European Identity: North and South, East and West – the main dividing lines

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1. Distance and closeness: John Paul II and his first address

"He was called from a distant country, distant but always so close through communion in the Christian faith and tradition." Those were the words with which Pope John Paul II referred to himself in his first address to the Christians gathered at St. Peter's Square in October 1978, just after the conclave's decision. These words, along with the Pope's appeal at the Holy Mass held at Victory Square in the center of Warsaw in 1979, "Let Your Spirit descend! And renew the face of the earth, the face of this land," became the symbol of an overturn in history for every Pole of my generation. The same change of course later took place in Europe, leading to the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism, and the transformation of the whole world. With four decades' perspective, I recall these words spoken in 1978 and 1979 when considering the current problem of European identity and the ongoing cultural wars. I will identify the meanings of *distance* and *closeness* in this context, as they are crucial in understanding the main dividing lines in the current dispute about the foundations of European identity. These lines, deeply rooted in our European history, are mainly geocultural and they have profound consequences for the current cultural wars. I mean here, first, the older and basic line between North and South, which was decisive in forming the Christian European culture and, secondly, the divide between West and East, which is closely related to the subsequent concept of modern European civilization. According to the latter, a closer consideration of the relationship between civilization and culture seems essential to understanding the problem of *distance* and *closeness* at the center of the current cultural wars over European identity.

Moreover, I would argue that the intersection of these two main lines dividing Europe, East vs. West and North vs. South, is the key factor in understanding the current European identity crisis and in the unfolding of Europe's future.

2. Distance of the bipolar world

It is important to consider the circumstances of the years 1978 and 1979, which I suppose were obvious to everyone who heard the Pope's first speech at St. Peter's Square or his later appeal at the Holy Mass in Warsaw. These circumstances in Europe were vividly symbolized

by the Iron Curtain, materialized (among others) in the Berlin Wall, and were implemented generally through the military, ideological, and political conquest of half of Europe by the Soviets. From that perspective, the unexpected election of a pope from behind the Iron Curtain ensured the universality of Christianity and the Catholic Church by undermining the bipolar, Cold War-era East-West division. It also foreshadowed the upcoming collapse of communism and the reunification of Europe. Hence, the pontificate of Pope John Paul II established a bridge over the Cold War borders and enabled the intrusion of long-awaited European closeness into the reality of ideological and political divisions that were responsible for growing feelings of distance in post-war Europe. This context of closeness and distance was clear for everyone during those days at St. Peter's Square and contributed to the awareness of the greatness of that historical moment. The existence of two different worlds and of what was described as the East-West divide and the bipolar Cold War struggle among powers suddenly disappeared at that moment, showing the prospects of making irrelevant the hard and often dangerous realities of divided Europe and paving the way to a restored closeness among Europeans. This development was fulfilled throughout the 1980s, leading to the new reality of the post-Cold War world. The struggle to overcome the East-West divide of the Cold War based on cultural and spiritual closeness was then often depicted in a naive but influential manner: as the liberal "arc of history" or simply as the "end of history." These two politically serviceable views on the meaning and consequences of the end of the Cold War were dominant during the last three decades and representative of the new liberal globalization ideologies, which have completely ignored or even purposely rejected any other possible insight into the meaning of the events that changed Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this context, Pope John Paul II's first remarks are worth remembering because they stress the experience of closeness and distance in Europe and restore the true meaning of overcoming the East-West divide, which was possible due to cultural and spiritual closeness and the clear awareness of the peril of communism as the real source of distance and alienation in Europe[i].

