

THE SOUL AND SPIRIT OF EUROPE

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WE ARE A FORGETFUL GENERATION. As short memories breed short-sightedness, we are therefore also a generation without vision. Winston Churchill said that a people who forget their past have no future.

Today is Europe Day, and we have gathered here in Athens to reflect on our roots, our past, our foundations—for the sake of our future.

This forum is held each year on and around May 9, the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration which led directly to the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community, and eventually to the European Union as we know it today.

We have come to consider the state of Europe today in the light of Schuman's vision for Europe as a 'community of peoples deeply rooted in the basic Christian values of freedom, equality, solidarity and peace'.

It is rare occasion when Christians convene from a wide spectrum of traditions spanning Orthodoxy to Pentecostalism, from the breadth of the continent from Greece to Ireland, from a diversity of professions including politics, theology, education and economics, and ranging from young to old. In short, we aim in this forum to be pan-European, trans-denominational, multi-professional and inter-generational.

We recognise that we need each other's help to see the big picture. That doesn't come naturally to my evangelical constituency, or even to Protestant Europe. Catholics see woods; Protestants see trees; Evangelicals see branches. While I have met many Germans, many Dutch, many British, many French, and so on, I have met few 'Europeans'—people who see the big picture. We need each other's help at this forum to broaden our horizons.

We are also mindful that we gather as the European financial crisis creeps into its seventh year. We heard the impact of that crisis on the Greek people from the panel last night. One of the working groups this afternoon will be focusing specifically on the relational and spiritual roots of this crisis.

We are also conscious that we meet as a new-old world order is emerging. How much has changed since the Sochi Winter Olympics! The recent events in the Crimea and the Ukraine have made us painfully aware of the deep rift between east and west, a schism with spiritual roots, as I mentioned last night.

When we first began planning for this event, long before the Crimea developments, we first considered the need for a call for solidarity to come from the churches to the peoples of Europe. However, we quickly realised that our failure to model solidarity as different churches thorough the centuries has disqualified us to issue such a call. We first need to address the question ourselves, and be instructed on biblical foundations of unity with diversity. This is a subject I personally have learnt much on from Catholic social doctrine, and we are most grateful for the contribution from Monsignor Mazurkiewicz on this subject.

The Ukraine crisis has also reminded us that peace cannot be taken for granted in Europe. The sixty-nine years of peace we have enjoyed since the war are a complete abnormality in European history. In the seventeenth century, for example, there were only four years in which war was not being waged in Europe.

Everyone knows, of course, who won the Second World War. But who won the peace? We tend to forget that the immediate post-war years were anything but peaceful. Life did not simply return to normalcy after the liberating soldiers had given out chocolates, kissed the girls and gone home. Europe was experiencing a major case of post-trauma stress disorder. These were years of much social disruption and strikes, uncertainties and tension, anxiety and fear.

The defining moment, in my view, came on May 9, 1950, when Robert Schuman, the French Foreign Minister, tabled a plan which, from that moment on, gave vision and direction towards 'an ever increasing union' of European peoples. In just three minutes, less than it takes to boil an egg, Schuman laid the foundations for the European house in which today over 500 million Europeans from 28 nations live together in peace.

Schuman, the first French MP to be imprisoned by the occupying Nazi forces in France, had managed to escape and go underground in the 'free zone' of southern France for the last two years of occupation. There he had spent his time planning for when the war would end, and Europe would need to be rebuilt. But what sort of Europe? And on what foundations?

These are questions we are asking ourselves today at this forum. The Schuman story offers insight on these questions from a politician who was a devout believer, a man of faith and prayer.

The Schuman Declaration, described in the media at the time as the Schuman 'bomb', surprised everybody with its daring proposal to treat the defeated Germans as equals to the French and other 'victor' nations. It

proposed putting the coal and steel industries under a supranational authority, thus rendering war in Europe 'unthinkable'.

In many aspects, the EU has followed the methods and purposes proposed by Schuman in his declaration. In other aspects, the course followed by the EU leaders has strayed significantly from Schuman's vision, chiefly his warnings about the perils of neglecting the spiritual dimension of Europe's fundamental identity.

Jacques Delors' warnings of 1992, now more than a decade past their deadline, echoed Schuman's cautionary exhortations of Europe's essential need for a soul:

*'Europe' cannot and must not remain an economic and technical enterprise: it needs a soul.*¹

So it is instructive for us to revisit Schuman's writings and speeches to remind ourselves of the vision that motivated the French foreign minister to propose such a radically alternative solution to the post-war problem of Germany—one based on Jesus' command to love God and neighbour; a solution based on forgiveness, reconciliation and brotherly love, so opposite in spirit to the Treaty of Versailles.

