THE LADY LEFT FOR DRAGON’S MEAT: COMMENTS ON THE PARIS STATEMENT

St. George he was for England,
And right gallantly set free
The lady left for dragon’s meat
And tied up to a tree;
But since he stood for England
And knew what England means,
Unless you give him bacon
You mustn’t give him beans.¹

¹. G. K. Chesterton, “The Englishman.”

². The Paris Statement: A Europe We Can Believe In, https://thetrueeurope.eu/a-europe-we-can-believe-in/. All quotations are from this document, unless otherwise noted.

The Paris Statement: A Europe We Can Believe In² was issued on October 7, 2017 by signatories from ten nations, including Rémi Brague, Roger Scruton, Robert Spaemann, and ten others, many of whom are political philosophers and several of whom are actively engaged in politics or law in one fashion or another. A solid majority are Catholic, though Scruton, for example, might be described as an agnostic or aesthetic Anglican. Italy, curiously, is unrepresented, while France is over-represented. Women are a decided minority. All thirteen men and women represent Europe, however—or what they call “the true Europe,” as opposed to the false Europe that is today in the ascendancy. And the true Europe they think tied to a tree, left for dragon’s
meat to the false. Their fervent hope is to save her.

Who or what is the true Europe? She is the Europe one dares to call home. She is the site, at once physical and cultural, of “shared histories, hopes and loves,” of things familiar and of people known and recognized by one another. She is not monolithic, of course. She is a region of such sites, a neighborhood of homes—a neighborhood not without strife between competing loves and loyalties, but a neighborhood nonetheless, a common project with a common civilizational architecture and a common respect for law and the limits of law. She is a family of nation-states, each with its own language(s), traditions, and borders, but a certain sense of what it means to belong to this family as a nation-state, not merely as a tribe or territory within some grand empire. Moreover, the true Europe, in its civilizational roots, is both Classical and Christian. She has faith in reason and a reasonable faith. She has a definite understanding of human dignity and solidarity, of kinship and the natural family, of civil rights and responsibilities, of sacrifice and self-offering, that she learned from Mother Church, who taught her cultural unity without political empire. If she is no longer consistently Catholic, she knows herself to be deeply indebted to the religion of Christ in which she was raised. And she has a hope tempered by realism, or a realism tempered by hope, grounded in that religion. She is no fatalist. Therefore, she takes responsibility for herself and her future.

She has, however, been tied to a tree, while her home is confiscated and her heritage plundered. “The achievements of popular sovereignty, resistance to empire, cosmopolitanism capable of civic love, the Christian legacy of humane and dignified life, a living engagement with our Classical inheritance—all this is slipping away.” She is in jeopardy, about to be swallowed up by the false Europe. And what is the false Europe? The false Europe is the Europe that “praises itself as the forerunner of a universal community that is neither universal nor a community.” Its proponents “are orphans by choice.” They are “prejudiced against the past” and “bewitched by superstitions of inevitable progress.” They view homes and homelands (including moral, religious, intellec-
tual, and artistic homelands) as barriers rather than sources of progress. The utopia for which they are longing combines forgetfulness of actual parentage with gratitude for bureaucratic patronage. It requires, not sacrifice for home and family and nation, but sacrifice of them. It flies the flag of multiculturalism but has much in common with the authoritarian, interventionist socialism to which Pope Leo XIII objected in *Rerum novarum*, even (I dare say) with the communism that was then around the corner in Russia and Eastern Europe. At the same time, it accommodates the “corporate gigan
ticism” that bends the market away from local interests to the interests of a wealthy oligarchy, Leo’s other major concern in that document. Its economics, like its social policy and its jurisprudence, are globalist. They tend, that is, to an “artificial, soulless solidarity” that reduces at the local level to bread and circuses.

While neither Leo nor this lineage is mentioned in the Paris Statement, there is something Leonine in the analysis. The authors emphasize that the gravest threats to Europe do not come from outside, but from inside. They do not arise from “Russian adventurism” or even from Muslim immigration and Islamist terror. They are not to be found in populist reactions either, though populism has at least the merit of pointing out the real danger, which arises from “a spurious universalism demanding forgetfulness and self-repudiation.” This universalism runs against the grain of human nature and picks apart the fabric of actual human community. Talk of multiculturalism, imported from America, cannot disguise its corrosive character or hide its authoritarian bent. On the one hand, it refuses the very idea of assimilation, ignoring the fact that “immigration without assimilation is colonization.” On the other, it seeks to subject all peoples and cultures to its own universalist vision. The false Europe is imperial in its instincts, which helps to explain its increasing democratic deficit. “Only empires can be multicultural, which is what the European Union will become if we fail to make renewed solidarity and civic unity the criteria by which to assess immigration policies and strategies for assimilation.”

In support of its imperial ambitions it has developed an imperial religion, from which
dissent is increasingly a punishable offense: “The universalist and universalizing pretensions of the false Europe reveal it to be an ersatz religious enterprise, complete with strong creedal commitments—and anathemas.” This is not a Europe in which one can believe, but a Europe in which one must believe. Its ersatz religion is cultivated and propped up by an equally ersatz asceticism of the mind.

The asceticism that once sought to free the mind of the tyranny of dominant opinion has become an often complacent and unreflective animus against everything that is our own. This stance of cultural repudiation functions as a cheap and easy way of being “critical.” Over the last generation, it has been rehearsed in the lecture halls, becoming a doctrine, a dogma. And to join in professing this creed is taken to be the mark of “enlightenment,” and of spiritual election. As a consequence, our universities are now active agents of ongoing cultural destruction.

