
Želimir
PULJIĆ

Dubrovnik, Croatia

EUROPE OF
THE THIRD
MILLENNIUM:
DON'T STOP
PRAYING

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the media often uses the word EUROPE. Entry and acceptance into Europe as well as the conditions for this entrance and reception are talked about. What sort of Europe is being talked about? Which Europe do we want to build? On what kind of foundations do we want to build Europe and with which goals in mind? Are there any signs that we can recognize amidst the great number of offers in the contemporary “free market”? Are there any outlines from which we can conclude that this is “that new society”, “the new Europe”? These are the questions that unavoidably impose themselves at this point of our national history. For this reason, our answer makes a difference. Moreover, the kind of Europe we imagine, want and dream about matters more.

Europe is a somewhat larger peninsula of Asia. Why aren't we then called “Asians”? On what basis did this peninsula acquire its name and identity? Europe has not always existed. It came into being on the basis of some historic event. The defence of Greece in the face of Darius' conquest at Marathon 490 B.C. and Salamis 480 B.C. marked the beginning of the “European ethos”. It was a confrontation with the strongest empire of the time. At the beginning of the fifth century B.C., Persians conquered without difficulty in the East and the West. However, during the conquest of western countries a number of paradoxical things occurred marking the birth of “Greek culture”, and, by the same token, of Europe. If this had not happened, Europe would be one of the provinces of the large Asian continent like India or Indochina.

In 490 B.C., Darius' army consisting of 25,000 soldiers and 220 ships set out to conquer Greek cities. In the face of this military danger, many Greek leaders believed it would be preferable to draw up a “contract” entailing political and economic subordination to Persia by becoming the 21st satrapy of the powerful Persian kingdom. However, there were also those who thought differently: that it

pays to fight for a free Greece. A sense of pride and consciousness was aroused among the Greeks. Ten thousand hoplites led by Miltiades confronted and defeated 25,000 well armed Persian soldiers at Marathon. This event determined the future of Greece. This is fact the beginning of Europe. The Aegean Sea was different after this battle. Some chroniclers have seen, in this historical war, a clash between "Greek civilization and Asian barbarity".

In this climate of freedom successfully defended, human beings started to ask questions about their origin: from where, why, where to? They encountered "reason", and inaugurated "the profession of philosophy" and became the archetype of a European person, who thinks, concludes and bases everything on reason. Conversely, there is the "Asian" type, who bases everything upon myths in the form of some "fantasies", "theogonies" and "arational conceptions". Thus, it can be concluded that the battles at Marathon 490 B.C. and at Salamis 480 B.C. signify the defence of human beings and their freedom. They enabled the Greeks to discover within themselves the seed of "logos", the seed of reason that liberates from fear and the illusory freedom of myth, and makes all spiritual adventures in the field of being and existence possible. The study of order and harmony, goodness, beauty, ethics and aesthetics, physics, metaphysics, logic, and ontology were to become a constituent part of both the Greek and European "ethos".

JOHN PAUL II AND EUROPE

"European Ethos", that is, European culture came into being during the millennial process of evangelisation of various barbarian peoples, who came to this area from various directions. Europe is, in fact, a unique amalgam of Greek (philosophical) genius, Roman administrative wisdom, and the spirit of Christian love. ATHENS - ROME - JERUSALEM - the three symbol cities are the "architects" of that unique European process, "European ethos", and European identity.

However, it is also true that the Europe of the 20th century, after Jalta, became a divided servant of two powerful centers. "The Iron Curtain", embodied visibly in the "Berlin Wall", became the symbol of that division in its "spirit, mind, and heart". It is no wonder that Europe felt "lost" between the "two Big Brothers", winners in the Second World War. Moreover, the Berlin Wall, "a wall of shame and lawlessness" became "a tombstone for the 'deceased' Europe".

Since 1945, nothing significant has happened in Europe that has not been branded by the myth of Jalta. The Hungarian uprising (1956), the naive “Prague Spring” (1968), the rebellions of Polish workers (1956 and 1970), and “Croatian Spring” (1971) changed nothing in the political sphere or in the consciousness of the people. The best proof of that is the hypocritical attitude of the West towards those rebellions and uprisings in the East. It was reduced to ordinary expressions of “sympathy with those poor brothers behind the Iron Curtain”, as well as soothing one's own conscience by declaring that “nothing can be changed”.

The first genuine infraction upon Jalta occurred in October 1978, when cardinals in Rome elected Karol Wojtyła, a citizen of Poland, a bishop from the Eastern Block, Cardinal of Krakow, as Pope. That was not politics, but the work of the Holy Spirit. That choice demonstrated that the Church can transcend all divisions, and that it cannot be forced into any kind of mould. After October 16, 1978, Europe and the world could not remain the same. It is no wonder that the great and powerful centers that supervised and controlled Europe (“Big Brother is watching over you”) were not overly satisfied with this choice. The spirit of Jalta was buried that day, along with the phantom of “Big Brother”. Why?

