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European Identity and Political Systems

Workshop 9:
Do EU institutions and policies "produce" European identity ?

"Institutions, traditions, innovations. Which religious identity for Europe ?" [1]

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Introduction

Between February 2002 and June 2004, the European Union debated and finalised a new Constitution. As constitutions define the nature, identity and scope of political communities, struggles commonly take place over the values and principles they embody. What should the European Union stand for? How should it situate itself in history? This was the stake of the controversy about the Christian heritage of Europe.

The question of whether Europe can be at least partly defined as a community of values and identity by virtue of its Christian heritage is a matter of longstanding debate. The process of EU constitution making gave this matter a new impetus and focus. It raised the stakes significantly because constitution making is an extraordinary symbolic process in the life of a polity. It is a rarity because it deals with the fundamentals of communal identity and therefore involves stepping aside from routine political life (Closa 2003). Constitution making means devising a framework intended to have significant durability. Because the EU's constitution-making process was a matter of formal, open deliberation it took place in the public domain. It also brought into public view competition by a range of political and religious actors aiming both to pursue and privilege their interests[2].

In the wake of 9/11, and contemporary worries about a 'clash of civilisations' between 'the West' and 'Islam' (Armstrong 2001; Barber 1995: ch. 14; Huntingdon 1998 passim), claims to religious identity have taken on new salience both internationally and within states. As Jean-Paul Willaime (2004: 75) puts it so succinctly: 'Religious geography is also a political geography'. Thus, to think of Europe as a predominantly – if not exclusively - Christian territorial expression takes us straight into claims about how we should imagine belonging to an emergent political community, its privileged version of history, and who might be its acceptable and legitimate members. However, as we shall show, the proposition of a Christian identity for the EU is far from cut and dried. Not only is Christianity itself still riven by diverse confessions and their related historical antagonisms but the European Union's space is also not exclusively Christian. From the point of view of religions, European history can hardly be written without acknowledging the centuries-long interplay between Christianity, Judaism and Islam.[3]

The political uses of religion depend on its place and its status in social life. The debate about secularisation shows that, even if religion has lost its content in Europe, its functions do not disappear but evolve. More than a source of normative collective values, religion is today lived as a cultural system providing ways of expressing peculiarities and

resources of adaptation or opposition to change. The question is then to know the role of the religious register in the legitimization of the EU through the structuration of a public sphere and a shared identity. (I)
These public sphere and identity have to be redefined at the supranational level. But it had been constituted in the matrix of the nation-state and it remain heavily marked by the national background. (II)
The European constitutional process was supposed to accelerate the emergence of a European political community by the densification of communication between citizens. The analysis of the religious issue, replaced in the general context of the debates around the Convention for the Future of Europe, suggests that the usual limits were not really overtaken in terms of citizens' information, media exposure, interest representation and collective action. (III)
In the same way, the constitutional process was linked to a project aiming to reinforce European identity and memory. This ambition was quickly circumscribed to the intergovernmental path dug since the beginning of the European integration. The controversy about the Christian heritage of Europe did not produce any new element and simply translate the mutations of the belief systems. (IV)
In conclusion, in the debate about the European constitution, religion appears as a transformed but resilient political resource, and emphasizes the contradictions of modern politics without being decisive any more.

I The political uses of religion : A secularised Europe ?

Latterly, in the social sciences, the classical focus on the role of religion in the construction of a political order and popular mobilisation has been enlarged to encompass the study of how religion may be used as a way of expressing an identity, status or claim. From this standpoint, religion is less a source of values than a resource for communication and self-assertion. On the one hand, religion may be conceived as a constitutive macro-social force that provides a belief-system and an institutional framework; on the other hand, we need to consider how religion is used by social actors.

Clifford Geertz (2000: 125) has proposed that we approach religion as a 'cultural system', whose mode of production, internal logic and effects we need to understand. From this point of view, religion is one system of beliefs among others, a means to handle the irreducibly irrational domain which each social order has to manage in its own specific way, not least because it is part of the political game. Religion offers a way of imposing a rationalised order on the irrational. However, we cannot simplistically counterpose religion to secularism and suppose that the latter may be identified with reason. Nor can religion be reduced simply to a normative body of thought for the attention of theologians, or indeed viewed as just another system of domination in need of sociological scrutiny and critique (Willaime 2004: 267-269). Rather, the persistence of religion in diverse forms in different kinds of social order prompts us to think of it as an inherent part of collective life.

In the classic debate of sociology of religion between 'functionalist' and 'substantivist' approaches, we give priority here to the first option by insisting on what religion *does*, namely addressing the ultimate questions of life and death, of the meaning of the human condition (Wallis and Bruce 1992: 10-11). Such a definition risks confusing religion with other grand systems (such as political ideologies) that also address questions of goal and purpose. Political discourse, like the religious, is often produced in ritualised settings (such as parliamentary debates or press conferences) and it also seeks to produce loyalties and to mobilise publics. Henceforth, it is necessary to use a criterion taking into account what distinguishes religion

from other big narratives, the reference the sacred. Here a substantivist definition allows to outline what religion *is* :
'Religion for us consists of actions, beliefs and institutions predicated upon the assumption of the existence either of supernatural entities with powers of agency, or impersonal powers possessed of moral purpose, which have the capacity to set the conditions of, or to intervene in, human affairs. Further, the central claims to the operation of such entities or impersonal powers are either not susceptible to, or are systematically protected from, refutation.' (Wallis and Bruce 1992: 10-11).
The substantivist theory intervenes then as the complement of the functionalist theory in our analysis. It implies to look for both the sacred and the social effects of the sacred to understand the presence and the role of the religious.

