should respect human dignity, (ii) it should become inclusive, (iii) it should become regenerative, and (iv) it should rely on co-creation with other stakeholders.