Increasingly, it is articulated and enforced by a “rights” jurisprudence that relies on an impoverished notion of human dignity and freedom, one that does not know what to do with concepts of the good or of virtue and is incapable of recognizing or producing any moral consensus. In all of this it displays an empty hubris entirely unable to sustain civic trust and social cohesion or even to generate the will to self-defense.

Leo observed that “since the end of society is to make men better, the chief good that society can possess is virtue.” The authors of the Paris Statement do not shy from insisting that “Europe needs to renew a consensus about moral culture so that the populace can be guided toward a virtuous life.” Neither do they hesitate to contrast the solid contributions of Christianity to moral culture with the acids of the Generation of ’68 and its “roiling sea of sexual liberty.” They see very well that there is a connection between sexual libertinism and political bondage. They understand that there can be no home or homeland, and no political freedom, without respect for the natural family, as Chesterton made clear a century ago. Whether they agree together

the truth in Hilaire Belloc’s epigram “the Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith” is another matter; but in some sense they, too, are arguing that “Europe will return to the Faith, or she will perish,” though they are not so bold as to leave “the Faith” its initial capital.

The Paris Statement is a pledge of resistance to the false Europe. It posits the existence of an alternative. It rejects the fatalist shrug of those who pretend that there can be no revival of the true Europe. It calls on the brave to help break the spell of the false Europe and to throw off its tyranny. The ropes that bind the true Europe are merely cords of doubt, which dissolve at the touch of faith. The lady need not be left for dragon’s meat, if only she recovers her faith and begins to believe in Europe again.

Its positive proposals, if I may paraphrase, are these: restore to the institution of marriage its procreative vocation and resume raising children. Take up the burden of memory, and the task of transmitting it to the next generation. Accept the duty to speak the truth, if not with love then at least as “patrons of linguistic decency,” for the truth sets free. Rescue “freedom” from the nominalist ruins in which it has come to mean no more than “the right to be left alone.” Rebuild the authentic liberalism that rests on robust public debate, and does not shy even from “inconvenient truths about Islam.” Recover a proper doctrine of the Two, or (in American terms) separation of Church and State, in which the former’s worth is acknowledged and the latter’s ersatz religion is repudiated. Resist the unbridled capitalism that operates primarily on a global scale and has no regard for local communities. Build homes, not merely houses, and defend homelands. Foster a new kind of statesman willing to help with that defense.

“This work of renewal,” we are told—and the telling is like a slap from Augustine, or even from Calvin, to revive Lady Europe before she drifts into unconsciousness—“begins with theological self-knowledge.” With theological self-knowledge? Yes, for that is how Europe was originally built. My only serious complaint about the Paris State—

5. Ibid., 173.
ment is that I would like to
have seen more of this rather
than less. To appeal to Leo a
third time:

When a society is
perishing, the wholesome
advice to give to those
who would restore
it is to call it to the
principles from which it
sprang; for the purpose
and perfection of an
association is to aim at
and to attain that for
which it is formed, and
its efforts should be put in
motion and inspired by
the end and object which
originally gave it being.
Hence, to fall away from
its primal constitution
implies disease; to go
back to it, recovery.6

The reason why the great
cities and cultural centers
of the West are individually
and collectively our Lepan-
to, where a great battle must
be fought, not with Muslims
but with ourselves, is that
we have lost our theological
self-knowledge and a proper
grasp of our primal constitu-
tion. More must now be said,
openly and publicly, about
that knowledge and that con-
stitution. For the real cure for
fatalism, and for our secret
self-hatred and despair—born,
as it is, of our dissipations and
bloody holocausts—is not faith
in Europe or faith in America
or even faith in our Classical
and Judeo-Christian heritage,
but down-to-earth Jewish and
Christian religion: the bibli-
cal religion that is itself con-
crete, rather than aesthetic or
abstract. It is not mere recol-
lection—Je me souviens, as we
say here in Quebec—that will
save us, nor some Herculean
effort to shoulder once more
the burden of memory and
transmission of memory. It is
rather repentance and recon-
ciliation that will save us. If
either Europe or America is
to be a place in which people
can believe, it must again be a
place in which people do be-
lieve—believe, that is, in the
God of Moses and the Father
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Paris Statement has
settled for a Tolkienesque
praise of home, and that is
already a powerful contribu-
tion. Last year’s Prague Ap-
peal, which also called, in its
way, for renewed faith, seems
very thin and watery by com-
parison; beans without bacon,
so to say. The striking differ-
ence between the two state-
ments is that one comes to
the defense of an abstraction,
liberal democracy, whereas
the other comes to the de-

fense of an actual homeland, Europe. Of theological self-knowledge there is some, but not very much, in the love for liberal democracy. In the love of home, on the other hand, there is a great deal, as Tolkien knew when he created an entire mythos (the beginning of which can be found in the opening pages of the Silmarillion) to support those pregnant words from Sam that bring to a close the Lord of the Rings: “Well, I’m back.” The Paris Statement’s defense of Europe, in its character as home, does not rise to that level, of course. It does not even rise to the level of Chesterton’s poem, perhaps. But then it is not a poem, just (for its genre) remarkably good prose, to which all who feel the authors’ keen sense of confiscation should pay close attention.

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