Taking this broad definition as a starting point, our aim here is to assess the contemporary workings of the religious dimension in the EU, noting how its meaning and form have shifted. This means that we have to take on board present-day debate on secularisation.

The idea of the 'disenchantment of the world' has been revisited frequently over the past century. The social sciences can hardly ignore religion when assessing the balance sheet of modernity. On the contrary, the persistence of the sacred in all kinds of society has been emphasised and its return with a vengeance has been noted. The intellectual journey of the sociologist Peter Berger (1999) is an example. Berger was a pioneer of the secularisation thesis but came to question it radically, in particular the idea that religion is going to disappear. He now conceptualises the issue in terms of changes in belief-systems that have led to de-institutionalisation. Berger emphasises the alternatives to the process of rationalisation provided by anti-secular reactions now under way, whether as religious sub-cultures or through the adaptation of traditional beliefs to the demands of modernity.

Berger suggests two main reasons for the social rejection of secularisation. First, religion continues to offer a privileged answer to the search for meaning; second, it can also often provide a resource for social and political conflict, not least when shaping opposition to secular elites that pursue modernisation. Furthermore, Berger relativises the phenomenon of secularisation when he points out that it has only really been of quantitative significance *in Europe* – a point of some relevance for what follows.

Those arguing for the secularisation thesis do not necessarily question the persistence of religion. Wallis and Bruce (1992**:** 12-15) show that the view that modernisation accompanies a decline in the social significance of religion needs to be put in the context of three constitutive features of modernity. First, *social differentiation* strips the churches of some of their traditional social or educational roles and sets them in competition with other, more specialised institutions. In parallel with this, the development of specific identities linked to new social classes renders less plausible the idea of a uniform human community subject to a grand design, encouraging diversification in the search for the good. Second, *societalisation* heralds the displacement of communities by societies, in Tönnies' sense of these terms. This results in systems that increasingly rest on common incentives and constraints to shape individuals' behaviour as opposed to the inculcation of a shared vision of the moral order. Consequently, it is less and less likely that a homogeneous religious body of practice and belief could exercise a general influence on society. Finally, *rationalisation* induces change in the modes of thought and action. A secular universe becomes open to rational and empirical exploration.

Social differentiation, societalisation and rationalisation together bring about secularisation, but only when religion fails to perform other functions than that of mediating the sacred. But religion does other things. First, it can play a role in cultural defence by providing resources with which to protect national, ethnic, local or group cultures. Second, religion may also operate as a instrument of cultural transition, offering a framework through new identities can be negotiated, sustaining the meanings and values of people undergoing change. In such contexts, the churches are looked both as interpreters of the new and also as anchors of stability (ibid: 17-19).

Yet such social roles do not hide the decline of religion's traditional function. As Wallis and Bruce show, the development of new beliefs does not compensate for the erosion of institutionalised belief. Contemporary practices are resolutely centred on the individual and require a minimal investment – which marks out the difference between those who believe and those who don't. Religion, far from being about to disappear, has shifted ground from the collective to the individual level. Even when its hold appears to be strong, it is no longer the supreme source of social orientation. Where it survives as a general practice, it is at the price of a weakening of its religious content properly understood, and with an ebbing of the supernatural dimension. Nevertheless, religion has the potential to be reactivated at a time of crisis (ibid: 21).

The new uses of religion are elaborated through communication and identity. To affirm one's belonging to a confession is a way of placing oneself within a distinct community, of being written into a specific lineage, while claiming the status of participant in the expressive and deliberative processes of a pluralistic democracy. Religion may therefore help a group to make itself heard while at the same time providing materials for constructing meanings and shaping public decision-making. Recent debates in Belgium, France, Germany and the UK on the scope and limits of a multicultural society and on secularism have demonstrated how identity politics and the making of policy interact. These have been contained within the boundaries of *national* public spheres. At this level, the definition and redefinition of collective identities has been on the agenda for the past two centuries. The European constitutional process, however, has been the spur to raising such questions at the *supranational* level, with unprecedented intensity.

'Europeanness': identities and public spheres

The question of a 'European identity' has figured on the agenda for a good two decades. This is not surprising, as the EU is a highly heterogeneous entity in which culture, nationality, ethnicity, language and religion continue to have major symbolic weight. Since the end of the Cold War, and the demise of the great simplifying narratives of communism v capitalism, Europe's complexity and its potential as a cultural battlefield have come increasingly into focus (Schlesinger 1992).

