

# THE BERLIN WALL, 1992 AND BEYOND

By JOHN LUCAL

**R**ECENT EVENTS IN EUROPE teach us that prediction of the future is at best a precarious undertaking, but it does seem safe to say that the year 1989 will be recorded in European history as a year of revolutionary change at least as important as 1917, 1848 or even 1789, when the Bastille was stormed by an enraged populace. The storming of the Berlin Wall in November by a jubilant populace symbolically recalls Paris two hundred years before, but it also demonstrates the difference in the two events: the revolution of 1989 was, by and large, peaceful to a degree no one could have thought possible in our violent age. Except for Romania, where it would be more accurate to speak of an internal Communist Party coup than a genuine, popular revolution, the old order collapsed without a struggle in the streets of Berlin, Prague and Budapest. Was this a sign of special grace? If so, was not the new Soviet policy of Mr Gorbachev, replacing the Brezhnev Doctrine and encouraging *glasnost* and *perestroika*, also due to a movement of the Spirit? People who prayed to Our Lady of Fatima for the conversion of Russia have good reason to think so. And those who believe that God really does act in secular history and not just salvation history (which is a vacuous concept if divorced from this world) must also ask themselves just why all of this happened in the way it did in the Europe of 1989.

But if one proceeds in this line, then there are still more questions to be asked, other current European phenomena to be explained. The poet Robert Frost wrote the memorable line in 1914, 'Something there is that doesn't love a wall' ('The Mending wall'), and the Berlin Wall is not the only one that is in the process of being dismantled in Europe. Less spectacular, but just as real and important, is the breaking down of the walls separating the twelve member-states of the European Community. This is a quiet, ongoing process that, however, is equally amazing if we look at history since the end of feudalism, a history of bitter wars and lasting enmities. Who would have predicted the Franco-German

reconciliation after World War II that laid the foundations of the present European Community? Was not grace moving then as well? It is not common for nation-states to cede some of their sovereignty to a supranational entity in the name of a higher common good, nor is it customary for motorists of this continent to display bumper-stickers reading 'Europe my country'. Something extraordinary is going on in this process that is still commonly called '1992', although the Single European Act will not take complete effect until 1 January 1993 (and could be delayed even further). And the process will affect and ultimately include the rest of the continent. A new Europe is being born.

I do not think it is possible rationally to demonstrate that this breaking down of walls in Europe is the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet in faith I believe that it is. Discerning God's ways with us, unravelling the mysteries of Providence, requires a longer view than any but prophets possess. Moreover, it is made murkier by the presence of very mixed motives in humankind (which does include European policy-makers). But what the gospel says about peace, community and solidarity is still eloquent: by that standard, which is fleshed out by the social teaching of the Church, Europe is receiving an invitation to grace. The most popular song at the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1975 was 'Break down the walls that separate us'. The same kind of ecumenical spirit, which in matters of Christian unity the Pope has called 'irreversible', seems to me to be at work in contemporary Europe—East, Central and West. If this view is correct, then an even more important question, in fact *the* question, must be put: what are we Christians, the Church, doing about it?

Efforts to discern the hand of God in this breaking down of walls and building of new forms of community in Europe thus require a closer look at the process itself and the forces directing it—for the outcome is not predetermined. Central and Eastern Europe could collapse economically as completely as the Berlin Wall, and the EC could enter a period of national stubbornness and stagnation as bad as that of the 1970s. Even worse scenarios are conceivable: instability, depression and civil wars. This leads us to the 'beyond' in the title of the present article. As Christians we must ask ourselves what moral and spiritual resources are needed to respond to this invitation to grace. But first we have to make a brief analysis of the situation.

*What has happened in Europe (the unpredicted)*

The ending of the Cold War 'schism' has terminated the last of the three great European divisions of our millennium. The other two, the East-West ecclesiastical split that culminated in the mutual excommunications of 1054 and the Reformation that lasted from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, are still substantially in place, though being overcome slowly by the ecumenical movement (perhaps we are moving backward into time in the healing of history). It is currently fashionable to gloat over the sudden collapse of communism, but it would be folly to ignore the reasons for its appearance in the first place, namely the inhumanity of the old order that preceded it and the power of the dream of a classless society of 'from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs'. This dream is, in fact, being forgotten in the East, having been forgotten long ago in the West. In the pressing struggle to satisfy basic human needs, there is the danger of importing the materialism of the West along with its concepts of human rights. A prominent Hungarian political scientist assured me last year that no one in his country even mentioned such Marxist idealism any more. Another casualty of this ideological upset could be the internationalism that communism preached but never practised (relapsing into Russian hegemony), although the new nationalisms of Central and Eastern Europe do not exclude federal or confederal links to higher units of government. The dream depended, of course, on the creation of the 'new Soviet man', which failed utterly because it neglected the transcendent dimension of grace, which alone can reach deeply enough into the human heart to effect consistent social behaviour. Unless this dimension is taken into account, the new societies of Central and Eastern Europe may easily degenerate into chaos.

