

# The Zenith of the European Peoples

James V. Schall

*The three-day war on Cyprus was typical of two centuries of European nation-state aberration. It might, for example, have been 1914. Enthusiastic volunteers loaded into trains, a crusading spirit contrasted with the other side's chauvinism.*

*Appeals were made to God, the homeland, and honor. Despair was matched by patriotic exaltation, slogans mindful of Bismarck's Kulturkampf, race hatred, death wishes.*

*It was a resurrection of Europe at odds with itself, dazzled and deluded, but lacking in its former grandeur and harmony.*

—Karl-Heinz Janssen, *Die Zeit*, July 26, 1974

Some very old, almost forgotten memories are suddenly flickering across the European scene these days—the Crusades, the Balkans, August, 1914, Islam, Haile Selassie, Persia, the Holy Land, Suez, Ireland, Scotland, Portugal, the islands off Aden in the Red Sea. There are even reports of Chinese submarines stationed in Albania. *Albania!* This was the heroic little country of early World War II. From Albania in 1799 a young Mehemed-Ali came to Egypt with the Ottoman Sultan's army to try to stop Bonaparte's invasion. Then, having learned something from this experience, Mehemed proceeded with his son Ibrahim to establish the first purely Arab power against Turkey. The oil crisis and Cyprus serve to remind us that Europe was as much the creation of Islam as it was of the barbarians, while the structure and frontiers of the present Middle Eastern states are the product of the French and the British.

Europe is a place large enough to have experienced most of the tragedies and glories of mankind

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—indeed, there is something in Europe that persistently identifies itself precisely with "mankind." Still, it is young enough to have forgotten its own experience in every generation since its unexpectedly successful resistance to Persia—a war almost lost because of the failure of the Greek city-states to act in concert. Thucydides recognized at the very beginning the need to study history, to be aware that the things that happened once might happen again. If we read his powerful chapter on the Revolution on Corcyra, with memories of what we have seen lately in Belfast, or Santiago, or Cyprus, Biafra, Bangladesh, Indonesia, or Vietnam, we will be slow to doubt the persistence and pertinence of the European heritage, even less likely to accept uncritically the notion of progress—another late European idea. (And if we should look for Corcyra on a map, we shall find it under the name of Corfu, just off the southern Albanian coast.)

Europe, whether we care to admit it or not, is the continent and the spirit out of which has come the peculiar and by no means necessary shape of the modern world. No better proof of this can be found than by trying to list the significant political and intellectual leaders outside Europe (in this sense, Russia and America are European) who were *not* educated in Europe or by European structures. I suppose mostly Japanese names could be listed, but their very naming serves to prove the point, since Japan is the one nation that sought to preserve its autonomy precisely by borrowing from Europe what it thought essential. Moreover, the very fact that China, from which Japan once received much of its original culture, conceives itself to be "Marxist" would seem almost obscene were it not that Marxism, however invalidly, claims to be a "science"; that is, claims to belong to a European tradition of universalism which, when accepted, does not entail acceptance of "Europe" as well.

We ordinarily speak of the modern world in terms

of those scientific and technological discoveries that enable us to understand and utilize the physical universe for our human purposes. Genesis says that the earth is for man, as did Aristotle. Europe transformed this idea into a project to be accomplished, and found the means to accomplish it. Thus the abolition of slavery was probably more a technological event than a political or moral one. But the modern world also developed those economic and political institutions associated with the American, French, and Industrial revolutions, which suggested the possibility of providing freedom as well as riches, and providing them to *all* men. And we should point out that the nation-state, surely the most universal and imitated institution outside the Atlantic world today, is strictly a European discovery. The modern world, then, is largely the record of the development and now, perhaps, the failure of these European discoveries.

We cannot, however, grasp the full impact of Europe if we begin as late as 1500 A.D. The dreams and experience of some kind of international order go back to our Hellenistic, Roman, and papal heritages. There is much of this, as well as of the notion of the "nation" and the destiny of peoples, in our Jewish origins. Christianity, however, in its various forms taught us to be missionary, to think of the world as a place we go out to, to convert, to explain differences between right and wrong, to distinguish true from false gods, whatever variety they might be. In this sense those who speak of both Islam and Marxism as Christian heresies are correct. Christianity has fundamentally taught man about the Kingdom of God and the abidingness of human sin and evil.

