



John Waters

# Seeking Our European Heart

I am especially conscious of the fact that I am speaking in Germany, for several reasons. One is the context of the efforts during my own lifetime to create a single, harmonious Europe, as a result of the horrors that erupted out of your nation's internal pathologies just a lifetime years ago, 75 years. The other is that I come from Ireland, where the attitude towards Germany has in recent years become less sanguine and affectionate than it may have been for some time. The third is that I have a great faith in the soul of the German people, who for many years have been much better fans of Irish music than even the Irish. And the fourth is the hope and direction I have gleaned from the words of one of your greatest countrymen, a matter which I will return to in a while.

My view of the EU is simple: it is not Europe. We often use the terms 'Europe' and 'EU' as though they were interchangeable, but they actually have nothing much in common. Europe is a continent rich in culture and history, the centre of the Christian civilization which has transformed the world. The EU is a bureaucracy – nothing more.

The European project has been restricted by this radical limitation: its essentially bureaucratic nature, which has treated culture as something irrelevant and non-essential, soul as some residual anachronism, and faith as something to be 'tolerated' rather than embraced. This has had, and continues to have, a stifling effect on the potential of the European Union to evolve as a genuine community, with common aims and dreams. In the absence of a cultural and spiritual vision, the economy has become at once everything and, inevitably, a nothing. In its headlong dash to fulfill its aims through economics, the European Union has destroyed the hopes of many Europeans, including many in my own country.

The failure of the EU project to capture the imaginations of its people is not merely 'coincidental' with the retreat from Europe's rich Christian heritage. There is a causal relationship between the two. The retreat from an understanding of first causes – once loudly and proudly expressed in the Christian narrative and transmitted via the richest culture the world has known – has left a vacuum which economics, liberalism and materialism has unsurprisingly failed to fill.

For various reasons, what evolved into the European Union was never articulate about itself in cultural terms, but instead resorted to a language and logic of materialism and secular democracy. It appears to have made the mistake which is also being made in some of its larger principalities – that a society can form itself willy nilly out of a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures. Instead, what happens in such experiments is that, without a strong and assertive host culture at the centre, the multicultural soup lacks any context for unity, and so divides into a multiplicity of enclave entities. This process can be seen in many European countries – in Holland, in France, in the UK, where immigrant populations, attracted by prosperity and modernity, converge for economic reasons only, and end up weakening rather than strengthening the host cultures they depend on. In the same way, all of the member countries of the EU are as immigrants to the idea of European Union. They came to it in hope and expectation, but having got there have found the core vacated, a hole in the doughnut of the unity they anticipated. That is fundamentally with the EU and Europe have no immediate prospect of being coterminous entities.

Perhaps we can blame the Italians? As the euro was about to be issued on December 31st 2001, the president of the European Commission Romano Prodi observed that 'money is not only substance, it is also identity'. A year later he elaborated: 'The single European currency project is not economic at all. It is a purely political step. The historical significance of the euro is to create

a bipolar economy in the world. The two poles are the dollar and the euro. That is the political meaning of the single European currency. It is a step beyond which there will be others. The euro is just an antipasto'. In these few sentences, Prodi summarized all that has been wrong about the EU project: first, thinking that a currency is capable of supplying an identity; second, sneakily moving from an economic to a political project without speaking of culture; and third pursuing in effect a federal superstate without asking its citizens what they think.

This is the thinking that has rendered a united Europe impossible. And impossible is proving. For if the euro is just an antipasto, the meal has been rudely interrupted by the fire alarm. Serious indigestion may yet ensue across the entire Eurozone.

I am unsure what you understand about the condition and feeling of my own country, Ireland. Let me bring you up to date. A couple of years ago, there was considerable unease about the high-handed and summary manner of the EU/IMF intervention to extend Ireland what is termed a 'bailout'. This initiative ignored the unjust imposition of massive banking debts on taxpayers who had no part in creating the crisis, and yet presented itself as a helping hand. In reality it was an attempt to shore up the Irish economy to avoid the risk of contagion across the continent. Few among us doubted that the intervention package was not, despite its title, a 'bailout' for Ireland, but a 60-year punitive mortgage at loan-shark rates, designed not to save Ireland but to staunch the haemorrhaging of the single currency project.

