What is Europe, Where is Europe?

From Mystique to Politique

The way in which I have phrased my title is derived from a famous statement by Charles Péguy: “Tout commence par la mystique, et finit par la politique.” These words are virtually untranslatable, but perhaps a fair paraphrase would be: Every great enterprise starts off with enthusiasm for an exalted aim, and ends up by being bogged down in petty politics.

How far does Péguy’s proposition apply to what has been called “the European idea” or “the idea of Europe”? Let me first look to the mystique.

The word “Europe” has been used and misused, interpreted and misinterpreted, in as many different meanings as almost any word in any language. There have been and are many Europes: the Europe of Greek mythology; the Europe of the geographers—the two extreme western peninsulas of the Asian land mass; the Europe of the Carolingian empire and its successor the EEC; the Europe of Byzantium; industrial Europe and agrarian Europe; “capitalist” Europe and “socialist” Europe; the Europe of the great powers and the Europe of Woodrow Wilsonian self-determination; the Europe of self-styled national states and of disaffected national minorities. That is not an exhaustive list.

Nearly all these Europes that I have mentioned come from the past, and some from the very distant past; but all to some extent belong also to the present. I must frankly admit my conviction—based on over 50 years of efforts to understand both numerous periods of history, and current politics as I have lived through them—that past and present are inextricably intermixed; and I make no apology for jumping to and fro in time in what I have to say.

Europe is more than a geographical expression. The growth of an increasingly homogeneous European culture, and also a belief among thinking men and women that they belong to a single, even if diverse, European cultural community, are facts of history and facts of this present time. The notion of an European cultural community, allegiance to which transcended, but did not normally contradict allegiance to a more precise regional or national sovereignty, is derived, I think, from an earlier allegiance to Christendom, and this in turn has its antecedents. Let me look briefly at these.

The notion of Christendom—a community of peoples, and a geographical area, as distinct from “Christianity” which is a religious faith, or a variety of faiths of a common origin—goes back to the grant by Emperor Constantine to Christians of equal rights with other religions, which developed into an exclusive status for Christianity as the religion of the empire. Thereafter the Roman Empire was the land of the true faith, and the outside world was the land of infidels. This dichotomy became still sharper after the Muslim conquests of the 7th century, when Christendom became almost confined to Europe—and not all Europe, since it lost most of Spain for more than 500 years; and before Spain had been recovered, most of Russia, all the Balkans and the remnant of Asia Minor had been lost. The allegiance to Christendom as a higher ideal transcending narrower territorial and feudal loyalties was maintained by the reality of conflict, on sea and land, with Islam. It inspired the Crusades, which were of course also motivated by all sorts of ambitions, political intrigues, and lust for plunder. Its equivalent was the Muslim division of the world into the House of Islam and the House of War which—similarly combined with ambitions, intrigues and lust for plunder—inspired the numerous Arab or Tatar or Ottoman invasions of Europe, the last being the 1683 Siege of
Vienna, after which there was a rapid decline in the fear of Islam and in the lip-service paid by monarchs to the defence of Christendom.

The dichotomy between Christendom and infidel was thus a reality for more than a millennium. But it too was related to something still more ancient, which we are too often inclined to forget in thinking about the origins of Europe. This is the dichotomy between civilised world and barbarians. At the other end of the world the Chinese have long thought in these terms, but their concepts and ours hardly touched each other before the 19th century. In our part of the world this dichotomy was first clearly expressed in the two familiar contrasts of Jew and Gentile and of Hellene and barbarian. The Jews were a small compact community with their own territory, something not so very different from the modern concept of a nation. But the Hellenes were divided between dozens of sovereignties, little states which fought each other, often savagely. Nevertheless they were aware of being Hellenes and as such different from barbarians. The notion of barbarian soon came to mean not only people of foreign land and foreign speech, but also people living at a lower level of humanity, what we today would call "uncivilised." This was how the Hellenes, and at a later period the Romans, heirs to Hellas, saw it. Today we may perhaps dispute their judgment: the greatest adversaries of Hellas, and later of Rome, the Persians, were certainly not uncivilised, and I suspect that the debt to them of Rome, and of ourselves as descendants of Rome, may be quite considerable.

The two dichotomies—civilisation and barbarism, and true faith and infidel—were fused in the later Roman Empire. The one word which combined true faith with civilisation was "Christendom." The Roman Empire disappeared, the barbarian Teutons and Slavs were brought into the true faith, and Christendom became coextensive with Europe—a geographical, not a cultural term. Across the Mediterranean a new religion and a new civilisation flourished. Neither the Muslim world of the Abbasids nor the Europe of Charlemagne or Empress Irene was uncivilised, but this did not stop fanatics on either side from seeing them as such. And the general public image, or traditional stereotype, which emerged through the centuries was closer to the outlook of the fanatics than of the enlightened few on either side.

