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THE EUROPE OF TOMORROW

Three questions must be posed if one wants to speak about the Europe of tomorrow. The first asks – what was Europe like, the second – what is it like, and, finally, the third – what will it be like. The answers given to these questions will determine the shape of the Europe of tomorrow.

The first question is “what was Europe like before we, the contemporaries, appeared?” This is a question about the past of Europe, about the Europe of our fathers, the Europe as a deposit of values and goods assembled and passed on from generation to generation, till it has finally been inherited by us, the people living in it today. But this must also be a question about the roots of Europe, for they determine its shape: what has it grown out of and on what foundations has it evolved? Thus, “what was it like” is also a question about the foundations upon which past generations have been building up Europe throughout the centuries.

The second question is “what is Europe like today?”. It is a question about the Europe of today, the one in which we live. The question about today is also a question about what we have done with the heritage of past generations: have we destroyed what our fathers built and have we begun a different process of constructing Europe? Have we cut ourselves off from its roots, and what have we done with its foundations? Or perhaps, have we added our own segment to the Europe of our ancestors, without destroying the deposit? What is Europe like? The question also deals with what will remain after us and what we shall leave for those who come after us. What heritage shall we leave and what will our children take from it in the future? It is also a question about the foundations on which we build – is it a rock or is it sand? Ultimately, it is a question about our own identity.

And finally, the third question is posed with a note of warning – what will Europe be like? It is a question about the future of Europe, but must be answered by us who are creating it now, for we are erecting the framework for this future Europe. It is a question about a vision of Europe, although its actual builders will be those who will come after us.

But the question “Which Europe?” is also dramatic in its meaning for it expresses our responsibility for the Europe of tomorrow. And while we imagine, programme and lay the foundations for the Europe of tomorrow, we do not

know that subsequent generations will not reject this vision and start building on the ruins of the Europe of today.

Thus, the Europe of tomorrow is a sum total of all these "Europes," the one from the past, the one of today, and the one we would like to pass on to the future.

What was Europe like?

For centuries Europe was perceived as a great family of nations and states, combining various cultures and traditions of the West and the East and transmitting the common Christian spiritual and cultural heritage which created its identity.

It is to Christianity and to its values that the history of Europe was bound most closely. In it we find the roots of European civilization. Christian values determined the spiritual and cultural unity of Europe, although it should be borne in mind that it retained its dual nature, eastern and western, equally contributing to the creation of its identity and constituting its richness. Europe lives with "common Christian and human values, such as the dignity of the human person, deep attachment to justice and freedom, hard work, the spirit of initiative, family love, respect for life, tolerance, desire of cooperation and peace."¹

With the passage of time these values, historically introduced by Christianity, turned into a common heritage for all of Europe and acquired a universal, pan-human character. And when today some people reject Christian values, one should pose the question: What would remain of Europe, of its culture and history, if we reject everything that was introduced and created by Christianity?

What is the Europe of today like?

Does contemporary Europe still represent in its common heritage a unity rooted in Christianity? Is the identity of modern Europe still pervaded with Christian values? What is the Europe we are now creating like? It seems that modern Europe is first of all the Europe of a battle – a battle for the soul of man, and thus also a battle for its own soul. Europe has declared war on the values that for centuries have shaped its identity. It does much to annihilate its Christian heritage. The Europe of today wants to regard Christian values as a closed chapter, as the "yesterday" of Europe. In trying to reject Christian values, Europe wants to reject fundamental values, to reject the truth about the human being, his dignity and his destiny.

Already in the Europe of today one can see a decline in many elementary values, those which have so far constituted "an unquestionable good not only for Christian morality but simply *for human morality, for moral culture*: these values include respect for human life from the moment of conception, respect

¹ J o h n P a u l I I, *The European Act* (Santiago de Compostella, 9 September 1982), „L'Osservatore Romano” 4 (1983) No. 2, p. 29.

for marriage in its indissoluble unity, and respect for the stability of the family” (*Dives in misericordia*, No. 12).

