

Memory, Nostalgia and Repentance

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A few years ago vehement opposition to the idea of further European cooperation and integration came from an unusual quarter. The Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly used the occasion of his moderatorial address to warn of the dangers to Protestantism posed by the existence of the European Economic Community. He was particularly concerned to warn the church that the Roman Catholic Communion was perhaps more dangerous to the Protestant polity at that time than at any other point in recent European history. In his view the Common Market was nothing more or less than the foreign policy of an imperialist papacy. He pointed out that, at that time, Catholicism was the religion professed, at least nominally, by the majority of inhabitants of the Community, that the founding document was the Treaty of Rome and that large numbers of the Community's officers were associated with Christian Democratic parties which were closely linked with the Catholic Church.

The speech caused some embarrassment to his co-religionists and was widely reported in the press. Many people immediately assumed it was nothing other than the theocratic ravings of a small and paranoid body and dismissed it out of hand. However, it cannot be denied that many of the founding fathers of the pan-European movement were clearly influenced by Catholic social teaching and motivated by a strong desire to ensure not only the prevention of another European war but also the promotion of reconciliation amongst former enemies. The vocabulary of European integration was often theological in tone and conveyed the resonance of Roman juridical formulae. The Moderator was right to suspect that European union would have religious as well as political consequences, especially for those national religious communities which, even though they might be firmly anti-Erastian, claim to embody something of the *volksgeist* of their own particular people. Fears of loss of sovereignty in the secular sphere are no less in the sacred, especially for communities which have pledged themselves to the defence of the Crown Rights of the Redeemer. The development of an integrated Europe seems to promise a disintegrated nation; fears of dispossession, of being a stranger and powerless in one's own homeland, of loss of home and identity, are never far away. It is in this context that the notion of a common European home assumes importance.

Both President Gorbachev and Pope John Paul II have used the

term 'European homeland'. Gorbachev coined the phrase when he was inviting Western European countries to abandon some of their suspicions of the Soviet Union and to engage in a programme of economic, political and cultural co-operation. In this way he was staking Russia's claim to be a European rather than an Asiatic power. Peter the Great turned Russia towards Europe, whilst Catharine the Great, a German princess, vastly extended its Asiatic territories, confusing its identity still further and committing it to an imperial destiny which it cannot now sustain. Gorbachev found an unlikely ally in the Papacy. Pope John Paul II also used the theme of the common European homeland in his address to the European Parliament on 11 October 1988, when the recent changes in Europe did not figure on the political horizon:

I have a wish as supreme pastor of the universal Church, as one from Eastern Europe and as one who knows the aspirations of the Slavic peoples, that other 'lung' of our common European homeland. My wish is that Europe, by creating free institutions for itself, may one day expand to the dimensions bestowed on it by geography and above all by history.¹

It is only when he enjoys a secure sense of belonging, the experience of being at home, than man can come to himself. It is only when man is 'at home' that he can begin to uncover patterns of solidarity which unite him to the created world and the rest of humanity. When President Gorbachev visited the Pope in the Vatican in December of 1989 the Pope reminded him that:

Solidarity helps us to see the 'other'—whether person, people or nation—not just as some kind of instrument ... but as our 'neighbour', a 'helper', to be made a sharer, on a par with ourselves, in the banquet of life to which all are equally united by God.²

The predominant experience of humanity over the past fifty or sixty years has been one of homelessness, literal and metaphorical. The growing ecological crisis shows the extent of our deracination. Our attempts to control and dominate the universe have served only to confine humanity within the prison of alienation. The flight from metaphysics prompted by the breezy certainties of modern science and technology has led to a cynical contempt for the world as a created reality. Consequently humanity is in the curious position of appearing not to be able to control what it has conceived. Pollution, the spoliation of the environment and squandering of the world's resources have their counterparts in the spiritual and intellectual realms. Truth becomes an ideological reflection of existing conditions so that we are no longer at home in our language; the covenant between word and world has been broken.

