

# ANNOUNCING THE GOSPEL IN EUROPE FACING THE CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL CHANGES AND RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DIVISIONS

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*I. Relaunching the Evangelization of the European Continent, an initiative of John Paul II in his meeting with the Bishops of Europe*

*1.1 A phrase of John Paul II, explained by himself.*

“The evangelization of the European continent” is a phrase first used by John Paul II at the IVth symposium of European bishops in Rome in 1979.

He had just chaired the plenary assembly of the Latin American Bishops' Council in Puebla. The theme of this assembly was “the evangelization of Latin America, today and tomorrow.” When John Paul II addressed the CCEE, which is the European equivalent of the CELAM, although in a far less structured manner - it was natural that he drew the bishops' attention to the “evangelization of the European continent.” This relaunching was to turn out to be one of the great design's of his pontificate. Afterwards, John Paul II also spoke of the new evangelization, or even of re-evangelization. In these words, especially in the term “re-evangelization”, a pejorative judgement of the recent style of the evangelization of the Catholic Church, or even of other Churches, was sometimes perceived. In fact, the word re-evangelization” is very rarely used by John Paul II, who essentially envisages a “new quality of evangelization”, new in its capacity to reformulate the message of salvation for our contemporaries.

It is thus worthwhile to take very precise note of the exact terms with which the Pope envisages the evangelization of Europe the first time he speaks of it to the representatives of the bishops of this continent. He emphasized four essential points

which constitute a sort of charter of the way in which he himself and the bishops of Europe have viewed evangelization till now.

These four essential points are the following: in the spirit of Vatican II, he reminds bishops that collegiality implies responsibility, born in common, towards evangelization. Evangelization requires analyses, and must be conducted within the framework of ecumenical cooperation. And lastly, evangelization must look towards the future. Let us take a closer look at that with the terms used by John Paul II.

### *1.2 The collegiality of bishops is a responsibility for evangelization*

“It is not only each bishop in his diocese, but it is also the different communities of bishops and especially the national conferences of bishops who can and must make the key theme (evangelization) a subject of reflection about the society toward which they have the pastoral responsibilities of evangelization.”

In fact, the first symposium that was to follow, in 1982, was devoted to “the collegial responsibility of bishops and episcopal conferences of Europe in the evangelization of the continent.” This first step proved to be decisive for the organic development of the reflection of the CCEE concerning the ongoing evangelization of the decade to come.

### *1.3 An appeal to analyse situations in view of the complexity of the task*

“I consider,” says John Paul II again, “this theme to be complex, extremely complex... We must draw the vision of the future from the analysis of the present situation... This analysis must include every country, every nation of our continent... and must take into account each one of their situations.”

This papal invitation to analyse the complexities of Europe had an impact on the 1985 symposium, at which a critical approach of the phenomenon of secularization preceded theological statements. In the same way, at the 1989 symposium a constant coming-and-going was established between the analysis of the growing medicalization of life and death in Europe and the practises of evangelization of these decisive stages in people's lives.

### *1.4 Evangelization must be linked to ecumenical cooperation*

“I think that at present, at the time of ecumenism,” adds John Paul II again, “the moment has come to look at these questions in the light of criteria elaborated by the Council in a spirit of fraternal cooperation with the representatives of the Church and communities with whom we are not in full unity.”

This desire to link evangelization to ecumenical cooperation, expressed by John Paul II, is very largely implemented in the repeated meetings between the CCEE and the KEK (which means Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen). This sister organization brings together all the Christian churches of Europe, Protestant and Orthodox. You all remember that the meeting at Basel in May 1989 was a great success: justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation. You will also have some echoes of the meeting at Santiago de Compostela in November, 1991, which provided the opportunity for a public and open dialogue, in particular between the representatives of the Pontifical Council for promoting Christian unity and those of the Russian Orthodox Church, although the Russian Orthodox Church did not accept the invitation of John Paul II to the special synod on Europe.

### *1.9 Evangelization must turn the Church toward the future*

“Our mission,” says John Paul II on the same occasion, “is always and everywhere turned toward the future: both toward the eschatological future, the future of which we are certain in our faith, and the future of which we cannot be humanly certain”.

This emphasis placed on the future in evangelization clearly shows that this outlook does not aim at restoration, characterized by nostalgia for an idealized European past. To be sure, the Pope frequently appeals to the Christian memory of the continent, but this is in order to move forward today.

