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"EUROPE" AND "CHRISTENDOM"

A PROBLEM IN RENAISSANCE

TERMINOLOGY AND HISTORICAL

SEMANTICS*

The term Christendom (*Christianitas*) meaning a territorial area took many centuries to establish itself, but by the twelfth century it had become part of the regular vocabulary of the Latin-speaking and -writing world.[1] During the long period of the emergence of Christendom the world Europe was not a competitor, for it was used only in a geographical sense in scientific works and in exegesis on those passages of the Bible which described the peopling of the world.[2] There is, however, a marked change in

*The first part of this article was communicated to the Tenth International Congress of Historical Sciences, Rome, September 1955. I use the term "historical semantics" in the sense it is given by Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire* (Paris, Colin, 1949), p. 85. The whole of Bloch's discussion, pp. 79–97, is very valuable and to the point.

1. See Jean Rupp, *L'idée de Chrétienté dans la pensée pontificale des Origines à Innocent III* (Paris, 1939).

2. There is an exceptional period when Europe had rather more significance in Carolingian imperial speculation: W. Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (London, Methuen, 1955), pp. 95, 105–6; cf. H. Gollwitzer, "Zur Wortgeschichte und Sinndeutung von Europa," *Saeculum* (Munich, 1951), 161–171.

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the fourteenth century in this regard. Europe is a rare word in Dante: in Petrarch it is frequently found. It is true that there is one isolated example of the adjective in the eighth century, in a chronicle describing the united resistance to the Moors.[3] Thereafter there is, I believe, no further example until the fourteenth century. Dante in fact, who has no inhibitions about using the words "Asian" and "African," deliberately avoids "European."[4] The next generation sees Boccaccio use the word "Europaic"—an old invention, which was not to have any parallels either in Latin or in vernaculars.[5] And it is not till we come to Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini that we find *Europaeus* emerging. The adjective is found more than once in his voluminous writings.[6] In the following generation we find Erasmus using *Europaeus*[7] and in the next generation again we find the word entering the vernacular languages of Europe.[8] It is, of course, true that *Christianitas* (or more commonly *respublica Christiana*) continues to be used with great frequency during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, together with the vernacular equivalents of these expressions. But the fourteenth-century emergence of "Europe" as a word increasingly employed, joined with "European" in the fifteenth century, is of considerable interest in many ways. The concepts of Christendom and Europe have, needless to say, attracted the attention of other scholars. Fritzmeyer's book, *Christenheit und Europa*, is useful,[9] though I think he passes too quickly over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; and there are more recent studies by Chabod[10] and Saitta,[11] who are both concerned primarily with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century evidence. What I shall try to do in the next few pages is to suggest some reasons for the emergence of the European concept in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to show that some contemporaries were

3. H. F. Mueller, *A Chronology of Vulgar Latin* (Halle, 1929), p. 46; M. Bloch, *Société féodale* (Paris, Michel, 1940), I, 6, and note.

4. *De Monarchia*, III, xiv, 7: *"non modo Asiani et Affricani omnes, sed etiam maior pars Europam colentium."*

5. *Commento alla Divina Commedia* (ed. D. Guerri, "Scrittori d'Italia"), III, 180.

6. *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1571), p. 387; Vat. Cod. Lat. 405, fol. 249; and cf. Werner Fritzmeyer, *Christenheit und Europa* (Munich-Berlin, 1931), p. 28.

7. *Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (ed. Leyden, 1643), p. 22; and cf. *Opuscula* (ed. Ferguson, the Hague, 1933), p. 34, and doubtless elsewhere.

8. Godefroy, *Complément*, s.v. "Européen": Bonivard, *Advis et devis des lengues*, 1563. *N.E.D.* s.v. "European" A and B (1603 onwards).

9. Munich-Berlin, 1931.

10. F. Chabod, "L'idéa di Europa," *La Rassegna d'Italia*, II, Nos. 4 and 5 (April, May 1947).

11. A. Saitta, *Dalla Res Pubblica Cristiana agli Stati Uniti di Europa* (Rome, 1948).

conscious of these changes, and to indicate some of the larger questions which arise in connection with this type of inquiry.

