

The Medieval Origin of the European Disunion

Description

by [LAURENT GUYÉNOT](#) via [Unz Review](#)

Excerpt

To free itself from the clutches of NATO, Europe has, as things stand, no other alternative than to ally itself with the Russian empire—for the Russian Federation is indeed both a civilization and an empire, heir to the Byzantine civilization and empire destroyed by the papacy. Those who say that Europe should fear Russia as much as the United States (as do many affiliated to the French “Nouvelle Droite”) are even more inconsistent and dangerous than nationalists who long for their nation’s sovereignty. The realist sees no alternative between America and Russia, because there is none. The realist does not give up on Europe, but he is betting that the multipolar world order that Russia is promoting will be much more favorable to Europe than American domination.

[category EuroSlavia, remember?]

Europe was a civilization. From Charlemagne until, say, the 16th century, European civilization was “Christendom.” “The Faith is Europe, and Europe is the Faith,” in Hillaire Belloc’s words.^[1] Western Christianity had Rome as its capital, and Latin as its language. But this unity was, in theory, just spiritual. Rome was the seat of the papacy, and Latin the language of the Church, known only to a tiny minority. Europe therefore had a religious unity, but it had no political unity. Unlike every other civilization, Europe never matured into a unified political body. In other words, Europe has never been an empire in any form. After the failure of the Carolingian Empire, too brief and too obscure for us to distinguish its reality from its legend, Europe progressively crystallized into a mosaic of independent nation-states.

Nation-states were actually a European invention, their first embryos taking shape in the 13th century. Before the Middle Ages, there were only two kinds of states: city-states and empires; “Either the city-state became the nucleus of an empire (as Rome did) ... or it remained small, militarily weak, and sooner or later the victim of conquest.”^[2]

In addition to Christianity, the principalities of Europe were united, throughout the Middle Ages, by their sovereigns’ kinship, resulting from a diplomacy based on matrimonial alliances. But this community of blood and faith did not prevent states from being separate political entities, jealous of their sovereignty and always eager to extend their borders.

In the absence of an overarching imperial authority, this rivalry engendered an almost permanent state of war. Europe is an ever-smoldering battlefield. If you think of Europe as a civilization, then you have to think of its wars as civil wars. This is how the German historian Ernst Nolte did analyze the two European conflicts of the twentieth century.^[3] Neither common religion nor family ties prevented

European civilization from tearing itself apart with unprecedented hatred and violence. Remember that on the eve of the First World War, King George V, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Tsar Nicolas II were first cousins ??and all defenders of the Christian faith.

The stated aim of the “European construction” from the 1950s onwards was to make these European wars impossible or at least improbable. But this project was an anachronism, because it started at a time when European civilization was already dead, with no vital energy left to resist being colonized by the new empire on the block.

The European Union is not supported by any “civilization consciousness”—in the sense that one speaks of a “class consciousness”. Many people feel attached to their nation, and can say, as Ernest Renan did, “a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.”^[4] But no one perceives Europe as a spiritual being, endowed with “individuality” and a destiny of its own.

There has never been a great European narrative to unite with a common pride all these peoples crammed in the European peninsula. Each country has its little *roman national*, ignored or contradicted by the schoolbook narratives of its neighbors. There are certainly some shared myths. Charlemagne for example. But the endless quarrel about him precisely illustrates the point; as if Charlemagne has to be either French or German. The other European myth is that of the Crusades. But the Crusades illustrate just as precisely the inability of Europeans to unite on a project for Europe. By the Crusades, the popes told Europeans that the cradle of their civilization was a city at the other end of the world, disputed by two other civilizations (Byzantine and Islamic), and asked them to fight for it as if their own civilization depended on it. There cannot be a more anti-European project. The Crusades, in fact, only exported national rivalries into the Middle East. Sure, they make a good story, but it is mostly a great lie, since its only lasting result was the destruction of Eastern Christianity and the reunification of the Muslim world, soon organized into a new Ottoman Empire which would chip away parts of Europe.

