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THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: THE ALLIANCE OF THRONE AND ALTAR REVISITED?³

Abstract

Starting from the assumption that the resurgence of the political influence of religion also affects the European continent, the article explores the interactions between the Roman Catholic Church and the European Union, focussing mainly on their mutual ideational influences. The study is divided into three parts: In the first, it analyses a substantial corpus of EU documents, trying to identify explicit references to Christianity and the religious inspiration of the integration process in them. Following from this, the second section identifies the key loci where the religious language used by the Church can be translated into the secular language used by EU policy-makers. In particular, we focus on the institutions which were set up specifically to foster the dialogue between the Church and the EU or to present the Church's views to EU officials. Finally, after an analysis of the EU's discourse on religion and the Catholic bodies dealing with the EU, we assess the overlap of the fundamental value-orientations of the two institutions. The main question the study addresses here is whether the discursive and institutional interactions between the RCC and the EU are supported by a deeper agreement between the Church's and the Union's fundamental values concerning the preferred political order.

Keywords: European Union, Christianity, Roman Catholic Church, political relations

Introduction

The recent rise of the academic interest in political aspects of religion has also brought increased attention to the nexus between the European Union and

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Christianity. Understandably most of the studies approach these relations from a secular perspective, seeing churches as actors taking part in various types of relations with the EU institutions, which include dialogue or lobbying (Jansen 2000; Arnold 2005; Jenkins 2005; Hehir 2006; De Vlieger, 2011; Houston 2009; De Vlieger and Tanasescu 2012), the role Christianity plays in the legitimization of the EU and/or political attitudes of Christians to European integration (Marks et al. 2000; Nelsen et al. 2001; Coupland 2003; Gallagher 2005; Foret 2009; Boomgaarden and Freire 2009; Chelini-Pont 2009) and specific issues related to the European identity, European Constitution and European law (e.g. Foret and Schlesinger 2005; Byrnes 2006; Nexon 2006; Faltin 2007; Leustean and Madeley 2009; Doe 2009).

As useful as these studies are, we believe that the position of a particular church (in our case, the Roman Catholic Church) vis-a-vis the EU cannot be fully understood if we do not take into account her theological outlook. Hence, an analysis of the ideational overlaps and differences of the two entities is needed, with the overlaps including ideas stemming both from their political outlooks and from the church's theological views. What makes their relations even more complicated is the fact that the EU also adheres to a system of values that are held sacred and seen as a non-negotiable fundament of the integration process. In other words, both churches and the EU have their own "political theologies", their own "belief systems" from which they draw counsel for their political actions. In our study we examine the case of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) from the perspective of her ideational interactions with the EU.

In order to explore these ideational influences, we proceed in three steps. Firstly, by analysing a substantial corpus of EU documents, we try to identify explicit references to the inspiration of the integration process and of the EU's particular policies by the RCC or by the ideas the Church advocates. Secondly, since we expect that such explicit religious references in the official EU discourse are rare, we try to identify the key loci where the religious language used by the Church can be translated into the secular language used by EU policy-makers. In particular, we focus on the institutions which were set up specifically to foster the dialogue between the Church and the EU or to present the Church's views to EU officials. Finally, after the analysis of the EU's discourse on religion and the Catholic bodies dealing with the EU, we assess the overlap in terms of the fundamental value-orientations of the two institutions. The main question we would like to answer here is whether the discursive and institutional interactions between the RCC and the EU are supported by a deeper agreement between the Church's and the Union's fundamental values concerning the preferred political order.

The sources and research methods

To explore the three above described questions, we employed a discourse analysis of more than five hundred documents of both the European Union and

the RCC and interviewed 18 representatives of both the EU and the Church who are involved in various types of interactions between the two institutions.

The analysis of EU institutions and the EU's representatives draws from three sources: (1) all the official documents available at eur-lex.eu (treaties, legislation, preparatory acts, EU case-law and parliamentary questions) where the words "Catholic Church", "God", "theology/theological", "Christianity" and/or "secularism" appear; (2) public statements and speeches of the EU's top leaders that are related to the RCC, theology, and/or Christianity and/or refer to God, and which can be retrieved from europa.eu⁴; (3) semi-structured interviews with various representatives of the EP, the European Commission, and the European Council who deal with religion, including the dialogue with churches, the implementation of article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, intercultural and interreligious dialogues, etc. All the interviews were conducted in June-July 2012. To sum up, the EU corpus of the analysed textual units contains 127 legal documents, 86 interpellations of MEPs (written parliamentary questions available at eur-lex.eu), 176 relevant documents of EU leaders and almost ten hours of interviews with EU representatives and politicians from EU institutions.

