

Where is Europe's Spiritual Capital?

'To forgive is not to forget'.



The European Parliament in Strasbourg



Bruegel: The Tower of Babylon (Fragment)

#### Introduction: Europe's Last Capital

One thousand years ago Europe's Capital was undoubtedly Constantinople, New Rome. This was almost certainly the largest city in the world, perhaps numbering one million inhabitants, with by far the most advanced culture, science, libraries, drainage systems and low-scale, environmentally safe technologies. In Western Europe, even the largest settlements, like Rome, Paris and London, were no more than muddy, provincial towns. Made up largely of wooden hovels with, in the case of Old Rome, extensive ruins, their populations numbered little more than ten or twenty thousand.

With its many monasteries and churches and civilised standards, Constantinople, situated on the European side of the Bosphorus, was also spiritually advanced. It spread across the waterway to Asia, the source not only of civilisation, but also of the Gospel of Christ. But even so, Constantinople did not consider itself to be a Spiritual Capital. For this it looked elsewhere. The World's Spiritual Capital was, as it still is today, not in Europe, but in Asia, in Jerusalem. For Christianity is an Asian, not a European, religion.

Today, having long ago compromised the Faith, the source of its real glory, for secular compromise and glory, Constantinople no longer exists as a Christian city. It has become Istanbul, a Muslim city with scarcely a thousand Orthodox Christians in it. With its extensive Christian ruins, it is certainly no longer a European Capital, let alone today's European Spiritual Capital. Indeed, is it at all possible to speak of a European Spiritual Capital?

Where is Europe?

In order to answer the above question, we must first define what we mean by Europe. We must understand that Europe is far greater than its outlying Western corner, the tiny Europe of Charlemagne together with its recent extensions. For it is this that so many ethnocentric Westerners, with their modern day Babylonian commercial union, think of when they hear the word 'Europe'.

In reality, Europe stretches from the Ural Mountains of north-east Russia to the Atlantic coast of south-west Portugal and from the northern Hebrides off the Scottish coast to beyond Georgia and the shores of the Caspian Sea, together with the outlying islands of Iceland in the far north-west and Cyprus in the far south-east. Even the present much extended 'European' commercial union of twenty-seven countries still covers no more than a third of this real Europe.

Secondly, we must understand the one fundamental division of Europe. A thousand years ago, when Constantinople was the Capital, this division was taking definitive shape. Roughly, it formed a diagonal line drawn across central Europe from the north-east to the south-west, finally becoming firmly fixed only about five hundred years ago. This line cuts across the centre of Europe from near the present Russo-Norwegian border west of Murmansk in the Arctic north-east, down the present border of Russia with Finland, inside the eastern border of Estonia, inside the southern borders of Latvia and Lithuania, to Belgorod in eastern Poland, into the south-west Ukraine east of Lvov, through the south-east corner of Poland near Sanok, across north-eastern Slovakia, through Hungarian western Romania and then to the Croat border with Bosnia and down to the Dalmatian coast.

Spiritually Backward Western Europe

The Western marches of this division, for example eastern Slovakia, are symbolically marked by castles, often built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in order to repress the Orthodox Christian peoples of Europe and deform their Faith. They were constructed by various militaristic groups, from the Teutonic Knights to the Hungarian elite. To the West of these marches lies the rest of Western Europe, which conceals the origin of these castles in northern France. Indeed, it is covered with a far

denser network of castles, dating back to the tenth century, and a series of huge and gloomy Romanesque and Gothic churches, the easternmost of which is in Kosice in eastern Slovakia. Thus, from Ireland across to Wales, Scotland and England, into the Low Countries, Germany, southern Scandinavia, Poland and the Baltic Republics, from Portugal and Spain into France, most of Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary, the whole region is dotted with fortress-like churches and castles, the first of which date from just before the Year 1000.

These castles with their dark dungeons and torture-chambers are not some picturesque souvenirs, but relics of oppression and evil. They are the visible signs of oppression of authentic Christendom by feudalism. Feudalism was little more than a mafia-run protection racket system that began in northern France in about the Year 970. Feudalism left a spiritually deprived people - it is notable that even its spiritual centres, battlemented and gargoyle churches, look like threatening castles. For the Western Church too was swallowed up into the secular, feudal system, of which it became an integral part.