Now, things appear to be better, on the surface at least. We have exited the 'bailout' and have 'returned to the markets'. In a certain limited sense, we have regained our sovereignty. But really nothing much has changed. We still depend for our survival on outside forces, and, because the option of emigration is pre-programmed in the Irish almost at the level of instinct, our children have again started to move towards the airports in the hope of finding a better life abroad.

I come from a family background in which opposition to Ireland's membership of what is called "the European project" was passionate and pronounced. My father was one of 211,891 Irish people (17% of Irish voters) who in 1972 voted against joining the 'Common Market'. He believed membership would lead to the destruction of the Irish farming and fishing industries, and make us the paupers of Europe. He insisted that the required trade-offs – especially the exchange of sovereignty and natural resources for infrastructure and subsidies – would erode our longterm capacity for self-sufficiency. It would be difficult today to make the argument that my father was wrong in the concerns he expressed.

This perspective was almost in my blood, and I articulated it for many years, encountering a high degree of abuse and ridicule along the way. The argument against Ireland's membership was especially unpopular during the 1980s and early 1990s, when large amounts of structural and cohesion funding became available and Ireland was a net beneficiary of community largesse. I began to rethink my position after the ratification by Irish voters of the Maastricht Treaty, in 1992, the moment we crossed over into what seemed an acceptance of a different relationship with the rest of Europe and a new idea of how our country might sustain itself. With that treaty, the EU ceased to be merely a cooperative community, acquiring many of the characteristics of a single political entity. I had assumed that, in voting Yes to Maastricht, the Irish electorate was aware of the choice it was making. It seemed obvious that the argument for an independent, self-sufficient Ireland was lost.

I also felt that the pursuit by a succession of Irish governments of a particular and consistent approach to economic development had left us no longer in a position to be the deciders of our own fate. Ireland had become so dependent on the relationship with the community that, henceforth, almost everything that concerned Ireland's future would have to be pursued from an acceptance of this dependence.

In my heart of hearts, I still regard this as a tragedy. In 1972 and even in the years after we joined, we had hopes of developing an indigenous self-sufficiency, while using our membership of the Common Market, and later the European Community, in ways that might have supported this. But nobody in Irish politics at the time was offering a coherent vision concerning how this might be pursued. Whenever Irish objectives were at odds with the drift of the community, we chose to accept monetary compensation rather than insisting on retaining certain essential capacities and resources within our control.

Ireland, arising from our colonial relationship with England, has an historical addiction to rendering itself dependent. For many years, the Irish economy has depended mainly on outsiders coming in to create activity from which the Irish people gain significant but somewhat fragile benefits. We don't really have any kind of indigenous economy. Even in the boom times, there has been a stark contrast between the achievements of the transnational elements of the Irish economy, which were spectacularly successful, and the indigenous elements, which were sluggish and inefficient. Nobody in the political class of today offers any vision by which Ireland might proceed outside the EU or in a reduced role within it. Such an idea is almost unimaginable. Our leaders know no other way of running our country except in some kind of dependent relationship with some larger entity.

For four decades, Irish politicians have dealt with the European question by emphasising Ireland's short-term pecuniary interests, rather than seeking to inspire the Irish people about our place in Europe. It is a cliché of Irish politics that 'we are all Europeans now', but any close observer of the discussion since it began would have to conclude that nobody had any real interest in anything except the structural and cohesion funding. The founders of the EU project – Monnet, De Gasperi, Adenauer, Schuman – are almost unheard of in Ireland. Very few Irish people would be able to mount a convincing argument concerning the cultural and spiritual characteristics of Ireland's place in the European project. Because that project was sold for three decades as a matter of obtaining financial supports, voters remained cynical about any attempts at describing a deeper connection. It didn't matter because the money was continuing to come.

