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John Paul II's Idea of Europe

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That the pontificate of John Paul II has been a decisive factor shaping the course of political events in Europe in the last quarter of the twentieth century cannot be gainsaid. On the question of the part played by the Polish pope in the collapse of communism in 1989, Timothy Garton Ash has asserted that, if he were forced to name a single date representing a crucial turning-point for the history of Central and Eastern Europe between 1949 and 1989, he would choose June 1979, the month of the then recently elected pope's first pilgrimage to Poland.¹ In his important biography of Karol Wojtyła, Tad Szulc has sought to nuance any too simplistic idea that the pope and the communist regime in Warsaw were ineluctably locked from the outset in some titanic fight to the finish – independently of events in the Soviet Union – with no quarter to be given by either side; but he has also cast additional light on the central role played by the pope in bringing about political change in Poland and in fostering Europe's dramatic geopolitical transformation.²

For future historians there will be little doubt that the pope's pilgrimages to Poland in 1979, 1983 and 1987, as well as the support he lent to Solidarity, served as a catalyst for the collapse of an oppressive system of government in a state that had been found intrinsically and patently wanting (or lacking in 'rationality', to put it in Hegelian terms). Furthermore, the events in Poland in the first half of 1989, culminating in June's semi-free elections, exerted a domino effect on what was to follow later that year in Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia and, albeit less directly, on the subsequent changes of regime further eastwards.

Apart from his role as a major figure in Central and Eastern Europe at a time of revolutionary change, John Paul II has sought since the beginning of his pontificate in October 1978 to encourage the cause of greater European unity, and he has emphasised the necessary role of international political institutions or organisations in serving this end. Noteworthy in this respect was his visit to Strasbourg in October 1988 to speak successively before the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. In addressing the latter, just months before Europe's year of geopolitical upheaval, he called for the eventual eastward enlargement of the European Community, and urged that the Community should be outward-looking too by being open to the needs of developing countries.³ In keeping with the Holy See's contribution to the preparation of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, of which it was a signatory, John Paul II has consistently attached importance to the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), now the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Not that there has ever been any suggestion – in what would effectively be a gesture in support of the Russian position – that the OSCE has made

NATO redundant, this being a matter on which the Holy See can have no brief at all. In general, if the pope has sometimes decried the failure of Europe's institutions in stemming the political violence that has afflicted the continent towards the close of the millennium, the purpose has not been to disparage them but rather to strengthen them.

Although the influence of John Paul II on the course of political events in Europe in the particular conjuncture of the late 1970s and the 1980s has proved far-reaching, his concerns for the continent's future have from the outset been primarily spiritual (without the realm of the spiritual being conceived as a disembodied one). Mention may be made here of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) – a body bringing together representatives of the Roman Catholic Church's national episcopal conferences in Europe – which was formally established in 1977. Since the beginning of his pontificate John Paul II has desired that the CCEE should play a leading part in fostering the 'reevangelisation' of Europe; and the CCEE's fifth symposium in 1982 was of particular importance in situating this mission in a cultural context that included both East and West. In his teachings, his idea of Europe has been one where spiritual and cultural considerations are closely intertwined.

In the positions adopted by the Roman Catholic Church on world issues there tends necessarily to be a large degree of continuity from one pontificate to another. Thus as far as that Church's role in Central and Eastern Europe is concerned, John Paul II has built on what was achieved or explored during the pontificate of Paul VI (1962–78), both by that pope himself and by his close collaborators, notably Cardinal König of Vienna and Archbishop Casaroli, the future papal secretary of state. In the area of the Roman Catholic Church's attitude to political and economic integration in postwar Western Europe, the strongest of encouragement was given by Pius XII (1939–58) to the beginnings of the European Communities – and this is one of the reasons why the spectre of Catholic clericalism was raised by Kurt Schumacher, the leader of the SPD in the early years of the Federal Republic of Germany, in opposition to the Schuman plan.

This continuity does not exclude change of emphasis, however. In the case of John Paul II the idea of Europe put forward in his encyclicals and addresses has its own special contours. Some of his considerations concerning the continent's future find their inspiration not only in the positions taken by his immediate predecessors during the postwar era but also in earlier papal teaching, notably since the time of Leo XIII (1878–1903). On the other hand, there are significant fresh emphases and new developments in his elaboration of the relation between ecclesiology and culture in the particular setting of Europe. The outcome is an idea of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals which has, indirectly at least, a certain bearing on some of the larger contemporary political questions concerning the continent's future.

Society and Economy after Communism

One of the striking features of the present pontificate has been the attention paid by John Paul II to the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, by virtue of the claim that it is fitting and proper for the church to pronounce on questions of justice in the economic and social sphere. The encyclical *Laborem exercens* on the subject of human work was published in September 1981. A further encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, followed in December 1987 and looked anew – following Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio* (1967) – at the subject of economic and social development, including the contentious issue of liberation theology (which had been

partly influenced in Latin America by the neo-Marxism of the *dependencia* school of political economy, as exemplified, for example, by Gustavo Gutierrez' *Teología de la Liberación*). In May 1991 the encyclical *Centesimus annus* was published to mark the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, the encyclical of Leo XIII that had been the first papal document to address the question of social justice in the industrial age and that had been adamant in its refusal of both unbridled economic liberalism and Marxist-inspired socialism.