Already at the dawn of the Middle Ages a division, more important than the boundaries of local sovereignties, was beginning to appear within Christendom. Rome became a provincial city, while Constantinople remained the centre of a still powerful empire and of a sophisticated system of government, and the seat of a Patriarch whose missionaries went out to convert numerous pagan peoples, meeting and competing with the emissaries of the Bishop of Rome.

The contrast between Rome and Constantinople was deepened when a Pope crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day 800 AD. The authority of this revived Empire received at least verbal recognition from rulers in an area of western Europe, whose boundaries coincided to a remarkable extent with those of the original EEC. Doctrinal disagreements between the two Churches grew fiercer, and led in the 11th century to a rejection by Constantinople of the supremacy of Rome. Since then we have had a Roman Catholic Church and an Orthodox Church, hierarchically and dogmatically separate from each other. Even so, the notion of a single common Christendom survived, and was perhaps increased by the common experience of the early Crusades. It took a very heavy blow in the so-called Fourth Crusade of 1204, which consisted of the seizure of Constantinople by the western Crusaders at the instigation of the Venetians. This crime created a profound distrust of the West by the Greeks, traces of which have survived to the present day.

Still more important, I think, were two great conquests of European lands from the east: first, of Russia by the Mongols, whose successors the Tatar Khans became Muslim, and second, of the Orthodox Slav states of the Balkans, and of Constantinople itself, by the Ottoman Turks. For roughly 200 years, from 1250 to 1450, the frontiers of the lands of civilisation and the true faith lay along the eastern borders of Poland and the north of what is today Romania, and for the next 250 years the frontier swung round westwards through Hungary and down to the Adriatic. Beyond this line, to east and south, were infidels and barbarians. Beyond it also were Christians, but these were almost all Orthodox, not Catholic, and so the rulers and thinkers of conquered Christendom gradually, if not explicitly, wrote them off. Christendom became coextensive with Catholic Europe west of the Tatar and Ottoman borders.

The Balkan Orthodox mostly remained under the Turks for 400 years, but the Russians re-emerged sooner. Already in the 16th century there was a Principality of Moscow which was rapidly growing into a serious military power. The Poles, accustomed to see their border as the border of Christendom, found it difficult to see in the Muscovites fellow-members of Christendom. In the Polish view of Russians even today, apart from the traditional hostility to dangerous neighbours and long memories of injustice and suffering in the past 200 years, there remains, I think, an element of contempt for the barbarian which goes back to a more distant past. It is something there which is not present in the long historical rivalries of western peoples, French and Germans, French and English, even English and Scots.

Equally important, and less appreciated, is how the Muscovites then saw the rest of the world. In the Orthodox view, the Catholics were schismatics who had seceded from the true faith—and of course the Protestants after the Reformation were schismatics from schismatics. Once Muscovy had shaken off the Tatar yoke, its ruler—Great Prince, later Czar (a Slavisation of the word Caesar)—was the only independent Orthodox ruler in the world, which meant the only truly Christian ruler. Christendom, the land ruled by a Christian monarch, was Muscovy; nothing else was. Muscovy faced to the west and north the schismatics whose vanguards were the Romanist Poles and the Protestant Swedes; and in the east and south the infidels—Tatars and Ottomans.
In the 18th and still more in the 19th centuries the idea of Europe began to replace the idea of Christendom in the west. This was the result of various processes which made themselves felt at the end of the Middle Ages: the rise of secular sovereign states, expansion across the oceans, scientific discoveries, and above all the religious wars of the Reformation, which tore Christendom to pieces and created in thinking minds a profound disillusionment with the idea that religion could be the main uniting force in human communities.

The overarching unity of medieval Christendom had been expressed in the basic similarity, side by side with regional variety, of religious painting, church architecture, and literature in the common Latin language. In the secularising Europe of the 18th century, styles of painting and architecture were no less interrelated; this was still more true of the flowering art of music; and though the growing secular literature was expressed in diverse languages, its content was increasingly similar from country to country. This new secular European culture began to get a hold on the minds not just of a tiny vanguard of advanced thinkers, scholars and jurists, but of a much wider educated class, not excluding rulers and their officials.

If Europe was replacing Christendom in both Catholic and Protestant lands, this was not at first visible in Russia. Muscovy was coextensive with Christendom, and Europe was something foreign and odious, dominated by Roman-German schism. Certainly there were individual Russians to whom Polish, Swedish, or German models were attractive, and such influences were not unknown at the court of Czar Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645-76); but they were very much a minor trend. This changed with the advent of Peter the Great. Though the effectiveness of his policies is arguable, and his motivation debatable, his reign was still a turning-point and he is assured of his place in history as the great prototype of the artificial moderniser of the underdeveloped society: the number of his would-be imitators in the 20th century is legion. The myth of Peter, the creation of the new capital, and the symbolism of Pushkin's great poem "The Bronze Horseman" have done their work in human history, and are doing it still, and no amount of burrowing by irreverent historians into the history of the real Peter will undo it, for better or worse.