Here was a vision of Europe as a community of peoples sharing a common spiritual and cultural heritage, deeply rooted in the Christian values:

We are called to bethink ourselves of the Christian basics of Europe by forming a democratic model of governance which through reconciliation develops into a 'community of peoples' in freedom, equality, solidarity and peace and which is deeply rooted in Christian basic values.

Schuman spoke of both the **soul** and the **spirit** of Europe, giving the two words different but complimentary meanings.

SOUL

For him, the **soul** of Europe was that which had animated the spiritual and cultural community of those peoples populating the western peninsular of the Eurasian landmass, strangely called a continent, or even The Continent!

The story of Jesus, and the book telling that story, had been the greatest influencing factors shaping Europe's identity and values. Our understanding of time—as past, present and future—came from the Bible. It is not as self-evident as we may think. Our understanding of human beings as being created equally is also not self-evident, as the American founding fathers claimed, who had grown up in a society influenced for centuries by the Bible. Just go to India where no-one believes that that is self-evident.

Schuman's strong conviction was that Europe's only future lay in rebuilding Europe on such Christian foundations.

*The merging identity of a new Europe 'cannot and must not remain an economic and technical enterprise; it needs a soul: the conscience of its historical affinities and of its responsibilities, in the present and in the future, and a political will at the service of the same human ideal.'*²

Jacques Maritain and Christopher Dawson were two contemporary intellectual leaders who helped shape Schuman's thinking. Dawson, in his book *Understanding Europe* wrote:

*Europe owes its unique character to the fact that it is and has always been a society of nations, each intensely conscious of its own social personality and its own political institutions and laws, but all united by a common spiritual tradition, a common intellectual culture and common moral values. It is only by the recovery of these common traditions and values and in the strengthening of them that Europe can be saved.'*³

This was also the view of others such as Adenauer and de Gasperi. After the signing of the ECSC treaty in Paris in April 1951 Adenauer wrote to Schuman:

'I regard it as a particularly favourable and even providential sign that all the weight of the tasks to be undertaken rests on the shoulders of men who, like you, our mutual friend President De Gasperi and myself, are filled with the desire to build the new edifice of Europe on Christian foundations. I believe that few occasions in the history of Europe have offered better opportunities for achieving such a goal.'

En route to the signing of this treaty, these three men had joined in a prayer retreat at the historic Maria Laach monastery near Koblenz, a place of personal spiritual and intellectual refreshment for both Adenauer and Schuman, and even refuge for Adenauer, when Hitler's men had sought to kill the former mayor of Koln.

¹ Robert Schuman, *For Europe*, p58

² Schuman, p58

³ Christopher Dawson, *Understanding Europe*, (Sheed & Ward, 1953) p223.

For in Schuman's understanding, the roots of true democracy—the principle of equality, the practice of brotherly love, individual freedom, respect for the rights of the individual—all came from Christ's teachings. Democracy owed its existence to Christianity, he argued. Practical application of those teachings had transformed Europe through the centuries, resulting in liberal democracy.

Christian principles had become the features of our civilisation, he wrote in For Europe, to which the seventeenth century rationalists owed their human and citizens' rights, which are essentially Christian'.⁴

'Loving your neighbour as yourself' was a democratic principle which, applied to nations, meant being prepared to serve and love neighbouring peoples.

Let's just pause here. These are very familiar words. If this is the command of Jesus to love our neighbour as ourselves, we must ask to what level are we prepared to obey? Who are our neighbours? Usually those we tell ethnic jokes about.

As we think about migration and solidarity today, let us remember how radical these commands of Jesus are. How can Europe fulfil this command to love our neighbours who are knocking at our doors?

Schuman shocked his fellow countrymen during the war when he was underground, by telling them they would have to learn to forgive and love the Germans, something few could accept, least of all Charles de Gaulle!

Democracy, he believed, was 'essentially Evangelical', since love was its mainspring. *'Democracy will either be Christian or it will not be. An anti-Christian democracy will be a parody which will sink into tyranny or into anarchy.'*⁵

Early democracy of the Hellenistic age based only on majority voting would end in a 'tyranny of the majority'. True democracy required servanthood: serving the people and acting in agreement with the people. The goals had to start with peace and the means had to be works of peace.