The analysis of the RCC's views of the integration process is also based on three types of sources: (1) 159 documents that are available on the official websites of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), the Holy See and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) - we collected all the documents containing the words "European Union" and/or "European integration" out of the group that represents the public pronouncements of Church leaders from 1990-2010 (for an examination of this in more detail, see Kratochvíl, Doležal 2014); (2) the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church and (3) interviews with Church representatives from the COMECE and the CCEE and also other Catholic bodies which work directly in Brussels (Caritas Europa, Jesuits for Europe, and Catholics from the Chapel of Europe).

Catholic Christianity in EU discourse

Let us start the empirical analysis with the broadest question: Can we trace any direct allusions to Christianity, Catholicism or, broadly speaking, divine revelation that would play an important part in the politics and discourse of the EU? We focussed first on the analysis of the central terms, such as "God", "theology", "Christianity", "Christian", "Catholic", "Bible", "Gospel", "divine", and "sacred", in our corpus of EU documents. Quite surprisingly, we found that there is a huge asymmetry between the EU's discourse on its internal matters and the frequent references to Christianity in the outside world. For instance, most of the EU's references to Christianity appear in connection with Turkey, China, Malaysia, Egypt,

4 Only a minority of the documents contain explicit and detailed positions of the bodies or representatives of the European Commission or the European Parliament.

and/or Iraq, and typically the terms are used in the context of blasphemy laws in the legislations of particular countries (EU94, 96, 98, 119, 120) or in association with discrimination and persecution of Christian communities (e.g. EU21, 75, 118) or priests (EU 168, 198). Also the terms “theology” and “theological” appear mostly in connection with Christian schools in third countries that were closed by state authorities (e.g. EU200, 203, 204, 206, 391) or in the names of universities, seminars or academic degrees within the EU territory (e.g. EU239, 382).

Frequently, the notions were used in a “de-sacralized” context. For instance, the notion of God appears in the European context mostly in references to history (e.g. EU276, 282), traditions, arts and Greek mythology (e.g. EU105, 123, 124, 130, 131, 136, 324) and in jargon or idiomatic expressions such as “Thank God” (e.g. EU321, 376, 83) or “act of God” in the sense of a force majeure (EU76, 78, 84, 100, 169, 363, etc.). But we also found several rejections of divine inspiration (EU273, 279, 303), such as President Prodi’s claim that “excellence in knowledge and technology follows investment, not divine intervention” (EU303). Also as far as theology is concerned, we discovered only a handful of theology-related phrases ridiculing the opinions of political opponents (such as “Euro theology” in EU319 or “theology of subsidiarity” in EU302).

“Catholic social teaching”⁵ is not mentioned in the documents at all, and the Catholic heritage in a spiritual sense appears only once in them, in connection with bioethics. The word “Gospel” is mentioned only three times in all the analysed documents: two of the mentions are connected to activities of priests (EU243, 43), and the third is Prodi’s remark about political ideology in a non-religious context (EU288). To sum up, when God or divinity is mentioned as directly determining the law, politics or political order, it is exclusively in a historical or non-EU context.⁶

All of the few explicit links to theology or revelation that are visible in the hundreds of EU documents in our sample deal with bioethics – here allusions are made to “living organisms created by God” (EU135) or “the loyalty between man, nature and the Creator” (EU240). However, these references are rare and they never appear in official documents. This is further corroborated by the MEPs among our respondents, who stated that they do not use much religious rhetoric in the political debates within the European Parliament, even though the EP is probably the most open space for expressing personal statements among EU institutions.

