

## EUROPEAN UNITY

WE hear much of the ideal of European unity, and much more of the difficulties lying in the way of its realisation. But for a satisfactory definition of this unity we ask in vain. The trend of public and private comment is largely negative—let us avoid war at all costs. It may be of some use to consider the problem from a strictly Thomist standpoint and to discover whether it can be solved in the light of Thomist principles.

All conflict is ultimately metaphysical and every war a battle of philosophies. Copernicus, Galileo and Descartes, by teaching that reality is reducible mathematically, have made the unity of number identical with that of being. Unfortunate man not so reducible, has become 'res cogitans' cut off from reality, thinking intuitively, and the body, as Maritain observes, an instrument not of perception, but of conquest. Intellect is shut up in the brain, and body goes forth to organise matter and subdue the Universe. This situation is further complicated, on the one hand, by Kant's doctrines of unknowable reality and the supremacy of the moral consciousness, and, on the other, by Hobbesian and nineteenth century evolutionary materialism. Small wonder the heirs of such thought find themselves clamouring for a European unity they cannot define but for which they are ever more or less consciously striving.<sup>1</sup>

St. Thomas distinguishes between 'one' the principle of number and 'one' identical with being, and adding to it the idea of undivision. It is clear that European unity must be of the second kind, a unity of being. Europe is, indeed, a collection of different

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Progress*.

## *European Unity*

peoples, of various customs, philosophies and religions. Yet all these nations have a common basis in the Graeco-Roman-Christian civilisation from which they have all developed. It is true that the rise of particularist nationality, the decay of unity in religion and other modern movements have almost destroyed all traces of this common origin. But not entirely so, for it is obvious that such a work of dissolution requires a long period of time. The experiment has begun on a grand scale in Russia, elsewhere not yet so openly.

In view of the differences that exist, it may seem impossible to construct or reconstruct unity in Europe. Some may even urge that local variation and national character being in themselves good, render such unity not only impossible but also undesirable. Yet, bearing in mind that unity is undivided being, we may distinguish between essential and non-essential variations. It is obvious that a nation formed according to Kantian principles can, as a nation, hold no true communion with one educated in the doctrines of St. Thomas. Here no reconciliation is possible without some sacrifice. On the other hand, non-essential differences, *e.g.* the emphasis in France upon thought, in Spain upon passion, in England upon action,<sup>2</sup> are not only reconcilable, but mutually helpful.

Unity is then possible in idea. We may allow that in fact it must be difficult to attain. Yet Europe appears more and more to desire it. Unhappily, many concerned in promoting it have no clear notion of what it entails and advocate dangerous methods of achieving it. All men are rational animals and their souls enlightened by the same first principles. In Europe this rational animality has developed historically upon similar lines in each nation, though in vary-

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of these characteristics, see Señor Madariaga's *Englishmen, Frenchmen and Spaniards*.

## *Blackfriars*

ing degrees and modes. There seems to be some ground for believing that in the Western mind there is at least a potential unity.

Many people, wishing to realise this unity, seek to do so by means of matter, economic co-operation, customs unions, the United States of Europe. Surely there is a dangerous error here, arising from the neglect of the ancient definition of matter as the principle of individuation and division. We may indeed produce a Europe materially one, all its members sharing in a common store, but this will not be human union. Neither men nor nations live apart or together by bread alone. Economic co-operation, based upon matter, is a two-edged tool, and can produce strife and war as well as unity and peace. It produces peace in so far as it is co-operation, and therefore spiritual. But its material foundation constantly menaces it with dissolution. There is much to be said for the view that each nation should be economically self-sufficient, depending on none but itself, content with what it has and developing its own material life accordingly. It is surely better for nations to be economic individuals rather than the formless economic entities so many of them are at present.

Our thesis is that true European unity must be of the mind. Objections are here many and obvious. European nations differ in religion, *i.e.* in their conception of ultimate reality; in philosophy, *i.e.* in their opinions of the functions and achievements of reason; in their ethical and political theories, *i.e.* in their views of the nature of the human act, personal and corporate. Even supposing these differences eliminated, it is urged, unity of mind is still impossible, for it will be obstructed by matter, which is a necessary part of man.

Holding that man is a little lower than the angels, we must allow him power, and considerable power,

## *European Unity*

over his material environment, but only in so far as he is a spirit. The higher he rises in the scale of the spirit, the more independent will he become of matter, and the more power will he exercise upon it. But as matter is at the root of division, the most spiritual men are the most easily united. The tenacious unity and survival of the great religious orders are a proof in point, as is also their tendency to disintegrate in times of decay and weakened fervour. The more, therefore, a man acts according to right reason, the better he orders his life towards a rational end, the more will he be free of matter and the more capable of union. Now it is clear that the chief ends right reason proposes to all men are the same; and hence, unity of mind among men is both possible and desirable, for it is based upon common ends and a common control over matter.

