

THE VATICAN'S OUTLOOK ON EUROPE: FROM FIRM ENCOURAGEMENT TO EXACTING SUPPORT

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SUMMARY

The overwhelming “yes” voiced during the referendum on same-sex marriage in Ireland, a country with a strong Catholic tradition, is viewed within the Church as a defeat. The Vatican in particular finds itself swimming against a growing current that has overtaken its historic western strongholds.

**“THE LONG-STANDING
FAVoured RELATIONSHIP
WITH EUROPE IS GIVING
WAY TO A MORE DISTANT
ATTACHMENT TO BRUSSELS”**

Relations are changing between largely secularised Europe and a less Euro-centric Catholic Church under the pontificate of the first pope from the Southern Hemisphere. The Holy See's expectations remain nonetheless high with regard to a continent called on to serve, to use the expression of Pope Francis in Strasbourg, as a “precious point of reference for all humanity”. Yet the long-standing favoured relationship with Europe is giving way to a more distant attachment to Brussels, subject to real vigilance.

Vatican diplomacy was, however, a loyal supporter of European construction. It backed the first treaties under Pius XII (ECSC, EDC, Treaties of Rome) and anticipated its enlargement under John Paul II. Its constant concern – on which it was insistent during the negotiations of the Constitutional Treaty – was to assert the Christian basis without which Europe is not viable, according to the Church. Today, the Church intends to foster its dialogue with European institutions and become a facilitator so that all Europeans of the continent may live together, beyond the EU.

Highlighting the value of peaceful coexistence between different peoples and religions forms the basis of Pope Francis' upcoming visit to Sarajevo on June 6. This trip to a city ravaged by history will mark his second in the Balkans, after Tirana (Albania) in September 2014. He sends a new message against the rise of extremisms in the rest of Europe as well as a reminder to draw from the lessons of the past – especially those which form the basis of the European project.

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INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis is preparing a visit to Sarajevo, on 6 June 2015. This one-day trip will be his third in Europe – outside of Italy – following his visits to Tirana, on 21 September 2014 and then to the European institutions in Strasbourg on 25 November 2014. The selection of these destinations denotes the singular outlook on our continent of the first non-European pope in recent history.

These visits, however, continue along the lines of those made by his predecessors, attentive from the outset, albeit at varying degrees, to European construction, which is itself constantly evolving by definition. From initial encouragement with federalist emphasis under Pius XII, the Holy See's appraisal of the European project focused on its relationship with Christianity, while manifesting growing concerns in this regard.

While de-Christianisation is indeed continuing in many European countries, it is mirrored by a de-Europeanisation of the Catholic Church, including its central government. The election of the first pope from the Southern Hemisphere is a sign of this. We are witnessing a distance being put between the Holy See and Europe, while a constant critical dialogue is maintained, currently focused more on social issues, such as migration and cohabitation in particular.

BOX 1 ► The Vatican

Covering an area of scarcely 44 hectares, an enclave within the city of Rome, the Vatican City State came into existence by the Lateran Treaty of 1929 with Italy, to ensure the independence of the Episcopal See, or Holy See, the higher institution of the Catholic Church headed by the pope acting as the successor of Saint Peter.

Elected on 13 March 2013, Pope Francis is the 265th successor of Peter. The pope is head of the Vatican City State, which has diplomatic relations with 189 countries and international organisations, and the spiritual leader of 1.25 billion Catholics worldwide.

The pope has sovereignty over the Vatican. The term can be traced back to the ancient designation of part of the right bank of the Tiber, which was outside Rome at the time. The smallest sovereign State in the world has around 800 inhabitants and around 4000 employees. Its currency is the Euro.

1. From Pius XII to Benedict XVI, the development of attentive vigilance

1.1. In the beginning, proximity and favour

1.1.1. A Euophile and far-sighted Vatican

The Holy See had a strong interest in the European integration project from its post-war beginnings. Previously, Benedict XV (1914-1922) expressed his concerns for peace in Europe following the First World War, which he deplored as a war between Christians. He opposed, in vain, the revenge-based approach towards Germany. Pius XI (1922-1939) then paid close attention to the pacifist initiatives of Aristide Briand. "Still, there was

not yet a Europe-centric ideology with regard to European construction”, observed historian Jean-Dominique Durand¹.