Among reasons for the change, we must put first a decline in the reality of a universal church. "Christendom" was a category which depended directly on an acceptance of religion as a unifying principle. It was the territory of Christian order—potentially the whole world, but in practice a region with frontiers: it was, so to say, equivalent to the Dar al-Islam of Moslem law. But during the fourteenth century this Christian community was strained to breaking point. The Greek Church, schismatic since 1054, had been forcibly incorporated in Latin uniformity for fifty years in the thirteenth century, but was again a rival by the fourteenth century. More important than that, within the area of Latin obedience the church was becoming provincialized. Each king strove to make the church in his territory respond to his control, and magnates and gentry resented even more than kings the ultimate interest of the pope in the landed wealth in their territories, however remote it might be. The Avignon popes, unjustly perhaps, were associated with the temporal power of France: Germans, Italians, and Englishmen resented them bitterly. To these developments the Schism of 1378 came as a final blow. The old international orders (like Cluny and Cîteaux) were reduced to a collection of semi-independent groups of houses within the great kingdoms and the fissiparous Franciscans fared no better. Even reformation, on the few occasions when it was attempted in the fifteenth century, was on a strictly regional basis—the so-called system of "congregations." To these developments the councils of the early fifteenth century offer the best commentary. For the better minds saw hope only in a federal church, where mixed-monarchy would take the place of papal sovereignty, and where regions would have permanent representation in a reformed and representative College of Cardinals. Compared with such a destruction of the older Christian unity (and I need no more than mention the problem of heresy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), what a pathetically inadequate answer was the short-lived "union" between Latin and Greek churches. The post-conciliar church is governed by popes who are only Italian princes, and the universally adopted system of concordats gave princes the *de jure* power they had so long enjoyed *de facto*. After all this Luther comes merely as an epilogue.

A further influence lies in changes in the boundaries of Christendom. In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Christendom lost its overseas appendages: Acre had fallen in 1292; the Black Sea principalities, chiefly Trebizond, collapsed in the fifteenth century, long after the Otto-

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man Turks had overrun the Byzantine possessions in Anatolia. On the other hand there were striking advances in the area of Christian obedience. In 1386 Lithuania, almost the last home of paganism in Europe, was officially converted to Latin Christianity and a century later Granada, the last foothold of the Moors in Spain, fell to the sovereign of a united Spain. In these ways there was a greater correspondence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than ever before between Christendom and Europe. Already, in the vocabulary of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the use of the term "ultramarem—outremer" suggests that the European territories of Christ were regarded by Europeans as forming the real or essential part of Christendom, the Syrian and other Eastern Christian areas having a sort of colonial status. During the fifteenth century there could be no such ambiguity. "Outremer" was gone and those Christians who bothered about such things (and there were very few) concentrated on defending Christian Europe from the Ottoman advance, not on the older Crusade to recapture the Holy Places. Europe and Christendom had been forcibly amalgamated.

Something of this was expressed in the new cartography. The old maps of the medieval period were formal diagrams, mostly of a circular world divided into three symmetrical portions—Asia occupying half, Europe and Africa each a quarter. Jerusalem was the pivot on which the map turned and it was literally orientated to a Garden of Eden set in the farthest east of Asia, at the top of the *mappamundi*. These maps existed in every shape and form from the great wall maps of Hereford and Ebsdorf to the tiny illuminations in scores of manuscripts of Isidore, Sallust, and so on. I have examined some hundreds of reproductions of these maps without finding a single example which portrays Christendom:[12] not one medieval geographer seems to have felt it worth while to indicate the boundaries of his religion. As for the continents, here again no geographer in the Middle Ages showed any inclination to discriminate in any meaningful way between Europe and Asia, Europe and Africa. The sons of Noah are sometimes marked on the continents that fell to them,[13] but no attempt is made cartographically to represent the significance attached to this by St. Augustine.[14] The *dispersio apostolorum* is shown on another series of maps, but no

12. The collection of reproductions made by the late M. C. Andrews is now deposited with the Royal Geographical Society. I was able to consult it through the kindness of G. R. Crone.

13. Most commonly on the so-called "Isidore" maps.

14. *De civ. Dei* xvi. cap. 2.

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attempt is made to show the lands that are no longer Christian, though originally converted by a disciple. All this was to be strikingly changed in the new maps which are found in the West, at any rate from 1300, the portolani.[15] These are mariners' maps in origin but soon elaborate copies were being made for amateurs and for scholars. The portolani began by showing the sea coast of the Mediterranean, and were rapidly extended to embrace the Atlantic coast. Not only were the results a truer picture of the surface of the earth, not only did they enable (as *mappaemundi* did not) a progressive improvement in accuracy, but in effect they were maps of Europe as such and (even more significant) they display an interest in the cultural and political character of the lands whose coasts they depict. A considerable number of them mark the sovereignty over each area by a reproduction of a coat of arms, real or imagined, and we can see the crescent of Islam dominating Africa, Asia Minor, and parts of southeast Europe, while the diversified banners of Christian kings and towns are restricted entirely to Europe—and to less than the whole of it. Thus in the fourteenth century for the first time the continent of Europe was graphically depicted in something like its true shape, and for the first time the limits of Christendom were marked on a map.