I was for many years deeply suspicious of the European project, mainly because of its bureaucratic dimension and the way it seemed to treat the issue of democratic endorsement as a rubber-stamp on decisions already taken by politicians and officials. As I said, as a journalist and sometime activist, I campaigned against several EU treaties, up to and including the Maastricht Treaty of 1992. After the Irish ratification of that treaty, I concluded that Ireland was already so far advanced on the road towards a new dependency in relation to the EU that there was no way back. I remember well the condescension and hostility of the political and media establishments back then, as we sought to persuade people that voting Yes to Maastricht would be the most disastrous decision we would ever make. Later, I argued against European Monetary Union and the introduction of the euro, but was on the losing side in these arguments also. These developments resulted in the Celtic Tiger ° a materialist carnival which lasted for ten years, and

which the Irish people in general embraced as though it were the arrival of the Promised Land, the outright vindication of the choices they had made. I politely continued to point out that this was delusional, that the prosperity we were enjoying did not appear to have a solid basis. But, in the face of what appeared to be the reality of our situation, I eventually stopped talking. Although my country's direction appalled me somewhat, I decided to support it once it became clear that this was the democratic decision of my people. Today, it gives me no great pleasure to say that I appear to have been correct from the beginning, and that everything I heard my father warn about has now come to pass.

Many people in Ireland have been unable to avoid noticing that the recent crisis seemed to again reduce the country to a separate economic entity. When we were being persuaded to sign up to European Monetary Union, one of the key selling points was that the new currency would render the problems of one the problems of all. No country would be left on its own or treated differently to others. But then, when the crisis hit, and despite that it was obvious that Ireland's problems arose from the wider inconsistencies of the Eurozone, we were somehow, at this moment of our greatest difficulty, seen as a uniquely problematic element – and therefore somewhat semi-detached. In failure and disgrace, 'Ireland' was deemed still to exist, a separate entity, cast back on its own resources. Now, a couple of years later, we have managed to stabilize our balance sheet, we are treated again as part of the 'European' family. Irish people watch all this very carefully and are considering exactly what it means.

For as long as prosperity lasted, we were told that it was due to the benefits of membership of the Eurozone; but now it seems that our failures were the consequences of our own actions.

For a while we half-believed this. The slow, odd way we slipped into this crisis from about September 2008 led us to adopt certain analyses 'on the hoof', without more than a glance at the bigger picture. We blamed the banks, individual banking personalities, domestic politicians – accusing them, not implausibly, of recklessness and incompetence. We focused on the use or misuse of domestic instruments, when the only one that might have saved us – domestic control over interest rates – had already been surrendered.

Underneath the surface cacophony of rage and recrimination that defined the Irish public conversation over the past five years could be detected another chord – of self-blame. There was just no shortage of evidence that we had gone a little bit crazy, and this contained just enough substance to repress any truly comprehending anger.

But gradually we are putting together a new 'history' of the past few decades, and at the heart of the story, I suspect, will be a previously unidentified villain: the euro.

A decade ago, dizzy with the idea of an economic and cultural transformation, we took the dramatic changes to our culture and public spaces for granted, as the promised flowering of European convergence. We looked at these strange coins and notes in our purses in much the way we scrutinised the lanky Poles and Latvians who served us cappuccinos. We didn't exactly understand what had happened, but we were not about to look its bounties in the mouth. Really, our temporary opposition to the treaties of Nice and Lisbon was the response of a people infected by a hubris. These were not thoughtful responses, but gut reactions, perhaps inspired by a growing sense that Ireland was no longer in charge of its own destiny.

But, at the same time, we embraced what appeared to be the benefits of that which we struggled against.

It was actually precisely between the treaties of Nice and Lisbon that the real damage was inflicted. For nearly a decade from 1999, interest rates – directed at German conditions – hovered below Ireland's rate of inflation, which meant that, in a certain warped sense, it was foolish not to be heavily indebted. With all the appropriate fiscal and financial levers long since surrendered, the nation's prudence went on automatic pilot as, with one side of our brains, we persuaded ourselves that, all things considered, we had been exceedingly smart. With the other side of our brains, we continued to be skeptical, but this skepticism never came to anything.

