



JOURNAL À PLUSIEURS VOIX

Breathing With Both Lungs

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Europe, a continent converted to the Gospel for some thousand years, and now itself a missionary for conversion throughout the world, has always been the object of comprehensive Vatican attention. This attention subsequently turned into worry, however, with the development of two World Wars from Europe during the twentieth century, the latter leaving the continent seriously divided. Did not the Catholic Church itself also have partial responsibility for these events? What could it do, faced with this ideological conflict and its repercussions in all the countries involved? What future could it envisage for this continent, linked as it had been for such a long period of history?

Such questions oblige us to analyse the constants of Vatican behaviour as dictated by diverse factors: on the one hand, by imperatives of a religious nature and geopolitical constraints; and on the other hand, by the specific contributions of the individual Popes—their personalities, their past, and the priorities they each felt.

Born in a Communist country and marked by his experience of totalitarianism, John Paul II is the first Slav Pope in history, and there is no doubt that he cannot but give a particular slant to the European policy of the Holy See. Demonstration of this is the intention of this article, taking into account the fact that any political project planned by an authority such as this, of course, is primarily the result of a religious perception of reality.

The death of man

Before the events of autumn 1989, everything still seemed to oppose the two Europes: a pluralist, liberal West, respectful of human—and religious—rights, and an authoritarian, collectivist East, officially professing atheism. Two worlds were juxtaposed in a situation of coexistence which often posed problems, even though they were both parts of the same continent. It might be thought that Western Europe, with its respect for liberty and for religious liberty in particular, found more favour in the eyes of the Bishop of Rome than the other Europe, where the faithful were the object of serious discrimination and even persecution. In

reality, the 1988 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* traced a critical approach to both liberal capitalism and Marxist collectivism, and the Holy See thus shared out bad marks fairly equally between the two camps.

Of course John Paul II does not spare his criticism of the suffocating structures of the East, of societies based on an ideology minimising the importance of the human individual and his dignity, and of governments transforming the faithful into second class citizens, when not actually persecuting them for their convictions. In this connection he never ceases reminding the free nations of the privilege they are accorded in enjoying this freedom. Yet the Pope is no less severe with regard to these opulent Western nations. In the latter he denounces the excessive priority given to economic success with respect to human values (November 9, 1982, in Santiago de Compostella), and the insensitivity brought about by well-being, with all the selfishness and hedonism it involves. For spiritual life, well-being is at least as redoubtable an enemy as socialism. The Pope is severe on the devastating consumption which amounts to confiscation of the resources of the planet, and which is consequently damaging the least privileged, those ignored by badly channelled development. He puts us on guard against the perversions of liberty, a liberty which can develop into permissiveness and disorganised subjectivity (see his speech to the European communities on May 20, 1985).¹

In a general way, and this applies to Europe as a whole, John Paul II worried about the evolution in living conditions; about the decline of the family; about employment for women; about the banalisation of abortion (deplored on repeated occasions, whether this be before the Council of European Episcopal Conferences in 1985, or before the Council of Europe in 1988); and he dramatically denounces what he considers to be a case of genuine demographic suicide in Europe. In fact this continent possessed 25 per cent of the world population in 1960, whilst today it has only 15.9 per cent, a figure capable of going down to 5 per cent by the middle of the next century.²

All these views are too well known and maintained with such constancy as to require any insistence. For John Paul II, both East and West have proclaimed the death of Man: "In the West, the human person has been sacrificed to well-being, whilst in the East, he has been sacrificed to structure." (speech of October 11, 1985, already quoted)

Diagnosis and remedy

Our Europe which, as Goethe put it and John Paul II repeated at Santiago de Compostella, was born on pilgrimage, has abandoned the Christian faith, and is in the hands of secularised ideologies everywhere. Both in its philosophy and practice, the East has proclaimed the death of God, whilst the West has imposed the same, in its permanent temptation to live as though God did not exist. (Homily in Speyer cathedral, May 4, 1987).

This theme of the abandonment of Christian roots recurs as a *leitmotiv* in the Pope's speeches,

and had a kind of anguished coronation before the European Parliament in Strasbourg: "All the various schools of thought of our ancient continent should reflect on the sombre prospects introduced by the exclusion of God from public life, of God as the ultimate ethical instance, and supreme guarantee against all the abuses of power perpetrated by men on other men ... It is also my duty to emphasise forcefully that if the religious and Christian substrate of this continent ended up by being marginalised in its roles of ethical inspiration and social action, it is not only the entire heritage of the European past which would be denied, but also the worthy future of European man—of all European men, believers or not—would be compromised" (October 8, 1988).