The Western European movement toward peace, justice and unity was based on a different anthropology, profoundly realistic and Christian. First, there was reconciliation between the arch-enemies France and Germany, in which Church leaders and individual Christians played no small part. Men like Schumann, Monnet, Adenauer and De Gasperi were politicians who were profoundly influenced by their faith. Pope Pius XII consistently urged steps toward European unity. Ever since, the Christian Democratic parties have held to this ideal. But Monnet and Schumann were realistic enough to see that the movement had to begin with economics: coal and steel that made war possible, atomic

energy that could make it totally lethal to creation, agriculture that sustained a whole way of life and industrial production that could provide work and flourish only in a truly common market. Only when that was accomplished could cultural and spiritual unity go forward. We do not live by bread alone, but if we do not eat we cannot hear the word of God. I stress this point because a good number of people in Church circles have criticized or even ignored the EC because of its strategy of beginning with the economic, seen by them as having nothing to do with the spirit. Such 'angelism' was never directed against *Laborem exercens*, nor does it realize the profound implications of the Single European Act for social justice, education and culture in the longer term. Fortunately, this mind-set has only praise for the work of the Council of Europe in the field of human rights, despite its secular approach, and for its warm welcome to the new democracies on the other side of what used to be 'the Wall'.

At the moment, we are in a period of transition and ideological confusion. Events in other parts of the world have blurred the focus on Europe, while a kind of spiritual apathy about the future still prevails in the Churches. And yet there are signs that the question of European unity is being taken seriously by some theologians. A recent seminar that we helped to organize at the Institute of Theological Studies in Brussels attracted considerable attention, while the very fact that this issue of *The Way* is devoted to Europe speaks for itself. We are still waiting for the Churches to respond decisively to the call of the European Ecumenical Assembly held in Basel in May 1989, an unprecedented and hope-filled event that was a real grace.

*What seems to be happening in Europe (the predictable)*

In Western Europe, the EC is moving toward economic and monetary union of some sort, and how much influence Britain will have on the process leading up to the December intergovernmental conference remains unclear. As for steps toward political union, also to be discussed in December at a separate conference, there are many different proposals in the corridors, but it seems very likely that the European Political Cooperation (EPC) mechanism will be strengthened. Also clear, at least in my mind, is that political union in the EC will not resemble any existing form of federation or confederation, but will be based pragmatically on the principle of subsidiarity, that pillar of Catholic social teaching. The

member-states will lose neither their identity nor their competence in many fields, but more power will continue to flow upward to the Community, while other powers will gradually devolve on the regions of Europe. In all of this, cultural distinctness will be enhanced rather than melted down. Shortly after 1992, there will be new members in the EC, with Austria as the most likely candidate. This will constitute the 'inner circle' of Western Europe, united more and more by a growing *corpus* of European law coming out of the Court in Luxemburg, as also by increasing linkages in the cultural field.

A 'second circle' of States, members of EFTA (the European Free Trade Association) will be more closely associated with the EC, though not members juridically, in the Single Market and in cultural interchange. A 'third circle' of States will be those of Central Europe, soon to become full members of the Council of Europe and seeking eventual entry into the EC. The role of the Council of Europe will increase, though still at the level of an intergovernmental rather than supranational body, and its work for human rights, together with programmes of assistance and cultural cooperation, will add impetus to the unification process. Counting Poland as a Central European country (as Pope John Paul II did so pointedly when he orally changed the prepared text of his address to the European Parliament in October 1989), that leaves as a 'fourth circle' the western U.S.S.R., Romania and Bulgaria, countries which are still trying to adapt a disintegrating communist ideology to a measure of political and economic freedom. No doubt but that they, too, are seeking entrance into the 'common European house', but what that house will look like when built is anyone's guess. (One story has it that when asked what the word 'house' made them think of, Western Europeans described a detached house with garden, while Central and Eastern Europeans saw a block of flats.) Like the ecumenical movement, the European dynamic includes different visions of what unity will be like, very little idea of the timetable for achieving it and a strong reliance on hope that we will eventually get there.

