

Comment

Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, East Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, West Germany, Yugoslavia – this list is just to remind you of some of the nations of Europe. Of course it is not complete; it takes us only to the Carpathians, but it will do. Europe, even in this artificially limited sense, consists of these twenty-seven states. Eight of them are Peoples' Democracies and claim to be socialist; of these, seven are very closely united. The rest can best be described as states in which the writ of the transnational companies still runs; of these nineteen nations, nine are loosely united in a common market.

It is with this picture clearly before our minds that we should glance at a document called "A Word about Europe."

It is sad to think that only a year or two ago the Archbishop of Birmingham published a splendid pastoral letter urging us to call things by their right names (names like 'racialism' and 'torture' and so on), for he has now been prevailed upon as President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales not only to sign this document but to introduce it under the manifestly mistaken impression that it has been signed by "most of the European Catholic Bishops' Conferences." In fact it has been signed by no single Bishop from among the teeming Catholics of Eastern Europe. The Archbishop, alas, has also permitted himself to say, "It is not a political message." In fact it is a piece of unconcealed political propaganda on behalf of the Common Market.

Nobody, I hope, will expect this journal to be shocked by Bishops who take a clear political stance; on the contrary, we have always argued that this is one of the things Bishops are for, but it is unfortunate if they do not call their political stance by its right name and, of course, it is also unfortunate if their stance is the the wrong one.

The Treaty of Rome is a peace treaty between competing national capitalisms whose rivalries in the recent past have led to two hideous world wars; essentially, shorn of his antisemitism and other pathological fantasies, it is Hitler's solution to the problems of Western Europe. It is intended to provide a large enough economic base, sufficiently unrestricted movement of capital and a large enough supply of relatively weak and 'flexible' labour to remove some of the dangers to capitalism in its next crisis. If you believe that capitalism with a little adjustment can provide the solution to the major problems facing mankind, then you can make out a good enough case for the Common Market – it is at least less obviously explosive than the old nationalist jungle. If, on the other hand, you don't, then you can't.

For our part, the criticism of man and of human history that we find in the gospel through the tradition of the Church inhibits us from a simple faith in the power of organised greed to solve human problems, and so we are predisposed to accept the commonsense critique of capitalism that socialism has provided. We fully recognise, however, that just as there can be (and are) sincere Christians who can dispense with the doctrine of the Incarnation, so there can be (and are) sincere Christians who are prepared to find in the Common Market some kind of positive ideal. Amongst these must be counted Cardinals Koenig and Hoefner and Archbishop Dwyer. This is fair enough; what is not fair enough is advocacy of the Common Market masquerading as concern for the 'unity of Europe.' Nor is it anything but disheartening to find this advocacy founded on something very like Hilaire Belloc's notorious 'Europe is the faith and the faith is Europe.'

To say, "The nations of Europe, despite their many failures. . . have carried the message of Christ into the world" or to speak of ". . . the very essence of what Europe can give: a system of fundamental values rooted in the Christian Faith" is to command a more receptive audience in Cologne or Brussels than in, say, Angola or Hiroshima. If Europeans in the course of their blood-thirsty rape of Asia, Africa and the Americas happened to plant the seed of the gospel in these lands it was almost entirely in spite of themselves. In the mysterious ways of God, if the gospel of justice and love is at last arriving in a strange form in these places it is in great part through people who believe themselves to repudiate Christianity. To recognise this is to suspect that the Europe groping towards socialism in the east, the Europe ignored by these prelates (apart from a small genuflection to Cyril and Methodius), for all its often unreasoning prejudice against the Church, may be closer to the real christian tradition than the bastion of capitalism they seek to defend and extend.

But to see this is also to see the shallowness and irrelevance of the terms in which this document sees the problem. There is talk of 'brotherhood among men' and 'endeavour for peace' but nothing about the savage class-struggle built into the structures they uncritically extol. And what are we to make of an anxiety that people may be 'reduced to a dependence which would be still greater because of a levelling-out process'? If that isn't a plea for class structures, what is it? A bad translation? But it is their own translation.

If these Bishops are seriously concerned about human unity they must first of all look at human division. The roots of our divided Europe lie in the class division of exploiter and exploited and the cure is not to paper over the division but to eliminate the exploiting class.

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