



KRZYSZTOF TOMASZ WIECZOREK

University of Silesia in Katowice

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7987-168X>

## The Drama of Two Hopes: The Secular Versus the Christian Project for Europe

**Abstract:** Europe is a community of people and nations with a still-to-be-determined identity. The project of European unity is a work in progress, and under the influence of historical circumstances it undergoes successive changes and looks for new inspirations. One of the key moments in the European history in the third millennium was broadening the EU in 2004 to include ten more countries, among them the Republic of Poland. Each of the new countries entered the community with its own set of hopes and expectations. In Poland, shortly before accession, the basic question was posed: what kind of Poland in what kind of Europe? Answers to this question were shaped by two types of inspiration: the first was based on the vision of the new evangelization of the continent, in which Poland could participate creatively thanks to its faithfulness to Christianity preserved through the centuries (*Polonia semper fidelis*); the second referred to secular traditions and the idea of a rational, just, free and democratic Europe, maintaining axiological neutrality. The text shows the dramatic divergence between these two projects for the Europe of the future, seen from the Polish perspective.

**Keywords:** Europe, Poland, hope, Christianity, values

“In the beginning there was no Europe. All there was, [...] was a long, sinuous peninsula with no name, set like a figurehead of a ship on the prow of the world’s largest land mass. [...] To the east lay the land-bridge to the rest of the world, whence all peoples and all civilizations were to come.”<sup>1</sup> With these words Norman Davies begins his story of

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<sup>1</sup> N. DAVIES: *Europe. A History*. Oxford 1996, p. XV.

Europe. Later, however, when the Hellenistic culture arose and developed, “Europa was the subject of one of the most venerable legends of the classical world.”<sup>2</sup> It concerns the myth of Cadmus and his sister named Europa, kidnapped and abducted into the unknown by Zeus, who took the form of a snow-white bull. Among the many associations that (according to a British historian) the legend of Europa evokes,<sup>3</sup> the most important are those that can be considered as symbolic characteristics of European identity: “Europa’s ride [...] captures the essential restlessness of those who followed in her footsteps [...] the civilization of the Mediterranean Sea was stimulated by constant movement. Movement caused uncertainty and insecurity. Uncertainty fed a constant ferment of ideas. Insecurity prompted energetic activity.”<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of a short chapter on the Greek legend, Davies concludes: “Europa’s curiosity may have been her undoing. But it led to the founding of a new civilization that would eventually bear her name and would spread to the whole Peninsula.”<sup>5</sup>

Curiosity, restlessness and permanent mobility are the qualities that distinguish Europeans from other people — similar opinion is voiced by the great traveler Ryszard Kapuściński: “In the march of civilization, Europe will be an exception. Since it is the only one which, from its very Greek beginnings, has manifested curiosity about the world and a desire not only to master and dominate it, but also to know, and in the case of its best minds — [also] to understand, to come together and to form a human community.”<sup>6</sup>

Another testimony to thinking of Europe as something unique by its fluid identity is Zygmunt Bauman’s book *Europe. An unfinished adventure*. Starting, like Davies, from a Greek myth, the author argues that the “Euripides and Sophocles enabled Oedipus to practise what was to become the common frame for the character, torments and life dramas of the Europeans,”<sup>7</sup> and quotes Denis de Rougemont’s opinion: “To seek Europe is to make it! Europe exists through its search for the infinite — and this is what I call adventure.”<sup>8</sup> Bauman comments: “Europe is not something you discover; Europe is a mission — something to be made, created, built. And it takes a lot of ingenuity, sense of pur-

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> See ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. XVI.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. XVII.

<sup>6</sup> R. KAPUŚCIŃSKI: *Ten Inny*. Kraków 2006, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Z. BAUMAN: *Europe. An unfinished adventure*. Cambridge 2004, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> D. DE ROUGEMONT: “L’aventure mondiale des Européens.” In: IDEM: *Les Chances de l’Europe* (1962), <https://www.unige.ch/rougemont/livres/ddr1962ce/2> [accessed 10.02.2024].

pose and hard labor to accomplish that mission. Perhaps a labor that never ends, a challenge always still to be met in full, a prospect forever outstanding.”<sup>9</sup>

According to the unanimous opinion of the quoted authorities, Europe is an *ens in statu nascendi*, whose essence is a permanent search for identity, or “unfinishedness,” and whose qualities are mobility, curiosity, ferment of thoughts, uncertainty, creativity, restlessness and leaning towards the future. The history and present of this particular civilizational formation is an intense search for a “patent for Europe,” a constant testing of constitutive formulas oscillating between unity and multiplicity and involving ever new models of ties of community.<sup>10</sup> That is why such an important dimension of the European spirit is hope, which expression could be found, for example, in the philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Hope, as a hypothetical idea of a better future, is usually combined with disappointment with the present, perceived as a state more or less distant from expectations. A way of thinking about the shortcomings of everyday life, typical of a specifically Polish sense of humor, is presented in the following fragment of a monologue by Wiesław Dymny, a satirist from the Kraków cabaret Piwnica pod Baranami, parodying the style of speeches by Władysław Gomułka: “There is only what is. And because what is — this is not it, so there is nothing. That what is, is nothing; but that which is absent, is something!”<sup>12</sup>

Poland is a part of Europe whose inhabitants have had more than one occasion in history to train themselves in the virtue of hope. Let us take as examples some of the key events that all Polish children learn about at school during history lessons:

- the hope for the healing of the crisis situation in the state and the Church in the Polish lands, as expressed in Andrzej Frycz-Modrzewski’s work *Commentariorum de Republica emendanda libri quinque* from 1551;
- the hope for building the foundations of a modern, enlightened and liberal society, included in the text of the 3rd of May Constitution, that is, the Governance Act of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, adopted on 3 May 1791 in the face of an imminent threat of loss of independence;

<sup>9</sup> Z. BAUMAN: *Europe. An unfinished adventure...*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> See *Więzi wspólnoty. Literatura — religia — komparatystyka / The Ties of Community. Literature, Religion, Comparative Studies*. Eds. P. BOGALECKI, A. MITEK-DZIEMBA, T. SŁAWEK. Katowice 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. BLOCH: *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*. Berlin 1954; G. MARCEL: *Être et avoir*. Aubier 1968; J. TISCHNER: *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*. Kraków 1975.

<sup>12</sup> Quote from memory from a cabaret show in Kraków in the 1960s.

- the hope for stopping the annihilation of the institutions of the Polish state and for thwarting the intentions of the neighboring powers planning the partition of the lands of the Republic; in the name of this hope, the Bar Confederation was formed, and in 1794 the Kościuszko Insurrection broke out;
- the hope for regaining of independence, discussed in endless political discussions and publications, such as Józef Pawlikowski's famous pamphlet *Czy Polacy wybić się mogą na niepodległość?* ["Can Poles win their independence?"], published in 1800 in Paris;
- the hope for the rebirth of an independent Polish state at Napoleon Bonaparte's side in 1795—1813;
- the hope for throwing off the yoke of the partitioning countries by way of armed action, which lay at the root of all Polish national uprisings and patriotic uprisings in the 19th century;
- the hope for the re-emergence of a great, strong, powerful Poland as a result of the radical changes to the political map of Europe following the end of the First World War;
- the hope for building a new, just, democratic Polish People's Republic with the support of a powerful ally, the Soviet Union, after the Red Army liberated the Polish lands from Nazi occupation in 1945.

The years following the Second World War were a particularly important and difficult lesson in hope. Two generations of Poles, living under the oppressive system of Stalinist and post-Stalinist communism, learnt to live drawing strength and encouragement from the idea that nothing is eternal and that even the strongest empires experienced their end. Sometimes it was hope against hope (*spes contra spem*) when, after a great collective effort, it turned out that the wheels of history had turned the other way. This was the kind of drama that Central and Eastern Europe experienced as a result of the political decisions taken at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. As victorious Red Army troops pushed towards Berlin from the east, ambivalent feelings arose further and further to the west as the Nazi occupying forces were pushed out. One part of the population, liberated from the Nazi terror, felt a huge sense of relief, coupled with the hope that the possibility of building a new, democratic and just people's state under the auspices of the USSR would emerge. The other part, based on historical knowledge and daily observation of the methods of the encroaching Russian forces, expected nothing good. History conceded the latter, despite the fact that supporters and sympathizers of the new regime, euphemistically called "people's democracy," still engaged in activities actively supporting the regime for many years. Paradoxically, however, the weaker the communist terror became, the more the disillusionment with the state-forming offers of the socialist system grew.

According to the most frequently repeated assessments by researchers of recent history, the most important reason lay in the economic inefficiency of the system, which, due to the fact that the mechanisms of the market economy and competition had been replaced by a so-called planned economy, the lack of currency convertibility on the international market and the rapidly growing economic backwardness, after 30 years began to decline.<sup>13</sup> Objective economic mechanisms were then joined, especially from the 1970s onwards, by a second major factor of a more subjective nature. This was the hunger for value.

The basic value, the lack of which was the most serious problem for the citizens of the Polish People's Republic, was truth. As the level of general education increased (which, incidentally, was one of the priority objectives of the new regime), the awareness of the fact that socialism (this was the name given to the communist system on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain), as practiced in the countries that were satellites of the USSR, was based on a monstrous, total lie became widespread. What struck hardest at the deepest human spiritual needs were not the small, everyday lies, which abounded in the propaganda omnipresent in the media, and which were effectively mocked by satirists, but the whole elaborately constructed system of alternative reality,<sup>14</sup> constantly sustained by the state ideological-propaganda apparatus, which monopolized the official media coverage.

The monopolization of public discourse by the party-state authorities amounted to depriving citizens not only of political but also of personal subjectivity. Official propaganda maintained that real power in the

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<sup>13</sup> See W. SKRZYDŁO: "Z problematyki zmian w ustroju Polski Ludowej." In: *PRL czyli Polska w drugiej połowie XX wieku*. Eds. J. GRYZ, E. KIRWIEL, E. MAJ, M. WICHMANOWSKI. Lublin 2013, pp. 17—26.