The Kings of France and Britain escorting the Pope

At the risk of stating what is obvious, it has to be considered, however, that such a diagnosis presupposes the Christian identity of Europe as a whole. This, in fact, has never been doubted by the Pope. It was expressed by Pius XII during the torments of the war and the post-war period.³ It recurred with Paul VI⁴ or Monsignor Casaroli⁵ who conducted his *Ostpolitik* under the former's pontificate. It is thus no coincidence if there exists a Council of European Episcopal Conferences (C.E.E.C.), reuniting the Bishops of both East and West. Born informally in 1965, effectively shaped in 1971, and canonically recognised in 1977, this organism is not only intended to reflect on the life of the Catholic Church throughout the European nations where it is present, but to do so with the prospect of overcoming the political and ideological cleavages dividing the continent. The symposia it regularly organises (1967, 1969, 1975, 1979, 1982, 1985, 1989), and which from now on take place in Rome, have always been opportunities for John Paul II to express his more profound convictions over European issues, even though there do exist other organisations of this kind, at least within Western Europe.⁶

John Paul II expresses this idea of the Christian identity of Europe so forcefully that for him, European identity is simply incomprehensible without Christianity: "The church and Europe are two realities intimately linked in their existence and their destiny ... They both remain imprinted with the same history ... If, in the course of successive crises, European culture has attempted to take its distance in its relations with faith and the church, then this very fact, which has been proclaimed as a wish for emancipation, has in reality been a crisis within the European conscience itself, put to the test, and tempted in its profound identity. It is for this reason that the transformations of the European conscience, which led to the most radical negations of its Christian heritage, are nonetheless not fully comprehensible without an essential reference to Christianity. The crises of the European citizen are the crises of a Christian."⁷

This text is important. It shows that in the eyes of John Paul II, it is not only a question of a return to Christianity, but that it is the latter which has to find within itself the solutions to the problems of Europe today. This is behind the famous appeal he made at Santiago de Compostella: "Get back to yourself on your own, be yourself, discover your origins. Revive your roots. Rebuild your spiritual unity." (November 9, 1982). This appeal is simply the echo of numerous speeches made all over Europe,⁸ and in particular in Gniezno in Poland in June 1979. It is not an indifferent fact that from the beginning of his papacy on, and during his first journey to his birthplace, then still behind the Iron Curtain, John Paul II insisted on emphasising this Christian identity. He was simply emphasising the fact that Europe would not cease with the frontiers of Western Europe, and that it would not forget the nations of Central Europe, the latter also being Christians.

The Europe of Karol Wojtyła

None of what has just been said constitutes any real novelty as far as the Vatican's approach to

European problems is concerned. The Pope's present contributions are in reality part of an established desire to make the borders of Europe coincide with those of Christianity within the continent. John Paul II is certainly not the first to repeat de Gaulle's expression "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals",⁹ but he is the first to insist on the existence of a double Christian identity, also manifested by the double tradition within the church itself: the Latin tradition and the Byzantine tradition.

This perspective was shown on December 31, 1980, with the proclamation of Saints Cyril and Methodius, following that of Saint Benedict by Paul VI in 1964, as patron saints of Europe. In order to illustrate this dimension, which he judges to be fundamental, John Paul II used the image of the two lungs. This first appeared in the 1985 Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, and was repeated some months later on June 2, 1985, in the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, dedicated to Saints Cyril and Methodius, evangelists of the Slav world, who are likened to "a spiritual bridge between the oriental tradition and the Western tradition" of the church. The latter text profoundly expresses the church's nostalgia for the undivided church of that period, before the schism of Byzantium: it was a church which John Paul II would like to see revived beyond the divisions caused by history.

It will be clear, then, that in such a perspective, the responsibility of the Roman Catholic Church is fully engaged. How is it possible, in fact, to appeal to the spiritual unity of a Europe born of Christianity, yet maintain century old divisions? In other words, how is it possible to maintain the division between Rome and Byzantium? This worrying issue is certainly not new, and guided Paul VI in his 1965 reconciliation with Athenagoras, Patriarch of Constantinople and, appropriately, *primus inter pares* within the Orthodox hierarchy. But John Paul II took over this worry, and all the more so as he is the first Slav Pope in history. A Slav amongst Romans, and a Roman amongst Slavs, he feels he has been called (along the lines of a Polish messianic tradition already pointed out by Soloviev), to reconstruct the unity of the church.

This reconstruction does clash, of course, with difficulties of both a theological and canonical nature. In effect, how is it possible to conciliate authority and collegiate administration in a universal church made up of separate churches which do not always have the same idea of each other? How is the supreme authority of this church to be defined? Which role is to be attributed to the Bishop of Rome?

For ten years this dialogue has been led by a mixed international Catholic-Orthodox Commission, which last met, for the sixth time in plenary session in June 1990, at Freising in Germany. Even though certain convergences have been established, there is an obstacle to dialogue over a difficult problem, that of Catholic Churches of Byzantine rite called Uniates, because united to Rome. Considered one of the more privileged means of expression of Ukrainian nationalism, the Uniate Church of the Western Ukraine, a region previously Austro-Hungarian and Polish before annexation to the USSR in 1945, was absorbed by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946. Now thanks to *perestroika* the Uniate Church of the Ukraine has



King Lothar kneeling before the Pope

emerged from the underground, has found a new, legal existence, and is claiming the restitution of the places of worship occupied by the Orthodox Church. The conflict sparked off by this has become so acute that at Freising the mixed commission, abandoning theology and canonical law, ended up by dealing with Uniatism alone, judged in particular by the Russian Orthodox Church as being incompatible with the national unity of the country. The conclusion was that Uniatism, far from favouring any reconciliation between the two Christian traditions, could not constitute a "method for any search for unity"¹⁰, a conclusion which has not received any official comment by the Vatican.

