

Cross over Europe

Evert Van de Poll, in *Vista, research-based magazine on Mission in Europe*, Issue 17, 2014/2, page 1-4

Wherever you go in Europe, you find a multitude of crosses. Look around and you cannot escape them. You find them on church buildings, on top of bell towers, beside the road, on mountain tops, in schools and hospitals, in private homes, and on book covers and posters. Countless people wear them as ornaments or amulets, or both. Crosses are carried in processions. Sport clubs have crosses in their emblems. Europe is literally packed with crosses. The cross, of course, symbolizes the Christian faith. It stands for the religion that has created a bond between the peoples of this continent, despite their different cultures, their rival interests and so on.

But notice this: as you travel across the continent, you will find crosses of all kinds. In fact, the same cross comes in a great variety of forms. We have the Celtic Cross, the Huguenot Cross, the Nordic Cross, the Maltese Cross, and the Languedoc Cross, to mention but a few. Each of them represents not only the message of Christ but also a region, a language, a nation, a particular history, a local tradition.

Ten countries have a cross integrated in their national flag, but the colours and forms are different on each flag. A larger number of regions and provinces have cruciform symbols. Every one of these cross symbolizes a particular history, a particular or regional national identity.

At the same time, it reveals something of the identity of Europe as a whole. You don't find this elsewhere, by the way. Outside Europe, the flags of only six countries bear a cross: Tonga, the Dominican Republic and the four countries that incorporate the United Kingdoms' Union Jack and its triple cross in the corner of their flags (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and Tuvalu).

The omnipresence of this symbol, in an almost endless variety of forms and formats, is not just a curiosity or a play of traditions, but a clue to understanding this part of the world in which we live. So here is the point: *Christianity has played a key role, not only in the emergence of the cultural unity of Europe but also in the development of its social, political and cultural diversity!* If there is one symbol that captures the paradox of Europe, i.e. its unity and its diversity at the same time, it is the Christian cross.

2.1 Diversity

Diversity is indeed a remarkable aspect of our continent. We are a mosaic of ethnic identities, languages, national histories, political traditions, cultures, and lifestyles.

Ethnic diversity

The forebears of the European peoples came largely from the east, some already long before the beginning of the Christian era, settling mainly around the Mediterranean, from which some moved further north. Many came with the great people movements towards the end of the Roman Empire and in the centuries following its downfall. They spoke a variety of mainly Indo-Germanic languages. They worshipped a host of gods. Scores of divine names have been recorded. As a result, a great ethnic diversity

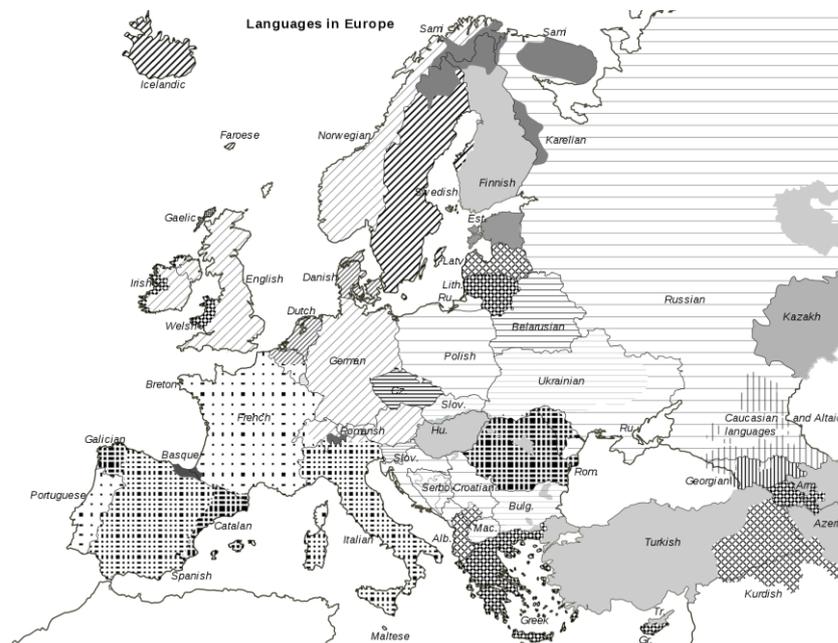
emerged: besides Romans and Greeks, there were Celts, Scots, Bretons, Picots, Russians, Lombards, Saxons, Franks, Burgunds, Germans, Slavs, Ostrogoths and Visigoths, Frisians, Danes, Vikings and more.