3. Distance and the Western concept of European civilization

The distance and alienation created by communism – as opposed to cultural and spiritual closeness – reveal some deeper layers of the historical division between East and West that were related to the "project of modernity" and its chain of unfinished revolutions. This makes the distance the pope was referring to much older and deeper than one would assume based on the realities of the Cold War in Europe, which were the direct outcome of the situation

following World War II. Distance created in Europe through communism, along with other powerful modernity ideologies of the 20th century, including German Nazism and Italian fascism, resulted from the events in Europe in the late 1700s and early 1800s, specifically the events in Europe in the decisive period between the years of 1789 and 1814-1815, which in turn were the product of the whole mental, revolutionary transgression of Europeans that had taken place in philosophy, theology, and science earlier, in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. As the product of this longstanding process of fundamental changes mounted in the Enlightenment, Europe altered completely during the turn of the 19th century, and the new modernization logic of the East-West divide (distance and alienation) was triggered, determining the two last centuries, and it still exists. Consequently, these events influenced the new idea of European civilization, shaped on the concept of modernization (the project of modern man as opposed to the ancient and traditional one), on historical progress based on the concept of historical and scientific mind (truth), and finally on the utilitarian ethics of an individual or group's interests. All this together decisively influenced the new understanding of Europe and the West as the center of the project of modernity, while in this context the East became distant, unfamiliar, and extraneous. This enabled the special role of tsarist Russia for the enlightened West. Considering the tsar's rule extremely cruel and tyrannical, the Westerner modernizers started to perceive Russia as the only power capable of projecting a new, enlightened modern order over the territories and populations in eastern Europe, which had become viewed as eccentric, oriental, and wild. Even more profoundly, it revealed another consequence of the modernization project: the idea of post-Christianity. It is important to stress that this change, which was caused by modernization, happened fully at the expense of Christianity through a rejection of Europe's entire Christian culture, including the Christian concept of truth, the Christian concept of the universe and of human life. Europe's longstanding Christian culture started to be considered the chief obstacle to modern European civilization, one that had to be eliminated for the sake of the project of modern progress. So at the turn of the 19th century, Christian culture and modern civilization started to be perceived and understood as two completely distant and hostile realities within Europe – a situation that Friedrich Nietzsche explicitly named at the end of the 19th century, at a time in Europe's history that was influential on the preparation of the powerful and disastrous modernity ideologies of the 20th century.

4. Enlightenment or Enlightenments?

Many prominent authors such as Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and Karl Loewith[ii] tried to examine the evolution of the modernity project taking place at the expense and to the detriment of the traditional divide and the metaphysical context of the human world. The intriguing question remains of whether the hostility between the modern mind and the Christian faith was inevitable and necessarily led to the clash with the divine and metaphysical context, and consequently to its complete abandonment, which many rationalists saw as the only acceptable foundation for the further progress of modernity. This question refers directly to judgments about the meaning and the consequences of the Enlightenment and about the probably unreconciled relationship between the enlightened mind and religion. Some inspiring debates occurred in the late 20th century on this issue, such as, for instance, the intellectual exchange between Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger about modern rationalism and Christianity in the post-enlightened age[iii]. Pope John Paul II gave us another indication of this in his book *Memory and Identity*,[iv] in which he recalls the alternative path of the Polish Enlightenment, which at the time of the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski made efforts to reunite Christian faith with modern rationality. Regarding the possible alternative developments of modernity, Gertrude Himmelfarb aptly explained her strong reservations about the concept of what is called the European Enlightenment, which in her view was incorrectly established as the model of the common experience constituting the main conceptual images of the current modern West[v]. For her, the European Enlightenment usually means the unique experience of French radical rationalism and laicity, which in modern history profoundly differed from the logic of modernization that took place in North America, England, and even Germany, where the relationship between the modern mind and religion went in different, more reconciled directions. Even if we recognize the existence of different types of European modernity framed differently in different cultural contexts, however, and we realize the specific French case of modernization to be only one among many others, we have to admit that in the end the radical forms of rationalism and materialism dominated the Western project of modernity identifying modern civilization through a complete opposition and hostility to religion and culture. It is also disturbing how the growing radicalism of the modernity project during the 19th century was linked to the powerful and destructive modern ideologies of the 20th century. Hence, the discussion of distance and alienation during the Cold War was only partly related to the geopolitical realities of a Europe divided into West and East. In a much more profound sense, it touched on the general

consequences of the increasingly radical face of modernity, which has been replacing cultural and spiritual closeness with the realities of the civilizational distance. The radicalism of the modernity project, nurtured and growing during the 19th and 20th centuries, didn't halt with the end of the Cold War and is still affecting the West and the Western approach to Eastern Europe.