## ***II. How do the Catholic Bishops of Europe, meeting together on the continental level, view the evangelization of Europe?***

### *The 1982 symposium*

When the Catholic bishops reflected together at their 1982 symposium on their responsibility in the evangelization of Europe, for the first time in a formal manner,

they chose the vocabulary of John Paul II. But what did they mean by continent? In their eyes, who is to revive the evangelization? The answer to all these questions will undoubtedly be enlightening about the evangelizing activity of the Catholic Church in today's Europe.

### *2.1 Why insist on speaking in terms of a continent?*

A word like "continent" can easily be misunderstood. Let us suppose that a reader with no historical education comes across it in twenty years. He might understand that in the 1980s, the Catholic Church, which is a minority religion in Europe (we represent only 47% of all persons baptized on this continent), and geographically limited to certain regions, had set on a religious reconquest of Europe!

In the texts themselves there is not trace of such a desire for reconquest. "Continent" should not be understood here in its territorial sense (in which case it would be absurd for English-speaking people!), but it is rather the political situation of the Europe of that time that led to choosing the term. He is thus the carrier of a twofold message:

- the Catholic bishops thus say clearly that they do not intend to limit their reflection to the Europe in the process of uniting, that of the Europe of Nine at that time which was soon to become the Europe of Twelve, and of fifteen today.

- at the same time, the Catholic bishops take an ethical position: they refuse, already on the level of language, the inhuman division imposed on Europe by violence and terror. Two other expressions, "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals" or "the Europe of the West and the East," which we also encounter in the vocabulary of the CCEE, have exactly the same ethical function, as the frequent references to the Helsinki agreements show.

### *2.2 Who is to receive evangelization?*

Who are the groups and people of this continent who are to receive evangelisation? As Cardinal B. Hume says, "the local Churches and the episcopal conferences have the responsibility to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to their own peoples. By "their own peoples" the cardinal deliberately designates the secularized and non-

practising population. He adds that in the latter case that it will be “less an initial proclamation of the Gospel, which is necessary, than a very vigorous catechizing, so radical and so steady that we could call it permanent evangelization.” But there is the need to evangelize in the strict sense of “those who practice non-Christian religions, who are atheists or agnostic humanists”.

In all that, as Cardinal F. König (Vienna) emphasizes, “we must not begin by the evangelization of institutions, but rather of people.” By “evangelization of Europe” we should understand that of Europeans. Such precision is not useless when suspicions still remain about the political Catholicism of yesterday, which sought to place the power of the State in the service of Christians faith and mores.

### *2.3 The acceptance of a religiously and culturally pluralist Europe*

In three reports of cardinals Hume, König and Etchegaray at the 1982 symposium, we find no nostalgia for a Christian Europe, which formerly possessed an ideal unity to which we should return. On the contrary, Cardinal R. Etchegaray refuses to:

“Be too quick to say that what makes Europe are its Christian roots... We cannot annex the spiritual destiny of Europe, but we have to respect its original and present complexity... At the sources, we find the three great Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman currents, symbolized by... Jerusalem, Athens and Rome. We must not forget... the great tears in the seamless tunic: Constantinople, Canterbury, Wittenberg, Geneva. We must view Islam with a friendly eye. Many Moslems meet only Christians in Europe (and often very closely) who are often not sufficiently aware of the importance of such contact.”

This acceptance of cultural and religious pluralism is based on the theology of evangelization proposed in the apostolic exhortation of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the result of the Roman synod of 1974.

### *2.4 The theological understanding of evangelization*

From the quantitative point of view - and this can also be measured qualitatively - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is the document which is most often referred to in the CCEE, far more than any other document of Paul VI, John Paul II, or of Vatican II itself.

We can say of this document that it was very widely received and that it functions as a privileged theological reference.

Evangelization has as a “base, centre and summit... a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made human being, who died and resurrected, salvation is offered to every man, as a gift of the grace and mercy of God. Not an immanent salvation... but a transcendent, eschatological one, which of course begins in this life, but which is completed in eternity.”

In this perspective, “evangelizing is the grace and vocation specific to the Church, its deepest identity. The Church exists to evangelize.”

But this vocation of the Church to evangelize encounters great difficulties in Europe. We are going to make a survey of those difficulties based on some of the reflections of Catholic bishops on this subject on the European level. In a somewhat technical manner, we will first deal with the global orientation which emerges concerning the evangelization of secularized European societies (III). Then we will look into several specific cases of the evangelization of a Europe that is also characterized by religious, denominational and ethnic tensions (IV), which let us say in passing, show that an authentic secularization of Europe remains debatable.