A man from the border of the Eastern Empire, with a sense of history that would restore belief in the people and reawaken nostalgia for lost unity arrived at the center of European Christianity and Europe and said: “Therefore I, Pope John Paul II, son of the Polish people, Slavic among the Latin, and Latin among the Slavs; I, successor to St. Peter and shepherd to the entire Church, cry to you, old Europe, with love from Santiago: “FIND YOURSELF! BE YOURSELF! REDISCOVER YOUR ORIGIN! REVIVE YOUR ROOTS! RETURN TO LIFE!”

These words spoken by Pope John Paul II, on November 9, 1982, are not some proclamation or program. No, they were an EVENT. The dream about the resurrection of Europe was no longer the domain of visionaries, poets, and philosophers. It became a living reality. Likewise, in Croatia that defended its freedom, culture, and identity with its own blood and sacrifice demonstrated its place in the mosaic of Europe and its unique diversity. The dream about the resurrection of Europe was a reality that occurred at the Second European Synod, where the indefatigable Karol Wojtyła exclaimed: “Europe of the Third Millennium: Don't stop praying!” With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the process of liberation and exit from catacombs

started for many nations of Europe. Great hope was born. Many barriers and walls cracked, and borders were opened. "Worldly messianism caved in, and a thirst for new justice was born in the world."

This was the atmosphere in which the Pope announced the "Second" European Synod on June 23, 1996, in Berlin: "From this renowned city which has, in a special way, experienced the destiny of European history of this century, I would like to announce to the entire Church that I intend to call a second special synod on Europe." The goal of the synod was to analyse the state of the Church in Europe, and, in the light of the coming Jubilee, stimulate an authentic religious and any other kind of renewal.

WHAT IS THE SYNOD?

The synod is a lasting institution founded by Pope Paul VI by the apostolic letter "Apostolica sollicitudo" of November 15, 1965 with the intention of maintaining and spreading an authentic council spirit. It is a gathering of representatives of the Catholic episcopate whose task is to advise the Holy Father on the management of the Church. In the above mentioned apostolic letter, Pope Paul VI says: "After careful consideration, and out of respect toward Catholic bishops whom we wish to give the opportunity to cooperate with us as efficiently as possible to the benefit of the entire Church, by this 'motu proprio' and by our authority, we hereby establish, in this esteemed City a permanent Council of Bishops, which we will call the *Synod of Bishops*." The word "synod" is of Greek origin and means a gathering, a council. Canon-law defines synod as "an assembly of bishops elected from various parts of the world who meet at a specific time to promote close cooperation with the Bishop of Rome. Their advice helps him in the protection, growth, maintenance and strengthening of faith and morality.

Since 1967, when the first synod was held, until 1999, when the second European synod ended in October of that year, nineteen synods of bishops have been held: nine general regular synods, two non-regular, and eight special synods (two out of which were about Europe).

THE SECOND EUROPEAN SYNOD

The Second European Synod was held from 1-23 November 1999. It included 238 participants - 174 synodal fathers, 16 expert theologians, 38 observers, and ten repre-

sentatives from other churches. The Serb Orthodox Church declined the invitation to be present at this synod. Along with five Croatian bishops, there were two Croatian female observers: a nun and a student.

The synod was a confession of faith that “Jesus, who lives in His Church, is a source of hope for Europe”. It opened with a solemn Eucharistic celebration in St. Peter's Basilica, where the Pope said: “The Lord wants to send a call of hope to the Christian pilgrim peoples from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains. The Lord of Covenant knows the heart of His children. He knows the trials and tribulations of the European peoples in this difficult and tormented century. He, Emanuel, God is with us, was crucified in concentration camps and Gulags. He knew the sufferings during bombardments and in trenches. He has suffered wherever people have been humiliated, exploited, and dishonoured, in wars and conflicts that have bloodied European soil.”

By the power of the Lord, the Church repeats its words to present-day Europe: Europe, do not lose heart. Do not succumb to the ways of living and thinking that have no future because they are not founded on an enduring certainty of the Lord's word. On this occasion, the Pope also publicly proclaimed the new patron saints of Europe: Edith Stein, Brigitte of Sweden, and Catherine of Siena.

SOME INTERESTING THEMES AND AN ATTEMPT TO DIAGNOSE THE SITUATION IN EUROPE

Among other things, the social and spiritual “weaknesses” of the old continent were discussed at the synod. Many “diseases” plaguing Europe at the threshold of the third millennium have been diagnosed: materialism, consumerism, ethic and spiritual anemia, intellectual agnosticism, individualism, and unrestricted pluralism. This subsequently leads to the “weakening of thought” and rejection of the holy, that was called by Cardinal Eyt of Bordeaux “a light apostasy of faith”. In addition, it was noted that the history of Europe was marked by a triple division within the course of two thousand years: first, by a split between the East and the West at the beginning of the second millennium in 1054, followed by the Protestant schism during mid 16th century, and finally by “the third ideological split” in the 19th century, which led to a “rift between faith and culture”, because it juxtaposed reason and faith. These divisions have had significant repercussions during this century, and have been marked by three totalitarian

ideologies - Communism, Fascism, and Nazism. Moreover, Cardinal Schonborn stated that fascist and nazi crimes have been fully studied and analysed, whereas those of the communists have not.

