
E U R O P E

The European Identity in Crisis

From the “Soul of Europe” to the “Europe of the Treaties”

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“If we do not succeed in the next ten years to give Europe a soul. . . , then we have lost the struggle.”
(Jacques Delors)

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THE MAIN idea of the present paper can be briefly stated in the following way: Europe is confronted with a profound identity crisis, manifest in the recanting of its historical roots and in a lack of spirituality. Metaphorically speaking, the Old Continent, which was the first Christianized continent, is in danger of losing its soul. Although it has been called *Christendom* even until the 18th century, Europe is now the most secular and Christophobic continent in the world.

Research Questions

WHO ARE we, the Europeans? What differentiates us from other inhabitants of the Earth? What are the historical roots and the factors that have historically influenced the identity of Europe? What are the factors that influence the identity of Europe in the present? What are the actual challenges to the European

identity? Is the European identity in crisis and, if so, what does this mean? What are the causes of this crisis, what are the symptoms and the forms that it takes and what are the remedies for it, considering that the construction of the European identity has to refer not only to the past, but also to what Europe is today and to what it will be in the future?¹

In her speech in front of the European Parliament, after assuming the presidency of the European Union, Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, formulated a set of questions, “in the name of the European citizens”: What will Europe be? Why do we need Europe? What is Europe in its inner being? What the European Union means?

First of All, what Is Identity?

AS IT has been said on many occasions, identity is an ambiguous term and therefore difficult to define.² Literally taken, the concept of identity points to something identical; it is used to “offer the impression that all individuals are equal within an imagined community.”³ Guibernau defined identity as an interpretation of the Self, which assesses what is and where the person is, both socially and psychologically. When someone has an identity, (s)he is molded in the form of a social object, by the acknowledgment of the participation and belonging to social relations.⁴ Synthesizing the answers to the question “What is identity?” in the form of a “central idea,” Samuel Huntington, the author of an inciting book about identity,⁵ defines identity as the perception of the self, in the case of an individual or a group, or as the result of the self consciousness which pretends that I possess, or that we possess, as entities, certain distinct qualities that differentiate me from you, or that differentiate us from them.

In short, identity is something that differentiates us from others.⁶ We can define identity, therefore, as a set of relatively constant elements that differentiate an entity from another, a human community or an individual from others. In this context, it is clear that we have to make a distinction between individual identity and group or collective identity. We understand collective identity as the set of elements defining the specificities of a human community that distinguish it from others. While individuals can change their identity relatively easily, by assuming an affiliation to different groups, the collective identity is shaped over time, through complex processes, so that a group can hardly give up its identity. There are also circumstantial, contingent identities, which are imbued on the surface or based on appearances, and there are deep identities, of substance. The latter provide consistency and continuity to a group and they

could not be imposed through administrative measures, because they are linked to the historical destiny of that group or community.

Alongside these distinctions, there are also a few others that could be considered, such as: spiritual identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, racial identity, national identity etc. All these illustrate different facets of the identity concept and the complexity of the notion, which makes it so difficult to define. Identity is a concept with different connotations, and individuals and groups can simultaneously have more identities, thus justifying the notion of multiple identities. Finally, there can be concurrent and complementary identities. For instance, having the identity of a member of a terrorist organization and that of a member of a religious denomination that rejects violence would mean to have concurrent or even incompatible identities.

Usually, both in the case of individuals and in the case of groups, we have dynamic identities, which suffer changes, as a result of historical events and processes. However, there are some relatively constant elements of identity, necessary to ensure the survival of the group. In this case, one can talk about the constants of individual or group identity.

What Does European Identity Mean Today?

ACCORDING TO Thomas Jansen, when someone speaks about the European identity, (s)he must explain what exactly (s)he has in mind, because taken separately these two words can be ambiguous and can create confusion. There is a distinction between the European identity and the identity of the European Union as a political, economic and social organization. In this context, Jansen speaks about the Spirit of the Union and about the necessity for its citizens to understand this spirit and to accept it, so that eventually they can identify themselves with it.

