

# 'Europe' in an Era of Bureaucratisation and the Intensification of Identity

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*Note: this is not the actual text of Richard Roberts' presentation at the conference, but his own subsequent summary, partly in the light of the discussions at the conference.*

The ideas and identities of 'Europe' are contested because of their intimate connection with a conflictual religious history,<sup>1</sup> and this contestation has been expressed in extraordinarily intense ways in the religious history of Scotland, a small nation struggling for centuries to assert itself against a more powerful neighbour. In the course of the past half century since the end of the Second World War what were largely intellectual and ideological issues about belief have become strongly politicised. The most recent manifestation of this transition can be detected in the paradoxical tension that has arisen between demands for fuller integration of the European Union and its ever greater expansion.

The underlying tensions between the integrative ideals of the founding figures in the movement that strove to build the successive associations that now culminate in the EU can be detected in the differences between the European Constitution of 2001 and the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 that is now on the verge of full ratification. The proposed *Constitutional Treaty for the European Union* of 2001 contained the following stirring declaration in its preamble:

*Convinced that, while remaining proud of their own national identities and histories, the people of Europe are determined to transcend their ancient divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny.... Convinced that, thus "united in its diversity", Europe offers them the best chance of pursuing, with due regard for the rights of each individual and in awareness of their responsibilities towards future generations and the Earth, the great venture which makes of it a special area of human hope....*  
*Draft Constitutional Treaty for the European Union, Preamble (Draft Treaty 2003, p. 10)*

These statements are resonant with the sense of recovery of a historic and mythic European 'Manifest Destiny', sentiments notably absent from the Lisbon Treaty which is a more pragmatic document shorn of any risky ideological aura emanating from appeals to a religious past.

In essence, the Lisbon Treaty reflects global trends towards a managerial modernity in which surveillance, governance and control tend to supersede matters of belief, trust and core values, unless the latter can be thoroughly integrated into corporate identities and managerial objectives. The various strands of religious identity that can be isolated and represented as competing 'souls' of Europe remain contentious, and the issues associated with religious

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1 For fuller accounts of the issues involved see: R. H. Roberts, "The Souls of Europe: Identity, Religion and Theology", Inaugural Lecture, University of St Andrews, *Informationes Theologiae Europae, Internationales Okumenisches Jahrbuch fur Theologie*, 1994, pp. 137-66, republished in revised form in *Religion, Theology and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, November 2001), pp. 217-247; "The Construals of 'Europe': Religion, Theology and the Problematics of Modernity" in Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 186- 217.

identity have undergone intensification with the advent of ever larger Muslim populations in European countries.

The distinguished German sociologist Jürgen Habermas attempted to confront these complex issues in 2001<sup>2</sup> when as a sociologist in the classic mould he sought both to explain the operations of the EU, possibly the most complex bureaucracy in world history, and to find ways in which the Union might undergo legitimation in the minds and hearts of its citizens. In my critical response to Habermas' attempt to represent the Constitution as itself a document of sufficient inspirational power to bring about 'cool' legitimation, I argued that a 'warmer' form of legitimation was required, and that a source for this might be found in symbolic, affective and spiritual power of ecological awareness, above all in 'deep ecology' understood as the vehicle of an immanent sublime.<sup>3</sup>

My contributions to the recent Faith in Europe Conference at Dunblane drew upon a long paper that is growing out of my contribution to Ralf Rogowski and Charles Turner's edited collection *The Shape of the New Europe*<sup>4</sup>. What I feel might be most useful for readers of the *Faith in Europe Briefings* is to present and briefly comment upon the questions we were asked to prepare for our final discussions at Scottish Churches House.

It is important to be clear about the significant differences between the failed European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty as they affect the religious dimension. Given the shift from an appeal to residual religious and ideological factors in the proposed Constitution to the managerial centralism of the Lisbon Treaty we need to ask if we still need legitimation at all. More formally, does a Europe-wide, managerial *post-democracy* still require *legitimation* in the classic Durkheimian sense of widely accepted *collective representations* capable of overcoming *anomie*, and if so, on what basis might such an owned consensus be achieved?<sup>5</sup> In this context what does Jürgen Habermas' plea for a Constitution for Europe and its subsequent failure tell us about the present dominant mode of European integration and the implications of this for a pan-European identity? Answers are not simple.

