

Curing the Europe-triggered Migraine: the Contribution of the Church

FLAMINIA GIOVANELLI

Let me first of all thank the organizers for inviting me to talk at such an interesting and, in some way, “experimental” Conference. So many distinguished (and young), both speakers and attendees, intimidate me a little, but I have so many reasons to be happy to be here, in this marvellous place, that I will try to do my best as much as my poor English allows me to do.

Many Connections

In fact, I could detect many connections between the place where we are, the subject that I have been asked to talk about and myself. And human life is made of relationships and connections, and discovering them gives particular flavour and significance to the everyday human events.

We are here in Thomas Mann’s summer house in Nida: this brought me immediately to think to another little town located in Italy where a young Thomas Mann spent a very fruitful time and where I used to spend a big part of the year, and still do. This little town, full of remembrances of the two brothers Mann, is Palestrina where Thomas spent a summer in 1897. Right in that little town, many years later (1947), he set the scene of the encounter between the protagonist of his *Doctor Faustus*, the musician Adrian Leverkühn, and the demon.

Another connection, which certainly determined the choice of the theme of our Conference, is the interest of Thomas Mann in Europe considered as

a cultural unity. This interest is witnessed by the many warnings to Europe – that he thought to be the only antidote to German nationalism – and particularly by two famous discourses addressed to young people, pronounced just in the years in which Nida hosted him during the summer.

Talking about Europe, I cannot but remember my European youth. This is another important connection that concerns me personally. In fact, I belong to the first generation of new Europeans, if I can say, as I lived in Brussels between 1958 and 1965! My Father was a pioneer of the European construction and myself and my classmates, of only 6 different nationalities, were pioneers of the Brussels European School. At that time Europe was not a migraine and we were curious to discover the culture, the languages and the different ways of life of our fellow students enjoying, maybe unconsciously, the atmosphere created by the ideals of the Founding Fathers of the European Community.

Finally, a more important connection has to do with the very argument of my presentation, that is to say the connection between Europe and the Catholic Church that I had the privilege and the joy to serve during 43 years. This bond has always been very strong during the 20th century throughout which the Popes, starting from Benedict XV during World War One, have always acted to bring peace in the Continent. In particular, after World War Two they manifested in different ways their convinced and strong Europeanism. This deep interest in Europe and in European peoples can be identified in three directions; the spiritual unity of Europe; the importance of the European identity; the rich network of the Catholic Church institutions at the European level.

The spiritual unity of Europe was the motivation that prompted Blessed Paul VI to proclaim St Benedict, already greeted by Pius XII “Father of Europe”, Patron of Europe. The proclamation occurred in October 1964, and at that very circumstance, Pope Paul wished that for “men today, those who can act and those who can only desire, the ideal of the spiritual unity of Europe be intangible and sacred and that they didn’t miss a help from above to realize it in a practical and opportune order”.

The position of St John Paul II on this question was even more resolute, due to his origins of man of the East. His insistence on the argument and the imaged way in which he put it are well known. Very often he spoke about the necessity of Europe to breath with both lungs and in one of his

major discourses on the theme, addressing the European Parliament in 1988, when the European Community gathered 12 countries, he said: “Other nations will certainly be able to join those that are represented here today. As the Supreme Pastor of the universal Church, myself a native of Eastern Europe and knowing the aspirations of the Slavic peoples, the other „lung“ of our common European homeland, my wish is that Europe, willingly giving itself free institutions, may one day reach the full dimensions that geography and, even more, history have given it”. A year later, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the wish of Saint John Paul was granted.

The second direction is the importance of the European identity, I should better say: the importance of the awareness of the European identity and the need to proclaim it openly. In short, this is the question of the Christian Roots and the wished reference to them in the (abandoned) European Constitution. This demand didn't, and doesn't, come only from the Catholic Church. It was, and is shared, by a number of secular intellectuals and, in a more or less conscious way, by a large part of the European people. In fact, the debate around the inclusion of a reference to the Christian Roots, beside the Greek-Enlightenment tradition already adopted, gave rise to a debate that has been defined “absurd”. Non recognizing the Christian Roots of Europe implies the repudiation of Christianity's public role, the exclusion of the engagement with Europe's religious tradition, which is so clear despite its denominational variations and, ultimately, it constitute a threat to democracy itself, “whose strength depends on the values that it promotes”. In final analysis, the choice to oppose or ignore the European Christian tradition, rather than to dialogue with it, could be judged “a sign of immaturity, if not indeed weakness”. I am personally afraid that this weakness if it is not the only cause of the present European crisis concerning the migration phenomenon is, at least, one of those that originated it.