5. South and North divide – closeness to the sources

It is worth noting the time when American historian Larry Wolff published his excellent book, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment.*[vi] It was the year 1994, and as the author of the book declared once to me personally, it was exactly the time, at the peak of the events leading Europeans to the new post-Cold War world, when he felt that Europe was on its way to restoring its unity and cultural closeness. He realized, too, that it is vital to inquire into the reasons for the distances that divided Europe in the last two centuries, including the most important division between West and East. The title of his book includes the key problems: the invention of the East, the shape of the new civilization, and the enlightened mind. His main argument in the book was that the East-West divide was an ideological design created for the purpose of the new self-identification of the West recreated around the new ideas of the Enlightenment and rationality. By legitimizing the foundations of the new European civilization, the key invention of the East-West divide aimed at a complete rejection of the foundations of the "old" Europe, which for many centuries, specifically from the second half of the first millennium, when Europe erected its geographical and cultural outlines were designed along the continent's main geocultural line between North and South.

Let us now focus on another important line, the prior one in Europe's history and identity, which for centuries organized the geocultural and spiritual order of Europe along the North and South axis. It was decisive in forming European identity, European culture, and the spirit of Europe in general. This line is much deeper and older than the modern East-West divide modeled on the secular concept of modernity and progress. It was, after all, rooted in Christianity and its impact on Europe. It revolved around the divine Revelation, human openness, and conversion to the Christian Truth. At the same time, it was framed by the recurring attraction of the old world of Romanitas and its ancient traditions and achievements, which were Christianized and later became the chief spiritual and cultural inspiration for European nations during Europe's history. Geographically, this line between the South and North followed the Rhine and Danube rivers and the Alps, which for a long time remained a real and mental boundary of Roman civilization on our continent.

This key line has disappeared slowly but was replaced during the 19th and 20th centuries by new, progressive modernity ideologies at the expense of Christianity and ancient traditions. In unexpected and intriguing ways, however, it has been recalled recently by some crises that shook the European Union profoundly in the last decade, making many aware of the existence and impact of the North-South divide. Although these crises have been of a pragmatic character and primarily of a financial, economic, and social nature, they displayed and recalled the whole cultural and historical complexity of the old, abandoned division between Southern and Northern Europe.

This previously appeared in different forms as the Renaissance and the Reformation, which were powerful forms of pre-Enlightenment change and progress in Europe. As recurring ruptures and reunions, they helped each time to restore and redefine the central sources of European identity and culture existing in the heritage of Christianized Romanitas and the ancient Mediterranean South. The Renaissance, as the opposite of the progress that was a pillar of the modern concept of post-Enlightenment Europe, rested on an entirely different understanding of change. It understood the key North-South axis not in terms of distance, of civilization's dividing lines, but as the constant tension within Europe with ways of restoring spiritual and cultural closeness and re-unity based on their common sources. It recurrently enabled Europeans to restore the bridges between the past and the present. It was like the story of passing away, of vanishing and resurrection and reunion, of Persephone and Demeter: the fall and rise of Europe along common lines of cultural and spiritual continuity. This fruitful dynamic of the cultural closeness enshrined in the South and North relationship started with the clash between the barbaric tribes from the North and Roman civilization at the very beginning of what we call European history. This relationship, at first hostile and violent, has been transformed into the adoption, assimilation, and overtaking of the passing civilization as the form and source for the new, beginning European reality. Christianity, the Christian message, the Gospel, and the conversion to the Christian truth played the key role for centuries in this process of adoption, fruitful translation, and establishing closeness between the North and the Southern sources.