The Middle Ages, anyway, are the beginning and the end of the European grand narrative. The notion of a “European civilization” calls to mind the Middle Ages and nothing else. And quite logically. Europe was a brilliant civilization during the classical Middle Ages (11th-13th centuries). But because this medieval civilization failed to form an integrated body, it fragmented into several micro-civilizations, each of them playing its own imperial game against the others. We therefore had, in the 19th century, a French empire, then a British empire and a German empire, all trying to destroy each other. They were colonial empires: having failed to create an empire at home, Europeans exported their rivalries in predatory conquests. Ultimately, they gave birth to the American empire, born in genocide and slavery, and destined to bring the woke plague on its genitors.

Hence the hypothesis put forth by the historian Caspar Hirschi, that European history is characterized by a rivalry between centers of power fighting for imperial supremacy without ever being able to achieve it:

an imperialist political culture, dictated by the ideal of a single universal power inherited from Roman Antiquity, coexisted within a fragmented territorial structure, where each of the major powers was of similar strength (Empire, Papacy, France, England and later Aragon). In the realm of Roman Christianity, this led to an intense and endless competition for supremacy; all major kingdoms aimed for universal dominion, yet prevented each other

from achieving it.[5]

So nations are, according to Hirschi, “the product of an enduring and forceful anachronism.” And nationalism is nothing but “a political discourse constructed by chronically failing would-be-empires stuck in a battle to keep each other at bay.”[6]

Hirschi does not identify the mechanism that prevented one power or another from winning this competition. So let’s ask: What happened? Or rather, what didn’t happen? Everywhere else, civilizations tend to unify into some form of political unity, around one dominant city or ethnos. Only in Western Christendom do we have a civilization without a State, that is, a body without a head. Why is Europe not an Empire? It’s not for lack of will—Hirschi is right on this point: Europe longed to be an Empire, willed it intensely, but failed. The peoples themselves aspired to this ideal, synonymous with unity, peace and prosperity. Empire should not be taken here in its modern sense. As Ernst Kantorowicz explains in his biography of Frederick II Hohenstaufen:

The ideal World-Empire of the Middle Ages did not involve the subjection of all peoples under the dominion of one. It stood for the community of all kings and princes, of all the lands and peoples of Christendom, under one Roman Emperor, who should belong to no nation, and who, standing outside all nations, should rule all from his throne in the one Eternal City.[7]

Even after the fall of the Hohenstaufens, who came close to achieve this ideal (more below), the dream lived on. The Empire was a metaphysical being, the very image of God, as Dante Alighieri argued in *De Monarchia* (c. 1310):

the human race is most like unto God when it is most one, for the principle of unity dwells in Him alone. ... But the human race is most one when all are united together, a state which is manifestly impossible unless humanity as a whole becomes subject to one Prince, and consequently comes most into accordance with that divine intention which we showed at the beginning of this chapter is the good, nay, is the best disposition of mankind.[8]

Caspar Hirschi’s theory therefore lacks a clue of the inhibiting factor that prevented the unification of Europe, despite the collective—one could almost say organic—thrust. But Hirschi is also mistaken in his description of the European dynamic. The competition for Empire was not, as he writes, between “the [German] Empire, the Papacy, France, England, and later Aragon.” Until the middle of the 11th century, only the former, officially known as *Romanum imperium*, claimed imperial sovereignty. Then one other power emerged to challenge its claim: the papacy. For three centuries, the competition between the emperor and the pope dominated European politics. From intellectual debates down to the battlefields, Europe was entirely drawn into that struggle. No other factor is comparable in intensity and influence in the classical Middle Ages

The popes deliberately and persistently prevented the expansion of the German empire, which was, for geographical and historical reasons, the only power capable of unifying Europe politically. The unification of Europe could only start by the unity of Germany and Italy, but this is precisely what the papacy resisted with all its might, and its supernatural powers. In the process, the papacy consolidated other emerging kingdoms, while preventing any of them from prevailing. Ultimately, neither the emperor nor the pope were able to reign over Europe. And so it was only in the 14th century, when the German empire had lost momentum, that France, then England and finally Spain, began to manifest

their own imperial inclinations and entered into a competition that could only lead to a stalemate, and a permanently divided Europe.

Therefore, the political action of the popes, from the start of the Gregorian Reform in the mid-11th century, is the single reason why Europe did not become an empire—in the medieval sense of a “kingdom of kingdoms,” as was the Byzantine *Oikoumene*—and therefore could not build the foundations for its future cultural, linguistic and political unity. This is what I will try to show in this article. By clipping the German Empire’s wings and finally reducing it to the rank of one nation among others, the papacy turned Europe into a collection of rival states united by no other law than the laws of war.