Linguistic diversity

Europe is also marked by the linguistic diversity of its inhabitants. When the European Parliament meets in Strasbourg, all deputies wear headphones, enabling them to listen to the simultaneous translation of what others are saying. Speakers are proud to use their mother tongue to express their opinions. Hundreds of translators are busy interpreting what each of them has to say, into the twenty or so official languages of the European Union. To American or Chinese observers, this sounds crazy. But for Europeans, this is normal. This is precisely what makes us Europeans: we communicate and cooperate in a multilingual way because we do not want one culture to dominate. To preserve our diversity, we accept that many different languages are used. As Umberto Eco once said: 'Europe is translation.'

Europe's linguistic diversity is a major obstacle to its economical cooperation and political integration. Yet others insist that it is an asset, a cultural richness. Because the European Union endeavours to maintain this diversity at all levels, it is held out as a model for other regions of the world where countries are separated by linguistic and cultural borders. The following map shows the linguistic variety.

Figure 2.1



There are three main language families: Latin or Romance (various forms of dots in squares), Germanic (oblique lines) and Slavic (horizontal lines). Scattered among these are other languages, some of them are akin to each other (Basque, Celtic languages in Ireland and the United Kingdom, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian, Albanese and Greek, Hungarian, Turkish.)

The geographical distribution of languages is such that we can speak of three major linguistic zones: 'Latin' in the southwest, 'Germanic' in the northwest, and 'Slavic' in the east. Notice the mosaic of languages in the Southeast.

Diversity of histories

A major element of culture is the collective memory of historical events that shaped the conditions of life of the people. Again, Europe is marked by a diversity of historical experiences. Every European country has its own historical experience and therefore its own memory of the past. Their particular histories have been determined by geographic location, economic developments, wars and invasions, political rivalry and alliances. The memory of the Poles, for instance, is marked by submission to the surrounding peoples: Prussians, Austrians and Russians. The common memory of the Italians is marked by ages of internal division and the fact that its capital is simultaneously the institutional centre of the worldwide Roman Catholic Church. The memory of the Germans is marked by the clashes between Protestant and Catholic princes, and the fatal imperial ambitions of the Second and the Third Reich. While some nations have a long history, going back to the High Middle Ages (England, France), others have been established much later. Belgium was created in 1830, Slovakia in 1991.

2.2 A common story

Although every ethnic group and every nation on the continent has its own particular story to tell, and while they have fought each other bitterly and continuously, their histories are marked by some common denominators, so that we can speak of a combined history in which the fate of these peoples has been closely intertwined.

The first one is the Roman Empire. It brought the southern regions together under the umbrella of an administrative system, and it spread the Greco-Roman culture which became a sort of layer over the existing local cultures and religions. This gave cohesion to the heteroclitic population within its borders. However, it was a Mediterranean empire, even though it spread to the northwest as far as Britain. The larger part of what is now called Europe lay outside the empire. The Romans called the ethnic groups beyond their borders collectively 'Barbarians'.

The second common denominator is Christianity. Having become the official religion of the Roman Empire, it gave a religious cohesion to the peoples within this Empire. After the disorder following the downfall of the western part of the empire, the Church stood out as sole force of cohesion among its multicultural population and the host of invading tribes who, quite remarkably, adopted the religion of the people they had conquered or driven away.

Moreover, the Christian message was spread much further than the Roman armies had ever ventured, to the north and to the east. The same Story from the same Book that had been told to Greeks and Romans was now also told to Gauls and Celts, Scots and Picts, Angles and Saxons, Frisians and Franks, Germans and Goths, Slavs and Rus and Vikings. They were integrated into the Christian realm, their frame of reference became the Christian religion and world-view. Over the centuries this led to values and behaviours that have become known as 'European', and are now generally taken for granted as being self-evident.