However, the EU's identity can only be understood in the wider context of Europe in general, and Jansen himself talks about the historical, cultural, social and political factors that define, in his opinion, the European identity. The European identity issue is not very easy to settle, however. It generated heated controversies, especially in the context of the eu enlargement process and after the elimination, from the preamble of the proposed European Constitution and later on from the Treaty of Lisbon, of the explicit references to the historical foundations and to the Judeo-Christian heritage in particular, as constitutive parts of the European identity. In addition, Turkey's wish to accede to the EU further complicated the issue and raised many questions in respect to what Europe really is and to what it should be.

The Historical Roots of Identity

MOST ANALYSTS acknowledge that the European identity rests on the foundations represented by the classical Greek culture, the Roman civilization, and Christianity. Recently, emphasis is also being put on Judaism's contribution to the shaping of the European identity ("the Judeo-Christian heritage" or the triangle: Athens–Rome–Jerusalem). Indeed, historical Europe was defined and rested on these three pillars: the ancient Greek culture, the Roman civilization (Roman law) and the Judeo-Christian heritage.

The Greeks were the first Europeans who posed the identity question, trying to separate themselves and from the others, as the distinction made between the Greeks and the barbarians proves. In any case, the Greek heritage, or the "Greek miracle" as it has been called, means more than that. The ancient Greeks invented the philosophy, the art, and the science which later became the defining components of European civilization, decisively marking the course of its history. In addition, some would say that the invention of politics also belongs to the Greeks. In this respect, there are three great inventions that we owe to the Greeks: politics itself, democracy, and political theory in its two forms, namely, political philosophy (Plato) and political science (Aristotle). Among the great inventions of the Greeks we could enumerate: the definition of the human (Aristotle), the invention of logic (Aristotle) and the discovery of the laws of rational thought (the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, the law of excluded middle and the law of sufficient reason), the invention of the concept (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), the discovery of reason and the invention of rationalism which, according to Max Weber, would eventually lead to the spirit of capitalism, along with Protestant ethics. Greek thought, eminently rational, has decisively marked the history of European and Western thought.

The definition of the human by Aristotle, which is probably the most comprehensive one after the definition given by the Bible, had a significant influence on the European understanding of the human destiny on earth. Aristotle defined the human by reference to four elements: reason, sociability, the ability to communicate, and morality.

The ancient Greeks discovered the "eternal values": Truth, Justice, Good, Beauty, which later became fundamental components for the development of the European spirit and culture. Finally, it has been said that the Greeks invented liberty, in its ontological, philosophical and political understanding. Even if we take just these elements into consideration (although the "Greek miracle" is much more complex) we should be grateful to the ancient Greeks for the unequalled heritage they left us.

Rome had a less important contribution to the shaping of the European identity, in respect to intellectual creativity. Empires never represented decisively factors of identity. They rather generated disorientation and transformations of the existing identities and tried to impose, often by force, the elements of identity belonging to the conquering powers. Despite all that, the extraordinary civilization created by the Romans contributed to the diffusion of some elements and factors of identity that cannot be overlooked. Thus, the development of Roman roads made possible the diffusion of Greek culture and of Judeo-Christian culture. Rome not only contributed to the diffusion of advanced cultures, but eventually it imposed Christianity as the official religion of the empire.

At the intellectual level, the Romans provided Europe with the famous Roman law, which became the foundation of all European juridical systems, starting with the Middle Ages. In short, the legacy left by the Romans to the Europeans consists of the Roman roads that facilitated the circulation of information, and of the Roman laws. Undoubtedly, the ancient Greeks also gave importance to laws (Plato wrote a dialogue entitled *The Laws* and Aristotle also spoke about the role of laws in governance both in his *Politics* and in *The Nicomachean Ethics*). However, the Romans, favored by the existing circumstances, created the first juridical system applicable beyond the boundaries of the city.