It is no wonder that wherever the European spirit touches, both a worldly kingdom and a heavenly one are proclaimed. Europeans are not at rest at home. Because they have read *The Republic*, Matthew, and Augustine, wherever they set foot the kingdoms of this world are questioned and disturbed—even their own. The European heresy, the one that is invariably European, is the one which proposes the elimination of personal and political evil by a rearrangement of political, social, familial, economic, psychological, or, lately, genetic structures. Classical European sanity insists that man is not to be "made" anew by his own efforts, even though it also says that something in man still needs renewal. Aristotle clarified it all when he remarked: "Politics does not make man to be man, but taking man from nature, it makes him to be *good* man." This makes the essential aspect of our worldly enterprise one of moral choice for men who are mortal. That is, there is no lasting kingdom of this world; what we do in this world has ultimate significance.

To acknowledge the debt owed to Europe today is not, I realize, fashionable, even though there are few essential criticisms of Europe,

no matter how radical, that do not originate in Europe itself—except for the abiding and ancient Oriental philosophies that make of the world an illusion. Thus it is popular to blame the ills of the world on European history, politics, and economics while implying that the European dream of a better and freer world is now being submerged in the realities of underdevelopment, population, and poverty outside of the European context. That is to say, we are now being informed that the modern world was itself an ill-conceived project (something reactionary conservatives have been telling us at least since the French Revolution). Yet this older past of Europe questions us more and more. Everywhere we see the resurrection of economic and political notions once associated with feudalism and considered obsolete—ideas of fair price, controlled competition, the downgrading of merchants, fairness, control of products, corporatism, care of land and nature, the devaluation of material goods as ways or conditions of happiness.

Those oft-quoted lines from Edmund Burke's famous *Reflections on the Revolution in France* force other questions to the fore:

Nothing is more certain, than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things that are connected with manners and civilization, have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles; and indeed were the result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion.

We must wonder if there is some connection between the failure of the modern world—or at least our increasing secular belief that it is failing—and the loss of these two spirits that Burke defined to be at the heart of Europe. Europe has constantly reminded mankind, even when it did not itself observe its own ideals, that not just any life was worth living, but only the good life, the life of justice, virtue, and knowledge, the life of manners and faith and, yes, even holiness.

During the nineteenth century no figure was more derided than Pius IX. And of his ill-fated statements the most often cited to indicate his reactionary views is the last of the *Syllabus of Errors*: "The Roman Pontiff can and ought to be reconciled and conjoined with liberalism, progress, and modern civilization." For this position, which the Pope condemned because of notions of authority, limits on the state, and cultural attitudes, he has been roundly condemned. Some one hundred years later it seems ironical indeed to find the latest and newest "theses" finally speaking much like Pius IX:

Now without going beyond the specific dangers of population growth, war, and environmental deterioration, I must identify a fundamental element

in the external situation—not so much a fourth independent threat as an unmentioned challenge that lies behind and within all the particular dangers we have singled out for examination. This is the presence of science and technology as the driving forces of our age (Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Human Prospect*, 1974).

Heilbroner's case for authoritarian government, added to his fear of modern civilization, is a troubled criticism of our time astonishingly analogous to the troubled criticism of Pius IX. No turnabout could be more astonishing than this. In the middle of the 1970's we are no longer excited about walking on the Moon or on Mars. Doomsday has become the property, not of the Roman Pontiff, but of assorted scientists, nature lovers, and politicians.

Anyone who has recently spent time in Europe will realize that Europe as a reality and as an ideal has never seen itself in greater crisis—even though being in crisis is a typically European condition, as anyone will acknowledge who reads, say, Augustine or Bernard of Clairvaux, Luther or Voltaire, Nietzsche or Thomas Mann or Kafka, anyone who knows of Saladin, Savonarola, Gustavus Adolphus, Ghengis Khan, Napoleon, Bismarck, Benedict XV, Clemenceau, Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, or De Gaulle. Just how Europe conceives itself at this time, consequently, strikes me as a worthwhile subject of reflection. The *Times* of London, in a long and perceptive editorial on the Middle East, stated bluntly the long-range significance of Europe's present crisis:

It already seems likely that 1973 will be remembered by posterity as one of the key dates of the Twentieth Century, the century in which the domination of the world by the people of European origin reached its zenith and went into steep decline.

The two world wars destroyed the old European powers and delivered the world leadership into the hands of two offshoots of European culture in America and Russia. But they also destroyed the ideology of European domination, and introduced a new ideology according to which all peoples are equal. The post-War world was fragile because of the crying contradictions between the ideology and the reality, which was characterized politically by superpower dominance and economically by the overwhelming advantage of the manufacturing nations over those which produced mainly raw materials. In 1973 the states producing one particular raw material—oil—discovered that they held the manufacturing world in their power. They made this discovery because a majority of them belonged to a single cultural group, the Arabs, who held the manufacturing world responsible for the occupation of their territory, and stumbled on their countervailing power ("A Year After the Yom Kippur War," October 7, 1974).