Peter decided that Russia must become part of Europe, and his successors never abandoned that purpose, even if they ignored or reversed some of his policies. The Russian elite succumbed to the charms of secular European culture and of the French language. The Russian court modelled itself on European courts, the Russian dynasty intermarried with European dynasties and was welcomed by them. More important, Russian armies proved a match for the best European armies. Apraksin entered Berlin in 1760, and Suworov beat armies of the French Revolution on Italian soil in 1799.

The age of St Petersburg, from 1702 to 1918, was the age of Russian membership of Europe, but it had its limitations. The growth of European unity in the 18th century was shaken by the first of the three great modern European civil wars, from 1793 to 1815, which Russia did little to bring about, but from which Russia was one of the chief sufferers. The invading army of Napoleon, which included contingents from most parts of Europe, aroused in the whole Russian people an implacable patriotic resistance, in which priests and peasants saw the enemy as the hordes of Antichrist, and many more sophisticated Russians described the forces of Roman-Germanic schismatic Europe, spearheaded once more by Poles (Napoleon had about 90,000 Polish soldiers, one in seven in his total). Nevertheless, after it was over, Europeanisation became once more the aim both of Czars and of the social elite, although different schools of thought in Russia looked to different Europe, from the Prussia of Frederick II to the England of Gladstone or to the France of the Paris Commune. And below the educated elite—no less European than the French or German of its day—the cultural permafrost in which the peasantry was buried remained.

And now we come to the successive paradoxes of my parents' lifetime and my own. The cultural unity of Europe, the allegiance of educated persons all over this continent to an overarching idea of Europe, grew all through the 19th century, and especially in its last decades and in the first of this century. And side by side with it grew its negation: healthy national devotion to individual national cultures, variant flowerings of an overall European culture, became perverted into nationalist fanaticisms; defence and self-defence of the dispossessed and the oppressed became perverted into the fanaticism of unlimited class hatred; and boredom with routines of civilian life and yearning for the heroic was perverted into dreams of purifying blood-baths. And the dreams came true; nightmares were surpassed by real life. And the nightmares are still with us.

Russia, as a European great power, made its contribution to the launching of the second great European civil war, but was its chief victim. Russia's was not the highest casualty rate: that was the fate of Serbia, which lost a quarter of its population. But the successive disasters of war, civil war, famine, more famine and purges which overtook Russia surely surpass the record of any other country in modern times. Perhaps China could compete in ghastly rivalry.

And here is the paradox most relevant to my theme. The revolution made by one small political party against the parties which thought they had taken power when Czardom collapsed in war, was made in the name of what was then thought to be the most progressive body of thought in modern Europe—revolutionary Marxist socialism. But the effect of the Bolshevik victory was to destroy or drive into exile the greater part of the Europeanised section of Russian society—at least a million people. It is true that the Bolshevik party itself contained Europeanised Russians, not least Lenin himself, and that others found scope for their talents in the service of the new Soviet régime. But these survivors did not last long; Stalin's purge in the 1930s finished them off, and political mores returned to the age of the Tatar yoke.

The transfer of the Bolshevik capital from St Petersburg back to Moscow had a perfectly practical immediate cause: the old capital was further away from the enemy, an essential
point in 1918. However, it proved to be highly symbolic. Bolshevism turned its back on Europe. This of course is not how Soviet Communists see it. Russia, they would argue, belongs to Europe no less than it ever did, but this is for them of minor importance. The division that matters today is not between Europe and the rest of the world, but between socialism and capitalism. The Soviet Union is the leader of the forces of socialism, which are destined to prevail for the whole human race. The world is divided into two camps. On the one hand are the lands of socialism, or those struggling to build socialism. On the other hand there are three types: the capitalist countries; the developing countries in different degrees of dependence on the capitalists, varying from neo-colonial subjection to relative independence; and finally the countries ruled by renegades from socialism who falsely claim to be true socialists.

Now this picture does to some extent correspond to the reality of today—even if we may reject the labels which Soviet spokesmen would attach to us—and it is different from the past. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable similarity to an earlier stage of Russian history, that of 16th-century Muscovy under Ivan the Terrible. Then Muscovy was considered to be the only land with a Christian ruler. Muscovy was Christendom. It faced a hostile world, on the one hand schismatic Roman-German Europe, on the other hand the infidels. Today the Soviet Union is the land of socialism. Socialism is the Soviet system; no other system is. Some of the neighbours of the Soviet Union, and a few more distant lands, under Soviet tutelage, have made great progress towards socialism, but still lag behind the Soviet model. The outside world is hostile. On the one hand are the infidel exponents of unregenerate capitalism. On the other hand is the realm of the renegades to socialism, the Chinese Maoists. The main difference between the situation of the Soviet Union today and of Muscovy then is that then the schismatics were in the west and the infidels in the east, and today the positions are reversed.