The past five years of centralized autocracy, intended to rescue the project from its own structural disintegration, has left things much worse than before. The economy of Europe is now in remission, but the crisis will return, inevitably, because the foundations remain weak. When it does, the cracks will again begin to widen, and sooner or later the Union will come under unbearable strain, with the almost certain prospect that some parts will fall away. This can be avoided, but only by a rediscovery of Europe's lost soul: the repressed Christian heart of the continent that, embarking from this proposal, remade so much of the world in its own image.

One way of putting the problem with the European Union would be to say that it is not a union but a dictatorship of the economically strong over the economically weak. A decade ago, when the euro currency was introduced, this dictatorship resulted in a kind of benign manipulation of small European nations using cheap money to inflate human desires with a view to long-term profit. Now, the process works in reverse, with these small nations (and some not so small) being compelled to pay back horrendously inflated debts arising from the hyper-inflation created by an unbalanced and dysfunctional currency and a poorly organized banking apparatus. These circumstances were rendered inevitable by two factors: one, the lack of economic cohesion into which a functional currency might have been bedded down; and two, the requirements of German reunification, which provoked a sluggishness in the German economy, and for which interest rates were set at a level that destroyed the integrity of smaller economies which had never previously been subjected to such an explosion of available credit.

This is the truth of it. An attempt has been made to rewrite history in this regard, to put the problems down to the fecklessness and irresponsibility of devil-may-care southern nations. This is bogus, and the persistent attempts to impose this version has greatly delayed the possibility of an understanding capable of rescuing the situation.

Instead of admitting what has occurred, a generation of European politicians has sought to pretend that the real problem was the unruliness of small nations. And these small nations, partly through powerlessness, and partly arising from a misplaced guilt provoked by their recent experiences of untrammelled credit on their cultures and peoples, have so far acquiesced in this characterization.

Following an uncertain period in which it seemed that the very nature of the euro might come under review, a new climate of normalization has been asserting itself. Blackmail, bullying and economic intimidation have been employed to ensure widespread acquiescence in the idea that the core nations of the EU should suffer minimal consequences for the failure of the euro zone project, while citizens of other EU member-countries pay the full price. Germany and France have achieved this impressive outcome on their own behalf by appropriating the levers of the



EU and suspending its already weakened democratic instruments, utilizing their new-found hegemony to insinuate that the EU is entirely the creature of German and French philanthropy. Having hi-jacked the key EU institutions, they have proceeded to bully and intimidate the feeble leaderships of peripheral countries, and where necessary replaced their governments with more amenable administrations.

The official policy of the European Union has, in other words, become the imposition of a momentous untruth which has served, finally, to vindicate the doubts of all those who previously sought to question its underlying motives and intentions. The necessity for the lie arises from the self-serving blindness of a generation of politicians which cannot bear to declare its project in ruins and contemplate that it might have to go back to the beginning at the very time when it expected to be taking a lap of honour.

Those who promote the European project almost invariably speak as though everyone has a moral duty to respond positively to what is proposed by its logic. But beyond a general sense of the potential benefits of economic cooperation, there has been little attempt to put substance, in the popular imagination, on the philosophical core of the project. From time to time, we hear about the desire of the founders to unite the continent in the wake of the Second World War, to ward off future mutually-destructive hostilities within Europe. It is implied that a failure to go along fully with what is proposed will result in the fields of Europe turning into bloodbaths once again. To avoid this, it appears, several European countries, including my own, must impoverish themselves for several generations and condemn their children to watch the emergence of a two-tier continent. In such a 'Europe', the prosperity of the rich will be accompanied by a new form of economic autocracy which will justify itself on the basis of containing the untrammelled appetites of nations which are unable to manage their own affairs. Increasingly, it will become difficult to distinguish between the circumstances unleashed by this logic and those the European Union was conceived in order to avoid.

