

THE FIRST CRUSADE AND THE FORGING OF THE EUROPEAN CONCEPT

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Abstract: The First Crusade represents the compatibility proof of parts of a body (Europe) that still kept a single breath. And if the First Crusade carries the sublime message (maybe the last in History) of an Europe with a Christian soul, attached with both arms (the Eastern and the Western), to the ideal of unity in, through, and for Christ, it also carries the most terrible warning: even the purest soul can be corrupted, to disfigurement, by vain glory.

Keywords: Christianity, the First Crusade, Middle Ages, Europe, European concept.

Introduction

With the Renaissance and the beginning of colonialism, a haughty Europeanness will cement itself, "liberated" of the moral barriers of its Christian past (belittled under the name of "age of darkness") and will "change the target" from ideology to the power - interest pair. Humanism will force a new conception of God: "400 years ago we met a God of Renaissance and nominalism: God is the Almighty and *potentia absoluta* is the attribute, the main quality of His divinity. That is the reason why man, His image on earth, was supposed to aim the acquisition of the power to win his own divinity. Neither Goodness, nor Truth, but Power was preferred among the attributes of divinity. But how can man gain the power to become like God? By science and technique..."¹. Undermining and ultimately dismantling the hierarchical system of the Middle Ages (structured on the three cooperative estates: men of cloth, warriors and workers), the new "humanist" order, sustained by the great bankers and merchants, with all its "Greek-Roman" seduction will be transformed from birth into a system of "acquired rights", system beneficial not to the common man, rather to the "strong man"², that is to say the exploitation of the human being by the oppressor with more technical data. After all, the absolute model of humanism - the Greek-Roman world - was based on slavery and colonialism, and this fit like a glove to the financial interests of the extortionists of all ages.

Under such circumstances, the theme of the Crusades, in general, and that of the First Crusade (the only one that has achieved its purpose), above all, give rise to the most heated disputes. According to the various currents and religious, philosophical and/or political schools to which they belong, people devoted to modernity have issued contradictory views on the interpretation of the historical process. Thus, there were points of view that assimilated the First Crusade with the moment of chivalrous glory and the honor "without fear and without sin", as well as visions that consider it a plague, sprang from fanaticism, injustice, ambition, and greed, throwing it as a "revolutionary and progressive" reproach in the face of the Church.

¹Jürgen MOLTMANN, *Dumnezeu în creație* [God in creation], Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2007, editori Emil Jurcan și Jan Nicolae, pp. 45-46.

² Some of the "acquired rights" theorists were Don Carlos de Aragon, Juan Ginés de Sepulveda, or Francesco da Vittoria. In the modern age, personalities such as Louis Folliot and Otto Schilling will unconditionally support colonialism under absurd names: "providence", "consequences of the just war", "civilization interest", etc. See: NICOLAE, Metropolitan of Transylvania, *Atitudini teologice contradictorii în problema colonialismului*, [Controversial theological attitudes to the issue of colonialism], in MMS, No.3-4, 1962, pp. 179-192.

The lack of interest in researching the first-rate literary evidence has broadly encouraged the exaggerated proliferation of clichés and prejudices regarding the role of the Church in the struggle for the liberation of the Holy Places. By isolating and exaggerating to the point of generalization individual elements or secondary events, Communist literature has correlated the First Crusade with an "invasion war", initiated by the Church, and the Liberal literature with a "migration" determined solely by demographic, economic and social factors.

1. The One-essence Plurality, the authentic root of European identity

The unity of thought, which is based, in equal measure, on both the on-going process of evangelizing the world, as well as on the general defence against anti-Christian attacks, began to take shape for the first time in Nicaea in 325. *"It all began in 325 with the Council of Nicaea, summoned by the Emperor, which was followed by six other meetings spread until 787. Let us leave aside the material and civilization factors; that for centuries the Christian world has been able to organize - on the edges of a Europe plagued by chaos and nomadic Arabs - meetings such as these, that assembled spiritual leaders from as far as Spain or even France, achievement which only serves as proof of the existence of a secure system of contacts and communications, road control, good administration and bureaucracy, that is to say the civilization that the West would end up flaunting in later years. Let us spare a thought, however, for the debate of ideas, which at that time had, naturally, a purely religious character, but whose reverberations, albeit philosophical at first, were passed on to the whole European culture, even through unknown means, to the systems of profane and anti-religious values, fact which gives us authorization to assert that the year 325 marked the birth of a new culture"*³.