Does a belief in the existence of a single European culture require the creation of a single European state, or federation of states? This was not the expectation of European intellectuals of the 18th and 19th centuries. After 1918, in the search by thinking minds for drastic measures to prevent a repetition of the recent bloodbath, a few voices were heard in favour of abolition of state sovereignty. But this was not prevalent in the heyday of the League of Nations, of Briand and Stresemann, whose outlook could well have been described by the slogan of a later generation: "l’Europe des paires." In the 1930s, of course, Europeanism of any sort became remote. In the mid-1940s, during the third and worst European civil war, which was also truly a world war, the only unity offered to Europeans had as its spokesman Dr Joseph Goebbels and his weekly paper with cultural pretensions, Das Reich, to some extent an echo of the mythology of European unity favoured by Napoleon Bonaparte, and directed against the same two powers at opposite margins of the continent, Britain and Russia.

In the movement for greater European unity which developed after 1945, the nostalgic memory of a lost cultural unity was certainly a factor, but it was less prominent than a number of others which must be briefly mentioned.

One was the awareness of a common peril. Europe was threatened by Soviet power, as Christendom had once been threatened by Muslim power, first Arab then Turkish. Or European, or partly European, power controlled half the continent beyond its borders, and the rest was in no position to resist its pressures from its own resources. It was not a question of an imminent danger of a Soviet military advance to the Atlantic. Rather, the danger came from economic exhaustion in Britain, internal disruption in France and Italy by indigenous forces linked to the Soviet Union, and the complete collapse and destitution of Germany. This rather complex but urgent danger was well understood by some Western statesmen, especially by Ernest Bevin and Dean Acheson. Together, in the face of great obstacles, not least from within their own countries, they set in motion the reconstruction of the economy of Western Europe. Then political leaders began to think of ways of getting Europe not only to live beside each other but to work together.

A second force was the reaction of millions of Europeans against the destructive nationalism of the Age of Fascism. This was especially evident among French and Germans. The mutual fear and bitterness between these two had threatened the peace of Europe for hundreds of years, and especially for the last 80, and had greatly contributed to the making of two world wars. In the second of these both French and Germans had been utterly crushed and humiliated. As they scrambled painfully out of the pit, some of them resolved to put an end to this sterile enmity, and in the next two decades this aim was largely achieved. This has been seen by some British commentators as a misfortune for Britain, and the two men who did most to bring it about, General de Gaulle and Dr Konrad Adenauer, as unfriendly to this country. For my own part, I can only say that, having grown up in a time when reconciliation between these two great nations was more desirable, and more unattainable, than almost anything, I watched the process with joy, and remain moved by the result, and do not believe that it can be to Britain’s disadvantage.

The reaction against nationalism went naturally together with the notion of European solidarity. Especially for the defeated Germans and Italians Europe was a replacement for the fatherland, the claims of which had been so long and so monstrously exploited and perverted by Hitler and Mussolini. A similar tendency was also to be seen further east, especially perhaps among Austrians, Czechs, and Hungarians. In the last two decades there has, I think, been some change. Generations born since the War have to some extent rediscovered a pride in and a devotion to their own national sub-cultures, without the xenophobia and arrogance of the Age of Fascism. My impression is that this is true of Germans and Italians, and certainly of Poles, Romanians, and Hungarians. I would not, of course, claim that xenophobia has disappeared in those lands, but it seems to me it is far less than when I first visited them, and in general that the national patriotism of today is blended with European conscious-
A third force which needs mention is American pressure for European unity. Certain deeply rooted American myths have to be borne in mind. There is the contrast between the numerous squabbling nations of Europe, with their endless entangling alliances and counter-alliances, and the great peaceful American nation, spread across a land about the size of the whole of Europe (including Russia to the Urals). It is true that America experienced a fairly frightful war 120 years ago with half a million dead, but it ended in victory for unity, and the generosity of victors to vanquished ensures, so it is said, peaceful progress ever since. The secret of all this progress was the federal Constitution, strong enough and flexible enough to hold this great nation together already for almost 200 years. Why then can’t the Europeans federate?

This, of course, has never been an official American demand, and the makers of American foreign policy have mostly known too much about Europe to think like this. But millions of Americans have thought and still do think this way, and a few words of explanation of the differences between Europe and America may be useful.