The EU was conceived not from abstractions or utopias but from the facts of history and European politics. What Monnet and the other original builders of a United Europe sought to impart was not a high-flown notion, but a practical project – based, yes, on great ideals – but firstly a construction to be built together step by step, and founded upon shared values, cultural principles and institutions that take the human desires of Europe's people into account. The past four years of German and French led autocracy have set these ideas back almost half a century.

For me as for many, the core problem of the European project has long been its failure to ignite the imaginations of the people. In spite of the glorious rhetoric of its founding fathers, it has remained a techno-bureaucratic phenomenon justified by high-flown but essentially meaningless promises of democracy and egalitarianism.

In a 1994 speech to the European Parliament, the great Czech dissident, writer, philosopher and then Czech president, Vaclav Havel, spoke about his response as an enthusiastic Europhile on reading the Maastricht Treaty. He came to the treaty as someone who believed closer integration was essential for Europe, not least to countries like his own. But his zeal was dented by the text he encountered. 'Into my admiration, which initially verged on enthusiasm', he said, 'there began to intrude a disturbing, less exuberant feeling. I felt like I was looking into the workings of an

absolutely perfect and immensely ingenious modern machine. To study such a machine must be a great joy to an admirer of technical innovations, but for me, a human whose interest in the world is not satisfied by admiration for well-oiled machines, something was seriously missing. Perhaps it could be called, in a rather simplified way, a spiritual or moral or emotional dimension. My reason had been spoken to, but not my heart’.

Long before, Havel had been dissecting the nature of Communist ideology. Far from vindicating the triumphalist responses of western capitalists that occurred in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, his diagnosis stands as a warning of the implicit risks arising from all forms of Utopian thinking. Years before the collapse of communism, he wrote that the socialist ideology of the East was ‘a convex-mirror image’ of the capitalism of the West, a slightly exaggerated version of something relating fundamentally to the perversion of human desire.

Ideology, Havel starkly declared in his essay *The Power of the Powerless*, ‘pretends that the requirements of the system derive from the requirements of life. It is a world of appearances trying to pass for reality’. The real questions, he declared, are these: whether we can place morality above politics, restore content to human speaking and rehabilitate the personal experience of human beings as the authentic measure of freedom, placing at the centre of this question not a coherent set of beliefs but ‘the autonomous, integral and dignified human I’. He identified a need in modern society for what he termed ‘post-political politics’, defined as politics not as technology-of-power but as a means of enabling meaningful human lives. This, he proposed, would require an ‘existential revolution’, engaging mankind in the totality of being, transcending politics and society as conventionally understood. He stressed repeatedly up to his death that this was as urgent in the free democracies of the West as it had been in the communist zone.

Man persists in misunderstanding the nature of freedom. We may knock down walls or create supranational entities in order to meet the insistent demands of our deepest longings, but the answer we seek is not necessarily to be discovered in the ideas of freedom on the other side of a wall, a border or an ocean, never mind in embracing the trappings of a different, more promising system. Human desire is boundless and indefatigable, and freedom is not something a political or economic system can ultimately deliver, because the human appetite remains unsatisfied by physical conditions or resources. Beyond a certain point in man’s pursuit of self-realization, something else needs to take over: an understanding that the things that suggest themselves as the target of human desire are merely stepping stones to something else, and that this always lies tantalizingly ahead. This means that humans are ultimately insatiable and cannot become to any degree content until they begin to recognize this paradox. Havel was politely telling us that the capitalist system, as much as the socialist system, survives by concealing as well as suppressing the true nature of the human heart. A freed human being is one who comes to know that what he desires cannot be bought, any more than it is to be found on the other side of a barrier.

Every supranational entity in history that has enhanced humanity, Havel told the European Parliament in that 1994 speech, has been buoyed by a charismatic quality, out of which its structures ultimately grew. To be vital, such entities had to offer some key to emotional identification, an ideal that spoke to people and inspired them – ‘a set of generally understandable values that everyone could share’.