The 1991 encyclical contains a restatement of the principles of *Rerum novarum* as applied to the late twentieth-century world; not only does it testify to the great importance, in John Paul II's mind, of Leo XIII's innovative formulation of social doctrine, but also, like the earlier encyclicals of 1981 and 1987, highlights the economic and social dimension of the present pope's reflections on the nature of the 'person' (reflections owing much to the philosophies of Max Scheler and Maurice Blondel). In his address in October 1995 to the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation he was to return to the theme of the 'person' when explaining the 'moral dynamics' of the quest for freedom in Central and Eastern Europe and its outcome in the non-violent revolutions of 1989.⁴

In the introduction to *Centesimus annus* the pope wrote that he was including in the encyclical an analysis of some events of recent history, an analysis which had no pretence to be definitive and did not fall within the magisterium's specific domain. The events were above all those of 1989 in Europe, to which a special chapter is devoted. Speaking of the magnitude of the challenge facing the formerly communist countries of Europe after so long a period of thwarted economic and social development, he argued in this chapter that they had been largely the tragic victims of the postwar European order sanctioned by the Yalta agreements and that, accordingly, the continent's other countries now owed them assistance as 'a debt in justice'.⁵

In *Centesimus annus* the pope also warned the western countries of the wrongness of assuming that the collapse of 'real socialism' meant that their own economic system was in need of no correction. In the chapter entitled 'Private Property and the Universal Destination of Material Goods' he stressed that the advantages of market mechanisms should not lead to the idolatry of market forces. Dangers included those of consumerism and other kinds of alienation – in a Christian rather than a Marxist sense: for instance, the alienation brought about by an exclusively profit-oriented work environment.⁶ Here, incidentally, was an echo of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's criticisms of the materialism of the West.⁷

Twentieth-Century Nationalism

If the legacy of Leo XIII has played a large part in the present pope's reflections on economic and social questions, that of Pius XI (1922–39) must often be near to his mind when the subject is contemporary Europe's political strife. It was this pontiff who repeatedly denounced, for doctrinal reasons, the exaggerated nationalisms of the interwar years as well as the ills of atheistic communism, the formal condemnation of the latter having been expressed through the encyclical *Divini redemptoris* of March 1937. Simultaneously, in his encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, which was given on Passion Sunday 1937 and read in all Roman Catholic churches in Germany on the following Palm Sunday, the pope denounced the 'neo-pagan' nature of Hitler's national socialism, as manifest, for instance, in Goebbels' bitterly negative attitude towards religious instruction in schools as well as in the activities of the German Faith Movement (*Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*) with its advocacy of 'Positive

Christianity'. In 1938 Pius XI was to start the preparation of an encyclical entitled *Humani generis unitas*, which would have formally condemned antisemitism and all forms of racism, but his death in February 1939 led to the encyclical's being abandoned.⁸

In the early part of his pontificate Pius XI had devoted considerable attention to politico-religious affairs in France. In particular, in 1926 he was to condemn the ideological nationalism of Charles Maurras and the organisation Action Française. Although this French political movement was a quixotic and marginal phenomenon compared with the deadly politics Hitler had in store for Germany seven years later, Maurras' brand of nationalism had long exerted a pernicious influence on French Catholics, not least among the intelligentsia. It allied an extravagant praise of the Church of Rome, seen as the bastion of order, to a ranting antisemitism, which was largely founded on a deep antipathy to Judaism as a spiritual force.

Whether by coincidence or not, it was about the same time as he condemned Action Française that Pius XI signalled his lack of sympathy for the confusion of religion and nationalism promoted in Poland by Roman Dmowski and his *Endajca* or National Democracy movement (which in 1919 had become the Popular National Union). Prior to his elevation to the pontificate Achille Ratti had firsthand knowledge of this leading Polish political figure who championed Roman Catholicism (embodied above all in a 'national church') for largely temporal reasons; this was when the future pope had served as papal nuncio in Warsaw immediately after the First World War. Dmowski's nationalism was like Maurras' in being positivist-based and antisemitic in character, and it stood in sharp contrast to Józef Piłsudski's broader idea of the Polish nation. No doubt the young Karol Wojtyła, in reflecting upon the tragic twentieth-century history of Poland and Europe, must soon have become aware of the fetters put upon Christianity by modern nationalism.⁹

In May 1995, in his message on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, John Paul II referred to an address of Pius XI to the Roman Curia in 1930 in which the latter had warned that