This approach was brought in by Pius XII (1939-1958). “It is the ordeal of war and Soviet pressure on the continent that urge the pope to call for Europe to unite with haste”, the academic continued. “The war had a profound effect on Eugenio Pacelli”, confirmed Vatican expert Bernard Lecomte². “It further reinforced his fight for a united Europe”. Against the 200humiliation of defeated Germany, Vatican diplomacy dealt with past enemies equally, a stance shared by some French Catholics.

This prompt support for the project of a united Europe was embodied in particular by the presence of a special representative of Pope Pacelli at the Hague Congress, which brought together strong pro-European forces in May 1948. In the November of that year, the pope explicitly positioned himself in favour of such a union.

He immediately warned against the risk of impeding the project of the “great nations of the Continent”: “We expect them to set aside their former greatness to align themselves on a superior political and economic unity”³. On the contrary, he spoke about the “exaggerated concern for uniformity” and the risk of “enforced harmonisation” in which extensive integration could result, while no process was yet underway.

While the freedom of movement of persons within the European area was not yet established, as early as 1953 he raised “the question of the equality or equivalence of rights in what regards goods, contracts and persons for the citizens of one sovereign state who either live for a short time in a foreign state or, retaining their own nationality, establish permanent residence there.”⁴ The question remains valid today.

1.1.2. A Vatican-oriented and federalist Europe

Pope Pacelli’s clear vision of future problems did not diminish his passion for European construction.

Very much in favour of the burgeoning Europe of six Member States, he supported the European Defence Community (EDC) project. “His appeals increased in number (around thirty) and became more urgent, resulting in controversy on the so-called ‘Vatican Europe’”, reminds historian Philippe Chenaux⁵, in reference to the mocking statement used by Guy Mollet during an impassioned debate on the EDC: “The failed ratification of the EDC at the French National Assembly (30 August 1954) will be very painfully felt in the Vatican”⁶.

The signature of the Treaties of Rome was celebrated in Rome with bells ringing across the city. Pius XII welcomed the “most important and significant event in the modern history of the Eternal City”.

He was, however, critical of how the new European Economic Community (EEC) functioned. He stated, “The European Economic Community is less successful than the Coal and Steel Community, whose High Authority has powers which are relatively broad and which, except in certain determined cases, do not depend upon any Council of Ministers”⁷.

Getting involved in the Community’s institutional mechanisms like none of his successors, Pope Pacelli was in favour of “the formation of a European political authority which will have sufficient responsibility to be felt”. In the same address, he also claimed that a “single external political community” was essential, together with “instrumentality which will effectively refine and apply such a plan” and a “great deal of material aid” for Africa.

1. Jean-Dominique Durand, Jean Moulin University – Lyon 3. Interview with the author.

2. *Histoire des papes*, Perrin, 2013, p. 189.

3. Pius XII, address to the 2nd Congress of the Union of European Federalists, Vatican, 11 November 1948.

4. Pius XII, address to Italian Catholic jurists, Vatican, 6 December 1953.

5. *Une crise chrétienne de l'Europe ? L'urgence européenne*. Proceedings collected by Jean-Dominique Durand, published by Parole et Silence, 2013, pp. 103-112.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Pius XII, address to the European Movement, Vatican, 13 June 1957.

"THERE IS A CLOSE CONVERGENCE OF VIEWS BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE AND THE 'FOUNDING FATHERS' WHO, FOR THE MOST PART, ARE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS"

These ambitions were also shared by the 'Founding Fathers' of European construction. There is indeed a close convergence of views between the Holy See and these politicians who, for the most part, are Christian democrats, including devout Catholics such as Robert Schuman - who is currently being beatified - and Alcide De Gasperi. "United Europe cannot be built upon an abstract idea. She must depend for support on living men", predicted Pius XII as early as 1948⁸. This closeness is the foundation of the myth of a 'Vatican Europe'. This was also reinforced against the backdrop of the Cold War, which fuelled suspicions of establishing a Catholic Europe between a Protestant USA and an atheist USSR.

The pro-European favour of Vatican diplomacy continued after Pius XII, though John XXIII and his successors did not support Europe with the same federalist ideal. "European construction, predominantly limited to economic affairs, no longer represented a key issue for the postconciliar magisterium", observes Philippe Chenaux⁹, with regard to the Second Vatican Council closed in 1965 by Paul VI.

A former close supporter of Pius XII, Pope Montini (1963-1978) "learned from him pro-European feelings, that also came from his education and culture"¹⁰, stressed Giovanni Maria Vian, current Editor-in-Chief of the *Osservatore Romano* - the Vatican's daily newspaper -, and expert on Paul VI. "His father was connected to De Gasperi", he added.