The most urgent task facing the union, he concluded, was ‘the recreation of its charisma’, and



the first step in this process was the formulation of a 'single, crystal-clear and universally understandable political document that would immediately make it evident what the European Union really is'.

It is interesting to recall that, when an attempt was made to formulate such a document a few years later, in the form of a EU Constitution which all member nations were invited to endorse, the initiative was attended by a controversy arising from the exclusion from the draft document of mentions of God. Perhaps herein lies the clue to the root cause of what has gone wrong.

I am a great admirer of your countryman, Pope Benedict XVI. At the Bundestag in September 2011, as on numerous occasions in the previous six years of his pontificate, Pope Benedict spoke eloquently and comprehensively about the reduction of reason imposed on our cultures by positivist thinking, i.e. the proposal that reality might be understood by objective, empirical means alone. 'In its self-proclaimed exclusivity,' he said, 'the positivist reason which recognizes nothing beyond mere functionality resembles a concrete bunker with no windows, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions, being no longer willing to obtain either from God's wide world. And yet we cannot hide from ourselves the fact that even in this artificial world, we are still covertly drawing upon God's raw materials, which we refashion into our own products. The windows must be flung open again, we must see the wide world, the sky and the earth once more and learn to make proper use of all this'.

This was a most graphic and accurate description of where what we call 'progress' has now taken us. In his pursuit of omnipotence, man has lost sight of the only thing that might serve to mitigate his desires and cushion him against his own inability to satisfy them. He has, in other words, lost sight of his own structure, what Pope Benedict called 'the ecology of man' – and of the inbuilt disproportion that persists between what man truly seems to want and what his dreaming leads him towards. The dreams are good, leading man to discover great things about the world; but the desire is far greater than anything man can devise. Thus, the more he seeks stewardship of his own destiny, the more dissatisfied man is doomed to become.

I often think how strange it is that, while working tirelessly to eliminate from our culture the idea of a God who watches over everything, we have recently replaced Him with something that, even in the terms of our positivist culture, is far more irrational. Nowadays, what keeps watch on our every move is not a deity but something called 'the markets'.

The markets never sleep. These ghostly entities sit night and day in front of computer screens, observing trends and reading minds, weighing up the fates of peoples, anticipating Greek confidence, dictating the value of Irish bonds. Nobody seems to know the names of these beings, or where exactly they sit in watch, or what they look like. But constantly we are reminded of their watchful presence by the new ordained – bankers, speculators, ratings agencies officials and 'economists'. The bankers, especially, are blessed with exceptional powers, being permitted to create money out of nothing. And this new tendency has taken hold in an almost precisely inverse relationship to the deconstruction of religious understandings of reality.

What we have observed in the past decade or so of EU experience has been the acting-out at a macro-political level of the most fundamental of man's misunderstandings about himself. These recent and continuing events bear witness to the urgent need for the elites of the European

autocracy to emerge into the light and begin to speak to the citizens of Europe about their fundamental human desires and how these might best be adhered to in a political project governing the whole of Europe in accordance with the true nature of man.

A couple of years ago, Pope Benedict also made an appearance in a short film entitled 'Bells of Europe', which dealt with the relationship between Christianity, European culture and the future of the continent, includes extracts from a series of interviews with important religious leaders from the main Christian confessions, and leading figures from the world of politics and culture.

Pope Benedict's contribution was as remarkable as it was brief. In a few sentences, he cut to the heart of the difficulty of modern man, setting out both an antidote to the positivistic misappropriation of reason and a method for seeing truly.

'The first reason for my hope', he says, 'consists in the fact that the desire for God, the search for God, is profoundly inscribed into each human soul and cannot disappear. Certainly we can forget God for a time, lay Him aside and concern ourselves with other things, but God never disappears. St. Augustine's words are true: we men are restless until we have found God. This restlessness also exists today, and is an expression of the hope that man may, ever and anew, even today, start to journey towards this God.'