The post-Cold War evolution of the continent has underlined the continuing importance of the nation-state as a principle of political organisation. As most of the post-communist successor states have fled from what remains of the Russian sphere of influence, they have sought a home both in NATO and in the EU. Thus, the renascent nationalist project has been tempered by the quest for international frameworks that might provide both security and economic well-being. The EU's attraction has, above all, rested on the guarantees its offers to the entrenchment of a more democratic order and because it is forcing-house for economic modernisation.

The EU’s expansion eastwards leaves us wondering how the additional ethnic, national, religious and culturo-linguistic diversity will be integrated and how it will change the Union’s dynamics. The diversity of its social base certainly raises questions about whether a European Union public sphere, capable of becoming the locus and focus of common debate by most of Europe’s peoples is at all imaginable. The EU’s territorial expansion and economic integration is contradictory. While it simplifies some social relations by developing the single market and diffusing democratic norms across the continent, it simultaneously engenders increased complexity and therefore steering problems for the present system of governance. Moreover, the EU’s incipient supranationalism has contributed to producing nationalist and regionalist reactions to a perceived loss of sovereignty and threats to collective – most especially, national - identity.

Such considerations require us to consider what would be involved in the construction of a common ‘European’ identity coterminous with the political space of the EU and underpinned by its institutional realities. It is plain that such an identity (because of its partial coverage of the continent) cannot exhaust all possible claims to ‘Europeanness’. There is no common European citizenship that embraces the entire continent, which could offer one form of identity. Indeed, the geographical boundaries of ‘Europe’ are themselves contested and inasmuch as the EU claims more and more to ‘represent’ Europe, its continual growth continually unsettles possible comprehensive identity-claims. Nor do cultural background or religious affiliation or ethnicity individually or in combination settle the question of who is a European.

Collective identities – whether national or supranational - are the outcome of processes of inclusion and exclusion: to be ‘us’ we need those who are ‘not-us’, against whom boundaries can be drawn and conceptions of belonging and non-belonging articulated. Collective identities have a temporal dimension: they are rooted in traditions which, as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) have famously pointed out, might actually be of recent provenance. Characteristically, as Maurice Halbwachs (1992) long ago showed, such identities invoke versions of common or shared memories whose hegemony is often the object of struggle inside a given collectivity. Collective identities commonly also have a spatial dimension: in Europe, national identity claims have been normally linked to land or territory with defined, though often contested, boundaries (Eisenstadt 1999; Schlesinger 1991). Within Europe, in the modern era, the territorial boundaries that define the space of the national state have also been the effective limits of the public sphere. The development of the EU as a polity, superimposing its own spaces of identity and of public debate on those of the member states, has brought a transnational dimension to how the public sphere must now be conceived. Indeed, it is more apt to think of the transforming EU as a sphere of publics (Schlesinger and Kevin 2000).

The question of identities in the EU is closely connected to the question of the public sphere – the communicative space in which, according to Jürgen Habermas (1989), matters of general interest are open to public debate. As the EU has evolved, however, how we might conceive of the public sphere has mutated. Habermas’s theory shifted ground. In his earlier work, the scope of the public sphere was defined by the nation-state. Subsequently, it has been conceived as boundaryless. However, while recognising the ways in which information–based networks may expand the scope of communication, Habermas (1997) has been concerned with the conditions for the creation of a European public sphere, which does require us to think in terms of a bounded polity. In this context, the process of constitution making is seen

as a key step to the creation of a common political culture by virtue of intensified interaction. The constitutional framework is both supposed to structure and to embody a common political identity. If Habermas's (2001) reasoning is right, and constitutional reform does indeed have such importance for the formation of a political community, the debate about the EU's identity does matter greatly because of its defining impact for the emergent collectivity.

It remains the case, however, that all efforts to define a transnational identity continue to face a major obstacle. The key collective identities with political weight inside the EU continue to be those territorially framed by the member states. Within these, the component nations continue to provide the politically crucial forms of recognition. While extensive powers have been ceded to the EU's institutions, the states' territorial domains remain potent spaces of political identity.

No member state is an ideal-typical or 'pure' nation-state – in which, according to Gellner's (1983) classic definition, the national culture and the political roof can be made to perfectly coincide. States may contain several overlapping public spheres, as we need to allow for communicative spaces at the sub-state level, whether these be national, linguistic, ethnic or regional. That said, individual political membership of a state takes the form of citizenship, which is often – but not invariably – coterminous with nationality, and indeed, often confused with that concept. Because, in Benedict Anderson's (1983) now well-worn phrase, to possess citizenship of a member state – rather like nationality – entails membership of an 'imagined community', being a citizen transforms individuals (through a legal-symbolic framework) into members of a collectivity. Citizenship defines the scope of political belonging. By contrast, as successive Eurobarometer polls have demonstrated – the European citizenship available to all citizens of member states since the Maastricht Treaty (1991) has not yet superseded the identities offered by member states as a focus of loyalty and affect. And the current debate over communicative processes has yet to offer conclusive arguments that we are witnessing the emergence of a common European public sphere.

