

eras. One cannot imagine literature, philosophy and the science of thoughts without their Christian roots.

However, traces of Christianity are not only found in museums or libraries, they deeply affect many aspects of our daily lives. Even now, we still count our time from the date of Christ's birth, Christian names are obvious, one doesn't work on important Christian feast days, the "C" qualifies many political parties... But this is only the surface. Everywhere Christianity has been able to penetrate culture and society, it has created a heritage that even atheist regimes couldn't entirely make disappear: the humanization of culture which touches the heart of civilization.

When we speak today of the spiritual premises on which the modern state relies, but which it cannot guarantee, we speak of values that we owe to the Judeo-Christian culture. The concept of the person, the inalienable dignity of every human being, tolerance towards those of another stream of thoughts or faith, these all spring from the Christian message. Every person, old or young, strong or weak, is a beloved child of the Creator, and God became man so as to save each one of us.

Through the ages, Christianity has brought an answer to the question of knowing who man is, where he comes from, where he is going, what it means to find personal salvation.

Whether Christianity is confronted with praise or hostility is not important. This is how a modern society was born from rights and rites of clans, with a monogamous wedding as community between equals, the fathers' rights no longer included the choice of life or death for the members of his family, "honour" murders and slavery were considered unacceptable and were abolished. Everywhere the gospel spread (look at India, Africa or the poor regions of Latin America) one encounters this humanization of culture

In the same way, we have striven for freedom of religion and of conscience. This struggle has required its share of sacrifices from devout Christians to, as one can see in the Christian faith which motivated resistance against National Socialism and communism. The peaceful unification of Europe after the Second World War was based on the clear wish to obtain reconciliation with Germany without revenge. Even the "velvet revolution" in 1989, for example in Poland or Czechoslovakia, was based on a Christian vision of the human person. When John Paul II visited Poland in 1979, he asked his compatriots: "What do you choose? To bend before a totalitarian force or to fight for the intrinsic right to live according to the divine order and as humans in liberty and dignity?" The answer to that - known as Solidarnosc under its political form - didn't take long to come.

The effects of living the teachings of the gospel in Europe is most perceptible in the support for the weak, the handicapped, those who suffer, protecting them from a utilitarian social vision. In the same way, suffering, which modern society has little if any idea of how to deal with (we all know the aggressive pro-euthanasia lobby), is alleviated through the Christian tradition of care and in the many hospitals, receiving a new meaning in the light of faith. Through faith, the ill and the suffering find a real dignity and justification for their existence.

We can rightly be proud of our Christian heritage. But in turn, this demands also a contribution from us: that we hand it over in a firm, spirited way to the next generation. Because tradition is not ashes but the embers hidden underneath.

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Reading suggestion:

CS Lewis. The Abolition of Man. ISBN 0-06-065294-2.