In fact it is not clearly known how Rome envisages the idea of complementarity between the two Christian traditions. In June 1990, John Paul II asked the Uniate Ukrainian bishops, assembled in the Vatican for the first time since 1946, to act as a bridge and not an obstacle. For centuries the Roman Catholicism has been a centralised institution with a hierarchy, commanded by a Pope holding "supreme, full, immediate and universal power within the church" (Canon 331 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law). How else can it see unity other than as complementarity within a single Catholic Church? And in this respect, should not the Uniate Churches, as the Pope sees it, constitute a model to be followed by the churches of the Orthodox Rite?

However, contested on historical grounds, as well, has been the idea of re-establishing Europe, a Greater Europe with two "lungs", within a Christian vision of the world, the vision of instilling certainty thanks to a rediscovered European identity, and the idea that faith is the ideal means for building a pacific, loyal and humanitarian Europe and for overcoming opposition and contradiction (the speech before the European jurists on November 10, 1980).¹¹ To a certain extent Europe has developed from a disintegration of Christianity, first with the Byzantine Schism, and then with the Protestant Reformation. Furthermore, secularisation is an old phenomenon (observable since the XIII century), and is not necessarily accompanied by atheism. Yet it is easy to see that such a line of criticism leads to the enormous field of the relations between the church and the modern world. It is a question of the entire strategy of evangelisation, in a world which is now committed to pluralism of convictions and ideologies, and the problem is thus more within ecclesiastical than political jurisdiction. Let it suffice to say that John Paul II is fully conscious of the diversity amongst the instances of civilisation which have fashioned Europe during the course of the centuries (see in this sense John Paul II's speech before the Council of Europe on October 11, 1988); nonetheless he considers that Christianity has forged a conception of the world and of Man—Man with all his essential human dignity—and that Christianity, by demystifying the cosmos, has thus offered the cosmos to Man's investigations, assuring the Christian countries a privileged scientific and technical development. According to John Paul II, in fact, neither economics nor politics could have been sufficient to bring unity to the European continent: it is a result of essentially ethical roots.

The Pope, however, is always anxious to emphasise that his is not an integralist vision of the

world.¹² It is not a question of reconstituting the Europe of the Middle Ages, it being a well known fact that even though the church then held the bridle of knowledge, and imposed its culture on this world, the masses were only superficially converted to Christianity, and were essentially peasants, more often than not illiterate.¹³ For John Paul II, the liberty of modern societies is a stimulating challenge to Christianity, which has to use this liberty to defend and propagate its values, and the Pope sees these values as fundamental. Far from having to remain within the private domain of the individual conscience, Christianity has something to say to society as a whole.

Dimensions of reconquest

Prophecy for one side, and refusal of modernity for the other, it remains to be seen how this kind of vision of Europe has implications of a political nature.

The first aspect of a reconstruction of Europe, in effect, would require the liberty of each church, a liberty which has been totally lost in certain countries, and this has been the aim of the *Ostpolitik* carried out by the Vatican since the beginning of the 1960s. This policy has been criticised at times, insofar as it has not been able to avoid compromising with established power, at least in the most difficult cases.¹⁴ Whatever its ambiguities and imperfections might have been, this policy has allowed the church to guarantee a kind of minimum presence in those countries where atheism inspired the ideology in power. The encouragement the Vatican lent between 1972 and 1975 to the CSCE preparations is to be seen as part of this perspective of defence of liberty, and consequently of the presence of the church. In fact the main reason for the participation of the church in this conference was to help achieve the authentication of an international act engaging all the signatory states—in point of fact all the European nations with the only exception of Albania—to uphold the rights of man, and in particular the first amongst these rights, that of religious liberty.¹⁵ This was effectively one of the objects of the final Helsinki Act in 1975, and as is well known, the CSCE has been regularly meeting ever since, now constituting a tribune which usefully offers world public opinion any evidence of eventual violation of the engagements signed.

A second aspect, however, is that defence of religious liberty could not be dissociated from the struggle for political liberty—in other words the struggle against totalitarianism—at least in the Eastern European nations. There is no need here to recall how the Christians have fought to obtain political liberty in Eastern Europe, nor how the Catholic Church, like the other Christian Churches, has thus created its own spheres of liberty. At the same time, this fact has greatly contributed to reinforcing the prestige of all these churches, cancelling the image of religion as the opium of the people and promoting it as a liberating force, thus reconciling the churches with the various dissident movements of all kinds which have been multiplying since the Helsinki Conference.