Communicating through the constitutional process? Religion an the European public sphere

Reflection on the constitution provoked by the Convention has explicitly pursued communicative purposes. At the same time as the image of an open, deliberative process was promoted a constitutional text intended as a framework of identification for citizens was being written. The Commission's President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (2003: 27), summing up what had been achieved, firmly insisted on both of these dimensions, underlining his own perception of what still needed to be done. 'Europe is still an organisation; it is not yet a political entity… Europe situates itself above the lived experience of the Member States, but it is less lived than the life that is rooted in each of these', Giscard d'Estaing opined. The objective, then, has been to make the European Union both visible and transparent by endowing it with a legal personality. From a geopolitical standpoint, it is a matter of affirming a *European* political body. This explains why the Convention discarded the adjective 'universal' from Articles I.2 and I.3, which deal with values and principles. What has been emphasised instead – as communally specific – are values such as tolerance, equality between men and women, and respect for international law (ibid: 27-28).

Transparency and the mobilisation of civil society, therefore, have been construed as imperatives. In this, we may discern a leitmotiv of the discourse of legitimation that goes back to the 1980s. Transparency, in *communautaire* thought, takes on a paradigmatic value, indeed

becomes practically synonymous with democracy. Transparency is held to be the linchpin of the relationship between political responsibility and communication: it is no longer concerned with how those in power account for their actions *ex post facto*, as they would in a representative system of government. Rather, the public authorities need to be under the day-to-day scrutiny of the citizen. The European Constitution undertakes to develop this new conception of how to communicate political responsibility so as to enhance the accountability of the European institutions (Magnette 2002: 149-152).

In the Final Report of the Convention Presidency to the President of the European Council (Report 2003), those aspects that emphasise the opening outwards of the constitutional process came under the spotlight. These included the public nature of the sessions; the accessibility of documentation on the website (which averaged 47,000 monthly hits, peaking at 100,000 in June 2003); the setting up of a Forum that received 1264 submissions from NGOs, economic interests, academic circles and others; a plenary session held in June 2002 devoted to civil society; the Youth Convention held in July 2002.

Ultimately, the outcome seemed vitiated because it operated within a predictable framework of actors and of discourse, as had the Convention on the Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000 before it (Delauche-Gaudez 2002, 177-226; Eriksen et al 2001). The Convention for the future of Europe's media coverage was irregular and rather predictable both in how it was handled and in the audiences that it addressed.[4] It appeared difficult to circumvent the well-entrenched limitations of news coverage of EU integration (Garcia and Le Torrec (eds) 2003; Baisnée 2003). The national path remained strongly dominant in the interpretation of facts and in the structuration of the agenda, even if the issues were common[5].
Survey results on the impact of the Convention tell their own story. In October 2003, a Eurobarometer Flash survey (2003) reported that 61% of those questioned said that they had never heard of the Convention. Asked about the constitutional project itself, almost half those surveyed were don't-knows. One year later, in November 2004, just after the solemn and widely media-covered signature of the Constitutional Treaty in Rome by the heads of state and government, one-third of Europeans surveyed said that they had never heard of the European constitution. More than half claimed to have heard of it but to know very little about it (Eurobarometer Special 2005: 3-4). Truly, in some countries like France, a certain cognitive mobilisation occurred through *national* public campaigns of ratification. The French "no" on the 29th of May 2005 highlighted that information is difficult to spread and insufficient to create a real public deliberation, not to speak of a rational consensus.

The mobilisation of civil society (and its failure to be mobilised) may also be related to more specialised patterns of communication. Take the European Youth Convention held in July 2002. Two hundred and ten young people, aged from 18 to 25, coming from twenty-five states, convened for three days of work on the same documents as the senior *conventionnel*s. The youngsters were asked to convey the vision of future generations to the political decision-makers. Giscard d'Estaing exhorted them to be 'the constituents of their [own] European dream'. The results of the Youth Convention revealed an overall conformism and a tendency to reproduce the dominant institutional discourses. One reason for this lack of radicalism may lie in how the delegates were recruited. The young *conventionnels* were recruited by their elders (mainly by MPs in the national and European parliaments) and by the European Youth Forum (an NGO closely linked to the EU institutions). They usually belonged to pro-European circles, were well up on the Brussels debates, and simply reproduced established arguments and positions.

Arguably, the constitutional process has not greatly enlarged the social scope of those engaged in deliberating European matters. So far as the debate over religious questions is concerned, this too has followed in well-worn European tracks and stayed within established circles. Our analysis of religious interest groups shows the dominance of a Catholic-Protestant alliance and a sidelining of other confessions and faiths. Attempts to develop a broader constituency in order to mobilise the support of various strands of public opinion had little result. In that connection, the petition launched by the Euro-MP, Elizabeth Monfort, is an instructive case. Close to the right-wing nationalist Philippe de Villiers, and herself a member of the European People's Party, she saw her proposal to recognise the Christian heritage swept aside by the European Parliament (*Le Monde,* 13 December 2003).[6] She then decided to appeal directly to citizens by means of a petition,

By February 2004, Montfort's petition, she maintained, had secured some 700,000 individual signatures, not counting the support of various associations claiming to represent some 40 million citizens.[7] Apart from mobilising this support, those behind the initiative thought that they had ensured that the question of Europe's Christian heritage would stay on the political agenda. They believed that they had managed to arouse unprecedented awareness of the spiritual dimension of European construction, bringing into existence transnational networks able to resource future campaigns.