The American republic was populated from the beginning predominantly by people of one language—English—derived from mainly one country. Europe by contrast is the home of something like 50 language-groups which have existed as compact entities for a millennium or longer. Secondly, America was an almost empty land, full of splendid resources, and the Americans became, in David Potter’s memorable phrase, a people of plenty. Europe, too, was and is extremely rich in resources, but they were divided between the numerous peoples: there has never been a time, as there was in American history, when this rich continent lay open to occupation and development by a newly arrived people. Thirdly, though the immigration of the 19th and 20th centuries brought the United States millions of new citizens, at any particular moment the immigrants were but a small proportion of the total population. Uprooted from their homelands, they arrived in a country which already had its predominant language, its constitution, and its culture. They were also eager to be absorbed in this new culture, and if they themselves found it difficult, their children achieved it. In Europe, their kinsmen lived in solid compact populations in lands in which their ancestors had lived for generations or centuries, were attached to their distinct sub-cultures, and were being urged, by their politically conscious educated elites, to think of themselves as nations. Attempts either by pro-nationalist dynastic régimes or by proselytising alien nationalist rulers to suppress their growing national consciousness caused them to follow extreme nationalist movements among their own peoples, and this contributed as much as any other single cause to the unleashing of two world wars.

These differences between the American and European historical and social realities made the simple application of American federalist formulae to Europe quite unreal. But American exhortations to Europeans to unite undoubtedly had their effects.

Lastly I mention the economic forces, for the creation of a West European common market, not because I think them less important than the forces which have been mentioned, but partly because my own economic knowledge is minimal, and still more because they are rather well known, and are constantly in the public mind, whereas the things which I have been stressing seem to me often to be forgotten. Moreover, it is, I think, true that the motives of the founding fathers of the EEC were not primarily economic, but that it seemed to them—no doubt rightly—that initial progress would come more easily and quickly in the economic than in other fields.

I come now to the question: what connection is there, or should there be, between a movement for European economic and political unity, and a sense of a European cultural community? The second can exist without the first: it did for more than 200 years. Can the first exist without the second? It can, but at great cost, and perhaps not for very long. Let us not underestimate the need for a positive common cause, for something more exciting than the price of butter, more constructive than the allocation of defence contracts, a need for an European mystique. This was understood by the founders of the EEC, men well aware of the European cultural heritage, deeply marked by it. But when a mystique gets into the hands of bureaucracies, there is apt to be trouble. Remember Pégy’s aphorism, “Tout commence par la mystique, et finit par la politique.” The Brussels Eurocrats’ mystique may have much to be said for it, but it is a long way away from the mystique of Europe. The basic EEC territory was the former Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne: even the border between Federal Republic and DDR is not very different from the line of Charlemagne’s advance into Germany. Gradually this neo-Carolingian empire has been extended, but with increasing pontifications as each new recruit was added.

Europe, whether it be a geographical, a cultural or a moral concept, has never been, and is not now, coterminous with the Carolingian empire. Attitudes to the concept of Europe today have striking similarities to those of the distant past. In particular, the two dichotomies of lands of civilisation and barbarism, and lands of the true believers and the infidels, reappear under new names on both sides of the Lübeck-Trieste line.

Of the dichotomies as seen from the Soviet side, and of the strange similarities in the Muscovite “mentalités” of late 20th and late 16th centuries. I have already spoken. The two dichotomies apply also, though in different form, on the western side of the line. The spokesmen of the EEC and
NATO readily seek to appropriate the mystique of Europe, implying, even if not categorically asserting, that those beyond the line are sunk in a lower level of civilisation, in fact in barbarism. They also see something which they call alternately "the West" or "Europe" as the protagonist of a true faith which most of them publicly identify with an abstraction called "Western democracy", while some still think in terms of the older contrast between Christendom and infidel or heathen. Their attitude recalls that of the leaders of late medieval and early modern Christendom who increasingly and implicitly wrote off the Christians living under Muslim rule.

But the truth is that nowhere in the world is there so widespread a belief in the reality, and the importance, of an European cultural community, as in the countries lying between EEC territory and the Soviet Union. It is true that this belief is complicated by political considerations. The peoples of this region feel a certain resentment against the West Europeans for having done, as they see it, so little to help them; and at the same time, in terms of world power, they see the counterweight to their own imperial master not in Western Europe but in the United States. It might be argued that what they long for is membership of a Western community rather than of a European community. But these two concepts overlap in their imaginations, and the cultural community which they remember, or their parents remember and have told them of, is essentially European.

To these peoples the idea of Europe is of a community of cultures to which the specific culture, or subculture, of each belongs. None of them can survive without Europe, or Europe without them. This is of course a myth—by which I mean a sort of chemical compound of truth and fantasy. The absurdities of the fantasy need not obscure the truth; and whether admirable or not, any complex of ideas which gets a powerful hold over whole peoples is historically and politically important. Every modern nation has its historical mythology—including even the English, even if the most sophisticated among them turn their backs on it. For the western colonial subjects of the Soviet empire an historical mythology of Europe is added to their own individual national historical mythologies.