With respect to this, however, it is necessary to underline the importance of the Pope's three

journeys back to his own country. As is well known, Solidarity was created in 1980, one year after the first journey which was a severe event for totalitarianism. By reminding the Polish that the legitimacy of a State is measured by its respect for the sovereign self-determination of a people, John Paul II had sowed doubts as to the legitimacy of the government, and supplied arms to a contestation which was waiting for nothing but to express itself. Organised during the state of military siege, and thus in a period when Poland experienced genuine diplomatic isolation, the 1983 journey did anything but recommend caution to the Polish authorities, as had been feared in certain quarters. In reality it helped the population to keep to its hopes and maintain its social objectives—objectives which the Pope did not hesitate to justify in their entirety. As far as the third journey in 1987 was concerned, it fell into the pattern of the previous two, and increased the pressure on the government at a time when Gorbachev had come to power and when the situation consequently seemed to be opening. All things considering, and this was no coincidence, Poland was the first Eastern European country (1989) to be able to have a non-Communist premier. And by accepting this situation, Moscow simply encouraged the other countries to follow the same path. The consequences are well known: the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and that of all the established governments in Eastern Europe during the weeks which followed.

The Vatican and the autumn of 89

In order to be able to measure the satisfaction these events caused within the Vatican, it is necessary to recall John Paul II's positions with regard to Europe's political assets since the beginning of his papacy. "In this part of Europe which you represent ..." he had said as early as April 5, 1979, to the European Parliament, emphasising on that occasion its "common responsibility for the future of the entire continent". This was clearly indicating that the Community only represented a part of Europe. The Pope also referred to this idea in his speech to the European Communities on May 20, 1985: "... the limits treaties have cannot trace limits to overtures between men and peoples; the Europeans cannot resign themselves to the division of their continent. The countries which for different reasons do not take part in your institutions cannot be denied a fundamental desire for unity; their specific contribution to the European patrimony cannot be ignored."

This text is without ambiguity. The countries of Eastern Europe will not let themselves be forgotten. It is in the logic of their history that they will be reconciled to the Europe which is in the process of constituting itself in the West, returning the latter to its real geographical dimensions. And it goes without saying that this rapprochement can only be effected in respecting the liberty of human individuals and nations alike. This is the sense of John Paul II's message to the European Parliament on October 8, 1988:

"My desire as the supreme shepherd of the universal church, having come from Eastern Europe and having seen the aspirations of the Slav peoples, the latter the other 'lung' of our common European homeland—my desire is that Europe, by sovereignty establishing free

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institutions, can one day occupy the dimensions it has been given by geography, and even more by history.”

It is clear to what extent the events of autumn 1989, must have constituted the coronation of a policy and the realisation of a desire very dear to the Pope. In his traditional speech to the diplomatic corps on January 13, 1990, John Paul II expressed the satisfaction of the Holy See with regard to the “great transformations which have recently marked the life of many peoples”, emphasised “the irrepressible thirst for liberty which has been manifested there, which has demolished walls and opened doors”, and recalled the role of the church in this process of liberation. As though to authenticate this evolution, held in certain quarters as miraculous, John Paul II did not hesitate to visit Czechoslovakia only three months after he had been invited by the President, Vaclav Havel—an exceptionally brief wait. This very short two-day visit furnished the Pope with the occasion to denounce “the tragic utopia” of materialist ideology which had suffocated the life of the nations of Central Europe, as also the “illusory” character of the “pretension to construct a world without God”; this, in his arrival speech on April 21, 1990, was a veritable cry of victory.

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In fact, the months which followed marked the apex of a slow and often discouraging policy of presence, of defence of the rights of the faithful, and hence of the whole range of the rights of Man which had been eliminated by dictatorship. The diplomatic relations which had been broken by the governments installed after World War II have successively been re-established in Poland, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia, in Romania and in Bulgaria. And at the same time, the churches in these countries have revived a right to existence and a legal status. It has even been possible to nominate bishops in those dioceses where lack of agreement with the political authorities had caused them to remain vacant, in particular in Czechoslovakia.

The Soviet Union has not been exempt from this evolution. As is known, President Gorbachev paid a visit to the Vatican on December 1, 1989—a visit which would not have been able to take place had it not, in conformity with current etiquette, been solicited. And this visit, renewed in November 1990, cannot have been totally disinterested. There is no doubt that during the difficult epoch of *perestroika*, a moral authority such as the Catholic Church can

contribute to keeping calm claims which have been repressed for too long, and to moderating the unrealistic demands for autonomy of certain ethnic groups. For his part, the Soviet President entered into certain engagements with the Pope which subsequently materialised in the establishment of a special representation of the USSR and in the sending of a Papal Nunzio, Monsignor Colasuonno, as the Head of a diplomatic bureau installed in Moscow. The promise Gorbachev made regarding a statute for the faithful in the Soviet Union led to the voting, on October 1, 1990, of a law on religious liberty in the USSR, judges to be acceptable. In 1990, a bishop was nominated in Minsk, Bielorrussia, and on January 16, 1991 John Paul II was able to proceed with the nomination of bishops of the Latin Rite and confirm those of the Byzantine Rite in the Western Ukraine. For the Holy See, as John Paul II said in his speech to the cultural world in Prague on April 21, 1990, "a united Europe is no longer a dream".