Not only has the unity of essence of the Trinity Persons dogma had a theological effect, reserved for the specialists, but it was also meant to imprint life in all its aspects. The Ecumenical Councils, beginning with that of Nicaea, have obeyed the Savior's desire, making sure, as much as humanly possible, that human existence is in accordance with the Lord's Great Prayer before the Holy Passion: *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me"* (John 17:20-23). Thus, the entire Christian world, having as guide and only means of sanctification the Church, the Body of Christ, in which all those baptized are incorporated without being dismantled, united in one essence (the deified humanity of Christ) without losing, in any way, their free will, strongly linked by a hierarchy, yet at the same time irreplaceable as individualities, will continually strengthen its purpose of mirroring the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth: *"Europe begins in 325 with the Council of Nicaea. Serves as the model. The faustian Europe will perish, as it has been said, but that belonging to the one-essence plurality will not. The Nordic peoples have substituted Europe in the year 1000 and have galvanized it. However, it remains a faithful Trinity-oriented one. It operated in substance. Christianity is the "religion of religions" and Europe is the <<culture of cultures>>"*⁴.

The synodic miracle brought forth for the first time an Europe born and raised in the East, overlapping over almost five centuries (325-787), exclusively across the Balkan-Asian region. *"There, in the world of the Thracians, the Mythic Trojans and the Greeks (Byzantium being the epicenter), with no other place being more suitable for the task at hand, came together the*

³ Constantin NOICA, *Modelul cultural european*, [The European cultural model] Ed.Humanitas, București, 1993, p.64.

⁴ Constantin NOICA, *Jurnal de idei*[Diary of thoughts], Ed.Humanitas, București, 1990, p.337.

*nations of Europe and the entire known world, to accomplish, in one unique confession, the joint affiliation to a spirit, both current and prophetic, soaked to the deepest level in the grace of the Spirit of God*⁵.

Although the Church testified as the fundamental truth of existence the one-essence plurality, it has been opposed (either openly or subversively) by an unconverted spiritual form that, along the centuries, has shaken the world through heresies. Rooted in the old legacies of the gnosis and the monarchianism of the 2nd-3rd centuries, tributes and / or contributions to the pagan gods of the Greco-Roman, Nordic, or Semitic nations, the heresies tried to determine a "reform" of the Orthodox concept. The Arianism rejected the divinity of the Son of God, the Nestorian movement separated the natures of the Word so much that it came to say that there are two distinct persons with the name Christ (God and man), and the Monophysitism denied the human nature of the Lord.

2. The Clash of Identities

It might strike as odd, for an unfamiliar reader, to talk about heresies and their effort to destabilize Christianity in the context of the First Crusade. However, the motivation of this dogmatic detour is closely interlinked to the historical evolution of the Christian nations and the level of struggle for the regaining of the Holy Places.

Disputing the supremacy of the Euro-Mediterranean world, divided between the three major civilizations (Byzantine, Papal Frankish and Saracen) and the complicated play of diplomatic, political, religious, cultural and - we must clearly recognize it as being the most tempting of them – the play of swords, have lead in each of the respective communities to a certain behavior, which would certainly not have been achieved in the absence of the other two rivals. The alliance of the two commercial cities, Genoa and Pisa, against the Moorish emir Mujahid, in a lasting and difficult war (1015-1021), which was finally crowned with the victory of the Italians, represents the first time that more European Christian powers join forces against the common Islamic enemy⁶. This behavior was later named "European", used most of the time in history as antithesis to the ideological outsider.

Of course, in spite of the ideologically motivated hyperbolization that befell the sideslips of the crusading movement, they existed, without a doubt. As a matter of fact, they have not been overlooked even by eyewitness accounts⁷. However, the existence of deviations will never be able to challenge or shadow anything that has been achieved by the First Crusade, achievement which, for that matter, no further movement will be able to ever achieve it: **the quenching of a pre-existing militant Christian consciousness, whose lance peak was and should have always been Europe.**

The nightmares that have disturbed the existence of all the adversaries of Christendom, both the historical ones – the Abbasid or Fatimid caliphs, the Seljuk and Ottoman sultans, *etc.* – as well as the "newer" ones – "sultans" and the "caliphs" of modernity – have been and remain a Europe united in Christianity and a united Christianity in Europe and worldwide.

The First Crusade is the very proof of the compatibility of the parts of an organism that still retains an unitary breath. And if the First Crusade carries the sublime message (perhaps the last one in History) of an Europe with a Christian soul, joined with both its arms (the Eastern and the Western) to the ideal of unity in, through and for Christ, it also carries the most terrible warning: that even the purest soul can be corrupted, until disfigurement, by vain glory⁸.

⁵Pr. Dr. Mircea Cristian PRICOP, *Ortodoxie, etnicitate, identitate europeană* [Orthodoxy, ethnicity, European identity], Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Tomisului, Constanța, 2012, p. 50.

⁶ Denis CĂPRĂROIU, Eugen DENIZE, *Nașterea Europei Medievale* [The birth of Medieval Europe], Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2008, pp.150-154.

⁷*Gesta* I, 2; VIII, 33.

⁸*Gesta* I, 2.