Finally, the third direction in which we can detect the tight connection in between the Catholic Church and Europe is the network of Church institutions, official or spontaneous, centred in the religious or socio-political issues of the Continent. Its aim is to keep formally and concretely alive the link between the Church, on one side, and the European Nations and Institutions on the other. I will just point out the major ones. At the ecclesial level the largest institution is the Council of the Episcopal Conference of

Europe (CCEE) which embraces the representatives of forty five countries. In between its other aims, the Council has also the one of the “ecumenical collaboration for the unity of Christians” giving a living ecclesial witness in European society. I have willingly recalled this institution because it was born thanks to the vision and foresight of Card. Roger Etchegaray, who has been my boss for many years.

As the European Treaties do not envision the participation of the Churches as “observers” – as it is the case for the Council of Europe, where the Holy See develops, in this quality, a very intense activity from 1970 – it is only in 1980, the year after the first European elections, that the Bishops of the then 8 European Members States of the European Economic Community created the COMECE with the aim to “communicating to the European institutions and authorities the opinions and views of the Bishops’ Conferences of the Member States concerning European integration”. It should be noted that the diplomatic relationships between the Holy See and the European Economic Community were established since 1970: another signal of the importance given by the Church to the European construction. Beside these more “official” institutions there are others more “spontaneous”. I will point out only one because I have been very familiar with it during many years: the Conference of the European Justice and Peace Commissions.

Curing the Migraine: the Symptoms

The first step to cure any disease is to describe the symptoms, which in Europe are more or less evident. We have them before us and we all know them. Nevertheless, I will try to point out some because this is the first stage of the process of discernment offered by what we call the Social Teaching of the Church. A process with which I am familiar and that contemplates three consecutive stages: see; judge and act.

Two premises are necessary: All our world is today dominated by the phenomenon of globalization, so I think that our headache is largely due to this phenomenon which, in the words of St John Paul II, “*a priori*, is neither good nor bad. It will be what people make of it”.

Second premise: I dare to say that Europe is a migraine in itself, starting with the very difficulty of trying to define it. Pope Benedict XVI, who is a profound scholar of the issue of the European identity, answers this way

to the question about what is Europe: “Europe is not a continent that can be comprehended neatly in geographical terms; rather it is a cultural and historical concept”. Europe, in Benedict XVI–Joseph Ratzinger thinking, constitutes, for its citizens, a way of being together by different peoples that is founded on a mutual ordering of faith and reason. It is not possible to overstress the importance of this combination. In Pope Benedict’s view the positivist approach to nature and reason is a most important dimension of human knowledge but in and of itself it is insufficient to correspond to the “full breadth of the human condition” and, particularly, cannot fully express the case of Europe which “became Europe through the Christian faith, which carries the heritage of Israel in itself, but at the same time has absorbed the best of the Greek and Roman spirit into itself”. To live up to the richness of this cultural heritage cannot but give one a headache!

Coming back to the symptoms, just a few flashes:

It is not necessary to look at Eurostat complicated website to notice the aging crises and the population decline of Europe. It enough to think to our present families and to consider some amazing news: Germany misses midwives and teachers! This is what made Pope Francis say: “Europe which is now a “grandmother”, no longer fertile and vibrant”. In fact, if the Europeans were 738 million in 2015, forecasts show that we will be 734 million in 2030 and 707 million in 2050.

The rise of economic inequalities inside the European Countries and between the Member States of the European Union is another symptom. This is particularly alarming considering that in the Treaty of Lisbon we read that the “European Union shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy (and) shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, ... promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child”. Taking into account only the differences in wages, it is clear that Europe has found it quite difficult to realize its objectives. Recent data show that the top 20% of Europeans earn five times more than the bottom 20%. It is not surprising then that the European workers, in particular the young, move constantly from one country to another to find a better remuneration if not simply to find a job. To say nothing about the children at risk of poverty: they are 1 million more than 10 years ago!