The most convincing – and yet the most ignored and taken-for-granted evidence – is within us: our desire. To see desire as a thing in itself is to know hope as a thing in itself.

Having gently reminded us of the question that defines us, the Holy Father directed us again towards the human witness that is the Gospel. This must be entered into fully before we know what it is we are talking about. Unlike the ideologies which come and go as they distract us in different ways and directions, the Gospel is true, and therefore cannot wear out. 'In each period of history', he said, 'it reveals new dimensions, it emerges in all its novelty as it responds to the needs of the heart and mind of human beings, who can walk in this truth and so discover themselves.'

Bringing these two elements together – desire and truth – the pope predicted a new 'springtime for Christianity' – its early symptoms already capable of being observed in the 'sense of restlessness' that exists among the young.

'Young people', he said, 'have seen much – the proposals of the various ideologies and of consumerism – and they have become aware of the emptiness and insufficiency of those things. Man was created for the infinite, the finite is too little. Thus, among the new generations we are seeing the reawakening of this restlessness, and they too begin their journey making new discoveries of the beauty of Christianity; not a cut-price or watered-down version, but Christianity in all its radicalism and profundity. Thus I believe that anthropology, as such, is showing us that there will always be a new reawakening of Christianity. The facts confirm this in a single phrase: Deep foundations. That is Christianity; it is true and the truth always has a future.'

Thus, the Pope enabled us to see ways into and around the problem by redefining its terms. For us in Europe, he elaborated, there is the need to find a new identity from which to carry out the responsibility of Europe to speak and transmit the truth in these fractured and confusing times.

But the problem, as he said, is not to be found in the host of diverse nations that make up the modern Europe. Difference does not necessarily mean division. 'In their cultural, human and temperamental differences, nations are a rich asset which together give rise to a great symphony of cultures. Basically, they are a shared culture.'

The Pope expanded: 'The problem Europe has in finding its own identity consists, I believe, in the fact that in Europe today we see two souls: one is abstract anti-historical reason, which seeks to dominate all else because it considers itself above all cultures; it is like a reason which has finally discovered itself and intends to liberate itself from all traditions and cultural values in favour of an abstract rationality. Strasburg's first verdict on the crucifix was an example of such abstract reason which seeks emancipation from all traditions, even from history itself.'

We cannot live like this, he says. Pure reason is defined by history, by truth, and cannot be removed from this context. Thus, Europe's 'other' soul remains – the Christian soul. It resides, still, within us all, at the core of our longing and hoping. We should not feel so discouraged. 'It is a soul open to all that is reasonable, a soul which itself created the audaciousness of reason and the freedom of critical reasoning, but which remains anchored to the roots from which this Europe was born, the roots which created the continent's fundamental values and great institutions, in the vision of the Christian faith.'

This soul must first find a new and more deeply shared expression in the ecumenical context – between the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox churches. And this must become the beginning of something new – perhaps, and this is my own interpretation, of Havel's 'existential revolution'.

'It must then encounter this abstract reason', Pope Benedict continued, 'in other words, it must accept and maintain the freedom of reason to criticize everything it can do and has done, but to practise this and give it concrete form on the foundations and in the context of the great values that Christianity has given us. Only by blending these elements can Europe have weight in the intercultural dialogue of mankind today and tomorrow. Only when reason has a historical and moral identity can it speak to others, search for an "interculturality" in which everyone can enter and find a fundamental unity in the values that open the way to the future, to a new humanism. This must be our aim. For us this humanism arises directly from the view of man created in the image and likeness of God.'

It is awesome to observe such clarity and such simplicity. It is beautiful to read it. But it is almost overpowering to know that, placed before the reason of man, such words are capable of rekindling a hope that many had thought dead because of some change in reality which they had not been able to understand.