... it will be more difficult, if not impossible, for peace to endure between peoples and states, if in place of true and genuine love of country there reigns a selfish and intransigent nationalism, that is to say, hatred and jealousy in place of the common desire of the good, distrust and suspicion in place of fraternal trust, competition and strife in place of harmonious cooperation, the desire for power and mastery in place of respect and protection for all rights, including those of the weak and small.¹⁰

Later in 1995, in his address to the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation, John Paul II came back to the same theme: 'nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms' is, he said, 'the antithesis of true patriotism, and today we must ensure that extreme nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of the aberrations of totalitarianism'.¹¹

It might have been thought in 1978, at the time of his election, that the era of exaggerated nationalism in Europe was largely over. Not that there was any reason to doubt the continued vitality of the nation-state, even in economically and politically integrated Western Europe: John Paul II himself, in the early years of his pontificate, stressed the importance of the idea of the nation as a community and of the ties binding together the nation, its culture and its political expression as a state; for instance, he expressed views to this effect during his first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979. In speaking about the Polish nation, he could indeed echo the passionate

sentiments of Adam Mickiewicz, as witness the moment towards the close of the ceremony of his inauguration as pope when he recited, for those of his countrymen present, the opening patriotic lines of the epic poem *Pan Tadeusz* (lines in which the most famous of Poland's romantic nineteenth-century writers invokes the Virgin Mary, protectress of the defunct Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth).

The 1990s have, however, been marked by a change of emphasis. Already in the late 1970s John Paul II had condemned 'metaphysical nationalism', in contrast to the legitimate and more restricted idea of the nation as a community and vehicle of culture serving wider universalist values. But it is in recent years, after the collapse of communism in Europe and in the face of the various tragic political events blighting both Europe and Africa, that his criticisms of nationalism as a continuing malevolent force in the contemporary world have come to be more frequently voiced and with a fresh intensity. A notable example was the traditional New Year address in 1994 to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, when the pope denounced the 'paganism' of the 'deification of the nation' and lamented 'the most primitive forms of racism and nationalism ... steeping the Caucasus and Bosnia-Hercegovina in blood'.¹²

Several months earlier, visiting the Baltic states, the pope had pointed to the fundamental importance of respect for human rights both in the rebuilding of nation-states and in the conduct of international relations. This was notably the theme of an address to the diplomatic corps in Vilnius. He stressed the need to look beyond narrowly defined national interests and in this context called upon the Baltic states to respect the rights of their own minority communities, including those Russians who had once served in the Soviet army and had made one of the three countries their adopted home. Addressing the international community represented by the diplomatic corps, he argued too for the integration of the continent's newly independent nation-states into the wider Europe.¹³

It is Václav Havel, among Europe's present-day statesmen, whose pronouncements on the continent's political and economic future have tended to be closest in spirit to those of John Paul II. The president of the Czech Republic has often spoken of the importance of wider European integration for the overcoming of the demons of nationalism, and he has also stressed the necessity of founding this integration on values entailing moral obligations. Like the pope, moreover, he has argued for an idea of civil society that transcends economic individualism; and he remarked, prior to 1989, that the civilisation of Western Europe was endangered by a culture of consumerism, to which the totalitarian system installed in Eastern Europe served as a 'convex mirror' – a remark to be echoed in the equivalence drawn in *Centesimus annus* between 'real socialism' and 'radical capitalistic ideology'.¹⁴

Christianity and Europe

The statement of an affinity between the views of John Paul II and a figure like Havel on the question of Europe's identity should not be pushed too far, however; it should not hide the centrality and indeed originality in the former's thought of a number of considerations concerning Europe and its different religious traditions. In particular, as the first Slav pope John Paul II has been concerned to emphasise the richness of the spirituality of Eastern Orthodoxy and to point with sorrow to the religious and cultural losses entailed by some thousand years of division between Rome and Byzantium. Although his ecumenical initiatives have owed much to earlier steps taken by his predecessors – notably Leo XIII and, more recently, both John XXIII

(1958–63) and Paul VI – what has lent a special character to the present pope's approach is the closeness of his own Slav roots to those of the Orthodox tradition.

John Paul II has a firsthand awareness of the long and complicated relations between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. He has an evident affection for the Old Slavonic liturgical language, which is still used in the Byzantine liturgy of the Slavonic Eastern Churches of the Rite of Constantinople – both Greek Catholic and Orthodox – in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, as well as in the Roman liturgy of the Catholic Church in Croatia. His acquaintance with the Orthodoxy of the Russian Patriarchate has evidently been facilitated by his knowledge of Russian and Ukrainian. Furthermore, his sense of time and place has been partly moulded by Kraków, where he was successively university student, priest and bishop; notwithstanding the city's quintessentially Central European atmosphere, much of the city's history has been marked by ties with the East and the memory of it runs deep.