How many of them bother about these things? A minority of the population of course, but a much higher proportion than among Western peoples whose national culture and identity has not been in danger for centuries. A large minority care deeply, and this includes working men and women in factory and field; and even of the majority, ill-fed peasants and all, I should hesitate to assume that allegiance, either to their own nation or to Europe, is meaningless. "The masses care for none of these silly ideas, only for material interests" (the comfortable patronising cliche of progressive intellectuals) may or may not be true in England or Sweden. Maybe if it were universally true, the world would be a more comfortable place. But it is not, and least of all in the eastern half of Europe. The division of Europe, and the forcible subjection of their national cultures to manipulation by conquerors whom they despise, is something to which they will not in the predictable future reconcile themselves.

MY LAST SENTENCE probably suffices to damn me in many minds as "a cold warrior." But all that I have done is to state in simple words the basic facts which 40 years of study have convinced me. Yet such has been the impact of propaganda, counter-propaganda, and disinformation that in the minds of hundreds of thousands of enlightened Western men and women, firmly devoted to freedom in their own countries, the present division of Europe has acquired a sanctity which they will fanatically justify; and to say that this division is permanently unacceptable for more than a hundred million Europeans, and will not last, is seen by them as tantamount to preaching nuclear war.

Now it is true that the emergence of Europe from the political ice-age associated with the names of Metternich and Czar Nicholas I was brought about not by revolutions (all revolutions of those years were crushed, just as all four revolutions since 1945 have been crushed), but by a series of what we may perhaps call medium-sized wars; and that the emergence of the new states in Eastern Europe was a result of a world war. It is also true that in the nuclear age, medium-sized wars in Europe are virtually inconceivable, and that nuclear world war, whatever it did, would not liberate and reunite Europe. But do these truths give permanence and sanctity to today's division? There is just one statement that historians can safely make about history: that in history nothing is permanent. How change will come, historians are poorly qualified to predict; those who have tried have not added to human wisdom.

Let us stop thinking of the Soviet colonial empire as permanent, and stop speaking of the EEC's neo-Carolingian empire as Europe. There is nothing warmongering or sacrilegious about these small changes in vocabulary.

The European cultural community includes the peoples living beyond Germany and Italy; and this is something which we should never forget, something in no way annulled by the fact that they cannot today belong to an all-European economic or political community. This is all the more reason for promoting, and for making the best possible use of, every sort of cultural contact with them that offers itself, and to show constantly that we recognise them as fellow-Europeans.

But do the British belong too? The belief that Britain has turned its back on Europe ever since the beginning of the British overseas empire, is widely accepted both within and outside Britain, but is at most a half-truth. It is easily forgotten that the English came rather late to overseas expansion, arriving after the Portuguese, Spaniards, and Dutch, and about the same time as the French. All these had strong links overseas, yet all took part in the cultural and scientific trends, as well as in the political and military conflicts of Europe, and so did the English, not to mention the Scots, Irish, and Welsh.

While the metropolitan countries continued to be involved
in Europe, from the overseas communities there emerged, in some cases through wars of independence and in others by mutual agreement, new states and new nations. Between the new states and the old not only trade but cultural links persisted, and are still strong. However, certain differences should be noted. Firstly, the total population of both France and the Netherlands is larger than that of persons overseas whose mother tongue is French or Dutch, whereas in the case of Portugal, Spain, Britain the reverse is true. Secondly, whereas the numerous Spanish-speaking nations with few exceptions remain economically undeveloped, and all of them, as also the sole overseas Portuguese-speaking nation, are militarily weak, in the case of the English-speaking nations the reverse is true. Canada, New Zealand and Australia are advanced industrialised states, and the United States is both economically and militarily the most powerful state in the world. If, then, the English have since the late 19th century been drawn away from Europe more than other nations of the west coast of the continent, this is because of the peculiar character of membership of the English-speaking world.

Not so long ago, it used to be argued that, for the British membership of the Commonwealth was more important than membership of Europe. But though there are of course still many links with the former colonies, the expectation that the Commonwealth would be a significant political unit has been proved to be fantasy. What has remained a reality is the English-speaking world, consisting of the United States, Britain, and three of the Old Dominions. When de Gaulle weighed against “les anglo-saxons”, he was speaking of something real. I do not see how any citizen of this country, who knows something of international affairs and is concerned for the future of Britain can doubt that Britain belongs both to Europe and to the English-speaking world. For my own part, I know that my roots are in both, that I cannot give up either, that I cannot cut my mind or brain in two. The task that has lain before the British for the last three decades, and which regrettably their rulers have not discharged, is to be a strong binding force between the two, not to stand shivering on the brink of the Channel and the Atlantic, sneering in turn at those on each of the opposite shores, indulging alternately in self-approach and self-pity, doomed to the fate of the donkey which could not decide from which pile of hay to eat, ending up as prey for carrion-feeders.

