

# Marek Delong

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## The Approach of Pope John Paul II to European Integration

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Polityka i Społeczeństwo nr 8, 45-52

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2011

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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**Marek Delong**

**THE APPROACH OF POPE JOHN PAUL II  
TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

Poland's accession to the European Union became relevant not only because of economic reasons but also from the perspective of spiritual values shaping the process of European integration. The Catholic Church in Poland supported the preparation of our country for the unification with the European Union. Spreading papal teachings, it acknowledged Poland's efforts to take an appropriate place in the political and economic structures of the uniting Europe. However, Poland could not lose its spiritual and cultural character that had been shaped in close connection with Christianity. This is why the Polish Church declared itself to be an ally to the governing elites in their struggle to defend these values. Simultaneously, it opposed the consumerist model of life and the reduction of the European integration exclusively to its economic and political aspects. Besides, Pope John Paul II attached big hopes to the presence of Poland in Europe. He was convinced that our nation, being rich culturally and spiritually, could contribute to the strengthening of peace and security in the continent.

John Paul II believed that the position expressed by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical titled „*Rerum novarum*” had granted the Church „civic rights” to change realities of social life; these rights were recognised and reconfirmed later. The Pope reminded that the evangelical mission of the Church, manifested in its social teaching initiated by Pope Leo XIII, was continued and did not lose its validity at all. The social doctrine of the Church defends the dignity of the human person and points to adequate solutions to social-economic problems in accordance with the Christian principles. Pope John Paul II spoke about a necessity to introduce the Catholic social teaching into the life of the nations since this was a doctrine of unity and peace, guided by principles of love and justice (Jan Paweł II 1996: 370).

The social teaching of the Church<sup>1</sup> is characterised by a small number of doctrinal texts pertaining Europe, but the Catholic Church has always been present in the background of the integrative processes following World War II, encouraging and morally approving of the unification tendencies (Pieronek 1997: 101). The popes noted with attention and empathy attempts leading to the establishing of the European Communities, which is evidenced by the presence of the papal envoy representing the Holy See at the EC diplomatic corps (Jan Paweł II 1985: 205). The first papal statement concerning Europe was announced by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical „*Quadragesimo anno*” that had been written on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the publication of Leo XIII’s encyclical „*Rerum novarum*”. In his document, Pius XI warned against the threat of brutal communism looming over the whole European continent (Zwoliński 2001: 171).

His successor, Pope Pius XII spoke about Europe decidedly more often. He proposed to unify the Continent that could take shape of a pan-European confederation of states politically organized basing on a model that reflected the constitutional regime of Switzerland. In 1946, the Pope pointed towards the positive example of Switzerland that, in the period of all-powerful nationalism, benefited from the fruit of its strength and peace rooted in the unity of its citizens. Pius XII criticised Europe for its abandonning of Christ’s teachings whose warden and teacher was the Holy See. The rejecting by Europe of the moral principles of the Catholic teachings destroyed its spiritual unity that it had derived from its former upbringing in the spirit of Christianity. Pius XII spoke about a vacuum in the sphere of ideas that spread in the particular European countries and at the same time he reminded about the role of the Church in the history of Europe, referring to the greatness of the past of Christian Europe and the civilisational benefits of the unity between Christianity and Europe.

The idea of the European unity was developed in the teachings of Pius XII’s successor’s, Pope John XXIII’s, who expressed his support for the integration processes declaring, like his predecessor, a necessity to respect Christian values and to emphasise the Christian roots of the European civilisation. In contrast to his predecessor, John XXIII did not try to determine the political shape of the integrated Europe. Also, Pope Paul VI spoke on the subject of European integration. His teaching was

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<sup>1</sup> Social teaching of the Church – a doctrine promulgated by the Church in the social domain. It regards broadly understood human activities in all social dimensions.

to a greater degree characterised by an anthropological approach. Although the Pope indicated political, economic and cultural differences, his own considerations primarily referred to world contexts.

Nevertheless, the most clear and consistent vision of a united Europe in the condition of the division caused by the iron curtain, was formulated by Pope John Paul II. It was notable that neither Pius XII, John XXIII nor Paul VI, albeit supportive of the integration processes in Western Europe and efforts aiming at establishing a European Union in the future, identified the western states with Europe as a whole. „However it was John Paul II – Jerzy Kłoczkowski writes – who began to remind the Europeans about «two lungs» of the Old Continent with great consistency and involvement. In 1980, he even articulated the concept of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals that had been earlier expressed by de Gaulle, which led some commentators to reflect on similarities between „Wojtyła’s Europe” and „de Gaulle’s Europe” (Kłoczkowski 2002: 125). The collection of statements by John Paul II regarding the European unity in the years of 1978–1999, titled *Profezia per l’Europa*, counts more than a thousand pages and contains 669 texts. It is significant considering that in the years between 1939 and 1978, the papal statements regarding Europe numbered only 136 statements (36 Pius XII’s statements, 7 John XXIII’s statements and 93 Paul VI’s statements) (Usiadek 2007: 32). Apart from the papal teaching, which occupies a supreme position, one also needs to recollect symbolic gestures by the Pope, his attitude, meetings and decisions. Jan Usiadek stresses the following of them: the mass celebrated at Auschwitz in June of 1979, the speech made at the Brandenburger Gate in Berlin in June of 1996, the mass celebrated „in the snow” at Sarajevo in April of 1997, the visit at the European institutions in Strasbourg in October of 1988, the remembrance of the saint martyrs that co-created the history of the European continent: Benedictus, Cyrill, Method, the blessed: Edith Stein, Birgid of Sweden, Catherine of Siena. The European issues were also discussed during two sessions of bishop synods – in 1991 and in 1999. All of the papal European enuntiations were in full or in part devoted to the uniting of Europe and the European culture shaped on the basis of the Christian values (Usiadek 2007: 33).