<sup>14</sup> "In propaganda, totalitarianism generally uses not mere lies, but a whole system of its own language in which all the most important concepts of human speech have been thoroughly re-evaluated [...] because the totalitarian state is built on the assumption that human nature is not what it is, namely what it should be according to the theses of the doctrine." Z. KUBIAK: *Nowy brewiarz Europejczyka*. Warszawa 2001, p. 23. This description is supplemented by Józef Tischner as follows: "The common reason is convinced that truth consists in the conformity of cognition with reality, [...] but in social life there are no fixed and unchangeable things. In a fluid so crises on various levels, is one family of nations based on a common Christian tradition. [...] European reality, that which does not yet exist, but is just becoming, has a greater 'force of existence' and is 'more real' than that which still subsists, but is already doomed to death. Hence the new proposition of political reason: the truth is that and only that which, taking into account historical development and progress, can produce the expected results. [...] What the [politician] says is more true than the truth of common reason entangled in 'metaphysical superstition'." J. TISCHNER: "Kłamstwo polityczne." In J. TISCHNER: *Polski młyn*. Kraków 1991, pp. 126—127.

socialist state was held by the “worker-peasant masses,”<sup>15</sup> and the institutional state apparatus is only a tool of this collective power. However, already in the very word “mass” was hidden the intention of depersonalization. In fact — as Zygmunt Kubiak had already pointed out in 1956 — the model of a system invoking the power of the people was a great political experiment, based on the fundamentally false idea of objectifying the human being. “The [communist] system is a gigantic attempt to build an artificial world, to replace natural laws with laws derived from intellectual construction. [This attempt] was born when intellectuals wanted to transform human nature, treating it merely as an object, an object of action, an object of experiment [and in this way] they wanted to make ‘human material’ happy.”<sup>16</sup>

The false and anti-humanist face of the system began to come to light simultaneously (albeit for independent reasons) with the progressive pauperization of society. The hopes of an increasing part of the population then turned away from the increasingly discredited idea of a “developed socialist society” in two other directions; at first perceived as converging, but as they became more concrete, revealing the fundamental differences between them. The first trend is strongly inscribed in the centuries-old tradition of the Polish national community, expressed by the slogan *Polonia semper fidelis*, known to every Pole, which emphasizes the deep bond between Polishness and Christianity. Pope John Paul II referred to this bond in his address to the Poles on 19 May 2003, when he uttered the following words: “We cannot think of Poland without thinking of Europe. Nor can one think of Poland or Europe without thinking of Christianity. [...] Poland has always been an important part of Europe and today it cannot exclude itself from this community, which, although it is experiencing crises on various levels, is one family of nations based on a common Christian tradition. [...] Europe needs Poland. The Church in Europe needs the testimony of faith of the Poles. Poland needs Europe. From the Union of Lublin to the European Union! [...] This is the challenge that modern times pose to us and to all countries.”<sup>17</sup> The second trend is based on a secularized vision of replacing the lame and inefficient Eastern European system with a formula that has worked well in Western culture. The turn of some elites in this direction is described by Richard

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<sup>15</sup> See J. BRALCZYK: *O języku polskiej propagandy politycznej lat siedemdziesiątych*. Kraków 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Z. KUBIAK: “Natura i obłąd.” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 1 (1956), reprinted in Z. KUBIAK: *Nowy brewiarz Europejczyka*, pp. 12—25.

<sup>17</sup> JOHN PAUL II: “Przemówienie Jana Pawła II do uczestników Narodowej Pielgrzymki do Rzymu (19 maja 2003 r.).” *Wrocławskie Wiadomości Kościelne* 56/2 (2003), pp. 135—136. [https://dbc.wroc.pl/Content/74335/WWK\\_2003\\_2.pdf](https://dbc.wroc.pl/Content/74335/WWK_2003_2.pdf) [accessed 10.02.2024].

Barbrook as follows: “having rejected the failed social experiment of the Soviet communists, sensible and wise people acceded eagerly to a new experiment: to American-style neoliberalism.”<sup>18</sup>

The tension between the two projects of hope for a new systemic model and a new relationship with the surrounding world survived the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and carried over into the period of systemic transformation. The more real and closer in time the formal incorporation of the Polish state into the structure of the European Union became — which finally took place on 1 May 2004 — the more frequently the question arose in public discourse: what kind of Poland in what kind of Europe? It was no longer just about a new shape of the political system, but about broader and deeper issues: about a new social ethos in post-communist Poland<sup>19</sup> and, at the same time, to assess — from an ethical and axiological perspective — the spiritual condition of the Europe, the part of which Poland was to become, and indeed has become, an integral part, that is, the Europe of the first decades of the third millennium. In the committed and passionate discussions sweeping across the country, and especially in academic circles, two topics were raised in parallel. The first concerned what benefits — and, according to the more skeptical discussants, also what possible dangers — await Poland in the process of integration into Europe. The second focused on the question of what values Poland could bring to a united Europe. In the background of these discussions there was an important motif: whether Poland will manage to renew and defend its historical status as *antemurale christianitatis* in the new cultural and geopolitical conditions, and whether contemporary Europe will be interested in the testimony of faith and fidelity to Christian values brought by the new member of the community.

At a time when the discussion took its liveliest turn, the side in favor of a Europe of values was able to invoke an undisputedly strong argument: it is Poland that is this “far country”<sup>20</sup> from which John Paul II came to the See of Rome — the Pope at the turn of the millennium, who

<sup>18</sup> R. BARBROOK: “Przedmowa do wydania polskiego, Londyn 12.06.2009.” In: R. BARBROOK: *Przyszłości wyobrażone. Od myślącej maszyny do globalnej wioski [Imaginary Futures. From Thinking Machines to the Global Village]*. Trans. J. DZIERZGOWSKI. Warszawa 2009, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> The public discussion about the new shape of ethos was already initiated by Józef Tischner in the 1980s with the article entitled “Myślenie o ethosie społecznym.” In: J. TISCHNER: *Myślenie według wartości*. Kraków 1982, pp. 453—465.