On top of the above factors comes the slighter but nonetheless noticeable impact of Humanist diction, which was inimical to *Christianitas*, friendly to *Europa*. This was an aversion among writers of revived classical Latin to medieval Latin terminology. *Christianitas* could not fail to be distasteful to the scholars who sought not only a "pure" vocabulary but also to avoid words associated with the thought of the Middle Ages. In any case a word was hardly likely to have a future in neo-Latin verse when, as was the case with *Christianitas*, it could not be put into a hexameter line—however oblique the case.

I have tried to show very briefly that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries "Europe" and then "European" became part of the normal vocabulary of the West; and I have tried to show some of the reasons why this development probably occurred. It remains to answer the question: How far and when were contemporaries aware of the change?

Here we are on more difficult terrain and it will be simplest to list some evidence in chronological order.

1. One of the French apologists for the papal residence at Avignon, replying to Petrarch's famous attack of 1366, claimed that Avignon, and not

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15. K. Kretschener, *Die italienischen Portolane des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1909); A. E. Nordenskiöld, *Periplus* (Stockholm, 1897).

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Rome, was nearer to the "modern boundaries of the Catholic Church" (*a finibus modernis ecclesie catholice*).[16]

2. At about the same time a French ambassador to the court of Urban V urged similar reasons for Urban remaining in France. "In these days," he said, "Christians dwell in Europe—for none or very few Christian princes rule outside Europe." He went on to argue that the south of France was the center of Europe. Rome had been the center of Christendom at the start but is no longer so.[17]

3. In 1407 an Englishman, Richard Young, tendered advice on the ending of the Schism. His suggestion was to compel French attendance at a council under the threat that otherwise France would be handed over to the spoliation of her neighbors. But France will comply, he went on, and will not prevaricate "as the Greeks always do: after all, the Greeks are on the very edge of Christendom, whereas the French are at the heart of it."[18]

4. At Constance met the general council for which Richard Young had argued. In two respects it offers useful evidence:

a) The whole problem of electing a future pope led to considerable debate on the nations and the scope of Christendom. All parties in practice argued from the tacit assumption that Europe and Christendom were one and the same in area and extent.[19]

b) More significant still is the famous debate between the French and the English at Constance on the status of the English nation, in which the French argued for a grouping which would have put the English and the Germans in one nation, and the English argued in favor of a quadripartite division of the church in Europe, for—as a member of the English delegation wrote in a memorandum which formed the basis of the English reply to France—"nowadays only Europe is Christian" (*sola Europa modo est Christiana*).[20]

16. H. Cochin, "La grande controverse de Rome et d'Avignon au XIVᵉ siècle," *Etudes Italiennes*, III (1921), pp. 1–14, 83–94.

17. C. E. du Boulay, *Hist. Univ. Parisiennes*, IV, 396–412. On the authorship of this extraordinary effusion see Mollat, *Papes d'Avignon*, 9th ed. (Paris, Lecoffre, 1949), p. 253. Du Boulay's text is very bad indeed.

18. Martène and Durand, *Amplissima collectio*, VII, 749. For the identity of the author see E. F. Jacob, *Essays in the Conciliar Epoch*, 2d ed. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1953), p. 71.

19. For example H. Finke, *Acta Concilii Constanciencis*, III, 628–637.

20. Mansi, xxvii, cols. 1022–1031, 1058–1070, and von der Hardt, V, colls. 56–101, print the French and English protests, on which see Fillastre's "Journal," Finke, II, 82, 90, 99–100; M. Creighton, *History of the Papacy* (London, 1897), ii, 80–81; N. Valois, *La France et le grand Schisme* (Paris, Picard, 1896–1902), iv, 376; Louise R. Loomis, "Nationality at the Council of

5. This brief catalog may conclude with a reference to the writings of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini. No one knew Europe better than he did, and when he became Pope Pius II in 1458 it became his prime task to defend Christendom from the Turks by force of persuasion and by force of arms. For Pius, Christendom and Europe are one and the same. In his letter to Mahomet II he lists Christian resources as the resources of Europe, and denies the existence of any real Christians outside Europe. Mahomet will soon realize how strong Christians are, says the pope, if he approaches the "interior of Christendom"—that is, the interior of Europe. Whereas if Mahomet accepts conversion (like another Constantine) the pope promises him the admiration "of all Greece, of all Italy, of all Europe."[21] As for the Crusade Pius tried to promote at Mantua, it was, in his own words, "to drive the infidel out of Europe."[22] And at the end of his life, when he prayed for the success of the crusaders, he said: "Give us victory over thine enemies that, having at length recovered Greece, we may sing thy praises through the whole of Europe."[23] Much more could be said of Pius II. We may restrict ourselves to one other point: he hotly disputed the insidious tradition that made the Turks "Teucri"—allowed them to share in that Trojan origin which would have given them kinship with the Franks, and would, in short, have made them European.[24] All in all, it is hardly surprising that Pius II's writings provide us with our earliest examples of the adjective "European."

