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Religion and Citizenship from a European Perspective.

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How significant of religion is for Europe? The fall of Communism helped quicken the pace of European integration and enhance the process. The expansion of the European Union, as well as the drafting of a common European Constitution and efforts to bring the legislations of the member states more in line with each other, once more beg *the question of the cultural and spiritual identity of Europe.* Will the controversy about the wording of the European Constitution lead to superficial political skirmishes in the media about individual clauses, and a revival of the "Kulturkampf" spirit, or will it provide, on the contrary, *an opportunity to rethink the relationship between religion, politics and culture—and not only in European, but in the global context*?

Over the past fifthteen years, I have had the opportunity to travel across the world, not only lecturing at universities but also listening and learning to join in common reflection, learning to see the world through others" eyes

and understanding those whose cultural and spiritual experience is distant from my own. I have had the opportunity to talk with Catholic thinkers, not only in Europe but also in Latin America, with Jewish rabbis in Israel and the USA, with Orthodox clergy in Moscow, with patriarchs of Buddhist monasteries in Japan, Taiwan, and Burma, with Hindus in India and Nepal, and with Islamic intellectuals at the university of Al Azhar in Cairo and in Maroco. The common denominator of all those meetings and talks was the question: what sources of moral strength and spiritual inspiration are available to humanity at the present time in order to cope with the complex problems posed by life on the threshold of the new millenium? Are there any commonly shared values and experiences that we can use as a basis to learn to live together on this planet, which in many respects is becoming too small?

The only answer that I can see is dialogue among existing cultures and religions. In spite

of all the mutual influences and all the risks of misunderstanding, these will retain their identity but will learn mutual respect and the art of living not only among one another but also together. Maybe, however, we can surpass the model of mutual tolerance and learn to widen our horizons by sharing our specific experiences. *But first of all we must learn to reflect our own experience.*

I keep coming back to John Paul II.´s appeal to Czech Christians during his first visit in Prague in April, 1990: "You shall now build the temple of free life of your church not by returning to what was here before you were robbed of your freedom. Build it in the strength of that to which you matured during persecution."

I think those who went through the dark night of communism could and should by the power of their spiritual experience not only help build the temple of the church, but also contribute in their part to the cultivation of a global civilization that is growing in place of the former bipolar world.

But to what have we matured? Suffering does not automatically help character to mature. It is not just necessary to "endure" pain, but also to make internal use of it. The experience of suffering can lead to reevaluation of values in life and to higher sensibility towards the suffering of others—but the point is that this fruit of suffering should not just be a passing flash of lightning that we soon forget about and that we oust from our consciousness. I feel anxious about how superficially most Christians from Central and Eastern Europe have dealt with the not-so-remote past, how little we have learned and how little we have contributed so that this chapter of European history would enter into the treasury of historical experience of mankind.

Now I am going to try to give a *brief account of the experience that Christians in the heart of Europe underwent in the 20th century.*

The disciples of those who saw in God of the Bible the "poison from Judea" or the "opium of the people" tried to create a healthy town of man, in which—just like in the heavenly Jerusalem according to the Apocalypse—*"there will be no temple."* Temple—religion, church—is an institution of pilgrims, a sign that human society is still on a historical path. In heaven or hell, there is no temple. Totalitarian regimes wanted to abolish history and fulfill eschatological longing and hope immediately.

Democracy, on the other hand, is an expression of the kind of patience and carefulness to which the Gospel exhorts those who want to separate wheat from weeds too soon. Those who try to create heaven on earth usually end up creating hell for the people. Neither the conception of new civilization in Nazism nor in communism had place for a temple, for the God of the Bible. Not a trace should have remained after Him, not a memory, not a shadow. Communism, having more time and wider space at its disposal, started to demolish churches and to either brutally liquidate the church or at least subject it to the bondage of the state as a museum, ghetto, or an instrument of state propaganda.