What role for the church?

For John Paul II things are clear, and he repeated them to the Czech clergy on April 21, 1990: "... the life of the church must not be reduced to the liturgy and the sacraments; it must spread into the domains of culture, of education, of social engagement and of social assistance."

Even though the word politics is not pronounced—the church has a social doctrine, but not a political doctrine—it is evident that in its very spirit it is the church which must fill the vacuum left by the failure of ideologies. Though it must not be politicised, it must be present in society. The encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* had already emphasised the role of religion as an instrument of political reconstruction, and the decisive contributions of Saints Cyril and Methodius in the construction of Europe, a contribution not only for Christian religious communion "but also in the domains of its political and cultural union". John Paul II re-assigns this task to Christianity, the common denominator of the European countries, "a family of peoples, linked to each other by bonds of common religious ascendancy", as he said in his comment September 7, 1986.

The task is considerable, and above all mandatory where the vacuum is most immediately perceptible, as in the countries emerging from the Communist regimes. In this respect it is, of course, necessary to distinguish between traditionally Catholic Central Europe and the Slav world where the Orthodox tradition has spread, in particular the Soviet Union. In the former, where religion has been fought for some forty years, everything is lacking: men (the clergy has been persecuted and entry into the surviving seminaries strictly limited); infrastructures (the churches have been destroyed or transformed); and financial means, as everything will have to be rebuilt. Even though certain aspirations can still exist—lack of liberty and discrimination towards the faithful, instead of destroying religious faith, have often made it vigorously raise its head—the practical possibilities of responding to this are weak.

It is particularly in this perspective that it is necessary to understand preparations for the special Synod for Europe; it is no coincidence that on April 22, 1990, it was announced that this Synod would be convoked in Velherad, Czechoslovakia, the place from which the apostles

Cyril and Methodius departed in order to convert the Slavs to the Gospel. This decision is a new sign of the wish, already signalled, to treat Europe as a whole, in spite of and beyond political and ideological differences, and equally in spite of the diversity of the economic and cultural situations involved.

Two essential objectives are, in fact, behind the organisation of this Synod, objectives defined in function of what the two Europes, East and West, can offer each other:

Confronted with the challenge of liberalism, and in a march towards well-being and consumer society which is gliding over the need for transcendence, Western Europe can receive from the churches of the East, tried as these latter have been by difficulties and persecution, the evidence of their struggle for fundamental values, their courage and their heroism: in brief, it can receive the true value of an example.

Poor and deprived of means of all kinds, Eastern Europe can receive from the churches of the West, which belong to the world of the well-off, their material help, thus accomplishing the imperative duty of solidarity, as can be understood from the speech to the diplomatic corps on January 13, 1990. These churches have in any case the function of sensitising the Western world to the obligations it has, and at the same time have the possibility of channelling the aid received and getting it to wherever it is useful.

Is all this a giant wager? Coming from the Pope, however, perhaps it should be termed an act of faith. In effect the situation is not without its ambiguous aspects. Europe has become the birthplace of liberty, and it is in the name of a liberty which has been mocked for all too long that the whole of Eastern Europe has just shaken off the yoke of totalitarianism. If the Christian Churches, and in particular the Catholic Church, have been able to favour recent political evolution, it is notably because they have created their own spheres of liberty, and because there has been a coincidence of interests, for Christians in general and for the Holy See in particular, between requirements in the religious field and claims of a political nature. John Paul II, in fact, does not underestimate "the dangers involved in the newly found freedom of contact with the West", and during his speech to the Czech Episcopal Conference on April 21, 1990, he asked the priests to organise "immunity" defence against certain "viruses" such as secularism, indifference and practical materialism. Eastern Europe's return to liberty is no mean challenge for a Christianity which, before rebuilding society, will have to impose its values on it.

On the other hand, the countries of the Orthodox rite pose different problems. Diversely from countries of the Latin rite, they have been marked by a tradition of intermingling between temporal and spiritual, this being connected to the fact that the autonomy their churches enjoy has allowed them to be identified more easily as national churches. Furthermore, faced with Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism, those responsible for the Orthodox Churches have not preserved the same independence that Catholic prelates such as Cardinal Wyszyński in Poland

or Cardinal Mindzenty in Hungary have been able to manifest. In the Soviet Union, with seventy years of atheism to do away with, it is the frequent accepting of compromise which has to be abandoned. At the risk of losing all their credibility, the Orthodox Churches, and in particular the Russian Church, have to learn how to live both independently of Caesarism, whether it be Czarist or Bolshevik, as also in a post-totalitarian society.