For Schuman, a future, united Europe naturally had to be both Christian and democratic. The European story was deeply rooted in the Christian story. Cut off from those roots, Europe would lose the foundations for equality, human dignity, tolerance and compassion.

*The democrat's position can be defined as follows: he will not accept that the State systematically ignores religion or that it opposes it with hostility or contempt... the State cannot ignore the extraordinary effectiveness of religious inspiration in the practice of civic duty and in protecting people against forces of social disintegration which are at work everywhere.*⁶

Schuman's vision for Europe was not limited to Europe itself, but embraced a sense of deep responsibility to the rest of the world, and extension of the command to love one's neighbour.

SPIRIT

If the **soul** of Europe was the historical reality that had shaped Europe's fundamental identity as a spiritual and cultural community of peoples, what then was the **spirit** of Europe?

Schuman used this word 'spirit' to refer to the recognition of this basic historic reality, and the corresponding attitude, perspective or outlook that Europeans ought to have towards Europe as a whole and towards the nations as parts of that whole:

*The European spirit signifies being conscious of belonging to a cultural family and to have a willingness to serve that community in the spirit of total mutuality, without any hidden motives of hegemony for the selfish exploitation of others... Such a spirit is needed, which means that we need to be aware of our specifically European common patrimony and we need to have the will to safeguard and develop it.*⁷

Today such talk of Christian roots sounds anachronistic/politically incorrect/intolerant/arrogant and even dangerous; it signifies a head-in-the-sand denial that time has marched on, history has moved on to a new era; and there is no going back to tired-old Christendom.

In a relativistic, post-modern age, it is politically incorrect to claim priority for any one worldview over another. All are equally valid, we are often told. Nothing is absolutely true. No belief can claim it is true. Yet that statement is logically absurd. Most beliefs hold that they are uniquely true. Islam, Christianity, and the belief of those who hold absolutely that no belief is true.

The claim that Europe's roots are primarily Christian is ignored today in the light of the presence of many later competitors. Hence the rejection of the mention of God and the Judeo-Christian tradition in the

⁴ Schuman, p45

⁵ Schuman, p51

⁶ Schuman, p52

⁷ Schuman's speech in at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 16 May 1949

proposed European Constitution. Yet, what was the real source of Europe's basic values? Is that a matter of conjecture? or of historical fact?

Pope John Paul II, on the other hand, was prepared to admit freely that Europe had multiple cultural roots:

*'If a new European order is to be adequate for the promotion of the authentic common good, it must recognise and safeguard the values that constitute the most precious heritage of European humanism. Multiple are the cultural roots that have contributed to reinforce these values: from the spirit of Greece to that of Roman law and virtue, from the contributions of the Latin, Celtic, Germanic, Slav and Finno-Ugric peoples, to those of the Jewish culture and the Islamic world. These different factors found in the Judeo-Christian tradition the power that harmonised, consolidated and promoted them.'*⁸

The pope stressed that the diversity of cultures making up Europe's heritage found their unity in the biblical tradition. Of course, we expect a pope to say such things. Yet even arch-atheist Richard Dawkins candidly admits we cannot understand European history without understanding Christianity and the Bible.

Yet roots are not something we invent or choose. We discover roots.

Jürgen Habermas, one of the world's most influential secular philosophers, concedes that there is no alternative to Judeo-Christian ethics for grounding freedom, solidarity, emancipation, morality, human rights and democracy:

*'Universal egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judeo ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern chatter.'*⁹

There's a story of a drunk man on his hands and knees looking for his keys under the lamp-post at night. When asked where he lost them, he says: "over there in the dark; but there's more light here." Many Europeans refuse to look for the lost keys to Europe's future anywhere but within the orb of Enlightenment thought.

The question remains: *which world and life view can give us answers for the pressing questions of our day?*

Are the multiple crises facing us in Europe today—economic, political, social, religious and environmental—the result of ignoring Schuman's warnings that: *'The European Movement would only be successful if future generations managed to tear themselves away from the temptation of materialism which corrupted society by cutting it off from its spiritual roots.'*¹⁰

May our deliberations today, in some small but significant way, help us understand what it will mean to recover both the soul and spirit of Europe.



⁸ John Paul II,

⁹ J. Habermas, 'Conversation about God and the world', *Time of transitions*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006, p150-1

¹⁰ Schuman, speech to the General Assembly of the International Catholic Organisations, 1956.