Philosophies, indeed, differ, but, as was observed above, some are essentially irreconcilable, and others only accidentally and capable of integration into a common philosophy. No unity of mind is possible even in idea unless the unity and validity of human reason is universally assumed. Any system that, in any degree, dissolves this unity and denies this validity is in like proportion anti-unitary, anti-human. Its reduction to a common doctrine is only possible in so far as its teachings can stand in the philosophy of infallible reason. Again, it is true that matter will tend to obstruct unity, but although in this life unity can never be perfect, material opposition may be reduced to a minimum. In international affairs, as in those of the family, or any human group, material conditions may cause dispute, but true oneness of mind can prevent such differences breaking into armed conflict. Just arbitration is the solution of international as well as national material differences, and the only lasting basis of just arbitration is a common mind,

## *Blackfriars*

the common possession of truth, a common theory of man and the universe.

English philosophical tradition here raises another capital issue. It insists that intellectual agreement and co-operation are of little value, that the real bond of union is a common will, a common desire for good. Politics, national and international, are in the field of action and, therefore, depend primarily upon volition rather than intellect. But it is a fundamental principle of Thomism that although the will moves naturally towards the good, it requires the direction of the intellect, for truth, the end and cause, is primarily in the intellect. Many seek good in harmful things, either through ignorance, which intellect can dispel, or through conscious choice of evil, which religion, as will appear below, alone can fully correct. In both cases the danger of erecting will into a primary principle of unity is apparent. Will requires direction, correction, unification, before it can itself direct, correct, unify. It is true, however, that the human act requires the co-operation of intellect and will, for once the rational end is seen, the will chooses and organises the means, but the end and cause, as we have noted, is primarily in the intellect. Hence the objection that politics are in the field of action and volition resolves itself, for we have seen that the human act requires both intellect and will.

Having discarded matter and will as primary unitive principles, we must justify our thesis that these principles are in the intellect. The human mind is darkened by original sin, the process of knowledge slow, difficult, and patient of error. The will with its power of choice can frustrate the ends of intelligence. It may be urged that with such a feeble instrument European unity cannot be built.

Yet, weak as the intellect is, it is the strongest natural link we have with reality, for through it we

## *European Unity*

reach and apprehend being, without which man cannot live. True, intellect works in matter and abstracts reality from matter, and with much labour gropes its way through the labyrinth of the real. Error, indeed, is possible, but truth equally so : humility, submission to the real in the individual, tradition, co-operation in the many are the surest safeguards against such error. Through intellect we *comprehend*, and, as Aristotle teaches, in some sort, *become* all things, and the highest creature of whom we have direct knowledge is our fellow-man. Through intellect we apprehend and, in some sort, become one another. Here, then, is true foundation for union.

The problem of the will's ability to distort truth is soluble only by religion. A common European intellectual effort will demand many a sacrifice of cherished positions, much heart-searching, much humility, and here religion alone can avail. The intellect can err *per accidens*, though absolutely infallible in its own sphere. Most of the ills of modern metaphysics are due either to the exercise of reason in spheres where it is impotent, or to the introduction into the field of reason of other elements, such as sensation, sentiment, volition. Religion alone by revealing an ultimate end and cause, the doctrine of the true nature of man, the fact and significance of the Incarnation, can integrate all mental, moral, and even material endeavour, into a complete synthesis. It alone can rectify the will and by charity towards God and neighbour render true co-operation possible. It alone can inculcate genuine humility by exactly placing man in the hierarchy of creatures. This position undefined, no true knowledge or action is possible.

Before considering the actual conditions in which modern European unity has to be sought, we may briefly resume our conclusions. Unity in Europe is possible in idea because all European nations have a

## *Blackfriars*

common secular and religious origin and a common desire for union. Economic co-operation, based upon matter which divides, is the most dangerous and unstable form of union. There can be no union of wills without a common known end, which the intellect provides. Hence true union must be founded in reason, in knowledge, in truth, in being; in an intellectual co-operation, a common quest for reality. But the accidental liability of reason to err, and the distortion of which will is capable, render necessary the illumination and guidance of Faith, the unifying influence of supernatural charity.

The speculative intellect is concerned solely with truth in itself: the practical intellect with the ordering of the contingent in the light of necessary truth. There is, therefore, no place in a speculative essay for a practical programme. But we may be allowed to examine in the light of our principles some of the difficulties the practical intellect experiences in the organisation of European unity.

From certain standpoints the prospects of unity are encouraging. The League of Nations, the International Court of Justice, the Committees of Intellectual Co-operation are signs of that desire for union we claimed as justifying our belief in its possibility. But these great institutions will fail to become instruments of unity if they go counter to the laws of right reason, as there is danger of their doing.

The first and most obvious error into which they may be misled is the one we have already characterised as the appeal to matter. In its lowest form it appears in the doctrine of the unitive force of international finance. The raising of money into what almost amounts to a principle of government has surely proved its total inadequacy as a conservative power. A source of division in the State, it is an even greater one in the realm of international politics.

