

# **Christendom and the European Union: An Exploratory Essay**

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**“If I had to do it all over again, I would start with culture.”**

**~Jean Monnet (almost certainly apocryphal)**

This paper is an exploratory essay that sketches in broad strokes an explanation for the current state of the European Union (EU). By tracing a common thread in European history running from ancient Rome to the present, we underline the importance of culture—particularly religious culture—to the success of European integration. Our method is necessarily macro, with “empire” as our unit of analysis. In addition, we focus on the “central tendency” and ignore the “outliers.” We also cite few sources: We want to get the argument down and sort out the details later. So, with all of that in mind, we begin our experiment.

### **Introduction: Empire and Religion**

Our starting point is an underappreciated piece by Gary Marks (2012), “Europe and Its Empires: From Rome to the European Union.” In what was initially a plenary lecture at the 2011 EUSA conference, Marks identifies the EU as a “large polity”—“a government having a reasonable probability of implementing authoritative decisions for the population living in its territory [covering at least one-fifth of the west European landmass]” (p. 1). These large polities he calls “empires” because they exert authority over a “great territory containing diverse communities” (p. 1). Five such polities have appeared through West European history, including four we identify specifically as empires (the Roman, Carolingian, Napoleonic, and Nazi) and one we call a union (EU), although still an empire by Marks’ definition.

Empire presents leaders with practical advantages. All polities provide their populations with public goods such as security and public roads. And all governors recognize the “benefits of scale in the provision of public goods” (p. 3), lowering the cost of providing government services. But such benefits extend beyond government to the private sector. As Marks points out: “By encompassing a greater number of people, larger jurisdictions—whether states, international regimes or empires—expand trade, extend the division of labor, and facilitate economies of scale in production and distribution” (p. 3). Thus, from the perspective of “authority,” large is good.

But because empires (by definition) incorporate a diversity of peoples, they experience a counter pressure to the relentless drive for scale: the search for “community.” Communities—“bounded groups of densely interacting humans sharing distinctive norms,” as Marks puts it (p. 4)—are characterized by communal trust that can assist in the provision of public goods. But communities are also wary of outsiders and often unwilling to make sacrifices for those identified as “other.” They also resent being forced to sacrifice by a higher authority they deem foreign. As Theitmar of Merseburg put it: “Rule by foreigners is the greatest punishment” (Warner, 2001, p. 81). This brings community into direct tension with scale: independence versus efficiency.

All is not lost, however, for empire. As Marks points out, empires have engaged in several strategies to deal with the threat of community. One is to *eliminate* an offending community through dispersal, exile, enslavement or genocide. The Nazi empire adopted this horrendous scheme in the European east during World War II (Mazower, 1998; Snyder, 2015). A second, more palatable strategy is to *accommodate* distinctive communities by accumulating territory but allowing minority peoples a measure of self-rule in exchange for exploitable

resources. Rome used this strategy toward neighboring tribes as it expanded up and down the Italian peninsula in the fifth century BC. According to Marks, accommodation also describes EU enlargement: adding states to the single market without eviscerating their domestic authority and governing institutions (pp. 5-7). The final strategy identified by Marks is *assimilation*—inducing communities or their leaders to identify with the empire. At one level, this is “nation building” and was often achieved by coercion. Empires, however, often reject assimilation strategies (Hitler’s racial empire could not, by definition, assimilate “non-Aryans”) or come to it reluctantly (Rome opened citizenship up to other Italians only after the Social War, 92-88 BC).

Still, assimilation has distinct advantages: voluntary acceptance of central rule by elites in newly-won territories greatly reduces the cost of administering the empire. The Romans won over local elites by bestowing patronage, land, honors and political and military backing. The European Union has also rewarded national politicians, especially from smaller states, with a steady flow of funds for pet projects and a bigger stage on which to perform. They can participate in frequent summits and ministerial meetings, appear in “door-step interviews” before the European press, enjoy handsomely-paid parliamentary positions and hold bureaucratic postings to Brussels. Furthermore, we know that local citizens who support the EU are often those likely to reap economic rewards from integration (Gabel, 1998).

Assimilation, whether by chance or design, is the best strategy for perpetuating an empire. Marks emphasizes the improvement of “life chances,” including a person’s “stream of income,” that assimilation offers ambitious elites (p. 13). He acknowledges a cultural dimension of assimilation, including language, style of dress, and participation in ritual, but tangible rewards of “joining” the empire constitute the main draw for disparate communities and their leaders. We agree that these incentives are important, but think that Marks misses an important dimension: effective assimilation must engage the emotions; empires must capture the heart as well as the purse. Coercive force and economic reward are essential to empire building, but they must be supported by a cultural glue that binds symbolically and emotionally. Moreover, the thicker the cultural adhesive, the more likely the empire will endure.

European empires, like all universal empires, claimed legitimacy from heaven. As the divine presence, or its representative, the emperor claimed the right to govern all humanity “as a single whole under the law of nature” (Nelsen and Guth, 2015, 36). Loyalty to the emperor bound conqueror and conquered together in an ordered cosmos that brought peace (not least with God) and prosperity to grateful subjects. Symbol and ceremony surrounded the deified or sacred emperor to cement the relationship between ruler and ruled. The imperial state erected religious buildings, regularized worship and holy days, and appointed religious officials. Throne and altar were united in one person who stood at the center of state and cult. The state elicited obedience by the sword, while the “cult-ure” cemented loyalty by invoking divinity. Hard power and soft power worked hand-in-hand.