The positive attempt to restore the common European home

followed on the disastrous failure to locate a sense of belonging within national communities. It is possible to trace the intellectual genealogy of the nationalistic polemic of both Imperial Germany and National Socialism to the rejection of cosmopolitanism by Herder and his colleagues in the German Romantic movement. True humanity came to be seen as only attainable within the community of the nation. Each nation or people, united by a common language, climate, religion, customs and manners, shared in a common mentality which was unique and incommunicable to those who were not part of the national home. Cosmopolitanism was believed to be a threat to authentic humanity, since it undermined everything that made a man most himself. The ubiquitous, eternal verities of the rationalists of the Enlightenment were robbed of their general relevance and firmly planted in the earthy particularity of the *volk*. Mutual comprehension was, therefore, only possible between nations that had reached the same standards of intellectual, cultural and institutional development. One nation could only aim to understand and sympathise with the institutions of another because it valued its own way of life to the same degree. Experience shows that national pride is easily wounded. Isaiah Berlin, in a seminal essay on nationalism, has reminded us that those who find themselves the objects of contempt of powerful, successful neighbours undergo one of the most traumatic experiences that individuals or societies can suffer.³ The pathological response to such humiliation is the exaltation of the real or imaginary virtues of the victim against those of the oppressor, and often, driven by a messianic sense of national destiny, it results in the most vicious and uncompromising aggression. It was precisely this vision of the nation state that was positively rejected by those who wished to see the emergence of a new Europe.

The decisive impetus to the idea of a common European home was given by the destruction of the Second World War. Even before the war ended politicians and academics all over Europe were suggesting that the only way to restore the integrity of humanity in Europe was through some form of European unity. The idea was first expressed in the 'Ventotene Manifesto' in 1941. Ventotene was an island in the Gulf of Gaeta which served as a prison camp for Mussolini's political opponents. Far from being inhibited by their confinement, the exiled politicians transformed their captivity into a continuous political seminar. When one of their number, the veteran socialist Eugenio Colorni, escaped from the island in 1942 he was able to found an underground newspaper, *L'Unità Europea*, which propagated the philosophy of the Ventotene declaration. When the government of Marshal Badoglio signed an armistice with the Allies in 1943 the Ventotene prisoners were released and immediately took up the cause of European reconstruction. Two of them, Altiero Spinelli, later to become famous as an ardent European federalist, and Ernesto Rossi, made their way to Switzerland to take part in a meeting of delegates of the various European resistance movements

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convened in Geneva in 1944.

Fifteen delegates from nine Nazi-occupied countries met in Geneva to discuss a post-war political programme. They were concerned not so much with the economic reconstruction of a shattered continent as with the restoration of its human and spiritual values, the necessary healing of its memories and the rebuilding of trust that would be necessary if European society was to function once more. They came to the conclusion that the only way to avoid a future holocaust and to promote the rebuilding of mutual confidence was to aim towards a federal union among the European peoples. A leading figure at the Geneva meetings was Willem Visser't Hooft, more famous as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. His involvement shows that the movement was not simply to be political in tone but moral; right from the very beginning the idea of European unity was marked by the spirit of Christian internationalism and appealed to Christian intellectuals. Ironically, the strongest support for the union came from Christian and Socialist organisations. *Vrij Nederland*, the Dutch underground Christian monthly, and *Het Parool*, its socialist counterpart, canvassed the idea strongly.