The former cardinal archbishop thus exercised his office in the shadow of the late Piast and Jagellonian dynasties – literally so, since the Wawel cathedral and royal palace stand alongside one another on the rock above the Vistula. Kraków cannot be separated from the memory of the union in the fourteenth century of Poland and Lithuania under the Jagellonian dynasty and then the foundation in the sixteenth century of the integrated Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, which up to the late seventeenth century included both present-day Ukraine and Belarus'; and so the religious identity of a large part of this greater Poland's population was, over centuries, either Ruthenian (in communion with Rome through the Union of Brest-Litovsk in 1595) or Orthodox, rather than Roman Catholic. Much later, under the Austrian Partition, Kraków still looked eastwards, even if no further than to Lemburg (now Lviv in Ukraine), the bastion of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics, and the rest of Galicia. All this makes for a historical sense of perspective that must be quite different from that of Karol Wojtyła's Italian predecessors at the head of the see of Rome.

The pope's proclamation in 1980 of Saints Cyril and Methodius – the 'Apostles of the Slavs' – as copatrons of Europe, alongside Saint Benedict who was proclaimed the patron of Europe in 1964 by Paul VI, takes on an added relief when viewed against this background. As missionaries from the Byzantine Church, these two brothers from Thessalonica evangelised Greater Moravia in the ninth century and, through their influence, a much wider area extending into the territories of southern Poland; it was Cyril, moreover, who invented the Glagolitic or 'Cyrillic' alphabet, thereby opening the way for Slavonic literature. To give backing to his proclamation of 1980 and to commemorate the eleventh centenary of their evangelising work, John Paul II published his encyclical *Slavorum apostoli* in June 1985. He wrote of their work as an invitation to restore the unity of the two Christian traditions, the Eastern deriving from Constantinople and the Western deriving from Rome, and of its being 'an outstanding contribution to the formation of the common Christian roots of Europe, roots which by their strength and vitality are one of the most solid points of reference, which no serious attempt to reconstruct in a new and relevant way the unity of the continent can ignore.'¹⁵

Another symbolic occasion was in 1988 when the Roman Catholic Church joined in the celebration of the millennium of the baptism of Kievan Rus' (effectively the baptism of Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev and future patron saint of the Russians and Ruthenians). Commemorating the occasion in March of that year was the pope's apostolic letter *Euntes in mundum*. In May 1991, against the background of the disputes over church property between Eastern-rite Catholics and Orthodox,

especially those in western Ukraine, he was to address a letter to the Catholic bishops of Europe on improving the relations between Catholics and Orthodox in the new situation of Central and Eastern Europe; in it he expressed the hope that, wherever Eastern-rite Catholics and Orthodox lived side by side, their relations would be fraternal and mutually respectful.¹⁶ Following discussions in Geneva between representatives of the Holy See and the Patriarchate of Moscow in March 1992 the former Pontifical Commission for Russia prepared a document whose ponderous title *The General Principles and Practical Norms for Coordinating the Evangelising Activity and the Ecumenical Commitment of the Catholic Church in Russia and in the Other Countries of the CIS* indicated a continuing desire for dialogue, if not altogether on the terms desired by the Russian Orthodox.¹⁷

In 1995 John Paul II stressed anew the importance of unity between the Eastern and Western traditions of Christianity. It was the theme of his apostolic letter *Orientale lumen* published at the beginning of May, in which – perhaps thinking most of all of the Russian Orthodox Church – he urged Catholics to cooperate respectfully and modestly with the churches of the East. More important still, the desired unity of the Eastern and Western traditions was a central theme of *Ut unum sint*, the first ever papal encyclical devoted to ecumenism, which was published at the end of the same month. The encyclical was also concerned with repairing the divisions of the Reformation, being addressed to the ‘Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the West’ as well as the ‘Ancient Churches of the East’; and the positive role played by the World Council of Churches received particular mention. Of note in the encyclical was the ecumenical tone of the paragraphs dealing with the claimed ministry of unity of the bishop of Rome.¹⁸

Then in November 1995 the pope penned another apostolic letter to mark the fourth centenary of the Union of Brest-Litovsk. The tone was strongly ecumenical. He declared that, in respect of twentieth-century developments in the eastern half of the continent, ‘the churches of Europe’ were bound together by a heritage of persecution and martyrdom; the ‘real, if imperfect communion, already present between Catholics and Orthodox in their ecclesial life’, could take only added sustenance from the remembrance of martyrs ‘whether victims of the ideologies of the East or of the West’.¹⁹

Non-Exclusiveness of Europe’s Religious Identity

On the question of Europe’s religious identity, John Paul II makes no pretence that it has been, or should be, exclusively Christian. What has been said about his awareness, as a Slav and a Pole, of the importance of the Eastern tradition of Christianity must apply *mutatis mutandis* to his awareness of the importance of the Jewish presence in Europe and, particularly, in the territories of the old Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, on whose lands, just prior to Poland’s partition at the end of the eighteenth century, lived perhaps two-thirds of the world’s Jewish population.²⁰ A look at Kraków itself suffices, since it was once part of that now largely destroyed world; the famous Jewish district of Kazimierz goes back, as its name indicates, to the time of Casimir the Great in the fourteenth century. But the pope’s experience of the ineffable tragedy of European Jewry’s twentieth-century fate has, perforce, been also of a personal nature.