### ***III. Some approaches concerning the evangelization of the secularized societies of Europe.***

#### *The symposia of 1985 and 1989*

In the course of the last decade several relatively firm approaches seemed to arise from the reflection of the bishops on the European level. These reflections invite us not to remain satisfied with the diagnosis of secularization concerning these societies. The bishops observed the widening gap between some sectors of the population and the groups of believers and practising persons which themselves have undergone a certain erosion. But the bishops did not confine themselves to an attitude of deploration or denunciation of this situation. They invited us to meet this challenge through the pursuit of an active inculturation of Christian faith and life. This attitude also implies that the evangelizers should pay far greater attention to people's everyday life and believe less that the broad trends in thought rule the world. As concerns the change in mentalities, television, which is part of the everyday world, has much more influence than the works of Nietzsche or Freud!

*3.1 From the diagnosis of secularization to the need for the inculturation of the Gospel, particularly in everyday life.*

*3.1.1. The use of the term “secularization” is often insufficiently critical in Catholic theological and religious circles.*

To interpret the ebb of religion, or of some of its forms or functions in European society since the early 19th century, Catholic pastors often resort to the category of secularization. Following the example of most theologians, whose favourite references are usually philosophical, the pastors usually limit themselves to a global approach to this development. When they speak about it, they do not deal with it as researchers in the social sciences would. These researchers would be careful to establish precisely the multiple and complex causes of this phenomenon, as these causes should be established in order to possibly affect them, be it in the long run. The theologians' concerns are different; they are religious and moral, as is natural. Hence also their desire to make an immediate value judgement on secularization, a rather negative one among Catholics (whether they are of the “left” or the “right”), and rather positive among Protestants. This desire is also the reason for the success in the same circles of the distinction between secularization (which is perhaps acceptable or even good) and secularism (which is certainly bad). However, we must ask whether making a moral judgement about this phenomenon before analyzing it empirically does not further complicate the objective understanding that is appropriate.

However that may be, many of the participants in the VIth symposium of European bishops were probably drawn spontaneously to an interpretation in terms of the metaphysical destiny of a culture. They thus remain dependent in fact on the Enlightenment philosophy which they criticize under other circumstances. The major positive outcome of this symposium was a more empirical and more historical understanding of the relations that are created between religion and society.<sup>1</sup> There is probably no secularization per se, but only various balances resulting from

1. It is interesting to note that the current sociology of Catholicism has clearly shown that explanations based on external factors - economic, demographic, geographical - are unsatisfactory. “The most influential factor is to be sought in the history of pastoral activity,” D. Hervieu-Léger, *Toward a new Christianity?* (Le Cerf; Paris 1986) 52.

complex social compromises which always involve the initiatives, communication and transaction capacities of the various partners. So this involves the responsibility of the participants, which excludes an interpretation in terms of destiny or an outside plot, although there have actually been political plans to eradicate religion, like those carried out by communists.

### 3.1.2 In the social sciences, the term "secularization" is very vague.

If this is the case, the concept of secularization, which is too quickly considered as clear ("one of the main obstacles to evangelization"), does not constitute a tool for rigorously analyzing the relationship between a religion and the surrounding society. In fact, most researchers in the social sciences agree in deploring the many meanings simultaneously given to this term in the various European linguistic environments.

In the French-speaking zone, F.A. Isambert writes in the *Encyclopedia Universalis*: "The vicissitudes of the word "secularization", so often used nowadays in discussions about religion, the coming and going of this word between French, English and German, have succeeded in inflicting a polysemy upon it... resulting from oppositions, exclusions and doctrinal distortion". The term is no clearer in English than in French, especially since the fashion theologies of secularization of American origin. It is revealing that the international programme of "conceptualization and measurability", adopted at the symposium of Rome in 1969, organized jointly by the Secretariat for non-believers and the University of California, never materialized.<sup>2</sup> In the German-speaking world, M. Heckel also observes a widespread conceptual vagueness: "Since the beginning of the 19th century, the notion of "secularization" has been broadened and has become a fashionable word after a sort of semantic explosion: it has multiple and elusive facets due to fallaciously appealing connotations... The term 'secularization' has

2. See Ch. Y. Glock, "Lo studio delle noncredenze: orientamenti per la ricerca" in R. Caporale & A. Grumelli, *Religione e ateismo nelle società secolarizzate*, (Il Mulino; Bologna, 1972) 129-159. The proceedings of the same symposium were published in English the previous year under a slightly different title, *The Culture of Unbelief* (The University Press of California; Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1971) - As soon as review of this book was published, a reviewer, J.P. Deconchy expressed his scepticism about this project: "The scientific' key concept, that of "secularization", is a mythical one' in *Archives des Science Sociales des Religions* 18 (1973) 152



become a widespread cliché in every analysis, every criticism, every cultural policy, based on a very broad and extraordinarily complex meaning.”<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, according to an expert from the University of Rome, the term “secolarizzazione” is characterized in Italian, too, by “the ambiguity of terminological adventures.”