6. The self-conscious barbarian who converts

Remi Brague drew attention to one fundamental aspect of this translation process, which took place between the South and North in Europe's pre-Enlightenment history. Describing it in his excellent book *The Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*, originally titled *Europe, la voie romaine*,^{vii} he emphasized that the specific closeness, restored thanks to

Christianity through adoption and translation of the ancient, Southern sources, did not mean identity or replacement by an entirely new civilization. It established a specific relationship between South and North, which Brague calls "secondarity" and "intermediation" and which he puts at the very heart of the European, pre-Enlightenment cultural and spiritual identity. According to that secondarity of Europe, the normative and formative impact of the ancient civilization was transmitted by Christianity into the barbarian souls. Hence, the converted barbarian from the North, who is constantly conscious of his own dark origins and his hidden, unformed, and dangerous might, struggling recurrently against this dark heritage of his own barbarism and drawing from ancient sources transmitted to him by Christianity – such a "barbarian" becomes the very essence and the permanent symbol of Europe and European culture. He is the historical and spiritual product of the clash and closeness between the North and South. This leads Brague to one important and practical conclusion: the lack of consciousness about the secondary nature of European culture indicated through the lack of consciousness about its own inherent barbarianism and the need for conversion as the only way to calm it, this lacking consciousness or the hope of overcoming it, which was and still is the main promise of modernization and progress, each time in Europe's history led us, Europeans, to amoral acceptance of pure force, violence, and dehumanization.

7. *Translatio imperi* or lost in translation

The best known historical example of that kind of translation and adoption in the relationship between the North and South, was, of course, the Holy Roman Empire, later renamed the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. For centuries the German Medieval emperors claimed to be the only true vicars of Christ on earth and so to be the only legitimate head of the universal Christian spiritual and political order. This, of course, led recurrently to conflicts with the papacy and Rome about its supremacy. This political and historiosophical universal concept of the Holy German Empire was based on the specific idea of *transatio imperi*, which was the key political idea of pre-modern Europe. According to this, Europe was founded politically on the Roman myth of the golden city on a hill, Rome, erected as the fulfillment of the divine mission by the first European pioneer, Aeneas. This mission is continued and repeatedly fulfilled in Europe's history by establishing new centers of universal power in other places of the continent. The Holy Roman Empire claimed its legitimacy from being the most powerful representation of this transmission between the South and North.[viii]

Translation can ensure transmission and connection, but it can also keep us lost in translation. This was the main reason for the failure of the imperial German project, which became

focused on exercising pure secular power in Europe, and was then due to reformation, aimed at decoupling the powerful North from the South. Finally, the idea started to prevail that the North, liberated from Southern patronage, which was seen as obsolete and depraved, should entirely replace the South in Europe and provide itself with its own sources. The whole relationship between the North and South was questioned, and so were the primacy of Christian culture and ancient traditions along with the secondary nature of Europeans. The path to establishing the concept of a new modern European civilization was open. Hegel was right, indeed, seeing in German reformation the first powerful step toward the entirely new project of modernity in Europe.

8. The Polish case and the South-North transmission

Pre-modern Europe was constituted in consequence of many different attempts to fulfill the South-North transmission. Let me make some remarks about the Polish case regarding this, as it differed substantively from the German *translatio imperi*. The Polish *translatio*, however, remains pivotal for Poland's place in Europe as well as for the evolution of its culture and identity. The importance of the transmission between South and North seems obvious in the Polish case if we consider that the political and cultural statehood of Poland in Europe, which started in the 10th century, rested directly on the act of Christianizing the Poles. Although having its own pre-Christian history, albeit drowned in darkness, the foundation of the Polish state was not an act of conquest or an establishment of a new dynasty but an act of conversion, adoption, and transmission and coupling to the Southern sources of medieval Europe – an act that can't be perceived purely in terms of a geopolitical decision. It was a strong commitment and a declaration of faith. As an independent and conscious act of faith, Christianization was the foundation of the Polish political and cultural community at its inception. It also lay in the open tension with the universalistic idea of the Holy German Empire and its *translatio imperi*, but in turn, in direct connection to Rome. This was the crucial point for further developments in Poland's history.