So here we have 'the two streams of history that have flowed into the life of Europe during the past two millennia', as Lesslie Newbigin has formulated so well. On the one hand the stream flowing from classical learning and administrative structures, with its fountainhead in the history of the Roman Empire, and on the other hand 'the stream that comes from the history of Israel mediated through the Bible and the

living memory of this history in the life of the Christian Church'.¹ And he goes on to say:

What has made Europe a distinct cultural and spiritual entity is the fact that, for a thousand years, the barbarian tribes who had found their home there were schooled in both the biblical story and the learning of classical antiquity, the legacy of Greece and Rome. Their intellectual leaders were taught in Greek and Latin, but the story that shaped their thinking was the Bible (...) The biblical story came to be the one story that shaped the understanding of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going... And because Europe later developed that way of thinking and organising life which is now known throughout the world as 'modernity', we cannot understand modernity without understanding this part of our history.²

From the Mediterranean ports to the abodes of Danes and Normans ('people of the north') from the Irish and Scottish shores way into the vast plains of Russia, people were remembering the same story of creation and salvation through the liturgical year, in popular drama and songs, in sculptures and paintings. The story was everywhere, and in whatever language or custom it was couched, and in whatever theology it was expressed, it was basically the same everywhere. 'This laid the foundations for what was to emerge as a self-conscious geographical unity calling itself Europe, distinct from its Asian background', as historian Norman Davis puts it well.³ (He is referring to the fact the many tribes had originally migrated from Asia.)

Different interactions with Christianity

Christianity is a common denominator in the history of European peoples, but at the same time it has also shaped their diversity. All of them have been marked by an interaction between Christianity and culture, but this has taken different forms. For a start, when the peoples in the Roman Empire and later on the Indo-German tribes north of the Empire were Christianised, their cultures were not suppressed but transformed through the influence of the church. Their languages remained, although they adopted much of the ecclesiastical languages, Latin in the West and Greek in the East.

Moreover, while the church had a dominant position, she did not exert her influence in the same way everywhere. In some cases, prelates acted in alliance with the existing political powers, in other cases they supported opponents and rivals to the rulers in power.

Finally, as divisions within the church developed into military conflicts, they shaped the political map of Europe. The prime example is the rift between Protestants and their opponents within the Roman Church, which gave rise to the religious wars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Each country had its particular Christian tradition. In each country there was the alliance between the rulers and a particular church. As a result, Christianity took on different national colours. It became a kind of civil religion. In some European countries, the dominant church clearly nourished nationalistic sentiments. One thinks of Orthodoxy in Russia, Lutheranism in Germany, and Roman Catholicism in Spain.

¹ Lesslie NEWBIGIN, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*. London, SPCK, 1995, p. 2.

² *Idem*, p. 3 and 13.

³ Norman DAVIES, *Europe: A History*. Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 216.

2.3 Religious zones

Due to the internal divisions of Christianity, there are now three major religious and cultural zones:

- *Protestant* northern Europe: United Kingdom, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, northern and eastern Germany, Estonia, Latvia.
- *Orthodox* Eastern Europe: Greece, Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Rumania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro.
- *Roman Catholic* Europe: Ireland in the west; Portugal, Spain, France, Italy in the south; Belgium, southern Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Czech Republic in the centre; Lithuania, Poland, part of Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia in the east.

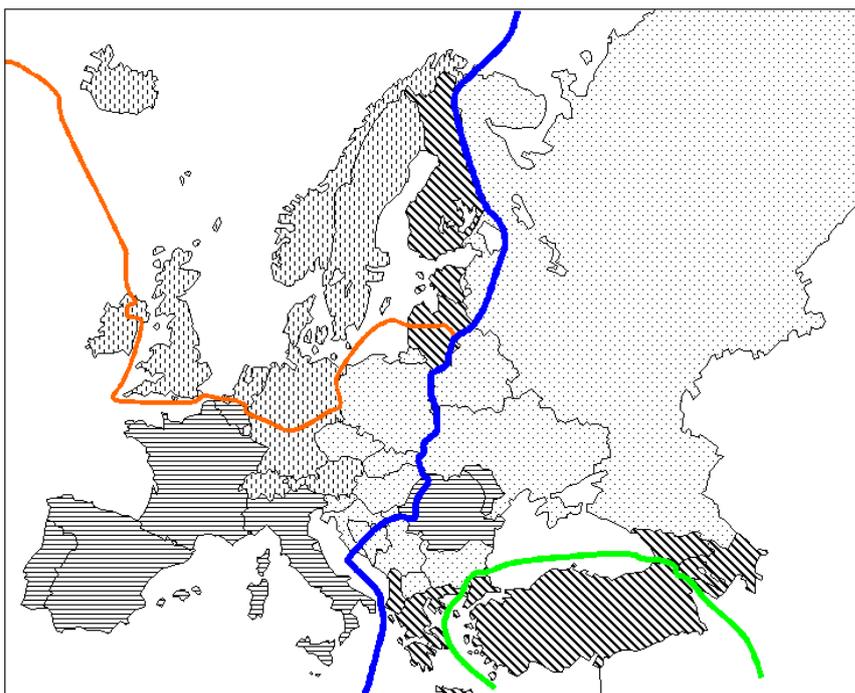
Christianity has been the dominant religion, to the virtual exclusion of all others. In the past, only Judaism and Islam have maintained a presence.