Both totalitarian regimes started to build their own temples and their own religions— their own cult rooms, rites, ceremonies, holidays, et cetera. Unlike the Jakobine "civil religion" of the French revolution, there was no "Goddess of Reason" on the altar. Nazism knowingly leaned towards the irrational instincts of tribal and racial belonging to blood and earth. Marxist socialism proclaimed science as the winner over "religious superstitions," but in reality science in communist countries was under heavy control of the Party inquisition that guarded the untouchability of the dogmas of Marxist ideology.

Marxism was a kind of Christian heresy. Chesterton called heresy "truth gone mad," a particle of truth that wrenched itself loose from its context and expanded into dreadful dimensions. Marxism was a kind of inversion of Christian eschatology into the time-space of historical future, which can be planned and

realized through revolutionary interventions into history. "We will order the wind, the rain, when it has to blow, to fall" went one of the songs of Communist youth. Communism consummated the hybris that was latently present in the tradition of the Enlightenment: man has to take upon himself everything—nature and history, fate of the people and their souls, hearts, and consciousness.

Marxist ideology counted on religion dying away automatically in the moment when economic relations change because, according to Marx´s teaching, religion was "nothing other than" superstructure and reflection of the class society, an expression of estrangement and the split personality of man. When the experiment of socializing the production processes came into force, the revolution in the superstructure did not take place. Christianity in Soviet Russia and later in its satellite states refused to die away. The violence that the communists started to use against churches and believers was in fact proof that their theory failed in practice. Not even violence helped.

When the revolutionary terror of the 1950s exhausted itself and Communism grew older and fatter, the euphoria of one part of society and the fear and anger of the remaining part was replaced by general boredom. Two attempts to revise communist regimes—in 1956 and in 1968—fell through. After 1968, in the majority of communist states, communist ideology changed into a curious type of state religion—nobody believed in it, not even its own high priests.

Marxism had been dead in communist countries long before the fall of communism. It was the official ideology, but in reality almost no one had believed in it for many years. There were far less convinced Marxists in the East than in the West. Not even the vast majority of communist officials believed in Marxism—as a rule they were simply cynical apparatchiks.

What kept communism in power was not belief in an ideology, but instead an *unwritten pact between the rulers and the ruled:* so long as citizens con-

formed the state would ensure them a certain degree of social security and would tolerate all sorts of things—poor working morale, petty everyday economic crime with respect to the "people's property," et cetera. That secret "social contract" bred an odd kind of human that Josef Tischner has termed "homo sovieticus"—a person without creativity, initiative, or responsibility. In totalitarian society everyone lived a guilt-free existence like in a Franz Kafka novel: the rulers did everything in the name of the system or future happiness, the ruled had no freedom and so had no sense of responsibility. No wonder so many are pining for that paradise where they had no burden of responsibility.

There is much talk in Eastern Europe about the need *to "come to terms with the communist past"*—and clearly that important task has yet to be fulfilled. Condemning communism is not simply a matter of bringing to trial a couple of communist criminals or distancing oneself verbally from the old regime and its ideology. It means pointing clearly to the "anthropological roots of totalitarianism," to those forms of behaviour and character traits that enabled the totalitarian regime to survive for so long. It is a thankless task and it is no wonder, therefore, that politicians in particular—and above all those who indulge in populism to maintain their popularity ratings—painstakingly avoid the topic.

Young democracies in post-communist countries—also in such countries that belonged to the most stable and solid European democracies between the World Wars, as did Czechoslovakia—still experience the distressful way through the desert. People are exposed to all kinds of temptations. I heard a story about Indians who were being removed by colonists from their original settlements and brought to new ones. Before the end of the trip, the Indians asked for a break, explaining: "Our bodies might be almost at the end of the trip, but our souls are still in those old homes. We have to wait for our souls." Whenever I meet with various tokens of imperfection of the renewed

democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, I remind myself of these words. *We have to wait for our souls.*

The first decade of freedom brought a bitter realization: to change political and economic structures is not enough, because the homo sovieticus is not able to hold his ground in a free society. The persuasion that the mere existence of a free market and the privatization of property will give life to a new, better human type is as naïve as was the Marxist expectation that this could be reached by collectivization and socialization. Man is simply not primarily determined by economic factors of social development, as Marx thought or as is the belief of some theoreticians of "upside-down Marxism," the postcommunist market fundamentalists.