What we have outlined, of course, is an ideal type. But Western European empires, we argue, have largely followed the pattern first established by Augustus, but which later evolved into a thoroughly Christianized version, “Christendom,” which in theory at least comprised “a single church uniting all citizens, working in alliance with civil authority” (Nelsen and Guth 2015, p. 69). Christendom, in various forms, was a large polity covering much of the European continent, incorporating a multitude of communities. These communities, however, were united by a single religious culture with many local variations and a set of polity-wide state and religious institutions—throne and altar. The institutions were mutually supportive: the altar created an identity—a “we-feeling” (Deutsch, et al., 1957)—within the mass public and

bestowed divine legitimacy on the throne; the throne encouraged participation in the cult and enforced its religious monopoly. And the two acting in concert suppressed political and religious dissent. In short, Christendom was Europe's answer to the problems of scale and community: Scale was achieved when the Christian empire of Latin Christendom assimilated diverse communities.

We will soon argue that the EU is a modified form of Christendom. But before we can make that case, we must survey Christendom in Europe since Caesar Augustus.

### **Rome 1: Augustus to Diocletian, The Standard**

In 31 BC Octavian (d. 14 AD) emerged the victor from a series of civil wars marking the end of the Roman Republic. Rather than ruling directly as a military dictator, Octavian constructed an imperial government under the guise of a restored republic, mostly by amassing titles that conveyed particular powers. His political power rested on the loyalty of his armies, the patronage funded by his vast wealth, and his positions as Roman consul and commander of the provinces. But he understood that his rule would endure only if he shrouded his person in religious mystery. To this end, Octavian accepted from the Senate the novel title of "Augustus" (illustrious one) in 27 BC, carrying strong religious connotations and giving Octavian a "halo of sanctity." He also styled himself as *Imperator Caesar divi filius*, or "Commander Caesar son of the deified one" to connect with his deified uncle and adoptive father. Augustus sought the revival of Roman virtue through renewal of a religion that now made room for an imperial cult. While he did not encourage Romans to worship him directly, Augustus did not discourage his grateful subjects in the hinterlands from engaging in worship of his *genius*, or soul, usually in conjunction with the goddess Rome. Hymns extolled him and provincials hailed him as the "Savior," the "bringer of glad tidings," "God the Son of God" and "Messiah" (Nelsen and Guth, 2015, 37). The project succeeded and in 12 BC Augustus assumed the role of *pontifex maximus*, one of five high priests and the most important office in the Roman religion. As head of the Roman cult, Augustus now held supreme political and religious authority.

The Augustan Imperium lasted for over two centuries, but the troubled third century AD strained the system to the breaking point. Diocletian (d. 311) is usually credited with saving the Empire through the "tetrarchy," a creative collegium of four emperors. This strategy finally shed past republican forms and explicitly acknowledged the emperors as autocrats. Imperial ceremonial elevated Diocletian and his colleagues above ordinary people. Diocletian wore jewelry (unlike Augustus) and prohibited the wearing of purple by anyone but an emperor. All those received by the Emperor had to prostrate themselves at his feet; the privileged were allowed to kiss the hem of his robe. Moreover, Diocletian accepted a gold diadem to symbolize that his power came not from the Senate, but derived from heaven itself. He and his colleague Maximian (d. 310) declared themselves the companions of Jupiter and Hercules and were all but deified as "gods and parents of gods."

By this heightened reemphasis on the Imperial Cult, the tetrarchy sought to unify a fragmented empire by propaganda and ceremony. They knew the importance of military victory over internal and external enemies, but also understood that an empire needed a single culture to hold the venture together. Unfortunately for Diocletian and his companions, their imperial religious project ran into the growing Christian church. The orthodox church, now a century and a half old, featured an increasingly sophisticated administrative structure and preached an "anti-Caesar"—Jesus of Nazareth—who had submitted to Roman torture and crucifixion, but had risen

from the dead and proclaimed a kingdom greater than Rome. Christians could respect Caesar, but honored Christ as the supreme Lord of the cosmos. Understandably, the tetrarchy saw Christianity as seditious and declared war on the incipient state-within-a-state in 303 AD, requiring Christians to sacrifice to the gods. Many fled, many were martyred, but in the end, Rome failed to enforce conformity and lost the culture war.

Rome's pagan cultural glue dissolved in the fourth century, but not before setting the standard for the European West: one state, one religion. What Augustus initiated and Diocletian sought to perfect was a strategy for bringing order out of chaos. Victory on the battlefield was obviously necessary, but holding a vast territory with many peoples required creating a common identity. Ceremony, symbolic acts, monumental architecture, elite language, shared history, economic connections, calendars, wine, sports, and public conversation all contributed to a "Roman way of life" that distinguished "Romans" from the "others." But holding it all together was a common imperial altar where (theoretically) all Romans shared in honoring the emperor in whom earth and heaven became one. That powerful imagery legitimated autocratic rule and solidified loyalty in Roman hearts, but at the price of freedom to dissent—both politically and religiously.

## **Rome 2: Constantine I to Nicolas II, Rome Baptized**

Emperor Constantine I (d. 337) picked up the pieces of the tetrarchy, which could not outlast Diocletian. Famously, Constantine opened to Christianity in 312 (he was baptized on his deathbed in 337) before his decisive battle over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge. By 323 he had consolidated his control of the Empire. Constantine ruled as a Christian emperor—a profound cultural change—but he adopted the constitution established by Diocletian, minus the multiple Augusti and Caesars. He ruled as divinely appointed emperor and priest (he maintained his title as *pontifex maximus*); his person was sacred; he accepted the "worship" of his subjects; and he began to replace the old pagan religion with Christianity as the cultural glue required by a strategy of assimilation.