When the Islamic Ottomans ruled over the Balkan regions, from 1453 till the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of the population remained Orthodox or Catholic, while the military, civil servants and some people groups converted to Islam. Their descendents are found in Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo, the European part of Turkey and the Caucasian periphery of Russia. This could be called the fourth religious zone, although it is a rather scattered one.

Three zones plus a mixed one

Roman Catholics constitute the religious majority in twenty-three countries, the Orthodox in ten countries, Protestants in nine countries, and Muslims in two countries. Interestingly, the religious zones and the distribution of languages show considerable overlap, as the following map brings out.

Figure 2.2



The horizontal stripes in the southeast (plus Romania) show the Romance or Latin languages; the densely dotted area in the north and west represent the Germanic languages; while the Slavic languages are the lightly dotted area in the east is. Finally, the biased strips stand for the remaining languages. (The map fails to bring out that Hungarian is not a Slavic language.)

Added to this are three lines that visualize the major religious divides. The line in the west divides the regions with Roman Catholic and Protestant majorities. The horizontal line from south to north marks the historical divide between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox regions, while the curved line in the southeast indicates the Muslim presence.

One can see that the Balkans are a region apart, where different religious communities live side by side, in a complex mosaic of sub-regions that do not always coincide with national boundaries. This region has always been marked by ethnic and religious tensions that often erupted into open conflict, the latest example to date being the war in the former Yugoslavia, from 1992 to 1995. Because of the close relation between religion and national/cultural identity, these peoples seem to remain more attached to their religion. Secularisation percentages are lower than in other parts of Europe.

Minorities that do not fit in this picture

Of course, such a map is a simplification of reality. It neither brings out the important Roman Catholic communities in predominantly Protestant countries, nor the Protestant minorities in the south or the Orthodox communities in Western Europe. Furthermore, it does not depict the spread of *Evangelical churches* all across the continent. Notice that there are important religious minorities within all three (or four) zones:

- *Jews*, dispersed all over Europe, the largest communities being found in France, Russia, Ukraine, England and Germany. Not all of them practice Judaism, but it is difficult to ascertain the percentage of secularised Jews, since Jewish culture is permeated with religious customs.
- *Muslims* are present in all European countries, mainly due to a continuous wave of immigration during the last four decades. Besides the historic Islamic 'pockets' mentioned above, there are now important Muslim communities in France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and to a lesser extent in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Switzerland.
- Adherents of Asian religions, notably *Buddhism* and *Hinduism*, are present in many European countries, notably in the United Kingdom and France. This is due to immigration from former colonies, and to a fashionable openness among 'post-modern' indigenous Europeans for oriental religions and philosophies of life. New Age spirituality is to a large extent based on these religions.

Finally, an increasing percentage of the population is *secularised*. This phenomenon can be witnessed all over Europe. It comes in two forms mainly. First, the people who are not affiliated with any religious institution. This percentage is the highest in Protestant and ex-communist countries, with peaks in the Netherlands, the eastern part of Germany and the Czech Republic. Secondly, the non-practicing nominal

members of Christian churches. This percentage is highest in traditionally Roman Catholic countries.

Even though these division lines are a reduction of a much more complex reality, they are helpful in presenting a clearer picture of the diversity of the European context in terms of religion and culture.

2.4 A socio-cultural cross

So far we have noticed some regularity in the cultural diversity of Europe. Religion and language are major components of a people's culture. Moreover, the form of Christianity that prevails in a given country is the outcome of its history. We can simplify the picture of the religious diversity by combining the three major divides in the form of a cross. This enables us to identify four zones and their main characteristics:

Figure 2.3

<p>Protestant northwest</p> <p>Predominantly Protestant with important Catholic minorities (UK, Netherlands, Germany)</p>	<p>Slavic east</p> <p>Roman Catholic countries in the western part and Orthodox countries in the eastern part</p>
<p>Latin southwest</p> <p>Mainly Roman Catholic</p>	<p>Mixed southeast</p> <p>Mosaic of Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims</p>

North versus South

Another factor that has determined the culture of European peoples is their geographic situation, which has to do with climate, natural resources, arable land, commercial routes, and access to ports. For a start, there is a north and there is a south in Europe. The divide between the Mediterranean world and the regions beyond it has a lot to do with climate and vegetation, and therefore with culture, because the natural and weather conditions influence agriculture, food patterns, lifestyle and traditions of a given society. The colder the climate, the harder one must work to survive and make living conditions more pleasant. Another consequence of climate: families in the north live more indoors, in the south more outdoors. People drink wine in the south, beer in the north.