What is disturbing about present developments, with all the breaking down of economic and political walls between states, is the tendency to build new walls around the common area. Other parts of the world are justifiably concerned about an economic 'Fortress Europe', while the so-called 'third countries' (which are mostly in the Third World) see an increasing European tendency

to keep out asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrants from the developing world. The Dublin accord of the EC and the Schengen agreement of France, Germany and Benelux, both signed in June 1989, offer little hope that this hardening of attitudes will change. In addition, racism and xenophobia show new signs of life. Five Church-related organizations based in Brussels and dealing with European affairs issued a call last year (on the occasion of the European parliamentary elections) for an 'open Europe', but still a certain closing of minds and borders seems likely to continue unless more pressure is brought to bear. Meanwhile, the Common Agricultural Policy of the EC, through its export subsidies for surplus products that depress world prices (the U.S. follows the same policy), is ruining Third World agriculture on a large scale. Neither is Europe doing much to ease the enormous debt burden of the poorest developing countries, whether through forgiveness or exercising its influence in the international financial institutions that are imposing harsh measures of 'structural adjustment' which hurt the poor most of all. One cannot say that Europe, for all of its new-found self-identity, has acquired a sense of its international vocation. It is rather still imprisoned in its own wall of self-preoccupation.

The situation does not have to remain this way. Many European organizations, including Church-related bodies, are working to change the present mentality. The development assistance programmes of governments and the EC, under the Lomé Convention and otherwise, remain in place. The European Parliament, which still has only limited decision-making powers, takes far more enlightened stands than the Council of Ministers, which meets behind closed doors and often acts without consulting the national parliaments. If the EC as such is to open itself to the rest of the world, then it will have to become more democratic and have a broader popular base. That means more power to the European Parliament, for one thing. The same remedy must be applied if the EC is to play a role in alleviating the problems of social injustice within its own territory; this effort, seen by the EC Commission as something for a later stage of development, is still in its infancy, as shown by the adoption in December 1989 of a Social Charter without binding force. However, the potential is there to achieve a great deal, if the EC can mobilize enough popular support (what Maritain called a 'body politic') to bring governments into line. I for one believe that this will happen eventually, but would not

want to predict how and when; it depends upon the social forces at work in European society, of which we have not heard enough. These forces include the Churches, who have been far too reticent in speaking out (for the reasons noted above), but who could provide the moral and ethical base for a basic change of attitude.

*The Churches' role in the moulding of Europe (the possible)*

The Churches have not been silent about European unity, as I have already noted, but it may be asked whether they have always taken the right approach. The principal Catholic preoccupation has been with secularization, which is undoubtedly a fact. Northern Europe is very secularized indeed, and the other parts of the continent are headed in the same direction. But does it help to say that Europe has lost its soul? Secularization is compatible with a residue of faith that is seeking meaning and direction. To declare that Europe must 'recover its Christian roots' makes sense at one level, for we all need to find our roots in order to go forward. But it can be misunderstood as a call to return to the past, which is not going forward. From conversations with my Protestant friends and colleagues in ecumenical organizations, I can say that certain pronouncements of Pope John Paul II, in particular the message delivered at Compostela, have had an unforeseen negative effect: they see the Pope as calling for the restoration of medieval Christendom or something equally horrendous from their point of view. Many Catholics share this apprehension. Would it not be better to say that Europe should draw on its spiritual heritage in order to create something new, a European society that is thoroughly modern (or post-modern, even post-post modern, if you will)? The Basel Assembly did just that. Its positive approach, I believe, will produce a positive result.

It is hard enough to agree on whether there is a European cultural identity that is really common to the continent. The experience of organizing and attending colloquia and seminars on the subject has left me with the conviction that there is something there in common, but that we have yet to articulate clearly just what it is. The riches of Europe are its diversity. All the more difficult, therefore, is an attempt to discern a common spiritual heritage from the past: there is simply too much to reduce to a common denominator. And the spiritual heritage of Europe is not only Christian: there are Jewish and Muslim contributions, the Enlightenment has something to say, even the anti-clerical and

atheistic movements from the last century have helped to shape the spiritual character of contemporary Europe. This spiritual condition may be confused, but it is the reality we have to begin with in order to achieve greater clarity. This diverse heritage has to be brought to bear on the problems of faith in the Europe of today (that use of 'faith in' is intended as a copy of the 'faith in the city' and 'faith in the countryside' of the Church of England's recent incisive reports). Faith has to be active or it is dead. The spiritual heritage of Europe is rich, but it will remain dormant until we mobilize it in the service of the future. The Basel programme of 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation' is just such an effort that could succeed in making faith relevant to the problems of Europe and the world in our time.