What is sometimes called the “balanced policy” of the papacy, playing one state against the other, and in particular France against Germany, was a means and not an end. The ultimate goal of the popes was not to create a “Europe of nations”, but to rule the Empire. This project was conceived by a group of intellectuals whose earliest central figure was the Cluniac monk Hildebrand, whom cardinal Peter Damian, who knew him well, once called “saint Satan”. He became pope under the name of Gregory VII in 1073. The main lines of his program are contained in the 27 propositions of his famous *Dictatus Papae*, including: “Only the Pope can with right be called universal. ... He alone may use the Imperial Insignia. ... All princes shall kiss the feet of the Pope alone. ... It may be permitted to him to depose emperors.” That program defined the papacy for three centuries. One hundred and thirty years after Gregory VII, Innocent III claimed to sit above kings because: “The Lord gave to Peter not only the lordship over the universal Church, but also over the whole world.” On the very day of his consecration in 1198, he affirmed his right to make and unmake kings and emperors, because, “To me is said in the person of the prophet, ‘I have set thee over nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down, and to waste and to destroy, and to build and to plant’ (Jeremiah 1:10).”[\[9\]](#)

It is a gross mistake to regard these words as metaphorical. The means used to turn them into reality (summarized in this article) show that they must be understood literally. The means included excommunication and deposition of any unsubmitive sovereign. In the Middle Ages, this was a very powerful weapon, for most people believed, or feigned to believe, in the pope’s power of sending people to heaven or hell. Innocent III’s record includes the excommunication of one emperor, seven kings and countless lords. Innocent III actually appeared to many of his contemporaries as the *verus imperator*. He conducted a foreign policy that can only be described as imperial: “It was his ambition ... to bind as many as he could of the kings of Europe to the Papacy by ties of political vassalage.”[\[10\]](#)

Contrary to the empire of the German kings, the imperial project of the Vatican had no chance of ultimate success, because it had no other legitimacy than the gigantic lie of the Donation of Constantine (more below). The first setback was a famous slap inflicted in 1303 on Boniface VIII, who had stated, quite simply: *Ego sum Caesar, ego imperator*. The French king Philip the Fair trialed the pope for sodomy, sorcery and heresy, and shook off the yoke. Bohemia revolted in the following century (the Hussite Revolution). Then German princes responded to Luther’s call (*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, 1520). The papal empire failed, but its lasting achievement is to have stood in the way of the only empire that could succeed, and to have left Europe chronically divided by both national ambitions and religious creeds.

But why talk of “failure”? One can, after all, see in the European order of nation-states a great success. Two questions must therefore be distinguished. The first one is: was the political unity of Europe possible, or even inevitable, without the opposition of the papacy? This question can be answered by

an objective historical study. That is what I am going to do. The second question is subjective: was the imperial unity of Europe desirable? It then depends on the point of view. The nationalist will reply that it is fortunate that Europe was not an empire, for then nations would not have existed—or very little. So Thomas Tout can write: “The conflict of Papacy and Empire ... made possible the growth of the great national states of the thirteenth century, from which the ultimate salvation of Europe was to come.”^[11]

But what salvation are we talking about? That of a Europe set on fire and bloodshed during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), the Italian Wars (1494-1559), then the Thirty Years War (1618-1648)? The latter, by the way, was largely orchestrated by Cardinal Richelieu who financed and armed the Protestants (Lutherans as well as Calvinists) in order to ruin the Empire of the Catholic Habsburgs. It was, he said, “for the good of the Church and Christianity, because the universal monarchy, to which the [Habsburg] King of Spain aspires, is very harmful to Christianity, to the Church and to the pope.”^[12]



In reality, the Thirty Years War was the birth pang of a Europe that no longer had anything Christian about it. “In the space of three decades, writes Arnaud Blin, the European geopolitical universe was completely transformed. The medieval idea of ??a unified Christian Europe gave way to a political chessboard governed by a new mechanism of international relations based on conflicting interests, the balance of power, and the amorality of realpolitik.”^[13] What the Peace of Westphalia (1648) inaugurated, Montesquieu described a century later in *L’Esprit des Loix*:

