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“Passion for Europe”

Rediscovering the European common good

The European Union is a successful project. It has brought peace where conflicts lasted for centuries, as recognized by its being awarded the Nobel Prize in 2012. It has brought decades of prosperity. To outsiders, Europe retains a strong capacity of attraction and remains a source of inspiration. However, the EU is facing critical times, even if there are signs of economic recovery. Challenges facing Europe include a perceptible lack of citizens’ trust in “Brussels”, serious difficulties in the relations between the EU and member states when national interests are pursued instead of European solidarity, the Brexit, and the rise of nationalisms exacerbated by the challenge of migration flows. These issues are symptoms of a loss of meaning in the European project, and represent a crisis of a spiritual nature.

In his address at the Conferral of the Charlemagne Prize on 6 May 2016, Pope Francis called for the birth of a new European humanism by drawing inspiration from the founding fathers of Europe.

“Passion for Europe” is a group of Catholic Christians from seven nationalities who are passionate for the European project, and whilst concerned about it being challenged by some, nevertheless look to the future with hope. Starting from Pope Francis’ call for “memory transfusion”, the members of the group find hope in reviving the vision of the founding fathers, rooted in the Church’s social thought, and in the social dimension of Christian anthropology. Indeed, the spirit of the European integration project resonates fully with the Social Doctrine of the Church. The group has reviewed these resonances. They are summarized in the present paper which highlights crucial points of attention to be taken into account in the ongoing discussions for an EU revival. At a later stage, *“Passion for Europe”* intends to draft a more comprehensive document including concrete proposals for a Christian contribution to these discussions.

Europe’s Founding Fathers’ inspiration and the Social Doctrine of the Church

Human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, participation, the common good, universal destination of goods, preferential option for the poor and sustainability are fundamental principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Many of them have inspired the inception of the European project.

Solidarity is at the heart of European integration process. Europe, a “family of peoples” as Pope Francis named it in his “Charlemagne Prize” address. Beyond internal transfers of resources for the sake of cohesion policies, solidarity should be understood in terms of “doing together”. Robert Schuman explained that nations, far from being self-sufficient, should be mutually supportive and that solidarity is the conviction that the real interest of each is to recognize and accept in practice interdependence of all. For him, a united Europe prefigures the universal solidarity of the whole world without distinction or exclusion. Such a vision was consistent with that of Alcide De Gasperi, who urged Europeans to seek in the leaven of the Gospel the impetus for moving towards a policy of fraternity and justice and to seek the core meaning of Christian universalism.

All in all, their vision clearly echoes Social Doctrine according to which “Solidarity highlights in a particular way the intrinsic social nature of the human person, the equality of all in dignity and rights and the common path of individuals and peoples towards an ever more committed unity” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, para 192). Jean Monnet’s intuition was not to make States into a coalition but to unite men.

Schuman's inspiration for Europe refers to another principle of the Church’s teaching when he said that above each homeland there is a common good, superior to the national interest, and also that Europe is in need of a soul, of a political will to serve the same human ideal. Again, this resonates with Social Doctrine which emphasizes that the common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment” (*Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, para 26).

As Pope Francis said on 24 March 2017, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome, Europe finds hope when man is the centre and the heart of her institutions. He also warned against the temptation to reduce the founding ideals of the Union to productive, economic and financial needs. According to Social Doctrine, “the centrality of the human person and the natural inclination of persons and peoples to establish relationships among themselves are the fundamental elements for building a true international community, the ordering of which must aim at guaranteeing the effective universal common good” (*Compendium*, para 433).

The Catholic Church in her teaching recognizes that, in a context of globalization, “the attainment of the common good has become a goal that is beyond the reach of individual States” (*Compendium*, para 442). Recognising this, means that in relation to Europe, there needs to be “some universal public authority acknowledged as such by all ... respectful of the principle of subsidiarity” (*Compendium*, para. 441). Schuman expressed this principle in saying that any supranational organization goes beyond the nation not to diminish and absorb it, but to give it a wider and higher field of action. The principle of subsidiarity has been introduced in the institutional order of Europe as a principle of governance relating to the organization of relations between the EU and its Member States. If it is a legitimately restrictive approach to the Union's action, it has a positive corollary which consists for all societies of a superior order in “attitudes of help (“subsidium”) — therefore of support, promotion, development — with respect to lower-order societies” (*Compendium*, para 186).

The key issue then is how European policies can make concrete the principle of subsidiarity not only in the relations between different levels of government (EU governance) but also in the economic and social fields for the benefit of the human person (EU assistance). What is at stake are the fulfilment of humanity and the respect of human dignity. In any organization, the person fulfils his vocation only if he or she is capable of creating and if a place is attributed to the less able. For Denis de Rougemont the supreme conquest of Europe is the dignity of man.

This clearly connects with another basic principle of Social Doctrine: the preferential option for the poor – that the criteria of how humane a society is lies in how the weakest and most vulnerable are treated. It also refers to the concept of “creative subjectivity of the citizen” (*Encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, para 15) which should be a special focus for Europe’s revival.

In this respect, participation is a logical consequence of subsidiarity. “The citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs” (*Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, para 15). That matters when it comes to the poorest: “We must pay attention to the poor not as a problem but as to people who can become subjects and protagonists of a new and more human future for all” (*John Paul II’s message for 2000 World Day for Peace*).