According to our research, however, key actors in the debate, both civil servants and those representing both religious and lay interest groups, were mostly unaware of the petition. Media coverage was rare. Moreover, political decision-making was not influenced as intended. The case of the petition illustrates the difficulty that MEPs may sometimes experience in attracting attention or in significantly mobilising sections of civil society (Morgan 1999).

While (low) political and media attention was directed at whether God or the Christian heritage should be mentioned in the Preamble to the Constitution, in fact this was of (yet) lesser interest to the key actors concerned. In the small world of Brussels-based experts, of much more central concern was what was at stake in Article 52 - the question of the status and participation of the churches in decision-making. This latter issue attracted no attention. Humanist circles explain this by invoking a conspiracy theory The Catholic church is held to have engaged in a diversionary action about the Preamble in order to secure a discreet passage for its real objective: becoming a privileged partner of the institutions.[8] Others have argued that the media needed to find a popular hook on which to hang the constitutional process and that the Preamble and the Christian heritage was more accessible.[9] In effect, and as is frequent, the established actors in Brussels coalesced around points of consensus and smartly avoided areas of conflict (Costa 2001).

Constitution, identity and memory: aporia of the sacred?

Apart from its significance for communication and its potential impact on the consolidation of a European public sphere, the EU's constitutional process is also relevant for the debate over a European identity. Classically, a collective identity entails the formation of a common memory, whatever the model of memory is. It involves a common relation to the past to ground a shared present political will and a shareable future.

Mobilisation by the institutions of the concept of a European identity as a political resource dates back to the 1970s (Strath 2000). Prior to this, the debate had been presented solely in

terms of functional integration. While a 'European consciousness' might sometimes have been evoked, identity as such was not a card to play. All changed with the economic crisis of the seventies that propelled Member States of the EEC into intensified cooperation to reinforce their global position. At this time, underpinning the discourse of legitimation became an imperative that brought about a series of intergovernmental initiatives. The Declaration at the Copenhagen Summit in December 1973 set up a general framework. The Tindemans Report of 1975 requested by the European Council stressed that the heroic epoch of European construction, led by a few pioneers, was now over. It was now necessary to convince the citizen. But this had little direct effect. The results of the first European elections under universal suffrage in 1979 and then in 1984, revealed low and falling participation as well as campaign agendas that were essentially national. This provoked new approaches. The European Council set up the Adonnino committee, whose report of June 1985 notably resulted in the creation of a European symbolic repertoire: an anthem, a flag, Europe Day. The modest success of these symbols marked the inherent limits of this kind of identity-building enterprise, as noted by successive reports from the European Parliament and the Commission. Subsequently, during the nineties, institutional discourse shifted away from the notion of identity to emphasise the 'democratic deficit', making increased rhetorical use of technocratic terminology both in the field of communication and that of 'nation-building' (Foret 2001; 2003).

The constitutional process engaged in by the Convention did not reverse this tendency. At the very start, there was a certain ambition to undertake both educational and symbolic work. There was a desire to produce 'a short text, strong and resonant that might be read or learned by schoolchildren', in the words of Etienne de Poncins, one of the drafters of the Constitution working in the Convention Secretariat (De Poncins 2003: 72-73). But identity questions occupied no more than a limited and contested place in the deliberations. By way of example, the Convention's constitutional project endowed the Union with a certain number of symbols, which provoked some reservations even though the text did no more than formalise those already in existence (ibid: 481-482). The twelve-star flag and the European anthem have been retained. The same applies to 9 May, the day of the Schuman Declaration, which has kept its status as Europe Day, but without becoming a holiday for all Europeans as had been proposed. Strictly speaking, the euro is not a new feature; however, in the constitutional process it acquired a novel status by being designated as 'the currency of the Union' (Article I.8). This brought protests from the United Kingdom and Denmark which interpreted this description as pressure to rejoin the single currency (ibid: 483). The name of the European Union was debated at Giscard d'Estaing's initiative, however, the alternatives were not convincing and the status quo remained in force. The Convention's president proposed four options: 'The United States of Europe', the historical formula used by Hugo and Churchill, but which he thought came too close to imitating 'The United States of America'; 'The European Community', an historic name central to the integration process but seen as inadequate for that reason and therefore as a backwards step; 'United Europe', the term that Giscard d'Estaing himself advocated, arguing that it was a way of emphasising the noun 'Europe', but which was seen as awkward. In the end, the final option, 'The European Union', was kept because of its wide and established use as much as for the impossibility of finding an alternative (ibid: 82-83). The slogan 'united in diversity', which figured both in the Preamble and in Article I.8 represented the only real innovation (ibid: 77).