<sup>20</sup> The first words that Karol Wojtyła uttered from the balcony above the main entrance to St Peter’s Basilica, known as the box of blessings, after the official announcement of his appointment as Pope, were: “Io sono venuto da un paese lontano” (I have come from a distant country).



breathed new life into the dusty and anachronistic Catholic structures and environments of the whole world, including — last but not least — the Old Continent. What Karol Wojtyła succeeded in doing could be confirmed and strengthened by millions of his compatriots, restored after decades to the status of fully-fledged citizens of Europe and with the same right to vote as others — such was the thinking behind, among other things, the hope for the creative and constructive participation of Poles in building the kind of Europe described by “their” Pope in the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*.

In the period immediately preceding the enlargement of the EU to include the new member states, Polish society was clearly polarized but not divisive. Throughout the entire post-war period in Poland there was fierce rivalry between the two worldview camps — Catholic and secular. As a result of the post-1945 geopolitical situation, those with a left-wing orientation were mostly (though not 100%) concentrated around political parties, which took power in the state and monopolized the apparatus of violence and the mass media. Adherents of the Catholic worldview, on the other hand, found their place in the Church, which had strong structures and high social authority in Poland. The position of the Church was so strong that even the communist authorities, who officially proclaimed a program of atheization of society and removal of religion from public life, did not dare to launch an open fight against the Church, limiting themselves to individual actions and carefully planned persecutions aimed at selected targets.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as the course was softened and terror was gradually abandoned, a climate began to take shape that was conducive to the search for common ground for Marxist-Catholic dialogue. Józef Tischner’s book *The Polish Shape of Dialogue*, published in 1981 by the émigré publishing house Editions du Dialogue, is an insightful study of the evolution in mutual relations between Christian circles and supporters of the socialist system. The book begins with the following words: “For more than thirty-five years now, a unique encounter has been taking place in our country between Christianity, Marxist socialism and the world built by this socialism — an encounter between two opposing concepts of making man happy. [...] The meeting is of universal interest. Christianity and socialism today focus the hopes of millions for the betterment of man’s lot on earth. [...] The historical conditions in Poland have so arranged themselves that the two ideas must live together and together determine the history of the nation.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See *Stosunki państwo—Kościoł w Polsce 1944—2010. Studia i materiały* [State—Church Relations in Poland 1944—2010: Studies and Materials]. Ed. R. ŁATKA. Kraków 2013.

<sup>22</sup> J. TISCHNER: *Polski kształt dialogu*. Paris 1981, p. 9.



Despite numerous tensions and understandable distrust, attempts at dialogue and mutual understanding continued even after the period described by Tischner. A particularly surprising and elsewhere unprecedented dimension was assumed by this movement during the martial law declared by the state authorities on 13 December 1981. The unintentional result of this last, desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the ruling party to salvage its hegemony was a mass turning of society away from the authorities and a search for a space enabling the realization of the desire for freedom in the face of the mass repression facing society. Such a space of freedom became the sphere belonging to the Church. Most of the initiatives independent of the authorities, encompassing cultural and intellectual life in the broadest sense of the term, took refuge under the wings of the Church, whose lay and clerical representatives took up this challenge with courage and commitment, consciously reckoning with the risk of repression from militarized state structures. The result was not only a tactical, but also a partly ethical rapprochement between the Catholic community, which showed exceptional openness and hospitality in this difficult time, and representatives of non-Catholic worldviews, including non-believers and adherents of left-wing values.<sup>23</sup>

This is the historical background to the situation that took place immediately before Poland's accession to the EU. On this background, there was a radical confrontation between two hopes, each of which was built on a considered set of arguments. In the briefest terms, these arguments can be divided into three main areas: historical, epistemological and ethical. Here is a recapitulation of them.

Those who hope for the success of the new evangelization of the European continent and wish to take part in this process themselves invoke the following rationales:

**Historical.** Europe has been and remains Christian for more than a dozen centuries. As Andrzej Muszala writes, Europe was co-formed by "the model of the Church that had taken shape since the Edict of Milan in 313, when Christianity emerged from the catacombs and over time became the official, privileged religion. Over the next dozen centuries, *civitas christiana* was built — a society in which God's law was the guiding principle. [...] Christianity also shaped our country, where this model of the Church is still, and to a large extent, in operation."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A personal account of this rapprochement process was provided by, among others, the left-wing anti-communist activist Adam Michnik in his book: A. MICHNIK. *Kościół, lewica, dialog*. Warszawa 1998.

<sup>24</sup> A. MUSZALA: "Czy chrześcijaństwo ma jeszcze jakąś przyszłość?" *Więź* 3 (2022), <https://wiesz.pl/2022/03/09/czy-chrzescijanstwo-ma-jeszcze-jakas-przyszlosc/> [accessed

**Epistemological.** The Church is the depositary and indefatigable proclaimer of the most important truths for every human being about the creation of the world, revelation, resurrection and redemption. These are universal truths, they apply to all people throughout the world, and they constitute the good news that carries the power of liberation from sin, points out the right way of life and allows for the healing of interpersonal relationships,

**Ethical.** The Church's teaching contains the most profound and universal moral indications by which all people should be guided in their lives in order to be able to count on the grace of salvation in the future and, in the present, to create a harmonious community of people living in peace, loving and respecting one another, capable of forgiveness and mercy. The spread of evangelical morality is the only way to recognize and consolidate the principles by which Europe can become an international community of free and happy people.