His childhood and schooldays in the small town of Wadowice, not far from Kraków, took place in a partly Jewish environment. Later the Auschwitz concentration camps were to be built some fifteen miles away; many members of the Jewish

community in Wadowice died there, while he had the relative good fortune of living a precarious existence in Kraków during its German occupation. Lublin, with its rich Jewish (and Hassidic) past, was to be the other Polish city with which the future pope was to be closely associated, teaching ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin in the 1950s. The Majdanek concentration camp was built at the city's edge, though most of Lublin's Jewish population were transported to the Bełżec camp, near to the present border with Ukraine and less than fifty miles from L'viv, to meet their cruel death. What happened in the concentration camps, above all the Holocaust of the Jewish people, was certainly no far-away event, and its memory has marked the Polish pope deeply.

In this context, mention should be made here of a longstanding friend and lay mentor of Karol Wojtyła, namely Jerzy Turowicz, the editor of the Kraków-based *Tygodnik Powszechny*. He has been an unceasing advocate, ever since the independent Catholic weekly's founding after the end of the Second World War, of new and improved relations between Christians and Jews (as witness, for example, his strong condemnation in 1946 of the government stage-managed Kielce pogrom and his publication in 1978 – the year of the pope's election – of Jan Błoński's seminal article 'Biedne polacy patrzą na ghetto' ('The poor Poles look at the ghetto')).²¹

In 1979, at Auschwitz, John Paul II himself spoke simply of the 'Golgotha of the modern world'. Then in April 1994, on the 51st anniversary of the rising of the Warsaw Ghetto, a joint Jewish and Christian ceremony was held in the Vatican in the presence of concentration-camp survivors; before the pope, Rome's chief rabbi and the president of Italy, six candlesticks of the menorah were lit for the six million Jews who had perished in the camps, and the Kaddish prayer for the dead was recited.²²

The pope's respect and feelings for the world of European Jewry relate partly, of course, to theological considerations; on the occasion in 1986 of his visit to the Rome synagogue, across the Tiber from the Vatican, he spoke simply of 'our elder brothers in the faith'. It may be remarked that his respect and feelings relate also to a certain Polish intellectual tradition, even if there have been other very opposing ones. Mickiewicz, for one, had held a deep conviction that the Jews in Poland should enjoy the same privileges as everybody else while retaining their right to remain distinct in religion and custom. Another notable figure in the same respect was Cyprian Norwid, the nineteenth-century poet who eschewed Mickiewicz's political messianism and stood rather for a universalistic Christian humanism. In his poem 'Żydowie polscy' ('Polish Jews') (1861), Norwid had written of the country's 'priceless heritage' of two different, yet related, rich cultures. For Norwid's poetry and view of history, the pope has a particular admiration.²³

Nor would the pope exclude Islam from Europe's religious faiths. Among the aristocracy of the old multiconfessional Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, to speak of his own country's past, there was a significant Tatar minority professing the Muslim faith. And, to turn to the contemporary world, the Second Vatican Council stressed the importance of mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims. In keeping with this spirit, John Paul II's three-day visit to Turkey in 1979, a little more than a year after his election as pope, was an occasion not only to meet the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Demetrios, but also to show his good will towards the predominately Muslim population of this large European state. More recently, in the face of the tragic events afflicting former Yugoslavia, the pope has repeatedly expressed his anxiety for the future of the Muslim community of Bosnia.

Besides Turkey and the long-established Muslim presence in the Balkans, the face

of Islam in Europe at the end of the twentieth century is largely that of immigrant communities. Their well-being has been a frequently voiced papal concern. Since many of the immigrants have come from North Africa, the pope's mass meeting with young Moroccans at the Casablanca stadium in 1985 was an event that effectively gave moral support to the efforts of local churches in Europe – especially the Catholic Church in France – to overcome prejudice and discrimination against immigrant communities and against Islam itself.²⁴

In the sphere of diplomacy, John Paul II has made clear his support for the European Union's endeavour to improve relations with the Mediterranean countries of North Africa and the Near East, an endeavour symbolised by the Barcelona Conference of November 1995. The future of all the countries of the Mediterranean basin – European and non-European – is intertwined, a fact which only underlines the importance of the Second Vatican Council's document *Nostra aetate* on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religions. In this context, the wave of murders in Algeria, between May 1994 and August 1996, of Catholic clergy of European (and mainly French) nationality – 19 in all – has been the clear reflection of the harsh face of a deformed, politicised Islam. After the assassination in Algeria of seven Trappist monks in May 1996 the pope expressed his sorrow in referring to the common heritage of Christians, Jews and Muslims, all children of Abraham.²⁵

Religion, Civilisation and Politics

Europe's religious identity – or identities – might seem a subject far removed from the contingencies of practical politics. However, the pope's view of Europe, from a religious standpoint, does have some bearing on two of the main political challenges facing the continent: the immediate challenge of consolidating a lasting peace settlement in former Yugoslavia; and the long-term challenge, for the twenty-first century, of arranging, as well and as realistically as possible, further advances in the continent's economic and political integration.