In respect to politics, the Romans offered Europeans two forms of political organization that were going to mark the destiny of Europe: the Republic and the Empire. The first one represented a paradigm that served as a source of inspiration for the modern European republics.

The Latin language could also be added as an element of the Roman legacy left to the Europeans, in terms of the constitutive factors of the European identity. It is interesting to note, as Rémi Brague did, that Latinity is the only uncontested feature vindicated by Europe, while the other two—the Greek and the Judeo-Christian legacies—were perceived by some authors as exogenous factors.

Although Christianity was not born in Europe and it is not a political ideology or doctrine, it influenced the history of the European continent (and of the world in general) more than any other known political doctrine. How can this be explained? In an essay entitled “Why We Cannot Not Call Ourselves Christians,” the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce argued that Christianity was the greatest revolution experienced by mankind, so great that it is no wonder that it seemed and still seems to be a miracle, a revelation, a divine intervention in human affairs, which granted them a new law and a new direction. All other revolutions seem to be particular and limited when compared to the Christian one, and all of them have to be considered only in a dependant rela-

tion to the latter, because this revolution gave the primal impulse which can still be felt nowadays.⁷

Christianity gave Europe a profound identity—as Pierre Chaunu noted, Europe was called *Christendom* up until the 17th century.⁸ Christianity provided Europe with a spiritual identity (Europe was actually the first entirely Christianized continent, although it is indeed also the first de-Christianized one, so that some authors speak now about a “post-Christian Europe”) and, alongside Judaism, it provided Europe with a moral identity—two capital faces of collective identity that proved to be the most perennial components of it.

The Present-day Factors of the European Identity

WHICH ARE the factors that determine or define the European identity today? One of the features of the current debates regarding the European identity, as we have already seen, is given by the dismissal of the traditional historical factors of identity: the ancient Greek culture, Latinity and Christianity. In the current debates their place was taken by other factors considered to have a more important impact upon the European identity.

The first one is the political factor. It is considered that the European Union is first of all a political enterprise and therefore some authors (H. Schneider, etc.) do not hesitate to speak about the primacy of politics in the shaping of the European identity.

Another factor that has recently raised the interest of those concerned with the European identity is the economic one. As it is known, the first European treaties were concentrated on economic aspects. Thus, other authors consider that the common market and currency have a great relevance for the forging of the New Europe’s identity—despite the reticence of some states to adopt the Euro or the lack of enthusiasm with which it was adopted by others.

A third factor considered to have had a major impact upon the European identity is the juridical one. The EU has adopted a complex legislation—the famous *acquis communautaire*—and it has been considered that this *acquis* will eventually resolve all the problems and the dilemmas of the united Europe’s administration. As anticipated in 1989 by two French economists, Christian Hen and Jacques Léonard, the “construction of Europe through treaties” has become a reality.

Other significant factors that were considered relevant for the emergence of the European identity could be also mentioned: among them, the administrative factors (the European Commission and European institutions in general), the European citizenship, the European educational system. Along with

the increased importance given to these factors, there has been a decrease in the importance given to some other factors, such as the historical, traditional, geographical, racial, national, cultural ones, etc. Nevertheless, the most neglected factor during the last decades, in this respect, is represented by the spiritual one. While the rest of the world witnesses a global religious resurgence, which seems to fulfill Malraux's prophecy according to which "the 21st century will be religious or will not be at all," Europe is now one of the most secularized and "Christophobic" areas of the world.

One thing is certain: post-modernity determined a rearrangement, even a radical overturn of the factors that determine the European identity. And this is not necessarily a good thing.