Regarding the term “Catholic”, the number of its appearances is relatively high (162), but approximately one half of all the mentions are related to events

5 See Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church or e.g. Fahed (2009) for more details on principles of the Catholic social teaching

6 E.g. the “divine right of kings” in association with the evolution of the sovereignty concept in several lectures by C. Patten (EU280, 281, 289, 297) or the speech of M. Wallström (EU318), and the cases of the death penalty for “waging war against God” in Iran (see EU95, 119, 120). Another example of historical reflection in this sense is the remark about discrimination on grounds of religion, which “seemed perfectly natural - indeed, ordained by God - during large portions of the history of Europe and the Mediterranean basin” (EU133).

outside the EU. Out of the remaining 84, around one third are neutral descriptions of the role of the RCC as the owner of some properties and as an important agent in the intercultural and interfaith dialogues. It is just in this latter area where the Church is perceived in an unambiguously positive light (8 references). Critical assessments of the Church are twice as common (15 appearances). All of them appear in the Parliamentary questions in association with either tax exemptions, the special funding from the state budget in several Catholic member countries or the Church's castigation for "spreading of false scientific claims regarding the effectiveness of condoms" (EU49). Similarly, explicit identifications with Catholicism can be found only in proclamations of individual politicians or particular member countries. The Church is only rarely referred to when religious, spiritual, ethical or generally social issues are discussed (for more detail see Table 1).

Tab 1: How "Catholic" is used in the EU documents: contexts and discursive approaches in which the term appears

(here without the 84 appearances of the term in non-EU contexts; the total number of appearances of the term "Catholic" in the sample documents is 164).

<i>The discursive approach of the author of the document to the RCC</i>	personal data: CV, education, membership	culture, history	technical (ownership, taxation, etc.)	discrimin., religious and human rights, violence	Church as social actor	intercultural or interfaith dialogue	political role of the Church	religious, spiritual or ethical issues
Identification with the Church							XX	XXX
Defence or praise of the Church				XXXX	XXXX	XXXXXX	XXXX	X
Neutral references	XXXXXXX	XXXX	XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX		X	XXX		
Criticism of the Church			XXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX	XX	XX			

To sum up our analysis, there are but a few direct links to Catholicism, Christianity or religion playing an important role in EU documents. The Church is discussed relatively frequently, but mostly in connection with technical issues or with a critique of the RCC's particular policies. The political role of the Church or its ideational influence is almost never acknowledged.

The EU-RCC dialogue: where religious language is “translated”

The near total absence of religious terms in the EU’s discourse and the predominant focus of questions related to religion on the territories outside the Union’s borders do not necessarily mean that religiously inspired arguments are entirely absent from EU politics. In fact, many political thinkers argue that one of the key features of liberal democracy is the possibility of various private and religious languages being translated into the public, i.e. secular, language. For instance, Jürgen Habermas argues that “the truth content of religious contributions can only enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making if the necessary translation already occurs... in the political public sphere itself.” (Habermas 2006: 10) So, does the translation from the religious into the secular language take place in the EU?⁷

There are multiple sites and multiple ways through which this translation takes place. Indeed, some EU leaders, especially those with a strong Christian background, such as Delors, Prodi, Barroso and van Rompuy, supported a more intense dialogue with the churches and called for more open communication between the Churches and the EU. For instance, President Barroso declared at one of the annual meetings with the representatives of religious communities that “religions... have a specific responsibility in building up just, fair and humane societies. That is why I have invited you here today. To reflect with the highest representatives of Europe’s institutions on how we can make sure that Europe is built on human dignity. To debate the role that churches and religious communities can play in such a Europe. To share ideas on how to promote human dignity, and the values that spring from it, beyond Europe’s borders” (EU222).

One of the most important official platforms is the Dialogue between European institutions on one side and churches, religious associations and/or communities as well as philosophical and non-confessional organisations on the other. Being attached to the European Commission, it dates back to J. Delors’ activities but it has been taken up by the Lisbon Treaty (Article 17 TEU), and thus it was lifted “from good practice to a legal obligation, enshrined in primary law”⁸. It contains the obligation to “maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations”, which takes the form of annual meetings of the highest representatives of the EU (e.g. the Presidents or Vice-Presidents of the EP, EC and EU) with religious leaders. The representatives of churches are invited on a personal basis, and the list of guests usually differs

7 The EU political space is not the only sphere where the RCC adapts its language to the particular audience: The theological terminology has been used when the speech aims at Catholic believers directly while rather secular (e.g. anthropological or legal) argumentation has been employed when the RCC addresses a broader public (cf. e.g. Voyé 2003). We are grateful to one of the anonymous referees for the comments on this matter.

8 The official website of the Dialogue with churches, religious associations and communities and philosophical and non-confessional organisations, Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), European Commission at http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/activities/outreach-team/dialogue/index_en.htm.

from year to year and from topic to topic (I-EU05). Additionally, the EPP Group in the EP keeps its own contact with churches and even has a special platform for intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which, e.g., organises seminars in cooperation with the COMECE, the CEEC and other religious bodies (see Activity Report 2010)⁹.