I believe that it would be a good idea for pastors and theologians not to use the concept of secularization - which has an extended meaning and therefore lacks precision, as sociologists recognize - instead of the necessary analysis. Indeed, “secularization” is no more rigorous, scientific or operational than other expressions like “contemporary man”, “the modern world”, “Medieval Christianity” or “urban and rural civilization.” So if we do not want to give an answer like the famous one in the Molière comedy, “that is why your daughter is deaf,” we must, for the sake of method, explain secularization by this or that concrete change in society which leads to a given group of Christians to move away from the traditional image of Christian life.

### 3.2 *Secularization or social change?*

At the 1985 symposium, a consensus was established not to resort to this pseudo-explanation. Cardinal Danneels noted that the terms “secularization” and “secularize” are too ambiguous and imprecise to be used as conceptual keys in a survey of the religious dimension remains very present in European cultures, although it is not very clear whether it is a return or a distortion of the sacred. John Paul II also observes that:

3. M. Heckel, “Säkularisierung. Staatskirchenrechtliche Aspekte einer umstrittenen Kategorie”, in *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stift. f. Rechtsgeschichte K.A.* 97 (1980) 4-5 We may take the following methodological observation: “There is no secularization per se, but a multitude of heterogeneous and divergent secularizing processes, and partly antagonistic ones. In each case they have their own purpose, their own function and especially their own limits which are rarely specified and clearly defined. So the concepts mainly dissolve because of unreflected meanings and analogies” (ibid.)

“a thorough analysis showed the ambiguity, and even the equivocal character of the term, which is so polysemic, imprecise and elastic that it covers multiple and even opposite phenomena.”

The awareness of this ambiguity, like any phenomenon of this type, was not universal, of course. Indeed, we can see that since then a whole Catholic literature continues to denounce secularization, along with “materialism”, “hedonism”, “individualism”, etc. However, many pastors now pay greater attention to everyday life in order to encourage the inculturation of Christian life in Europe. It would be best to show this through two examples that were studied by the bishops themselves.

### *3.2.1 An initial case study: the growing secularization of women in Europe.*

For the sake of method, I will discuss the first survey a bit further. For what reason are a certain number of Catholic women in France and in Northern Europe, as in North America, moving away from the Church? If we are too inclined to believe that ideas rule the world, we will say: it is because of feminism! In reality, this is due to objective factors, mainly non-ideological, like the progress of medicine and women in the work force in post-industrial societies.

Indeed, the progress of medicine has in 50 years made it possible to limit the mortality rate of women giving birth as well as that of infants. Medical progress also makes responsible parenthood possible, as the popes themselves desired. More broadly speaking, it is now enough to have two or three children to be sure to keep them. The average European woman is 32 years old when she puts her last child into kindergarten. Thanks to medicine, she can live till an average age of 80 years and 3 months, if she is French (whereas her husband lives till 73). So how could she not want to work, especially in a post-industrial society where male muscle power no longer plays practically any role? But here we introduce the financial independence of women in their household, the need to share household and child-rearing tasks, the possibility for working women to broaden their social relations beyond their husband. What is the result in the consciousness of women on our societies? Women are going to feel increasingly like partners of men, and not dependent on them. The search for a new social and psychological balance between men and women is therefore linked to the technical development of our societies, and is not due to “feminist ideas”. We can go even further - it is feminism itself that is an effect and not a cause of these developments...

We are thus not dealing with a passing fashion, or just the dissemination of false ideas, although this may turn out to be the case. We are basically facing an important fact: many women increasingly feel like partners of men in their social life. So more and more they are leaving the social and mental universe in which women are defined by men, but not vice-versa to the same degree. In short, they are leaving what is called the androcentric world. That is, the world that places men in the centre instead of viewing really human existence as reciprocity between men and women.

In this situation, the danger of secularization, i.e. of considerable proportions of women moving away from the Church, is great. Especially so if the Church preserves, or even legitimizes, an androcentric discourse and mores, because today's women would not feel recognized. They might even feel like outsiders.

How can this danger of secularization be avoided? Will it be enough to refute possible feminist errors? To deplore, or even to denounce, the secularization of "modern" women? The task will be more difficult and more complex. It will be to return to the heart of the Biblical and evangelical message at the precise point where it makes men and women fully-fledged partners.

