

# *The Evangelization of Europe*

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## **Introduction**

'Are you sure you want to go where you say you want to go?' This cryptic message was to be seen all over Strasbourg during Pentecost weekend when 'Kairos Europa' held an ecumenical assembly of more than eight hundred 'ground-floor' people from a wide variety of Christian groups from all parts of Europe to mark the double significance of 1992 — the Single Market and the Christopher Columbus Anniversary. The message was on the back of the teeshirts sported by some of the participants. It mystified those who did not understand English and puzzled those who did.

Frankly it puzzles me to interpret exactly what the teeshirt wearers were trying to get across. I assume it was to do with the personal cost of building the kind of world for which 'Kairos Europa' was pleading, and which — in the important phrase now sadly in danger of becoming somewhat hackneyed — could be summed up as 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation'. So far so good. But the clumsy question can in fact be applied with a certain validity to the examination of another theme which has become over-familiar in the early nineties — the Evangelization of Europe. There are costs as well as benefits in this vision.

No doubt the phrase has a certain resonance. It can stir the blood and rouse the troops. 'Evangelization' — the announcing of the Good News of Jesus Christ; the call to conversion; the claiming of the kingdom of this world for the Kingdom of God. And 'Europe' — a rediscovered continent: open frontiers, reborn nations, rapid change, a vacuum of ideas and convictions, 'ripe unto harvest'.

But without denying the command to spread the gospel, nor dismissing the unique opportunities and needs of this present hour in Europe, we should take time to examine what we mean. Perhaps we have not counted the cost. Or perhaps we do not want to go where we say we want to go. My purpose in this article, then, is to offer some signals of how, first, the word 'Europe' and secondly the word 'Evangelization', may be understood in 1992, while considering how the bringing together of these two themes may throw light on whether this is really where we want to go.

## **A brief provisional survey of the mission field**

### *The need for humility*

Before turning to the present scene in Europe, we should heed a necessary health warning. We can, in fact only approach the subject with a certain humility. The word 'provisional' is important. There have been too many instant and superficial assessments of what has taken place in Europe in recent years. It may seem odd to quote Ho Chi Minh the discredited communist former Vietnamese leader, at the start of an article on this subject,

but the classic reply attributed to him when he was asked for his assessment of the French Revolution — 'It's a little too early to judge' — may serve to remind us of the need to avoid hasty judgments. If 200 years is not long enough to make a definitive judgment on 1789, our own assessment of what has taken place in Europe in 1989 — or indeed, since 1945 — must at least be provisional.

Moreover, what happens next will help us understand better what is happening now and what has gone before. There is indeed an increasing awareness in students of history that the story of past events is continued in the present day and will continue into the future. The final chapter of several recent history books concerns itself with the future.<sup>1</sup> For the study of the past is not a closed book: the processes are still at work. That is one of the reasons for taking a long view.

But the historical perspective, while it throws a necessary light on the present and the future, does not provide us with firm predictions. The unexpectedness of recent events in Europe only serves to underline the surprises of history and the impossibility of accurate futurology. It is good news that any idea of determinism has had to be discarded in recent years. On the contrary the prophet's teaching that, under God, human beings are the subjects, not the objects, of their own history has been demonstrated by events.

So any enquiry into the European mission field requires both a sense of responsibility as active participants rather than as passive observers, and a strong dose of humility under the surprises of God.

Humility must be coupled with an attitude I can best describe as respect. The present scene in Europe presents us with a number of countries in the east who struggle with questions and opportunities they did not foresee five years ago, and countries in the west who are thought to be able to provide answers and help. This is so in the economic, political, cultural and religious fields, and there is, of course, a great deal of what has come to be called (officially) as 'know how' where help can in fact be provided.

But, whether it is entrepreneurs or democrats or academics or missionaries, respect is essential. People in central and eastern Europe have indeed been cut off from the movements of the last fifty years: but they are not to be regarded as benighted. At the same time we in the west, for our part, see that our systems have many faults: in all fields, we have much to learn as well as much to teach.