At the end of the 12th century, at the peak of the Medieval Renaissance, the Polish transmission evolved into a full-fledged political and cultural European self-identification intellectually and literarily worked out by the Cistercian monk Blessed Wincenty Kadłubek, Bishop of Cracow, whom Pope John Paul II once aptly called "the father of Polish culture." His main work, *Chronicles of the Kings and Princes of Poland*, is much more than a typical chronicle enumerating rulers and historical events. Its four volumes contain several important political and philosophical tracts containing many references to antiquity and recalling some

concepts of political philosophy drawn from Cicero and John of Salisbury. Wincenty was an intellectual and a prelate of the Polish Church who represented the European Medieval Renaissance of the 12th century in Polish thought and contributed substantively to the creation of Polish political culture and Polish political language (expressed, of course, in Latin). Thanks to him, they were permanently bound with the ideas of *res publica* and of equal and free citizens directly constituting a republican community, both drawn from the Aristotelian and Roman tradition transmitted to Poland in the strong context of Christianity. This kind of republicanism in the form of political constitution and at the same time as a kind of public ethics and a vision of republican history with its roots in antiquity deviated, of course, completely from the Medieval political realities of the Polish Kingdom and the Polish Principality. As a political and philosophical idea, however, it contained an immense and powerful potential for further intellectual and political reception and continuity in Polish political life. It shaped the political culture, political vocabulary, political practices, and self-perception of many Polish generations in the following centuries, forming the strong foundations of the Polish *Rzeczpospolita* from the 15th to the 18th century. It also positioned Poles against the concept of the Holy Empire in Europe and the universalism enshrined in *translatio imperi*, making them convinced and devoted Christian republicans for generations.[ix]

9. The golden age of 16th century – Cicero in Poland

The 16th century is the peak, the Golden Age, of the evolution of spiritual and cultural closeness between North and South in the Polish case. Neo-Roman republicanism, with a strong and unique reception of Cicero and Aristotle, special diplomatic, political, economic, and academic relations with the republic of Venice, a huge number of Polish students at Italian universities, mainly in Padua – all this contributed to the rise and flowering of the Polish Commonwealth in the North. It is worth noting that this spread of the idea of neo-Roman Ciceronian-based republicanism at that time also involved some other countries in the North of Europe as well, like the Dutch Republic or England, and, as comprehensively shown by Quentin Skinner in his historical analyses of the evolution of freedom before liberalism, it contributed decisively to rebalancing the political absolutism in Europe.[x]

The Polish case shows vividly how the South-North line, so essential for the evolution of European culture and identity, through Christianity and republicanism, enabled the closeness of the cultural and spiritual sources of the South to the distant countries from the North for centuries.

10. How the West was reshaped and replaced South and North

Coming back to the East-West distance created by the new post-Christian European civilization, the Reformation had a remarkable impact as an originally religious, Christian movement of the North, which decoupled Europeans from the sources of the South (through the anti-Rome affects). It gave rise to religious and anthropological individualism and laid the foundations for the existential loneliness of the void secular world (Kierkegaard) by questioning European Christian universalism and establishing absolutism in politics. This change, however, was revealed to be only a preparation for further revolutionary spiritual, scientific, theological, and philosophical changes that took place in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and finally led to the establishment of the modernity project. The appearance of that project was associated with the real change in the basic geopolitical and geocultural directions, which completely altered European self-identification and replaced the old North-South axis with the East-West divide. What one usually calls the European Enlightenment was a reintegration of the old concept of *L'Occidence* or *das Abendland* around new rational ideas, openly critical of or even hostile to the theological and philosophical Christian world view, in order to establish the new West as an enlightened and post-Christian modern civilization. This reintegration and creation of the new West mainly took place in France and was to be massively strengthened in its effects and intensity by the French revolution, although the processes that simultaneously took place in England were no less important for the formation of a modern West of a different nature (there, it was related chiefly to the formation of capitalism). While the idea of the new West was modelled on modern rationalism and new, post-Christian values, at the same time the new concept of the East, as the Oriental opposite to the rational West, was invented.