The appointment last January of a Minister of Loneliness in the United Kingdom seems to me be another unmistakable symptom of our migraine. Isn't this an important indicator of a **diffused** social malaise? 14 percent of the population in Great Britain often or always feels lonely (with economic consequences, as it seems to cost UK employers up to \$3.5 billion annually). This is the "sad reality of modern life" and it doesn't affect only Europe if, for instance, a third of American citizens over the age of 45 feel lonely. Nevertheless, it is particularly shocking in Europe where the density of population is still quite high and where the culture is a "relational" one, facilitated by a network of many towns of little and medium size where the exchanges between inhabitants are customary.

The last symptom I will point out is very similar to the previous one, but more complex. This is the feeling of fear that is going through Europe. In fact, the terrorist attacks suffered by many of our European countries, the terrorist threat present all over the Continent, the industrial revolution 4.0 and the expected transformations in the world of work with job losses that will inevitably follow, the sensation of an increase of crime amplified by the media (in my Country the news reports that at least one woman is killed each day!), the deterioration of infrastructures (after the falling down of the Morandi bridge in Genoa, all the Italians are afraid to pass over any bridge or under any gallery), the well known migration crisis, these are all some of the causes that seem to justify this feeling of fear. The problem is that all this has moved into a considerable part of the European electorate and towards the "defence rhetoric" and "Fear appeal" which begins to dangerously resonate.

Finally: I am not in measure to know the reasons for Brexit, but it is clear enough that this event cannot but be considered a major, if not the major, symptom of the Europe-triggered migraine!

Curing the Migraine: Trying to Find the Causes of the Migraine

The second stage of the discernment process is the judgement of the situation, in this case, to try to understand what is at the origin of the symptoms. It will, of course, be a very quick overview, perhaps unsatisfactory and non-exhaustive. Nevertheless, the particular perspective from which I look at the issue, will hopefully bring some elements to understand the illness.

1. It is impossible to name only one cause for the origin of the population decline. After all, as usual, the causes are more than one. Anyhow, I would synthesize saying that in Europe we are experiencing a widespread existential fragmentation accompanied by a kind of a fear of the future. This situation concerns all sectors of society, but it is particularly relevant in regard to the family where human beings are generated (at least where they used to be!). And there is no doubt that “Europe is presently witnessing the grave phenomenon of family crises and the weakening of the very concept of the family”. This weakening pointed out by Saint John Paul II in 2003 couldn't be successfully counteracted over these years despite the fact that young people (in Italy 70%) still consider the family a pillar of their life, a large majority of them (in Italy 94%) are in favour of funding a family with children and that many of them (40% in Italy) would like to have more than 2 children. The issue of the family is crucial for the Catholic Church as it is demonstrated also by the two Synods for Family held at the Vatican in 2014 and 2015, 35 years after the first one held in 1980. So, in 2015, a few years ago, the Bishops couldn't but observe a growing and extreme individualism that weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit. But, on the other hand, the bishops also noticed the difficulties of the families coming from abroad: they “feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions. The negative impact on the social order is clear, as seen in the demographic crisis, in the difficulty of raising children, in a hesitancy to welcome new life”.

2. Passing to the second symptom, there is no need to insist on the potential explosive consequences that the growing of inequalities can produce. It may be difficult to say a definitive last word on such a complicated issue studied at the scientific level by many scholars all over the world, however it is undeniable that this particular situation has to do also, if not primarily, with the moral sphere. In fact, a progressive splitting up between the financial activities and the actual economy (work, production) and “predatory and speculative tendencies” became more and more evident with the last financial and economic crisis. In this situation, if there is an agreement on the need of more international regulations, it appears clearly that the economy, like every other sphere of human action, “needs ethics in order to function correctly” and, I will add “not any ethics, but an ethics which is people-centred”, otherwise money will rule and not serve. The point is

that the current vision of the human person is limited, “as the person is understood individualistically and predominantly as a consumer, whose profit consists above all in the optimization of his or her monetary income”. But, actually, the human person is characterized essentially by a rationality that resists a reductionist view of one’s basic needs, thus in the transmission of goods among persons there is always something more than mere material goods at play, as for instance, trust and equity. This is something that touches the moral sphere!

In our globalized world these considerations could be valid all over, but they are particularly relevant in Europe because our traditions, also in economy, were quite different.