To start with the latter challenge, the crucial question is whether the European Union's present approach should dictate planning for the future. This approach, which is also influencing the tackling of the question of NATO's eastward expansion, is essentially one of allowing for the Union's progressive enlargement until eventually – say, some decades hence – its eastern borders become coterminous with the western borders of the former Soviet Union, minus the Baltic states. And there the process stops. Perhaps any (even) more ambitious approach would be quite unrealistic. Yet if the European Union's approach remains unchanged, there should be no illusion about its shortcomings. It is a design that still retains an element of 'Cold War thinking'.²⁶ Furthermore, it is at odds with the Union's own rhetoric (*Treaty on European Union*, Preamble and Article O: 'recalling the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent ... any European state may apply to become a member of the Union'). The Russian Federation, with its vast Asian territories, may be considered only partly European. Yet, if it is justly considered a Eurasian power, it can scarcely be said not to be a European state at all. Less ambiguously, Ukraine, Belarus', Moldova and, arguably, even some of the states of the Caucasus too, on account of their Greek or Byzantine heritage, have all claim to the title of European.²⁷

The pope's idea of Europe, as quintessentially a continent bringing together the Eastern and Western traditions of Christianity, has certain affinities – albeit in a different realm of thought and discourse – with the idea, advanced by Charles de

Gaulle, of Europe as a society of states extending as far east as the Urals. And this Gaullist vision of the continent, from the standpoint of international relations and culture, is at odds with the conception of Europe, still overly weighted towards the West, that underlies the present strategy of the European Union in the matter of enlargement. Such different notions of Europe cannot be purely arbitrary. Ultimately, whether the leading concern be religious or political, the idea in question must have some historiographical underpinning.

In this respect, the implicit historiography of John Paul II would appear to be close to that put forward in *The Limits and Divisions of European History* – published in English in 1950 – by Oscar Halecki. This well-known Polish historian not only followed and developed Lord Acton's approach in associating European history with the idea of the freedom and dignity of the individual person as promoted notably by Christianity, but he also looked askance on any bipartite division of the continent according to which one half is privileged as preeminently European by virtue of its being the vehicle of what is (problematically) termed 'Western civilisation'. There is also an emphasis in *The Limits and Divisions of European History* on the special identity of 'East-Central Europe' and on the importance there, at the outset of the modern era, of the 'Jagellonian idea', which was 'much more than a dynastic conception and had little in common with [latter-day] Polish nationalism'.²⁸ Certainly, for John Paul II as for Halecki, there is the memory of the extraordinary cultural and religious diversity of the old Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

More than a trace of this same memory appeared in Zbigniew Brzezinski's article 'A plan for Europe' which was published in 1995 in *Foreign Affairs*, the leading American periodical for discussions of foreign policy. This article's main focus was the security issue of NATO's eastward expansion (definitely favoured by Brzezinski, with Poland and the Czech Republic put at the head of the list). However, in the same article the long-term future of Ukraine and the Baltic states also received attention, and the danger of isolating Ukraine from the rest of Europe was notably underlined. In his conclusion, Brzezinski argued for the desirability of a far wider political Europe.

In scope, today's 'Europe' still evokes Charlemagne's: essentially a Western Europe. That Europe had to be an American protectorate, with European unity forged beneath NATO's umbrella by France and a truncated Germany. But in the post-Cold War era, the territorial reach of the emerging Europe is more reminiscent of the Petrine Europe of the Holy Roman Empire ... The progression from Charlemagne's Europe of 1990 through the Petrine Europe of 2010 will set the stage – perhaps by 2020 – for seeking Charles de Gaulle's vision of a Europe stretching 'to the Urals'.²⁹

The political vision of Europe held by de Gaulle and Brzezinski is one that might be judged to be in concord with John Paul II's religious one. Difficult, of course, in the hypothetical perspective of a 'Europe stretching to the Urals' is how to address the problem of the Russian Federation's future ties. It might be argued that such a perspective is of little political relevance to Russia's long-term future; this is notably the position of Solzhenitsyn who has called for a Union of the Eastern Slavs – comprising Russia, Belarus' and Ukraine – together with Kazakhstan.³⁰ Yet in the sphere of international relations Russia's European heritage cannot simply be shrugged off. Cognisance has to be taken of the fact that, for the purposes of most international institutions and diplomacy, Europe does already embrace Russia, as

witness the latter's membership of the OSCE, its signing in March 1995 of the EU-sponsored Stability Pact in Europe (under which a series of bilateral good-neighbourliness agreements, some of them signed by Russia, have been formerly entrusted to the OSCE), and, not least, its admission in February 1996 to the Council of Europe.