If, however, we do grant the ongoing significance of the religious factor then will it ever be possible for 'Europe' to escape its conflictual and aggressive past without first abandoning its religious identities? My response to this kind of question is to investigate from an anthropological standpoint those dimensions of human religiosity to be found in shamanic practices, calendric ritual and transformational processes in the 'shamano-ritual complex' that predate and which are ontologically prior to the elaboration of traditions. This requires us to enter and investigate the complex field of surrogacy in a culture that no longer exhibits an explicit culture of adaptive practices.<sup>6</sup> The basis for this kind of inquiry in the European

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2 Jürgen Habermas, 'Why Europe Needs a Constitution', *New Left Review* 11 (2001), pp. 5-26, republished in Ralf Rogowski and Charles Turner (eds.), *The Shape of the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 25-45.

3 See R. H. Roberts, "'Nature", Post/Modernity and the Migration of the Sublime', *Ecotheology* 9.3 (2004), pp. 315-337.

4 See R. H. Roberts, 'Gaia and Europa: Religion and Legitimation Crisis in the "New Europe"', in Ralf Rogowski and Charles Turner (eds.), *The Shape of the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.146-166.

5 In a recent article I examine the transition between personnel management and human resources management (HRM) and argue that the key factor is the elision of human agency once a human being is thoroughly understood as a 'resource', or attribute- and competence-bearing conscious entity whose composition is surrendered to the manager.

6 This has led me into extensive fieldwork in the borderland between psychotherapies and so-called alternative spiritual practices in the UK, Ireland and Germany.

context is provided by, for example, the sociologist Klaus Eder's assertion of ecology as the 'masterframe' for the future organisation of the human condition, and to argue that this offers possibilities for new forms of 'hot' (i.e. 'effervescent') legitimation. Eder argues that

*The age of post-environmentalism begins where ecology is established as the masterframe thus laying the ground for a further development of the cognitive, moral and aesthetic rationality inherent in the culture of modernity.*<sup>7</sup>

To these 'rationalities' we may add the 'religious' or 'spiritual' dimensions that Eder, as a secular sociologist, omits.

Given what I consider on the one hand to be the deficit in the ritual function and the growing failure of 'deep socialisation' in secular modernity, yet on the other the evolutionary indispensability of the shamano-ritual complex in securing transformatory adjustments in individuals and communities since remote prehistory, how might European religious traditions mutate in order to meet the need for renewed deep socialisation in an era of violence against women, child abuse and the male 'kidult'? This is hugely complex question, yet it in my view it comprises the kind of issues that might well be addressed by those who control critically important sacred spaces that should not simply be absorbed into heritage tourism.

A central element of the fascination of living in Scotland, being committed to Scotland and studying Scottish identities is the role of the reality of 'Caledonian Antisyzygy'. Unlike England, in which the archetypal image of the Via Media has reigned in the cultural unconscious since the Elizabethan Settlement and Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, the mind and souls of Scotland have been rent by painful yet creative division. This allows Scotland's greatest twentieth century poet, the irascible Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Greave) to claim the following:<sup>8</sup>

*The British are a frustrated people  
Victims of arrested development.  
Withered into cynics  
And spiritual valetudinarians,  
Their frustration due  
To a social environment  
Which has given them no general sense  
Of the facts of life,  
And no sense whatever  
Of its possibilities;  
Their English culture a mere simulacrum,  
Too partial and too provincial  
To fulfil the true function of culture  
The illumination of the particular  
In terms of the universal;  
Beside the strong vigour of daily life  
It is but an empty shadow.  
(Collected Poems II, p. 938)*

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7 Klaus Eder, *The Social Construction of Nature* (London: Sage, 1996), p. 196.

8 MacDiarmid's pathological detestation of all things English has to be set to one side if we are to appreciate the radicalism and penetration of his vision.

The controversial implication of these stark lines is that with England and 'Britain' Scottish culture by contrast *is* in principle capable of fulfilling the 'true function of culture'. The question is how can the particular be illuminated by the universal? This is where, for example, the shamanism, transformational ritual, embodied Tantra, and the liminality and altered states of consciousness excluded from Western traditions by the competing monocultures of the Abrahamic religions and Enlightenment rationality come into play. As when wandering *homo sapiens* sought the means of survival and adjustment in the face of the Ice Age so now the inhabitants of an overpopulated globe must adjust, indeed seek new identities - *and rediscover the means of achieving them*, that is if we are to be responsible global citizens, aware that we are all indigenous now. This means living more intensively with less; this is where life lived in regular, yet properly understood and responsible interplay with the *limen* becomes really exciting. Mainline religious traditions need to re-learn skills they have lost and repressed; humankind needs these possibilities as the necessary adjunct of the Word.

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