Representatives of the second type of hope, focused on the need to respect democratic freedoms and pluralism of worldviews, counter the above arguments with the following:

**Historical.** The principles of democracy in European civilization predated Christianity, as far back as the Greek *poleis*. And when Christianity was introduced, it took place in a world arranged on principles very distant from democracy. For centuries, the historical systems of the European states, with the approval of the Church, were a hotbed of oppression, injustice and harm. Moreover, the Church has not only failed to prevent wars and conflicts, but has itself actively organized, supported and participated in countless armed campaigns bringing death and destruction.

**Epistemological.** The idea of absolute truth was finally discredited in the tragic times of fanaticism and totalitarianism. Today, a man who claims to have possessed the truth and to have the right to oblige others to respect it absolutely arouses fear, distrust and aversion because of the still vivid memory of the times of terror exercised in the name of the "only right truth." Modern man feels safer in such a social system, which does not require anyone to respect a top-down imposed canon of true beliefs, but leaves freedom of choice of worldview principles within the limits set by the overriding principle of the common good of citizens.

**Ethical.** Political domination by adherents of one worldview, for example Christianity, threatens with discrimination and undermines the basic principles of democracy. A mature democracy is formal rather than substantive, that is, it seeks to regulate the rules of coexistence through

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10.02.2024]. Cf. D. ALONSO: *¿Qué es la Universitas Christiana?*, <http://historiapolticaysocial.blogspot.com/2011/10/que-es-la-universitas-christiana.html> [accessed 10.02.2024].

legal and political mechanisms without interfering with the freedom of conscience and opinions of citizens.

During the European conference on the topic: “Die Zukunft Europas und das Problem mit den Werten” (Europe’s Future and the Problem with Values), one of the contributing speakers was Joanna Byrska. In her speech entitled “Freedom of values versus arbitrariness of values — an unavoidable conflict?” she drew attention to the potential conflict between democracy as a social value and other values. Starting from Hans Kelsen’s definition, according to which democracy “is a formal structure, a set of rules and principles of conduct that guarantees to every individual entitled a series of rights and privileges,”<sup>25</sup> concluded that “a democratic order is not necessarily a kind of ethocracy, that is, a socio-political order that would seek to realize the chosen values considered good by the majority or the authority endorsed by that majority.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, just as the term “socialist democracy,” commonly used in communist propaganda, was considered contradictory in political science discourse, so it would be pointless to opt for “Christian democracy” understood and practiced as an attempt to combine democratic principles with the dictates of values. Janusz Majcherek takes an analogous view, according to whom “the non-democratic aspiration to establish an ethical state means the thwarting or destruction of democracy.”<sup>27</sup> Referring additionally to the views of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde and Hermann Heller, the author notes that “in the literature on the subject, one can come across voices arguing that democracy is an axiologically neutral order, since it does not realize specific values and the content present in the socio-political sphere of a democratic state depends on the worldview and the aspirations and life goals of the citizens.”<sup>28</sup>

Is it really possible to defend such a thesis? It seems obvious that a state — democratic or otherwise — that is not based on the foundation of any system of values will have no authority or basis for creating a collective identity for its citizens. The quoted author goes on to note that “inherent in the essence of democracy [...] is a set of specific values, tacitly assumed, whose presence is responsible for spreading a positive valorization of democracy as a system of government and as an order of life in society,”<sup>29</sup> which set can be described as the axiological

<sup>25</sup> J. BYRSKA: “Wolność wartości versus samowola wartości — nieunikniony konflikt?” In: *Die Zukunft Europas und das Problem mit den Werten*. Ed. H. BADURA. Wien 2011, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> J. MAJCHEREK: *Demokracja, przygodność, relatywizm*. Warszawa 2007, p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> J. BYRSKA: “Wolność wartości...,” p. 130.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 131.

minimum of democracy. The question remains as to which specific values are included in this set and whether it really has to be the case that they are worldview-neutral.

One speaker on this issue is Anna Drabarek, who, in her text "Values in European democracy," lists just four axiological foundations that constitute the tradition of European democracy. These are: "justice, order, progress, diligence."<sup>30</sup> She then goes on to conclude her speech by adding "then society can organize and integrate itself both through the operation of the free market and through the civic activity for the benefit of the community that is characteristic of democratic structures."<sup>31</sup>

Further pieces of the puzzle can be found in Zygmunt Bauman's book *Europe. An unfinished adventure*. In his search for the key to understanding a European identity that escapes all discourses, the author concludes that "in the case of Europe, always struggling to come nearer to a state it believed to be good and desirable, rather than settling for the state it was in [...] the link between values and identity is arguably still more intimate than in other cases: identity is more fully defined by the values Europeans cherish than by any other of their characteristics."<sup>32</sup>

Apparently, Bauman sees no contradiction between the fact that contemporary Europe is a conglomerate of democratic states, of which as many as 27 form an overarching structure based on democratic governance, and the fact of a shared commitment to a particular set of values. We are left to ask, what are these "distinctly European" values? Bauman answers: "These values are 'distinctly European' because they were thought out, articulated and refined in the part of the planet that tends to be described as 'Europe proper,' and their articulation and refinement cannot be separated from the course of Europe's history."<sup>33</sup> This is a general characterization; for topographical details of the axiological map of Europe, Bauman refers to Tzvetan Todorov's work *Le nouveau désordre mondial*<sup>34</sup> from which he takes out the following thoughts: "Rationality comes first on Todorov's list. [...] the belief that all habits and their breaches need to justify themselves in the court of reason was and remains one habit that Europe has hardly ever broken. [...] 'Really existing Europe' being always some way behind the Europe that Europe craved to be, that belief made Europeans inherently critical and self-critical. [...] Justice is listed second on Todorov's list. [...] It is a value that underlies all solidarity and thereby