There is not much sign at present of an awareness of a European cultural heritage, a mystique of Europe, in Britain, or of any effort on the part of any political or cultural authorities to develop one. This may be partly due to the prevalence in a large part of our cultural elite of a hangover from empire in the form of a guilt-complex towards the peoples of Asia and Africa. For a long time the word “European” was associated with arrogant assertions of cultural, and racial, superiority. But if “Europe” is associated with this arrogance in Asian and African minds, does this mean that Europeans should reject their own heritage? And if the history, arts, and literature of Europe are richer than those of sub-Saharan Africa, do we have to pretend it is not so? Can we not simply study honestly the African cultures, and help Africans to study their own? This I know well has been the practice in some parts at least of the British academic world, and one must hope that it will develop further. But it need not cause the British intelligentsia to shudder with guilt at the thought that the British is one sub-culture of a European cultural community.

This brings me to another confused but important question, the cultural relationship between Europe and America. “European culture” is often said to be under attack from “American mass culture.” It is easy enough to see what is meant by this, but rather difficult to formulate it in words. Could one say that contemporary mass culture is based on an ethos of short-term material hedonism: that the overriding purpose of all human endeavour should be to maximise material comfort? The larger the number for whom comfort is provided, the larger will be the profit for those who provide the relevant goods and services. Commercial profitability and mass consumer satisfaction go together. The best brief label for this that I know was designed by someone for whose memory I have little affection, but who was always better at words than deeds: Mussolini. His phrase was “pluto-democracy.”

It is not my aim now either to denounce or to defend a culture or a society dominated by these principles, the practical results of which we all enjoy in our daily lives. The question which does concern me is, “Is this culture specifically American?” I think only to a rather small extent. It is American in so far as the United States is the most populous society of mass culture, and the first society to achieve it. The reasons for this lie in its history: partly in the great natural wealth of North America which the pioneers and subsequent immigrants had the great good luck to find there; and partly in the fact that the American republic was founded and developed by men consciously striving to create a new society and a new social ethos, no longer limited by traditional obligations and hierarchies. In Europe until about the middle of this century the commercial-hedonist values of capitalism had not won complete victory over the earlier values of service to the state, of classical humanism and of the City of God, whose origins go back through the Renaissance to the Middle Ages. In Europe the public ethos was an amalgam of these values, piled up on top of each other through the centuries, the relative strength of each constituent varying from country to country. This was especially true of the country which was the pioneer of capitalist enterprise, and also the country from which the ancestors of the American founding fathers had come, England.

But we would be wrong to see this contrast in absolute terms. The influence of the old traditions of Christianity, of Enlightenment and even of State service, were present in the minds of the Founding Fathers, and their influence can be traced in American history. Equally, the desire for material comfort was present in the minds of European men and women, and became a force as soon as most people began to feel that they could, or that they were entitled to, ask for a
better life. This of course is neither a quick nor a simple process; it does not follow immediately from the introduction of universal suffrage, or the secret ballot, or even proportional representation. But by the 1960s it had become pretty widespread in Western Europe, enormously accelerated by television; and it had gone a long way in Eastern Europe too, and even in Russia itself, where material hedonism is in theory part of official doctrine, but long-term rather than short-term (“I am tomorrow”), and inhibited by politically-motivated economic scarcity and by well-organised coercion; and even in the Third World it had spread at least to a large part of the urban population. Consumerism, then, is not something inherently American. It is useless, as well as unhistorical, to make America the scapegoat for our troubled feelings. In so far as consumerism threatens the older values of what we may think of as European culture, this threat comes primarily not from America (even if some of its wares have American labels) but from within European society, and indeed from within the minds of almost all of us. The existence of consumerism does not prove the irrelevance of European culture; if European culture is a reality, it can accommodate consumerism, can come to terms with it as it has come to terms with more than one preceding ethos.

ONE FINAL POINT I MUST MAKE. I argued that the European idea replaced the idea of Christendom largely as a result of disillusionment with religious persecutions and wars. But this does not mean that religion ceased to be an important force in Europe, or that those who believed in a European cultural community did not believe in Christianity. Far from it. Christendom, the area within which Christianity has its believers, is world-wide, no longer coextensive with Europe. In today’s world, allegiance to Christendom, the land of the true faith, can have no meaning. But Christianity is a powerful force still in Western Europe, and still more so in Eastern Europe. Any intelligent reader of the daily press must be aware of the strength of the Catholic Church in Poland. More difficult to estimate is the undoubted survival, inward renewal and expansion of the Orthodox Church in Russia.