The outcome in terms of identity and symbolism hardly came up to expectations. The same could be said for the question of memory. Identity presumes a significant measure of similarity with one's contemporaries but it also relates to what we have in common with

earlier generations and those to come. The constitutional project had the overarching goal of demonstrating the will of European citizens to overcome their past divisions and to forge a common destiny while at the same time conserving and honouring their national histories. It therefore seemed appropriate to applaud (without arrogance) the contribution that Europe had made to human history by emphasising its major achievements (democracy, human rights, and so forth) in the context of its openness to the wider world (De Poncins 2003: 72-73). However, those very differences rapidly came to the surface in relation to the uses of the past. Several members of the Convention proposed that the conflicts that had ravaged Europe be mentioned, so as not to promote an artificial image of the continent's history and in order to issue a warning for the future. The Presidium refused to go along with this, taking the view that to mention past differences was simply out of place, citing by way of counter-example the instance of the United States, where official allusions to the civil war are rare (ibid: 76).

The debate about acknowledging the Christian heritage was part of the traditional problem of what could be a European identity and memory, but on this occasion with its specific focus as that of *religious* belonging. It played into the desire of some inside the European Union to seek a new basis for legitimation, but at the same time it also brought into play resistances that ended by defeating the proposal.

Christianity and the idea of Europe and have long been connected. Christianity has been constantly used to define Europe without at the same time being totally identical with it, as Gerard Delanty (1995) has shown. The discursive strategies that have used these two notions as symbolic resources have tended to work around several nodal points. First, the eastern borders have functioned as a line of exclusion (with reference to the Ottoman empire, Russia, the world of Orthodoxy), leading to a consequent 'occidentalisation' of Europe (often reduced to 'the west') (Neumann 2001). Second, the relationship to Islam as a 'constitutive other' has been noteworthy, irrespective of the contribution of Arab civilisation to the European world. Third, Rome has been a key source of either acceptance or rejection.

If the European idea as a cultural framework took shape between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, it did not assume a political aspect until the sixteenth century, just as Christianity lost its unifying capacity in the face of the Reformation and the wars of religion. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment were resources for an alternative, new, and secular identity. The French revolution was an end-point in this process, marking the symbolic collapse of Christianity as a political system, although it did still continue to succour certain forms of European identity such as Christian humanism as well as anti-Semitic currents (Delanty 1995: 65-83).[10]

The relation between the political conception of a European identity and Christianity is both close and antagonistic. Both terms have been in constant interaction but also in competition. In the same way, at the level of the national state, the Church and State have both continuously opposed and aped one another in the construction of their institutional apparatuses and the worldviews that these have embodied. National identities have been partly constituted by a religious dimension, however attenuated that has now become in much of Europe (Madeley 2003: ch.2; Williaime 2004: 26-27). Apart from providing an administrative model, the churches have also provided states with theories of legal legitimation and rituals to copy (Kantorowicz, 1957). Political power has been defined both by and in opposition to religious institutions. That is notably the case in France, an exemplary instance of the conflict between Church and State. Even during the most fraught moments of confrontation, the civil authorities continued to ape the practices of the spiritual authorities,

not least while the grip of the latter on social life and practice was strong (Ozouf 1989; Ihl 1996). Two conceptions of citizenship confronted one another through struggles within educational institutions and wider social life, but at the same time they were in an exchange relationship (Deloye 1994).

In the context of European construction, the interaction between institutions and political and religious identities has been no less intense and influential. From the very start of the integration process, the Vatican lent its support to the undertaking, at first from a distance but with increasing involvement over time. Popes Paul VI and John Paul II openly exercised their influence to defend the values and role of the Catholic Church (Canavero 2003). Christian democracy provided a good part of the leadership and of the militants of the European cause (Chenaux 1990). The religious dimension had some noteworthy effects on public support for integration (Nelsen et al 2001). The legitimising tropes of politics are continually reworked through a religious optic. The 'Founding Fathers' are the object of a sanctifying cult (Milward 1994). The Community's symbols are frequently read by way of a Christian heritage to which no reference was made when they were first created (Lager, 1995).

Thus, references to Christianity continue to be privileged in how symbolic belonging to Europe is defined.[11] The Council of Europe took a pioneering role in this. When its 'Cultural Routes of Europe' programme was launched in 1987, its first act was to restore the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, duly followed by other sacred pathways. The European Union followed this practice in its promotion of the Christian heritage in its 'Culture 2000' programme. This approach found support in the 'peripheral' states of Scandinavia and central and eastern Europe as it showed their historic participation in the spiritual and political systems of Europe (Kalinowski 2002).

For their part, the Christian institutions undertook memory work that aimed to redefine the basis on which they could intervene in the public sphere, taking into account new modes of belief. The de-institutionalisation of the religious field and the individualisation of religious practices no longer allowed the churches to lay claim to the function of social regulation as *the* basis for their political role. Consequently, they have repositioned themselves in relation to the new sources of legitimacy. In a Europe in which the official constitutive criteria are democracy and human rights, it is necessary to demonstrate that these very values are the product of the Christian conception of humanity. Hence, Christian institutional discourse set out to establish that it was *Christianity* that had made human rights possible by treating the person as sacred and as the subject of inalienable rights. Religion cannot now monopolise meaning but it still continues to be mobilised as a key source of values and an identity-conferring tradition. It is 'religion as heritage' that the churches presently emphasise in order to present themselves as the guardians of the European patrimony (Kalinowski 2003: **7**). Their status as privileged interpreters of this heritage also has led them to propose a specific role in decision-making. The strategy is not to speak to the political order in the name of a superior, external power but rather one of sustaining it from within, based on a special relationship to its founding principles (ibid: 12).

