

## EUROPEAN UNITY AND THE CHURCH

DOES the economic and political unification of Europe, as such, have any importance for the Church? Since the Church exists in the world, it clearly has; but I wish to argue here that this importance is not merely of the kind which any structural change in society has in relation to the Church's pastoral and practical action, but also of the deeper kind which only some social changes have – when they have a direct bearing on the realisation of God's plan for humanity.

It is in this light that we can fully understand the unstinting support which the Popes from Pius XII to Paul VI have given to the ideal of European unity; and perhaps also why Catholic statesmen were in the forefront among the founding-fathers of the organisation which it is hoped will develop, in the not-too-long run, into an authentic European Parliament.

The unification of Europe, in the words of Paul VI 'fully corresponds to the Christian idea of human co-living by making of sister-nations one family. Hence, the Church heartily encourages them to pursue this goal.' In order to give a more solemn form to this encouragement, the Pope went to Montecassino to place Europe under the patronage of St. Benedict. Montecassino has the double interest of having been the site of one of the most tragic episodes of the last war, a bitter fruit of European disunity, as well as the site where 1300 years ago the Western monastic ideal, which was to be such a determining factor in the development of a common European culture in the Middle Ages, first flourished. Here the Pope wished to carry out a symbolic act in the hope that, in his own words:

'the ideal of the spiritual unity of Europe will henceforth be holy to the men of today – both to those who can effectively work for its realisation and also to those who can only hope for it; and in order that these men will not lack divine help in the practical realisation of this ideal through useful decisions.'

Among these useful decisions, the establishment of the Common Market must undoubtedly be regarded as among the most important. If the Church favours the *political* unification of Europe as a guarantee of peace, it is evident that the Church must also bless its *economic* unification: in order to eliminate one of the most evident sources of war, the clash of rival economic interests. Moreover, economic unification deserves the Church's blessing also as in itself a means of economic progress and greater justice between nations. That progress has resulted from the Common Market is evident from the statistics showing the much higher rate of increased productivity of the Common Market countries compared to the UK and even the USA, and above all the increase in trade; that this progress results in greater justice between nations follows from the co-ordination of policies which allow, for instance, workers to move on a massive scale from regions where there is an excessive supply of labour to others where is demand for it, with the countries requiring skilled labour paying for the training in these skills of unemployed young men in others. All this contributes not only to the general raising of the standard of living of the continent, but also to

the reducing of inequalities between the nations.

This reduction of international inequality was the first condition to be fulfilled, according to Pope John XXIII in a speech he made in July 1962, if European unity was to conform to the Christian ideal. The second condition was that Europe should not ignore the needs of the other continents. Europe had the duty of helping the developing countries progress. And the Common Market has, in fact, agreed to grant certain privileges and other advantages to the former colonies of its member countries. Nonetheless, it is the view of many that much more should be done in both directions than has been so far.

Pope Paul VI, in his turn, insisted on two other conditions. *First*, on the need of giving a really *European* education in the schools, particularly in the teaching of history, where the insistence should not be on the wars between us, and the victories of one over the other, but on the common heritage of all. *Secondly*, that it is the young who must especially be fired with enthusiasm for the ideal of a United Europe, which the Church wholeheartedly blessed.

If the unification of Europe as a guarantee of peace is sufficient to explain why the Popes should have spoken so strongly and so often in its support, there is a deeper religious reason why Christians should rally to the ideal. It is the essence of love to unite; of sin to divide. Any movement which aims at knitting human relationships more closely together, at increasing mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples, at fostering unity without destroying diversity, at organising in a harmonious whole disparate elements without reducing them to uniform blocks within a monolithic structure, any movement which contributes to a more communitarian form of life with full respect for the development of the individual personality of each through the reciprocal enrichment of all the partners, deserves the Church's blessing, because it will be contributing perhaps unconsciously, to the construction of God's Kingdom, not directly, but by creating temporal, political structures favourable to its flourishing.

In the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem opened up to us in the Apocalypse (Chaps. XXI and XXII), the City of God appears constituted of all the peoples and all the nations of the earth, but each nation preserves integrally its specific 'wealth' (although in a transfigured form), i.e. its own unique and unrepeatable corporate personality. The city of God is like a gigantic, myriad-faceted prism, each facet refracting, in its particular manner and colour, the light received from God, and from the Lamb, the central luminary of the divine city. *Et lucerna ejus erit Agnus*. Of this apocalyptic vision, it is hoped that the United Europe of the future will furnish us with a concrete, although partial and extremely limited, image on earth.

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