Nowhere is this more important than in the religious sphere. It is quite wrong to imagine that the gospel has not been preached in eastern and central Europe during all these years. Indeed, the quality of Christian discipleship under communism has much to teach western Christians who have enjoyed a high level of religious freedom. There is a call for help of many kinds — for partnerships and friendships now, happily, made possible

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1 For example, Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* covers the period 1500-2000. And both Adrian Hasting's *A History of English Christianity* and *The Illustrated History of Christianity* (several authors) have epilogues which explore possible futures.

by the new situation; for bibles<sup>2</sup> 'understood by the people'; for educational aids for teaching both children and adults; and for other tools for the churches. And it is imperative that this call be heard and responded to. But it should not be regarded as a handing out of largesse, but a part of an exchange in which givers and receivers are equally blessed.

So, with the need for humility very much in mind, what signals can be discerned in today's Europe? I offer these under four headings — Revolution, Disenchantment, New Nationalisms, and Secularization.

### *Revolution*

The revolution of 1989 is of course the most obvious, sudden, dramatic and recent. In his book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* Ralf Dahrendorf refers to particular moments which he would 'forever cherish': August 24 in Warsaw, when Mazowiecki, Poland's first non-communist prime minister, took his seat 'with his sad and pensive expression'; November 9 when the Berlin wall was broken through, with 'those who had been separated for twenty-eight years embracing each other'; December 29 in Prague when Vaclav Havel emerged 'in what was probably his only two-piece suit and tie' as the new president of Czechoslovakia. Dahrendorf speaks for all of us: it was indeed an *annus mirabilis*.<sup>3</sup> And there is no need for argument as to the suitability of the word 'revolution', despite the fact that there was, thankfully, so little bloodshed in most of the countries where it took place.

But if a revolution means a radical turning upside down, then Europe has seen not one but two revolutions since 1945 — one sudden, and the other gradual, starting after World War II and continuing today.

The revolution in the west went forward quietly and largely unnoticed. It was a process of replacing with a form of shared government the absolute sovereign state which had held sway for three hundred years. The intention was to seek a new form of unity in Europe by consensus rather than by conquest and — in the first place — in economic terms. This process was the immediate fruit of failure, poverty and near despair after Nazism and the Second World War. The Council of Europe, as well as its better known daughter, the European Community, were to be the instruments of this process which includes not only a unique juridical system to defend human rights, but also, of course, the open market. Quiet it may have been, but it was a fundamentally radical change of direction which merits the word revolution. And it is at this very moment at a crucial juncture, deepening its unity and widening its work. This is bringing into the domain of fierce public debate what had previously been unrecognised or boring or even a joke.

Both these revolutions had their roots in currents which were present much earlier in history (remember Ho Chi Minh!). But both belong to the present day in the Europe with whose evangelization we are now concerned; they form a crucial part of the context of mission.

2 The Bible Society declares that one and a half million bibles is the basic requirement.

3 The references are to Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, Chatto & Windus, London 1990.

As is sometimes the case, the churches have found in their own experience echoes and reflections of what is happening in the world around them. There are interesting coincidences (by which I do not mean to imply that the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with it) between the revolutions in Europe and events in the life of the churches. Without making too much of the dates, it would be possible to make a case for 1948 as the birthday of the quiet revolutionary process in western Europe. This was the date of the first meeting of ministers at The Hague which prepared the way for the Coal and Steel Community 'to give direction to a destiny henceforward shared'.<sup>4</sup> It was also the year when the World Council of Churches held its first assembly in Amsterdam, to be followed in the next few years by the Vatican Council and other attempts to work towards Christian unity. The ecumenical and the European movement have many fascinating parallels.

In that other year of destiny in Europe, there was another fascinating parallel for the churches. For it was in 1989 at the Feast of Pentecost that the Basle Ecumenical Assembly brought together Christians from all the mainstream churches of the whole of Europe, not only from the west but also from the east. They were invited by the Roman Catholics' European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and the two presidents of the Assembly were Cardinal Martini of Milan, and — from what was then the USSR — Metropolitan (now Patriarch) Alexy. Among its symbolic activities was the walk across the frontiers Switzerland / Germany / France / Switzerland with border guards joining in the celebrations and enjoying the distinctive gastronomical specialities shared among the hundreds of walkers. The Assembly at Basle was a moment of high hope. Although it preceded the openings to the east — and could have been among their many and complex causes — it expressed something of the same mood.