11. Napoleonic modern pan-Europeanism

Certainly, the French revolution made this whole change in Europe irreversible, despite all attempts by traditionalists and conservatives – from de Maistre to Chateaubriand. What might have been the outcome and impact of this revolution without the emergence of Napoleonian Caesarism? One could even argue that without Napoleon the French revolution would have remained a marginal, local historical event. Historical fiction? Not at all. Napoleon transformed the French revolution into a pan-European civilization project and universalized its political and legal consequences. By doing this, he contributed to the final collapse of the old cultural and spiritual transmission and closeness between North and South, replacing it through his powerful project of the French Empire as the center of the new European

civilization, which marked the historical and irreversible transgression of old boundaries. Paris as the capital of the new, enlightened West was supposed to replace Rome, which was the center from the past. Later, already imprisoned on St. Helena Island, Napoleon recalled his ideas as follows:

> "The Western world should be enlightened, in the new era all nations should be equal, but the spiritual and civilization level on which they will be equal was to be determined by the spirit of the French Revolution,"[xi]

and further he added:

> "All united countries must be similar to France, and if they are united from the Pillars of Hercules to Kamchatka, French laws must extend throughout this area."[xii]

Europeans who faced this modern, post-Christian hegemonic universalism of the reintegrated French West very often reacted to this using old, well known and deep-seated symbols and ideas. So, for example, many in German countries who initially welcomed the ideals of the French revolution as the new republican freedom were later disappointed by the French occupation and started to see in Napoleonic universalism (Hegel) the pure incarnation of Roman violence and quest for hegemony. They tried to oppose this by referring to Greek ancient traditions and by interpreting the central role of culture in the classical Weimarian vein. As one of the disappointed German Romantic poets, Joseph Görres, said about Napoleon:

> "We believed we were in Rome, but we found ourselves in Paris."[xiii]

It was likewise with Russia and the great opponent to Napoleon, Tsar Aleksander. The new post-Christian universalism revived the reaction in the form of old sentiments about the special relations and ties between tsarist Russia and the heritage of Byzantium, and along with that the mystical idea of Russia as the Third Rome.

But under the surface of these old symbols and ideas rooted in the past South and North relation, now reactivated in reaction to modern, enlightened French universalism, it became crystal clear, especially after 1815 and the Vienna Congress, that with the defeat of Napoleon a new kind of civilization dividing line in Europe was decided on and established. From then on, the West and East divide began to prevail in determining European self-identification and European politics.

12. Historical, scientific mind and utilitarianism

One could explain what this modern divide of Europe means in a deeper sense using the terms of distance and alienation in their cultural and anthropological meanings, both of which became the foundation of the modern Western world. Instead of recurrence and closeness of the sources and the Renaissance enabling redefinition of the sources through transmission, the radical transgression was placed at the center of the new civilization to pave the way for the final emancipation of individuals and mankind as a whole from the transcendent and metaphysical context. This new ideal of individual freedom, ultimately achieved by the fulfillment of the modernity project and the unhalted progress of modernization, completely redefined the meaning of humanism, human values, and Europe's self-identification. It gave rise to the new, modern European civilization, which is still our home, although the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk more appropriately calls this civilization the "European greenhouse," "glasshouse," or "Crystal Palace," emphasizing the protection and alienation which simultaneously characterize the process of modernization.[xiv]