Challenges to the European Identity

THERE ARE numerous challenges to European identity, but we will briefly discuss only a few. In the first place, we consider anti-Christianity to be the greatest challenge to the European identity, although it must be said that anti-Christianity is not a new phenomenon in Europe. Nietzsche anticipated it in his writings, especially in his *Antichrist*, where he declared war on Christianity and its founder, Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, Europe is affected today by a true Christophobia, which separates it dramatically from America, which, despite all the changes it experienced, remains singularly Christian. Another challenge refers to secularism—Europe being today one of the most secularized regions of the world. And here secularism does not mean just the separation between State and Church, but also a denial of the legitimacy of the presence of religion in the public space. Or, as Marcello Pera observed: "It is one thing to separate State and Church; it is quite a different thing to separate religion from the lives of the people." And he continued: "In Europe today, religion is not allowed to express itself in public. As a consequence, religion cannot nourish our civil customs, provide a spiritual ground for our societies, or act in support of our public rules and behavior. And, of course, once the links with the religious tradition are severed, the allegiance to the very same values which are the core of our living together starts losing its strength and gets weaker and weaker."

Postmodernism, which goes hand in hand with relativism, represents another challenge to the European identity, by calling into question the very idea of collective identity. According to postmodernists, each individual is what he or she likes to be. Any authority and rule is considered oppressive and inappropriate. Thus, postmodernism calls into question the very sense of living

together. It creates the illusion that one can build without a foundation—that is, without some values and principles acknowledged by everyone. By promoting ideas like there is no “objective truth,” the “death of the subject” and even the “death of man,” by destroying the grand narratives in favor of the micro-narratives of each individual, by its alliance with relativism, by contesting the existence of any foundation and generally valid principles, postmodernism calls into question the very idea of the European identity as a supra-individual structure. In other words, according to postmodern thought, there are no collective identities, only individual ones, everyone being able to construct them *ad libitum*. However, experience shows us that any social construction—including the European one—requires the acknowledgement of a minimal set of common rules, principles and values by all partners. Or, according to postmodernists, there are no such rules. Therefore, postmodernism is one of the great threats to European unity and identity inasmuch as it became the mentality of the young generations called to shape the identity of the New Europe.

The crisis of politics is another challenge that has to be taken into consideration. As we have already seen, many authors and most European political leaders consider that the European identity can be constructed by political means. Or, the legitimate question is: how can politics, which is itself suspected of corruption and lies, with an ever decreasing credibility, offer an identity to a continent? How can a crisis be overcome by another crisis?

Along with these challenges, which can be perceived as rather theoretical ones, there are also some more direct and practical challenges to the European identity. Among these we could mention the demographic challenge (the decrease in the European population), the immigration of Muslim populations, globalization, nationalism, multiculturalism, etc.

The Crisis of the European Identity

THE DISMISSAL of any explicit reference to the historical fundaments of the European identity from the European Constitution draft and later from the text of the Treaty of Lisbon determined many analysts to speak about a “crisis of the European identity.” Undoubtedly, Europe is not the only continent facing an identity crisis. As Samuel Huntington noted, there is a “global crisis of identity,” by which he understands the ensemble of national or regional crises that exist in our world today. Almost all countries in the world are currently facing an identity crisis.

How does this identity crisis manifest itself in Europe and what are its symptoms? According to Marcello Pera, the identity crisis in Europe is first of all

one of a spiritual and moral nature. Certainly, Europe is confronted with a crisis of fundamentals, and with a crisis of the historical roots of the European identity, manifest in what J. H. H. Weiler¹⁰ and later on George Weigel called “Christophobia.” As Weigel notes, Europe, through the actions of its political leaders, is determined, or so it seemed, “to airbrush fifteen hundred years of European history” by deeming “any reference to the Christian sources of contemporary Europe’s commitments to human right and democracy a profound threat to human rights and democracy.” And he goes on by asking: “Why did so many of Europe’s political leaders insist that the new Constitution of Europe include a deliberate act of historical amnesia, in which a millennium and a half of Christianity’s contributions to European understandings of human rights and democracy were deliberately ignored—indeed denied?”¹¹