### *Disenchantment*

After the hopes of 1989, there have been less joyful repercussions, and the last three years have seen harsh disappointments, in both political life and the life of the churches. The joy of the dawn has been followed by the cold light of morning. In the east, as we now see, the underlying process, the shifts under the earth's surface, were more complex and wide-ranging than we may have realised at the time. The release of pent-up energies which came with the departure of tyranny has, as we all know, led to new conflicts and confusions, and in certain areas to terrible violence. Sarajevo today; but where — as you read this — tomorrow?

Moreover, the conversion of an economic system which had been under the iron hand of the state to a form of free market is causing traumas and suffering to the people of central and eastern Europe and in many cases is extremely precarious. New injections of massive aid and investment are urgently required if chaos — especially in the former USSR — is to be avoided. There is a real danger that the Iron Curtain will be replaced by a silver curtain, where the division, not between political systems, but be-

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4 From the preamble to the Treaty establishing the Coal & Steel Community.

tween poverty and riches separates Europe.

The new freedoms, together with the uncertainties and fears about the political and economic future of most of the newly liberated countries, have also released a huge series of migrations within Europe. At the same time the migrants and other minority groups are facing rejection and, sometimes, persecution. There is also an increasingly alarming phenomenon in the old as well as the new democracies where extremist political groups, some openly expressing racist views, are attracting more support.

As the east, then, turns to the west, what are they turning to? Political freedom, parliamentary democracy, human rights, economic prosperity? Yes; and these are not lightly to be set aside. But the pillars of western society are creaking ominously and there is a dangerous spiritual void.

The Pope metes out even-handed criticism of western capitalism and eastern communism in his *Centesimus Annus*; and Archbishop George Carey declares that, if you listen to what politicians say, you will get the impression that life is basically about shopping, with freedom of choice as the supreme goal and the supermarket as its temple.

The democratic system is under stress in many countries as people vote less — certainly for the mainstream parties — and hold politicians in low esteem. Few western countries have not faced major political crises in recent months. At the level of the European Community, at the very point when it has resolved to make itself more effective, the Danes express not so much an 'anti-federalism' in the style of the Bruges group as a feeling of the great gap between leaders and citizens at both the national and international level.

These crises will be resolved in the short term. But the underlying *malaise* runs deep. And in the meantime our continuing incapacity to cope with structural unemployment, inner city deprivation, environmental degradation and mounting debt among Third World countries — to name only a few of the problems — is a profoundly disquieting fact which could make the nineties a time of considerable danger.

A novel and a film of recent years tell believable stories which illustrate these dangers. The novel *Apocalypse 2000* by Peter Jay and Michael Stewart presents a scenario of a return to tyranny. In the wake of riots, disorders and economic breakdown, a new style dictator with draconian policies gains power through democratic means. The film — *The March* — tells how an enlightened and caring leader of the European Community is completely unable to respond adequately to a group of hungry and disheartened Africans who — believing themselves destined to die anyway and being led by a charismatic leader — decide to march across the Sahara to the shores of Europe to put their needs before Europe's leaders face to face.

The dangers of the wicked man seizing power and of the good man (actually, in the film, a woman — played by the delightful Juliet Stevenson) not being able to use it, are real dangers for Europe today.

Disenchantment — yes, at many points. And it has affected the churches also in ways which are outlined in the next section, and which could cause a serious impediment to the evangelization of Europe.

*New nationalisms*

It is evident that the most important underlying political — as opposed to economic — cause of the present instability is the reaffirmation of many nationalisms which had, perforce, lain dormant under communism. The rediscovery of national identity is, of course, a reason for joy rather than for sorrow. In so far as it helps to answer the question 'who am I?' it is to be welcomed as a way in which we find meaning in an otherwise anonymous existence.

But it is the intolerance which has accompanied this rediscovery which has brought with it a dangerous and sometimes violent disintegration and conflict. In Europe today there is a special irony in the attempts towards integration in the west at the same time as the forces of nationalism cause disintegration in the east.