Constantine did not change imperial governance, but he did change its theoretical foundations. A Christian Constantine had to accept the supremacy of the Kingdom of God over the Empire of Rome, but this did not mean renunciation of Rome's universal ideal. Rather it required Constantine to redefine the Empire in Platonic terms as the earthly reflection of a heavenly reality. Runciman (1977, 162-163) elaborates: "[The constitution of the Empire] was based on a clear religious conviction: that it was the earthly copy of the Kingdom of Heaven. . . . It saw itself as a universal Empire. Ideally it should embrace all the peoples of the earth, who, ideally, should all be members of the one true Christian Church, its own Orthodox Church. Just as man was made in God's image, so man's kingdom on earth was made in the image of the Kingdom of Heaven." As God the Father had bestowed upon Jesus Christ all authority in heaven and earth, so Christ had bestowed upon Constantine authority to rule the earthly kingdom as his representative. The emperor was not divine but he was to be honored as god-like in nature. Constantine wore a jeweled diadem and referred to himself as "Our Clemency." His many possessions were sacred and acts praised; the splendor of his court befit the chosen Vicar of Christ (a term eventually applied to Byzantine emperors).

Like Augustus and Diocletian, Constantine also headed the imperial cult. But as a Christian he now had authority in the Church. He held no official office, but his desire to use the Church to bring unity to the Empire required him to seek unity in the Church itself, then deeply

divided over the nature of Christ. Seeking an official ecclesiastical settlement, Constantine called an ecumenical council in 325, presiding over and participated in its proceedings as though a bishop himself. These efforts produced a settlement (the Nicæan Creed), enforced through imperial decree backed by coercive force. Thus the reigning Roman Emperor, master of the known universe, presided as the very representative of Christ over the assembled Kingdom of God on earth. He unified in his person earth and heaven, the temporal and the spiritual, in an inseparable oneness. By the time of Theodosius I (d. 395), Nicæan Christianity was established as the only imperial religion (Edict of Thessalonica, 380). The Empire was now the Church, and the Church was the Empire.

The Constantinian model became the ideal for Roman, Eastern Roman, then Byzantine emperors (all thought themselves “Roman”) from Theodosius to Justinian I (d. 565) to Leo I (d. 474) to Heraclius (d. 641) to Basil I (d. 886) to the last emperor Constantine XI (d. 1453). The ideal and the reality, of course, were often far apart. But the emperors—and a couple of empresses—were always heads of the Church; they were Caesar and Pope in one person. With the fall of Constantinople—the second Rome—to the Ottomans in 1453, the titles, rights and responsibilities were translated to Moscow, the third Rome and new center of the Eastern Church (having separated from the Roman Church in 1054). Tsar Ivan III (d. 1505) was the first Russian autocrat to see himself as the successor to the Byzantine emperors. Ivan and his successors, from Ivan IV (d. 1584) through Peter the Great (d. 1725), Catherine the Great (d. 1796), Alexander II (d. 1881) and Nicolas II (d. 1918), all ruled state and church as the sole representative of Christ on earth—king and pope were one. Today President Vladimir Putin may not see himself as the Vicar of Christ, but he carries on the tradition of Russian rulers dominating both church and state, using Orthodox religion—to him the only truly Russian religion—to legitimate the state and serve as the core of the nation’s culture. As such, he carries on the Constantinian tradition.

Constantine and his successors unified Empire and Church. This very Roman model was eventually confined to the Byzantine East, while the West evolved in a different direction.

### **Medieval Europe: Charlemagne to Francis II, Latin Christendom**

The Roman Empire in the West withered and fragmented in the fifth through eighth centuries as waves of invaders took up residence inside or just outside the sphere of imperial control. As the state broke down, the Roman Church stepped in with needed services of governance and provision. Security was supposed to come from the emperor in Constantinople, but it seldom did after the short-lived Justinian reconquest (533-554). Thus, the popes in Rome began looking elsewhere for defense against barbarian influence.

In the mid-eighth century the Carolingian Franks gained permission from the pope to overthrow the Merovingian dynasty in a soft coup. Charlemagne (d. 814) returned the favor by bailing out the Bishop of Rome in 774 when he crossed the Alps and defeated the Lombards. Pope Leo III (d. 816) reciprocate his salvation by crowning Charlemagne (with or without Charlemagne’s knowledge is a matter of dispute) Emperor of the Romans on Christmas Day, 800—without the approval of Constantinople. The Empire had often had two (or more) emperors at a time, so the Roman Constitution in theory could support Charlemagne’s claim, if accepted by the Byzantine emperor. But this felt different. While exchanges between the courts of Charlemagne and Constantinople might have achieved some coordination between the two thrones, nothing substantive emerged. The new Western Empire was infused with Frankish

energy and ambition and was very much willing to go it alone, apart from the troubled Byzantine state.

Charlemagne's empire drew heavily on the traditions of the Christian Roman Empire. Barbarian tribes had overrun the West, but many, perhaps most, of the Germanic elites wanted to be Romans. They took Roman titles and adopted Roman ways; they also converted to Christianity, first in non-orthodox Arian form, then as Roman Catholics. Charlemagne insisted on religious conformity in the territories he conquered, as the pagan Saxons learned at their (forced) baptism. As Southern (1970, p. 61) wrote: "Religious unity could scarcely be thought of apart from political unity, if only because religious unity depended on some ultimate power of coercion." Thus, Charlemagne through his conquests brought religious conformity to the West. The Carolingians reorganized the church, regularized Latin, settled on a text of the Bible, reformed the liturgy, educated the clergy, and much more. The West remained culturally diverse, but over that diversity a common Catholic culture blanketed the continent. Latin Christendom was emerging and along with it a common identity as people increasingly saw themselves as Catholic Christians, in addition to being Franks, Lombards or Saxons (Hay, 1966). This new cultural glue held together the Carolingian Empire and the succeeding Holy Roman Empire.