Continuing along these lines, Paul VI encouraged European construction. "The outcome of the European Communities instituted by the Treaties of Rome appears to be clearly positive", he declared to the commissioners of the EEC and Euratom received, in 1967, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of these institutions. He congratulated them on the projected decrease in customs tariffs and for freedom of movement. "The Church approves and encourages you", he told them, assuring them of the "real interest and support that the Church provides to your work". Paul VI even spoke of the "encounter and harmony between a great political project and the general principles applicable to people and society, of which the Church has been entrusted with the role of guardian".

He was, however, careful not to get into the technical aspects of European construction. When addressing newspaper editors of six European Member States also received in 1967, he did not hesitate to acknowledge that "the mission of the Pope is not to offer the best possible political or economic approach to achieving the unification of the peoples of Europe", while stressing that "Europe's cause continues to progress", and that "the unification of Europe will be ultimately achieved" as a prelude to world unity.

Without questioning the functionalist approach to European construction selected by Europe's founding fathers, Paul VI above all wished that "this understanding would gradually shift from a material level to a spiritual one, so that souls can grow closer, even closer than interests and economies".

It is this spiritual closeness, also dear to Robert Schuman, that Paul VI encouraged as a priority. For this purpose, following on from Pius XII, who made Saint Benedict the "Father of Europe" in 1947, he proclaimed that the founder of the Benedictine Order become the "main patron saint of all Europe" in 1964. His care and support would assist with the "formation of a European conscience", to use his expression. He wanted "a Europe that works in deeds, mentalities and public opinions", as he explained during a European conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations, again in the year of the tenth anniversary of the Treaties of Rome: "Europe will be 'experienced', if one can say so, before being defined. Practice will precede legislation". To "people who are distracted today, absorbed in their immediate tasks", Paul VI wanted to enable them to rediscover the "immense cultural heritage and civilisation that Christianity has forged over the ages in all countries of our continent": "This is also a means of working for the good of Europe".

It is John Paul II who will undertake to promote this spiritual heritage across the continent.

8. Pius XII, address to the Union of European Federalists, *Op. cit.*

9. *Op. cit.*

10. Interview with the author.

1.2. Under John Paul II, a broader, impassioned and concerned outlook

1.2.1. The awakening of Christian memory across the entire continent

“THE HOLY SEE'S OUTLOOK
ON EUROPE EXTENDED TO
THE DIMENSIONS OF THE
CONTINENT AND PROMOTED
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INSTITUTIONS”

Under the long pontificate of the Polish pope (1978-2005), the Holy See's outlook on Europe extended to the dimensions of the continent and promoted nations more than EU institutions. “Under John Paul II, the nation became central in the papacy's European stance”, notes Philippe Chenaux¹¹: “This did not lead it to show great eagerness with regard to Brussels”. He visited the institutions, in Luxembourg and Brussels in 1985, then in Strasbourg in 1988, in addition to his national pastoral visits.

“Pope John Paul II celebrated the Christian origins of nations and their founding saints”, confirm Bérengère Massignon and Virginie Riva¹²: “For him, nations, like Europe, must ‘express’ their civilisational identity”. During his trip to France in 1996 to mark the 15th centenary of the baptism of Clovis, John Paul II revisited places of memory which forged this identity. His visits to Santiago de Compostella in 1982 and 1989 were intended to breathe new life into a pilgrimage which had lost popularity. “I utter to you, Europe of the ages, a cry full of love: Find yourself again. Be yourself. Discover your origins, revive your roots”, he proclaimed in Spanish, during his first visit there.

His aim was not at all to restore Christianity or re-establish former privileges. Karol Wojtyla wanted Europe, through Christianity, to seize its unity beyond the East-West divide, symbolized by the Iron Curtain which he helped to bring down. In addition to Saint Benedict, he made the Slavic saints Cyril and Methodius “co-patron saints of Europe” in 1980, and he diversified and added female saints to the list later in his reign (see Box 2). For the Church, his European stance was also ecumenical, with regard to the Orthodox world. “The Church must breathe with her two lungs!”, he wrote in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995), using a metaphor that he had already used several times and borrowed from Russian poet Viatcheslav Ivanov, with regard to the two Christian religious groups, Roman and Byzantine.

BOX 2 ► The patron saints of Europe

Following on from Pope Paul VI who, in 1964, proclaimed Saint Benedict, commemorated on 11 July, the “main patron saint of all Europe”, John Paul II gave this title to five other saints recognized by the Catholic Church.