That the *Times* should be the one to note the decline of the European peoples is, of course, of some significance. On the other hand, "decline" is a relative term. If Europe's present crisis merely means that other civilizations (now learning finally the Japanese experience in their own ways) are becoming more powerful and rich, this can even be applauded, provided the kinds of power replacing Europe do not represent a face against "humanity" as such.

Yet it is the fear that the decline of Europe would facilitate precisely the rise of systems alien to the spirit of the gentleman and religion, against the good and free life Europe at its best stood for to all men—it is this fear that underscores Europe's increasing comparative weakness. Since World War II we have become accustomed to marvel at the rapid growth of Europe and to wonder why other powers besides Japan could not imitate it. We *expected* Europe to recover and develop rapidly. We were sure too that Europe would naturally evolve into a continental power able to carry its own weight in the world. Indeed, there was no reason for it not to become the greatest continental power of them all. A general political system, a common army, economy, labor market, bureaucracy, and foreign policy were presupposed. And the groundwork in NATO, EDC, the Common Market, the Parliament of Europe, Euratom—Geneva and Brussels—seemed solidly laid.

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That such a European power was not developed can probably be left at the door of the British and the French, though all had a hand in the affair, not excluding Russia, Japan, and the United States. Americans in particular assumed some eventual European force would replace continental fragmentation. The cold war provided a common enemy, though the Soviets, fortunately or unfortunately, never really frightened Europeans enough into taking the final step.

Thus, by the three-quarters mark of the twentieth

century it seems more improbable than ever that there will be a "Europe" in the sense assumed desirable and natural up to now. Inflation, energy, and political crises internal to each European state have reversed the impetus toward a more solid general framework. This trend will probably continue, in spite of the proposed first European parliamentary elections in 1980. The word is out that parliaments no longer work. In 1974 practically every Western European country faced a general political crisis—England's strikes and elections, Italy's strikes and finances, the Brandt scandal in Germany, Pompidou's death and general strikes, the Swiss efforts to reduce foreign workers, revolts in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, the Gilstrup hassle in Denmark, failure of the Dutch to produce a parliament. Philippe Lemaître was quite correct:

The community has been steadily weakening for two years: first, it was badly shaken by the monetary and energy crisis and then crippled as a result of disagreement on how to tackle the ensuing difficulty. The only new element in the still troubled European scene is the change of guard in France and West Germany (*Le Monde*, reprinted in *The Guardian Weekly*, September 14, 1974).

The Wilson victory in the October British elections is clearly a defeat for Europe, while Giscard d'Estaing appears weaker than anticipated, and Schmidt stronger but with a political base far from stable.

The tragedy at present is that Europe, which so much of the world desperately needs, is concerned mainly with taking care of itself. "Western Europe is much too occupied with itself to influence world affairs much," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* lamented (June 12, 1974). "The consequences of this inability could be serious. We may yet have to pay the price politically." And "to pay the price politically" in European tradition means not merely to lose influence, but to rearrange power vis-à-vis the rest of the world or to change internal political forms within individual European states, corresponding to external influence. Aristotle's *Politics* remains still a rather useful description of this relationship.

The most significant sign of a basic change is the decline of parliamentary systems. This is undoubtedly connected with the loss of science and economics as the master disciplines, disciplines which in large part created "modern" Europe. The philosophies of stability and conservation have changed those spiritual and human objects for which modern European man was made. We no longer believe in progress; rather we believe we have progressed too far. This belief may not be all bad, but it can only result in a weakening of Europe before a yet more powerful Russia and make Europe seem like a selfish giant to a Third World still bent on development

and expansion. What we should note is that economic growth and political freedom are no longer the uncontested goals of European man.

Today, we must acknowledge, it is more likely to be the radical, Marxist, or liberal who argues for authoritarian forms of government to combat what is considered the logical results of the expansion of European science and political forms throughout the world. (It is interesting to note that those governmental forms that insist most on absolute personal integrity of politicians and merchants in their public and private lives are almost invariably authoritarian or totalitarian.) We are thus accepting a return to those legalized and customary controls over change against which the modern commercial and industrial revolutions posed themselves. That is, we no longer believe in a bigger, vaster world than the one conceived by our present scientific and political knowledge. The energy crisis and its related fears have converted whole schools of intellectuals to a proposition that the ordinary "desires" of the masses in their political and economic expressions are the causes of turmoil in nature and city. If we wish to see where authoritarian political theory is coming back into Western culture, this is where to look today.