Of course, Christophobia is not a new phenomenon. Friedrich Nietzsche was considered one of its forerunners and one of the prophets of the postmodern era, even from the 19th century, when he assumed the most invidious role ever assumed by a human being: that of the anti-Christ. Nietzsche ends his writing entitled *The Antichrist*, with these words: “This eternal accusation against Christianity I shall write upon all walls, wherever walls are to be found—I have letters that even the blind will be able to see . . . I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are venomous enough, or secret, subterranean and small enough,—I call it the one immortal blemish upon the human race...”¹² What distinguishes Nietzsche’s anti-Christianity from what Weiler and Weigel now call Christophobia is the mass character of the latter, as recent opinion polls indicate. Nietzsche’s prophecy seems to be fulfilled in 20th century Europe.

Returning to the European identity crisis, Marcello Pera identifies certain symptoms of it. The first one refers to the refusal to mention the Judeo-Christian roots in the Preamble of the European Constitutional Treaty. For all the vivid debates, the secularists won. Accordingly, Pera’s question: “Can Europe unify economically, socially, and politically if it lacks the strength even to mention that Judeo-Christian religion without which it would not even exist?” and his answer: “No, it cannot,” seem legitimate. The second symptom of the crisis identified by Pera refers to secularization, not just in the sense of the separation between State and Church, but in the sense of the separation between religion and the lives of the people. The third symptom of the crisis, a consequence of the former two, is multiculturalism, the view that communities must have rights over the individuals. “Taken as doctrine, multiculturalism is a form of relativism according to which no form of life can be said to be better than another because they are incommensurable. Taken as policy, multiculturalism is the denial of the existence of one single culture—one single set of principles

and values—encompassing all the others. By embracing it and by spreading the ‘anything goes’ slogan underlying it, Europe shows that it no longer knows where it comes from, what it is, and where it is going,” Pera argues.

But certainly the most shocking symptom is that of Europe deliberately abandoning its Christian identity and heritage. As Weiler puts it, the exclusion of Christianity from the European cultural heritage makes the European Constitution illegitimate. Seduced by the agnostic *laïcité* of the French state model, the framers of the European Constitution ignored one of the most important functions of a constitution—that of representing a repository of the values, symbols, and ideals of a certain community, which confer it its individual and unique character.

What seems less evident now but could become an irreversible development in the future, is that this spiritual and moral crisis currently facing Europe could extend far beyond the frontiers of the old continent. There are many authors that draw a comparison between America and Europe in this respect. For several reasons, “in the United States, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution have a religious foundation, society still has a religious essence, and religion continues to play an important role in the public arena,” Pera observes. In Europe, on the other hand, “not only have European states become secularized, European society has become *de-Christianized*. As Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, ‘Europe, unlike America, is on a collision course with its own history. Often it voices an almost visceral denial of any possible public dimension for Christian values.’”

The legitimate question, then, is how can this situation be overcome? What are the remedies to the current crisis? For Pera, the remedy for the identity crisis consists of a cultural response. A return to our origins is necessary in the first place, and an understanding of the fact that “the Judeo-Christian tradition is not just a form of culture like any other, but precisely the main basis of our liberal-democratic states.” And finally, “we have to reject the prevailing relativistic view according to which there can be no value judgments as regards forms of life, cultures, and civilizations,” which “prevents Europe from having a sense of mission, including the mission of spreading those human rights it is so proud of.” In the end of his essay, the Italian writer expresses his conviction that “the Judeo-Christian religion is necessary for providing foundations to our liberal and democratic states,” because both liberalism (as a doctrine of the precedence of the individual over society and state) and democracy (as a doctrine of the equality of rights of all men) stem from the Judeo-Christian idea that man was created in God’s image and every man has a dignity per se for this very reason; and also that “the sense of a religious faith is indispensable for social cohesion,” because “the most powerful glue of society does not come from blood ties,

material interests, common histories or narratives, shared economic and political goals, it comes from identity, in particular an identity of principles and values” and “the more these principles and values are believed in and cultivated as a faith, the stronger society is.”