Not surprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church was definitely seen as having the best organised religious network of experts and activities by our respondents (e.g. I-EU05, I-EU06, I-EU09), whereby the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Communities (COMECE) represents the most active religious body in Brussels, as it cooperates on different levels with other Catholic or religious bodies as well as with the EU and individual officials within EU institutions. As is evident from the interviews, the instances of the COMECE providing expertise for particular EU institutions are very important sites of translation of the theological teachings to the secular language (e.g. I-EU11, I-RCC01). What is unique about the COMECE is its ability and capacity to watch a broad range of the EU agenda and even to initiate the work of Catholic theologians on topical issues (ranging from social policy to global warming). The majority of the persons working directly in the COMECE office in Brussels are lawyers by profession, and not theologians, which reflects the necessity to analyse the EU legislation, including the upcoming agenda (I-RCC01). Apart from the COMECE, other Catholic bodies such as Caritas Europa and the Jesuits of Europe are also very active, as they write parliamentary questions for the EP, prepare position papers and are part of the consultation mechanism for the European Commission.

The translation of the religious language into the secular still keeps the distinction between the two spheres largely intact. However, there is also the possibility that autonomously defined secular values are not seen as mere translations, derivations from the religious sphere, but that they attain a quasi-religious status themselves, as they become "non-negotiable" values which have to be accepted by everyone who enters the public arena¹⁰. Consequently, a rejection of the fundamental values of the EU (such as human rights) means an automatic disqualification from public deliberations. In other words, the EU's essential values and principles may be seen as playing a certain quasi-religious role (in reference to their fundamental and sacrosanct position within a specific "belief system") or even a role of a "civil religion"¹¹ (in Bellah's sense of "ethical principles that transcend" a nation or a people (1991:168).

There is no doubt that there indeed are such values, which are broadly

9 "One of the oldest characteristics of the EPP Group's social policy is keeping regular contact with churches and religious institutions. The aim of this is to get to know the ecclesiastical point of view about certain policies, especially in relation to European integration and to spread information about the EPP Group's policy initiatives." (Activity Report 2010 of the EPP Group Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue)

10 Cf. Gill's reflection on public values in liberal democratic polities (2013)

11 We thank one of the anonymous referees for helping us to take a more nuanced position regarding the difference between implicit religion and civil religion.

referred to as “European values”. These values are almost ritually worshipped as undeniable in the EU documents on a regular basis, and they are often called “universal” or “non-negotiable” (e.g. EU239, 332). While directly religious references, for instance to the Spirit or the “spiritual” dimension of the EU, appear from time to time, mainly in the discourse of Presidents Delors, Prodi and Barroso, such allusions are definitely not a common element in the EU’s discourse. The values, on the other hand, are virtually ubiquitous (“The Union is founded on the values” are the first words of article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty). The discourse on values thus represents the broadest quasi-religious point of reference for the EU in terms of spirituality.

EU values are often seen as the ethical guidance without which politics would not work properly. Romano Prodi talked about “the ideas behind Europe, its insistence on principles and values as the basis for political action - our belief in and practice of human rights...” (EU301). These values are sometimes treated as a secularised revelation and adored in a quasi-religious way: they “act as both an anchor in a storm, and a lighthouse, to guide our way” and “provide the bedrock for consensus in the European Union” (EU222), or as “universal values” they constitute a key “to the process of integration between the Member States of the European Union and between their citizens” (EU239), “bind together our continent” (EU332) and “underline the essence of the Europe we want and treasure” (EU345).

This presents, however, a paradox for the Church’s attempts to translate its views into the secular language of the EU. Ironically enough, these attempts of the Church in fact often contribute to strengthening the EU’s own system of beliefs since the translations often use the vocabulary of European values which constitute the central element in the EU’s civil religion. In other words, while the EU may enjoy the occasional spiritual legitimisation lent to it by religious communities, including the RCC, it relies mainly on its own specific set of beliefs. This is further corroborated by our finding that while religious references are rare in EU discourse, the allusions to the EU’s own values are nigh omnipresent. These EU beliefs and values may be, and often are, compatible with the basic convictions of the RCC, but at other times these beliefs may compete with the traditional Catholic views. In particular, in discussions of controversial moral issues, such as the status of same-sex unions, contraception, abortion and euthanasia, the differences between the EU’s own political theology and that of the RCC become visible again.

