

# EUROPE AND ITS CHRISTIAN ROOTS



Dear ranger, dear rover,

Half of the Euromoot's name is dedicated to Europe, the Europe that we show on our uniform, the Europe that we commit ourselves to serve in our scout promise that we renew at the start of our ranger's journey and the rover's commitment.

We are familiar with the concept of Europe, yet it is not so easy to grasp. Let's take a moment together to think about this.

## Is Europe an area clearly delimited by natural borders?

At school, I learned that Europe was the territory between the "Atlantic and the Urals".

However, this definition does not reflect the political reality, past and present: Russia extends as far as the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Strait.

In the geopolitical context of the "Cold War", this expression was often used by the leaders of the "West", in particular by General de Gaulle, to reaffirm that Europe was not reduced to its Western part, but included the countries of Eastern Europe, then under the control of communist ideology.

## Is Europe a reality born of a common history?

Is it rather a common history that underlies Europe, more than its geographical characteristics?

The Roman Empire extended around the Mediterranean basin, including North Africa, but it did not extend very far north of Europe. It is therefore much more a Mediterranean Empire than a European one.

Subsequently, over the centuries, successive empires have covered only a portion of Europe. If we look at the borders of the European states for 2000 years, we see that they are extremely shifting, stemming from a particularly complex history.

## Is Europe rather a cultural construction?

On this subject, we must also be careful. For example, from the break in 395AD between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Western Roman Empire, culture evolved differently in the East and the West part. 650 years later, these cultural differences would form one of the main causes of the great schism of 1054 separating Catholics and Orthodox permanently.

These cultural differences are even reflected in the way we live our faith.

For example, the meaning of the sacred is deeply rooted in Eastern Christian traditions, even in the liturgy; in the West, the debate between faith and reason is more developed.

## A territory marked by its Christian roots?

Since the Middle Ages, Christianity has made a major contribution to the development and unity of Europe. Here are three illustrations:

- The great religious orders have spread throughout Europe. They have tirelessly collected and copied knowledge, both secular and religious, in their libraries. They created the first universities to collaborate with each other, long before contemporary exchange programs such as "Erasmus". By the way, did you know that Erasmus was a theologian priest to whom the Pope had offered to become a cardinal?

- Pilgrims could move freely throughout Europe, to go to Compostela or Rome, prefiguring the contemporary principle of free movement of goods and people.
- Finally, architects and builders circulated throughout Europe, hence the great similarities between most European cathedrals, masterpieces on the spiritual, architectural and cultural level.

Nowadays, this affirmation of Europe's Christian or more precisely Judeo-Christian roots is hardly acknowledged, if not polemical, in certain Western countries. However, the founding fathers of the European Institutions (now the Council of Europe and the European Union), including Robert Schuman and Alcide de Gasperi, two committed Catholics, will indeed rely on them to shape a common and peaceful future based on the social doctrine of the Church. Let us remember that after two World Wars, Europe in 1945 was in ruins, literally as well as economically, but also in search of meaning, both spiritual and political.

## **What about us, Guides and Scouts of Europe?**

This story concerns us directly. Within our movement, we find intuitions of Robert Schuman, for example :

- in the verse of the song of the Promise that is proper to our movement:  
"Across borders, I reach out my hand  
The Europe of my brothers will be born tomorrow".
- in our second principle:  
"Faithful to his country, a scout (a guide) favours a united and fraternal Europe."
- in our fundamental texts (Canonical Statutes):  
"Beyond country borders, the Union wants to create a true community of Christian life for the youth of Europe's various countries, and thereby to raise their awareness of belonging to a European community while developing, at the same time, a healthy culture of all national values, which are the diverse expressions of our common heritage."

To conclude our meditation, I will share words from Saint John Paul II who addressed us back in August 2003:

"Dear Guides and Scouts of Europe, you are a precious gift not only for the Church, but also for the new Europe that is being built under your eyes. You are called "to take part, with all the ardour of your youth, to the construction of the Europe of peoples, so that every person may be recognised in his dignity as a beloved child of God and so that a society based on solidarity and fraternal charity may occur".

Remy RS