The Huns turned away by the Cross

The Moscow Patriarchate's recent condemnation¹⁶ of the Soviet intervention in Lithuania would seem to inaugurate a greater independence of the Russian Church, though it is important not to underestimate certain reticences with respect to the free action of this church. The assassination on September 9, 1990, of father Alexander Men, an Orthodox priest of great ability and with considerable influence, open to the Catholic world and in favour of

perestroika, is embarrassing evidence of this reticence. The wish to eliminate a personality like this shows the resistance opposed to liberalisation policies in the Soviet Union, policies whose future remains still uncertain at the beginning of 1991.

In the East as in the West, and in Roman Catholic as in Orthodox circles, political upheavals are authorising and obliging Christians to redefine their roles with respect to their political engagement. The Catholic Church has been able to have the privilege of first choice in this redefinition process, however, as it has been able to keep its independence more often, and because its audience has been up to the level of all the aspirations it has tried to satisfy in its struggles. If Europe has two lungs, then no citizen can be a foreigner.

Which common house?

As is well known, the expression “the common house” is of Soviet origin. Born without doubt as an admission of defeat, under an obligation to admit the economic and technological superiority of the Western world, the term expresses a need for reconciliation with the West, and consequently acceptance of a certain opening to liberty.

John Paul II is sensitive to this evolution. In his letter *Euntes in Mundum*, published on March 22, 1988, in order to mark the millenium of Russian Christianity, he referred to the “process of detente in the civil domain, which generates so much hope amongst those working for pacific conviviality throughout the world”. The Pope also does not hesitate to take up the idea of the common house. “The house of the Pope has always been the house of all the representatives of the peoples on the earth”, he said with some complicity on welcoming the Soviet President to the Vatican, and shortly after he returned to the expression which seemed to him to be “richly suggestive”, in his message to the cardinals on December 22, 1989. “The moment is propitious to collect the stones of the demolished walls and build a common house together” John Paul II continued in his speech to the diplomatic corps on January 13, 1990, and in effect it certainly is a common Christian house which the Holy See would like to see built in this Europe—for him a continent with its frontiers set by the frontiers of European Christianity.

The Secretariat for Non-Believers, which became the Pontifical Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers during the Reform of the Curia in 1988, has long been organising meetings with representatives of the East.¹⁷ The most recent took place in Klingenthal near Strasbourg in October 1989, and brought Catholics and Soviets together to deal with the precise theme of the “role of civilisation in the construction of the common European house”. Those participating seemed anxious—and this was something new—to give the impression of establishing convergences.¹⁸

As far as John Paul II is concerned, he has not ceased to demand respect for religious liberty in the Soviet Union, and this was the subject of the letter he sent to President Gorbachev via Cardinal Casaroli on the occasion of the latter’s stay in Moscow for the millenium festivities. It

was one of the main requests expressed by the Pope when the Soviet head of state visited the Vatican in December 1989, and in any case the *conditio sine qua non* the Pope made before accepting the former's invitation to make an official visit to the Soviet Union.

The Holy See would seem decided on dealing with the Soviet government to the extent that President Gorbachev keeps to the promises he maintains he is implementing with the faithful. In January 1990, in a period of ethnic conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the Caucasian Republics of the USSR, the then Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Casaroli recommended the Soviet leader "wisdom and firmness" to re-establish order in the country.¹⁹ When the Lithuanian parliament made its declaration of independence in March 1990, and only a month later the Pope made his visit to Eastern Europe, in a Czechoslovakia just liberated from the Soviet yoke, the head of the Catholic Church avoided taking a position over the problem of the Baltic states. And another month later, during his visit to Mexico, he evoked the subject only extremely prudently with the press. According to John Paul II, the important thing is to recognise the aspirations of the various peoples, to respect international law (it must be remembered that the community of nations has never recognised Stalin's annexation of the Baltic countries in 1940, in the wake of the German-Soviet Pact), and also to deal with the Soviet leadership's wish for an opening. The same line was continued by Cardinal Casaroli during the CSCE Conference in Paris in November 1990: he was extremely discreet over the Baltic problem when, on Gorbachev's request, the representatives of the Baltic countries were not accepted as observers. Everything taking place would seem to demonstrate that the Vatican, anxious above all to do nothing which might risk leading to an interruption of the process in course in the Soviet Union, was avoiding any gesture which might destabilise its leaders.

Might it be said then, that in adopting the idea of the common house, the Pope is offering a seal of approval to new Soviet policy? This would be an over-simplification. As always when the relations between religion and politics are tackled, it is necessary to consider the fact that the same words do not necessarily have the same sense when used by the politician or by the religious authority, and that behind the meanings of each, often dissimilar priorities are concealed. There is no guarantee that the advantages for the economy and for technology as expected by the Soviets within a common house, might be judged a first priority on the banks of the Tiber. The church sees everything in terms of religious liberty above all.

In fact, just as with any proclamation of a political ideal backed by metaphysical and ethic convictions, John Paul II's plans for Europe pose as many questions as they resolve, or rather they leave the politicians the task of resolving certain aspects.

As the Polish Pope sees things, the Europe of the Twelve is undoubtedly called on to open its horizons. Yet under what form, in what stages and to what other countries? How may the European Community, with its more than thirty-year history, be associated with countries which have evolved with such vertically immobile systems and specific economic problems? Furthermore, what position would the Soviet Union have in this kind of regroupment?

