Newsletter No. 9

Christophobia and Laicism

Dear friends,

Christians from outside Europe often ask: *Why are you European Christians so timid and insecure?* Also people from other faiths ask the same, so for example a Jew, the renowned Professor of International and European law, Joseph Weiler.

Why are we so timid when we have so much to be proud of? Christianity shaped the West to embrace solidarity and democracy. Christianity discloses the personal and loving God, offers forgiveness and salvation, authentic peace and love - even of one's enemy. There is no end to the discovery of its riches.

And yet – it encounters so much hostility. Please find below excerpts of a speech Joseph Weiler gave on April 27th, 2006, in Vienna. If you are interested in the full speech, send us an email: office@europe4christ.net .

Your Europe for Christ! Team

PS: Don't forget: An Our Father for Europe a day! Let us ask our Father to give us self-confidence and strong strife to bring Christ to our neighbours and communities.

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Christophobia and Laicism
By Joseph Weiler

When half the population of Europe lives under constitutions which make explicit references to God and Christianity, the exclusion of any such reference made a mockery of Europe's motto 'United in Diversity'. Yes, so long as that diversity does not include God or Christianity. How many times does one have to reject the canard that exclusion of God from the symbology of the State and from the public square is not a neutral choice – it is a political choice for one world view over another.

I asked Mr. Giscard[1]: Where were you on the question of the *Invocatio Dei*[2] or of *Christian roots*. And he said he was in favor. But there was no consensus, and they were operating by consensus.

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[1] Valerie Giscard d'Estaing was the president of the European Convention drafting the Constitutional Treaty of the European Union.

[2] Latin for "call upon God". In the debate during the drafting of the European Union Constitutional Treaty, some favoured the inclusion of a directed call upon God, others a reference to the Christian roots and history of Europe. Both were denied with the wrong argument that either one would be offensive to non- and other-believers

Yes, there was no consensus. But why should the *default* be *exclusion*? And I asked Mr. Giscard d'Estaing: "Why didn't you put in an Invocatio Dei, which you say you believe in, and then say: 'I can't take it out, because there is no consensus to take it out.'" Why should the default be French laïcité, and not the German belief in the responsibility before God and man, the Irish belief in the authority coming from the Holy Trinity or the altogether elegant Polish solution, which recognizes both.

There is another reason why it did not go in: European laïcité, as distinct from American secularism, is not simply a "I don't happen to believe in God". It is a kind of faith in itself. It is a positive hostility to religion, which in Europe means Christianity. This is why I did not hesitate in my book to speak about *Christophobia*[3].

There is another, more serious element to Europe's inner struggle on this issue. Would a reference to Christianity not compromise Europe's self-understanding as a society built on tolerance, a new multicultural society? What of our Muslim citizens? What of our Jewish citizens? Would they not feel excluded? Maybe even threatened?

But beyond the question of the constitutional, is confusion about *tolerance*, *multiculturalism* and *identity*. Tolerance is not simply a social practice. It is a discipline of the soul, over-coming, accepting or tolerating that which in some respects negates, or contradicts.

Is it tolerance to say, I cannot judge, therefore everything has to be accepted? True tolerance – as that discipline of the soul which resists the tendency to coerce the other – can only exist against a basic affirmation of certain truths. And there is a contempt for the other, not respect, in an 'everything goes' attitude! How can I respect the identity of the other if I cannot respect my own identity? And why would a Muslim or Jew, as religious minorities, feel safe in a society which excludes from its identitarian icons recognition of its very own religious identity? People come to these countries partly because it is a tradition of tolerance, because in spite of their own traditions they can warmly welcome somebody who does not share in them. I cannot truly respect the other, if I do not respect myself. And we must indeed celebrate the richness of the Christian heritage.

It is a European vice, a kind of amnesia, a forgetfulness of the Christian past of Europe.

And now take the incident of *Rocco Buttiglione*[4]. As he is asked about homosexuality, he answers as follows: "If you ask for my personal belief, I believe those relations are sinful. But if you ask what I will do as Commissioner responsible for Home Affairs and Justice, I will uphold the law and the Constitution of Europe." He did not even say "wrong", but he said "sinful", which is a religious category. If you are not religious, the word "sin" has no meaning.

Now imagine, Rocco Buttiglione was a Jew: First, nobody would ask the question. And second, if the question were asked and he gave exactly the same reply, everybody would consider it the "model" answer: He upholds his tradition (which, as multicultural, we accept), and he is faithful to the Constitution. But if you are Christian you can be booted out. It's a telling story.

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[3] Christophia or Christianophobia: Irrational hatred of Christians, Christianity or Christian convictions. Results in verbal violence, acts of hatred or discrimination against Christians or even subtle persecution and "civil death" (John Paul II, Lourdes, 1983).
[4] Rocco Buttiglione was sent by the Italian government as a highly qualified Commissioner of the European Commission 2004 – 2009. After many hours of interrogation by the European Parliament he had to resign due to his Christian convictions.