The traditions of Christian Rome also influenced the Carolingian conception of imperial monarchy. Charlemagne modeled himself after Constantine. He built an imperial palace and chapel in Aachen incorporating Roman symbols wherever possible. The chapel was modeled on the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, incorporated genuine Roman columns dragged over the Alps, and contained a stunning Roman sarcophagus for Charlemagne's eventual burial. He ruled as Christ's representative on earth, in theory, like Constantine. And like Constantine he called an ecumenical council in Frankfurt (794, six years before his coronation as emperor) over which he presided. But Charlemagne rejected the near deification of emperors customary in the East and accepted that his role as "priest" allowed him only the right to preach in the church. Most telling was his refusal to set his imperial throne in the east of his chapel behind the altar where Justinian sat in San Vitale (symbolic of the Emperor's claim to an active priestly vocation). Rather, Charlemagne sat in the west with the congregants (although in the balcony above them). Thus, Charlemagne as the new Western Emperor staked a claim to superiority in both the state and church, but with an air of humility. This claim was only partially countered by the recently surfaced (and forged) "Donation of Constantine" that documented his granting to the pope preeminence over the Universal Church and the right to rule Rome and the western regions. In theory the Carolingian emperors were, like their Byzantine counterparts, heads of state and church, appointed solely by God himself. But the Donation seemed to establish that in the West, the pope had been granted the right to authority in both the state and the church, a right symbolically exercised when the pope placed the crown on the emperors' head, beginning with Charlemagne. Imperial defenders, of course, never conceded the superiority of the pope, providing the source of future tension.

The Carolingian Empire fell to external and internal enemies in the troubled ninth century, but the Roman church persisted throughout Latin Christendom. Otto I (d. 973) founded the Holy Roman Empire in the tenth century as a revived Carolingian Empire, in word and symbolic act evoking the memory of Charlemagne, as did many of his successors. All were eager to assume the Carolingian imperial mandate to defend Christendom, convert the heathen and rule the Church as God's chosen representative on earth. Such an arrangement continued to work well in the Byzantine East, but western emperors faced pushback from a more independent Western Church and an imperial pope. (The Church had, after all, kept Latin Christendom from

destruction for centuries before a new emperor appeared on the scene!) Popes, too claimed imperial authority: Leo I (d. 461) had taken the title of *pontifex maximus* in the fifth century; the popes wore a diadem (like the emperors); and by the eleventh century popes had adopted an imperial robe. In addition, the popes increasingly asserted their right to judge all earthly rulers, including the emperor, because the “spiritual” had ultimate authority over the “temporal.” Strong emperors kept popes under control, but when they were weak, popes sometimes humiliated them, as Gregory VII (d. 1085) did to Henry IV (d. 1106) in the snows of Canossa in 1077.

Tension between the emperors and the popes in the Middle Ages effectively separated authority over state and church in the Latin West in a manner quite unthinkable in the Byzantine East. That did not mean, however, that throne and altar in the West were not deeply interconnected. The Holy Roman Empire still defended the independence and integrity of the One True Church against all its enemies, both internal and external, heeding the call of the Church to crusade against infidels in the Holy Land and heretics at home. In return, the Church mandated allegiance to the Empire as the legitimate temporal arm of Christ’s earthly kingdom—and the popes crowned the emperors. From Nidaros to Malta and Lisbon to Riga, Europe was Roman Catholic, Latin Christendom. The direct authority of the Holy Roman Empire was far more restricted, but in theory the emperor commanded the allegiance of all Catholics. The Medieval Empire was a cultural empire that was nearly fully voluntary. Assimilation was achieved by baptism into the Roman Catholic Church, while schismatics and heretics were encouraged to change their minds or face elimination. Only the Jews were allowed a limited accommodation. And all this lasted, at least in theory, until Napoleon Bonaparte (d. 1821) broke the allies at Austerlitz in 1805 and Emperor Frances II (d. 1835) abdicated in 1806 bringing to an end the Holy Roman Empire.

### **Protestant Europe: Henry VIII to Elizabeth II, Christendom in Each Country**

The shattering of Latin Christendom came in bits and pieces. The Roman Church had worked hand in hand with secular authority to hold back pressure for theological and ecclesiastical reform. Suppression of religious dissent was part of the bargain with the state: the Church would legitimate princely rule and the state would enforce religious unity. But this arrangement crumbled when the religious reformer Martin Luther (d. 1546) gained the support of powerful German princes, thereby avoiding condemnation and the stake at the hands of Emperor Charles V (d. 1558). Luther’s reforms eventually had the unintended effect of dividing the church and splintering Christendom (Gregory, 2012). But Latin Christendom was not yet finished.

The sixteenth-century reformers fought over many issues—both consequential and petty—but they agreed on key points. First, they believed the Catholic Church was wrong to teach that salvation came to those baptized into the *visible* Church. They affirmed the Universal Church, but downplayed its role, insisting that God elected some to receive eternal salvation out of pure grace. These *elect* were known only to God, and constituted the true community of saints, *invisible* to the world. Thus, no visible church would ever be pure; it would always contain both the saved and the damned.

Second, the reformers saw the source of evil in the world as the pope and his Vatican henchmen, often describing the Roman Church in apocalyptic terms and marking their struggles with Rome as a sign of God’s imminent judgment. Some Protestants in later generations, especially in Britain, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia, determined that the End Times had



begun and that the pope as “Antichrist” was bent on destruction of the saints. Events did not confirm their expectations, but anti-Papism and anti-Catholicism burrowed deeply into the DNA of Protestant confessional culture.

Third, the reformers, despite their hatred of Rome, reaffirmed the ideal of Christendom, recognizing interests shared by church and state. God appointed civil magistrates to keep order, nurture righteousness, and establish “right worship.” Thus, the visible church, into which all subjects were baptized, would honor the righteous prince; in turn, that ruler would support, defend, and lead the purified church. The critical difference with medieval Christendom was that the reformed church was not a visible *universal* church, but the visible local (or national) church. Moreover, the rightful ruler was not a *universal* prince, but a magistrate exercising sovereignty within a city- or a nation-state. Thus, the reformers accepted the medieval marriage of throne and altar, as long as neither pledged allegiance to Rome.