“The dimensions of the historical habitats of the men in each continent are numerous, just as the nations are numerous”, said John Paul II in his speech to the cardinals and the Roman Curia on December 22, 1989. “In fact men live in communities which by their unity of culture, language and history eventually form a nation. It is therefore desirable that all the nations which live within the ‘European house’ can each have their own habitat, in harmony with the habitats occupied by the other nations.” This text is characterised by great prudence, along with the attempt to maintain the identity of nations. It is the work of a Pole, born in a country all too often sacrificed to the ambitions of its neighbours; one must not minimise the role of the Polish bishops - Monsignor Wojtyla was still Archbishop of Cracow - in the German-Polish reconciliation, as may be seen in the collective letter of the Polish Episcopate on November 18, 1965). Does this text represent a retreat of the present Pope with respect to his predecessors’ positions, highly favourable to European integration? This cannot be confirmed. On the eve of the adoption of the Single European Act in January 1986, John Paul II paid homage to the progress made by European solidarity (in his speech of January 11, to the diplomatic corps). His December 1989 speech, in fact, may be seen in the context, not of a minor and divided Europe, but of a greater Europe which is trying to put an end to the confrontation of two ideologically opposed blocks.

There is also another question: which links should the Europe of the future have with the United States, this black sheep of the church, where Catholic contestation is taking place with some force? Separating the former from the latter remains one of the objectives of Soviet diplomacy, and would not the creation of a common house, within which the Soviet Union would necessarily carve itself a great habitat if only due to its dimensions, be a means to accelerate this separation? There has also been no answer to this, except for permanent homage to the Helsinki process, the Final Act being an act of hope, as John Paul II has said. Secretary of State Monsignor Sodano emphasises the trans-Atlantic dimension of Helsinki, paying homage to the American spirit of overture and creativity,²⁰ but also uses great prudence on the subject of disarmament between the American and Soviet blocs, a disarmament which has always been envisaged as balanced and progressive.

In conclusion, how does Rome see the role of Central Europe, so often presented as a bridge between East and West? Insofar as closer association of Central Europe with Western Europe would not alter the greater planetary strategic balance (it is, in fact, the east of the west of the continent), it might be wondered whether the bridge role is only to be envisaged from an essentially religious viewpoint. Nostalgia for an undivided church and the desire for the co-existence of the two traditions of Rome and Byzantium under one roof reappear in this context with the hope that this Central Europe might contribute to the unity of the church.

Europe and the world

One must be careful, however, not to analyse the behaviour of the Vatican in general and John

Paul II in particular from the only point of view of a policy of presence, however indispensable this might be for moral authority. From the viewpoint of this kind of authority, recognition of ethical values and acceptance of a common code of conduct between nations are also factors of peace, and means to overcome antagonism. East-West antagonism was born out of a war which was also born in Europe, and Rome thinks it should also end in Europe: a common religion within the continent must contribute to this end, even though this implies a heavy burden on churches which have been separated for such a long time. But the need to bring this antagonism to an end also has other motivations. It must not be forgotten that the conflict is translated, or at least has been translated up to now, into the race for armaments, a race not only suicidal for humanity but also particularly costly, given that the gap between the richer and poorer countries is worsening daily.

One of the reasons for this insistence on restoring extended cooperation throughout the whole of Europe depends, in fact, on the analysis John Paul II applies to the world situation. All the observers were struck by the almost anguished tone of his last social encyclical of March 1988 (as mentioned above). For him, the accentuation of economic disparity and the aggravation of misery in the countries of the Third World are creating an explosive situation, and the responsibility of the richer countries is involved in seeing that this situation does not endanger peace, or even the survival of the earth. Now Europe, whether Eastern or Western, belongs to the rich North with respect to a deprived South, and in this perspective the traditional East-West conflict is nothing compared to needs of a gravity which surpasses all the ideological antagonisms which have characterised the last fifty years.

This return to earthly priorities has to be kept in mind in order to understand John Paul II's attitude towards the Gulf crisis. Although it may not be correctly qualified as a North-South conflict, Iraq not being a poor country, it certainly demonstrates the frustrations and inequalities of development.

The Pope certainly condemned the annexation of Kuwait by Iraq, and this could not be otherwise, involving as it did a flagrant violation of international law. In his speech to the diplomatic corps on January 12, 1991, however, he insisted on mentioning a rediscovery by the community of states of an international law "which does not constitute a kind of extension of their unlimited sovereignty, nor a means to protect their interests or even their hegemonic enterprises". In saying this, the Pope obviously reminds the states what international law should not be. At the same time he condemns war, an "adventure with no return", as a means of resolving conflict in today's world: the world might find difficulty in dominating consequent spirals of violence. Here there is the whole "just war" problem, a problem which cannot be discussed in this article. But in the same speech the Pope does insist on recalling the fact that "... in the domain of application of international law, the inspiring principle must be that of justice and equity". Cardinal Etchegaray commented on this idea on January 28, before the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace: "... we do not lose peace just on the day war breaks out; we have been corroding it all along the years by letting so much rancour, frustration and