Catholic legitimisation of the integration process

The final question of our study derives from the previous section, and it revolves around the mutual support and legitimisation of the RCC and the EU. Given that both the cooperation and the disagreements between the Church and the EU are plentiful, does the RCC on the whole rather support or criticise

the integration process? We will answer the question in two steps. First, we will focus on the views of European Catholics, and second we will look specifically into the overlap of the Catholic and EU values.

The Church and its leaders have made a number of pronouncements that deal with the integration process in Europe. Extensive research that demonstrates that the Pope and the rest of the Church hierarchy are very supportive of the general idea of European integration has already been conducted (cf. Chelini-Pont 2009). For instance, Pope John Paul II described the integration project as “a sure path to peace and harmony among peoples, seeing it as a faster way to achieve the ‘European common good’” (RCC27, cf. also RCC40). Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI also talked about “the path of European integration, the successful construction of a great European house under whose roof the people of the Continent can forge their future in peace, mutual respect and exchanges.” (RCC3) While the approaches of the individual pontiffs differed, with some stressing more the supranational dimension of the integration process and with others focussing more on the interstate cooperation, all the popes of the last six decades have endorsed the idea of deeper integration in Europe.

Equally importantly, in the area of European integration, the hierarchy’s views are largely shared by lay Catholics in EU member states. In general, more active Christians show a higher level of support for the integration process – those EU citizens who attend religious ceremonies tend to have more confidence in the EU than those who never attend (see Table 2). In addition, among Christians, Catholics have historically tended to be more pro-European than Protestants. This is evident both from the statistical data (see Table 3) and from the clear connection between the post-war New Christendom movement and the vision of overcoming the old enmities in order to reach a European spiritual, economic and political unity (cf. Nelsen et al. 2001: 193).¹² Additionally, the strong support for European regional integration applies not only to the individual Catholics, but also to the main Catholic political parties: for a number of reasons the Catholic Christian Democrats have demonstrated the strongest pro-integration attitudes in the long term (cf. Marks and Wilson 2000).

12 According to more recent data from the World Values Survey database, though, the confidence of the Catholics in the European Union is not substantially higher in comparison to other believers: half of the Catholic respondents expressed their confidence in the EU at the times of all the survey periods - 1990, 1999, and 2005-2007, when the question was asked. On average, Catholic citizens taken together reported slightly above-average confidence in the EU but this was not true for every individual country during all the years (e.g. German or Belgian Catholics in 1990 or Austrian Catholics in 1999 were not so confident in the EU).

Tab 2: Religious service attendance and the confidence in the EU

How often do you attend religious services?	How much confidence do you have in the EU?				
	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all	Total
More than once a week	9.4 %	41.5 %	36.2 %	12.9 %	469 (100%)
Once a week	7.6 %	44.2 %	36.4 %	11.7 %	1900 (100%)
Once a month	8.4 %	42.2 %	37.1 %	12.3 %	1540 (100%)
Only on special holy days / Christmas / Easter	7.6 %	43.0 %	37.0 %	12.5 %	3046 (100%)
Once a year	4.6 %	36.0 %	46.3 %	13.1 %	1041 (100%)
Less often	6.3 %	39.1 %	41.8 %	12.8 %	1491 (100%)
Never, practically never	3.9 %	33.1 %	43.2 %	19.8 %	4473 (100%)
Total	6.2 %	38.9 %	40.1 %	14.8 %	13958 (100%)

Source: Data extracted from the World Values Survey Databank¹³.

The interpretations of the Catholic support of the integration process vary but on the ideational level, there are two major factors contributing to the positive assessment of the EU by the Church. First, both the EU and the Church share a strongly supranational and, indeed, universalist outlook, stressing the dangers of excessive nationalism (cf. Marks and Wilson 2000: 438). Second, both the Church and the most influential EU institutions (such as the European Commission) share a traditional distrust towards nation states, albeit for different reasons. While the RCC is historically wary of nation states because their establishment was often connected with a dramatic reduction in the power of the Church (such as in the German Kulturkampf), for the European Commission and the European Parliament the main motives lie in the inter-institutional competition with the intergovernmental Council of the EU and the European Council (see Nelsen et al. 2001: 193, Boomgarden and Freire 2009).