According to Pera, to overcome the current crisis a dialogue is also required between the believers of many confessions and non-believers, and in this dialogue all parts have to pay the price of renouncing to some things. If the believers are asked to reject dogmatism, non-believers have to reject some current ideas such as ethnocentrism (according to which fundamental rights are an asset pertaining to Westerners alone), relativism (according to which they have no special foundation and are as good as any other) and positivism (according to which they are valid and legitimate just because they have been embodied into some law passed by some parliament at some time). We would add here Nietzscheanism, with its famous declaration: “God is dead” and with its Christophobia and postmodernism, which created the illusion that one could build without fundamentals, as Gene Edward Veith observed,¹³ although the list of the demons against which the responsible forces of Europe should fight against does not end here.

We insisted on Marcello Pera’s standpoint for several reasons. The first one is that we share his ideas in a great measure. The second one refers to Pera’s expertise as a social scientist and professor at the University of Pisa, and as an important European politician (he is a member of the Italian Senate and its ex-president). We agree with Pera that the current European identity crisis requires cultural answers and that first of all we have to return to our roots, to our origins. In this perspective, we believe that a rediscovery of the Christian fundamentals of the European civilization is the most important thing, in the context of the challenges to the European identity represented by the secularist movement and Islamic migration flows.

In a special report, Robert J. Windorf¹⁴ argues that “for the foreseeable future, the role of religion in Europe will be increasingly determined by the heightened battle between traditional Judeo-Christian forces, the increasingly popular secularist movement, and the rising tide of Muslim immigrants” and that “this predicament could indeed become the most crucial societal and political challenge for Europe throughout the remainder of the 21st century.”

Various scenarios could be imagined, of course, in respect to the results of this battle. A pessimistic one would be that Europe would give up its spiritual (Christian identity) and become the first secularized continent. The second one would be that Europe becomes Islamized—that is, Christianity’s place will be taken by Islam. A third scenario would be that Europe is re-Christianized, re-evangelized by her former colonies or by the former communist states, where

Christianity persists and is even stronger after its confrontation with the atheistic forces of the communist totalitarian regimes. Finally, there is also the possibility that certain dramatic events could determine Europeans to return to the Judeo-Christian moral and spiritual values.

One thing, however, is certain: this identity crisis will not be easily overcome and, certainly, it cannot be overcome solely by politico-administrative measures. The Christian Church could have a major role in this, given the spiritual and moral nature of the crisis. To be able to make a contribution, however, the Church has to restructure itself, to reform itself, to return to the genuine Christian teaching and to the Word of God: the Bible. A special role in this respect could be played by the Evangelical movement, with its special emphasis on the Scriptures. A reliable solution would certainly be a new spiritual awakening, and the missionaries, the evangelists, could assume a great part of this challenge. We strongly believe that only a dramatic event or a concerted action of the Churches could stop Europe's drive to disaster.

From the “Soul of Europe” to the “Europe of the Treaties”

IN 1992, Jacques Delors, the then president of the European Commission, called upon a group of religious leaders gathered at Brussels to reflect together to find “a heart and a soul for Europe.” He said that “if we do not succeed in the next ten years to give Europe a soul. . . , then we have lost the struggle.” Delors's collocation through which he suggested that the citizens of Europe need more than economic or juridical systems, illustrated by the treaties, went a long way; it has been re-assumed many times by different politicians and in different contexts. Two years after Delors's discourse, another initiative was born in Europe: a non-profit association called A Soul for Europe, whose objectives were to give the European Union a spiritual and a moral dimension, to contribute to the building of a Europe for the people, of a Europe in which people can find their substantial identity, by generating a dialogue between the religious communities and European institutions. Eventually, however, only the collocation Soul of Europe remained, with its mystical-metaphorical allure, sometimes evoked by politicians in crisis situations, to attract supporters. This is the case of the German chancellor Angela Merkel, for example, who recalled Delors's appeal to give Europe a soul, during a session of the European Parliament, after taking up the presidency of the European Union Council, in a time of crisis, after the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch voters. There she spoke beautifully about what it means to give Europe a soul, but forgot to mention the essential thing: that