Finally, for EU the principle of the universal destination of goods should take into consideration sustainability. As Pope Francis emphasizes, "the urgent challenge of safeguarding our common home includes the concern to unite the entire human family in the search for a sustainable and integral development" (*Encyclical Laudato Si'*, para 13). On the other hand, Europe could act so that "new technological and scientific knowledge must be placed at the service of mankind's primary needs, gradually increasing humanity's common patrimony" (*Compendium*, para 179).

To sum up, as mentioned by De Gasperi, at the root of the idea of Europe there is the figure and the responsibility of the human person with his ferment of evangelical fraternity. In this perspective Pope Francis in his "Charlemagne Prize" address, invited us to "broaden our horizons" in order to "promote an integration that finds in solidarity a way of acting, a mean of making history."

In this respect, time will be crucial. But as Konrad Adenauer said, "let us never forget that patience is a part of all big events and that especially we Europeans wanting a united Europe need to have that patience".

Points of attention for a new perspective for EU

For those who have to take decisions aiming to revitalise the EU, the Christian heritage of Europe and the founding fathers' inspiration could act as a compass. The following guidelines are of particular relevance:

Man at the centre...

- According to the Social Doctrine of the Church "the human person is the foundation and the end of the political community" (*Compendium*, para 384). Inclusion of the weakest is key in that context.
- Pope Francis warned that "regrettably, technical and economic questions prevail at the centre of political debate, at the detriment of an authentic anthropologic orientation" (*Pope Francis' address to the European Parliament*, 25 November 2014).

... and in relation with others

- We should depart from "a conception of the human person as detached from all social and anthropological contexts (...). As a result, the rights of the individual are upheld, without regard for the fact that each human being is part of a social context wherein his or her rights and duties are bound up with those of others and with the common good of society itself" (*idem*).
- Implementing the principle of subsidiarity "horizontally", consisting in the participation of society and creative persons would help "to put the person at the centre (which) means to make that it expresses its face and its creativity, at the level of individuals as well as peoples" (*idem*).
- We need to build on Christian anthropology which is based on the concept of man as "man for the others" (Pedro Arrupe).

... through a culture of encounter and dialogue

- Such a culture helping to build a just, responsive and inclusive society and to settle conflicts differently should be promoted. This culture of dialogue should involve all social actors and become an integrated part of education (*Pope Francis "Charlemagne Prize" address*). It should also be developed between the EU and its external partners.
- The soul of Europe is born from the encounter of civilizations and peoples and its identity is, and always has been, a dynamic and multicultural identity (*idem*).
- In the Christian vision, faith and reason, religion and society, are called to enlighten and support one another. Dialogue between European institutions and religions is of crucial importance and should be developed and structured.

... in view of the common good that requires social and societal responsibility

- The present situation does not permit anyone to stand by and watch other people's struggles. On the contrary, it is a forceful summons to personal and social responsibility (*Pope Francis "Charlemagne Prize" address*).
- We should work for genuine inclusion, an inclusion which provides worthy, free, creative, participatory and solidary work (*idem*). Solidarity as a cement for unity is at the heart of social initiatives aiming at taking (back) on board all jobless marginalized people.
- The European project should be developed within a "multi-level" process based on subsidiarity and responsibility, where persons, families, local communities, nations and Europe have their rights and duties in contributing to the common good, also at the global level.
- Migrations could provide a good example of such an approach: local communities having the responsibility to integrate refugees; States to define appropriate policies for the regulation of migration flows; Europe to define the general framework.
- When it comes to interrelations between human beings, the digital revolution deserves to be given particular attention. The exponential increase of our capacity to connect to the world and others brings many opportunities but at the same time a high risk to lose our humanity.
- The principle of universal destination of goods should apply to natural resources, climate and atmosphere. Taking care of creation is connected to other Christian ethical commitments: environmental harm compromises the common good and threatens human life and dignity of individuals (*Encyclical Laudato Si'*).
- This is why there is an indissoluble moral linkage between natural and social environment, between the state of nature and the state of the human family. This should lead European citizens towards a more frugal way of life and to develop new ways of consuming, including recycling and caring for a more balanced sharing of resources (*idem*).

There is also a specific responsibility for Christians as direct heirs and "active holders" of the European project's founding spirit and of the teaching of the Church.

- Christians should be vocal regarding the living memory of Europe's roots by participating in fora on Europe's future. The primary aim should be that the human being remains at the centre of the debate and that the common good is the final goal of the EU's revival.
- They should inform themselves, train and open up exchanges with others by virtue of the Church's presence in a network of schools, universities' chaplaincies, training institutes and parishes.
- They should contribute to developing the culture of dialogue at all levels: inter-generations, inter-institutions, inter-religions, cross borders as well as with the rest of the world.
- The Church and the many Christian NGOs, cooperating with all people of good will should continue to play a key role in supporting human dignity and integral development all over the world and to be at the forefront of initiatives for migrants.
- Christians cannot be indifferent to ecological challenges. They should be on the frontline of initiatives and policies that favour respect and safeguard our "common home".
- Finally, Christians should follow Pope Francis' invitation in his message for the 51st World Communication Day 2017 and communicate "hope and trust in our time" through social media.