It seems that this diabolical pride was a point of stumbling and even the ruin of all the later on crusading initiatives. A similar example can be found in the Nicopolis Crusade (1396) where, despite the great number, the misunderstandings between the French knights and emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg led to a disastrous synchronization of the crusading troops and to inevitable failure. Sigismund had proposed that the first attack would be given by romanian *dominus* Mircea the Elder's riding archers. But Count Jean de Nevers demanded vehemently and eventually obtained a frontal heavy cavalry attack. Either from pride, resentment, or caution, the Hungarians and the Romanians half-heartedly supported this attack they considered suicidal. "*The Battle of Nikopol would not have been lost if the French had listened to the Hungarians, who were more prudent in nature; however it could have been gloriously won if the Hungarians had followed the example that the French set and displayed similar bravery*"⁹.

It would be an injustice to issue, in our case, a Manichean type generalization: the demonic West and the Eastern Paradise¹⁰. Both Eastern Orthodox and Papal Westerners have had (and perhaps still have) their share of responsibility for the role played in the first Crusade and all the events that followed.

The hypocrisy of the Greeks, the greed of the Latins, and the narrow-minded strife of numerous hierarchs and princes (Eastern and Western alike), that provoked the "historical arrhythmia" of Christianity at the dawn of the second millennium until the fatidic hour of the fall of Constantinople – which brought along the fall of the whole mythical Europe - under the destructive regime of the Sublime Porte, were born of this destructive element of vanity: "*I regret that Saint Sophia, the most famous church in the world, was ruined or desecrated. I am grieved that the basilicas of the countless saints, raised with amazing craftsmanship, must stand in the desolation and defilement of Mehmed. What more could I say about the countless books, unknown to the Latins until now, which were there? Therefore, how many names of great men are destined to perish now! Here is the second death for Homer and for Plato alike. Where will we search from now on the brilliant works of poets and philosophers? The fountain of muses was destroyed! Perhaps we will wish for enough talent to be left to deplore this tragedy with the right words ...*"¹¹.

The Renaissance scholar Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who later became pope under the name of Pius II (1458-1464), would painfully come to the realization that, through the fall of Constantinople, a mythical Europe, the European identity itself was about to be destroyed, given that the West did not show a crusading mobilization similar to that of 1095, capable of removing the threat of the Turks of Mehmed II the Conqueror (1451-1481): "*We, in Europe, on our land, in our most important stronghold (...) allowed them to drive us away ...*"¹².

Mythical Europe, with its center at Byzantium, was recognized by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini as the hearth, home and origin of the Christian world: "*For in the past we have been hit in Asia and Africa, that is, in foreign lands. Now we are hit and rivetted (percussi cesique sumus) right in Europe, that is to say, in our homeland (id est in patria), in our home (in domo propria), in our ancestry (in sede nostra)*"¹³

⁹ Edward GIBBON, *Istoria declinului și a prăbușirii Imperiului Roman* [The Decline And Fall Of The Roman Empire], vol. III, p. 204.

¹⁰ Christos YANNARAS, *Ortodoxie și Occident, [Orthodoxy And The West]* in Pr. Dr. Constantin Coman's volume *Ortodoxia sub presiunea istoriei, [Orthodoxy under the pressure of history]* Ed. Bizantină, București, 1995, p.37.

¹¹ Aeneas Silvio PICCOLOMINI, *Scrisoare către papa Nicolae V din 12 iulie 1453* [Letter adressed to the Pope Nicholas V, dated 12 July 1453] in: Kenneth M. SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant*, vol.II, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1978, p.150.

¹² Dieter MARTENS, *Europäischer Friede und Türkenkrieg im Spätmittelalter*, volume edited by Heinz DUCCHARDT, *Zwischenstaatliche Friedenswahrung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Köln, 1991, pp. 48-54.

¹³ Aeneas Silvio PICCOLOMINI, *Constantinopolitana clades*, political speech held in Frankfurt on October the 15th, 1454; in *col. Pii II orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae*, hg. von Johannes Dominicus Mansi, 3 Bde., Lucca 1755-1757- 1759, here Bd. 1, pp. 263-285. *Eine neue Edition durch den Verfasser in Deutsche Reichstagsakten* (RTA),

And the loss of this capital of Christians from all over the place had the root cause, not in the fury of the Asian hordes, but rather in the same empty vanity manifested by the Greeks through the suicidal attachment to their diplomatic double-crossing and by the Latins through the materialistic petrification, pushed up to spiritual necrosis.

Conclusions

The First Crusade is an useful parable throughout history. It bears the message that as long as the European nations – involving both the internal, as well as external politics - remain united under the sign of the Cross, nobody and nothing can defeat them.

The inability to maintain Christianity unite for a longer period led to the failure of subsequent crusades. Being the only one which assured an equitable relationship at all with Byzantium, understanding its role as the cradle of European civilization, the First Crusade remains an unique reference of forging European identity.

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