The papal conceptions entailed integration not only in its structural dimension but also in its cultural dimension. The great authority of the Pope facilitated prompt understanding of his European teaching in the Churches of Western Europe. This teaching was of universal and timeless nature – inter alia because John Paul’s interpretation of Europe was

decidedly different to the one that was wide-spread at the end of the 1970s. „These differences – writes Michał Drzonek – were already visible as far as the interpretation of Europe’s boundaries. Suffice it to remind that just before being elected to the Holy See, cardinal Karol Wojtyła had clearly indicated the foundations of his European teaching in a paper titled *Gdzie znajduje się granica Europy?* [Where is the boundary of Europe?] that was published in Italy in spring of 1978. This paper by John Paul II already clearly evidenced that in Karol Wojtyła’s teaching the boundaries of Europe were much broader than the ones determined by the maps of the Old Continent towards the end of the 1970s” (Drzonek 2006: 31)<sup>2</sup>. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła distinguished two types of Europeanness: eastern Europeanness and western Europeanness whose division was caused by the emergence of two competing centres of Christianity, that is Constantinople and Rome. Within the area of Rome’s and papacy’s influences the western Europeanness was shaped, while the eastern one was born under the influence of Constantinople. In Wojtyła’s opinion, in some areas the eastern and western Europeanness overlapped, as exemplified by the Polish territory. What was a characteristic feature of the relations between the two models was lacking expansiveness of either of them – instead there occurred mutual contacts and overlaps.

The papal European teachings were very important in the whole body of John Paul II’s thought. They were closely related to his Polish experiences, and especially to the experiences of the Polish Church in the second half of the XX century that emphasized the role of the spiritual roots as the basis of human identity and dignity. The figure that symbolised this direction in Poland most was the Polish Church’s Head (*prymas*) Stefan Wyszyński who aimed at tying the biggest possible number of the faithful with the millenarian, Christian tradition of Poland (Kłockowski 1990: 9). Pope John Paul II was an ardent advocate of the realisation of the idea of the European unity. Still, it could not come true without including in the integration processes of all states situated on the European continent, especially the ones in its eastern part. The unification of Europe would be fully completed after the two lungs are joined. „My desire – the Pope said – as the highest shepherd

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<sup>2</sup> The interpretation of the European continent solely in terms of Western Europe has long and distant roots in historiography as for instance Leopold von Ranke maintained that the history of Europe is the history of Germanic and Romance peoples who had shaped its past for the last centuries. See Kłockowski 1990: 9.

of the Catholic Church, having come from Eastern Europe and knowing the aspirations of the Slav peoples, who are this second «lung» of our common European homeland, is that the Europe that autonomously elects its free institutions will grow in time to the size that it has been endowed with by geography and especially history” (Jan Paweł II 1988: 45). Such a full structural integration would also be an expression of the fulfillment of historical justice, meaning the reception of the Soviet Bloc states, earlier abandoned by the West behind the iron curtain. According to the Pope, this very divide into the West and the East is wrong since it is a manifestation of a real divide, or even its cause. To overcome it, the nations should act with solidarity within the framework of an international system (Simon 1991: 20). „For when European politicians and intellectuals kept silence, John Paul II – Rev. Andrzej Zwoliński wrote – demanded full rights for all European nations, which was and still is a preliminary condition enabling the building of international unity” (Zwoliński 2001: 172–173).