The desire for some form of common European polity was not confined to those countries forced to endure the oppression of the Nazi occupation but even featured within Germany itself. At great risk, members of the Kreisau circle, named after the estate of Count von Moltke, began to plan for a post-Nazi Germany. The circle included large numbers of committed Christians as well as socialists and aristocrats. Its deliberations were curtailed by the failure of the July bomb plot against Hitler. In the aftermath of the plot von Moltke himself, along with many of the members of the Kreisau circle, were executed in circumstances which are all too well known to need repeating. Again, the dominant theme was the necessity of a federal union of Europe. This was a theme which struck echoes amongst both Catholics and socialists in France, and representatives of both constitutencies were to be found in the *Libérer et Fédérer* group which operated out of Toulouse. After the war various organisations designed to promote international co-operation and understanding made their appearance, including the largely Catholic *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales*. It was only in England that suspicions of the federal movement persisted.⁴

Churchill's view was that England could be with Europe but was not part of it. In his view, when faced with a choice between Europe and the open sea England would always choose the open sea, when faced with a choice between France and the U.S.A. it would always choose the U.S.A. De Gaulle, to whom Churchill expressed this opinion, must have borne it in mind when vetoing Britain's application to join the European Economic Community in 1961. Britain, with its tradition of Common Law untouched by the Roman tradition and the *Code Napoléon*, with its

distinctive ecclesiastical polity, its anti-cosmopolitan character and its attachment to Empire, found it difficult to reconcile itself to making its home in Europe. As a result the emerging European institutions were formed during a period when Catholic political life on the continent was at its strongest. The Christian Democratic stamp, with its Catholic imprint, was especially strong in the movement for a united Europe. It even managed to win the support of Pius XII, who expressed his approval for the idea of a close union of European states although, typically perhaps, he envisaged that this union would encompass only the mainly Catholic states of Europe and be inspired by the doctrine of the Church.

It is only in recent years that the early interest and influence of prominent Europeans like Alcide De Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer and Robert Schumann, who combined considerable political acumen with a strong loyalty to Catholic faith and practice, has been followed by a greater degree of papal interest in the notion of European unity. The Council of European Bishops' Conference was founded in 1971 as an agency of 'service, communication and cooperation' amongst the national European hierarchies. The present Pope has placed the process of European integration high on his personal agenda. He clearly believes that progress towards true union does not involve only economic and political treaties and the creation of international institutions. During his historic recent visit to Prague, when he paid tribute to the moral courage and vision of many members of Czech and Slovak society and emphasised their historic contribution to a pan-European culture, he declared that a 'united Europe is no longer a dream. It is an actual process which cannot be purely political or economic. It has a profound cultural, spiritual and moral dimension. Christianity is at the very roots of European culture.'

A consistent theme throughout the present papal ministry has been the call to European peoples to look to their origins so that they may draw life from their roots. It is an appeal directed against much of the nationalist theory which followed on the Romantic movement, principally in Germany but later spreading to the Slav lands; theories of national resurrection had also made their appearance in Italy and Ireland. A criticism often levelled against papal political theory is that it is overly conditioned by the particular experience of a Catholic Poland faced with the task of retaining some sense of national identity and purpose in the face of foreign oppression. However, the tenor of the Pope's addresses, together with the symbolic significance of the places in which he delivers them, suggests that, far from attempting to implement some theocratic vision of a restored Holy Roman Empire, he is restating Paul VI's claim that the Church is an expert in humanity. He does not see the excesses of Nazism and Stalinism as momentary blips on the screen of history; rather they were, in his view, the consequence of a certain historical process involving the denial and denigration of true humanity.

Far from being oppressed by the history of his people, the Pope has integrated that experience, forging it into a unique social and political synthesis. As he reminded President Gorbachev during his visit to the Vatican in December 1989:

While on the one hand the Church comes to know the mystery of man in the light of the mystery of Christ, she also learns to deepen her understanding of that mystery through the experiences of individuals as well as through the successes and failures of nations.⁵

