

Comment

Dreaming of a common home

So 1989 is going to be a memorable year after all—not quite as memorable as 1789, or even 1939, but almost. However hard we try, those of us who have lived most of our lives in the chill of the Cold War cannot really take in what is happening. Events in Eastern Europe have been moving too fast for that, and the outcome of unvisualised events like the meeting of the Pope and Mr Gorbachev is too hard to measure. And meanwhile 1992 gets nearer and nearer.

What should worry us is that the political map is changing so rapidly at a time when Western Europe has got so little to say to anybody. The Danubian maidens are casting off one sort of apparel ... for what? For have the lives of Western Europeans ever been dominated by such vapid ideology? Surely we cannot be so supine as to think that the policies and slogans right for running a giant supermarket are sufficient to bring into being and hold together a newly united Europe? That *is* what a lot of us think, though.

Two months ago, on the centenary of Christopher Dawson's birth, *New Blackfriars* printed a reappraisal of that almost-forgotten historian, written by Fernando Cervantes. Not many Western Europeans now take much notice of the Church, and Christendom has long vanished. But where is the 'supreme value' going to come from that Milan Kundera believes is needed to unite Europe (p. 448) Cervantes thinks there is truth after all in Dawson's conviction that no attempt to solve the state of cultural disunity in Europe will succeed which does not take account of the spiritual disunity at its roots (p. 442).

We Christians have as much reason as anybody else to doubt that the churches possess what it would take to restore 'the dynamic element in culture' which Dawson speaks about (p. 439). But in this number appear two articles by Dominicans who have different ways of seeing things, Timothy Radcliffe and Aidan Nichols, both of whom nevertheless are saying strikingly similar things about the most powerful force which has united human beings during the past two centuries, nationalism. Especially about its potential destructiveness. Both acknowledge natationalism's strength—and question its future.

What is stopping some 'supreme value' replacing it? Partly, that lack of a historical sense which Ernest Gellner speaks about, in Aidan Nichols' article. But also the pessimism of many of those who *do* have a sense of history, when they look back to the bloodshed and disappointment after 1789, 1849, 1917. Disasters are easily measurable. Growths in the spirit are not. But which last longer, the disasters or the growths in the spirit?

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