<sup>30</sup> A. DRABAREK: "Wartości w demokracji europejskiej." In: *Die Zukunft Europas und das Problem mit den Werten*. Ed. H. BADURA. Wien 2011, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Z. BAUMAN: *Europe. An unfinished adventure...*, p. 125.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> T. TODOROV: *Le nouveau désordre mondial*. Paris 2003.

makes society possible. Justice primes the human habitat for peaceful and friendly togetherness. [...] Next on the list of Europe's foremost, indeed defining values is democracy [...] The essence of an *autonomos* society [...] has been embodied in the [Athenians] preamble 'edoxe te boule kai to demo'. [...] [The] liberty is another value — though unthinkable in separation from the value of democracy. [...] I suggest that it was the combination of all the named values that set Europe on its continuous, unfinished and hopefully unfinishable adventure."<sup>35</sup>

In the above enumeration, we are struck by a characteristic feature: if we were to apply to the listed values a measure taken from Max Scheler, they would all turn out to be formal values, while missing here are those that Scheler called material ones.<sup>36</sup> This means that in a society belonging to a democratic Europe, basically any values can appear as ethical regulations of the practical behavior of citizens, as long as they can be inscribed into the abstract forms reconstructed on the basis of Todorov's considerations by Zygmunt Bauman. In particular, this means that Europe as an axiological project is pluralistic in nature, open to many different value systems. Among them, there is also — equal to many others — a place for Christian values. It follows only that Catholics and other Christian communities acquire the formal status of one of many social groups, constituting a numerical minority or majority depending on the denominational structure of a given society, and endowed with relative autonomy within a democratic and pluralistic society based on the principle of freedom of thought, expression and religious belief. The constitutional principles grant them the right to freely practice their religion and profess and proclaim beliefs consistent with their faith, and exactly the same rights apply to atheists and all other non-Christians. Consequently, all political decisions, including those that concern the most important rules governing the life of people within the community (including — legal norms), should be made regardless of religious beliefs and worldviews, so that they are acceptable to everyone — believers, doubters and non-believers.

In practice, however, the question arises as to how many norms and principles there are whose content and ethical consequences can be detached from the metaphysical foundation from which they could derive their legitimacy. And even if such are found, in what to anchor their legitimacy? On what basis would the state insist on their observance, beyond purely administrative-legal means? If the only basis for the social acceptance of the state system were to be the social contract, modeled

<sup>35</sup> Z. BAUMAN: *Europe. An unfinished adventure...*, pp. 188—194.

<sup>36</sup> M. SCHELER: *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*. Halle a. d. S. 1921.

on the Greek maxim εἰς τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τῷ δήμῳ ('what the council and the people deemed good'), such a state would be constantly exposed to the fluctuations and disorders associated with the vacillation and volatility of citizens' beliefs, with the result that democracy could easily fall prey to populism, which sometimes takes authoritarian forms.<sup>37</sup> This is because the formal idea of democracy itself does not refer to any established and unrelatable values. Such a weakening of the foundations of democratic statehood would be irrational — contrary to the principle that Bauman proclaimed the first of the overriding values of the European way of being human.

However, in the history of European political thought, other patterns of links between politics and morality can be found. One thinker whose project of thinking about ethical duty in political life is still relevant is Immanuel Kant. Karol Wojtyła's disciple, Jerzy Gałkowski, argues that according to Kant "there is a real and strong connection between morality and politics"<sup>38</sup> with the understanding of morality as an objectified practice, determined by unconditionally binding laws.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, "Kant does not accept the possibility of excluding politics from the bracket of morality or adopting different principles for these domains."<sup>40</sup> What is the source of moral obligation, obliging also those in political power? It cannot be nature or human nature, since they are "subject to the laws of necessity, determinism,"<sup>41</sup> while the sense of duty is an appeal to freedom. Kant, in Gałkowski's interpretation, "not only shows freedom as a property of man necessarily connected with duty, but the cognition of this obligated freedom is for man both an experience and an imposition of duty."<sup>42</sup> Duty does not refer to historically variable convention, it is not a duty to someone - such as a ruler, or to a human-established instance, but "demands reaching to the very foundations of being."<sup>43</sup> In the search for these foundations, "Kant proposes [...] not to predetermine the goal, but to determine by reason capturing a priori laws, the necessary laws of our action. [...] These laws are simply moral principles, and thus determine

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<sup>37</sup> See *Autorytarny populizm w XXI wieku. Krytyczna rekonstrukcja*. Ed. F. PIERZCHAŁSKI, B. RYDZIŃSKI. Warszawa 2017, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/warschau/13931.pdf> [accessed 14.02.2024].

