

## There where nothing is certain and everything remains open

Beloved person,

In January the annual Machiavelli Prize for 2025 was won by the (TV program) Sinterklaas Journal. According to the judging panel, the program built bridges between tradition and renewal, between old and young and between people *with* and without children. It was praised for its accessibility, humour, intensity and societal sensitivity. A program rich in the power of connectivity.

The power of connectivity may be experienced at many moments and in many ways. If you search attentively, you will find it everywhere. For example, when you attend a multicultural festival or (perhaps for the first time) take part in a demonstration for peace. Or if you assemble a friendship book for the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of a dear friend.

However, the power of connectivity can also arise in a totally different way. By being close to someone and to stay in moments when it becomes tense or uncomfortable. By daring to be together 'when nothing is certain and everything remains open'.<sup>1</sup> By being nearby without your presence having to yield or solve anything, to be uplifting or to bring relief.

I recognised myself doing this in my contact with a mother who lost her son to suicide. She wrote: 'A year without end lies ahead of me. What a hell'. In my response I expressed the hope that some light will also shine on her path, even though that feels and seems impossible now. It is something deeply human to want to comfort others. To cheer someone up, as to soften the pain. To want to help, to want to resolve something. But this mother showed the way to something else... 'Just sit with me in the darkness and be there, let me be.'

*Without paths no losing way.*

*Without sun no ugly weather.*

*No health without ailments*

*and no less without more.*

*No below without above*

*and no behind without front.*

*Without doubts no believing.*

*Without silence nothing to hear.<sup>2</sup>*

The French philosopher Levinas describes vulnerability as the core of (fellow-) humanity itself, the entrance gate to the other. It requires courage to continue to stand in vulnerability, to acknowledge that we can never fully understand the other and still remain close by. Daring to show our vulnerability, our fears, doubts and not knowing is not seen as a sign of weakness by him, but as the most fundamental of human actions.<sup>3</sup> That is precisely where real connection arises. Not as an achievement but as a mercy.

And perhaps that is the greatest gift we can give to each other.

With a warm-hearted greeting,

Rob Groen and Marieke van Driel



<sup>1</sup> A sentence from the column 'Tweestrijd' (Conflict) by Sander de Hosson

<sup>2</sup> Poem: Zonder twijfel (Without doubt), Bette Westera (freely translated)

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy of vulnerability and responsibility