Speaking concretely, the answer to secularization in this specific case is based on collective learning. In this process, the transformations experienced in everyday life must be understood. The impact of these changes on language (or even stereotypes) must be analyzed as well as a spirituality, catechesis, ways of functioning and practices marked by a certain stage of culture, which is now archaic for many people. And all of that cannot become a criterion for announcing the Gospel,<sup>4</sup> according to Saint Paul's warning: "Do not be conformed to this world" (Romans 12,2). The main task of the pastors will be to make the Gospel audible to today's European women, without forcing them, in the name of the Gospel, to live the same mental life as their grandmothers. This requires that pastors be more deeply converted to this message, that they understand it anew and accept or promote the necessary changes.

4. Indeed, European culture does not offer a satisfactory partnership between men and women. The divorce rate is rising. In most European countries, the birth rate does not ensure renewal of generations. There is an alarming rise in non-marriage everywhere: in France, 37% of all persons old enough to be married are not. In Sweden, the figure is 48%. In Paris, one fiscal household out of two consists of a single person.

### *3.2.2 The second example: contemporary attitudes towards birth and death as challenges to evangelization.*

This second example occupied the entire 1989 symposium.

Over the past thirty years, technical and scientific innovations have radically changed the concrete conditions in which human beings are born and die in Europe. And the very conception of life has also changed, albeit at a slower pace, because symbolic representations change more slowly than practices.

Here again it is the progress in medicine far more than ideas that influences the way of seeing the beginning and end of human life. In former times, procreation and the birth of a child depended much more on chance, and parents placed their trust above all in Divine Providence in this matter. Today, with contraception and immense possibilities of biology, a child is "planned". Well before his birth we have pictures of him, we know whether he will be a boy or a girl, and he is born in a medical environment, far from the family home.

In the same way, at the other end of existence, no society before has ever seen such longevity, such a high proportion of elderly people. And none has taken death away from the family environment to such an extent: 70% of all Europeans die in a hospital, in a medical and technical environment.

So it was logical to verify the relevance of the previous symposium through these examples. That symposium had concluded that there should be less talk about secularization and more importance should be attached to inculturation. We would thus go beyond talk about change in general, and we would understand specific changes. And most of all, in this new context what is a better way to announce the Gospel to our contemporaries at these crucial moments of their existence since the Church continues to meet the great majority of them on the occasion of birth, marriage or death, for baptisms or funerals?

So once again, we see that what is required is a deep understanding of these changes. Whoever wants to evangelize cannot be satisfied with deploring or denouncing them.

In this context, Cardinal C.M. Martini, s.j. president of the CCEE, refused "fatalism and intellectual laziness" in the face of the changes analyzed. These changes must be the occasion for "active learning on the part of the faithful as well as the pastors to live and announce the Gospel in a changing world."

In order to announce the Word, we must deepen the theology of creation and of eschatology. In particular, in these fundamental areas of theology, an effort of thought is required, both in the direction of scientists and the population at large. Christian scientists carry out their research in the field of human sciences as well as the exact sciences just as their non-believing or agnostic colleagues “*etsi deus non daretur*”. It is obvious that theological epistemology still does not take this fact into account sufficiently, and that fundamental theology must pursue hermeneutics of statements about creation and eschatology that respect different levels, statuses, and types of knowledge.

Other epistemological treatments are appropriate for the questions of the population at large. For most people, questions of meaning are determined more at the ethical level (standards) and of rites than for intellectuals. This is why, in his conclusion called “Strengthening hope and resisting evil in today’s Europe,” Cardinal Martini rightly emphasizes that evangelizing is “becoming close to people, to their demand for rites, standards, and meanings, to which our diacony, our liturgy and our announcing of the Word must correspond.”

I have tried to show how the European bishops’ reflection moved, in their desire to evangelize, from the denunciation of secularization to the more positive and active perspective of a new inculturation of faith in Europe. In this way, they placed themselves in the perception that John Paul II expressed in the letter that he wrote to the chairmen of the episcopal conferences of Europe after the closing of the VIth symposium:

“Your reflection... particularly in the course of the last two symposiums, have clearly showed that European society has entered a new phase of its historical development. To the deep and complex, cultural, political, ethical and spiritual transformations that finally gave the European social fabric a new configuration, a new quality of evangelization must correspond, in which we find the way to reformulate the everlasting message of salvation in a convincing way for contemporary man.”

#### ***IV. Several challenges for announcing the Gospel in a religiously and ethnically divide Europe***

*Perceptions common to the CCEE and the special Synod for the Europe of 1991*

The main purpose of the Synod of bishops for Europe, announced by John Paul II

at Velehrad on April 29, 1990, held in Rome late in 1991, was not to reflect on the evangelization of Europe. In the Pope's mind, the purpose was to determine the meaning of the exceptional moment that the continent was experiencing and to encourage an exchange of gifts between the Churches. But the Synod was aware of the urgency of the situation, and it focused most of its attention on the new evangelization. We find a rather broad convergence in the work of the CCEE, which was more reflective and long-term. The Synod also linked evangelization to inculturation. For the Synod, too, evangelization cannot be separated from ecumenical cooperation and inter-religious dialogue, especially with Judaism and Islam. Lastly, the Synod also found that it was urgent for those who announce the Gospel to help to calm ethnic tensions, which often have a religious component.