The contemporary world, it seems is losing its sense of sin and does not understand the importance of mercy and forgiveness. It was said that Jesus would “redeem people from their sins”. Do present-day believers realize that the Eucharist is a celebration of sacrifice, offered for the reconciliation of our sins: Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Is this theme present in our sermons?

A “Social Catechism” has been announced, which would explain the Church's teaching about justice, peace, solidarity, and subsidiarity, and be presented publicly in the Holy Year at the assembly of workers in Rome on May 1, 2000.

The participants were warned against “the powerful forces of evil”, and it was emphasized that it is inadequate to observe peculiar phenomena from the perspective of psychology and sociology, when the presence of the devil's activity is at issue. Christ authorized the Church to have power over the forces of darkness.

The Romanian Eastern Orthodox bishop, Josif publicly apologized for the injustices inflicted upon Greek-Catholics in Eastern Europe, especially in Romania (this is the first time an Eastern Orthodox bishop has ever apologized for this). Namely, by a state order in 1948, the Greek-Catholic church was banned in Romania, and its property was assigned to the Romanian Eastern Orthodox church.

Many participants warned of the so-called “sacramentalization”, which creates among Christians a climate of “let that be done as well”, rather than a climate of a personal meeting with Christ and life through faith. It was pointed out that youth issues are often not given enough space in our pastoral, and that they should not be just told about “hope”, but be addressed “with hope”.

CROATIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN SYNOD

Five bishops, a nun and a female student from Croatia participated at this special European synod. They all spoke about “gladness and hope, sadness and anxiety” of the Church among Croats.

Cardinal Puljić reminded the participants that the Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina has had to walk the “Stations of the Cross” ever since the 15th century when Turks occupied the area. He recalled the decimation of

Catholics during the recent war years as well as the “remains of Israel” that are fighting to survive while healing wounds of the horrible violence. Thanks to “the school of the cross” believers have learned to live in hope offered by the Resurrected.

Archbishop Bozanić, recalling the brave testimony of Cardinal Stepinac, emphasized the importance of the education of conscience. Stepinac was and remains a great teacher and educator of Christian conscience in the memory of his people.

Bishop Srakić pointed out that “the path of ecumenism is the key to true evangelical activity”. He emphasized that the war in Croatia was not a “religious war”, because representatives of the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox churches met both at home (twice) and abroad (several times) through the mediation of the CCEE and KEK.

Bishop Komarica thanked God that he survived the horrible sufferings of his diocese. He reminded the synod of the martyrdom of six priests, a monk and a nun. He also pointed out that in spite of apparent peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina the “power of the strongest” is still prevalent. The right to a homeland and possessions is being denied, as well as the right to work and pay, religious freedom and health insurance. He called this shameful for Europe at the end of the 20th century.

I spoke about my participation at the First European Synod eight years ago, where I informed those present of the “cry of pain” brought about by Serb and Montenegrin aggression against the diocese of Dubrovnik. Contrastingly, my presentation was then marked by words of “sorrow and desperation”, whereas this time I addressed my colleagues with words of gladness: “Democracy, freedom, culture, as well as human and religious values have been successfully defended in Dubrovnik and in Croatia in the face of the barbarity of our century.” I also expressed hope that the blood of innocent victims unified with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross would guarantee human suffering with sacramental and eternal fertility.

Sister Kornelija highlighted the “role of convents” in the creation of contemporary Europe, and Sanja Horvat, a twenty-five year old theology student from Sarajevo, the youngest member at the Synod, spoke about youth problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

THE BISHOPS' MESSAGE AT THE SYNOD

At the end, the bishops addressed everyone with the following message: “We gladly witness the Gospel of hope in Europe.” Although it seems that hope is becoming weaker every day, devastated by so many forms of suffering, anxiety and death, the bishops believe that, with “humble perseverance”, hope is possible for all. “Man cannot live without hope. His life would be deprived of meaning and would become unbearable.”

Our confession of hope, the bishops state, encourages us to take a special look at Europe, as a complex, but cultural and geographic reality, the past of which is closely linked with the history of Christianity. Therefore, we ardently desire that the process of European unification guarantee priority to ethical and spiritual values. Bearing this in mind, the bishops invite believers to be confident Europeans who are prepared to contribute to present-day and future Europe. At the end of the Message, with sincere pastoral love, they encourage and call on those who have responsibility towards the future of our continent at institutional, political, and cultural levels: “Don't be silent, but raise your voice when the human rights of individuals, minorities, and nations are violated. Human life from conception to death and family based on matrimony are the foundations of our common European structure. Courageously, continue the process of European integration wisely harmonizing historical and cultural differences.”

“Inspired by the certainty that God remains faithful forever, and that He rules the history of humankind, we repeat our call: Europe, be not afraid! Churches of Europe, do not be scared! The God of Hope will not abandon you. Believe in His Love that brings salvation. Trust His mercy that forgives, renews, and restores life. Put your trust in the Lord, and you will never be ashamed!”