Protestantism preserved Christendom with a new model of religious governance: “Christendom in Each Country.” The reformers’ insistence on reading the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, fostered a new understanding of God’s relationship to his people. Protestants saw their own world in the story of Israel: they encountered “nations” as groups united by kinship, language, and territory; they saw God intervening in history and granting particular peoples specific territories. They also learned that God chose a special people for a sacred mission that would benefit all humanity (Appelbaum 2013). For Protestants, this world of nations was preferable to medieval political and religious unity.

In this context Protestant national identities emerged. Protestants soon began reading their stories into that of ancient Israel. If God rescued Israel from slavery, they too could be rescued from Spanish chains; if God saved Israel from Pharaoh’s murderous hand, they too could be saved from the wicked Queen Mary or Duke of Alba.<sup>1</sup> Like Israel, Protestants could covenant with God and each other to establish a righteous kingdom led by a sacred monarch in the likeness of David and Solomon. Protestants in England, Scotland, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands saw themselves as God’s people, chosen to be a light to the world by living the Kingdom of God on earth. This mission bound subjects to each other and to their prince, producing a common identity—a “we feeling”—and a sense of cosmic privilege. While Protestants from Sweden to Holland could each consider themselves chosen, they believed that since the God of the Bible was the God of all nations, he could choose other Protestant nations as well (Appelbaum 2013).

Ambitious nation-builders thus embraced the fragmentation of Christendom: a church freed from Rome allowed princes to employ religion to unify emerging nation-states. The precise relationship between state and church depended both on the type of Protestantism in a given territory and the nation-building strategy of the prince. Anglican England and the Lutheran Germanic and Nordic territories took a top-down approach. England’s Henry VIII (d. 1547), Sweden’s Gustav I Vasa (d. 1560), and Denmark-Norway’s Christian III (d. 1559) officially established state churches independent of Rome and installed themselves as heads of the church with bishops answerable to the crown. The hierarchical episcopal polity adopted by Anglican and Lutheran churches facilitated domination by secular authorities. Monarchs ensured that all subjects were baptized into the church, making membership a mark of participation in the nation. The national church unified and disciplined the people under the benevolent divine authority of

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<sup>1</sup> One is reminded of Bruegel the Elder’s masterpiece, “The Counting at Bethlehem,” which depicts Joseph leading Mary to a Spanish tax window in in the Low Countries.

its princely head acting as a kind of national pope. The monarch, in return, pledged to defend the church against all enemies, particularly those aligned with the pope in Rome.

The second model of church-state relations represented a bottom-up approach, emerging from Reformed Protestantism. Most Reformed congregations existed in hostile political contexts, often organized around small groups of covenanting members. Ecclesiastical authority rested with congregations and councils, not bishops. This “consistorial model” helped preserve the church under persecution, but usually failed to provide the unifying force of the episcopal model (Geneva, Zurich, and Rhine Palatinate were exceptions). Reformed churches in Holland and Presbyterian churches in Scotland were too fissiparous and their societies, especially Holland’s, too diverse to permit a religious monopoly. But several did become official churches, defended by a secular crown. Other Reformed churches—particularly in England and the Netherlands—and some Quakers found established Protestant churches filled with idolaters and heretics. These radical separatists longed for a society governed not by a monarch but by a purified church. Some of these churches headed to North America to establish their “shining cities on a hill”—the true Kingdom of God on earth—others stayed in England to fight for a Puritan Christian Commonwealth.

Protestantism thus assisted nation-building by forging a “we-feeling” among a people loosely grouped by language and territory, now fired by a new sense of chosen-ness and a deep hatred for Rome. The nation state, as it emerged after the Treaties of Westphalia (1648), served Protestants as a guarantor of national liberty. Protestants did not immediately abandon the idea of the righteous society governed by throne and altar, but gave up the notion of a *single, unified* Christian polity in favor of a more liberating idea: Christendom in Each Country. In theory this still undergirds the legitimacy of the monarchies and the state churches in Denmark and the United Kingdom where Queens Margaret II and Elizabeth II reign over state and church.

### **Modern Europe: Napoleon to Hitler, Secular Christendom**

Christendom, in one form or another, dominated European governance and identity from the fourth through the eighteenth centuries. One state, one church, one emperor, one sacred identity—these were the foundation stones of European civilization. This was easiest to see in the Roman East where church and state merged in the person of the emperor and where to be Roman meant to be Orthodox Christian, and vice versa. A sacred people governed by a sacred ruler in an empire created in the image of the Kingdom of God constituted the fundamental vision. After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, the theory underlying the empire transferred to the various autocephalous churches that emerged in newly self-conscious nations. But the inseparability of church and state remained a powerful idea even into the contemporary period.

The Latin West was more complicated. The Constantinian ideal of union between state and church remained present in the West, but emperors and popes could not agree on which office could legitimately claim to rule all Christendom. The church probably had the better claim: it reached into every corner of Western Europe, provided the stories, traditions, heroes, symbols and sacred identity central to Latin culture, and provided the model for state-building monarchs as it developed a bureaucracy, law, tax system and foreign policy centered on the Vatican (Møller, 2019). The Holy Roman Empire always struggled to match the reach of the papacy and thwart secular rivals. But the majesty of the emperor remained vivid in Western imaginations and efforts were often made in both the imperial court and the Vatican to bring

church and empire together to rule jointly as complements rather than competitors. The Reformation divided the church and the empire and led to a new state-based international system. But Christendom remained a powerful ideal in both Catholic and Protestant areas, even in a fragmented Europe.

The French Revolution changed all that. The revolutionaries' eighteenth century attacks on the monarchy and the church—throne and altar—undercut the two pillars of Christendom. It took over a century, but eventually Europe dismissed or dis-empowered its many monarchs, including the Holy Roman Emperor. Secular elements also fought to dis-establish or render irrelevant the established churches across Europe. So, was Christendom dead in Europe by the twentieth century?