#### *4.1 Evangelization requires a new inculturation of Christian life in Europe.*

Now that this aspect has been abundantly illustrated in the works of the CCEE, it will be enough to quote the conclusions of the 1991 Synod:

“Evangelization must reach not only individuals as such, but also cultures. The evangelization of a culture implies the “inculturation” of the Gospel. The mission of inculturating the Gospel within Europe's new cultural environment, marked by modernity but also by what is called “post-modernity”, raises a challenge which we must answer with all our strength: to succeed, the contribution of the men of the world of culture and that of theologians whose hearts are in communion with the Church is necessary.”

Here we see an appeal for the cooperation of theologians, and this deserves our attention. In fact, this cooperation was expected with optimistic encouragement on the part of the chairman of the CCEE, Cardinal C.M. Martini:

“The bishops feel a sense of solidarity with the theologians, whose task appears especially difficult and urgent in today's Europe. So let us encourage all those, theologians, preachers and catechists, who are engaged in a task like the inculturation of the faith in Europe. So let us encourage all those, theologians, preachers and catechists, who are engaged in a task like the inculturation of the faith in Europe. The Holy Spirit who teaches, corrects, activates and leads will not fail to support the efforts of all in the proclamation of what “the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard”, but that ‘God has prepared for those who love him,’ and who was ‘revealed by the Spirit’ (cf. 1 Cor 2, 9-10).”

To be objective, we must acknowledge that the Synod is less certain of being able to count on the cooperation of theologians: "If theology rooted in the Word of God and faithful to the teaching of the Church is very useful for the mission of evangelization, we are indeed forced to admit that theological "disagreement" is an obstacle to carrying out this evangelization."

The difference in tone is certain. But on the one hand there is no contradiction here, and on the other this can easily be explained by the difference in status between the two bodies: whereas the CCEE is not a magisterial body, a Synod presided by the Pope obviously is.

#### *4. Evangelization and ecumenical cooperation are inseparable for the Catholics of Europe.*

The CCEE has constantly aimed its efforts at the evangelization of Europe in close cooperation with the KEK (Conference of European Churches), a sister organization that includes all the other Christian churches of Europe. The VIth meeting between those two bodies was held in November 1991, just before the Synod, whose title was "Mission and evangelization in Europe." The conclusions of this meeting invite us to give up all proselytism and adopt a resolutely ecumenical attitude, thus avoiding any semblance of support to current ethnic conflicts in Ireland, the Balkans, or the rest of Europe. Such support would obviously be a major contribution to the dechristianization of our continent.

##### *4.2.1 Evangelization requires the refusal of proselytism and ecumenical cooperation.*

The main divisions affecting Christianity in our world are a European heritage: division between Orthodox Christians and Catholics; between Catholics and Protestants; and between the different Protestant denominations. The Christians of Europe, who have exported their divisions all over the world, also have the duty to heal these wounds. The continent of the division of Christians must also become the continent of their reconcilliation.

Now that the other Christians have been recognized at Vatican II as our brothers

by baptism, and in particular now that the Orthodox Church has been recognized as our sister Church, with true sacraments, including the Eucharist and the orders, our relations can in no way be those of proselytism or even of mission.

This question is very relevant today. After the revival of the united Oriental Churches and the renewed presence of apostolic workers who call themselves 'missionaries' in countries that are historically Orthodox, the Orthodox Church felt threatened on the concrete level as no longer being considered a sister-Church by us.<sup>5</sup> And it is thus that former tensions arose again before our eyes. In this situation, Cardinal Ruini very rightly declared that as Rapporteur of the Roman Synod: "Ecumenism must be promoted, not only for pastoral reasons, but especially because it responds to the will of the Lord" (IInd Report, n. 5). And the same Synod devoted its entire n. 7 to supporting "the close cooperation with the other Churches and Christian communities."