There is more faith in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West. Although the institutional elements of the Church that were not destroyed during the long years of persecution are still in a state of shock, there is still a tremendous faith among the people, who found in the Church a refuge and a source of strength. The Catholic Church in Poland and the Protestant Evangelical Church in the D.D.R. played a significant role in the revolution and will continue to influence social policy (Solidarity uses Catholic social teaching as its norm). The new government of Hungary is embarrassingly Catholic in a country known for its secularization, while Vaclav Havel's speeches are better sermons than most Europeans will ever hear. How many presidents of Western European countries have ever given a speech with a Christian reference as clear as 'In the beginning of everything is the word' (speech accepting the Peace Prize of the German Booksellers Association in Frankfurt, 15 October 1989, before he became President of Czechoslovakia) or hurled a moral challenge such as 'We are still incapable of understanding that the only genuine backbone of all our actions, if they are to be moral, is responsibility . . . responsibility to the order of being where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged' (Speech to the Polish Sejm and Senate, 21 January 1990, after his election as President) ?

While Central and Eastern Europe have a lot to learn about democracy and economic freedom from Western Europe, the latter has a lot to learn from the former. First, that major social, economic and political changes can take place peacefully. Violence was minimal, yet it would have been quite logical. There was no



vengeance on the torturers. Second is the lesson that we in the West can no longer define ourselves as 'anti-communist' now that the Wall is down: we have to ask ourselves who we really are. Thirdly, we can learn that oppression and poverty cannot destroy true cultural and spiritual values, which flourished behind the Wall to a degree unknown in the West. Fourth, we can learn that it pays to hold fast to the idea of truth and not compromise; many of those once called dissidents now occupy key posts. It pays to be honest. Lastly, we can learn that out of suffering can spring new life: the new Hungarian Prime Minister, Jozsef Antall, after asking what sense could be found in the years lost under socialism, concluded 'We have taken part in world suffering . . . we have shared the Passion of Christ'. (See 'Western Europe can learn from the East' by Gabor Tegyey S.J., in *European vision*, No. 8-9 (summer 1990), pp 30-33.)

A fundamental contribution of Christians to the moulding of the new Europe—East, Central and West—is still that of preaching reconciliation. That has not changed since 1945. Europe remains full of ancient resentments, religious, ethnic and political hatreds. We have to learn how to heal our history. Not forget it, but heal it, in full knowledge and acceptance of what has gone before. We have to learn how to accept responsibility, without admitting personal guilt, for what our ancestors have done to others. This is difficult, since we have lost the sense of corporate personality and responsibility. The point was brought home to me personally in a dramatic way in Prague two years ago, when a Protestant professor of theology attacked the role of the Jesuits there in the Counter-Reformation. I felt personally attacked myself, but indignantly repudiated any personal responsibility, saying that I was not there and if I had been then Jesuit policy might have been different. Later I realized that I could not escape the fact that I was a Jesuit and inherited, guilty or innocent, the whole past of the religious order of which I was a member. I had willingly accepted and benefited from the glories of Jesuit history, but I was not willing to accept what I did not like in that history. Are not most of us that way about the history of our countries: we gladly share in the patriotic glories of our national past, but can we accept a measure of corporate responsibility for the darker side of what has gone before? Theologically, I have problems with this whole question, but I have no doubt that it is part of the European problematic today. When Vaclav Havel said the Czechs should apologize to

the Sudeten Germans for expelling them from lands they had occupied for centuries, even Cardinal Tomasek balked. But Havel is perhaps ahead of his time.

Or is he the prophet we should be listening to today? Are not his words relevant to all the peoples of Europe carrying the immense burden of accumulated *ressentiment* that threatens their own peace? We know the history of oppression in Europe, and I think we know also that it will require a large measure of grace to forgive. To preach, to live that forgiveness is the task of Christians.

A workshop at the Basel Ecumenical Assembly during Pentecost week last year was on the healing of history. I found it an unforgettable experience. But then the whole meeting was unforgettable and, in my view, points the way for the Churches of Europe (by which I mean the one self-reconciling Church in Europe) to respond to that invitation to grace now offered to this continent. It was the first time that all the principal Churches of Europe had ever assembled together. May it not be the last: its message of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, together with its call to action, are what Christians in Europe need for the social ecumenism of the future, a future that leaps over the walls that divide us, passes through 1992 and enters the beyond. What that 'beyond' portends we do not know. You can only do so much, and leave the rest to God.