To return to the specific question of the European Union's enlargement, any extension eastwards to include Ukraine, never mind Russia or Belarus', would be impractical – for economic reasons alone – for several decades to come, even if it were on the agenda in Brussels. But a wider view of Europe, whether it be that represented by actual diplomatic practice or the more speculative view of Brzezinski, which partly reflects the religious dimension of the continent's identity emphasised by John Paul II, suggests that the question of the extent of the European Union's enlargement – conceivably well beyond the Visegrad area (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) – could legitimately be alive as an issue far into the twenty-first century.

To conclude with the immediate challenge, that of ensuring a lasting peace settlement in former Yugoslavia, it is not yet clear whether the Dayton agreement of November 1995 on the future of Bosnia will hold and, if it does not, whether it will at least allow for the negotiation of alternative peaceful political arrangements in Bosnia-Hercegovina; but there are anyway grounds for hope that there will be no reversion to genocide. Prior to the Dayton agreement the pleas of John Paul II for peace had been repeated and insistent. Furthermore, on the diplomatic front, the Holy See did seek consistently to play a constructive role, and it may be judged to have contributed to the eventual rapprochement of the warring parties.³¹

As to Europe's future, noteworthy in many of the pope's utterances in the 1990s about the horrors of the conflict was his sharp perception of its ideological dimension. Thus in his main address during his pastoral visit to Zagreb in September 1994 the pope condemned exaggerated nationalism; he spoke of the importance for the Balkans of the Eastern and Western expressions of Christianity as well as that of Islam; and he stressed that 'the tradition of religious tolerance' in the region was 'a common heritage which throughout the interval of almost a thousand years' had 'never been lacking even in the darkest periods'.³² In his abandoned visit to Sarajevo, which should have taken place a few days earlier, he was also to have addressed the theme of religious tolerance, regretting that Muslim, Jew, Orthodox and Catholic had all been victims, in Bosnia, of violent acts of nationalism.³³ Then in his New Year address in 1995 to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See he said starkly that the tragedy of Bosnia seemed like 'the shipwreck of the whole of Europe'.³⁴ It was a simile to which he returned in his New Year address in 1996 to the diplomatic corps, with a cautious optimism that a total shipwreck might after all now be avoided.³⁵

What John Paul II meant by this simile would appear to be twofold: first, that there had been a lack of moral strength in Europe as a whole to halt aggression, and, secondly, that the rich diversity of the religious traditions of Bosnia – a microcosm of his vision of the diversity of culture and religion in the wider Europe – had succumbed to nationalism. In Samuel Huntington's controversial and influential *Foreign Affairs* article 'The clash of civilisations?', which was published in 1993 and gave a cataclysmic warning of conflicts along 'cultural fault lines', such a shipwreck is portrayed as almost predestined.³⁶ For the pope the image of shipwreck implies the sinking of the very idea of Europe. On the question of the continent's political and spiritual future, there could scarcely be a sharper contrast than that between John Paul II's view and Huntington's curious amalgam of American political science and

the taxonomy of civilisations associated with Arnold Toynbee. One is an ecumenical and religiously rich idea of Europe, the other an idea of Europe as primarily the beleaguered bastion of the West.

Notes and References

- ¹ Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin & Prague* (Granta Books, Cambridge, 1990), pp. 133–34.
- ² Tad Szulc, *Pope John Paul II: The Biography* (Scribner, New York, 1995), pp. 285–92, 297–313, 337–416.
- ³ See *Le Monde*, 12 October 1988.
- ⁴ For the text of the address, see *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 11 October 1995. On John Paul II's idea of the 'person' from a philosophical and theological standpoint, see George Huntston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (The Seabury Press, New York, 1981), especially pp. 147–51, 186–218.
- ⁵ John Paul II, encyclical letter *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991), paras 22–29. The importance of the Yalta conference, in the thought of Karol Wojtyła, as the symbol of the moral catastrophe of Europe's post-war division is stressed by George Weigel, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992), pp. 96–98.
- ⁶ *ibid.*, paras 33–36, 41–42, 56.
- ⁷ See, for instance, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the Western World* (The Bodley Head and the British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1976), pp. 44–45.
- ⁸ For the history of this uncompleted encyclical see Georges Passeelecq and Bernard Sucheczy, *L'Encyclique cachée de Pie XI. Une occasion manquée de l'Eglise face à l'antisémitisme* (Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 1995).
- ⁹ A contrast between Dmowski and Piłsudski is strikingly drawn by Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986), especially pp. 129–48. On the 'national catholic' ideology fostered by Dmowski and its heightened influence in the 1930s see Bogumił Grott, *Nacjonalizm chrześcijański, myśl społeczno-państwowa formacji narodowo-katolickiej w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Nakład Tow. Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych 'Universitas', Kraków, 1991). This book includes a short summary in English, pp. 325–27. The negative attitude of Rome in 1926 towards Dmowski and the 'National Democracy' movement is described by Ryszard Bender, 'Il periodo fra le due guerre', in Jerzy Kłoczowski (ed.), *Storia del cristianesimo in Polonia* (Centro Studi Europa Orientale Biblioteca, Bologna, 1980), pp. 437–38. (This work later became available in French: see Jerzy Kłoczowski (ed.), *Histoire religieuse de la Pologne* (Le Centurion, Paris, 1987), pp. 457–58.)
- ¹⁰ *Message of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of the Second World War* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1995), pp. 9–10, 17–21.
- ¹¹ *L'Osservatore Romano*, loc. cit.
- ¹² See *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 19 January 1994. Cf. Jean and Blandine Chelini, *L'Église de Jean-Paul II face à l'Europe: dix années d'action (1978–1988)* (Nouvelle Cité, Paris, 1989), pp. 33–40.
- ¹³ For the text of the address, delivered in French, see 'La seule logique des intérêts n'est jamais très éloignée de la logique de la force', *Commentaire*, vol. 16, no. 64, Winter 1993/94, pp. 852–55.
- ¹⁴ The address by President Havel in Vienna, on 8 October 1993, to the General Assembly of the Council of Europe brought together, succinctly, his ideas about Europe and civil society. The pre-1989 remark about the 'convex mirror' was quoted by Cardinal Hume in an address he gave in 1983 when he was president of the CCEE: see Basil Hume, *Remaking Europe: The Gospel in a Divided Continent* (SPCK, London, 1994), p. 39.
- ¹⁵ John Paul II, encyclical letter *Slavorum apostoli* (2 June 1985), paras 13–14, 25, 27.

