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Introduction

(Karel Sládek)

The ethnic and religious composition of the population of Europe has changed dramatically over the past century. Modern-day Europe must now seek a new identity. From the birth of European civilisation, it was Christianity that provided the religious and cultural glue that held together the identity of the nations of Europe, although that identity naturally assimilated much of the culture of the preceding Roman and Greek civilisations, as well as the customs of the Celts, Franks, Teutons, Slavs and other peoples who inhabited or had migrated to the territory. In time, however, Christianity would become divided into Western and Eastern, and after the Reformation, Western Christianity would rupture once more, further dividing the geo-political map of Europe.

Christian roots gave rise to other movements, to European humanism, the Enlightenment and the scientific worldview, each of which defined itself in opposition to its past, its own heritage, not so much in a deliberate attempt to turn its back on Christian humanism, but more as a result of an antipathy towards any kind of relationship between church and state.

Arguably, the most fundamental changes in Europe's development took place in the wake of the Second World War and the division of Europe into two competing blocs, East and West. The countries within each region underwent a process of secularisation and laicisation: the West through an ideological relativism that at least tolerated religious life; the East through the militant atheism of socialism.

Furthermore, in Western Europe, the constantly changing composition of the population, especially as a result of successive migrations, has altered the continent's religious balance. Throughout Europe's history, it had generally been the case that in any given country there would be a Christian majority, from one of the main confessions, and perhaps a Jewish minority. Today, Europe is multi-religious and multicultural. Christianity has come into contact with a fast-growing Muslim community, and this has stimulated a debate concerning how Christians should conceive their own past – and indeed their present, as followers of one faith among many.

Despite these seismic changes, and although secularisation has brought a certain distancing of people's lives from church practice, we are now seeing a resurgence of interest in religion, manifested by the emergence of a new religiosity and a revitalisation of the old-established Christian traditions. Today, many Christians are anxious to preserve what is fundamental to their tradition while living a Christianity that is relevant to contemporary society. What we are witnessing, therefore, is an increasing desire to hold onto an awareness of the Christian roots of European identity.

The chapters of this book are based on presentations from an international symposium on the Christian roots of European identity held in Prague in 2016. The authors include scholars from the Catholic faculty at Charles University in Prague (Karel Sládek, Mlada Mikulicová, Noemi Bravená, Miloš Szabo and Vojtěch Mašek), the Greek-Catholic theological faculty at the University of Prešov in Slovakia (Marek Petro and Gabriel Paľa), the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow (Józef Marecki and Lucyna Rotter), and the Ludwig Maximilian

University in Munich (Rocio Daga Portillo, an expert on European Islam).

The perspectives of these academics from the countries of central Europe are of great interest, especially given those countries' often turbulent history over the past century. Because of their isolation, locked away behind the Iron Curtain for so many decades without the possibility of the free movement of their populations, the countries of the socialist bloc developed in different ways from the countries of Western Europe – socially and culturally, politically and economically. Our authors' perspectives on the current state of Europe are also, therefore, quite different in many respects. In seeking to preserve their national identity, the nations of central and eastern Europe are often quite critical of the Western model of a multicultural society in which 'citizenship' of a state can include people of various ethnicities and religions. The 'Eastern' part of Europe both fears and resists this transformation.

It is important, therefore, to give ear to and reflect upon the attitudes of Christians from the former communist bloc – Christians who had to struggle to preserve their religious and cultural identity in the face of an intolerant ideology. It is only natural that even now they seek to defend this identity and point out the contribution they can make to building a unified Europe. The chapters follow our scholars' reflections on the Christian roots of European identity, on the inspiration those roots provide for building a contemporary European identity, and finally on a Christian perspective on some of the important ethical questions facing Europe today.

Summary

The Christian Roots of European Identity

The multi-authored monograph *The Christian Roots of European Identity: A Central European Perspective* offers views on European identity from academics based at universities in Central Europe: Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, the University of Prešov, Slovakia, and the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow, Poland. Because of the high relevance of Islam in Europe today, a specialist from the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany, was also invited to contribute to the book.

These perspectives on European identity are rooted in countries whose membership of the Soviet bloc for much of the twentieth century set them on a different political trajectory from that of Western Europe, and where the relationship between Christianity and European identity became key, especially after the fall of the iron curtain and the re-establishment of religious freedoms.

Part one reflects on the Eastern origins of the Christian faith and the spirituality that helped to form European Christianity. These origins are traced through an analysis of the ancient extra-biblical manuscript *The Cave of Treasures* (Mlada Mikulcová) and an exploration of the Christian roots of Central Europe in the mission of Saints Cyril and

Methodius, a mission carried out before the time of the Great Schism (Miloš Szabo).

Part two examines the relevance of the Christian message for contemporary European identity, with chapters on the role played in modern society by Christian symbols (Lucyna Rotter), the legacy handed down by Europe's patron saints (Józef Marecki), the mission of the Slavic nations in contemporary Europe (Karel Sládek), and a view of the future of European and Christian identity through the eyes of children (Noemi Bravená).

The final part opens a Christian perspective on ethical dilemmas facing the continent of Europe, beginning with statements from the Catholic church on bio-ethical questions (Marek Petro) and a look at human identity in the context of the global market economy (Vojtěch Mašek). The penultimate chapter focuses on the current redefining of religious symbols in the media and the relationship between advertising and human identity (Gabriel Pala), and the book concludes with a timely European perspective on Islamic (Shari'a) law (Rocio Daga Portillo).