THE INTERWEAVING of the notions of Europe and of Christendom is a fact of history which even the most brilliant sophistry cannot undo. But it is no less true that there are strands in European culture which are not Christian: the Roman, the Hellenic, arguably the Persian, and (in modern centuries) the Jewish. Whether there is also a Muslim strand is more difficult to say. Medieval Muslim Spain was a channel by which European classical learning passed, through Romance versions of Arabic translations of Greek texts, into Western Europe. In the age of Ottoman greatness and decline cultural interchange was less evident than commercial or military. In Europe today, even leaving out European Russia, there are many million Muslims, living in lands where many generations of their ancestors have lived. Modern Turks, of whom five million live in geographical Europe, and two million Bosnian Muslims in Yugoslavia certainly feel themselves Europeans, accept the European heritage as theirs. Whether this is true of the two million Albanians, with the highest birth rate in Europe, I would not risk a guess, still less of Muslim Gastarbeiter or immigrants from overseas. The apparently growing upsurge of Muslim militancy, in Muslim lands from Morocco to Malaysia, is perhaps above all anti-modernising and anti-secular, but that it contains both anti-Christian and anti-European elements can hardly be questioned.

However we may estimate the Muslim contribution, it is clear that the main strands in European culture have come through Christendom, from Hellas, Rome, Persia and the Germanic north as well as from Christianity itself. To these were added the influences of the successive waves of invaders from the east as well as of the diverse cultures overseas which Europeans explored and exploited. The resultant compound, whose individual sources no one can unscramble, is the foundation on which the whole structure of modern science, industry and technology was built. These impositions structure fill the landscape but the foundation is unseen and unremembered. There is still a European culture, and it is one embracing the people of the north-west peninsula of Asia and their offshore islands, and also many individuals outside it in the Russian land mass and beyond the oceans.

It exists, but it comprehends only those who can see and feel it, and for this certain conditions must be fulfilled. In order fully to belong to European culture one must be aware of other Europeans, know some history, know another language or several, take some pleasure in literature or painting or old buildings. Those who have such awareness have always been minorities, everywhere. But in recent times some minorities have grown and some have shrunk. In most Continental countries there seems to be growth. Even the once invincibly unilingual Gallocentric French are learning* their neighbours’ speech as never before. In the Soviet empire there is a vigorous demand for foreign-language teaching, though there is some disagreement between rulers and ruled as to which language should be learned. Only in one country has the teaching of foreign languages—all of them, whether ancient or modern—the desire of pupils for* them, and the belief by the authorities that they deserve study, strikingly slumped: in Britain. Nowadays foreigners are all learning English, so there is no need, some argue, for* the English to learn theirs. Mass-produced translated texts will give us all we need, and with more and better computer language learning, not to mention literature and history, will be irrelevant.

Will they? How far is it possible to understand the thinking of persons of other lands without knowing either their* language or their past? Even in hard-headed export trade the* bilingual, or trilingual, salesperson has an advantage over the unilingual. As for history and literature, it is precisely the ability to remember, to imagine, and to record both memory and fantasy which differentiates man from ape.

Governments will continue to quarrel; conflicts of
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interest will persist, with changing shape and intensity, between nations and between classes; and the two ancient dichotomies of civilisation against barbarism, and true faith against infidels, will reassert themselves from time to time.

But the unity of European culture is independent of these things. It is not an instrument of capitalism or socialism; it is not a monopoly possession of EEC Eurocrats or anyone else. To own allegiance to it is not to claim superiority to other cultures—not to the Chinese and Japanese, which today would be manifestly ridiculous; not to Muslim, even when its spokesmen proclaim their hatred of us; not to African, an injustice which is mercifully less widespread than it used to be; and not to American, though this is still quite fashionable among some who fancy themselves as European intellectuals. Nor should allegiance to it be incompatible with the aspiration to create in time a wider Western culture or still more distantly a world-wide culture of humanity. These admirable aspirations will not be advanced by ignoring or even erasing what is shared between all the peoples of Europe, or what is peculiar to each individual people. The unity of European culture is simply the end-product of 3,000 years of labour by our diverse ancestors. It is a heritage which we spurn at our peril, and of which it would be a crime to deprive younger and future generations. Rather it is our task to preserve and renew it.

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**Birds**

I stare through a gap in the garden hedge
Distracted by a dramatic fancy
Of bees courting a maiden flower
And an item teasing from the line,
And am aware that I am watched, too.
A bird in the hedge’s chamber stares
Rounded with fearfulness, pretending.
What terror could I mean to bring
On this second-hand home, this rubbishy room
Guarded by a poor slum mother?
I go closer, testing her fortitude.
A species eye simple with instinct
Gleams back at me, an odd find, worthless
As bottle-glass hidden in dirt.
Thus I might mistake some fate
Stooping stupendously above me
Like clouds above an anxious walker
Or, worse, the great angry beast of the world
Rearing for destruction. If I
Keep still, pretend, it will not see me.
I picture Mediterranean birds
Flying past my inner eye, a casement
Detail in a peaceful painting.
Tips of trees that may be witnessing
An Annunciation. A feathery trail
Disperses down the angelic sky.
By now the marauding beast has roamed
Into some penitential landscape.
My eyelid windows gleam relief.
Birds flutter, settle on the ledge.
Fearful no longer I walk the chamber
Matching the quiet pace of my heart.

*Patrick Hare*