- ¹⁶ For the text of the letter see *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 17 June 1991.
- ¹⁷ For the Roman Catholic standpoint see Józef M. Maj, 'Dialogue with Russian Orthodox progresses', *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 20 March 1996. A considerable amount of information about Rome's care for the Uniate churches in Central and Eastern Europe, during the time of the Soviet Union and in its immediate aftermath, is provided in Sergio Trasati, *La Croce e la stella: La Chiesa e i regimi comunisti in Europa dal 1917 a oggi* (Arnoldo Mondadori, Milan, 1993), translated into French as *Vatican-Kremlin: Les secrets d'un face-à-face* (Payot, Paris, 1995).
- ¹⁸ John Paul II, encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), paras 88–96.
- ¹⁹ *Message of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II for the Fourth Centenary of the Union of Brest* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1995), pp. 14–15.
- ²⁰ See Antony Polonsky (ed.), 'My Brother's Keeper?': Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust (Routledge in association with The Institute for Polish–Jewish Studies at Oxford, London 1990), p. 6.
- ²¹ In connection with the role played by Jerzy Turowicz in improving understanding between Christians and Jews see Polonsky, *ibid.*, pp. 1–33 (Polonsky, Introduction), pp. 34–52 (translation of Bjoński's 'The poor Poles look at the ghetto'), pp. 134–43 (Turowicz, 'Polish reasons and Jewish reasons'). On the friendship between Turowicz and the future pope see Szulc, *ibid.*, pp. 123, 161, 166, 209, 293. See also: Antony Polonsky, "Loving and hating the dead": present-day Polish attitudes to the Jews', *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1992, pp. 69–79.
- ²² See Szulc, *ibid.*, pp. 454–55.
- ²³ Szulc, himself a Jew, gives considerable attention to the whole subject of Karol Wojtyła, Jews and Judaism: see Szulc, *ibid.*, pp. 40–41, 60–71, 306, 449–55. See also John Paul II's own *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1994), pp. 95–100, 150.
- ²⁴ On Muslims, see again *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, pp. 91–94.
- ²⁵ See *Le Monde*, 28 May 1996.
- ²⁶ A point, for example, succinctly expressed by Robert Skidelsky in a letter to *The Times* (London), 19 September 1995.
- ²⁷ On the question of the identity of the Caucasus states and of Europe itself, see the pertinent reflections of Norman Davies, 'On the Barbary shore' (a book review of Neal Acherson's *Black Sea*), *The New York Review*, 18 April 1996.
- ²⁸ Oscar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (Sheed & Ward, London, 1950), p. 194.
- ²⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'A plan for Europe', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 74, no. 1, January/February 1995, p. 42.
- ³⁰ See, for instance, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Russian Question at the End of the 20th Century* (The Harvill Press, London, 1995), pp. 88–94.
- ³¹ For the diplomatic good offices of the Holy See, see Jean-Louis Tauran, 'The Holy See and world peace: the case of former Yugoslavia', *The World Today*, July 1994, pp. 125–27.
- ³² See *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 21 September 1994.
- ³³ For the texts of the addresses that should have been delivered in Sarajevo, see *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 14 September 1995.
- ³⁴ See *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 11 January 1995.
- ³⁵ See *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 17 January 1996.
- ³⁶ See Samuel P. Huntington, 'The clash of civilisations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22–39.