- Saints Cyril and Methodius, made co-patron saints of the continent in 1980: inventors of the Cyrillic alphabet, they were pioneers of the inculturation of the Gospel in the Slavic world.
 - Three female saints made co-patron saints in 1999:
 - Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373), a wife and mother before going on to found a religious order, which symbolizes the ecumenical link.
 - Catherine of Siena (1347-1380): a Dominican nun who embodies the commitment to the resolution of many conflicts during her time.
 - Edith Stein, also known as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, (1891-1942): a Carmelite nun of Jewish origin, who died in Auschwitz, representing the convergence of Jews and Christians.
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Pope John Paul II worked with these two groups throughout his pontificate. In the 1980s, he defended religious freedoms in Eastern Bloc countries which were then under the control of atheist communism. In the West, he instigated a “new evangelization” so that Europe did not become post-Christian.

11. Ibid.

12. L'Europe, avec ou sans Dieu ? Editions de l'Atelier, 2010, p. 265.

1.2.2. The fight for Christian roots and its evidence

“FOR JOHN PAUL II, AS FOR HIS PREDECESSORS, EUROPE'S UNITY BREAKS UP IF CULTURE IS DETACHED FROM RELIGION”

The Holy See fears that Europe will shift from being secular to becoming anti-Christian and will turn away from its own roots. To fight this trend, it insists that Europe should uphold its ‘Christian roots’, which alone can stamp internal cohesion on its institutional construction. For John Paul II, as for his predecessors, Europe’s unity breaks up if culture is detached from religion. They also extol that promoting this link in no way prevents a separation between the Church and States which is clearly accepted.

This unflagging concern becomes focused on a diplomatic struggle right at the end of John Paul II’s pontificate, to enter Europe’s Christian heritage clearly in the preamble of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. Like Pius XII, who successfully had stated on the Resolution adopted by the Cultural Commission at the Congress of Europe in The Hague the “common heritage of Christian civilisation”. This bitter battle of values was already fought during the drafting of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in 2000, as historian Gérard Bossuat words it. In return, the French President Jacques Chirac and the Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt fought relentlessly against any mention of “Christian roots”. Vatican diplomacy considers the final wording of “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe” fundamentally lacking.

Obtained in a less passionate but nevertheless far-reaching manner, an article of the Constitutional Treaty, later used in the Treaty of Lisbon, formalizes an “open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations”, as well as between these organisations and non-confessional organisations¹³. This dialogue, marked by an annual top-level meeting and rolled out at different levels, reprises a practice used by Jacques Delors when he was President of the European Commission. This tradition was already acknowledged in a declaration appended to the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997). It aims to “give Europe a soul,” according to the metaphor used by Jacques Delors, who discussed it during a February 1992 conference before the Conference of European Churches (KEK). There, he discussed the need to “reanimate the intellectual and spiritual debate on Europe” with the support of the Churches in particular.

Despite this consistently effective dialogue, the failure of acknowledging Europe’s Christian heritage had a long-term effect on the Vatican’s attitude, which has since observed the development of European construction with critical vigilance. The successor of John Paul II, Benedict XVI (2005-2013) remained haunted by the bitter memory of this ordeal.

The pessimistic address of Pope Ratzinger to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaties of Rome in 2007 attests to this. He firstly mentioned “the still ongoing and difficult search for an appropriate institutional structure for the European Union”. He flagged the ageing population in Europe, putting it “on a path that might lead to its twilight in history”. He regretted that “there is little solidarity at both international and national levels”. He also criticised that “the process of European unification itself does not seem welcome to everyone because many ‘chapters’ of the project seem to have been ‘written’ with little consideration for what people expect”. The passage of this address which received the most media coverage is this double question: “Is it surprising then, that whilst it aspires to be a community of values, modern Europe seems to question universal and absolute values? Even before it is against God, doesn’t this singular form of ‘self-apostasy’¹⁴ not lead the continent to doubt its own identity? The contrast in tone with the past praises of Pope Paul VI could not be more striking.