Again we can discern parallels in the churches. The official churches took little part in the quiet revolution to the west. But in the revolution of 1989 churches both Catholic and Protestant played an important role, both in the pressures for freedom and in the affirmation of identity. And now, in its aftermath, religious differences are used by some to fuel the flames of strife.

But even in the quieter corridors of the counsels of the churches more than a hint of the same dynamic can be discerned. 'How can we link up with other nations', they say among the newly democratized countries to the east, 'until we have discovered ourselves?' 'How can we integrate at a deeper level of unity in the European Community' say the Danes and others in the member states, 'unless we can affirm who we truly are?' And in much the same way there is a renewed sense that Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants need to express their own particular traditions and convictions with renewed vigour before — or at the same time as — they engage in the ecumenical quest.

I spoke of the vision of the Basle Assembly in 1989. The ecumenical scene in Europe has not fulfilled that hope in the last three years. On the contrary the churches have followed it up by a series of gatherings, no longer together (albeit with 'ecumenical' or 'fraternal' observers) but separately. The Rome Synod of Bishops was called by the Pope in December 1991 from which four Orthodox patriarchates, led by Alexy of Moscow, absented themselves with reasons given politely but with the utmost seriousness. The Orthodox gathered together their several patriarchates in March 1992 and found distinct reasons to distance themselves from Rome. The Protestants also called two major European conferences in the summer of 1991 and the spring of 1992 to affirm their distinctive contribution to the European debate.

As for the Anglicans, the publication of the official Vatican response to ARCIC 1, which (significantly?) came during the Synod was a disappointment (not only to Anglicans but also to many Roman Catholics and others) which could not be disguised. It seemed to put in question not only the findings in the Report but the method and process of seeking unity behind the conflicts and separations since the Reformation.

Is this a regression? A flight into safe havens? The equivalent of the rebirth of separate and conflicting nationalisms? Have we to judge that the

earlier phase of the search for unity has achieved its ends and reached its limit? What next?

All this is brought sharply into focus as we contemplate the opportunities and the challenges of the evangelization of this volatile continent.

· *Secularization*

This slippery and much misunderstood word of many meanings<sup>5</sup> is commonly regarded as the key to understanding the missionary task. It may be contrasted with a state where religion is at the heart of a people's self understanding, where churches are full and ordinations and baptisms are plentiful and where religious principles inform political life. In the absence of these, we may rightly see Europe today as a continent in a state of secularization and this, we commonly judge, is a thoroughly bad thing which leaves God out of the reckoning and is a denial and dismissal of faith.

This analysis needs to be questioned for several reasons. It disregards many ambiguities — established churches in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom, religious education and broadcasting in which the churches are far from absent from the scene, saints days in France (the 'meteo' report always tells us tomorrow's saint while it forecasts tomorrow's weather), the German Sunday trading laws — as strict as Aberdeen of old. But more significantly it focuses on religious institutions rather than faith in God, and leaves out of account the potential holiness of the secular.

Some wise words on the subject have come from a Jew — Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. In his book *The Persistence of Faith*<sup>6</sup> he says: 'If God is present everywhere then every activity is sanctifiable' and he goes on to quote Rabbi Abraham Lakohen Kook 'What is secular is what is *not yet holy*'. Sacks certainly does not favour secularization: he pleads, however, not so much for an all out assault on it to reverse the trend, but 'the renewal of our communities of faith'. For, as his title suggests, he perceives within our societies a profound sense of the spiritual dimension of life, and a persisting faith among 'the vast majority'. 'Great harm is done', he says, 'to our understanding of religion by focusing only on its most visible effects and manifestations.' These words are from a Jew whose community has always been a minority in Europe, experiencing secularization, as it were, from outside. It is equally so for the Muslim community now growing so rapidly in many parts of Europe and sometimes facing religious as well as racial persecution. Both these great monotheistic faiths are part of the European scene.

Any attempt to survey the mission field of today's Europe, needs then not only to take account of the fact of secularization but to avoid a superficial analysis of what it means and how we should try to think about it.