## *European Unity*

Material co-operation, of which Customs Unions are an example, is preferable to mere finance, but fraught, as we have noted, with the dangers arising from matter as principle of division. It is true that the present arrangement of European countries and grouping of industries make it almost imperative that nations should be materially interdependent, and, therefore, in constant danger of mutual strife. Any re-organisation of Europe should take full account of the doctrine that such interdependence is essentially dangerous.

From the spiritual standpoint, difficulties are many. There are two main and opposite tendencies of a disruptive character — cosmopolitanism and hyper-nationalism. The first may be compared to the egalitarian principle in social theory, and in philosophy to the Cartesian doctrine of knowledge and power for all through a technique. It is a denial of national habitus or qualities as the other two are of personal. Its solution to the problem in hand is the abolition of those accidental national differences which we saw above were far from being obstacles to union if correctly understood and employed for the common good. The real core of the problem—how to achieve true intellectual co-operation—it has not perceived. It would produce a dead exterior uniformity hiding most radical spiritual antagonisms.

Hyper-nationalism is frequently a distortion of the noble passion of patriotism. Its extreme form is pilloried in the tag: 'My country, right or wrong.' Its spiritual vice is pride, vicarious if you will; it takes one country as a centre and exemplar, considers it as the necessary leader of the world, or at least of some portion of it. This nation's modes of thought and life are held to be absolute, not because of their inherent goodness, but merely because they are those of this particular country. Other peoples whose charac-



## *Blackfriars*

teristics are different are thought inferior, and if they are impervious to instruction upon these points, a theory of relative truth is invented, and we hear of 'lesser tribes,' not only 'without the law,' but incapable of any true law, a common but fortuitous assumption. The error of hyper-nationalism is obvious enough: by erecting accidental and often complementary differences into principles of truth and being, it denies the unity of the human intelligence.

Both these attitudes are intensified by the growth and facility of travel. Paul Morand says in this connection: 'Les races se sont mêlées sans se comprendre ni avoir eu le temps de se connaître et d'apprendre à se supporter.' There precisely is the danger of cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the hyper-nationalist with his false notions of the absolute, is confirmed in them by the evident differences he sees between himself and men of other cultures and traditions.

For those who genuinely desire a European intellectual unity, the spectacle of warring philosophies is a real cause of distress, if not of despair. As was stated above, some of these are in their principles at least, irreconcilable, and even with those whose principles are capable of integration into a common system, such integration seems beyond all hope of realisation.

We have already seen that the rise of physical science coincided with the revival of number as the principle of being, and the consequent exclusion of man from the universe, except in the role of gratuitous spectator.<sup>3</sup> Hence the division of the modern intellectual world; on the one hand, the physical scientist, distrustful of philosophy; on the other, the philosopher, either humbly subservient to triumphant physi-

<sup>3</sup> For a critical treatment of the influence of physical science on the principles of modern philosophy, see E. A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*.

cal science and applying its principles, methods and conclusions uncritically to thought, or else doubting whether it be true science—knowledge—at all. The great modern quarrel, as Christopher Dawson has remarked, is not between science and religion, but between science and philosophy.

Physical science is the study of the constitution of the material universe. It explains phenomena in terms of secondary causes. Philosophy studies the nature of both the spiritual and material universe, but in the light of ultimate causality. Physical science asks, 'How?' Philosophy, 'Why?' If both scientist and philosopher can be persuaded of the validity and importance (though in varying degree) of the answers to both these questions, the path to unity will be made so much the easier. But, unfortunately, both tend to imagine they can explain everything on their own principles, or that what they cannot account for is in no manner knowable.

The prospects of intellectual unity seem, perhaps, remote. It is our contention that the Catholic Faith and Thomism can alone provide a home for all that is true in these various views. They alone give a coherent account of all truth and reconcile science with philosophy, sense with reason, God with man. Holding that there is a hierarchy of knowable truths, of knowledge and of minds that know, they can define the exact limits of each discipline and its relative importance. They alone determine the exact position of the universes of matter and spirit in the hierarchy of knowables; the position of man in that of minds that know. They alone provide the links that connect science, philosophy and faith, science leading to universal judgment, *i.e.* the principles of philosophy; philosophy leading up to the fact of a revelation, *i.e.* the foundation of religion. They alone proclaim the infallibility in their spheres of sense, reason and

## *Blackfriars*

revelation. They alone inculcate and sustain that supernatural charity towards God and man, which is the ultimate goal of all science, of all knowledge.

There is no need to emphasise the duty of all Thomists to further the great work of integration. The problems are many, the apparent contradictions multitudinous, but with the faith and spirit of St. Thomas, we shall not surely find them wholly irreducible nor the spiritual unity of Europe wholly impossible.

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