The Vatican’s now sombre and suspicious stance with regard to Europe was further reinforced by the tremendous “crucifix affair”. Controversy erupted following an initial decision, issued in 2009, by a chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (Council of Europe), which stated that the presence of crucifixes in Italian state school classrooms violates the European Convention on Human Rights. Although this first order was

13. Article 17 paragraph 3 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union.

14. Apostasy is defined as the public and deliberate abandonment of a religion, in particular of Christian faith.

“THE BENCHES OF THE EU PARLIAMENT WERE CONSIDERED INFILTRATED WITH AN IDEOLOGY DESCRIBED AS SECULARIST AND ANTI-CHRISTIAN”

overturned by the Court's Grand Chamber in Strasbourg, in 2011, and while the European Union was not involved, the affair contributed to convincing the Holy See and many Catholics that European construction was irreparably suffering from “apostasy”. Benedict XVI's advisors discouraged him from accepting the invitation to visit the European Parliament, then presided by the German Christian-democrat Hans-Gert Pöttering. The benches of the EU Parliament were considered infiltrated with an ideology described as secularist and anti-Christian.

This severe observation did not gain much currency before the Catholic Church itself broke away from its Euro-centric perspective by electing the first pope from the Southern Hemisphere.

2. A more distant and critical outlook

2.1. A less Euro-centric Church

2.1.1. The end of Euro-centrism

With the election of Jorge Bergoglio on 13 March 2013, the cardinals went “almost to the ends of the earth” to get a pope, to use an expression of that evening. The son of immigrants from Piedmont – he is set to meet with relatives on the occasion of a visit to Turin on 22 June 2015 –, the Argentine pope is above all described as a ‘porteno’, an inhabitant of Buenos Aires, his native city and home. He freely admits that he is a homebody and has travelled little in his life, with the exception of a brief doctoral stay in Germany and a language-learning visit to Ireland.

As head of the Church, from the outset he demonstrated his desire to open up the Church's central governments to the five continents. This government must convey the universality recorded in the very etymology of Catholicism. His first selection of eight cardinals to advise him in the reform of the Roman Curia – now ‘C9’ – is a reflection of this. They hail from across the globe, with, as a representative of Europe, the German cardinal Reinhard Marx, archbishop of Munich and President of Comece (see Box 3). Appointments in other new bodies, created as part of the Curia reform (Secretariat for the Economy, Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors), also demonstrate this intercontinental requirement.

BOX 3 ► “Europe, where is your vigour?”

“To Europe we can put the question: “Where is your vigour? Where is that idealism which inspired and ennobled your history? Where is your spirit of curiosity and enterprise? Where is your thirst for truth, a thirst which hitherto you have passionately shared with the world? The future of the continent will depend on the answer to these questions. (...) A trunk without roots can continue to have the appearance of life, even as it grows hollow within and eventually dies. Europe should reflect on whether its immense human, artistic, technical, social, political, economic and religious patrimony is simply an artefact of the past, or whether it is still capable of inspiring culture and displaying its treasures to mankind as a whole.”

Extract from Pope Francis' address to the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 25 March 2014

The creation of new cardinals by Pope Francis also demonstrates the Church's drive to “put an end to its euro-centrism”, as stated by the Vatican spokesperson, P. Federico Lombardi, in the first six months of the pontificate. By selecting cardinal electors (aged under eighty years old) from countries which have never

been represented, such as Haiti, Burkina-Faso, Panama and Cape Verde, to the detriment of conventional cardinal seats, such as Brussels and Turin, the Argentine pope is overturning the balances within the College of Cardinals.

In the conclave that elected him, just over half of the 115 cardinals present were Europeans. In less than two years, this number has dropped considerably, to 46%. They still have, however, the casting vote in the election of the next pope, with a current number of 57 electors out of a total of 125. The other continents are at relatively equal numbers, with 21 electors from Latin America (including Mexico and the Caribbean), 15 from North America, 17 from Asia-Oceania and 15 from Africa. Yet the downward trend in the number of European electors is set to drop further over the coming consistories.

In the Roman Pontifical Universities, where those who will lead the Catholic Church of tomorrow are educated, Europeans are becoming the minority. In the Gregorian University, the Jesuit university in Rome, half of the 2700 students enrolled last year come from outside Europe. The same goes for the permanent Jesuit teaching staff in this institution, which includes Indian professors. Against this backdrop, seminars on European construction are not very popular.

“ WHILE EUROPE HAS CHRISTIAN ROOTS, THE CHURCH UNDER FRANCIS SHOWS THAT IT DOES NOT HAVE JUST EUROPEAN ROOTS”

For his Church, the Latin American pope believes that “We cannot demand that peoples of every continent, in expressing their Christian faith, imitate modes of expression which European nations developed at a particular moment of their history”¹⁵. Upon his return from South Korea in August 2014, he reminded that “Christ does not cancel cultures”. Ultimately, while Europe has Christian roots, the Church under Francis shows that it does not have just European roots.