<sup>38</sup> J. GAŁKOWSKI: "Kant o związku moralności z polityką." In: *Kant wobec problemów współczesnego świata* [Kant and the Problems of the Contemporary World]. Eds. J. MIKŁASZEWSKA, P. SPRYSZAK. Kraków 2006, p. 168.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 169.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 168.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 170.



the moral value of every action, including political ones.”<sup>44</sup> And since, as has been shown, the deepest basis of morality cannot be a naturalistically and therefore deterministically understood order of being, because this would contradict the principle of freedom of the will, then, Gałkowski concludes, “Kant’s claims are inspired by a religious view.”<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, what could be more natural for a “distinctly European”<sup>46</sup> way of thinking and valuing, than to base reflection on the foundation of axiology derived from the religious tradition of Christianity? It is worth taking another look at Zygmunt Bauman’s arguments at this point of consideration. He writes that: “identity is more fully defined by the values Europeans cherish than by any other of their characteristics”<sup>47</sup>; further that “the distinctive feature of European values is to believe that values ‘make sense’ only if seen as all-inclusive, and are indefensible unless applied to all humanity”<sup>48</sup>; and finally that “[t]hese values are ‘distinctly European’ because they were thought out, articulated and refined in the part of the planet that tends to be described as ‘Europe proper’, and their articulation and refinement cannot be separated from the course of Europe’s history.”<sup>49</sup>

But if this is the case, why does the author of such an ambitious attempt to define European identity not once mention in his book the deep bond between European culture and the history of faith and the Church?

Bauman’s stance seems to blatantly contradict the call of the Final Declaration of the First Synod of Bishops on Europe: “Europe today must not simply appeal to its former Christian heritage: it needs to be able to decide about its future in conformity with the person and message of Jesus Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this is the result and also a testimony of “the loss of Europe’s Christian memory and heritage, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 172.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 169.

<sup>46</sup> BAUMAN: *Europe. An unfinished adventure...*, p. 125.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>50</sup> FIRST SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR EUROPE OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS: *Final Declaration*, no. 2 (13.12.1991), [http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod/en/synodal\\_assemblies/1991---special-assembly-for-europe--so-that-we-might-be-witnesses.html](http://secretariat.synod.va/content/synod/en/synodal_assemblies/1991---special-assembly-for-europe--so-that-we-might-be-witnesses.html) [accessed 10.02.2024].

<sup>51</sup> JOHN PAUL II: *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Europa”* (28.06.2023), no. 7, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20030628\\_ecclesia-in-europa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html) [accessed 10.02.2024].

This kind of historical amnesia leads to ignoring the extremely important circumstance that “the Church has to offer Europe the most precious of all gifts, a gift which no one else can give: faith in Jesus Christ, the source of the hope that does not disappoint; (30) a gift which is at the origin of the spiritual and cultural unity of the European peoples and which both today and tomorrow can make an essential contribution to their development and integration.”<sup>52</sup>

Juxtaposed with scarcity of the axiological offer brought by the formal version of democracy discussed earlier, the spiritual and intellectual openness to the Christian tradition makes it possible to fill this axiological void, disturbingly close to moral nihilism. In paragraph 19 of his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, Pope John Paul II lists the most important values of which the Church is the source and advocate: “Many are the spiritual roots underlying the recognition of the value of the human person and his inalienable dignity, the sacredness of human life and the centrality of the family, the importance of education and freedom of thought, speech and religion, the legal protection of individuals and groups, the promotion of solidarity and the common good, and the recognition of the dignity of labour. These roots have helped lead to the submission of political power to the rule of law and to respect for the rights of individuals and peoples [...] these inspiring principles have historically found in the Judeo-Christian tradition a force capable of harmonizing, consolidating and promoting them. This is a fact which cannot be ignored; on the contrary, in the process of building a united Europe there is a need to acknowledge that this edifice must also be founded on values that are most fully manifested in the Christian tradition. Such an acknowledgment is to everyone’s advantage.”<sup>53</sup>

Rejecting or ignoring all this richness, coupled with an attempt to identify European identity solely with the tradition of secular rationalism and its associated principles of justice, solidarity, freedom and democracy, seen as embedded solely in a voluntary social contract, becomes a cause of confusion and disillusionment more than a source of hope. In *Instrumentum laboris*, a document summarizing the Synod of Bishops it was noted: “There are many troubling signs which at the beginning of the third millennium are clouding the horizon of the European continent, which despite great signs of faith and witness and an atmosphere undoubtedly more free and unified, feels all the weariness which historical events — recent and past — have brought about deep within the hearts of

<sup>52</sup> *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 18.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 19.

its peoples, often causing disappointment.”<sup>54</sup> In reference to these words, John Paul II noted with concern: “This is the context for those attempts, including the most recent ones, to present European culture with no reference to the contribution of the Christian religion which marked its historical development and its universal diffusion.”<sup>55</sup>

The result of such actions is certainly not strengthening of hope, but rather deepening of uncertainty and loss of clear criteria for judging people’s behavior. This situation places a particularly heavy responsibility on people who know what they believe in and have clear criteria for right and wrong. It is they, not the proponents of a morally indifferent balance between conflicting worldviews, who should become the conscience of the nation. This was noted more than half a century ago by Gilbert K. Chesterton. In his book *A Miscellany of Man*, he wrote, among other things: “A fixed creed is absolutely indispensable to freedom. For while men are and should be various, there must be some communication between them if they are to get any pleasure out of their variety. [...] If we all start with the agreement that the sun and moon exist, we can talk about our different visions of them. [...] But if once it be held that there is nothing but a silver blur in one man’s eye or a bright circle (like a monocle) in the other man’s, then neither is free, for each is shut up in the cell of a separate universe. But, indeed, an even worse fate, practically considered, follows from the denial of the original intellectual formula. Not only does the individual become narrow, but he spreads narrowness across the world like a cloud; he causes narrowness to increase and multiply like a weed. [...] Instead of the liberty of dogma, you have the tyranny of taste.”<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere, Chesterton argues unequivocally in favor of clear and precise thinking, one form of which is dogma, and at the same time against vague and ambiguous thinking, vacillating between extremes and most willingly giving heed to the most varied superstitions. In an argument vividly reminiscent of Plato’s distinction between ἐπιστήμη (episteme) and Δόξα (doxa), the author writes: “Some people do not like the word ‘dogma.’ Fortunately, they are free, and there is an alternative for them. [But] there are two things, and two things only, for the human mind, a dogma and a prejudice. [...] Our age is, at its best, [...] an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. [...] Now a direction [of thought] is always far more fantastic than a plan. [...]