From Pius II onward our evidence becomes overwhelming. The identification of Christendom and Europe is a generally accepted fact among publicists and men of affairs as well as among scholars. And to the identification thus established the sixteenth century was to add certain finishing touches.

The discovery of the New World proved a great stimulus to what one may call "continental ideology" and to geographical speculation. Moreover in a Christendom where Christians were divided as to what constituted true Christianity, the common denominator in overseas exploration and settlement was Europe and not Christendom. The Americas, discov-

Constance," *American Hist. Rev.*, xliv (1939), pp. 508–527, esp. pp. 522–26. The "Advisamenta" is in von der Hardt, v, 102–3. The whole debate was published (*Nobilissima Disceptatio* etc.) by Sir Robert Wingfield (Louvain, 1517), reprinted London, 1670.

21. Pio II, *Lettera a Maometto II* (ed. G. Toffanin, Naples, 1953), pp. 110–11, 113, 176.

22. Raynaldus-Baronius, x. 281 a.

23. *Ibid.*, 362 a.

24. A. Joly, *Benoît de Sainte-More et le Roman de Troie* (Paris, 1870), I, 527 n.

ered and exploited by Protestants and Catholics, were set over against not Christendom but Europe. In 1511 the first proper map of Europe was published and in 1588 that amusing map-figure of Europa—the first occasion on which a map of a cultural area was fully attempted.[25]

Yet Christendom was anything but dead.[26] Protestants as well as Catholics rejoiced at the news of Lepanto and "Christian" and "Christendom" are lively and active constituents in the vocabulary of seventeenth-century Europe. It is not till we reach the early eighteenth century, when (with the conversion of America) the equation Europe : Christendom is no longer viable, that the word has an archaic ring about it. From Montesquieu onwards to Burke, writers and men of affairs abandoned it.

The above brief discussion of Europe and Christendom is, of course, only one example of a field of research which is deservedly receiving more and more serious attention, not only from historians but also from students of political ideas and contemporary affairs.[27] The emergence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of nation states based largely on linguistic affinities has made the terminology of geographical areas of great public significance. In a decentralized feudal world lordships and loyalties could and did transcend so-called "frontiers." A similar ambiguity continued in the Renaissance period, when princely dynasticism frequently flouted what were later to be regarded as the sacrosanct limits of states: in what real sense was Charles V a "Burgundian" by nationality? Is not Erasmus to be found in the pages of the national biography of more than one modern country?[28] But with nationality emerging in its modern form, political nomenclature ceases to be unimportant. Much of modern politics resolves itself into campaigns organized round a name: Poland, the Balkan countries, Greece, are examples which readily come to mind. A twentieth-century world cannot (it seems) accommodate a non-affiliated Danzig or Trieste. Even within what must seem to outsiders as the homogeneous islands of the United Kingdom we hear the calls "Wales for the Welsh, Scotland for the Scots."

25. Waldseemuller, *Carta Itineraria Europae*, 1511; S. Munster, *Cosmographia Universalis*, 1588.

26. See, *inter alia*, F. le Van Baumer's papers in *American Hist. Rev.*, Vol. LI (1944), and *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. VI (1945).

27. Among the historians cf. the studies of Chabod and Saitta noted above, notes 10 and 11; G. Barraclough, below, note 31; E. H. Carr, " 'Russia and Europe' as a theme of Russian History," *Essays presented to Sir L. Hamier* (Oxford, 1956).

28. *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, vi; *Biographich Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, v; *Historisch-Biographisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, iii.

What are the necessary ingredients for the successful use of such abstract terms? When are people roused by an appeal to the name of an area? A mass of evidence exists for such a study. One thinks first, of course, of difficult areas, where political controls and names have changed dramatically: the "Low Countries," for instance, with Flanders, Holland, Burgundy straddling the ancient division between France and the Empire, and ultimately being resolved into modern Holland and Belgium;[29] or of Great Britain, where the Roman name "Britain," popularized by medieval romances, sponsored by sixteenth-century humanists, came in 1603 and later to absorb two nations under one rubric, making "British" a meaningful concept at any rate to the outside world. But even within countries where cohesion has been longest established, the process of terminological development is hardly less significant. In England it was a momentous change to move from *rex Anglorum* to *rex Angliae* and—by a typically illogical gesture—the revolutionaries in France in 1791 forced an official adoption of the title *roi des Français* in the place of *roi de France* which had been used for centuries. Obviously the power of a name is greatest where national unity has had most to overcome: Spain, Italy, Germany. One might argue (with these and other cases in mind) that the greatest influence the Romans had on subsequent historical events was to bequeath to certain large areas names around which political programs could be formulated centuries later.