Under him, Europe is not at all neglected, but no longer receives special attention. In the *Corriere della Sera*, when asked why he never discussed Europe¹⁶, the Argentine pope answered by saying that he had not spoken about Asia, Africa or other continents either.

His choice of visits demonstrates his lack of urgency to travel across his adoptive continent, unlike his two predecessors. After two visits to Asia and a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the pope will travel to South America in July – where he is set to return at the end of 2016 –, then in September to Cuba and the United States, and by some accounts to Africa at the end of the year. But what about Europe?

2.1.2. Another approach with regard to Europe

Pope Francis' approach with regard to Europe currently involves pastoral support to the outskirts of the continent and a call for it to regroup in the centre.

With a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina planned for 6 June 2015, following on from a visit to Albania on 20 September 2014, Pope Francis is persistent in his pastoral and political decisions to favour small precarious countries on the periphery of Europe, where Catholics are a minority. By placing this emphasis on the Balkans, the man who urges his Church to come out and go towards those who are far away, also invites Europeans to become less Euro-centric. To a journalist who defined Albania as a mostly Muslim nation, Pope Bergoglio replied: “It is not a Muslim country. It is a European country”¹⁷. His visit was intended to promote the “culture of cohabitation”, as he will attempt to do in Sarajevo, where an ecumenical and inter-religious encounter is planned.

While these two visits also implicitly argue for an entry of these countries in the European Union, as championed by the Holy See, they above all redefine the role that the pope assigns to his Church on the continent, that of encouraging Europe's sense of solidarity. This was the purpose of Pope Francis' whistle-stop visit to Lampedusa,

15. Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, p. 100, Vatican Publishing House.

16. *Corriere della Sera*, 5 March 2014, p. 3.

17. Papal press conference in the return flight from Tirana, 21 September 2014.

on 8 July 2013. Admittedly located in Italy, this first visit of his pontificate to an island on the borders of the EU, where refugees wash up after risking their lives to reach Europe, was intended to raise Europeans' awareness of those who he did not hesitate to call "new Europeans".

“THE POPE ASSIGNS TO HIS CHURCH THE ROLE OF ENCOURAGING EUROPE’S SENSE OF SOLIDARITY”

With the exception of these rare surprise visits, Jorge Bergoglio is for now refusing the customary visits to the main traditionally Catholic countries such as Spain were for a short time he was expected to visit. His advisors claim that he is in no hurry to visit France, where he was initially expected this year and where his two predecessors visited.

Pope Francis' Europe is not that of prestigious Christian locations but that of overlooked nations. He compares it to a "Europe that is tired (...) which has had enough"¹⁸, "a grandmother", an expression he used for the first time in Rome in early October when addressing the continent's bishops, before making it a striking part of his address to the European Parliament.

2.2. A critical yet present Holy See

2.2.1. A severe stance with regard to the EU

The Argentine pope is not familiar with European construction and freely admits it. "Europe, trust and mistrust, some theories about the Euro ... I don't know much about this kind of thing", he acknowledged, following the European elections marked by a rise in populist parties. His visit to the European Parliament was decided in early summer as a consequence of these elections.

For the former archbishop of Buenos Aires, a follower of 'theology of the people', who is respectful of popular piety, "populism" is not a derogatory term. A straight-talker, his address to the European Parliament echoed the feelings of voters, depicting EU institutions as "aloof, engaged in laying down rules perceived as insensitive to individual peoples, if not downright harmful". He also repeated fears of the risk that the quest for unity becomes confused with "uniformity of political, economic and cultural life, or ways of thinking".

With the Roman Curia in an increasingly critical stance with regard to the EU, various European leaders and MEPs attempted, ahead of the pope's visit to Strasbourg, to quell the fearsome vigour of his addresses. "The Vatican excessively perceives Europe through the prism of Italy, which reflects this impression of tiredness", regretted a North-European diplomatic source in Rome.

These persuasive efforts were to no avail. Totally ignoring the specific areas of competence of the assemblies where they were made, the pope's successive addresses at the European Parliament and the Council of Europe were aimed at all Europeans, to express what looks more like a hard criticism of an individualistic West, moving away from God, suffering from solitude and a lack of ideas.