The Pope's own political philosophy has emerged from this dialectic. His vision of a European commonwealth is certainly bound up with his vision of Polish history, but it is not tied to the Poland that emerged after the Second World War. The boundaries of post-war Europe are the creation of political rationalists intent on ensuring their own security and strategic advantage. Before the war Poles had comprised only sixty-three percent of the entire territory of the Polish republic, after the war that figure increased to ninety-three per cent. The war made Poland into a nation state, removing its minorities and shifting its eastern border 160 miles westwards, restoring the frontier with Russia almost to its nineteenth century position and drawing Soviet Russia closer to the European heartland. The pre-partition Kingdom of Poland was not the staunchly Catholic state of the modern Polish Republic. Paradoxically a Catholic Poland was the creation of the Soviet Union, the United States and Britain at the Teheran conference of 1943. Before that the Polish Commonwealth was multi-confessional in faith and pluriform in culture, containing a substantial Orthodox community, together with Armenians, Lutherans, Mennonites and the largest Jewish community in Europe before its liquidation by the Nazis. It is this model of nationhood which informs the Pope's cosmopolitan vision of European reconstruction. A tolerant and multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society, in which otherness is not a threat but an enrichment of the whole.

Of the many themes which the Pope stresses in his European journeys two are most relevant to a continent which is only now, forty-five years after its end, coming to terms with the Second World War. The Pope sees this particular time, the *kairos*, as he occasionally refers to it, not only as a time of challenge but as an age of grace. The various unsuccessful attempts to eradicate the dignity of man and reconstruct his profile in a secular and totalitarian image have failed. The time has come for not simply material reconstruction but a spiritual and cultural reconstruction. In order to begin this task two things are necessary: memory and reconciliation. It is these two themes which will feature prominently at next year's special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops.

The theme of reconciliation as an important element in the construction of the new Europe, and as a distinctive feature of the

Church's contribution to that process, was high on the agenda of Cardinal Wojtyla even before his election to the papacy. In September 1978, a few weeks before the conclave which elected him, Cardinal Wojtyla accompanied Cardinal Wyszynski and representatives of the Polish episcopate on an official visit to the hierarchy of the Federal Republic of Germany. The object of the visit was reconciliation; both hierarchies came to forgive and to ask forgiveness. Both sides had cause of regret. The Poles could not forget the sufferings they had endured during the war, whilst the German bishops were mindful of their own loss of a quarter of Germany's pre-war territory and over six million dead. Cardinal Wojtyla replied to the official welcome expressed by Cardinal Höffner, the President of the German Bishops' Conference, expressing the conviction that 'this moves us to the reshaping of a new countenance of Europe and the world in the imminent approach of the turn of the century and the millennium.'⁶ Later, at the tomb of St Boniface, the Anglo-Saxon apostle of Germany, Cardinal Wojtyla declared the absolute necessity of 'the strengthening in truth and love, the cauterizing of the wounds of the recent and distant past.'⁷ Here memory and forgiveness go together; both are essential if Europe is to find that unity on which the peace not only of the continent but of the world rests.

In November 1982 Pope John Paul addressed a crowd of over half a million people in Santiago de Compostela. They had come from all over Europe to this ancient place of pilgrimage. Representatives of the European Community, Nobel prize winners and members of the Council of Europe heard him invite them as representatives of 'old Europe' to find themselves:

Discover your origins. Give life to your roots. Revive those authentic values that gave glory to your history and enhanced your presence on other continents. You can still be the beacon of civilization and stimulate progress throughout the world.⁸

The Pope's appeal to Europe is similar to that issued in the dark days of the war by the pioneers of the unity movement: it is a call to the recovery of memory. Our memories make us who we are; when we lose our memories we lose ourselves and become rootless and dependent. A people that loses its memory is easily manipulated. The totalitarian regimes of the past represent a powerful attack on the corporate memory going together with an attempt to falsify history. The events of the past year in Europe disclose the power of memory. They show that the peoples of Eastern Europe have not lost their memories; their histories are in fact providing the armoury from which their anti-totalitarian weapons are drawn. The Eastern European struggle is, more than anything else, the struggle of memory against forgetting. There are many historical truths which will need to emerge before forgiveness is possible; the recovery of memory is a painful task. Neither should the descendants of the victorious powers think that it will not touch them, since the

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process is bound to uncover aspects of their own national equivocation and diplomatic blindness over the past half-century. Mrs Thatcher implicitly acknowledged this when in September she apologized to the Czech and Slovakian parliament for Britain's failure to help them in 1939 and 1968 ... although the apology was couched in such a way as to justify Britain's present Middle Eastern policy!