The Europe of today is not only a Europe of wickedness, egoism, nationalism, war, bloodshed, and death; it is also a Europe that has declared war on the fundamental values which constitute its richness and foundation of its identity. It is the Europe of drugs, AIDS, terrorism, corruption, despotism, injustice and poverty, the death of millions of people, including children whose faces are not even seen by their mothers for they are killed before they are born, the Europe which demands the right to kill conceived but “unfit” children. The Europe of today is also the Europe which holds cheap culture and the identity of the nations that constitute it. Hence, it is the Europe of two great crises, the crisis of truth and the crisis of love.

Through the absolutization of freedom, the Europe of today strives to break with the demands of morality. It seems unaware that the rejection of Christian values means not only a break with its own heritage, a destruction of the foundation on which it stands, but also ultimately a denial of the truth about the human being, and a denial of God Himself.

In his address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 1988, the Holy Father said:

if the religious and Christian foundation of this continent is deprived of its influence on the morals and the formation of societies, it would mean not only a negation of the whole heritage of European past, but also a grave threat to a future worthy of the inhabitants of Europe – of all its inhabitants, both believers and unbelievers.²

What will the Europe of the future be like?

Modern Europe wants to lay the foundations for a Europe that will be completely different from the one existing so far, the Europe which is to change its identity by rejecting the heritage of past generations. The very assumptions accepted by the new constructors determine the shape of the Europe of the future. They begin with the premise they will construct a Europe without God, living as if Christ had not existed. This means that the Europe of the future is to abandon Christianity. The world of the new Europe would then be a world without values, founded on moral relativism, which begins from the so-called privatization of values, which in turn is a result of the “privatization” of belief in God. Faith as a teacher of values – and thus, these values themselves – should remain within the private domain of the human being. Europe would thus be freed from constant and unchangeable values, from those values which had constituted the building blocks of its identity.

² J o h n P a u l I I, *At the Threshold of the New Stage* (An Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, October 11, 1988), “L’Osservatore Romano” 9 (1988) Nos. 10-11, p. 11.

The standard which determines the difference between good and evil would then be found not in moral criteria, but in rules accepted on the basis of the agreement or consensus of parliamentary majorities. Consensus ethics – as has been stipulated in a draft of a document of the Council of Europe, based on the consent of the majority – would determine moral principles in the spirit of compromise. Such norms would replace Christian values and become moral norms. Thus, with the consent of a majority, evil could be called good. The process has been begun with the permission to kill the unborn and the ill, with recognition of homosexual unions as marriages, and permission for couples living in such unions to adopt children. Will it be a Europe of the civilization of life or of the civilization of death, of destructive anti-civilization?

With time, some want Europe to become a Europe-fatherland rather than a Europe of fatherlands, as it has been thus far. It would become a Europe blurring cultural and national distinctions, obfuscating the national identities of the states that compose it, introducing a uniformization of culture, language and customs. It would become a Europe that no longer constitutes a multicoloured mosaic with a harmonious pattern.

What will the Europe of tomorrow be like? What will we make of it? What do we want it to be?

Will it be an aggregate of totalitarian states, evolving from the new red of a repainted communism called socialism, through fascism, to the new enslavement by a misunderstood, uninhibited freedom and moral relativism, unified by a territory which abolishes all national distinctions? But will this still be Europe? Or will we defend Europe for Europe, for the future generations, so that it remains as Europe also tomorrow, when we no longer exist?

If the Europe of tomorrow is to remain Europe, then it can only exist as a Europe characterized by freedom, responsibility and solidarity, aware of the values that have shaped its history and of the fundamental role of culture and consciousness, hence, also of the future; for memory is the hope of the future.³

The Holy Father said that Europe could not discard Christianity like an accidental travel companion who has become a stranger to her, much like a man cannot abandon the foundations of his life and his hope without suffering a dramatic crisis.

The Europe of today and the Europe of tomorrow need Christ and the Gospel because therein lie the roots of all its peoples.

Translated by *Patrycja Mikulska*

³ Cf. J o h n P a u l I I, *The Missive to a Special Gathering of the Council of Bishops concerning Europe and addressed to all the Leaders of the Continent*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 13 (1992) No. 1, p. 40.