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**"... still searching" (J. Derrida)  
On Europe's  
cultural identity / difference**

In the framework of a philosophical conference on "Europe's cultural identity", which took place in Turin in 1990 under the chairmanship of Gianni Vattimo, Jacques Derrida (born 1930) presented a paper on "the question of Europe" (J.D., *Das andere Kap. Die vertagte Demokratie. Zwei Essays zu Europa*. Frankfurt/M. 1997, 9-80, here 9; all subsequent references are in the text as they occur). For him, Europe is a question which has its place in "TODAY" (14), historically bound to "the European memory" (19) and open towards a future as "promise" (26). In short: *Europe is happening. Today*. Derrida explains: "This occurrence is happening (...), I think, as a Europe that is arriving, which is, today in Europe, still searching for itself and promises itself or announces itself as a promise." (26)

This *Europe which is arriving* – Derrida continues – is a "Europe without established, predetermined borders" (26). And, in the face of the current and future political controversies about the expansion of the European Union, I recall Derrida's question, which is: "Who should define the borders of that which bears the name of Europe?" (26) A few pages further on, Derrida formulates, in the form of a rhetorical question, an answer which I think is relevant in the current situation: "Could Europe bear the responsibility, so to speak, for this

opening, which is the opposite of excluding?" (18)

With his use of the term *border*, Derrida has introduced a quite decisive moment into my discourse about Europe. For a border divides and links together at the same time. It marks the difference between inside and outside, between outside and inside. It separates the self from others and, through this, makes it possible to fulfil the condition for the possibility of any sort of creation of identity. Once again I quote Derrida: "There is no reference to oneself, no identification with oneself ... without a culture of the self as a culture of the other person" (13). Only he who has an eye for differences, for the other, for otherness, will gain an identity. And that means: Europe can only gain an identity if it/we pays/pay attention to the other, beyond all Eurocentricity.

What I have just said in general in the context of the European discourse about the term *border*, concerning the difference between an *inside* and an *outside*, also applies, of course, to the ecclesiastical and theological European discourse. Here we need the border- changing and creative treatment of the difference between the inside of the Church and the outside of the world, and this movement must not develop into a "one-way street". The discursive inside of a post-Constantine church and theology (*M.-Dominique Chenu*) must prove itself against the "thinking of the outside", as *Michel Foucault* described it.

If we recognise this productivity of the inside-outside distinction, which is also theological, then an attempt to forge a public European good at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century once again with the aid of a "Holy Alliance" of Christian provenance is nothing but nostalgic posturing. Sociologically speaking, Christendom in Europe today is too weak to develop a renewed dominance. There are many reasons that can be cited for this: modernisation and secularisation, the Russian Revolution and the leaden decades of state socialism, a raging global capitalism,

and, in its wake, extensive migration movements.

Above all, the project to establish a common European good again on the hegemony of what is Christian must be criticised as being forgetful of history: the victims of the numerous wars witness to the failure of all holy as well as unholy alliances. And yet further: in most cases, Europe's wars were conducted precisely in the name of dominant mature religious or – as in the case of National Socialism – pseudo-religious ideologies.

Looking at this theologically, fundamental consequences arise from this analysis as well as from Derrida's considerations. It is not enough for Christendom to lay claim to the ethic of otherness which has endured and been valid since Jesus of Nazareth. On the one hand, it is possible to mention too many practices throughout Church history, which are diametrically opposed to such a self-assertion. On the other hand – and this has a lot more weight as a counter-argument – the emphasis on otherness, particularity and difference *unavoidably and necessarily* calls into question the Christian claim to universality – and thus any Christian claim to political hegemony!

Hence the theological challenge about the question of the open space between identity and difference involves enculturating the Gospel into the *particular political conditions* of Europe and, at the same time, holding on to what God has promised to *all people without any difference*: a life in happiness, dignity, freedom, peace and justice.

Ulrich Engel OP  
Institut M.-Dominique Chenu  
ESPACES Berlin

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### Informations

ESPACES collaborated with ABER-Europe in the context of the conference 'The European Construction: an ethical challenge'. The

Proceedings of this conference can be obtained from ABER-Europe, Maison de l'Europe, 16 rue de l'Hurteloire, F – 29200 Brest at a cost of 10 euros.

This document is not simply a report on the conference: it is a pedagogical tool for debating and reflecting on the future of Europe and the place of civil society (and hence religions). Among the most important elements are a paper on the convention which led to the Charter of Nice, a meditation on governance by J Vignon, an appeal to the young by B Fekkar-Lambiotte, a debate on the place of religions in the construction of Europe, a work of research on European values, etc.

### Incidentally...

There have been important changes at ESPACES. Not only has the Brussels team acquired a new member, fr Roberto Giorgis, a Dominican friar from Italy, but we've moved to spacious new offices in the newly refurbished Dominican convent in Brussels, home of the International Community of St Dominic: this means that we can expand in Brussels. And there's more: for the first time you have in your hands an updated version of our 'liaison' bulletin. The association's former logo has been replaced by a new one; we've kept the European blue together with the typical stars whose arrangement is a graphic symbol of genuine open spaces – spaces.

Let us know your reactions!

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Editeur resp. : Dr. Th. Eggensperger, av. De la Renaissance 40, B-1000 Bruxelles

Trimestriel juillet-septembre 2002