In Europe, however, the immediate threat is not yet the conservationist one, but the radical socialist analysis, which is itself, as Pius IX and Robert Heilbroner both well argued, part of the "modern civilization" causing our problems. What is actually replacing or debilitating European parliaments is a combination of invulnerable labor unions; untouchable governmental bureaucracies (themselves unionized); large-scale business whose vision and ability transcend the national state; and local lobbies, such as those in agriculture, which organize to protect themselves from international movements and requirements. Nationalism is being conceived as the distribution of the status quo in strictly egalitarian and bureaucratic manners. The American concept of a strict proportion of jobs and income to each group in relation to its size and the size of the gross national product seems even further advanced in much of European thought. Socialism, which began as an international class-brotherhood movement in Europe, is ending up largely as the spokesman of the isolationist, protectionist state, in which the lower, working, and middle classes are protected from any responsibility outside their nation-state. The problem of "production" is no longer pertinent—a proposition the national socialists and the environmentalists agree on. The European universities are in many ways dominated by dogmatic leftist faculties in which the very possibility of alternative views is largely excluded. (Cf. A. Knight, "A Time to Ask Questions: A Survey of West Germany," *The Economist*, December 1, 1973; H. Regnery, "The Malaise

of the German University," *Modern Age*, Spring, 1974.) All bureaucracies of European socialist parties and unions are being taken over by this approach.

For this reason Europe's military posture is of utmost significance. In a series of conferences in Vienna, Helsinki, and Geneva the Russians have managed to force the Europeans into accepting the de facto European boundaries without a single major reciprocal concession. The Russian army in Eastern Europe has recently been modernized. The Russian navy, which is probably the world's best, now looks to a straight passage from the Black Sea, the Aegean, through Suez, the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, and around to its Pacific home base. South Yemen has a Marxist government, while Somalia across the Gulf of Aden has considerable Russian technical and military assistance. There is little that Europe can do about this in its present disunity.

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By itself, European military capacity is very weak. There will be no more English or French action in the Middle East, or anywhere else. And, as Europe goes further left, the temptation to come to terms with Russia on Eastern Europe and oil will be very great. It would be a very neat package deal: to eliminate most remaining “democratic” influences within Europe and accommodate Eastern Europe in a broader socialist confederation in exchange for oil and raw materials. The Italian Communist Party even sees value in establishing Church-State relations on the model of Eastern Europe to bring in Catholics to the Marxist view. No intelligent European or Russian, or Arab for that matter, forgets for a moment that present Arab strength and European freedom are strictly a question of balance of power. Michel Debré, the former French Defense Minister, gave this recent estimate of the direction Europe is taking:

At the present moment, I doubt the actual military capacity of many of the European nations. As we feared, the appearance of the Atlantic integration in numerous cases hides a military re-

nouncement. . . . Finally, I would dare to speak with prudence on the political scene: neutralism has made real progress. . . . As to the sentiment for European defense, I say, weighing my words, not absolutely that it does not exist, but it has considerably diminished. Do you see the Nordic lands moved by a threat on the Mediterranean south? Do you see the Mediterranean south moved by a menace in the Nordic north? I prefer to go no further. . . . (“Le sentiment de la défense européenne,” *Le Monde*, September 7, 1974).

The great military fact of Europe is its political unimportance and its corresponding lack of any real military accomplishment.

I recall talking with a colonel in the American Army near Kitzingen in West Germany about ten years ago. He was an artillery commander attached to a mechanized division. “Our job here,” he told me that fall afternoon, “is to hold the line for twenty-four hours to give retaliation forces a chance to be launched. If the Russians ever cross the Czech or East German borders, we would all be wiped out, but that’s our job, to hold for twenty-four hours.” A decade later, I suspect, the prospect has significantly changed to make the Russians wonder whether, if they *could* get to the Rhine in twenty-four hours, the Germans themselves would insist the deterrence forces *not* be used. Speed of conquest against weak NATO forces may just favor invasion in today’s climate.