The concept of the new post-Christian civilization in Europe rested principally on two modern ideas that were elaborated in the 19th century, ones that must be stressed here, especially in the context of replacing the old transmission with the new transgression. The first idea was, on the one hand, modern utilitarianism, which should be perceived as a kind of radical ethical revolution resulting from rationalism, and on the other hand, the social, political, and economic consequences of the forceful and rapid evolution of capitalism. Using the radical concept of individual interests and happiness, Jeremy Bentham proposed his famous rational calculation of pleasure and pain as the only possible ethical foundation of human actions and decisions. He went further and used his calculations to design a detailed plan for a perfect, totally functional modern society in the form of his Panopticon – the perfect system of control, steering, and stimulation of humans confined to being merely behavioral objects. This monstrous project very quickly became the symbol of the modern industrial society managed by the narrow group of entrepreneurs and scientific specialists who replaced the old group of clergy. The Panopticon was originally invented as the ideal prison, but as Bentham stated later,

> "It will be found applicable, I think, without exception to all establishments whatsoever, in which within a space not too large to be covered or commanded by buildings, a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspections. No matter how different or even opposite the purpose."[xv]

In consequence, the radical ethical revolution of utilitarianism, proposed by Bentham and modified later by other thinkers in the 19th century like John Mill and Henry Spencer, utterly undermined the ancient republican and Christian concept of justice and its applicability to modern political, social, and economic life. This ethical revolution contributed decisively to establishing the modern post-Christian European civilization.

The second idea was the new concept of history enshrined in Hegel's philosophy and resulting from the appearance of a new kind of modern historical consciousness, which during the 19th century was transformed into a completely secular, positive scientific mind and into the concept of the scientific and objective history of mankind. In his famous *Untimely Meditations* series, Friedrich Nietzsche revealed the consequences of this entirely new understanding of human history and of human understanding of time. The scientific mind as the product of a secularized philosophy of history utterly expelled God, freedom, theology, and metaphysics in the name of positive, objective, scientific truth, as thinkers like August Comte, Ernest Renan, and David Strauss showed vividly in the 19th century.

13. Final remarks

The effect of this process was the ultimate replacement of the North-South transmission by the East-West transgression in Europe, and furthermore the enhancement of the open contrast between the new European civilization, the European glasshouse or Panopticon on the one hand, and cultural and spiritual closeness on the other. Looking at this effect from the perspective of the changes that occurred in Europe in 1989 and 1990, one could argue that they were the great and unfulfilled hope to bridge this modern antagonism between civilization and culture. The collapse of Communism and the reunification of Europe substantively contributed to the awakening of hopes for a possible correction of the Western path of modernity by reconciling the clashes between modern European civilization and Christian cultural and spiritual context. It turned out that this kind of closeness, however, was not restored during the last three decades. Moreover, what we are now witnessing in Europe is the acceleration of alienation instead of closeness. Modern civilization has radicalized its hostile stance to Christian culture, strengthening the quest for the ultimate transgression and justifying it, alongside the well-known ideological modes of thinking about modernity and progress from the 19th and 20th century, as a historical and scientific necessity. The project of emancipation must be completed at any cost. Even the slightest compromise between progressive liberalism and conservative reservations is not on the horizon. The modern mind, once set free from any context (transgression instead of transmission), will never stop on its

own and will never again recognize any boundaries where it has to halt. The project of modernization certainly doesn't allow any self-limitations, so it always leads to efforts to establish a new civilization without culture, which is the ideal of transgressed modernity.

This paper sought to explain the meaning of closeness and distance in the context of the evolution of the European identity. It is no secret that this identity is currently undergoing a very deep crisis. To understand the reasons for this and to look for remedies, we need better knowledge of Europe's evolution in history. South and North versus West and East enables us to recognize the main directions and paradoxes of this evolution. We are actually at the crossroads of both: on the one side is the deep-seated tradition of Christian European culture that transmitted the ancient sources for us; on the other side is the concept of modern post-Christianity and transgressing civilization that is now under unprecedented strain and uncertainty. How we get through this crossroads will be determinative for Europe's future.

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