5. The desire to revive uniatism would be extremely unrealistic, as would be the desire to "convert Russia", even if we claim to base this wish on the private revelations of Fatima. The review *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* has just published the spiritual Testament of a French Jesuit, Philippe de Régis, who anticipated around 1954, with a true prophetic intuition, the disaster that such a revival would bring. It is enough to listen to his words to be convinced:

"The temptation could be great, on the day that Russia opens up, to rush into this vast apostolate field and view it as virgin land to be cultivated. Some will be dying to convert this people. Holy souls will pray for this in cloisters. And ardent hearts of apostles will be impatient to get to work. They will necessarily conceive of their task as the predication of the universality of the Church. They will stress the question, which will seem paramount to them, of the supremacy of the pope. They will speak of this dogmatic truth "at the right time and at the wrong time." They will repeat that outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation. They will create parishes or groups to serve as centres from which to disseminate this truth. They will probably have some limited successes, and moreover quite modest ones, with some people. Large sums as well as undeniable energy and zeal will be spent. The result will surely not be in proportion to all this. Furthermore, it is not less obvious that this activity will provoke a violently hostile reaction on the part of Orthodox circles. The clergy will feel threatened. It will have a strong effect on the great mass of believers. And once more the Catholic Church will appear in the eyes of the Russian people as a muddle-headed foreigner, a ravisher of simple souls, an enemy of the national faith. The gap will be widened, and even made deeper, between the two halves of Christendom, formerly united, and which were to be brought back to the unity of a single faith, and not to be pitted one against another. And who knows if we will ever bridge the psychological and emotional gap which would be worsened by the many mistakes made and abundantly repeated? May God save us from such a deed!" V. Poggi, "*Le Travail Futur*", by Philippe de Régis, s.j." OCP 58 (1992) 13-14.



At Santiago de Compostela, a formally ecumenical meeting, the two chairmen declared: "our Churches pledge to renounce all competitive evangelization that would reflect a spirit of competition between them."

They also indicated the path to take: "speak of everything that is a problem and extend our hand." Concretely speaking, we must mutually inform each other of all our evangelization plans, and we must do nothing without the local Churches, and especially nothing against them. Let us also remember the conclusion of the Chairmen, which is important for those who want to contribute to the evangelization of Europe: 'Without ecumenical peace, there will be neither evangelization nor common witness in Europe.'

#### *4.2.2 Avoid any semblance of religious support to current ethnic tensions and develop the positive Christian appreciation of the other.*

In all of Europe, the media report on the current ethnic conflicts, and observe that religion constitutes a factor in their aggravation. This is obvious in Ireland and in former Yugoslavia. But this observation also applies to conflicts between communities of Eastern rite Catholics, or even Latin Catholics, on the one hand, and the Orthodox Church, on the other hand, in Rumania, Slovakia and Ukraine. The tensions between the patriarchate of Moscow and Rome are also related to this context. The suspicion thrown by the Enlightenment on the dark social functions of religions takes on its full strength again, combined with the public image of Islam. Religions are not free of violence, or even fanaticism. The argument in favour of God based on the fall of communism convinces only half of the sceptical Europeans of the idea that appeal to God alone can bring harmony among men.

People expect the Churches and Christians to go into action, fast if possible. A happy event: the meeting in June 1993 of the international commission for the Orthodox Catholic dialogue in Balamand, Lebanon, put an end to uniatism in the following terms: "Because of the way in which Catholics and Orthodox once again consider each other in their relationship to the mystery of the Church and discover each other once again as sister Churches, this form of "missionary apostolate" described above, and which has been called 'uniatism', can no longer be accepted either as a method to be followed or as a model of the unity of our Churches are seeking."

The Gospel will lose credibility, and one of its core ideas, that of the love of

others, if the leaders of the Church do not quickly find the means to encourage the respect of those who are different because of their religion, ethnic group, nationality (the migrants!), or gender (man/woman relationships)! In fact, as the assembly of Santiago de Compostela noted: "the tensions between Christians are greatest where ecumenical education has been the weakest."

In the same way, "the Christians of the minority Churches have seen, regardless of the Church they belong to, that they suffer from quite analogous difficulties, whatever the dominant religion of the country."

In these examples we see a tragic illustration of the fact that Christianity has given rise to national Churches instead of creating Churches for the nation. By strengthening national identities, the Church would allow itself to be secularized from within, and would renounce one of its specific principles, the love of others. However, the Church in Europe is simultaneously making a great effort to develop inter-religious dialogue.

### *4.3 Evangelization in Europe must go hand in hand with the inter-religious dialogue.*

#### *4.3.1 The Judeo-Christian dialogue*

The need for the dialogue with the Jews and the need to find the special links that unite us is largely developed in the Declaration of the Synod of 1991 in n.8 Such an attitude is necessary because of the anti-Judaism pursued by Christianity until the tragedy of the Holocaust. Tragic anniversaries occurred only a short time ago. In 1492, 500 years ago, Isabella the Catholic expelled all the Jews from Spain. In 1942, 50 years ago, the meeting of Wannsee (Berlin) decided the "final solution" of the Jewish question!