“NO MENTION OF WHAT MAKES BOTH THE SPECIFIC FEATURE AND GREATNESS OF EUROPEAN CONSTRUCTION AND WHICH CAN CONVERGE WITH THE CHURCH’S CONCERN”

Besides a commendable commitment to ecology, the address makes no mention of what makes both the specific feature and greatness of European construction and which can converge with the Church's concerns: French-German reconciliation, respect for 'small countries' in decision-making processes, the significant public development aid, redistribution in favour of less advanced regions or the widespread abolition of the death penalty, a consequence of the respect for personal dignity.

¹⁸. Address to the Community of Sant'Egidio, Rome, 15 June 2014.

In the pope's four hours in Strasbourg, on an institutional level, the EU was treated in strict equality with the Council of Europe, an organisation which today has less political weight. This is a means for the Holy See to show that the EU does not represent all of Europe, as the pope's visits to the Balkans also emphasise.

That said, the originality of the trip to Strasbourg is that it was entirely devoted to European institutions so that they would precede any future visit to an EU Member State. According to Cardinal Marx, who provided staunch support for the pope's visit to the European Parliament, this was a way to acknowledge the unique and essential nature of these institutions.

2.2.2. Elements for an active dialogue

With regard to the long addresses of Pope Francis at the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, which remain for now the most complete and concrete material to analyse the current outlook of the Holy See on European construction, five key points arise for Europe's future:

- An encouragement to return to the firm conviction of the founders of the European Union. Without naming them, they are mentioned five times in total in the two addresses. During an improvised speech on 30 April in the Vatican, Pope Francis named Robert Schuman and Alcide de Gasperi as examples of Catholics who actively engaged in politics.
- Confidence in young generations, with in particular support for "younger politicians from various parties".
- Confidence in the long processes that are rolled out over time, of which the European project is an example. This converges with a fundamental principle for Pope Francis, which is that social peace requires "initiating processes rather than possessing spaces"¹⁹.
- Advice to foster diversity, in virtue of the motto of the European Union. The image used by the pope in one of the addresses is one he often mentions, that of the "polyhedron, in which the harmonic unity of the whole preserves the particularity of each of the parts".
- An invitation to redefine European identity in light of this diversity: "Skilfully linking the European identity forged over the course of centuries to the expectations and aspirations of other peoples who are now making their appearance on the continent"²⁰. If the pope has made reference to Europe's roots in this sense on several occasions, he has never used, in Strasbourg or elsewhere, the exact expression of "Christian roots". Above all, he wishes to contribute to "a correct relationship between religion and society", by "purifying one another from ideological extremes"²¹.

The Holy See wishes to involve the Church in the promotion of these points through constant dialogue with the European institutions. This dialogue is firstly based on the two European episcopal bodies (*see Box 4*), one covering the EU and the other the Council of Europe. Cardinal Marx claims to be aware of the challenge: "It is our role to give Europe this soul, as Jacques Delors formulated it. Who could build bridges between the languages, cultures and nations in Europe, if not the Churches?"²² This role of bridge builders, that Pope Francis also promoted by visiting the Balkans, is set to grow in European societies in which Islam is on the rise²³.

19. Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, p. 179, Vatican Publishing House.

20. Address of Pope Francis to the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 25 November 2015.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Cardinal R. Marx, "Pour un renouveau de l'Eglise en Europe", *Etudes*, issue 4214, March 2015.

23. Muslims will represent 10% of the European population in 2050, according to a forecast by the Pew Research Center.

BOX 4 ► Church–Europe, tools for dialogue

- **Diplomatic relations between the EU and the Holy See**

Since 1970, the Holy See has had an apostolic nuncio (equivalent to an ambassador), in Brussels, accredited with the EU and, in Strasbourg, a permanent observer at the Council of Europe. In return, since 2006, the EU has accredited a permanent delegate at the Holy See in Rome.

- **Comece (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community)**

Made up of bishops delegated by the 28 Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the EU Member States, which funds it, this body founded in 1980 and established in Brussels has a permanent Secretariat of around ten persons. One of its main roles is to foster regular dialogue on various levels with EU institutions, as set out by the Treaty of Lisbon, and to notify the Church of developments in European policy and legislation.

- **The CCEE (Council of European Bishops' Conferences)**

Founded in 1971, the CCEE brings together the 39 members of Bishops' Conferences or equivalents in Europe. It is above all a body that promotes cooperation between bishops. It aims in particular to inspire a new evangelization in Europe. Its Secretariat is based in St. Gallen (Switzerland).