Therefore, as *The Economist* suggested, when Tito dies the gamble may just be worth it. Granted these arguments and the pacifist influence of those scientific, university, and religious groups which argue that nuclear weapons not be used under any circumstances—including those that would foreclose the exercise of freedom—the prospect of a quick and successful invasion of Germany seems reasonably attractive. It is perhaps the surest way to guarantee that the Americans would *not* use their weapons even if the American ground forces in Europe were wiped out. In any case, the logic of this argument reinforces the tendencies of the European Left both in economic and foreign policy. This is why, too, the direct contacts of Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Brezhnev are viewed by the Europeans as less than reassuring. What European could doubt that, given such a lightning move, Mr. Brezhnev would receive a favorable response, not only in America, but especially in Germany and Europe, when he asked the American President—as, of course, he would—to “talk” before nuclear reaction?

This argument strikes me as having much merit. The only caution the Russians have is that they might just achieve most of their objectives without this invasion if the forms of government especially in southern Europe and England, Europe’s under-

belly and northwestern flank, continue to change in the socialist direction. And as we have not heard the last of the French and German radical theoreticians in the parties, universities, and unions, that might still seem the safest to the ever cautious Russians.

Thus with parliament and party in decline, with the energy crisis moving us to more controlled social atmospheres, with the isolationist-protectionist-inflationist moods of European labor and agriculture ever on the increase, the prospects for Europe in the classical sense are ever dimmer. The so-called new "social compact" which all European governments talk of to replace real parliamentary and political institutions is not merely an open admission that unions and lobbies and bureaucracies are stronger governments but the first step to a more complete statization at precisely the disastrous nation-state level, not the continental or international one. Nationalization in Europe is today a strategy on the Left to produce a de facto socialism by taking over the costly economic failures of business and by refusing to face the overpricing of European goods based on full employment and distribution theories. (Cf. "The Best Result," *Times*, October 9, 1974.)

In this context the challenge of the Shah of Iran and the shrewd Sheik Yemani to build an Arab industrial power is both logical and possible. Industry has already discovered that its real future probably lies outside of Europe. This would be considered progress in terms of the world's real needs were it not that present Left political dogma in Europe is isolationist in practice and theory. Colin Clark has, I think, put his finger on the root cause of the present difficulties. Socialist-Marxist doctrine both in Europe and in the Third World, where it is disproportionately influential, basing itself paradoxically on the national state, does not understand the nature of trade, nor can it conceive of comparative economic development in terms other than those of exploitation.

The irremediable error of Marxism is its hostility to all forms of trade, teaching that trade must represent exploitation. This is based on the concept that what one party gains from trade the other must be losing, and Marxists cannot understand that both parties may gain from a trade transaction. This error, one regrets to say, goes back as far as Aristotle ("Aid for Development," *The Intercollegiate Review*, Summer, 1974).

The attack on consumerism and trade, science and technology, growth and change has an ancient history in Europe.

The final problem to be touched lies with the European south. The forms of government in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Greece have never really followed the northern European models. In southern Europe, and more and more in France and even England, Marxist-oriented parties are managing to present themselves as the only real alternatives to the existing regimes. The rapidity of change in Greece and Portugal is undoubtedly a warning to northern Europe that it must be realistic in its own backyard. Undoubtedly, the death of Tito will be a turning point. Milovan Djilas recently predicted that in fifty years Russia would be broken up into separate states. But it seems certain that a similar fate is more immediately threatening Djilas's own land. There is no question that the re-Sovietization of Yugoslavia and Albania would soon shift the Italians and the Greeks to a form of political rule in which the Left dominated. In other words, the failure of "Europe" to organize itself has left each nation prey to forces within and without itself that are too large and too powerful finally to be handled by the nation-state system in which Europe is now hiding. With the decline of American power and will—for the Europeans the Vietnam war can only have one meaning—there is no one to fill the vacuum within Europe itself, at least no Europe.

The zenith of the European peoples, then, may well have been reached. The Arabs are not wrong in sensing this. Cyprus was symbolic in being the first piece of ground reconquered by Islam on the fringes of Europe since the heyday of the Ottoman Turk. But there is, perhaps, a better sign of this zenith. Europe and America no longer want the world to expand and grow, and even Russia can produce and expel a Solzhenitsyn who would preach such a doctrine. But comparative population statistics clearly demonstrate the proportionate decline of European and American numbers. In other words, the élan of growth and power to accomplish levels of technology and civilization at sizes and complexities beyond the capacities of the middle of the twentieth century is dying among the European peoples. This zenith is as much spiritual as political and economic.

One last thing remains to be noted. The belief that peoples and civilizations can have "zeniths" is itself a European idea. So is the belief that men are not controlled by the fates, nor by their own beliefs in what is possible, nor, in short, by their own "zeniths."