We assume on strong evidence that revolutions fail to root out every last vestige of the *ancien régime*. In Europe, Christendom as an ideal remained embedded in post-revolutionary culture, but it took a different form. In place of the church—the chosen people of God on earth—liberal Europe now placed “nation” (Smith, 2008).<sup>2</sup> In place of Christian religion, liberal Europe now assigned “nationalism.” And the state, which once served the church as the divinely appointed representative of Christ, now served the new “divinity,” the “people” represented by the mystical “general will.” As Smith has so perceptively pointed out, modern national identity as it developed in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rested on sacred foundations: the symbols, ceremonies, myths and traditions formerly exclusive to religion now given national meanings. Crucifixes and processions, for instance, became symbols of special status and national unity in places as different as Italy, Poland, and Northern Ireland.

This new form of Christendom was, in fact, “secular” in the sense that it no longer referred to traditional Christian religion, but it continued to function like a state religion within the nation states of Europe, although not Europe as a whole. In a sense, the Protestant notion of “Christendom in Each Country”—now largely secularized—had won the day. The “nation” (playing the role of organized religion) legitimated the state (through referendums and/or elections) as the sole representative of the people; the state promoted and defended the nation as the “especially valuable” community. And active steps were taken by states, backed by the nation, to limit political dissent and to deal with minorities within state borders that were identified as outside the nation. The nationalist ideal was “one nation ruled by one state,” but twentieth century elites found achieving the ideal politically and morally messy. When nationalist states did try to create empires—as did France under Napoleon and Germany under Hitler—the conquered nations either resisted or accommodated (they generally could not nationally or racially “assimilate”) or they were eliminated as part of a murderous scheme, as Jews, Poles and others were under Hitler.

“Secular Christendom” (to use an ironic oxymoron) as a successor to Latin Christendom simply reinforced the fragmentation of Europe. Secular state elites used nationalism—which they were responsible in part for constructing—as the cultural glue holding their nations together. But nationalism was not the only European response to the eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal revolutions. The dream of a united Europe—the “idea of Europe”—remained a viable option in some intellectual circles. Some Catholic intellectuals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Novalis (d. 1801), Joseph de Maistre (d. 1821) and Christopher Dawson (d. 1970) argued for a single government for a single cultural area. De Maistre and Novalis called for a papal

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<sup>2</sup> Smith (2008, p. 19) defines a nation as “a named and self-defined human community, whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, symbols, values, and traditions, reside in and identify with a historic homeland, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe shared customs and common laws.”

monarchy, while in the twentieth century Jacques Maritain (d. 1973) and others committed to a secular federation. Many secular liberals and socialists also supported the idea of Europe as an antidote to aggressive and distorted nationalism.

The point here is that Secular Christendom did not have to be nationally based (“Secular Christendom in Each Country”); Europe could still be governed as a single whole. Western Europe could recreate a continental or near continental state, much like a revived Carolingian Empire. But could it recreate the “church”—the cultural glue needed to hold the empire together? Could it provide citizens with an identity and an emotional connection to the state? The “nation” and nationalism had performed that function after the liberal revolutions, but nationalism—distorted, certainly—led to European fragmentation and violent conflict. The post-World War II leaders who envisioned a united Europe would have to answer the identity question—the quest for a cultural glue to hold the new empire together.

### **The European Union: Schuman to Habermas, Christian Democracy to Cosmopolitanism**

The EU is an empire, but it is a voluntary one. It assimilates new peoples by incorporating them into a dense web of economic relationships, grants them imperial citizenship with a host of individual rights, and reduces risk and uncertainty through the *acquis communautaire*. When assimilation runs up against hard kernels of sovereignty, accommodation in the form of derogations is possible, including eurozone and citizenship opt-outs. And there is an escape clause for nations that want to exit, but as we have learned since 2016, leaving the EU is far from easy. To hardcore Brexiteers, the EU looks more like an imperial power every day.

The EU is an empire very much in the image of Latin Christendom. The EU state governs but is constrained by parochial powers—nothing new for Latin Europe. The Holy Roman imperial state never achieved centralized, unchallenged rule, nor did the pope in Rome. But Latin Christendom was held together by Catholic religion, overseen and governed by the Vatican. What is the EU equivalent of religion as the cultural glue? What serves as the medium of assimilation in the EU?

Postwar European elites posited three answers to this question. First, Christian Democratic leaders—primarily Catholics—offered *Christianity Lite* as a viable emotional bond and source of identity to hold the continent together in an open attempt to recreate Latin Christendom in a contemporary form. Second, elites from across Europe, but concentrated in the Protestant Anglo-Nordic north, favored *Defanged Nationalism*—a version of Secular Christendom—that refused to give up the notion of “Christendom in Each Country,” thus rejecting the establishment of a continent-wide “Union.” Finally, secular liberals opted for a new *Cosmopolitanism* that rejected the religious underpinnings of European unity and sought to create a culture based on “European values.” We briefly explore each in turn.

Christian Democracy dominated postwar continental Europe through the 1960s—and in some countries well beyond. While the movement was officially open to Protestants, it was led primarily by Catholics, even in the Federal Republic of Germany where the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) did incorporate many Protestants. In the nineteenth century the movement had rejected the anti-democratic spirit of the Ultramontane Church and embraced democracy as the form of government best able to defend the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, following modern papal teachings beginning with Leo XIII (d. 1903), Christian Democrats stressed the importance of persons in social formations, particularly the family. A rightly ordered society operated on the principle of subsidiarity where decisions were taken at the

lowest level of governance possible—as close to the individual as was appropriate to address the problem. Subsidiarity demanded that many decisions be left to individuals or families, but some society-wide problems could only be solved at the national level, and some at the continental level. Thus, Christian Democrats saw European unity as a logical extension of the principle of subsidiarity.