In this distribution of roles, the Holy See could become more of a partner to the EU with regard to international issues. The new assertion of Vatican diplomacy invites this. Placed under the leadership of a Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, highly respected in chancelleries, its Secretary for Relations with States (the equivalent of a minister of foreign affairs for the Vatican), has been since January Mgr Paul Gallagher, a Europhile British archbishop who was permanent observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg from 2000 to 2003.

“A CONCRETE AREA OF COOPERATION CONCERNs THE ISSUE OF MIGRATION”

A concrete area of cooperation concerns the issue of migration. Given great importance by Pope Francis, it raises an urgent challenge for the EU, which is open to cooperation with Churches in countries of departure to deal with the local state structures which are often lacking, or with NGOs that are less deeply rooted in society.

The Holy See accuses the EU of indifference with regard to the severity of the immigration drama and criticises those who make "emigrants the scapegoat for social frustrations and manipulate them for electoral objectives"²⁴. On the contrary, there is evidence of "the need for manpower and strengthening demographic that European countries have in order to maintain an efficient economy and political influence"²⁵. Personally committed to the subject, Pope Francis has been pleased with expected developments to EU policy²⁶ but has regretted, on several occasions, the striking lack of immediate action: "We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast graveyard!"²⁷ More largely, the Catholic Church defends the plight of migrants, regardless of their confession.

Another, more in-depth, potential area for cooperation is Christians of the East and other religious minorities who are persecuted. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See vigorously defends religious freedom, which the Council of the EU sought to protect by adopting guidelines on 24 June 2013. Rome ensures that this freedom may be exercised across the globe but also that it is fully respected within the EU. The abolition of the death penalty, championed by both Vatican and European diplomacy, remains another area of collaboration that is still insufficiently explored.

The current crisis in Ukraine, however, has proven to be less favourable. European chancelleries, particularly in the East, criticise the Holy See for its refusal to denounce Russian aggression. They do not consider the Vatican to be a possible mediator in the conflict, as the faithful in Rome are biased. However, Vatican diplomacy may assist Belarus, where Cardinal Parolin visited from 12 to 15 March 2015, in the resumption of talks with the EU.

24. Mgr Silvano Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN in Geneva, interview with Radio Vatican, 21 August 2014.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Interview with the Mexican channel Televisa, broadcast on 12 March 2015.

27. Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP

Which pope would today pay close interest to the banking union, the energy union or other future developments of European integration, as Pius XII and Paul VI followed the first creations? The election of a non-European pope, in terms of country, education and areas of interest, heralds a development set to continue at the head of the Catholic Church.

The end of Euro-centrism comes together with considerations on decentralisation that could require regional and national episcopates to organise themselves more effectively. In Africa and in Latin America (the Latin American Episcopal Council, Celam), where Jorge Bergoglio was a key player, Churches already cooperate to a greater extent than in Europe. Ecclesiastical before being European, the principle of subsidiarity may require in future that it is the Church in Europe rather than the Holy See that refines and asserts its specific role to support the project to unite the continent. Comece and the CCEE are working on this. While it is still close, the special relationship between the Holy See and Italy is also changing. Ultimately, if the bells were to ring again one day for a European treaty, they would no longer be those of Saint Peter's, but those of the cathedrals, whose spires stretch across the entire Union.

IN THE DAILY

CHALLENGE POSED LIVING
TOGETHER IN EUROPE,
THE CHURCH CAN BUILD
IMPORTANT BRIDGES AT
ITS DIFFERENT LEVELS"

Would a joint inter-religious declaration not be more appropriate in such circumstances? An increasingly multi-faith Europe is coming to this. "We are moving towards a pluralistic culture in which several ways of life will coexist", predicts Cardinal Marx²⁸. In the daily challenge posed living together in Europe, the Church can build important bridges at its different levels, in particular through its pastoral work in urban areas. Attached to combining faith and reason, it intends to counter selfish, community or nationalistic isolation, heated attitudes which are potentially harmful to European integration. "Let us be bridge builders", said the nuncio to the EU, Mgr Alain Lebeaupin, at the Comece on 13 November 2014. The Church's social doctrine can also contribute to strengthening the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, which the European project is founded upon.

The Holy See remains deeply in favour of the project for a united Europe deemed inseparable from the common good. Yet it follows developments with the fear, too often exaggerated and sometimes unfounded, that European integration has become an accelerator of secularisation. Rome's outlook with regard to Europe will only be appeased once it is completely assured that the work in progress is not conducted to the detriment of Christianity in its traditional breeding ground but that it contains, on the contrary, the seeds of something powerful.

²⁸. Interview with *La Croix*, 1 May 2014.

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