I am convinced that *it was the globalization process that swept away communist regimes.* Regimes based on a rigid state-planned economy and the censorship of ideas were unable to withstand the onslaught of competition and the free market of goods and ideas. With the fall of the Soviet Empire, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe won back their independence and with it came an increased sense of national identity and pride. However, the logic of globalization now obliges these same countries to increasingly respect decisions of supranational bodies in the economic and political fields alike. Attempts to resurrect a freeculture and spiritual life of their own face competitive pressures from local television, which, for commercial reasons, opts mostly for the cheapest and most inane products of the American entertainment industry. Churches have rapidly lost their aura of martyred institutions and have become a favourite whipping boy of the media. No wonder, then, that many believers are among those who suffer in present post-communist society from *"agoraphobia"*—to borrow a term from psychopathology—namely, an abnormal fear of open spaces, or literally: fear of the market.

Having been accustomed to playing a major role in traditional society from the very dis-

tant past, the churches of Eastern and Central Europe learned in the course of almost half a century to stand up to totalitarian regimes and state-imposed atheism. Of course the degree to which religion was persecuted varied from country to country and the church likewise adopted more than one strategy for survival. Within the framework of a single, local church one could find a whole spectrum of responses to pressure from totalitarian regimes, ranging from collaboration and compromises to the martyrdom of hundreds of believers. Many subconsciously expected that the fall of communism would herald a return to the situation they knew before World War II. However, instead of the traditional pre-modern situation, a complex post-modern vista has opened up. Traditional society, in which the church virtually merged with the prevailing culture, and the subsequent totalitarian state, with its militantly atheistic ideology, represented quite distinct situations for religious institutions and called for distinct strategies. *Pluralistic democracy and the post-modern cultural climate represent a third type* which requires the church to re-define once more its social role and evolve a new and quite distinct strategy.

In the churches of post-communist Europe, however, nostalgia for the perceived pre-modern ideal still prevailed and with it a strategy of restoration. When that strategy was frustrated by subsequent developments, certain churches adopted, vis-a-vis the liberal environment, the strategy of hostility and circular defense that they had learned from their confrontations with the communist regimes. As a result, the churches alienated large groups of those who had sympathized with them at the time of communism's collapse and who had also invested great hopes in them on the threshold of democratic renewal. In the Czech Republic the numbers of people identifying with the churches has fallen dramatically. The opinion now prevails that the churches have disappointed the hopes placed in them after the fall of communism and that they have become marginalised in society,

and if you ask people what civil society expects of the churches, many will answer: nothing or almost nothing.

Now the situation in certain post-communist societies in many respects mirrors the situation of religious organizations in secular societies of western Europe—the only difference being that both the representatives of secular liberalism and the churches lack the experience of decades of mutual coexistence and have not yet learned to communicate to any great extent. The Second Vatican Council allowed Catholics to conclude *a "gentleman's agreement" with secular humanism* and the civilization that grew out of Enlightenment ideals. However, many of the promptings of that Council have yet to be sufficiently assimilated by the churches of post-communist countries. Moreover, *the 2nd Vatican Council did not prepare Catholics for the booming interest in religion and spirituality at the end of the 20th century.* As a consequence, many spiritual seekers—particularly young people—sought their answers from groups and spiritual leaders espousing Eastern spiritual traditions.