Remembering, recollecting, is a dangerous business involving considerable risks. It often goes together with a profound sense of loss. There is a pain in remembering, not simply because there are many things about our past of which we are deeply ashamed and bitterly regret, but because the golden light of nostalgia casts a warm glow over what once was and will never be again. Our story is written in a certain way and we learn to skip over the blank pages and the missing chapters. The unhappy present constantly struggles to free itself of the damaged past. Memory without forgiveness is despair.

In St Vitus's Cathedral in Prague Pope John Paul addressed a congregation of priests and men and women religious, many of whom had suffered imprisonment and hardship for attempting to live their vows. He said to them:

The Church's life does not consist in liturgy and sacraments alone; it must also reach the fields of culture, education, social action and charitable activity. The Church can and must help all people in various ways. As Christ came for all, so too the Church does not exist only for herself and her faithful, but must promote the common good of all. Indeed according to Christ's words, Christians must be the leaven, the light of the world and the salt of the earth.⁹

The Pope does not see himself as restoring an imperial papacy or preaching the gospel of ultramontaniam. He offers the Christian tradition as the space in which secularized man may be restored to himself; humanity may find itself once more in the treasury of the cultural and social life of the Church. The institutions of any society, whether national, international or supra-national, cannot be sustained unless they rest on the solid foundations of a common fund of *mores*, recognizably humane customs or life-style. Unless there is some consensus as to the ultimate values of human life the institutions of the state become little more than ministries of expediency. If no common conviction binds the institutions together then custom is replaced by coercion. Historical experience shows that where questions of *mores* are ignored or suppressed tyranny is not far behind. It is this prophetic message which the Church addressed to a Europe on pilgrimage in search of itself.

Prophecy is often seen as a call to return, a call to forsake the place in which we are and to take the risk of returning home to the land flowing with milk and honey. Milk and honey are symbols of rebirth and recreation. In the early Church the newly-baptised were fed on their

emergence from the font with milk and honey. In the ancient world milk and honey were the food given to new-born babies to encourage them to thrive. In personal as well as in national life the call to return offers a powerful attraction but, very often, the impedimenta of our mistakes, the burden of our years, hold us back. The function of the prophets was to awake in the people of Israel a sense of nostalgia for God. Their call to the people was 'remembrance'; remembrance of the destiny to which they had been called, which inevitably involved the remembrance of how they had failed. Remembrance and repentance go together. As Europe begins to recover its memory and its integrity this is the prophetic message spoken by the Christian Church to a people in search of truth.

- 1 *Briefing*, vol xviii no 22, p. 471.
- 2 *The Universe*, December 10, 1989 p. 2.
- 3 Isaiah Berlin, 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power', in *Against the Current* (Oxford, 1983) pp. 285—330. See also Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thought* (London, 1988) pp. 11—16, 51—86.
- 4 For what goes before see Richard Mayne, *Postwar: The Dawn of Today's Europe* (London, 1983) pp. 285—330.
- 5 *The Universe*, December 10, 1989 p. 2.
- 6 Quoted in G.H. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II* (New York, 1981) p. 256.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Quoted in Eric O. Hansen, *The Catholic Church in World Politics* (Princeton, 1990) p. 125.
- 9 *Briefing* vol xx, no 11, p. 199.

Understanding Germany

Nicholas Boyle

Some illusions

The feelings of trepidation and resentment aroused in Britain by the imminent unification of East and West Germany, and too accurately voiced in July by Mr Nicholas Ridley, derived as much from the disturbance of illusions about ourselves as from any rational insight into the affairs of our most powerful and important neighbour. 'Don't mention the War' was a good joke because it precisely identified a *British* obsession: since 1945 a mythologized version of the Second World War ('the War') has stood in as the image of a national identity which neither the twilight of Empire nor our ever shabbier political institutions, let