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Europe — recovery or renewal?

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The vaccine has been discovered and within a few weeks (perhaps no more than a couple of weeks) we shall be able to start immunizing our people. Then the state of exception in which we have been living throughout this fateful year 2020 will cease.

What will happen then? Shall we go back to “business as usual”, to the world as it used to be before the pandemic? Is this possible? Is this desirable?

The birth of a new Europe through the power of the Word

Let us glance an eye on the world (or the Europe) of yesterday. The first years to the century are the years of a great victory and of a great defeat. The artificial division of the Continent imposed through the Yalta Agreements has been overcome and Europe has been reunited. This unification took place under a tremendous spiritual impulse given by John Paul II, the polish Pope.

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In June 1979 John Paul II came to Poland and spoke in Warsaw, in front of an enormous crowd. He invited the polish people to maturely assume the responsibility of the christening of their nation. The baptism creates in us a personality of communion, a personality that lives in the relation to other persons in such a way we become parts of each other, members of a community.

The communist power had created a society of isolated individuals, full of diffidence against one another, every one folded up and withdrawn in his individual egoistic interest. In this atmosphere of reciprocal distrust the society could exist and operate only through the action of a power standing over and above it: the party, the regime. What happened that day in Warsaw was an event. The words of the Pope, the celebration of the common Eucharist, created or recreated a bond of trust among those who participated to that mass. It created a bond of solidarity. They rediscovered their capacity of being a community, a nation. A community has the capacity and the right to organize itself and to govern itself, does not stand in need to be governed by a foreign and external power. The (re)discovery of being a nation led the Poles to demand the right of governing themselves, to take into their hands the destiny of their nation.

That event: the (re)discovery of the nature of communion of man, characterizes the Pontificate of John Paul II. This message has spread to the whole of Europe and was the spiritual basis for the collapse of communism and the recovery of democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It was the spiritual basis for the great reform of the European Institution.

In times of abundance men turn away from God to usury, lust and power

In the Ancient Testament we see that the people in times of distress pray to God to be delivered from the hands to their enemies, in times of abundance, however, every one goes back to his private interest, the powerful oppress the poor, the sons rebel against the fathers and the fathers want to impose their will on their children: the bonds of social friendship are easily dissolved. The same happened to us in Europe. We wanted to mention in the European Constitution the common cultural roots of Europe: jew, christian, latin and greek. First we did not have the cultural roots in the Constitution. Then we had no Constitution. We had only the Lisbon Treatises. We had a European Union

without cultural roots. We had a European Union with a truncated institutional framework, without an authentic political subjectivity.

It seems that we were convinced that the united powers of the market and of bureaucracy could be sufficient to keep together our Union. The cultural basis of this Europe seem to be merely individual rights with the exclusion of those duties upon which are grounded the rights of communities, of families and of nations.

The financial crisis of 2007 has brought this Union to the verge of the abyss. The disaster in the end was avoided but the peoples lost confidence in the institutions that should have expressed their unity. The United Kingdom of Great Britain has set sail for uncertain destinations, the member states continuously squabble on trivial pursuits, menacing clouds gather on our horizons: wars, biblical migrations, dramatic alteration of the balance of power threaten vital European interests, the climate crisis endangers the very subsistence of human life on this earth, in some countries grows a resentment against the Union and the inadequacy of the existing European framework is mercilessly exposed.

Then the Corona crisis came.

Lessons of the Corona crisis

Contrary to the expectations of many on this occasion the European Commission, led by a mother of seven, Ursula von der Leyen, succeeded (or, rather, seems to be succeeding) in organizing the solidarity of the member states in front of the common danger. The Pandemia does not only destroy human lives, it creates also terrible damage to the economy because we have to limit severely human contacts in order to prevent the diffusion of the virus. Several economic sectors must suspend their activity for many months. Only a great effort of European solidarity could prevent the unemployment of millions workers and the bankruptcy of hundreds of thousands companies, small and large. It seems that the Union found enough decision and determination to come to grips with an extraordinary task. In order to do this many consolidated taboos had to be overcome. One of them was the refusal to initiate a common European debt, another regarded the prohibition of having common social policies.

It is difficult to imagine now that we can go back to the past and be satisfied with a recovery that goes back to the situation as it was in 2019.

The impact of american elections

It is difficult because the world has changed. During the pandemic the presidential elections in United States have taken place. It is impossible to deny that a moral judgment on the measure taken against the Pandemic has been the main driving force for the victory of Joe Biden. The decision with which the United States were confronted was clear: shall we privilege the functioning of the economic system, the production of goods and services, the uninterrupted flow of money and profits and capital gains or the defense of the citizens' health and of human lives? The decision of the Americans was that life is more important than goods. Trump had been, in one sense, the world leader of the nationalist movements willing to block the dynamism of communion and solidarity at the level of the nation state. His defeat will have consequences at the world level and also in Europe. The (short) age of the research of a path leading to old fashioned nationalism and to a pre/globalization world order seems to have come to an end.

With Joe Biden US reenter the path of world cooperation.

The Catholic Church has seen world cooperation as a political expression of the communion. Benedict XVI in the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* explicitly demanded a world governance in order to tackle the many problems that cannot find a solution at the national level: the pollution and destruction of the environment, the peace among the nations, the mass migrations, the democratic control of the new, enormous concentrations of the powers of economy and information, the ordered development of world economies and, last but not least, the defense of health.²

Pope Francis in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* proposes again, albeit in a different language, the main idea of St. John Paul II: the Christian communion finds an external, visible, social and political expression in the construction of the human community, in all its variegated levels and forms, from the family to the community of mankind at large.

Can we then be happy with this new situation that is delineating itself on the world horizon? not quite. The epoch we are entering is full of promises... and of deceit. We have already seen that a globalization that is only economic does not work. Markets and bureaucracies are not enough to keep

² Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 2009, 27, 67.

the European Union together and much less can they orient a world governance. We must face up to a crucial question, a question regarding our own identity. Who are we? Why do we constitute a community? What are the duties that we freely recognize and accept as the cornerstone of our coexistence? It is the question we skipped when we did not want to have a constitution. The dominating ideology in Europe is that of a narcissistic individualism. Everybody lives in a world of his own, constituted through his arbitrary decision. The contact between these narcissistic isolated worlds is guaranteed through the free exchange of goods and services on the market and through the regulations of an impersonal bureaucracy. We have already seen that it does not work. The environmental crisis more than anything else has made us aware of the fact that we all live in the same world and whatever one of us dies has effects that concern all other inhabitants of the same planet. Through the environmental crisis we are rediscovering the old concept of natural law. Coronavirus heightened the perception of this crisis. A right wing variant of postmodernism has made an attempt to deconstruct the virus unmasking it as a complot of the powerful to impose rules on the individual. What is wrong if I want to live, and die, according to my own rules? What is wrong is that if you do not comply with the rules you cause the infection to spread and other people to die. You cannot think of yourself only as an individual, you must think of yourself at the same time as a member of a community, of the human community.

A great English poet, John Donne³, has written once:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; [...]
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.



³ John Donne (1572–1631), poet of the early English Baroque, representative of metaphysical poetry. Secretary to Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Anglican clergyman.