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought to an end one of the great myths of modern times: the communist illusion of building "the kingdom of heaven" on Earth. I cannot rid myself of the depressing thought that the attack on Manhattan in September 2001 also marked the end of an illusion, namely, the West's conviction that its version of a happy and successful liberal society based on the ideals of the Enlightenment is universally plausible.

Western liberalism inherited from western Christianity a belief in the universal validity of its own ideals that would sooner or later fulfil the latent expectations of people in every corner of the earth. The fall of Communism confirmed the West in its conviction and indeed the events of 11th September, 2001, may be interpreted as merely the work of a small group of fanatics and not be lent any profounder significance. However I can't help thinking that the two events—the fall of Communism and the attack planned in the caves of the Afghan desert—could be perceived differently by the West. Maybe it is precisely the task of thinking people in those countries, which after the fall of Communism are once more becoming part of the western world, to make a contribution to a new self-awareness on the part of the West. I can't help thinking that *the West is not sufficiently aware that it too finds itself in a new situation after the fall of Communism and that the need for "transformation" does not merely concern the countries of the former communist bloc.*

A feature of the Cold War was that both systems tended to define themselves negatively. When Gorbachev called on the Soviet regime to discard its "enemy image" as part of perestroika, it was a major step towards the collapse of the entire system: it turned out that the system couldn't cope without an enemy, that it lacked any positive vision that might motivate its own citizens, let alone be an inspiration to the rest of the world. The western economic and political system of free competition was certainly attractive for lots of people, who were prevented from fully using their gifts and fulfilling their aspirations by the totalitarian regimes of "existing socialism." However the first decade of experience of creating a system of political and economic democracy on the ruins of Communism, in this strange bridgehead of West that the "transformation countries" now constitute, raises a number of issues. *Can democracy be built in any cultural and moral climate whatever, or does it need a "biosphere" such as the one that was characteristic of western culture for centuries?*

What actually constitutes the West's identity? To what extent is the West today truly nourished by its spiritual roots? To what extent are "western values" accepted and acceptable in countries that were separated from the West for decades by the "iron curtain" of the Cold War?

Talking a few years ago to Islamic scholars at Cairo's Al Azhar University, I was forced to ask myself *what moral vision does the West now offer the world*? I came to realise that ever since my country and its neighbours have again been perceived as part of the West it is much harder for

me to answer that question. One of the reasons that Communism collapsed is that the set of values and ideals stemming from the European Enlightenment and culminating in the ideologies and myths of the nineteenth century was now exhausted. In the same way that the medieval concept of the world no longer corresponded to the experience of people on the threshold of the modern age, the experience of people who lived through the crises of the twentieth century can no longer adequately be interpreted by attitudes that were still shared uncritically by millions of people in the nineteenth century. The enormous power that has been amassed in the hands of humankind and the many recent experiences of its awful abuse is forcing people at the present time *to re-evaluate that optimistic and somewhat naïve self-confidence of Enlightenment rationalism.* It would be irresponsible to go on relying on scientific and technical progress to ensure of themselves a happy future for mankind or assuming that a change in economic conditions will automatically bring about a change in people's consciousness and behaviour, or that "the invisible hand of the market" will per se ensure that standards will prevail in all areas of life. It looks as if it will be necessary to turn the old Marxist axiom on its head: *for too long we have tried to change the world, it is now the time to make a responsible and concentrated effort to interpret and understand the world and our relationship to it.*

Europe is the scene of wide-ranging changes. The pace of political, economic, legal, and administrative integration of the member and candidate countries of the EU has hotted up. As the birth-rate falls in many European countries, the number of immigrants from other continents is rising, changing the ethnic and religious structure of Europe's population, most strikingly in the capitals of the Western world.

The demand is often heard from Christians: "Give Europe a soul." Even though I appreciate the concern expressed by this slogan, I can't help regarding it as a somewhat arrogant cliché.

Is Europe really soulless? And even if it were, are any people capable of endowing Europe with a soul? Aren't those who are promising to give Europe "a soul" actually offering a mere ideology?

