

# EUROPE TODAY: UNDERSTANDING THE EU

## Christian roots and the ongoing search for Europe's soul

### 1. The EU story - Who won the peace?

#### Post-war scenario:

May 1945 - The Allies had won the war in Europe. Immediate goal had been reached. Scenarios of victory parades, cheering crowds, chocolate bars, soldiers kissing girls... but when the cheering faded, & life got back to 'normal'...?

Europe: major case of post-trauma stress disorder - millions of lives destroyed, uprooted, disorientated. Deep emotional & physical wounds, families, cities and nations torn asunder. ...bitter hatreds, deep mistrust

On what foundations could Europe be rebuilt? What social and political vision?

Nationalism had failed. Trade unions & communist parties in Italy, France and the Ruhr Valley tried to hinder reconstruction with crippling strikes.

The **Robert Schuman** story: born in Luxembourg, educated in Germany, changed nationality five times in lifetime(!); French MP before WW2, devout Catholic believer, 'monkish', arrested by Gestapo - 7 months in solitary confinement; escaped through 700kms occupied France to freedom, while in hiding, began from 1942 onwards to prepare for after war...

WHAT OPTIONS???

- How to break the cycle of vengeance and violence? A new order was needed - unprecedented in history
- Old Order - since 1648, competing nation states, balance of power, alliances - such a system had led to two world wars. Nationalism had failed: too strong (Germany), or too weak (France).

Holocaust challenged many peoples' faith in God. Others lost their faith in humankind. Schuman had lost neither. His personal faith played a major role in his politics, although not overtly. In Schuman's understanding, the roots of true democracy—the principle of equality, the practice of brotherly love, individual freedom, respect for the rights of the individual—all came from Christ's teachings.

'Democracy will either be Christian or it will not be. An anti-Christian democracy will be a parody which will sink into tyranny or into anarchy.'

True democracy required servanthood: serving the people and acting in agreement with the people. The goals had to start with peace and the means had to be works of peace.

'Loving your neighbour as yourself' was a democratic principle which, applied to nations, meant being prepared to serve and love neighbouring peoples.

What did that mean in international politics? regarding the French and the Germans, habitual enemies? If Christianity taught that children of the same God 'regardless of race, colour, social status or profession', states too should be treated as equals. The universal law of love and charity made every man our neighbour, he continued, and social relations in the Christian world had been based on this ever since. No race or nation could claim greater importance in God's eyes. No room for De Gaulle's nationalism.

Solidarity, subsidiarity and equality were therefore all values based on Christ's teaching, in Schuman's view.

Applied to the community of peoples, forgiveness and reconciliation—even with those presently seen as the enemy—were Christian imperatives.

For Schuman, a future, united Europe naturally had to be both Christian and democratic.

The European story was deeply rooted in the Christian story. Cut off from those roots, Europe would lose the foundations for equality, human dignity, tolerance and compassion. Europe, he came to see, had to become a 'community of peoples deeply rooted in basic Christian values'.

A spring 1948 train conversation introduced Schuman to a centre for the reconciliation of the nations in Caux, Switzerland. Trade unionists attending conferences there brought a new spirit of reconciliation and cooperation to labour/government clashes in northern France. A total of 3113 Germans took part in the Caux meetings 1946-50, including 83 government members, 400 trade unionists, 210 industrialists, 14 clergy (including bishops & theologians), 160 media representatives, 35 educationalists (including university rectors and professors) and 11 members of the Adenauer family.

Schuman: 'I don't know who to trust in the new Germany.' Buchman: 'We have some excellent men in Caux.'

9 May 1950: Three minutes that shaped Europe!

23 August 1951 Adenauer: 'men like you...and myself who are filled with the desire to build the new edifice of Europe on Christian foundations.'

## 2. The Brussels Affirmation - our Christian responsibility

### THE 1992 BRUSSELS AFFIRMATION

*We, a group of evangelical leaders from various organisations and churches in Europe, participating in the EUROPA 92 consultation, affirm:*

1. our need to re-evaluate our attitudes towards the process of European union in general and the European Community (now Union) in particular, and to repent from our apathy towards involvement in this process.
2. that the institution of government, whether of the single nation-state or multi-national (as with Rome or the EC/EU), is a God-ordained sphere of authority (Romans 13:1-7); and that civil servants and politicians are called 'ministers of God' (*diakonos* - Roms 13:4), and are to be obeyed when operating within their God-given authority.
3. that we as Christians have a primary duty to pray for such government officials, both of nation-states and of the EC/EU, for wise and just government, so that conditions of social 'quiet and peace' might facilitate the preaching of the gospel (1 Tim 2:1-4);
4. that the original vision of the EC/EU was not primarily economic, but rather, consistent with biblical values, aimed to reconcile the warring European nations into a true community of nations, laying aside their 'tribal squabbles';
5. that in the real world, results do not always follow intentions, and that several areas of concern need ongoing monitoring:
  - the tendency for economic and material values to dominate the decision-making processes of the EC/EU;
  - a potentially alarming democratic deficit in these processes, which could lead to misuse of power;
  - the speed of developments in recent years which increases the danger of autocratic decision-making;

- the possibility for non-biblical worldviews to dominate the spiritual values which will guide the new Europe;
- 6. that we must explore and grasp the numerous opportunities, created by the process of European unity,
  - for evangelism and mission in those lands with limited freedom of worship;
  - for collective action towards aiding the rebuilding of the newly liberated central and eastern European lands;
  - for evangelical Christians to help shape the spiritual character and values of the emerging new Europe.
- 7. that issues challenging European union and true community today, such as racism, nationalism, the rise of Islam, the influx of refugees, and the environment, can only be sufficiently responded to from a biblical perspective, which transcends race, nation and culture, offers a secure hope allowing for tolerance to rival worldviews, calls for God's people to hospitality and compassion, and requires wise stewardship of earth's resources;
- 8. and that the power of the gospel has both preserving (*salt*) and saving (*light*) dimensions, and therefore we must apply God's word to every sphere of life affected by sin, including politics, economics and social issues.

### 3. The EU institutions - exploring the labyrinth.

[www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)

Based on four treaties:

- ECSC - 1951 ( in effect 1952)
- EEC - 1957 (1958) - Treaty of Rome
- Euratom 1957 (European Atomic Energy Community)
- EU - 1992 (1993) - Maastricht Treaty

Main decision-making institutions:

**European Parliament (EP)** - represents the EU's citizens and is directly elected by them

**Council of the EU** - represents the member states (council of ministers)

**The European Council** - heads of state/government (PM &/or president) meets 4 x year, 'summit'

**The European Commission** - the EU's executive arm, independent of national government. 27 members, one from each member state, with a term of office of 5 years. Responsible for implementing the decisions of parliament and the council; running its programmes and spending its funds. The Commission drafts proposals for new European laws, which just be passed by the EP and the Council.

Has a staff of 23000 civil servants - administrators, translators, experts, secretarial staff. (fewer than a medium sized-European city).

### 4. Is the game over? today's crises...