#### *4.3.2 The Islamic-Christian dialogue*

The Islamic-Christian dialogue is no longer an exotic one. Islam has become the second largest religion, after Christianity, in Europe, where 23 million Moslems live. This is the major change in the religious geography since the Reformation.

There is a convergence between the final declaration of the Synod and the work of the CCEE on the importance of this dialogue. It is a fact that Islam constitutes a formidable challenge on the pastoral level, as Christians know much better the Christology of Arius than that of Mohammed. And above all Islam questions their fundamental theology (the status of the revealed Scriptures) as well as their dogmatic theology (Trinity and incarnation), and Islam raises new practical problems (mixed marriages and conversions).

But Islam is an even more formidable challenge for divided Christians, in their division itself. Indeed, the Koran says in Sura V, verses 16 and 17: "The Christians move the words of the Scriptures and forget a part of what was taught them... This is why, We (=God) have aroused hate and division among them till the day of resurrection. God will teach them what they have done."

The Moslem exegetes are rather unanimous in the interpretation of these verses: what they hold against Christians is that Christians falsified the divine Revelation of which Jesus was the prophet, especially when the Christian community made Christ divine, and even later, corrupted monotheism by inventing the Trinity. It is this deviation from the message of Christ that made it necessary on the one hand to send another prophet, who will finally be the seal of prophecy, namely Mohammed, and on the other hand to constitute a new people of God, that of the Submissive ones (the name for the Moslems). The consequence was the rejection and division of the former people, who was thus to bear witness, through its division till the day of resurrection, that God had withdrawn his election from the Christians.

From this point of view, we see in an expected but rather eloquent way the need for ecumenical cooperation to bear witness to the Gospel. Because for Moslems our division functions as the experimental proof of the truth of their faith.

## *V - Conclusion*

### *The Future of the Church and the Gospel in Europe*

I repeat that I have been far from exhaustive: the work of the bishops on the European level includes many other insights like the emphasis on complementarity between the kerygma and the didascalía in evangelization. We should also take note of the large number of dossiers that were opened on tourism, migrants, the media, etc.

But I hope that these several reflections taken from the approach of the CCEE will confirm, if need be, your belief in the importance of the survey conducted on evangelization and the future of the Church in Europe.

We can conclude on a note of confidence.

The work of the CCEE has succeeded in breaking with a pessimistic discourse on the Church in Europe which is viewed as ageing, decadent, without vocations for the priesthood, more and more a minority in increasingly secularized societies. This discourse is worsened by a parallel portrayal of the Churches of the Third World as young, joyful, full of vocations. The CCEE found the way to say that the task for the Church of Europe is to meet an exciting call: to meet the challenge of a new inculturation of the faith in hitherto unknown societies, highly scientific and technical, having mastered their basic needs. To take up this challenge is also to serve the Gospel in other continents and in a way that nobody else can do, because the Churches of other continents must face too many urgent problems. They do not have the time to try to solve the constantly recurring question of the relationship between faith and the different forms of knowledge, or to raise deep theological questions of the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

The task of meeting the challenge of a new inculturation of the faith in Europe is a medium-term one. This is natural. As Christians, we transmit the Good News which came long before us and whose course will continue long after us. This challenge is real, because history teaches that no regional Church holds the promise of eternal life: the Christian faith has completely disappeared from North Africa, almost completely from Asia Minor and to a large degree from the Middle East. And these are Churches that have given us so many great saints and prodigious theologians!

But in the short run, the presence of the Gospel is linked to that of a sufficient number of Christian men and women in companies, administrations, universities and institutes, in trade unions and associations, and even in parliaments and parties. Not to exert a sort of clerical supervision of these different sectors of life, or even to "Christianize" them, but to share responsibilities and to help spread healthy forces and the potentialities they contain. If the Church lacks these men and women, all the efforts and all the teachings will remain mostly with no effect.

But evangelization will also remain with no effect without a real theocentric dimension, of which the life of priests and nuns seeks to be a reminder. Indeed, the centre of evangelization is not the Church, but God, the creator and saviour who

calls us to communion with Him. It is He who gives to us to live in such a beautiful and complex creation, of which we are the guardians. It is He who leads us through History. It is He again who gives us to live with close brothers and sisters, but also ones far away where it is also so urgent to show respect, solidarity, justice and love.

If we are seen as the true sons of God, grateful, creative, conciliatory, knowing how to contemplate, to hope and to believe in Him, many will no doubt find the path to the Father.

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