Of course, in the present phase of European integration the focus is on the "body of Europe" and the issue of Europe's spiritual identity seems secondary. However, is not the very courage to carry out this bold operation on the body of Europe that consists in widening and enhancing the European Union derived from the assumption that there is something that lends Europe meaning? That there exists and operates here some deep-seated unifying principle, the quiet intrinsic force of attraction holding Europe together in spite of all the changes? That there is something here that is hard to grasp, but which forms the basis of a European identity? Yes, the very political will to achieve European integration, however superficial its immediate motives might be, implies a belief in a "European soul." *Europe neither needs nor expects us to "give it a soul," but we, the Europeans of today, need very much to learn to understand its soul and nourish it.*

We frequently hear top church representatives in many European countries lamenting the fact that their environment is non-religious and unchristian.

I am of the view that the West's present situation should be characterised differently: Europe is not simply unchristian or non-religious, but nor is it religious in a Christian way. *Christianity is not the religion of present-day Europe and European Christianity is no longer a religion.*

However, to avoid any misunderstanding I hasten to add in what sense I am employing the term religion here. What I have in mind, is the old European concept of religion—*religio*, as it was used in Ancient Rome and documented from about the time of the Punic Wars and most clearly defined by Cicero. This ancient concept of *religio* as a collection of state-sanctioned symbols and rituals, has much in common with the modern concept of "civil religion" that has its

origins in Rousseau. Essentially it is a matter of ritual contact with the "sacred foundations of society," the symbolic expression of a common identity, of *what holds society together.*

It took several centuries before Christianity, which originally had a quite different form—it truly was a "path," a "life orientation," following Jesus Christ—assumed the form of a "religion" in the ancient sense and played that political role not only in Rome after Constantine but practically throughout the Middle Ages. On the threshold of the modern age, Christianity began to lose that role and in a certain sense *science was to become the "religio" of the West.* Christianity was assigned the status of a "philosophy of life" (Weltanschauung) and gradually came to be regarded as another ideology.

In my opinion, the main power of religion (in the sense of *"religio"*) resides in its ability to be the "common language" of a given civilisation. Christianity (Christian doctrine) has gradually become a "dead language," used, like Latin, only for ceremonial purposes or at congresses of experts. (This concept of a language could be compared to Michel Foucault's idea of a "regime of truth.") However, in the course of the 20th century modern science became so complex that it lost the ability to be the "common language" of Western civilisation. It is my feeling that in modern Western society, the social role of religion as *religio* is most likely played by the mass media. They increasingly influence ways of thinking and behaviour, mediating symbols and creating a network among people; for many they are the arbiters of truth: what is real and of importance is what can be seen on the television news.

During the period of the "crisis of ideologies" after the 1960s, Christianity too started in various places to extricate itself from the "philosophy of life" straitjacket: it was a time of increasing importance of social and critical praxis (in theology of liberation and political theology), a revival of spirituality (particularly mysticism), social ethics, ethics of science, et cetera. It would seem that these are areas in

which Christianity could become part of public debate and thereby help create the "common language" of the future civilisation. I don't think we can realistically expect Christianity to become, on its own, the exclusive "common language" of the West and once more assume the role of *"religio"* as in the Middle Ages.

Christianity has to find it´s place in civil society. In the global civil society. The "locus" of the church and its activity in Europe will no longer be the nationstate but instead the open and abundant free market of ideas and activities, the meeting point for dialogue and competition between every possible social group and movement that we call *"civil society."*

Ever since the Enlightenment, we in the West have been accustomed to regard *separation of Church and State as the ideal model for the relation between religion and politics.* This model that was the outcome of a historical drama in many acts, one element of which was the critical attitude to power adopted by many Jewish prophets and Christian martyrs: the "papal revolution" against the emperor's monopoly of power in the struggle over the investiture, Enlightenment endeavours to protect the freedom of civil society from church interference and the efforts of Christians to defend religious freedom in the face of totalitarian tendencies on the part of the State. There are many arguments in favour of retaining this mutually beneficial model in practical terms. However, if, today, we are seeking to understand the relationship between religion and politics, we cannot view it exclusively from the point of view of the relationship between Church and State.

