

'The Catholic concept of Europe' from the Luxemburger Wort (8 January 1955)

Caption: On 8 January 1955, the Luxembourg Catholic daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort outlines the European vision of Pope Pius XII and of the Catholic community.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 08.01.1955, n° 8/9; 108e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Das katholische Europakonzept", auteur:F., M. , p. 1.

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The Catholic concept of Europe

There is no such thing as a Vatican Europe, and it is a fallacy to use such language to describe the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. There is, however, a papal position on Europe; there is also a Catholic conception of Europe. Would it not seem strange if the Supreme Head of the Roman Catholic Church had no views on the viability of Europe and if it were forbidden for Catholics to imagine a Europe which would allow them as much freedom as possible in defining their principles?

It is, moreover, a fact that there exists no real Catholic or Christian model of Europe and that the ideas discussed in the past were merely based on moral concepts similar to those of the Christian spirit. Incidentally, this is confirmed by the fact that it was eminent Catholics, in their capacities as recognised statesmen, who either developed or promoted these European ideas. The concept of supranationality, which calls for the renunciation of national sovereignty, the mutual agreement of concessions and the achievement of transnational solidarity, may be regarded as a product of the Christian world view. Any ideas regarding associations at international level which refuse to draw inspiration from Christian dogma and which may even have the potential to reject or destroy it, are seen by Christians and Catholics as unworkable. Such ideas widen the tensions that they have caused within countries to international dimensions or further extend the boundaries of the totalitarian regimes they have established at national level, as demonstrated by Communism in the Soviet satellite states.

European integration, i.e. the step-by-step process of Europeanisation which the school of Europeans such as Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi and Spaak had in mind, has tried to give birth to institutions of a supranational character geared towards the effective promotion of European solidarity in certain areas, with the ultimate aim of building a solid foundation for the common ideals of freedom and humanity. The development of personal attributes and virtues in a climate of freedom and tolerance is one of the many requirements of the Christian faith. It demands respect for natural rights, life and customs, and it would be unimaginable in a regime which is based on the glorification of the state and a popular cult of materialism.

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Looked at in that light, European policy, as it is supposed to be organised through the Schuman Plan, the Defence Community and the Political Community, offers a minimum of guarantees for Christians and Catholics. There is no specifically Catholic plan for Europe, simply because Catholicism and Christianity are not political systems, although Christians should also be entitled to establish such a system and focus more on the political view of the world. They are equally justified in so doing as those who seek to gain European and international standing for their fundamental ideologies, such as the Socialists, Liberals and Communists.

Christians would prefer to see a Europe which is, above all, a tangible and living concept and not merely an extension of a lifeless, materialistic system. And that this concept can hardly be regarded as a 'Vatican conspiracy' was probably expressed best by the Pope himself when he spoke of the problem of European unity in last year's Christmas message.

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In his message, Pope Pius XII warned against the resurgence of nationalism. He stated that the efforts of the last ten years in building a strong and united Europe no longer formed the basis of new agreements, which were more reminiscent of the old coalitions. According to the Pope, many people believed that high-level politics were in the process of returning to a kind of nation state, which, under its system of ever-changing alliances, would be just as damaging as any that had been in existence over the past hundred years.

Only yesterday, the 'Escher Tageblatt' believed it was possible to expose the Vatican view of European politics of the future on the basis of Otto von Habsburg's idea of a return to the traditional concept of the old Reich. The Pope's declaration, however, was a clear contradiction of that concept.

‘The nature of the misconception,’ explained the Pope, ‘lies in confusing national life with national politics. The national life, the rights and the honour of a people have to be protected. National politics, however, must be firmly rejected, since they are the cause of never-ending strife. It is clear that if European politics continue moving in this direction, their cohesion will be severely weakened. It is also the dynamics of an imagined nationalistic power that can represent a danger for those on the outside. Such a perception similarly leads to hatred, fosters mistrust and inhibits genuine cooperation and mutual aid, just as if this power were real.’

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If our Socialists are in favour of this concept of Europe, they should kindly make their views clear to us. Should they decide to vote against unity, then this should be taken to mean that they are not serious about Europe and prefer instead to create a system based on Socialism with which they can continue to experiment. If, by chance, they do agree to take up the cudgels on behalf of the Europe which we all desire, because they consider it to be the only acceptable choice, then they should also own up to the fact that their claims of a ‘Vatican Europe’ are nothing more than the product of groundless fears.

M. F.