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, no. 7.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem, no. 9.

<sup>56</sup> G. K. CHESTERTON: “The Sectarian of Society.” In: G. K. CHESTERTON: *A Miscellany of Man* (1912), [https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2015/pg2015-images.html#link2H\\_4\\_0017](https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2015/pg2015-images.html#link2H_4_0017) [accessed 13.02.2024].

And this is a [truth] about the effect of our modern vagueness in losing and separating men as in a mist. It is not merely true that a creed unites men. Nay, a difference of creed unites men—so long as it is a clear difference. A boundary unites. [...] But our age would turn these creeds into tendencies. [That is why people are] far more unfit to understand each other than before.”<sup>57</sup>

Europe of values — as an object of hope for all those who are uncomfortable with a project built on an axiologically unfilled framework of formal democratic principles — is a cultural environment similar to the one imagined by Chesterton: Europe united by difference of faith, in other words — an ecumenical Europe in the broadest possible sense. The source of this kind of hope is the effort to promote and spread such attitudes that take the attitude of faith seriously, not to say fundamentally. This is by no means fundamentalism in the sense of meaning the intolerant absolutization of an arbitrarily chosen hierarchy of values, but rather an existential maturity consisting in the conscious and deliberate choice of such values that have a foothold in a reality that is more durable and solid than the rules of the social contract, which depend on historically changing circumstances. Such a foothold can only be found in transcendence. Choosing this hope means siding with the Europe of the future, which will be Europe of mature people, strong in faith, open to the voice and needs of those who believe differently, sincerely concerned with the fate of those who have lost their faith and are stuck in the superstitions mass-produced by the modern culture.

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<sup>57</sup> G. K. CHESTERTON: *What’s Wrong with the World*, chap. III, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1717/1717-h/1717-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0004](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1717/1717-h/1717-h.htm#link2H_4_0004) [accessed 13.02.2024].

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KRZYSZTOF TOMASZ WIECZOREK

## Le drame de deux espérances : le projet séculier contre le projet chrétien pour l'Europe

### Résumé

L'Europe est une communauté de peuples et de nations dont l'identité reste encore en grande partie indéfinie. Le projet d'unité européenne est en cours, et sous l'influence des circonstances historiques, il subit des changements successifs et de nouvelles inspirations. L'un des moments clés de l'histoire européenne au troisième millénaire a été l'élargissement de l'UE en 2004 avec l'adhésion de dix nouveaux pays, dont la République de Pologne. Chacun des nouveaux pays est entré dans la communauté avec ses propres espoirs et attentes. En Pologne, peu avant l'adhésion, une question fondamentale se posait : quelle Pologne dans quelle Europe ? Les réponses à cette question se sont formées sous l'influence de deux types d'inspirations : la première reposait sur la vision d'une nouvelle évangélisation du continent, dans laquelle la Pologne pourrait participer grâce à sa fidélité chrétienne séculaire (*Polonia semper fidelis*) ; la seconde faisait référence aux traditions séculières et idéaux d'une Europe rationnelle, juste, libre et démocratique, tout en maintenant une neutralité axiologique. Ce texte présente, du point de vue polonais, le déchirement dramatique entre ces deux projets pour l'Europe de demain.

**Mots-clés :** Europe, Pologne, espoir, christianisme, valeurs



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KRZYSZTOF TOMASZ WIECZOREK

Il dramma di due speranze:  
il progetto secolare contro il progetto cristiano per l'Europa

Riassunto

L'Europa è una comunità di popoli e di nazioni con un'identità ancora non pienamente definita. Il progetto di unità europea è in corso, e sotto l'influenza delle circostanze storiche, subisce cambiamenti continui e nuove ispirazioni. Uno dei momenti chiave della storia europea nel terzo millennio è stato l'allargamento dell'UE nel 2004 con l'adesione di dieci nuovi paesi, tra cui la Repubblica di Polonia. Ciascuno dei nuovi paesi è entrato a far parte della comunità con il proprio pacchetto di speranze e aspettative. In Polonia, poco prima dell'adesione, si poneva una domanda fondamentale: quale Polonia in quale Europa? Le risposte a questa domanda sono state plasmate da due tipi di ispirazioni: la prima si basava sulla visione di una nuova evangelizzazione del continente, in cui la Polonia avrebbe potuto partecipare grazie alla sua fedeltà secolare al cristianesimo (*Polonia semper fidelis*); la seconda faceva riferimento alle tradizioni secolari e agli ideali di un'Europa razionale, giusta, libera e democratica, che mantenga la neutralità assiologica. Il testo presenta, dalla prospettiva polacca, il drammatico contrasto tra questi due progetti per l'Europa del futuro.

**Parole chiave:** Europa, Polonia, speranza, cristianesimo, valori