A complete unification of Europe requires not only integration in the structural sphere, but also grounding the European unity on the foundations of Christian values which are an essential element of Europe’s historical heritage. John Paul II much more strongly than his predecessors emphasized the significance of the roots of eastern and western Christianity, he reminded the role of cultures and national memories. In accordance with those papal conceptions, Europeanization in the cultural aspects would be fulfilled by means of the creation of a European Spiritual Community. The Christian values should form the basis for its functioning while differences and diversities of other streams constitutive of the European heritage should be respected. „In the second half of the 1990s – Michał Drzonek wrote – one could discern a stronger emphasis put on the other streams of Europeanization, such as for instance references to the input of Judaism and Islam in the shaping of the ethical, political and economic standards in Europe. This, in turn, gave rise to the demonstration of the interrelationships of the European unity with the dissemination of positive effects not only through an ecumenical dialogue but also an interregional one” (Drzonek 2006: 33). The Pope drew attention to the Christian roots of Europe and to the fact that it does not end in its western part. The fact that he declared the saint patrons of Slavs – Cyril and Method to be saint co-patrons of the whole Continent alongside Saint Benedictus who embodies the West, was extremely important (Kłoczowski 1990: 18).

John Paul II expressed his support for the process of European integration while simultaneously criticising eurosceptics for abusing the authority of the Catholic Church in their opinions and activities. The Pope encouraged Christians to participate in the integrative processes, stressing that the Church did not oppose the integration provided that it was based not only on economic premisses but also spiritual ones. One of the most important papal statements concerning the Continent's unity appeared in a speech made during a mass celebrated at Gniezno on 3 June in 1997 in front of the faithful and presidents of Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary: „Could not one say that after the fall of one wall, the visible one, another wall was revealed, an invisible one that still divides our Continent – a wall that runs through human hearts? [...] Even doubtless achievements of the recent period in the economic, political and social fields do not obscure the existence of that wall. Its shadow looms over the whole Europe. There is a long way to go as yet before the European continent will be truly united. There will be no unity of Europe as long as it does not constitute a spiritual community. The deepest foundation of the unity had been laid for Europe and was strengthened for centuries by Christianity with its Good News, with its understanding of the human being and its contribution to the development of the history of peoples and nations” (Jan Paweł II 1997: 274–275).

According to John Paul II, the economic achievements accomplished in the process of integration are not sufficient and should not be treated as the only indicator of Europe's unity but rather as a means useful in reaching its full unity, based upon a „spiritual community”. The European problematic was treated in John Paul II's teachings holistically as he looked upon not only Western Europe but also upon the whole continent. The Pope never tried to define details of integrative solutions. „The most salient is the foundation – as Jerzy Kłoczowski wrote – and the foundation is constituted by culture and spirituality (in the last resort they are more important than politics or economy)” (Kłoczowski 2002: 125).

During John Paul II's pontificate the second biggest enlargement of the European Union took place. Post-communist states, where processes of political and economic transformation evidenced what big destruction communism had wrought, occupied a specially important place in the papal vision of the united Europe. The Polish example clearly demonstrates that the recuperated freedom got separated from responsibility, became an absolute value essentially turning itself into

an extreme realisation of freedom promoted by the Western liberalism. In contemporary European culture we see many symptoms of a crisis, such as: the diminishing of common ideal values and ethical principles, secularization and destruction of moral trends, degradation of humankind through separating the human beings from their cultural and spiritual foundations. Despite those negative phenomena, the papal vision implies a possibility of overcoming the crisis and of authentic uniting of Europe (Bortkiewicz 1998: 4–6).

In an interview published by the Italian daily „La Stampa”, John Paul II said that in Poland a mistaken conception of the accession of our country to Europe prevailed (*Papież pomiędzy Zachodem a Wschodem* 1993: 83–84). „Obviously, I am not opposing – John Paul II stated – the so called accession of Poland to Europe, however, I am opposing the attempts to turn it into some kind of an idol, a false god. According to the supporters of that plan, this accession to Europe would entail the introduction in Poland of a whole ultraliberal, consumerist system that is devoid of values but is promoted by forceful propaganda. [...] In reality, Poland does not have to accede to Europe because it is in Europe, it is in its centre. It is important that it should accede with all of its values, not conforming uncritically and blindly to the Western customs, not absorbing what is the worst in them” (*Papież pomiędzy Zachodem a Wschodem* 1993: 84). The Pope warned Poland, which had thrown off the shackles of communism, that it was endangered by the fading of spiritual life with all of its negative consequences, such as: economism, consumerism and indifferentism. According to Jan Maria Jackowski, this is all the more dangerous that in the media, under the catchy label of a „return to Europe”, what is promoted is almost exclusively a vision of Europe that is referring to agnosticism and lay humanism – to the conception that treats Christian values-as-roots-of-the-European civilisation as habitual cultural elements at most and only tolerates them just as such (Jackowski 1993: 130).

John Paul II was the Pope who animated the European Continent in the XXI century when it was still divided but at the same time united by ten centuries of Christianity. Clearly, he aimed at strengthening Christianity in Europe through its complete unification. He was a Pope who had his own vision of Europe and implemented it consistently, becoming a prophet of our days (Guetta 1991: 120–121). He wished that Europe was united in the boundaries attributed to it by its geography and most of all by its history. He consistently lobbied for the accession to the European Union of all Slavic countries, stressing at the same time



that Western Europe had a debt of justice to repay to those countries liberated from the shackles of communism (Pieronek 1997: 108).

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