Tab 3: EU Catholics and their confidence in the European Union

		A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all	Total
1990	Roman Catholic	12.2 %	48.8 %	29.8 %	9.2 %	8779 (100%)
	All the denominations together	11.3 %	45.8 %	32.7 %	10.2 %	12855 (100%)
1999	Roman Catholic	8.9 %	45.3 %	34.5 %	11.3 %	8761 (100%)
	All the denominations together	6.7 %	38.0 %	39.0 %	16.3 %	14475 (100%)

13 The selected countries/samples: Bulgaria [2006], Cyprus [2006], Finland [2005], France [2006], Germany [2006], Great Britain [2006], Italy [2005], Netherlands [2006], Poland [2005], Romania [2005], Slovenia [2005], Spain [2007], Sweden [2006].

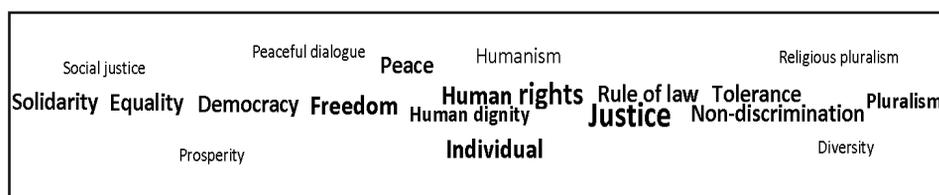
2005	Roman Catholic	6.3 %	46.7 %	37.1 %	9.9 %	3483 (100%)
	All the denominations together	6.1 %	39.6 %	41.3 %	13.0 %	7204 (100%)

Source: Elaborated data extracted from the World Values Surveys Databank¹⁴.

If we explore the overlap in values, the picture is more ambivalent than in the case of the views of lay Catholics and the hierarchs of the Church. Starting with the EU’s values, the Preamble to the Treaty of Lisbon, for instance, lists the values of the EU as follow: “Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”. (The Treaty of Lisbon) These values can be found in many documents in virtually the same wording; sometimes diversity and peace are also added as “essential European values” (EU326, 361), and sometimes humanism (EU332) and prosperity (EU345) as well as social justice (EU359) are also mentioned. Interestingly, the EU almost never relativizes any of the central values by claiming that the particular value is derived from and therefore inferior to a higher principle or value. Figure 1 shows the basic relations among the EU’s fundamental values as they are mentioned in the analysed texts. The different sizes of letters indicate the relevance/frequency of the individual concepts.

Fig. 1: The non-hierarchical structure of the values stated as core or essential in the EU

mentioned in the Preamble of the Treaty of Lisbon along the horizontal axis).documents (with the concepts

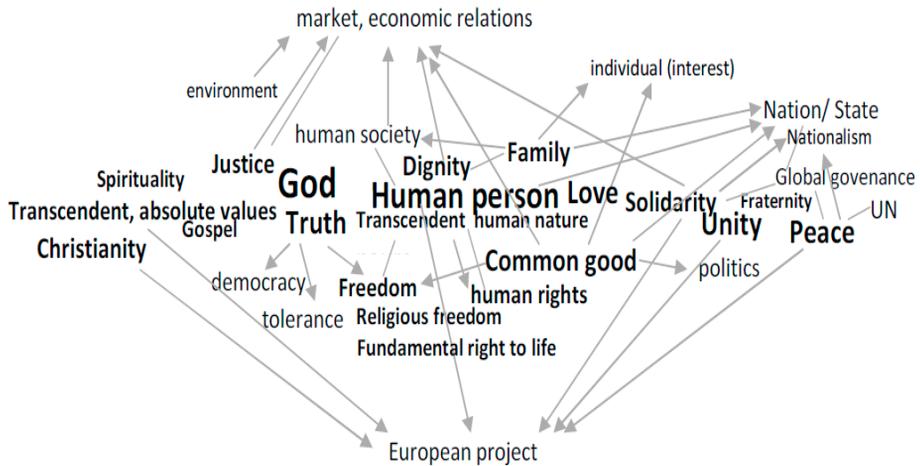


The analysis of the RCC’s “core values” and central principles yields substantially different results. While many principles have been mentioned as important in RCC representatives’ rhetorics and the Church’s social teaching,

14 The selected countries/samples: Austria [1990, 1999], Belgium [1990, 1999], Denmark [1990, 1999], Finland [1990, 2000, 2005], France [1990, 1999, 2006], West Germany [1990, 1999], Germany [2006], Italy [1990, 1999, 2005], the Netherlands [1990, 1999], Northern Ireland [1990, 1999], East Germany [1999], Greece [1999], Ireland [1999], Portugal [1999], Cyprus [2006], Great Britain [2006, 1999, 1990], Poland [2005], Spain [1990-ASEP, 1990-Data, 1999, 2000, 2007], Sweden [1990, 1999, 2006].