3. As for the third signal of migraine, the diffused sense of malaise, I would like to point out a major cause that seems to me to be at its roots. As many of our contemporaries, the European men and women give the impression to be themselves the only measure of life. This could appear to be an achievement but, in the end, it is unsatisfactory. Many reasons contribute to the sense that human beings are suffering from narcissism and so often are inclined to depression (7% of the European population suffers from this disease that accounts for 26% in the European Union countries). I would like to mention just two expressions of this malaise. The first one is the strong power received from the new technologies so diffused in Europe, for which advances we have to rejoice, but “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well” and he forgets that “we are not God”. The second one is the exasperation of our “culture of rights”. Of course, we Europeans must be proud of our legal culture born, or, better said, “re-born” after World War II, but we must agree that, it has placed the human being at the centre in an exaggerated way. Slowly, in our secularized world, it has changed him into a totally “self-reliant” individual, who doesn’t correspond to the very nature of the human being.

4. Finally, I would like to consider the feeling of fear that many Europeans perceive. This has to do, in my opinion, with the loss of historical consciousness found in many European countries, and, thus, with the fear of losing our European identity. The issue of the historical consciousness, which in Europe is very complex because of the complexity that we have inherited from our past, is even more complicated by a paradox that we can observe in our Continent. In fact, in Europe we find some nations suffering from

an excess of memory and others from a voluntary lack of memory. In both cases, it is about a degenerated relationship with the tradition. This has consequences not only in the capacity to look towards the future but also in the responsibility to take charge of the present and, ultimately, it has as a consequence the fear to lose our cultural identity. This is why, from his perspective, St John Paul II talked about a “loss of Europe’s Christian memory and heritage, accompanied by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference” adding that “many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots and somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history”. With even more vibrant and, in a sense, pessimistic expressions, Pope Benedict talked about “a strange form of self-hate” of Europe and the West that “we can only consider pathological... In order to survive – said Pope Benedict visiting the Italian Senate- Europe needs a new, critical and humble acceptance of itself”.

Contribution of the Catholic Church to the Cure

We have arrived at the final stage of our discernment process: *action*.

I have made, from the very beginning of my presentation quite a number of references to what we call Pontifical Magisterium. For this last section, I will follow, particularly if not exclusively, the discourse that Pope Francis addressed to the participants to the Conference on the theme “(Re)Thinking Europe – a Christian Contribution to the Future of the European Project”, sponsored by the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMECE). The reason is evident: the title of the meeting.

Nevertheless, before moving on the proposals of Pope Francis, some premises are needed.

Facing the present uncertainties, and a growing sense of nationalism in various countries – in Italy, part of the press use to speak of “sovereignism” originated by people experiencing dissatisfaction vis à vis the European Institutions -, we must reaffirm that the principle of the national States is inadequate to found a new order of peace.

Daring to speak about the contribution of the Catholic Church, better said of the Christian contribution, facing a totally secularized European society seems unrealistic, but scholars have clearly affirmed that – contrary of the common opinion – secularization is not the “last word” of history,

is not an irreversible process. We should perhaps talk about a situation synthesized by this expression: “the force of religion and the weakness of faith”. That is to say: to the strength of religion as a “need for sacredness” corresponds the crisis of faith.

Moreover, I think it is good to reaffirm that the Christian contribution does not represent a threat to the secularity of states or to the independence of the institutions of the European Union, but it rather intends to be an enrichment. In fact, the positive and constructive role that religion in general plays in the building up of society open to dialogue should be considered.

In my final premise, I would like to point out that, considering the motto of the European Union, United in Diversity – where unity does not mean uniformity of political, economic and cultural life, or ways of thinking -, the Catholic Church in Europe can give a sort of model: the unity between the local Churches in Europe “without denying the differences derived from historical situations and events, links the various parts of Europe. It is a unity which, rooted in a common Christian inspiration, is capable of reconciling diverse cultural traditions and which demands, at the level of both society and Church, a constant growth in mutual knowledge open to an increased sharing of individual values”.

Let’s move now to the concrete indications given by Pope Francis almost one year ago to bring about the Christian responsibility towards Europe.