despair accumulate.”²¹

This language is probably not new. *Pax opus justitiae* was the slogan used by Paul VI, a Pope who greatly contributed to making world opinion more sensitive to the injustices existing between nations. But what is new is the world he is addressing: a world where the inequalities of development are worsening and information allows them to be seen more clearly, a world where hate can root itself. In a situation such as this, the European continent as a whole, which figures amongst the privileged, is called on more than ever to support the reasons of the weakest, and forget its own quarrels. Apart from all the worry felt in certain decolonised countries at the establishment of the future civilising mission of Europe,²² the latter is nonetheless faced with earthly and urgent responsibilities. “Let us remember that politics is not only the art of the possible, but also the desire to achieve the impossible”. This reflection, applied by Vaclav Havel to his own country,²³ would seem an ideal formula to adapt to John Paul II’s plans for Europe.

References

¹ - The speeches quoted in this article have been published in *Documentation catholique* (D.C.), Paris. Dated, and thus easily retrievable in the collection, they are mentioned without further reference.

² - Marc, Gabriel, “L’explosion démographique” in *Le Rève de Compostelle*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1989, p. 316.

³ - Cf. above all the speech on March 15, 1953 to the members of the Collège d’Europe in Bruges, as also the 1953 and 1954 Christmas messages. Cf. also Chenaux, Philippe, *Une Europe vaticane?*, Ciaco, Louvain, 1990.

⁴ - For example, in the speech of September 8, 1965 to the members of *Giovane Europa*.

⁵ - Cf. in particular his Conference on January 20, 1972, before the Institute of International Politics in Milan, D.C., 1972, pp. 416-424.

⁶ - A Commission of Episcopates in the European Community, the COMECE, was created in 1980. There are also the European Council of Presbyterian Commissions, the European Lay Forum, the Union of European Conferences of the major Superiors of male and female religious bodies, and the European Council of Parishes. It must be added that for some forty years already, the Conference of European Churches, with its seat in Geneva, also carries out ecumenical work of the same kind. The impact of its last meeting in Basel, in spring 1989, demonstrates its importance. On this subject cf. the work by Chelini, Jean and Blandine, *L’Eglise de Jean Paul II face à l’Europe*, Nouvelle Cité, Paris, 1989.

⁷ - Speech at the fifth Symposium of the C.C.E.E. on October 6, 1982.

⁸ - The speech at Czestochova, Poland in 1979, at Subiaco and Monte Cassino, Italy, in 1979 and 1980, before UNESCO in 1980, and before the European Parliament in 1988.

⁹ - Used in particular by Monsignor Casaroli in a Conference at the University of Linz, November 18, 1977 (D.C. no. 1740, p. 372). Also used very frequently by John Paul II, especially in the speech for the European Vespers in Vienna on September 13, 1983, in Speyer on May 4, 1987, or in the speech to the Cardinals on December 22, 1989.

¹⁰ - Declaration of the International Mixed Commission for dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, in June 1990, D.C. no. 2012, pp. 826 - 827.

¹¹ - As also with particular vigour in *Le Rève de Compostelle*, a collective work already quoted, with the symptomatic sub-title *Vers La Restauration d’une Europe Chrétienne*.

- 12 - He did this very clearly in his speech before the European Parliament on October 8, 1988.
- 13 - The works of Jean Delumeau have amply demonstrated this. Cf. especially *Le Christianisme va-t-il mourir?*, Hachette, Paris, 1977.
- 14 - This was the case in Czechoslovakia in particular.
- 15 - Cf. de Montclos, Christine, "Le Saint Siège et l'Europe", in *Le Saint Siège dans les relations internationales*, Cerf/Cujas, Paris, 1989.
- 16 - *Izvestia*, January 15, 1991, quoted in *La Croix*, February 2, 1991.
- 17 - There was a meeting in May 1984 in Slovenia with the Yugoslavs alone, on the theme Science and Faith. Another meeting in Budapest in 1986 had brought together representatives of the Catholic Church and those from the group of Eastern European states, to reflect on "Society and Ethical Values".
- 18 - Cf. the interview with cardinal Poupard, organiser of the meeting, from the Rome stand-point, *L'Osservatore Romano*, French edition no. 14, 1989.
- 19 - Vatican Radio News on January 22, 1990, quoted by Caprile G., *Civiltà Cattolica*, February 3, 1990, p. 279.
- 20 - Speech to the C.S.C.E. on October 1, 1990, D.C. no. 2016, p. 994.
- 21 - *L'Osservatore Romano*, French edition, February 5, 1991.
- 22 - This aspect of the vocation of Europe, present in John Paul II's views, but which cannot be discussed here, is looked at by J. A. Mbembe in *Le Retour des Certitudes*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1987, chapter 10.
- 23 - Quoted by Elizabeth Schemla, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 4-10, 1990.