Europe had just given up its genuine soul: Christianity. And Europe did this without regrets. Although the chancellor admitted that Europe already has a soul, she did not say explicitly what or how that soul was. Actually, the soul of Europe means four things, for Merkel: diversity (Europe is unity in diversity), liberty in all its forms (including the liberty to believe or not to believe) associated with responsibility and tolerance. The latter is the most relevant of all, in Merkel's opinion: "The soul of Europe is tolerance. Europe is the continent of tolerance."¹⁵

Diversity, liberty, responsibility, tolerance... are these four elements the exclusive province of Europe? Does America hold less dear these ideals of liberty, diversity, responsibility and tolerance? And, after all, what do liberty or tolerance mean? Does it mean that the minority can institute a tyranny against the majority? Europe just offered a proof of intolerance by rejecting the candidacy for the European commissioner position of the Catholic Italian Rocco Buttiglione, who had the courage to affirm his Christian faith. "Tolerance," Thomas Mann said, "becomes a crime when applied to evil." Actually, Angela Merkel herself used this citation in her speech, but she forgot to mention that all the values she had invoked as representing "the soul of Europe" are stemming from Christianity and find in Christianity one of their greatest supporter. The reason for this omission is understandable. Merkel did not probably want to offend the secular political leaders and the numerous Muslim immigrants by mentioning Christianity. Accordingly, she ignored Joseph Ratzinger's words, by which he warned that it is not the reference to the Judeo-Christian traditions in the European Constitution that would offend Islam, but rather the lack of respect for God and the arrogance of Reason. Indeed, many Muslim leaders criticize Europeans for their lack of faith and for their spiritual and moral decadence. And what puzzle them even more, as some Muslims authors admit, is the easiness with which the Europeans give up their spiritual identity. We should, therefore, ask ourselves: If Europe has identified itself with Christendom for such a long period of its history, if "the soul of Europe" lies with Christianity, what remains today of this soul, in a Europe which is about to become post-Christian, in a Europe where Christophobia has become almost an emblem?

What is Europe today without its historical roots and without Christianity, which provided Europe its substantial identity? I would be tempted to answer using Professor's Vlad Constantinesco's words: "a juridical and political monster." There is probably no other entity with so many treaties and juridical rules like the European Union. However, could these rules offer European Union a genuine substantial identity? Can they ensure its continuing existence?

Returning to Angela Merkel's speech, the chancellor acknowledged that "the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, as well as the

Treaties of Rome, dealt with our culture very little or not at all, and even in the Maastricht Treaty it plays only a marginal role.”¹⁶