A new disease has broken out in Europe: it has infected our rulers and caused them to maintain armies which are out of all proportion. It has its recurrences and soon becomes contagious; inevitably, because as soon as one State increased the number of its troops, as they are called, the others at once increase theirs, so that the general ruin is all that comes out of it. Every monarch keeps permanently on foot armies which are as large as would be needed if his people were in imminent danger of extermination; and this struggle of all against all is called peace.^[14]

To pay these armies, more taxes and more debt were constantly needed, until finally, after the Napoleonic wars, Europe was enslaved to the war profiteers, with the [Rothschilds](#) as their champions. Europe, after inventing the nation-state, invented industrial war.

Assuming European nations could ever free themselves from financial parasitism, would they ever be able to live peacefully with one another while each being sovereign? No, and for a simple reason: the world is now composed of empires, and no nation can compete with empires. Without political unity,

Europe will always be kept in the subservience of one empire or another.

To free itself from the clutches of NATO, Europe has, as things stand, no other alternative than to ally itself with the Russian empire—for the Russian Federation is indeed both a civilization and an empire, heir to the Byzantine civilization and empire destroyed by the papacy. Those who say that Europe should fear Russia as much as the United States (as do many affiliated to the French “Nouvelle Droite”) are even more inconsistent and dangerous than nationalists who long for their nation’s sovereignty. The realist sees no alternative between America and Russia, because there is none. The realist does not give up on Europe, but he is betting that the multipolar world order that Russia is promoting will be much more favorable to Europe than American domination.

Finally, the realist accepts that, despite so many odds, Germany still stands as the natural and legitimate leader of Europe. We can debate on why this is so, but we cannot deny it. It is not just about economy. In its highest achievements, European civilization is German (and this is coming from a Frenchman). Nothing will happen unless Germany has the guts to denounce and the will to resist Washington’s racket, and to form a genuine and lasting alliance with Russia.

After these preliminary remarks, I will now tell the story of Europe with the purpose of demonstrating the theory that the medieval papacy was the main cause for the failure of Europe to gain political unity, and therefore the ultimate cause of its complete subjugation by Washington. (Actually, what Washington is now doing to Europe is a lot similar to what the papacy was doing to Europe centuries ago, as [Michael Hudson brilliantly argued](#).)

The papacy will be considered here solely as a political power, which it unquestionably was. There will be no discussion of Christianity as belief system or religious practice. The papacy and the religion of Christ are two separate—some would say opposite—things. In fact, until Gregory VII, “the papacy was almost absent from the lives of Christians outside Rome.”^[15]

Notes

[1] Hillaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith*, 1920.

[2] Joseph Reese Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, Princeton UP, 1973, p. 11.

[3] Ernst Nolte, *Der Europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917-1945. Nationalismus und Bolschewismus*, Herbig, 2000. The title translates as “the European civil war.”

[4] Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?* 1882.

[5] Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge UP, 2012, p. 14.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[7] Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second (1194-1250)*, (1931) Frederick Ungar publishing, 1957 (on [archive.org](#)), p. 385.

[8] De Monarchia of Dante Alighieri, trans. Aurelia Henry, Boston, 1904, Book I, chapter VIII, pp. 26-27, on files.libertyfund.org/files/2196/Dante_1477.pdf.

[9] Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe 1050-1320*, Routledge , 1992, p. 106.

[10] T. F. Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy (918-1273)*, fourth edition, Rivingtons, Londres, 1903, p. 325.

[11] Tout, *The Empire and the Papacy*, op. cit., pp. 6 and 2.

[12] Quoted in Arnaud Blin, 1648, *La Paix de Westphalie, ou la naissance de l'Europe politique moderne*, Éditions Complexe, 2006, pp. 70-71.

[13] Blin, 1648, *La Paix de Westphalie*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

[14] Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, Livre XIII, chap. xvii, quoted in Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power: Its Nature and the History of Its Growth*, Beacon Press, 1962, p. 383, on ia600502.us.archive.org/34/items/onpoweritsnature00injouv/onpoweritsnature00injouv.pdf

[15] Jacques Van Wijendaele, *Propagande et polémique au Moyen Âge : La Querelle des Investitures (1073-1122)*, Bréal, 2008, p. 111.