I spent some time a few years ago working on an English translation of the catalogue for an exhibition mounted in the headquarters of the European Parliament in Strasbourg to celebrate the resonance between the European project and the work of the great Catalan artist and architect, Antoni Gaudi. Entitled, 'The Realism of Gaudi and the Hope of Europe', the exhibition was the brainchild of two men, one a politician, the other an artist, or, as he prefers, a stonemason. Almost ten years ago, Mario Mauro, former Vice-president of the European Parliament, visited the Expiatory Temple of the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, the fantastic legacy of the genius of Gaudi, a monument both to human aspiration and human imperfection, still in

construction after more than a century of work. The breathtaking beauty of the Sagrada Familia is matched by the wonder instilled by the awareness that this project has already stretched beyond the scope of any one human life. The idea that it may never be finished becomes not a problem but an implicit celebration of man's relationship with Infinity.

While at the temple, Mauro encountered the stonemason Esuro Sotoo, who today continues the work started by Gaudi in seeking to create a suitable representation of man's apprehension of his own part in the Mystery that defines him. Inspired by this encounter, and struck by the parallels between the vision of Gaudi and the vision of the founding fathers of the European project, Mauro proposed that they create an exhibition to bring this idea to a wider audience.

The exhibition, then, laid the philosophy and works of Gaudi alongside the thinking of the founders of Europe, drawing attention to the many resonances and implicit connections. It was an intriguing and impressive concept, the first time I had seen the core ideas of the European Union announced in a coherent manner as anything other than a series of bureaucratic formulae arising from a self-interested perception of mutual interests. In his introduction to the catalogue, Mauro outlined the many resonances between the unification of Europe and the continuing construction of the Expiatory Temple of the Sagrada Familia. Both projects, he outlined, were attempts to reinterpret tradition for a new world. Both were born of a vision of something that seemed almost impossible. Both arose from a sense of the Presence of God. Both remain incomplete. 'Both,?' As Mauro put it, 'move forward with small steps, many times guided by intuition, with abrupt stops and sudden accelerations: a fire, the disapproval of a referendum, a change of architect, a new treaty... For both, a fundamental problem is finding people that know how to humbly propose, update and reinterpret the original intuitions once again'.

The Sagrada Familia is a truly inspirational project, a vast, spectacular construction that plays all kinds of tricks on conventional conceptions of time and space. Gaudi saw God in polygons, arches and parabolas. His objective was to incorporate in a building the natural geometric shapes of creation, and to demonstrate how these underpinned the beauty of the universe with a functionality that responded to the reason and intuition of man. Rejecting the rigidity of a rationalist architecture that seemed to defy nature, he sought an ethos of harmony with natural reality. The Sagrada Familia has a broad footprint, but its principal direction is upwards, towards the sky, in a series of towers and pinnacles that take the breath away. Gaudi had a passion for reality, its curves and angles, its lines and colours, and this was for him the meaning of Christianity. Circumstances, difficulties, setbacks, all these were manifestation of Divine will. 'Love of the truth,' said Gaudi, 'is above any other love. Art is beauty. Beauty is the magnificence of the truth. Art doesn't exist, but rather love of the truth.'

Patrick Piffaretti, the Director of the John Monnet Foundation for Europe, outlined in the exhibition's catalogue some of the parallels between the European project and the genius that was Gaudi. 'The legacy of John Monnet and the builders of the United Europe consists of having transmitted us a great ideal, and not a mere spiritual vision, but rather a construction to be built together step by step, freely desired by the people of Europe and founded upon common values norms and institutions that took the interest of everyone into account'.

As Esuro Sotoo puts it, 'Man has a need to be educated, to be continually constructed: this is the true goal of the construction of the Expiatory Temple of the Sagrada Familia'.

Recent events have told us that there is a clear need to educate the electorates of Europe about the core meanings of the project that seeks to unite them. I come to you from Ireland, one country which has suffered greatly from the reduction of everything in Europe to a matter of money.

But, as Gaudi observed, 'Important things are not done for money'. Here lies our clue. Here lies our model.

What do we mean when we talk of a 'godless Europe'? Perhaps the problem lies in our concepts of godliness. Gaudi tells us that religion resides in fealty to reality. There is no Us and Them; just Truth and Untruth. There is nothing to fear except our own fear of the future.