still there are only a few concepts which are treated as essential by the Church. The following figure portrays the results of the content analysis we conducted with the help of Atlas.ti analytical software, showing the interconceptual cross-references and relations of derivation traced in the analysed texts. Along the horizontal axis, it highlights the concepts explicitly marked as central by the RCC; the different sizes of letters indicate the relevance/frequency of the individual concepts. The relations of subordination or derivation are shown by means of arrows, and symmetric mutual relations are symbolised by straight lines.

Fig 2: Hierarchical interconceptual relations in the RCC discourse



In the RCC's discourse in the analysed documents, the most frequent and most stressed concept is "human person", a concept which is present in the Church's analysis of all spheres of life, including politics and economy.¹⁵ All other political concepts are then derived from the well-being of the human person and the common good of the society. For instance, the nation-state as the central notion of politics is seen as a mere tool serving the common good of human beings. Another central concept with clear consequences for politics is solidarity – the regional integration in Europe is thus seen as "an important step towards the globalisation of solidarity" (RCC409). The values propounded by the Holy See in international relations and vis-a-vis the EU are then derived from these basic principles and are defined as a) peace, b) freedom, and c) the

15 The centrality of *human person* is stressed in many documents (e.g. RCC2, 16, 40, 62, 120, 276, 321, etc.) as well as in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church - its third chapter is titled "The Human Person and Human Rights". Interestingly, the notion of human person is preferred to the notion of citizen, perhaps because the term "citizen" is too closely related to liberal political philosophy.

fundamental human rights (RCC16).

As we have shown above, the Church broadly supports the integration process, but it still opposes the purely secular grounding of those values that it considers transcendental, believing that a secularisation of these values would necessarily lead to “ethical relativism” (RCC2). But nonetheless, as long as the EU’s values are compatible with the interpretation of the Church, the RCC does support the EU’s view. In other words, the RCC often supports the EU, but its backing is rather conditional. For instance, when talking about the dignity and freedom of the human person, the RCC claims that “the Union must not forget that Europe is the cradle of the notions of the person and of freedom, and that these notions emerged because the seed of Christianity was planted deep in Europe’s soil” (RCC24), while also arguing that “human rights cannot become pretensions against human nature itself” (Ibid.). To summarise this argument, even though both the EU and the RCC underline the human rights of every person, the order of values is different – for the EU, human rights are the absolute pinnacle of the value hierarchy, whereas for the Church, even such concepts as democracy, tolerance or freedom are mere derivatives of the human dignity based in the human being’s creation in the image of God.

To summarise our discussion here, if we compare the value systems of the EU and the RCC, then the surprising conclusion is that the EU’s values, even though originating in rather arduous and heated political controversies, are today considered unimpugnable or even “sacred” by the Union. The RCC’s values, on the other hand, are derived from the absolute authority of revelation, which makes the EU-related concepts important, but certainly criticisable. Examples of the Church’s critique of these values include the censure of the “dangerous democratic neutrality” (RCC62) or of “modern human rights” (RCC2). However, the two entities hold a similar view of other elements of politics: they both criticise excessive nationalism in Europe as well as overly economic interpretations of the integration process¹⁶. Both the Church and the EU are also critical of the growing xenophobia and the dwindling rights of migrants in European countries, including Muslims and other religious minorities. In other words, the relationship between the RCC and the EU is by no means simple; the two pragmatically support each other but they are at times aware of the different order of values of the other and the different practical political consequences thereof.

Conclusions

The Roman Catholic Church constitutes a vast transnational network with a high potential for keeping alive the values grounded in the Church’s teachings.

¹⁶ E.g. Patten (EU268), Barroso (EU311), Mandelson (EU331) or J. Delors in his Speech to European Church Leaders in February 1993.

The RCC tries to spread its values both directly - via its hierarchy and the believers - and indirectly, through various cooperation and consultation bodies of the Church. Both of these mechanisms are at work in the relations between the RCC and the EU. However, the Church's ability to influence does not necessarily translate into similar or even identical outlooks on the part of the Church and the political entities with which it cooperates. Hence, the fundamental question of this study was whether we can talk about an ongoing deep mutual support between the Roman Catholic Church and the political order of the EU.