But there is more to it. At the time of the Roman Empire, the natural north-south division largely coincided with the limit (*limen*) between Roman territory and the realm of Germanic tribes. Britannia was the exception, a far off northern country in a Mediterranean Empire! More than a military and political border, this was, at least from the Roman point of view, also the demarcation line between the 'civilised' peoples linked together by a Hellenistic-Roman culture, and the 'uncivilised' world of

the Barbarians. In due time the Roman Empire declined while the Barbarians adopted the (Christian) religion of their former foes. Gradually, the north-south divide lost its significance. But traces remained. Even today, the Latin and Greek zones around the Mediterranean have distinct characteristics, as compared to the north. To mention just one example: extended family structures are more important than any other social structure in the south. Parents help their children with financial aid much longer than they do in northern countries.

It is a matter of interpretation where the north ends and the south begins. Belgium for instance has been called the most northern part of Latin Europe while people in northern France point out that the Latin mentality is only found in the southern part of their country. But wherever you draw the line, there is a difference between north and south. The Mediterranean world has a ‘feel’ of its own.

Socio-cultural ‘quarters’

It is interesting to see how these different factors interplay. When we combine the geographical, linguistic, and religious zones, we can identify four major socio-cultural ‘quarters.’ We can visualize this in a schematic way by drawing the following cross over Europe:

Figure 2.4

<p>Nordic Germanic Europe</p> <p>Germanic peoples and languages</p> <p>‘Beer’ culture</p> <p>Climate less hospitable</p> <p>Culture mainly determined by Protestantism</p> <p>Mostly Protestant with Roman Catholic minorities. Some Roman Catholic countries</p> <p>Industrious, enterprising, commercial development</p> <p>Used to a plurality of religious expressions.</p> <p>Today largely secularised</p>	<p>Slavic Europe</p> <p>Slavic peoples and languages (some exceptions)</p> <p>‘Vodka’ culture</p> <p>Climate less hospitable</p> <p>Cultures determined by Roman Catholicism (western part) or Orthodox (eastern part)</p> <p>Less prosperous than the West</p> <p>Some countries are very much secularised (e.g. Czech Republic), others marked by widespread religious practice (Poland)</p>
<p>Latin Europe</p> <p>Latin or ‘Roman’ languages</p> <p>‘Wine’ culture</p> <p>Hospitable climate</p> <p>Culture determined by Roman Catholicism</p>	<p>Balkan Europe</p> <p>Latin, Slavic, Greek, Turkish and other languages</p> <p>‘Wine’ culture or ‘black coffee’ culture</p> <p>Hospitable climate</p> <p>Cultural mosaic of ‘pieces’ determined by Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam</p>

Industrious, enterprising	Less industrious and prosperous than the West
Less secularised than NW Europe. High percentage of nominal Roman Catholics	Less secularised, because of relation between religion and national/cultural identity

Of course this is a simplification of the real situation, but it helps us to identify more clearly four major socio-cultural parts in Europe.

When we draw this cross, we do not want to give the impression that the borders are clear cut. In some countries, different zones seem to overlap. As one travels across Europe, one gradually moves from one cultural region into another. But at some point, travellers will sense that they have entered into another world, another kind of Europe. For instance, when they go from Amsterdam to Moscow, they might get a feeling of transition already at the German-Polish border, or at some point east of Warsaw, but that does not change the principle of the cross over Europe. When travellers go from Copenhagen to Barcelona, somewhere along the way they will realise that they have moved from a Nordic to a Latin kind of region.

More variables

This cross over Europe is a generalisation, and a tentative one. We do not pretend to have analysed in depth the various aspects of these zones. Further research is necessary to refine and modify it. In order to compare the different socio-cultural zones, we have used a number of variables, but to check our provisional conclusions and refine the picture, other variables should be added, such as:

- Individual initiative versus state initiative
- Take care of yourself versus the state takes care of you
- Family interests versus the general interest of the nation
- Role of (extended) family
- How egalitarian?
- How tolerant of religious diversity in general, and of Islam in particular?
- Attitude towards multiculturalism and integration
- How industrious, enterprising?
- Attitude towards authority
- Approach to education and learning
- How open to globalisation?
- How receptive of American way of life?

