



Dear Praying Friends in Europe,

Whose is the story of the origins of Europe? ...of the “European” values of freedom and peace? or of the process of European integration?

At the recent Swedish Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, parliamentarians heard an alternative to the secular narrative on the origins of Europe which marginalises God. Then at the State of Europe Forum, participants heard a further challenge to the view that values of peace, freedom and human rights were a fruit of the Enlightenment in the 18th century once the ‘superstitions of religion could be sidelined by reason’.

Schuman Centre senior researcher Evert Van de Poll’s talk to the politicians followed on from my own reflections on how Europe had become a “house of squatters”, indwelt by people unaware of who had laid the foundations of the European house and paid the price for the liberties we enjoy today. Although the ancient Greeks had used the name “Europe”, for them it was a small region overlapping part of today’s Greece and the southern Balkans. To their Greek minds, the idea of including the barbarians to the north into “Europe” would have been outrageous. For the Romans too, only the concept of “we Romans” and “our Graeco-Roman civilisation” counted – never “we Europeans”.

The story developed as Christian forces resisted the advance of Muslim armies in the 8th century, both in the west and the east. In his chronicle of the Battle of Poitiers, Isidore of Beja described the Franks and their allies as “Europeans”, using a collective name for a number of Christian peoples.

Father of Europe

The name ‘European’ meant being part of the Christianised world, a group of peoples sharing the same Christian faith. ‘Europe’ meant a sense of belonging to a whole that was bigger than one’s own nation. As more “barbarian” peoples embraced the Christian faith, so Europe began to grow: including Goths, Slavs, Vikings and Balts. A new Christian empire emerged, self-styled as the Holy Roman Empire and called “Europe” in ecclesiastical documents. Charlemagne, crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800, was known as *Pater Europae*, Father of Europe.

The story of Europe cannot be truthfully told without the story of Jesus at the centre. Every European politician should hear the story of the emergence of the idea of Europe as we understand it today. The same is true with the story of how freedom, peace and human rights emerged as European values. Enlightenment thinkers championing the right of every human being to certain civil rights and individual freedoms (such as freedom of expression or belief) drew, often unconsciously, on a long biblical tradition. This included

the Exodus and many passages about freedom; also the notion of natural law (i.e. the moral law written in each human heart and mind); as well as the revelation that each human is created in the image of God. Principles of equality, dignity, sanctity of life, brotherhood and solidarity are derived from this understanding of humanity. Which in turn became the foundations for human rights, propagated by early church fathers like Tertullian, and radical Protestants like Thomas Helwys, Richard Overton and Roger Williams, long before the Enlightenment thinkers repackaged these ideas.



Forgiveness

The European integration process was launched by the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950. This is the central story we tell each year at the State of Europe Forum. In Santa Clara Church in Stockholm, we retold this story about how Jesus’ instruction to “love one’s neighbour” compelled Robert

Schuman, the French foreign minister, to reach out in forgiveness and reconciliation to his German neighbours. That was how the European integration process began. Schuman was adamant that the European project could not just be an economic and technological process. It needed a soul, he insisted.

But, as I explained to the politicians at the prayer breakfast, we could hardly expect their competence to include finding a soul for Europe. It should be a task for the faith communities. Sadly, it’s a challenge our faith communities have too often neglected.

That task begins with us realising that these stories are *our* stories to tell. For all politics begins with our understanding of God, which determines our understanding of human identity, of society and how we should then live.

1. Let us pray for unity within the church so that it can give a coherent message to our nations and European institutions.
2. Let us pray also for ourselves to reclaim our true European heritage and to be authentic witnesses of the Bible and its truths for society.

We would like to draw your attention to those Christians whose are working within the public sector; in local government, public services and especially teachers, as they increasingly find their Christian values being not only challenged, but actually outlawed. We are regularly hearing about teachers who are being taken to court and some are ultimately losing their jobs for simply saying things like ‘well done girls’ as this may be seen as misgendering pupils who have decided to change their gender. Let’s remember to pray for them as they navigate these fundamental changes in society.

Additional Prayer Points:-

1. Pray for those in Russia who are speaking out against the war in Ukraine and are coming under increased persecution, with some being sentenced to long prison sentences.
2. Let us continue to pray for Turkey as this weekend sees the second round of the presidential elections.

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