

The Roman Catholic Church and European Integration: A study on the limits of Schmitt's political theology

Paper presented at the SGIR Conference in Stockholm, Sweden

9-11/9/2010

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“The alliance of throne and altar will not be followed by an alliance of office and altar, also not of factory and altar.”

Carl Schmitt (Schmitt 1922, in Hollerich 2004: 112-3)

Introduction

Recently, studies have started to appear on the relation between the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) (and more broadly Christianity) and the European Union (EU) (Nelsen et al. 2001, Coupland 2003, Arnold 2005, Gallagher 2005, Jenkins 2005, Knippenberg 2006, Crnic 2007, Faltin 2007). As promising as these studies are, almost all of them are descriptive in nature. This basic approach is quite understandable since the relations between the two entities had been unduly neglected in the past. Hence, data-gathering seemed to be the most important task of all. However, this preliminary phase of scholarly research on EU-RCC relations is over. What is now needed, is a more theoretically minded analysis of the mutual relations. It is no more sufficient to point to the inspiration of European integration by the Church, nor does it suffice to show the link between the religious adherence of the founding fathers of the Communities (cf. Venneri/Ferrara 2009). A more comprehensive analysis of the relations, including the mutual influences of the two institutions, which would put them into the broader theoretical debates about the relations of religious and secular institutions is called for.

Equally importantly, the prevailing approach to the study of EU-RCC relations is based on a purely institutionalist perspective (a typical example of such treatment of the Church is Steven 2009; see also Houston 2009). The religious (or even theological) element of the relations is simply often ignored (for an exception see Tanner 2005 and Morrow 2007). Instead, the studies discuss the views of the Pope or other relevant Church representatives about the EU in the same manner as if these were representatives of a nation state or a secular transnational movement. The research focussing on the EU side of the equation is even more “positivist”, often discussing the EU’s normative and legislative frameworks concerning religious organisations (cf. Massignon 2007; in part. chapter IV) and specific policies (Herbert/Fras 2009, Hornsby-Smith 1999, Jacobs 2005) or discussing the influence of the Church through EU’s Catholic politicians (in the European Parliament, the European Commission and elsewhere, Vorbeck 2005).

A third problem lies in the overall focus of both the academia and the mass-media on the moments of confrontation between the RCC and the EU. Recently, much attention has been dedicated to issues like the reference to God and Christianity in the Constitutional Treaty, the rejection of the nomination of the conservative Catholic Buttiglione for the post of a commissioner and the controversy of the “cross in the classroom” (Barbulescu/Andreescu 2009, Kerry 2007, Schlesinger/Foret 2006). Although these issues are undoubtedly legitimate objects of academic research, the excessive focus on differences leads to a rather static and purely reactionary picture of the Church which does not reflect the complexity of the institutions and the theological and political plurality it covers. The real question is, hence, whether these minor controversies are the tip of the iceberg of much more fundamental differences between the Church and the EU, differences based on the widely different value systems of the two. Or, are the Church and the Union rather two largely compatible entities that support each other most of the time?

This article will explore these issues from the perspective of Carl Schmitt's political theology which has experienced a return to the academic limelight in recent years. We will proceed in four steps: After introducing the basic elements of Schmitt's works concerning political theology, which are related to our analysis, we will present our methodology which consists of the software-based analysis of a high number of Church documents on the EU. Then we will proceed to four chosen core areas where the Church's interpretation of the EU's key concepts (secularism, individual(ism), free market, and state) will be discussed. The conclusion will focus on the relation between the RCC's theological imagination and the EU's political form as well as on the limits of the application of Schmitt's political theology to current politics.