What is new in the present situation is the invocation of continents: "Asia for the Asians," "Africa for the Africans," even "Europe for the Europeans." New, at all events, in its invocations by politicians generally, for the first adumbration of what one might call a "continental ideology" is presumably the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, when "America for the Americans" was enunciated, though not in so many words. At the Geneva conference in 1954, a good deal was heard about Asia, in not dissimilar terms. And at the same time we have seen the emergence of the advocates of a European civilization and culture building evocatively on the word itself. Mr. (as he then was) Winston Churchill, speaking at Copenhagen in October, 1950, envisaged "a Europe where men of every country will think as much of being a European as of belonging to their native land"; and, recalling that as a schoolboy he had been taught "that there is a continent called Europe," he rejected the view of the modern geographer "that Europe is really only the peninsula of the Asiatic land-mass" as being "an arid and uninspiring conclusion."

29. See P. Geyl, *Debates with Historians* (Groningen, Wolters, 1955), pp. 179-97.

Had the statesmen at the Congress of Vienna realized that from their actions a Europe was to emerge a century later which was to become a possible focus of attachment and antipathy, they might well have interfered with the quiet erudition of contemporary geographers. These (and notably German geographers) succeeded in effecting an extraordinary adjustment: they moved the boundary of Europe from the Don, where it had been in the days of Herodotus, to the Urals.[30] If Frenchmen and Englishmen could argue as late as the seventeenth century about whether Russia was or was not "European," they could not do so by the middle of the nineteenth. That this "Europeanization" of Russia was due to the geographers would be a ridiculous assertion. But that it reflected and encouraged other, and much weightier, factors is probable and worth investigating.

The evolution of concepts such as "Europe," "Britain," the "Low Countries" thus tends to compel historians constantly both to reassess the past in terms of the present and to distinguish the growing myth from the older actuality. They must do the first on the one hand because they cannot fail to express in their own activity the pressures around them: one of their roles is to justify current policies in historical terms—to see Magna Britannia as an entity from the Romans onward, to argue that Belgium has always had a unity. Such an activity is largely unself-conscious. On the other hand, the historian must forever question the tacit assumptions to which he so often contributes. He must deliberately avoid, so far as he can, falsifying the past and seeing a France where there was only a congeries of feofs, an Italy where the awareness of Italian unity meant something to only a handful of scholars. Above all, he must beware, in our own day, of attributing too much to a Europe which emerged as a self-evident proposition only in the days of Montesquieu.[31] As a citizen of the twentieth century the historian may devoutly urge the claims of "united Europe" and rightly trace back in time its roots and antecedents. But he must avoid forcing Europe on Christendom. "Medieval Europe" is almost a contradiction in terms.

One concluding reflection. Investigations such as are involved in trying to determine the emotional content of geographical names demand much time and patience. They are concerned with phenomena which are rarely self-conscious, which contemporaries seldom analyze. One must read with

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30. F. G. Hahn, "Zur Geschichte der Grenze zwischen Europa und Asien," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Leipzig* (1881), pp. 83–104. The change was accomplished by the 1830's.

31. G. Barraclough, *History in a Changing World* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1955), pp. 1–53.

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a mind alert for the general problem and on the lookout for a "Christen-
dom" that is archaic and moribund, a "Europe" that is invested with more
than a neutral sense. How one envies the student of classical antiquity,
whose dictionaries list all the words and note wherever they are employed.
As far as the so-called modern languages are concerned, we have only two
dictionaries constructed on historical principles (for England and France):
for German, for Italian, for Spanish—nothing. Above all, nothing for
Renaissance Latin, where so many germinal concepts (like Europe, Britain)
were nurtured. Yet the very difficulties of such inquiries add an excite-
ment. For one is dealing with a reality of a peculiarly vital kind. The words
a historian uses are those which, as Marc Bloch said,[32] "continuent à vivre
à côté de nous, d' une trouble vie de place publique." In trying to examine
an idea clothing itself in a name, old or new, one is trying to examine
life itself.

32. *Op. cit.*, p. 87.