Consistent with his thought and personality, Pope Francis thinks that Christians have to remind Europe “that she is not a mass of statistics or institutions, but is made up of people”: issues must not be reduced to discussions about numbers. This is because of the honour due to human dignity, to the centrality of the human person, created by God in his image, which, along with his or her rights, is also the main point of reference for the European construction. We must recognize that we often have the impression, speaking about European matters, that there are no citizens, only votes, no migrants, only quotas, no workers, only economic markers, no poor, only thresholds of poverty...

Thanks to the fact that Christians recognize that their identity is primarily relational also because they are joined to one another as members of one body, the Church, a “second contribution that they can make to the future of Europe... is to help recover the sense of belonging to a

community”. After all the Founding Fathers chose this very word to identify the new political subject.

Christians have also the task to reaffirm that the primordial community, remains the family, as the most fundamental place for the process of discovery of personal identity. In the family, diversity is valued and at the same time brought into unity. Analogously, this relationship is also found in civil society with which Christians, assured in their identity, knowing who they are, they are ready to collaborate.

Thinking of the service-minded attitude of the Founding Fathers, inspired also by their faith, Christians are called to promote political dialogue and to restore dignity to politics.

No need to say how much dialogue is needed in politics today: “all too often we see how politics is becoming a forum for clashes between opposing forces. The voice of dialogue is replaced by shouted claims and demands. One often has the feeling that the primary goal is no longer the common good, and this perception is shared by more and more citizens. Extremist and populist groups are finding fertile ground in many countries; they make protest the heart of their political message, without offering the alternative of a constructive political project”.

Another domain where Christians can offer their contribution is the promotion of a Europe that is an inclusive community. This is a difficult task today when the migration issue has become the main argument for political confrontation! If all government authorities have the duty to address this question “with the virtue proper to governance, which is prudence”, keeping in mind the need for an open heart without erecting walls of indifference and fear, Christians, for their part, following the guidance received by Jesus’ words: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” Mt 25:35), have to collaborate with the civil authorities to govern this epochal phenomenon welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating the migrants and refugees.

Finally, I would like to mention the major contribution of the Catholic Church to the European construction: it’s Social Teaching. In fact, this teaching had more than some influence at the very beginning of the process of European Unity, due to the formation and religious conviction of the Founding Fathers of the European Community. Still, the Social Teaching, a whole of principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action, can be an inspiration for European policies also in our time. After

all, the principle of subsidiarity, laid down in the Treaty of the European Union, is clearly borrowed from the Catholic Social Teaching. Even more so, when Pope Francis talks about bricks needed to build the European structure as solidarity, development and peace his point of reference is the Social Teaching.

He has in mind that solidarity, “lifeblood of a mature community” and other face of the medal of subsidiarity, “is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”.

Talking about development, when Pope Francis says that “a Europe that rediscovers itself as a community will surely be a source of development for herself and for the whole world”, he certainly wanted to make a link with the Treaty of the European Union. In fact, the preamble of the Treaty of Lisbon recognizes the determination of the EU “to promote economic and social progress... taking into account the principle of sustainable development and within the context of the accomplishment of the internal market and of reinforced cohesion and environmental protection”. But Pope Francis surely thinks about the concept of development presented by Blessed Paul VI in 1967 and still valid today. Development – we read in *Populorum Progressio* -, which is the new name for peace, to be authentic, “must be well rounded (integral); it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man”.

When Pope Francis calls for a commitment of Christians in Europe to represent a promise of peace, he reminds all of us that peace has not to be taken for granted and clearly make reference to “the central concern that inspired the signatories of the Treaties of Rome after two World Wars and atrocious acts of violence perpetrated by peoples against peoples”. But not only, he certainly also considered the profound teachings of Saint John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* that put as any condition to a lasting peace the recognition that “each individual man (or woman) is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable”. Isn’t this conviction at the very foundation of the

European Union? And, I would like to add, isn't this the conviction that pushed so many human beings, migrants and refugees, to come to Europe to see their rights recognized?

* * *

In conclusion: Pope Francis likes concreteness, it is well known, but he is also capable of visionary thoughts, in particular when he has to give hope to youth, in this case to European youth: "With mind and heart, with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith, I dream of a new European humanism, one that involves "a constant work of humanization" and calls for "memory, courage, [and] a sound and humane utopian vision". I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother: a mother who has life because she respects life and offers hope for life".

Let's put then a bit of sound utopianism in our medicine to cure the Europe-triggered migraine.