A united Europe, however, was not just a rational necessity, it was also a cultural and spiritual mandate. To postwar Catholic Christian Democrats—including Robert Schuman (d. 1963), Konrad Adenauer (d. 1967) and Alcide de Gasperi (d. 1954)—Europe had taken a wrong turn at the Reformation and had run over a nationalist cliff. Europe was a single cultural whole shaped and nurtured by the Roman Church, but had fallen into civil conflict in the first half of the twentieth century that, if allowed to continue, would destroy European civilization. In their view, the nation state and nationalism had to be discarded in favor of a unified, Christian Europe. They did not envision a return to a medieval Latin Christendom dominated by throne and altar, but to a Europe bound together by Christian values and a new Christian mission to demonstrate to the world the way of forgiveness and reconciliation among former enemies (Nelsen and Guth, 2015, pp. 190-198). They looked to Charlemagne and the Carolingians for symbols of a united Europe; they signed treaties in the Capitoline in Rome; and they attended a thanksgiving Mass and Te Deum to symbolize new friendship. Early Christian Democrats thought a Christianity stripped of clericalism and the particularism of Catholicism—*Christendom Lite*—could remain the unifying glue of a new Europe. But they were wrong. They understood, as did their spiritual successor, Jacques Delors, that a unified Europe could not be built on economics alone: Europe needed a soul. But it could not be a Christian soul, a fact made abundantly clear when Christian Democrats failed to get an explicit mention of Christianity in the preamble to the abortive Constitution.

Many West European countries did not join the original six integrating member states in the 1950s. Several had yet to transition to democracy (e.g., Greece, Portugal, Spain), and some adopted neutral foreign policies (e.g., Austria, Ireland, Switzerland). Still others were majority Protestant and suspicious of continental (i.e. “Catholic”) efforts to unite Europe. Britain and the five Nordic states fit this category. Eventually all of these peripheral states except Iceland, Norway and Switzerland joined the European Community/Union, but the majority Protestant countries provided the most interesting cases of Euro-reluctance.

Britain and the Nordics remained strong advocates of Reformation era “Christendom in Each Country.” All of the Anglo-Nordic states maintained established Protestant churches into the twenty-first century, and the church remains established to this day in Britain, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland. Despite the collapse of religious observance, being Protestant in all of these countries remains an important part of national identity. A defanged, gentle nationalism remains a potent force in Protestant Europe. Citizens, especially in the Nordic countries, take pride in their well-developed welfare states, compassionate labor markets, and enlightened attitudes toward sex, women’s rights, gender equality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. They may no longer consider themselves chosen by God, but they certainly see their societies as special. And they are protective of their independence—and from unwanted influences from the continent. They are perfectly happy with a “Secular Christendom” confined to their own country; they have never been comfortable with federalist notions of European integration. They believe in cooperation not integration.

Once several of them—Britain, Denmark, Finland and Sweden—joined the EU, they gained reputations as “reluctant partners.” Britain and Denmark opted out of much of the

Maastricht treaty and Sweden joined them in staying out of the Eurozone. Finland has been more cooperative, but even Finns found it hard to agree to bail out Greece during the debt crisis. In truth, the Anglo-Nordics have always been skeptical of the dreamy federalist notions so often on display in the Brussels institutions. They take a pragmatic approach to European integration: they support deep integration when it solves Europe-wide problems, but resist when alternatives short of supranational decision making are available. Such an approach has often made the Anglo-Nordics look like the EU's "awkward squad," but they have generally found ways to compromise with their EU partners. That is, until now. Britain decided two years ago to withdraw from the EU—the first and only member state to take that decision. So far, every effort to define exactly what "withdrawal" means has failed, leaving open the possibility that the UK may remain in the EU. What Brexit has made absolutely clear, however, is that about half of the British electorate is willing to harm the national economy in exchange for freedom. They have refused to assimilate into the new European empire; they remain nationalists committed to a version of Secular Christendom in their own country, but not in Europe.

By 1991 (the concluding of the Maastricht treaty) it was clear the EU had failed to find the cultural glue that would hold the empire together emotionally—the basis for a new European identity. The "Christian values" of the Christian Democrats were no longer the cultural norm in Western Europe—and with the exception of Poland, Eastern Europe as well. Europe had not found a way to create a civil religion (like the American one) that would cement the culture to the state. The Anglo-Nordic version of "Christendom in Each Country" maintained the citizen's emotional tie to the state, but could not provide an appropriate cultural foundation for Europe. The EU could have chosen to establish a Concert of European States that abandoned any notion of establishing a continental federation. Gaullist France, Catholic Poland, and perhaps the Netherlands could have joined the Anglo-Nordics in some deep intergovernmental organization that abandoned the search for a European identity and scrapped the trappings of federalism (e.g., the European Parliament, the Court of Justice). They could have accepted a Defanged Nationalism as the only possible way of mobilizing the hearts of their citizens, but this too was rejected as unworkable and probably dangerous. Continental countries were less enamored with borders and nationalism than the peripheral Protestant states. They had experienced the destruction of war; they were somewhat less emotionally committed to their nation states (some of which were still quite new); and, moreover, they had throughout most of their histories (unlike most of their northern European counterparts) been part of a broader empire that made the EU a fairly benign and comfortable organization. Of course, underlying all of this was a simple question: on what basis does Europe create a *demos*—an identity suitable as a foundation for democratic decision making? Christianity—even a watered down Christian Democratic Christianity Lite—was no longer suitable; and nationalism of any sort remained scary.

One more possibility, however, remained: Cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism—with its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, starting most prominently with Immanuel Kant (d. 1804)—is the notion that human beings of all sorts belong together in a single community governed by universal moral principles. Following Kant, societies governed by reason and characterized by republican forms of government will eventually agree to a civil pact that will establish a federation of states deeply interconnected by commerce and trade and governed by law. Thus, humanity will eventually progress to that blessed state of perpetual peace among nations.