Where pluralism is taken to be a normative principle of democracy, it becomes impossible to rank the different spiritual traditions present in the European Union. In the Convention's debates it was suggested that a list of the different religions that had shaped Europe be compiled. However, this proposal was quickly abandoned as no consensus could be reached on a definitive list. A first compromise was to identify three key epochs in European history: that of the ancient Greek and Latin civilisations; that of the spiritual and religious *élan* (or

uplift); and the century of Enlightenment. The second period made transparent reference to Christianity, apparent from its use of the term *élan*, which derives from the official discourse of the Vatican. However, this solution was rejected by the 'pro-Christianity' camp which denounced the 'historical denial' entailed by the omission of the Christian heritage, made all the more unacceptable by explicitly mentioning the Enlightenment. Given the evident impossibility of overcoming such divisions, it was finally decided to limit the historical dimension to citing the 'road to civilisation' opened up by the European Union without identifying any specific source (De Poncins 2003: 74-75). Reference to the religious heritage on the same footing as the cultural and humanist ones is a noteworthy step when compared with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The secularist camp was prepared to tolerate the compromise. Even so, with John Paul II and next Benoît XVI as their spokesmen, those who wished to make reference to Christianity in the Preamble persisted in seeking to modify the text right up to the conclusion of the constitutional process, and have persevered since.
In the end, the only short-term strategy in trying to construct a European memory was to be silent about the specifics. However, given the controversies that have been stirred up, this can hardly be seen as a unifying amnesia.

Europe's pluralistic religious heritage defies simple enumeration. Nor can it easily be manipulated into some officially-endorsed hierarchy: in the Constitutional Convention's texts, this led to the rejection of any reference to 'the religious heritage, notably the Christian'. That said, the practice is actually more discriminatory, as Willaime has shown. All faiths are recognised as having jointly contributed to European history. However, Christianity has had the key moulding influence and is the central reference point. Other faiths have found themselves marginalised. Within Christianity, the tendency of the Catholic church to arrogate to itself the management of the European religious heritage aroused critical reactions among Protestants. John Paul II's politics of memory was centred on the first millennium (notably that of medieval monasticism) rather than that of the second (which included the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment). His regular recourse to the saints also produced polemics because those canonised were almost exclusively Catholic and therefore figures whose memories might arouse painful memories for other religions (Willaime 2002: 91-92). In this approach, one can discern the workings of a selective memory that shapes and orders in line with its own goals of political mobilisation.[12] Here too, the inescapable choice appears to be between obligatory political amnesia and partisan mobilisation in favour of a given representation of the past, neither of which is without attendant difficulties.

Finally, questions arise about the compatibility of temporal conceptions embodied in religious memories, on the one hand, and by the political integration project on the other. Marcel Gauchet (1995) has hypothesised a transition from a society based in religious belief and heteronomy, structured by the 'elsewhere' of the sacred, to an autonomous society which is its own lawgiver by way of a system of political beliefs. This shift involves a displacement of the sources of authority. Religious belief, Gauchet argues, involves believing in the authority of the past whereas contemporary political belief involves believing in the authority of the future. European integration, a political undertaking that crystallises the characteristics of supermodernity, is particularly symptomatic of this reversal in the social construction of time. Marc Abélès (1996) has described the cult of urgency and the continual forward projection that marks policy-making in the European Union. This makes it almost impossible to develop a cumulative image of the past and to orientate oneself to history in ways other than a continual return to the Community's origins and to the Founding Fathers. Historically oriented analysis of EU publications and historical perspectives carried in the editorials of the different national presses in the Member States throw into relief the pregnant myth of the

early days of European construction. They also retail the widespread view that there is a contemporary crisis in the integration process – not least because present-day actors are thought to be inferior to the pioneers of the Golden Age of Jean Monnet. Finally, the uncertainty of the future is also manifest (Foret 2001: ch. 6; Foret 2003; Trenz, in this volume). It seems premature to conclude that the EU can now move on, with a consensus that rejects the negative past, not least of Nazism, Fascism, and the Communist other of the Cold War. Differences still erupt when the time comes to specify which objects of collective memory need to be cultivated. The problem of anchoring an historical perspective by way of a particular date, place or given person has been particularly moot in the case of religion. Religious memory, which is profoundly defined by tradition, has great difficulty in reconciling itself with the EU's future-oriented temporality as this undermines sacred linear time.

Conclusion

The constitutional process has thrown into relief the place occupied by religion in a potential European public sphere while, at the same time, showing the role that religion may play as a political resource when addressing the difficult issue of what it is to have a European identity and memory.

