

FROM THE EDITOR

DISCOVERING THE BORDERS OF EUROPE

In the history of individuals, families, communities, or societies one comes across events which are landmarks for them, which are – as a contemporary thinker says – “foundational” (P. Ricoeur). Every such event confronts us with something which did not exist before, and which makes us look at things in a new light. For a family, the conception and birth of a child is such an event. A man and a woman who until then were only husband and wife, from that moment on are mother and father; they look at their lives through the prism of this fact which is the coming into the world of their child. From this point on, they see their life as divided into “before” and “after” this event. The event gives meaning to their life, in a certain way – defines it.

The case of the life of a nation is similar. And although in the history of any community it is more difficult to point to the one and only event which would prove decisive for its lot, when we look back at the history of the Polish nation and ask about its identity, we are inclined to think about Gniezno and the year AD 966 (i.e. the date of the baptism of Poland). Is it possible to point to such a decisive event within the history of Europe – this subcontinent, not too large but containing many nations with similar cultures and languages as well as a common religion – an event without which Europe would no longer be itself, even though it remained the same continent?

The origins of the history of Europe are hidden deep in the past and the multitude of its threads makes it difficult to select such an event. And yet the author of the *Acts of the Apostles* succeeded, perhaps, in doing this. What event was this and where did St. Luke describe it? Here – during St. Paul’s second apostolic journey in Asia Minor: “One night Paul had a vision: a Macedonian appeared and kept urging him with these words, «Come across to Macedonia and help us.» Once he had seen this vision he lost no time in arranging

a passage to Macedonia, convinced that God had called him to bring them the good news.” (Ac 16 : 9-10)

What happened that night? Not much – Paul prayed. What happened after this prayer? Paul crossed the sea, from Asia Minor to Macedonia. Let us have a look at the map. Where is Macedonia? – In the Balkans. In Europe, the proclamation of the Gospel, of the Good News about the redemption of man by God, began from the Balkan Peninsula.

Is not the history of Europe divided into two epochs: “before” and “after” this night? Is it not divided into the period before Paul’s prayer – and after Paul’s prayer?

The night of St. Paul’s prayer takes us Europeans to two other nights, because of which – and thanks to which – St. Paul could have prayed at all. The first is the night of Bethlehem, the night of the God-Man. The second – Easter, the great night of redemption. In the light of events which took place during these three nights, let us attempt to look at the history of Europe. This is the history of man in Europe because the events of these nights tell us about man. They tell us about the extraordinary identification of God with every individual man. It is because of man that God became Man, and the God-Man gave His life also for man. “For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3 : 16) – in this way Jesus Himself explained the essence of the Gift from the Father to a Jewish scholar, Nicodemus, during their long nocturnal conversation. Equally, Paul – also a Jewish man of learning – understood that even if he had been the only sinner in the world, God, Jesus Christ, would still have given his life for him. This is why he also knew that even if there was only one Macedonian calling him, he had to change all his hitherto conceived plans and hurry to help those people to whom the Macedonian had been calling him, bringing them the same Gift from the Father about which Christ spoke to Nicodemus. The discovery of the priceless value, the uniqueness of every man, was at the same time the discovery of Europe.

“Paul, «Come across to Macedonia and help us!» Do we still hear in the Europe of today this call for help, for spiritual bread and light in the search for what is essential, for the pure water of truth and justice? Can this call really have faded away owing to the apparent «self-sufficiency» of many of today’s Europeans in their constant temptation to live as if there were no God” (John Paul II, Homily in Speyer, 4 May 1987).

In the course of time, the reverse of “Pascal’s wager” – “let us live as if God did not exist” – was to become the “measure” of being European. Whole social, political and economic systems were conceived and implemented in European countries according to this “wager”. Similarly, efforts were made to solve religious conflicts in the same way. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 with its *Cuius regio eius religio* was to be the rational, temporary compromise on

the way to the restoration of the broken unity among Christians. When a hundred years later the Peace of Westphalia (1648) was signed in Münster, Europe was drained of blood, an economically and socially ruined continent. We would spare the readers descriptions of the subsequent “reasonable” compromises – and the consequences thereof – so often made by Europeans in Europe in order to save or establish peace. It is enough only to recall the name of Yalta.