So risks abound. History accelerates. The pillars of the European house — both ancient and modern — are shaking or discredited. The European mission field presents a complex and dangerous scene.

5 See above, p 203ff

6 Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith* (Reith lectures 1990), Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1991.

But nothing can be taken for granted. The very fact that the landscape is in a state of such rapid change is not only frightening but also hopeful and exciting. Anything can happen. And the provisionality of our historical judgments and that humility which, as we have seen, is a prerequisite of any enquiry, not only underlines uncertainty but also provides grounds for hope.

### Evangelization

And so we turn to the other big word of our theme. The idea of the evangelization of a continent is difficult to define. It must mean something more than individual conversions on a continental scale. It must mean something other than regaining for the churches the commanding heights of society as of old. The heart of the matter is that it is not *our* evangelization but *God's*. And the call to conversion is not so much *from* the churches but *to* them. People at large can only hear the message if they also see it. The words that must be heard are the words not of the Church, but of God. And the churches must not only proclaim them but hear and apply them to themselves. Evangelism is about God. And so it must be to God that we look to find the authentic signals. What then can we dare to say about God? I offer five words — Hope, Justice, Diversity, Holiness and Unity.

### Hope

The hope of the merciful God is a word which Europeans need desperately to hear. For whether they express this in religious terms or not, there is a profound search for new hope. But the voice of the Church often seems to emphasise the negative aspect, the need to recognise the mess we are in, the facts of our failings, more than this astonishing and undeserved promise of new beginnings (even my own analysis above could be criticized for this).

However, before the word can be offered, it must be accepted by those who speak it. And European church gatherings have all underlined the call to a change of heart in the churches themselves. Nowhere was this call more clearly given than at the great Basle Ecumenical Assembly in 1989.

Jean Fischer, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, co-sponsor of the Assembly, told the Rome Synod last December about what was declared. 'The call to conversion', he said, 'was addressed both to individuals and churches, who were urged to overcome distrust and hostility in their relationships, to conquer the dead weight of paralysing past memories, and to leave behind the spirit of intolerance and the refusal of religious liberty, and invited to enter into a fellowship which recognises the constant need for forgiveness and renewal....'

The separate gatherings of Catholics and Protestants also spoke of the need for mercy in their own distinctive ways. The Bishops declared that they were gathered there 'to beg pardon of God and of our brothers and sisters for our faults and failings'. The Protestants laid special emphasis on the promise of grace in view of the fact that 'the transformations in Europe have made us aware of the guilt that has accumulated in our midst in the last few decades'.



So all the churches — together or severally — call for repentance, and thus for the receiving of mercy. And this is surely the first step. But this must be followed or accompanied by the word of hope for both churches and the world around. There are in fact plentiful signs of hope in the recent history of Europe. There is hope in the two revolutions to which we have alluded already — a hope of new life emerging out of what seemed to be wholly unpromising. 'Suddenly after years of standing still, time seemed to move more rapidly', said Vaclav Havel in 1990. 'They tell you politics is the art of the possible' he remarked. 'I can tell you it is the art of the impossible'. (I hope he still believes this three years later!)

There is an irony in the fact that some of the most eloquent stories come from the most apparently hopeless situations. From Northern Ireland, for example, there come stories of Christian communities discovering — amidst suspicions and dangers — the reality of hope. In 'Freedom from Fear', a report published by the Institute of Irish Studies in Belfast in 1990, it is possible to read of such groups as the Cornerstone Community and the Barnabas Trust who bear witness to this hope. And from Ireland and other places also, the people — unknown and known, simply holy men and women like Gordon Wilson or beatified saints like Maximilian Kolbe — who forgive those who murder their relatives or take the places of others in the queue for the gas chamber — these tell in their lives stories of hope which can be heard most powerfully in the places where life is hopeless and words can sound hollow — even in the conflict in the streets of what we used to call Yugoslavia or the USSR.