In this West, Christians have for nearly a thousand years largely been forced into abandoning the wholeness of the Faith. However, a minority has always kept a nostalgic yearning for God and His Church. This represents a pure but suppressed undercurrent in Western life, fighting in a hidden White Movement for spiritual authority, for God and King, for, in French, 'la foi et le roi'. It can be discovered only through the spiritual treasure-hunt for lost wisdom. Instead of spiritual development and progress, the Western powers have concentrated on economic and technological development and progress, giving themselves all power and authority. It is this Babylonian 'progress' and technology which will lead to the end of the world through catastrophe, nuclear, biological and ecological.

#### Spiritually Advanced Eastern Europe

The Eastern marches are symbolically marked by churches. For east of the European dividing line, Christians have continued to struggle in the integral faith, though with ever more difficulty as the centuries have swept past. They were persecuted and suffered for the Church, just as Christ suffered and just as He warned His disciples that they would suffer. 'If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also' (Jn. 15, 20). For suffering is the currency of this world, with which we can buy paradise. For the suffering that is with Christ is the suffering which has value in eternity, leading to the Resurrection.



The control room of the nuclear power station in Bilibino in north-east Russia, the most northerly nuclear power station in the world.

Europe's Spiritual Capital is intimately linked with these Eastern Lands, for a Spiritual Capital is always a place of spiritual development and progress, not spiritual regress and backwardness. It looks to Jerusalem, not to Babylon. And although the Western provinces of Europe have for the past nearly thousand years formed the technological centre of Europe, they long ago became spiritually backward, placing the cultivation of the psychic and the intellectual far above the cultivation of the human spirit. In their compromises they failed to understand that conscience is greater than life.

Thus, seeking a European Spiritual Capital, some mistakenly put forward Rome. It is after all a treasure-house of holy relics, indeed the main one in Western Europe, far surpassing Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain, with relics of St James, or Cologne in western Germany, with the relics of several saints, notably of the Magi. Several other European cities in Spain, Italy and France in particular also boast of similar treasure-houses of relics. However, a Spiritual Capital cannot only be a treasure-house of relics of the past, but it must also be living in the present. Therefore, we must leave the Western periphery and the outlying provinces of Europe and head towards the geographical centre of Europe which is in Carpatho-Russia, just east of the line that divides Europe into two.

Conclusion: The European Spiritual Capital

A strong candidate for the position of Europe's spiritual capital could be the group of dynamic monasteries of Moldavia in north-eastern Romania, close to Europe's geographical centre. Alternatively, we might refer to Diveyevo in Russia, though this is well to the north-east of the geographical centre. With nearly a thousand nuns and the relics of St Seraphim of Sarov and many other saints, expressing the views and values of Russian Orthodoxy, it would still be a strong candidate. However, we believe that the Spiritual Capital of Europe is elsewhere. It must be multinational, with representatives of many European countries, not simply from one nation. And it must also be a site of holiness, which appeared at about the time that Western Europe began falling away from Church Truth. Then it set out on the long, gradual, millennial process of self-secularisation, at the very end of the tenth century. Thus, it failed to fulfil its Divine destiny, so condemning itself to spiritual death in the futility of materialist development.

Therefore, we believe that the European Spiritual Capital is Mt Athos. At present this international centre is the true 'European Union'. 500 miles due south of the geographical centre of Europe, it can date its systematic monastic settlement to the Year 963, just when the first signs of feudalisation and castle-building were beginning in the West. Mt Athos is not only a treasure-house of relics, far more important than Rome, but also a living centre for some 2,500 monks of many nationalities, who cultivate the sobriety and grace of the ancient Christianity of the early Church. It is also at present under attack from apostates, who wish to send in armed police to martyr some of the monks. This is a clear sign that it is following the path of Christ, telling the Truth that disturbs the compromised, but also sets free (Jn. 8, 32) and which is therefore so hated by apostates and their many allies in the West.

Mt Athos is therefore the site which we would call today's Europe's Spiritual Capital. To the secularists it is a mere obscurantist Balkan village, a low-technology economic backwater. But to us it is a spiritual powerhouse. And this central powerhouse gathers together all the scattered Orthodox Christian fragments, spreading to every human soul in Europe, east and west, who share its values, in which way it grows stronger. For everything is promised to those who give their neighbours the best of what they possess and there is a spiritual centre in every oasis of the Truth of Christ, 'for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you' (Lk 17, 21).

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Holy Apostle Matthias