Kant may have given Cosmopolitanism a coherent expression, but Jean Monnet put it into practice. Postwar Cosmopolitans were largely secular (remember, Jean Monnet did not

identify as a Catholic or a Christian Democrat) but believed that Europeans could establish a moral community built on the dignity of the person (here they agreed with Christian Democrats). Such a community could only be created if Europeans came to see one another as fellow citizens, not foreigners. This could happen, according to Monnet, only if Europe agreed to common laws promulgated and implemented by common (i.e., federal) institutions. These practical steps would place Europeans together on a communal project requiring them to interact in significant and sustained ways. The result would be a “ferment of change” that would spark a “revolution in men’s minds” resulting in the creation a new European identity (Monnet, 1962). In Monnet’s view, economic integration would lead to cultural integration.

Cosmopolitanism is the newest European version of Christendom. It is the glue holding the EU together. The Cosmopolitan motto of “unity in diversity” legitimates supranational governance. And EU institutions promote and preserve the Cosmopolitan project in each member state: freedom of the press, independence of the courts, conformity in policies toward racial, religious and sexual minorities, and active participation in programs facilitating the free movement of people within the Union (e.g., Schengen) and resettling refugees (e.g., Dublin III). Thus, cosmopolitanism has become the secular answer to the need for a common culture to create a European identity strong enough to glue the modern empire together and forge a *demos* deep enough to support democracy.

### **Conclusion: The Failure of Cosmopolitan Europe**

The history of Europe is the unlikely, even hidden story of empire. Empire has made Europe. Every empire in history has married politics and religion: emperors have stood at the intersection of heaven and earth to bring the peace and prosperity of the realm of the gods to the people of the empire. Religion has been the cultural glue that has held empires together. The religion of the empire became the foundation of imperial citizenship; to be a citizen was to worship the gods. It was also the method of assimilation; outsiders became insiders when they accepted the imperial cult.

Caesars from Augustus to Diocletian made Roman religion the cultural glue that held the Empire together. When advancing Christianity threatened to undermine the legitimacy of the state, Diocletian declared war on the Church. Despite his gruesome efforts, he failed to stem the Christian tide. When Constantine decided to reverse course and accept the inevitable victory of Christ over Caesar, Christendom was born. Roman Christendom (and the Byzantine Empire it became) exalted the emperor as Christ’s representative on earth, sent to govern both the temporal and spiritual worlds. The emperor was supreme in state and church. The church legitimated the state; the state protected and enlarged the church. To be Roman was to be Christian; to be Christian was to be Roman. The story was more complicated in the Latin West where the Church sustained the culture and much of the administrative system long after the Roman state had been overrun and colonized by outsiders. Roman popes grew in authority through the dark years of invasion, but they eventually had to call on Western secular princes to save them, having lost all confidence in the emperor in the East. The Frankish rescuers saved the papacy, but in doing so secured an imperial crown that was soon contested by the popes who bestowed it. Western Christendom indeed married throne and altar, but it was a tumultuous marriage with plenty of rocky moments. Both emperor and pope claimed superiority, leaving the question of authority in limbo. What was not in question was the centrality of Catholic Christianity to the governance of

Europe. Roman Catholicism was the glue holding the sprawling, decentralized, fragmented and often warring nations of Europe together: altar legitimated throne; throne protected altar.

Protestantism fragmented Christendom, but it did not reject the concept. Protestants were fully supportive of establishing Christian commonwealths—just at the national rather than regional level. “Christendom in Each Country” allowed Protestant princes to use religion to support their rule and shape the identities of citizens. These princes created strong nation-states, but in doing so inoculated their societies from the perceived evil of European unity; Christendom could work at the national level, but not at the European. Further fragmentation occurred after the French Revolution when nationalism took the place of Christianity as the legitimating ideology. Pan-European nationalism was, perhaps, possible, but it foundered on rocks of national prejudice. The result was devastating war.

War left Western Europe longing for the unity of Latin Christendom. Christian Democrats attempted to create a Christendom Lite with economic integration accompanied by efforts to develop a European civil religion based on “Christian values.” Meanwhile, Anglo-Nordic Protestant countries defanged nationalism but continued to use it to protect their independence, especially from continental dominance. Both efforts failed: Christian values proved too weak to unite diverse peoples in the twentieth century; and Defanged Nationalism could not resist the pressures of globalization that eventually forced most of the Anglo-Nordics to accept EU membership, thus joining the empire.

But what of Cosmopolitanism? Habermas and Derrida (2003) proclaimed the cosmopolitan future of Europe after the mass demonstrations opposing the Iraq War in 2003. For a shining moment, a cosmopolitan EU looked like the model for the future. Values, law and institutions would lead the way for all nations seeking peace and prosperity. Kant would be proved right; Europe could turn international relations into domestic politics by creating a federation undergirded by a genuine European *demos*. Unfortunately the cosmopolitan dream ended with the euro crisis of 2009-2010, the migration crisis of 2015, the UK Brexit vote of 2016, and the rise of the populist and nationalist right in Italy, Austria, Germany and Spain.

Cosmopolitanism proved incapable of providing the necessary cultural glue to hold the EU together. As Molloy (2017) has recently pointed out, secular cosmopolitanism lacks a “sophisticated ontology” to secure it. Kant himself based his optimism on the purposes of providence to ensure the realization of a cosmopolitan perpetual peace. Europe—at least at the elite level—has lost any sense that providence has an interest in moral choice and the direction of history. The European institutions—poor substitutes for the majestic emperors of the past—cannot govern a vast empire without a cultural glue to assimilate diverse peoples and hold the political structure together. Like past empires that exhaust their common culture, the EU will erode as it repeatedly loses the intellectual battles with the forces of particularism.

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