### *Justice*

The relationship between social justice and evangelism has often been less than clear, and it has been customary, not only in the World Council of Churches, for 'church and society' to be kept in a separate compartment from 'mission and evangelism'. But the significance of service as an action closely related to mission is not only biblical but echoed in more recent times. The Final Declaration of the Rome Synod — referring to the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* — states that the church 'has a responsibility in the formation of human society ... which she fulfils most in her social teaching, which pertains to the task of the new evangelization.'

William Temple, in a lecture delivered in 1943, 'Social Witness and Evangelism' makes the same point: 'The Church as witness to the Word of God must proclaim the divine law for man and the divine judgment. It may be that this is what the world now chiefly needs from it. That witness, like the message of the prophets, involves direct intervention in the political sphere — not indeed in the region of ways and means, but in that of principles.... This is a plain duty on its own ground, but one to which the Church may the more eagerly devote itself because it is today the preliminary to Evangelism.'

But, again, words are only one part of this. It is in fact when the churches and Christians act in service to, respect for, and partnership with the very poor, the handicapped, the refugees, the outcasts of society, that the word of God is spoken and the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

### *Diversity*

The central statement of this truth is to be found in the very being of God. For Christian faith is founded in the Trinity and it is the gospel of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is to be lived and proclaimed.

Within the new Europe, where the new nationalisms to which we have referred are in several places in a state of conflict, the churches must both demonstrate and proclaim the intrinsic and God-given worth of its different races and ethnic groups, national and regional traditions, and languages. The richness of this diversity is one of the most important features of the European scene.

The Protestant statements on Europe place much emphasis on the fact of pluralism and the need to fight intolerance in their own churches and in the wider world. Their own churches have been, and often still are, expressions of a local, regional or national identity. Therefore they need all the more to find also a European identity, which holds together such groupings and may fight against xenophobia. These words apply also to those of other confessions.

For it is the task of all the churches together to affirm the gospel values concerning the stranger, and the rejection of all forms of racism. It is not only a political necessity; not only a matter of fairness to those who are at the margin; but also based on a theological belief in the importance of diversity rooted in our very doctrine of God. It has implications also for the churches' own understanding and the form of unity for which they work and pray.

### *Holiness*

Cardinal Hume spoke at the Rome Synod on the connection between evangelization and spirituality. He said: 'No Declaration coming from this Synod would be complete which failed to have an extensive treatment of this fundamental requirement for evangelization. Apart from this there is an emptiness in the lives of many both in the West of Europe and in the East, which we know can only be filled by God.'

The way in which such a place as Taizé has caught the imagination of so many people especially among the young is an indication of the power of this spiritual dimension. The Taizé liturgy is full of a sense of mystery and it speaks eloquently of the demands of the gospel. Its response to the new Europe is evident in the gatherings it has organised in the newly democratized countries. It is alert to the responsibilities of Europe towards the rest of the world.

There are other places where this sense of the beauty and the joy of holiness can be caught. Iona, the *Kirchentag*, the Focolari Centre at Loppiano, and the increasing number of special events and celebrations which now occur in many parts of Europe are to some extent meeting the same need.

But the weekly round of services at the parish churches of all confessions seem to find it more difficult to catch and hand on this flame. Is it that people need to get away to find this spiritual vitality? Does it depend on large numbers? Is it the presence of a religious community which provides the

key? Does the wider perspective of an international gathering provide some essential ingredient? Is the discipline of the regular round of the local Christian community meeting week by week in some way burdensome and frankly dull?

Probably all these questions are valid and point towards the truth. But the matter requires reflection in all local churches, not to try feverishly to copy at St X's what can only be appropriate on a different scale; but to examine the ways in which a community of friends who know each other and work together can provide regularly at the local level the means of building holiness.

The other side of this coin is of course the growth of the house churches where, at the most personal level, people often find the renewal and the fellowship they seek. Such groups often attract many new members. But being often independent and demanding a high level of conformity to the — sometimes idiosyncratic — views they espouse, their place within the wider scene is, at the least, ambiguous.