Surprisingly, our research shows that there is a large overlap between the RCC's rhetoric and the values promoted by the EU. The language used by the highest representatives of the Union is secular, but the tradition of Christian/Catholic presidents makes the debates about "the spiritual dimension of Europe" and Europe's soul (EU194) and their relation to Christianity an important topic in the EU's public sphere. Even though the EU's values are grounded in its own secular order, their legitimacy partially draws from the overlap and similarity between them and Catholic values. This also explains both the support for the integration among the Catholic citizens of the EU and the repeated positive evaluation of the EU by the hierarchy of the Church.

It is certainly possible to discover mutual support and legitimisation in the discourses of the two entities. The question, however, is how important the societal impact of this support is today. In particular, the perception of the Church may be very different from the times of the origin of European integration as well as from the time shortly after the end of the Cold War when the "return to Europe" of the formerly Communist countries meant a partial renaissance of the Christian churches in these countries. The moral credit of the Church related to its contribution to the fall of Communism is clearly overshadowed today by more up-to-date problems which the Church seems to be very slow to solve.

Even if we acknowledge the relatively weak direct influence of the RCC on the integration process, it is still clear that the legitimacy of the European Union and the currently dwindling loyalty of its citizens are not based solely on rational deliberation and pragmatic gain-seeking, but also on a system of beliefs which are to a large extent inspired and strengthened by Christian principles. Paradoxically, after these values and principles were transformed into secular values and principles, they attained a quasi-religious status in the EU, thus constituting the non-negotiable fundament on which the integration process stands. Hence, even though these values partially overlap with Catholic values, they form today an autonomous set of beliefs that can be considered implicitly religious and relatively independent from its (not only) Christian sources.

When discussing the EU's legitimacy, it is necessary to distinguish between the basic values, such as respect for human rights, which are protected in EU member states irrespective of the current state of the integration

process, and other values such as (European) unity, solidarity, and peace. The basic values in fact do not – under normal conditions – legitimise the Union since they are enshrined in national legislations as well. In contrast, the other values have a strong international and supranational dimension, and their legitimising power is much more important for the EU. The question is whether these values can survive even at times when instrumental calculation will argue against them and thus indirectly against the European integration process as well. Here, the legitimisation support by the RCC may be of utmost importance for the EU since its very foundations can be challenged and possibly destroyed if these values are dismantled.

While the RCC commends the presence of such values in the EU, it also connects the future functioning of the EU with a renewed stress on explicitly Christian values and on their more pronounced presence in the emerging European public space. Yet here we come to the key difference again, the different assessment of secular and transcendental values. In spite of the current problems, the Union increasingly derives its legitimisation from the emotional and normative power of secular(ised) values. The RCC, however, challenges this development, claiming that a clear connection to transcendental authority is needed for the integration project to survive. The fundamental question thus remains whether the EU can overcome the current and future crises with its secularised “belief system” or whether a return of religion to the EU’s public space is a necessary remedy for its future functioning.

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I-RCC01, an ex-President of the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (CCEE)

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ЕВРОПСКА УНИЈА И РИМОКАТОЛИЧКА ЦРКВА: ПРЕИСПИТИВАЊЕ САВЕЗА ТРОНА И ОЛТАРА?

Резиме

Са почетном претпоставком да је оживљавање политичког утицаја религије утицало и на европски континент, овај чланак се бави интеракцијом између Римокатоличке цркве и Европске уније са фокусом на њихов међусобни идеациони утицај. Овај студија је подељена у три дела: у првом делу се анализира значајан корпус докумената ЕУ са циљем да се идентификује посебне референце према хришћанству и верским инспирацијама за уједињењем. У наставку, други део идентификује главна места из којих се верски језик од стране Цркве може превести секуларним језиком којим се користи ЕУ политика. Нарочито се фокусирамо на институције које су успостављене са циљем да подстичу дијалог између Цркве и ЕУ, или које представљају црквене погледе званичницима ЕУ. И на крају, након анализе дискурса ЕУ о религији као и црквеним телима које се баве ЕУ, процењујемо преклапање фундаменталних вредносних оријентација ове две институције. Главно питање које овај чланак поставља јесте да ли је дискурсивна и институционална интеракција између Цркве и ЕУ заснована на дубљем споразуму између њихових фундаменталних вредности који се тичу жељеног политичког поретка.

Кључне речи: Европска унија, хришћанство, Римокатоличка црква, политички односи

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