And it is enough to note: these same Balkans which witnessed the first evangelization of Europe became, at the threshold of 20th century, the witness of the outbreak of World War I, and today they are again the arena of a tragedy in which, under our eyes, the descendants of this man from Macedonia who asked Paul for help lose their homes, families and their very lives. Cannot other Europeans hear the desperate cry coming from there: “Help us”? Yet, is it only from there that the cry can be heard? Can it not also be heard within the “satiated” and “self-sufficient” societies of well-off Europe?

However, when we hear the cries of the many injured and those deprived of their rights, we must also look carefully for those most wronged, those who do not cry only because they are devoid of any power. Do they not live among us, in Europe? They do, but they do not cry: the unborn. Also the old people, left to themselves, to whom society ever more often and ever more boldly extends the “death by choice.”

Solidarity with every man who calls “Help me!” – even if (or rather – especially) it were the “silent scream” – is the proper name of Europe. Therefore, there is only one proper border of Europe – and one criterion of being European – as the common home of all its inhabitants. This border is marked by the difference between the attitude of solidarity with every man, and the attitude of rejecting his call. This border was pointed out to Europeans by Paul from Tarsus through his response to the call and the need manifested by one of their representatives; because Paul cared for the good of the latter, he undertook the hardship of crossing the sea. But the boundary of radical solidarity with every man was demarcated by the Son of God, Jesus Christ, at Golgotha, where he offered His life for the life of His neighbour. You are a European if you “help most the one who can least help himself.” You are a human and a European...

If this is so, is the attitude of solidarity obligatory for us only in relation to every man in Europe? Let us remember: St. Paul showed this attitude to Europeans, but – let us stress this – it is the Lord Christ who, by dying for every single man who lives anywhere in the world, made it binding for everyone towards everyone else. You are a human if you “help most the one who can least help himself.” You are a human and a European...

Today, when Europe considers itself to be democratic, and the European countries are democratic states of law, democracy itself is understood as the rule of the majority respecting the rights of the minority. If we take into ac-

count the criterion of solidarity with every man, it is necessary to make here an essential correction: democracy is the rule of the majority respecting the rights of every individual man. Even more so: democracy is the participation in the rule of all in the service of each individual. Only solidarity may save the sense of democracy in Europe and at the same time Europe itself – for Europe and for the whole world.

Simultaneously, this is John Paul II's vision of Europe; Europe which discovers and affirms itself when it serves the authentic good of every man... not only in Europe. Because this is the Europe in which lives the mystery of Christ who was "sent" to all nations. This is why John Paul II's vision of Europe is also expressed by the fact that he is the Pope who regularly sets out on pilgrimages from Rome – the place where St. Peter and St. Paul arrived – to the world and, going beyond the borders of Europe, he stays within it, or even in its very heart.

In this issue of "Ethos" which we place in the hands of our readers, we present the papers and discussions from a session entitled "John Paul II's Vision of Europe" which was held on May 16–18, 1995, and was organized by the John Paul II Institute of the Catholic University of Lublin in collaboration with the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein. Already for a long time, the thread of friendship and cooperation has connected Lublin and the Principality of Liechtenstein, one of the smallest countries in Europe. In 1945, this country, opposing the pressure of the great powers, gave shelter to a group of soldiers – the Cossacks – who were fleeing Stalin's revenge. By this act the Principality of Liechtenstein and its ruler Franz Josef were ahead of the rest of Europe and of the world by a whole epoch – advancing beyond the age which divided influence according to the argument of power – and turning towards the spiritual sources of Europe. Today, Liechtenstein, apart from the fact that it is a modern and highly developed country, is also the meeting place of philosophers from different parts of Europe and the world united by the common idea: *Diligere omnem veritatem et in omnibus*. Since this transcends the borders of all countries and continents, there also gathered in Lublin scholars from Europe and North America who spent several days in the "City of Union," reflecting together on the essence and meaning which the heritage of the Old Continent has for the contemporary world.

The materials from the above-mentioned session are preceded by an essay of the then Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, written in 1978 for an Italian monthly "Vita e pensiero": "Where is Europe's Border?," hitherto unpublished in English. The Editors of "Ethos" are deeply convinced that it is worthwhile recalling the testimony of the past. Is this, however, the testimony only of the past? The diagnoses made therein are valid also today in Europe – as it is often said – after the breakthrough, and the current pontificate by the author of this testimo-

ny is a clear realization of the message contained in it. How is this possible? – Maybe this pontificate discloses to Europe the mystery of this first and genuine breakthrough which was accomplished almost 2,000 years ago, somewhere between Asia Minor and Macedonia...

C. R.

Translated by *Partycja Mikulska*