The Pope speaks of the need to discover the '*Soul of Europe*' and sees in its roots the place where this may be found. Certainly the Christian heritage of cathedrals, churches, art and music have great inspirational powers. And we should not dismiss the picture of a Europe when Christian stories and teachings were part of the air we breathed. But we are in the business of seeking holiness in today's Europe, not of reestablishing the glories of the past. The spirituality of which Cardinal Hume spoke will be very different, although it could provide some of the stability which is so desperately needed in this volatile continent — a stability which was indeed provided in earlier times by the Benedictine Community of which the Cardinal is a member. True holiness, however, will always be a spur as well as a support and the gospel community will always have a prophetic, even a subversive, element.

There is another factor — the Orthodox tradition. The distinctive witness of the eastern churches with their powerful sense of mystery, their doctrine of the holiness of creation, of transfiguration, of sacramental theology (or, to turn again to a Jewish concept, 'the transformation of the material world'), that mixture of the earthy and the sublime which is found so strongly in the Orthodox liturgy, is a contribution to the total Christian European witness which we should now hope to discover in an open Europe. For a variety of reasons that voice has yet to be heard in Europe as a whole. One place where it *was* heard was the Basle Ecumenical Assembly where the keynote address by Metropolitan Kyrill of Smolensk related the Orthodox doctrine of the created order and the environmental disorder following Chernobyl.

### *Unity*

The first statement in the creed concerns belief in *one* God. Those words of God on which we have been reflecting above — Hope, Justice, Diversity and Holiness — are held together in the heart of the Godhead. They are not several or separated but one. Being finite, we have to think about them one at a time: but always we must see them as a unity. The oneness of God is

therefore the summing up of all that has gone before concerning both Europe and evangelization.

This does not only concern the attributes of God but the mystery of the Trinity itself. Again being finite, we find ourselves thinking about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit one at a time. But the relationship and exchange of love which we believe are mysteriously present in the heart of all beings is also at the heart of the Christian gospel, the 'Kerygma', and must therefore be at the heart of evangelization.

St Paul's teaching in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians about the Christ who sums up all things, points towards both the one new humanity in Christ and the role of the Church in the loving purposes of God: 'We are all to come', says the apostle, 'to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself' (Eph. 4:13).

The word 'oecumenic' has come to define the new humanity in Christ, of which the church is called to be 'the sign, the instrument and the foretaste'.<sup>7</sup> And if the evangelization is to be authentic, this vision must be present. The movement which we call ecumenical has therefore to be seen as something bigger than simply seeking the unity of the churches. Church divisions are indeed a major denial of a fundamental gospel truth and their healing is a matter of the greatest urgency. But this healing is not for its own sake but for the sake of the world — a part of the evangelization. Mission and unity are indeed inseparable.

There are three reasons why this reflection needs to be heard in the particular context of Europe. First, it was in Europe that the schisms occurred which fractured the body of Christ and crippled the Church's witness; it is therefore a particular European responsibility to heal these wounds. Secondly, Europe has exported its divisions to the rest of the world and so distorted the universal vision of which the Church is the steward. Thirdly, the call for the evangelization of Europe — and for the Decade of Evangelism — provides a new chance in Europe to 'throw open the windows' as John XXIII said of the Vatican Council.

Since the opening of the ecumenical era, there have been some extremely encouraging advances. Read again, for example, passages in the Vatican II documents — the Decree on Ecumenism or the Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) 1964, or the WCC Statements at New Delhi (1961), or the Anglican-Reformed International Commission (1984). Recall the visit to Canterbury by Pope John Paul II in 1982, the Basle Assembly of 1989, and, indeed, the moving ecumenical prayer service at St Peters, Rome during the 1991 Synod — the high spot of an assembly which, as we have seen, knew serious ecumenical disappointments.

But the disenchantment of recent times in Europe has, as we have seen, also been deeply felt in the churches. History has been making possible a new unity-in-diversity in what has happened in the east and in the west the churches have appeared unable to move out of their rigid structures to

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7 Anglican Reformed Report, *God's Reign and our Unity*, SPCK, London 1984.

respond to the opportunities of that moment.