For the purposes of this book, another important variable would be:

- How receptive are people to Evangelical Protestantism and church models?

Understand resemblances and differences at a regional level

Despite its provisional state, this cross clarifies why some national and regional cultures have more in common with each other than with others. Germans, British, Dutch, Norwegians and Swedes recognize much more of themselves in each other

than they do when they compare themselves to Italians, Greeks, Bosnians or Romanians. Russians feel very different from French, and at the same time closely akin to Byelorussians and Ukrainians. And so on. It also helps workers in intercultural mission to understand that cultural dividing lines do not always correspond to national borders.

On the hand, Europe is not at all a unified whole, despite the process of economic and political integration within the EU. It really is a collection of different contexts. Any European who stays and works in another country for longer than a tourist visit, will become aware of the barriers between him or her and the population of that country.

On the other hand, the cultures of European peoples are not as diverse as it first seems. They show all kinds of regional correspondences. Within each region there are cultural affinities that explain why people within Latin Europe understand each other easier than people in other regions. Spanish people have more difficulty in learning English than Dutch people for example. Generally speaking, Russians will find the French way of life much stranger than the way of life of Romanians and Slovaks. Germans identify more easily with Scandinavians than they do with Serbs, Greeks or Portuguese. This list of observations can be multiplied *ad libitum*.

2.5 *Old and new divides in the East*

Let us take a closer look at the divide between East and West, because it is not as clear cut as our socio-cultural cross would suggest. It goes back to the old division between the western and the eastern Roman Empire. After the Empire was Christianised, the division continued between the Catholic Latin West and the Orthodox Greek East.

During the Middle-Ages, the peoples to the north and the east were evangelised by Catholics and Orthodox respectively, so the division line spread as well. The Germanic and some Slavic peoples were incorporated in the Catholic realm, most Slavic peoples however in the Orthodox realm. As a result, the dividing line went right up to the northern outskirts of the continent, separating Scandinavia and the Baltic from Russia.

'Slaves'

Moreover, there was a deep cultural rift. Germanic peoples as well as Romans and Greeks looked down on the Slavs, as on the other peoples that came from Asia and invaded Europe (Huns, Mongols). When captured, these people were made slaves and traded on the slave markets in the Roman Empire. This practice continued for many centuries. Even during the reign of the Carolingians in the seventh and eighth centuries, Slavs, i.e. slaves, were being sold on the markets of Verdun and other major cities in the Christian world. In fact, 'Slav' and 'slave' became synonymous in the Germanic and the Roman-Latin languages in the West!

While the practice of slavery gradually disappeared, it has added to the feeling of difference between the West and the East, even after the Slavic peoples were evangelised.

Two lines between West and East

When we come to look at it, there are two parallel frontiers between East and West, as Urs Altermatt highlights in his study on the composition of Europe as a cultural zone.

Since the Middle-Ages, a territorial-political internal border runs through Europe that almost exactly corresponds to the eastern border of the former Carolingian Empire. More or less the same frontier was repeated in the 20th century, when the three allies Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill during the conference of Yalta in 1945 divided Europe in two parts. In an almost ghostlike way they reinstalled the age-old inner European border line. A second internal frontier runs more eastward, it is religiously determined, separating Catholic and Protestant from Orthodox Christianity.’⁴

The first frontier runs between the Germanic and the Slavic peoples. The second lies more eastward; it separates Orthodox Europe from Western Europe. Caught between the two lines are Slavic people with a ‘Western’ Latin form of Christianity (Roman Catholic Poles, Czech, Slovaks, Lithuanians, Lutheran Latvians and Estonians, Reformed and Catholic Hungarians). This explains the ambiguous situation of these peoples. Viewed from the West, they are Eastern Europeans, but they themselves would not like to be wholly identified with the Europeans east of them.

Throughout its history, Western Europe has been more prosperous than the East, as it developed global trade routes and colonial empires. As the East lagged behind, it has always had a desire to catch up with the West, to belong to the rest of Europe and not to be left out. Their elites were for a long time culturally oriented towards France and Germany.

These differences were intensified by the Iron Curtain that was drawn through Europe after the Second World War, dividing the continent into two opposing zones based on rivalling ideologies.