Nowadays the State no longer has a monopoly of political life and the Church has lost its monopoly of religion. On the threshold of the modern age, the *corpus christianorum* disintegrated, ushering in the epoch of nationstates and separate Christian denominations. These were to play a crucial role through modern times in Europe. For most Europeans, belonging to a nation and a religious denomination were the main pillars

of their identity, and not infrequently, fanatical attachment to a particular denomination or nation combined with demonisation of others resulted in ruinous wars.

We still have nationstates and individual churches, but their influence is considerably reduced. The dynamic of political life is increasingly provided by various new social movements and citizens" campaigns, often operating internationally while the dynamic of religious life is more supplied by various religious movements, often operating across the boundaries of the different denominations.

All human activity, including political and religious life, takes place within a new context, as part of the global information market created by the electronic media. Moreover, politics is increasingly in thrall to economics, which is increasingly globalised; the most important economic decisions, and therefore political decisions also, are taken at international levels, in bodies that are subject minimally to the influence of democratic mechanisms operating within the framework of the national state. The tested mechanisms of the political and the religious that applied hitherto have to a marked extent been tied to the narrower framework of the nationstate and church institutions and are hard to transfer into a wider context. Just as the classical model of democracy is hard to apply in broader contexts than the nationstate, so also the classical form of pastoral work is hard to operate outside the traditional church structures. The reasons why the style of political and religious life that applied hitherto is not simply due the incompetence of institutions and their representatives. It is the social and cultural context of religious and political life that has changed.

Every change in civilisation's paradigms requires "recontextualisation," whether in religion or in politics, and this is generally a lengthy and dramatic process of seeking new forms and a new style. If one examines the transformations undergone by European Christianity, for instance, one can see how well the Church stood the test after the fall of Rome and during the great waves of migration in the fifth and sixth centuries, and how it did less well on the threshold of the modern era. I see more frequent co-operation between the new religious movements and social movements as a logical development, both locally and internationally.

We mustn't ignore the fact that some of the new religious and social movements are prey to the temptations of sectarianism, messianism, exclusivity, et cetera. that have assailed almost all new phenomena in history—maybe for that very reason it would useful to initiate a dialogue with the traditional churches, which are repositories of historical experience.

If the church is to operate within civil society it is crucial for it to find a happy balance between an attitude of critical detachment towards the "spirit of this world" and the "spirit of the times" (Zeitgeist)—without which the churches would lose their identity and prophetic spark—and a **closeness** to the world, which is vital for mutual understanding and dialogue.

The basic issue for a future all-embracing world order is finding a basis for a new "oikumene." This will no longer be of the "pax Romana," "pax Britannica," "pax Sovietica," or "pax Americana" type. All parts of our planet are now mutually interlinked and no world power has any chance of dominating this development and taking its destiny in its own hands without regard for others. We are all interdependent and have to discover universally acceptable rules of mutual coexistence.

It is necessary to ask whether we cannot *find a firmer basis for future coexistence* and sharing among different human communities than the model of tolerance that emerged from the age of Enlightenment.

One of the fundamental issues of today's world in my view is *whether, in the framework of the globalization process, it will be possible to create a certain culture of dialogue and make globalization a communication process.* Without it, global civilization would simply be a new Tower of Babel.

Inter-faith dialogue and dialogue between Christianity and secular humanism would be an inseparable part of such a process. I believe that in certain circumstances Catholicism could play an important role precisely in this area—it is able to lead a dialogue both with the world religions and with secular humanism, since it has points of contact with both of them.

Yes, searching for points of contact and creating old and new alliances—that, in my view, is the path that the church must take in the new century—and not only in Europe.