The Bishop of Birmingham, who was the Church of England fraternal delegate to the Synod, spoke of ecumenism and evangelization in the New Europe a fortnight before the Synod opened. He asked 'How can we Christians proclaim that the Cross of Christ has power to heal the divisions of humanity if we ourselves acquiesce in divisions from one another? For too many centuries the divisions between Christians have both reflected and aggravated the divisions between different nationalities and cultures. Christians now see as perhaps never before, that if we are to preach the gospel of peace to the nations, we must be at peace and unity among ourselves'.<sup>8</sup>

Bishop Mark Santer pleaded that ecumenism might be placed at the centre, not only for the sake of evangelization, important as it is ('that the world may believe'), but also because of the truth ('that they may be one as we are one'). 'There is' said the Bishop 'a profound connection between the unity of God and the message of the gospel'.

But let us allow ourselves a word of hope, even of optimism. The very fact of the present experiences of disappointment could itself release new energies. It would not be the first time: it was, as we have seen, when they felt most weak after World War II that western Europe's leaders were brought to create something radically new. It is not beyond the wit of the churches also to grasp, out of a moment of weakness, a new step-by-step process towards the kind of unity required both by the nature of God and the needs of his people.

To do so will require that the quest for unity bursts out from the ecclesial channels in which 'Faith and Order' has so far been contained, and in which it has been possible — let us acknowledge — to create solid and remarkable achievements. But the causes of disunity lie deeper than those theological differences to which the dialogues have addressed themselves so faithfully. They are political, psychological, cultural, and concerned with power and self-esteem. These are also the features to be taken into account in the process of evangelization. The gospel announces God's acceptance of our differences and does not condemn the need for people to have power and to think well of themselves. We need the confidence of God's healing and forgiving love. And we need to announce it to others. The pulling down of barriers and the affirming of differences are a part of both evangelization and ecumenism. Both processes demand the healing not only of individuals but of history.

The ways of marrying these two forces remain to be seen. But we have instruments ready to hand. The Faith and Order talks both at the multilateral global level and bilaterally are already in place and could widen their agendas: a Faith and Order Commission for Europe could be considered. And there is the 'Meissen' process between the Church of England and the German Protestant churches (the most moving part of the service in Westminster Abbey in January 1991 to inaugurate the agreement was the prayer at the tomb of the unknown warrior — a contribution to the healing of our history). This process is now being widened to Scandinavia and to France.

8 Heenan Memorial lecture, November 1991.

It could hold a key to further healing. And that is to mention only two among many places where healing church divisions and healing history can come together.

But the healing of Europe's history must also include the regaining of the global vision for the whole redeemed humanity. In the churches as in the political order, Europe's interdependence with other continents needs to be rediscovered and reaffirmed.

Last year's issue of *Concilium* on 'The New Europe' states: 'The decisive criterion of whether a new Europe is really beginning with 1992 will be whether a lasting change is taking place in the way Europe deals with others. Will they be discovered and recognised as others, rather than being conquered and annihilated or assimilated to Europe's own concerns?' Again it is a question for churches as for politicians, a theological question as well as a question of economics and politics, a question which demands the vision of the one new humanity in Christ — the ecumenical vision.

Kairos Europa's Pentecost gathering was a very limited exercise and did not effectively involve the mainstream churches or the political processes. It in no way aimed to be an evangelistic operation. But it assembled people across a wide spectrum of church affiliations and was about Europe's responsibility in the global field. Thus it raised legitimate and difficult questions which need to be addressed — among them the one with which this article opened.

'Evangelization', says Vincent Donovan, 'is not proselytism or brain-washing or propagandizing or even convert-making. It is dialogue and there are two necessary components of this dialogue for us: authentic gospel and a true openness to conversion.' And although many, including myself, may question his use of the word dialogue as jargon and lacking vigour, Donovan is clear that evangelization is 'absolutely essential for our age'.<sup>9</sup>

It is because evangelization is not only locked into ecumenism but also demands the conversion of the Church and its members, that we may find it difficult to grapple with the difficult and cryptic question on the Kairos teeshirt. But God, who has many surprises up his sleeve may even give us the wit and the courage to answer it, even if with bated breath, for we do not see clearly where it will lead us — Yes, Lord, I want to go where I say I want to go.

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9 Vincent Donovan, *The Church in the Midst of Creation*, SCM, London 1989.