Another aspect of this dividing line should be mentioned. ‘Europe’ means ‘west.’ The idea of ‘Eastern Europe’ comes from Western Europeans who have determined the geographical and political foundations of the continent. They saw themselves as the real Europeans – this age-old prejudice still lingers on. After 1945 the countries west of the Iron Curtain had no difficulty in simply attaching the label ‘European’ to their common market, their treaties and institutions of cooperation. After the fall of the Berlin Wall the countries to the east were invited to ‘join’ Europe.’

What has become of Central Europe?

Another question comes up in this respect: what has become of Central Europe? In the past the Holy German Roman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire occupied the central part of Europe. The countries that have replaced these empires considered themselves neither as Western nor as Eastern but as Central Europe. However, the Iron Curtain ran right through the middle of *Mittleuropa*. West Germany and Austria were integrated in West (the EU, NATO), but the major part of Central Europe became part of the Soviet Bloc and its zone of influence. Due to their common recent history under communism, they now share an historical legacy with

⁴ Urs ALTERMATT et al., *Europa: Ein christliches Projekt? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Religion und europäischer Identität*. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2008, p. 65. Our translation from the original German.

other countries in the East, while the rift with the West has deepened. Today, it is difficult to speak of a distinct group of a 'Central European' nations. Sometimes, this notion is still retained, but it really belongs to the past

While 'Central' Europe has virtually disappeared, the question of East and West remains. People in the West often forget that Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Hungarians, Czech and Poles like to consider themselves as being part of Western Europe. Eastern Europeans in their mind are Russians, Ukrainians, or Romanians (although the latter speak a Roman language). There is a widespread feeling that they should rather not join the EU.

At an international cultural meeting in Prague in 1995, the Polish author Andrzej Szczypiorski gave a talk in which he excluded the Russians from the European civilisation 'because they lack Roman law, Latin Christianity and West-European Enlightenment.'⁵ He is not the only one to hold to such views. The Hungarian historian Jenő Szücs has published an influential essay in which he argues that there are still fundamental cultural and political differences between Western, Central-East and Eastern Europe.⁶ Perry Anderson has summarised the discussion on this subject as follows:

Since the late 1980s, publicists and politicians in Hungary, the Czech lands, Poland and more recently Slovenia and even Croatia have set out to persuade the world that these countries belong to Central Europe that has a natural affinity to Western Europe, and is fundamentally distinct from Eastern Europe. But if Poland, or even Lithuania, is really in the centre of Europe, what is the east? Logically, one would imagine, the answer must be Russia. But since many of the same writers – Milan Kundera is another example – deny that Russia has ever belonged to the European civilisation at all, we are left with the conundrum of a space proclaiming itself centre and border at the same time.⁷

The interesting thing about this kind of representation is that there seems to be a general feeling among people east of Helsinki, Berlin and Vienna that Europe equals 'the West.' In order to reckon themselves to this 'West,' they push Europe's eastern border further eastward, so as to include their countries while distinguishing them from 'another' Europe further to the East to which they do not want to belong. If this is so, than it really confirms how real the East-West demarcation is in the minds of people, wherever they would draw it geographically. This is a major cultural frontier.⁸

Meanwhile, Orthodox church leaders insist that Russia and its neighbours are the inheritors of Byzantine Europe, which stand in continuity with the Christianised Roman Empire. In other words, the East is a different kind of 'Europe.'

The Balkans

Finally there is that peculiar part of Europe that seems to belong to neither its East nor to its West. We have to situate it in the southeast but it is difficult to mark its frontier; it is even more difficult to give it a name. In the nineteenth century, the name 'Balkan' came to be used, denoting a region of incessant strife. Indeed, this is

⁵ Urs ALTERMATT, *Europa: ein christliches Projekt?*, p. 65.

⁶ Jenő SZÜCS *Die drei historischen Regionen Europas*, essay published in 1983.

⁷ Perry ANDERSON, quoted in Anthony PAGDEN (ed.), *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 219.

⁸ For a detailed treatment of this subject see: Urs ALTERMATT, *Europa: ein christliches Projekt?*, p. 67-72.

an area of tension, because it represents a mosaic of different ethnic origins, language groups, and religions. This is the only part of Europe where Islam has maintained a continual presence till the present day. Bosnia and Albania have a predominantly Muslim population. And we should not forget that Istanbul, ancient Constantinople, is a Muslim metropolis on European soil!