The discretion shown towards the question of the Christian heritage during the European election campaigns of 2004 shows the illegitimacy, not to speak of the danger, in using religion as an electoral argument in the competition over power. The subsequent focus on this theme, most notably in respect of the negotiations over the Turkish candidacy for EU membership during the latter months of 2004, shows that while religion no longer entirely frames the debate it can become strikingly relevant when it assumes a different role – that of demarcation. In the event, to invoke the Christian character of Europe in order to disqualify eventual Turkish membership, or at least to set the terms for this, means having recourse to confessional belonging. This is then used as an instrument of cultural defence against what some perceive to be a danger. The positive value accorded European secularism as opposed to American messianism works in a similar vein. In short, religion may have strategic uses.

The religious issue has been used to seek a place in the overall framework of 'governance' by way of partnership in the civil society recognised by Brussels. Religious bodies have claimed a specific place as an actor in the domain of public policies. The EU's organisational logic and discourse has reshaped the particularism of religious actors. In practical terms, 'Europeanization' entails accepting pluralistic politics and the Brussels rules of the game. That said, the question of church-state relations is largely the prerogative of the Member States and significant differences persist at the national level. Although all European societies are facing changes in religious adherence these differ from place to place and are far from homogeneous. If there are specific effects due to European integration, these have yet to be demonstrated.

The question of the role of religion has pointed up the shortcomings of the EU's discourse of legitimation, which is a keystone of the integration project. There have been recurrent attempts to define an underlying common culture and communicative space in order to define the scope of a European political entity and secure a political system appropriate to the supranational level. These attempts have tried to address the citizens' perceived need for some overarching normative allegiance. The putative Euro-democracy is still on the hunt for its underlying principles and conditions of existence.

The debate on the place of religion in the constitutional process is the current phase of a long history. Raising the question of the Christian heritage and its place in EU integration has opened up broader questions about the Union's cultural unity and cohesion and about what makes a society hold together and how it relates to a political order. In short, the religious issue is a potent one. And present struggles about its place are but the latest episode in a continuing drama.

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[1] This work is the result of a collaboration with Philip Schlesinger. A revised version of the text will be published in Foret F., Schlesinger P., « Political roof and sacred canopy ? Religion and the EU constitution”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 9, n° 1, 2006

[2] Alongside the high political question of whether Christianity should be expressly singled out as constitutive of the European Union’s values, a related low political process was also under way. This concerned the quest for recognition - as key actors in the construction of the Union - of the churches and other religious bodies by the new constitution’s provisions. We shall address this issue in another publication.

[3] There have been moments that, while extraneous to the constitutional debate proper, have been shaped by its course and articulation. These have provided the trigger for the religious dimension of the EU to receive a wider airing, both in the media and among political circles. Two cases in point in late 2004 were the rejection of Rocco Buttiglione’s nomination to the European Commission and the heated arguments over Turkey’s candidature for EU membership.

[4] Interview with Thomas Ferenczi of *Le Monde*, 19 November 2003.

[5] A comparative study of the media coverage in twenty member states led by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) focused on two main issues of the constitutional debate: the Charter of fundamental rights and the common foreign policy. The Charter of fundamental rights was quoted in twelve countries as a reason to support the text and in three others as a reason to reject it. A European diplomacy seduced in ten countries, but repelled in Austria and Sweden presses. The enlargment was perceived as a threat for the national identity in a majority of member states but promoted in peripherical countries like Ireland or Greece. Cf. Thomas Ferenczi, « Vingt-cinq campagnes nationales », Le Monde, 18/02/2005.

[6] Elizabeth Montfort's amendment proposed that after mentioning the religious heritage of Europe in the Preamble to the Constitution, the words 'notably Christian' should figure. The European Parliament rejected this demand on 24 September 2003 by 283 votes to 211, with 15 abstentions.

[7] Telephone interview with Elizabeth Montfort, European People's Party MEP, 10 February 2004.

[8] Interview with George Liénard, Secretary-General of the European Humanist Federation, 20 November 2003

[9] Interview with Thomas Ferenczi of *Le Monde*, 19 November 2003.

[10] For Delanty (2003: 5-6), any path to Europeanisation has to take account of the 'three civilizational constellations that have been constitutive of modernity in Europe. These are: (1) the Occidental Christian constellation; (2) the Byzantine-slavic Eurasian constallation; and (3) the Ottoman, Islamic constellation'. It is an open question whether the EU can steer such diversity in the direction of a cosmopolitan order or whether, in the future, long-established cultural and political divisions might reassert themselves.

[11] Interestingly, Habermas has acknowledged the specific contribution of Christianity in western philosophy and in particular the values that religious communities bring to a society in which market individualism and an uncertain international order are undermining solidarity. He argues that a post-secular society should recognise both the limits of secular and religious modes of thought and accord religious communities the right to exercise influence in the political public sphere. See his dialogue with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then prefect of the Congregation for Doctine and Faith at the Vatican, now Pope Benedict XVI (Habermas and Ratzinger 2004).

[12] Opponents to any reference in the Constitution to the Christian heritage denounced this selectivity. They cited as their ground the implied silence regarding black moments of European religious history. 'The Christians speak of nothing but the active. We also need to talk about the passive. For example, the Inquisition. You have to talk about everything or say nothing. The evocation of the [Christian] heritage simply opens up old wounds. This is against any pacification of identity.' Interview with George Liénard, op.cit.