

OUR NATIONALISM

Nowadays, just about everyone accepts that Catalonia is a nation. Although it has taken time, we have finally succeeded in this. Objectively speaking, Catalonia fulfills all the conditions necessary for it to be considered a nation: a territory, a people who inhabit it, a culture, a language, its own institutions, and — above all else — a will to be. Catalonia has shown this will to be throughout the centuries, regardless of persecutions, incomprehension and obstacles. We are a nation because we always have been. A thousand-year-old nation, that has wanted to live in peace with all others.

But not all other nations have seen things this way, and over the ages, Catalonia has seen its institutions, its culture and its language banned, especially during those periods when Spain has lacked a democratic regime. The term dictatorship is the antithesis of Catalonia; democracy and Catalanism have always gone hand in hand. And the Catalans' struggle — pacific, but a struggle — to preserve their national identity has given rise since the nineteenth century to the birth of the Catalanist movement, which defines itself as 'nationalist' to differentiate it from straightforward regionalism, which accepts elements belonging to the dominant Spanish nationalism. This was an aggressive nationalism, which persecuted the Catalan language, banned Catalonia's institutions and symbols and tried to smother or exterminate our culture. This was why the Catalan nationalist movement was born, basing its doctrines on the book by the Catalan politician Enric Prat de la Riba *La Nacionalitat Catalana*, published in 1906.

It is worthwhile explaining some of the characteristics of this Catalan nationalism. It is essentially one that affirms, that defends the historic and cultural personality of Catalonia, that lacks an aggressive or dominating spirit. It is a movement that remembers that until 1714 Catalonia was a nation with its own state, acting in solidarity with the other peoples of Spain and Europe, never imposing its language or its culture on the other peoples with which it co-existed. One which never renounced the culture, the language or the institutions that were torn from it by force in 1714 and, more recently, in 1939. These things must be explained to show that there is nothing aggressive, anachronistic or domineering about Catalan nationalism. As a basic doctrine, nationalism is indispensable for any country. For the Catalans, nationalism has always been the will to carry out an articulate programme, realistically taking into account the plurality of Catalan society.

Catalan nationalism has introduced a new concept: that of nationalism and freedom. As members of the community, we have tried to show that we are capable of recovering our identity as a nation, without oppressing anyone or smothering other nations; simply living in peace and harmony with all. To show that man cannot achieve true freedom except as part of a human community that has been freely accepted and constructed, that is



the nation, and that is capable of living alongside the others in freedom. It must be shown that nationalism and nation are not supreme or absolute values, but relative ones conditioned by man's freedom. On the other hand, for us, freedom is a supreme value and everything that contributes towards man's freedom is positive. 'Catalonia, without freedom, cannot live', declared a chronicler of the fifteenth century.

And from here stems the great difference between the two types of nationalism: the defensive and the aggressive. A Catalan politician, Ramon Trias Fargas, goes into some of these questions at depth, particularly the question of language, in his book *Nacionalisme i llibertat* (Nationalism and Freedom), published in 1979 and well worth careful reading. The new Europe we are creating and the new structure we will have to give the old Spain deserve it.

And for those readers who want to go deeper into the subject, I recommend a brief article by Jordi Pujol, President of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* and Secretary General of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya*, a party which defines itself as "nationalist".

The article is the prologue to the book *La consciència cristiana i els nacionalismes*, published in Barcelona in 1966, under the Franco regime. In it, Pujol makes a careful study of the various types of nationalism and states, 'The word nationalism covers a concept with many shades of meaning and many possible interpretations and distinctions. One of these distinctions — the first and most important — is this: the nationalism of a dominated people is not the same as the nationalism of a dominating people. The nationalism embodied in the wish to rescue the chance to shape men is not the same as hegemonic nationalism, whether in the political aspect or in the subtleties of the economic aspect. The nationalism that inclines to give meaning to a people's unity, to give it cohesion and the capacity for self-defence — what some English writers call 'coalescent nationalism' — is not the same as 'expansionist nationalism', the act of dominating and exploiting'. Our nationalism is integrative, solidary, based on freedom and co-existence with other peoples. First of all, it demands equal respect, with the same rights and the same duties. To us, the nationalism we have known in Europe for so long is a thing of the past, the nationalism that has led to international wars, that has supported imperialist dreams and the oppression of so many European nations, some of which, however, have also tried to oppress others as soon as they could. Ours is a nationalism based on a thousand years of experience, and with its sights set on the future. A future of harmony and freedom with the other peoples of the world, contributing to the universal heritage with the wealth of the variety of nations and peoples, of languages and cultures. Free men and women in a free nation, respecting others and asking to be respected, wanting to contribute its cultural heritage to Humanity. That is our nationalism.

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