The case of Greece

A specific case is Greece. It has a Mediterranean culture, but it differs from the Latin countries. Greeks are situated in the east, but they are not part of Slavic Eastern Europe, nor would they reckon themselves wholly as Balkan. At the time of this writing (2012), the impact of the financial crisis that erupted in 2008 continues to be felt all over the continent. Problems are most serious in Greece, considered to be the 'bad pupil' in the class of countries-with-the-euro. During the debate on whether or not to assist the Greeks with more financial loans that has been taking place, huge cultural differences have come to the fore. As other countries learn how their political, social and economic institutions function, they become aware of the fact that this is a cultural region unlike the western half of Europe.

By way of example, let me quote the elucidating testimony of Catherine Martin, a French 'little Sister of Jesus,' belonging to the *Spiritual Family Charles le Foucault*. Having worked in social aid projects, she is well acquainted with Greek society. Here is what she writes:

Living in Greece for eight years now I want to respond to the reactions to the situation in this country that I hear expressed in other countries. The image that is created of Greece for many months now, is the image of a country where corruption reigns, where fraud is a national sport, where scandals erupt and succeed each other to the rhythm of a machine gun. Nothing of that is totally false, and we should not hide the truth, but all depends on the way things are being said (...)

Secondly, nothing is gained when an already weak partner is further humiliated, all the more so when this partner is a whole people.

Thirdly, it has become quite apparent that in thirty years of partnership, the others have not succeeded in really getting to know and understand their Greek cousins.' For it is evident, although we may have forgotten it, that the Greeks are not Occidental Europeans and God willing, they will never be. With regard to the law they don't have the same considerations as we. Generally speaking, they don't have the particular rigour that marks the West and which is undoubtedly an inheritance from Rome. A legal norm is not seen as an absolute constraint but more like a simple reference point that has an indicative value.

I keep being reminded of what our Greek professor said to us during our first language class: 'The genius of Latin is its logical rigour; the genius of Greek is its elasticity, the art of nuance. There are rules of grammar but the exceptions, the shades of meaning, the variations and the irregular cases are very numerous indeed.'

Since living here I am persuaded that what is true for this language is also true for the mentality of this people. What is most important are family links and social links. When someone asks you to assist, you don't refuse it, even if it entails an infringement of the law. People help out their relatives and their friends, they are

sensitive to personal needs, but they don't have a very strong sense of the common good, so they evade the law without any hesitation in order to help someone.

The Greeks themselves admit that they are often willing to swindle. They often admit: *'this is not good, but this is the way we are, we will never change.'*

We rejoice in the diversity of Europe which constitutes its richness, but that implies that we should also reckon with these differences. We should neither be astonished nor should we expect that the Greeks behave altogether like the Germans or the French. If the European Union disserves its name, those who make up this Union should get to know each other in a more than superficial way and not just on the basis of clichés.⁹

This testimony is just one of the many possible illustrations of the cultural variety of our continent.

2.6 How does Evangelicalism fit into the picture?

Since we are looking at Europe from an Evangelical Protestant perspective, we want to raise the question where and how Evangelicalism fits into the picture. How receptive is the population in each socio-cultural zone to the Evangelical expression of Christian faith, with its emphasis on conversion, personal relation with God and individual responsibility? How do they relate to Evangelical forms of church life, with its 'low liturgy' and its emphasis on participating in and contributing to the witness of the Gospel? We would tentatively say that Evangelicalism is strongest in the north-western zone, and weakest in the southern zones. It seems that a population with a Protestant background is more receptive than to a population with a traditional Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox background. Is there perhaps a distance between the church model generally used by Evangelicals, and the socio-cultural context of these zones?

These are important questions for organisations involved in evangelism and church planting. It would lead us far beyond the scope of this book to deal with them in depth; we only raise them in order to make us aware of the need to take into account the different contexts of each socio-cultural zone.

One could narrow the enquiry and distinguish between traditional Evangelical Protestantism on the one hand and Pentecostalism (including Charismatic movements) on the other. Interestingly, Pentecostal movements have done relatively well in countries like France, Spain and Italy, where traditional Evangelicalism has been much more slow to 'catch on.' Moreover, in these 'Latin' countries there are sizeable charismatic streams within the Roman Catholic Church.

⁹ Catherine MARTIN, 'C'est L'Europe qui a une dette envers la Grèce,' in *La Croix*, October 3, 2011, p. 31; our translation, our italics.