Indeed, Christianity has certainly shaped this culture significantly. The last two European Treaties—The European Constitutional Treaty and the Treaty of Lisbon—contain a single phrase referring to the “cultural, religious and humanist European traditions,” but these traditions are not explicitly stated. This issue generated interminable debates and some argued that the Constitutional Treaty was rejected exactly for this reason. As Weigel noted, the constitutional draft identified the roots of contemporary European civilization and its commitments to democracy, human rights and the rule of law as the continent’s classical heritage, but Christianity’s influence on the formation of what is now Europe went unnoticed.¹⁷ For all the vigorous protests of some countries, eventually the voices supporting the inclusion of Christianity’s role in the formation of today’s democratic Europe were in the minority. Most European leaders considered that a return to Europe’s Christian roots would be a threat to the idea of a lay state and of the secularization of the society and a return to obscurantism, intolerance and even to fratricide. Or, such a thought is in itself an obstacle to the development of the continent. Marcello Pera considers this refusal to explicitly mention the Judeo-Christian roots of Europe as the first symptom of the identity crisis of the Old Continent. “Can Europe unify economically, socially, and politically if it lacks the strength even to mention that Judeo-Christian religion without which it would not even exist?” asks Pera. And the answer is certainly: No, it cannot! Weiler, on the other hand, argued that the exclusion of Christianity from the European cultural heritage makes the European Constitution an illegitimate one, because the artisans of the constitution ignored the fact that one of the most important functions of a constitution is that of being a repository of the values, symbols and ideals of a community, which confer that community its individual character and its uniqueness.¹⁸ Even authors that have no religious affinities acknowledge that the identity of a community finds its most noble expression in the internal order of that community, in its Constitution, and the European Constitution is defective in this respect. As it is known, the European Constitutional Treaty was rejected by referendum in France and the Netherlands. However, the Treaty of Lisbon does not solve the European identity problem either, so the crisis persists. The new treaty is the expression of a political compromise, already anticipated by Angela Merkel in her famous speech to the European Parliament in 2007. At the very best, it solved the political crisis generated by the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch voters, but not the profound identity crisis of Europe. Actually, the Lisbon Treaty does not hold anything substantially new from the identity point of view. There is a single phrase referring

to the “European cultural, religious and humanist traditions” in both documents. The Lisbon Treaty however has the word “inspiring” written in capital letters. Anyway, the same ambiguity and lack of courage in assuming the Judeo-Christian heritage is common to both documents.

The question is: in this case, can we still speak about the “soul of Europe”? Is Europe not on the verge of losing its soul, its spiritual identity provided by Christianity? What will remain of Europe if it loses its soul? It will remain a “Europe of the treaties” or “a political and juridical monster.” No other edifice was built on so many treaties and rules and never in history had a continent given up its identity so easily as Europe did. It is possible that, by betting everything on these “paper warranties” and on the Brussels bureaucracy, Europe will find itself unprepared in the face of a History that does not forgive and experience the horror of the void.

In the Introduction to a small book written in 1989, two French economists, Christian Hen and Jacques Léonard, said the following: “The realization of Europe. Its construction through treaties, institutions, political, economic and social unification of the European space, through the definition and practicing of common policies.”¹⁹ This is exactly what happened the following twenty years in Europe. The Europe of the treaties exists. However, is there also a profound Europe, a spiritual and cultural Europe? By refusing to live according to its Judeo-Christian heritage, does Europe risk to repeat, in the 21st century, the same mistakes it made during the 20th century, as Michael Novak asks?

As always, History will provide the answer.



Notes

1. Heinrich Schneider, “The Dimensions of the Historical and Cultural Core of a European Identity,” in *Reflections on European Identity*, ed. Thomas Jansen (European Commission Forward Studies Unit, Working Paper, 1999).
2. *Ibid.*, 22.
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Abstract

The European Identity in Crisis: From the "Soul of Europe" to the "Europe of the Treaties"

Europe is confronted with a profound identity crisis, manifest in the recanting of its historical roots and in a lack of spirituality. Metaphorically speaking, the Old Continent, which was the first Christianized continent, is in danger of losing its soul. Although it has been called *Christendom* even until the 18th century, Europe is now the most secular and Christophobic continent in the world. Christianity provided Europe with a spiritual identity (Europe was actually the first entirely Christianized continent, although it is indeed also the first de-Christianized one, so that some authors speak now about a "post-Christian Europe") and, alongside Judaism, it provided Europe with a moral identity—two capital faces of collective identity that proved to be the most perennial components of it. The dismissal of any explicit reference to the historical fundaments of the European identity from the European Constitution draft and later from the text of the Treaty of Lisbon determined many analysts to speak about a "crisis of the European identity." One thing, however, is certain: this identity crisis will not be easily overcome and, certainly, it cannot be overcome solely by politico-administrative measures.

Keywords

European identity, identity crisis, Christianity, Christophobia, Constitutional Treaty, Treaty of Lisbon