Schmitt's political theology

Schmitt's political theology posits two fundamental arguments regarding the relation between theology and politics, or – more precisely – between theological concepts and the concepts of modern political thought. The first argument is based on Schmitt's claim that the modern era, and in particular the juridical theory of state owe all of their main legal notions to their theological antecedents. As Schmitt (1922: 37, in Weber 1992: 11) famously put it, "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts". According to Schmitt, the rootedness of political terms in theology should not be understood as the manifestation of merely historical succession which led to a translation of theological concepts into secular ones (such as the frequently mentioned pair of omnipotent God – absolute monarch), but it also includes a deep similarity in their „systematic structure“ (ibid.) Since it is always the original theological notion that infuses the new, secular concept with its meaning, Schmitt clearly prioritises the theological over the political here. We can call this basic claim Schmitt's "political theology in the narrow sense".¹

However, the second line of argumentation, which is intertwined with the first in Schmitt's works, is altogether different. While the first approaches the issue from the historical perspective and it looks for the loci where the translation from the theological language into the legal and political took place, the second approach is much broader in focus. As interesting and innovative as the dependence of modern politics on late medieval theology might be, the most controversial claim defends the synchronous identity of the prevailing political form of a particular era with the dominant theological/metaphysical interpretation of the time. In Schmitt's own words, "the metaphysical image which a certain age makes of the world has the same structure as what it immediately sees as the form of its political organisation" (Schmitt 1922: 42).

Here, Schmitt's claim is not limited to just the early modern era of the nascent statehood. Instead, he believes that this kind of "sociology of juristic notions" (ibid.) can discover the connection between the metaphysical and the political as an ubiquitous feature of human society. Consistently with this position, Schmitt (1970: 124) argues that even the most secular political form has some theological underpinning, no matter how emphatically the regime and the age deny it: "The careful study of (the) transformation from the old political theology into one that pretends to a totally new, pure secularity and man-centered humanity remains in fact a permanent duty of scholarly search for knowledge" (Schmitt 1992, in: Hollerich 2004: 114).

When exploring this metaphysical-political identity chronologically, Schmitt describes two basic forms thereof. The first consists of a set of notions related to the rise of the modern state, i.e. the era of absolute monarchies, in which the essential attributes of God Almighty were transferred to the

¹ It is no accident that this argument is explored in Chapter III of Schmitt's Political Theology, which is again entitled Political Theology (Schmitt 1922).

king, who then represented the sole and ultimate power in the state, factually embodying the state and deciding about its legal order. Here, God's transcendence as well as God's ability to manifest him(her)self in the world (in the form of miraculous interference of his/her divine will into the mundane order) is not doubted. But the rise of the absolute state means that the same properties are also inscribed in the rulers of these states. They too – like God – hold the ultimate power over their subjects and they too can miraculously and at time violently disrupt the normative order by introducing the state of exception.

However, Schmitt argues that the key distinction between the state and the society starts to disappear in the course of the 19th and early 20th century when the powers of the monarch are gradually transferred to the "people". Hence, in the burgeoning liberal democratic regimes it is the people alone who are endowed with both infallibility and with the right to decide on the exception (cf. Rousseau's *volonté générale*). This, according to Schmitt (1950), signifies the end of the era of modern statehood and the collapse of the ultimate achievement of European political thinking – the *jus publicum Europaeum*. Although the notions of the modern theory of state are still preserved as "classical" even in modern times, their contents are transformed and finally emptied of any political meaning. The accompanying theological shift moves God from a position of transcendence to immanence, revelation is reduced to a general rationalist religion, and theological studies take a radical historicising turn after which God's "inscendence" in the form of miracles and other disruptions of reality are seen as no more possible.²

To sum up, Schmittian political theology advocates two relatively autonomous claims: The first sees a chronological link between theological concepts of the Middle Ages and the political concepts of the modern era; the second defends a synchronous link between the prevailing theological concepts of a time with their political reflections. Interestingly, it has been only the first that has received exceptionally focussed academic attention, perhaps because of the pertinent critique of liberalism that is hidden in this claim: the sharp rejection of the liberal distinction between the secular and the religious and the public and the private.

What we would like to explore here, is the second claim which has been so far sidelined in the academic study of political theology. More specifically, our key question is whether it is possible to discover in the current theological discourse of the Roman Catholic Church new elements that would correspond with the present day progressive political form in Europe. We are interested mainly in the Church's attitudes towards the European Union. Obviously, when Schmitt complained about the gradual erosion of the modern state, the political system's liberalisation and democratisation, which in his eyes also meant the loss of the unique system of security inside the state and that of regulated warfare outside it, he did not mention the then non-existent European Union. Yet given his account of the ills of the late modern era, the European Union qualifies as the ultimate embodiment of the liberal rejection of the political as Schmitt understands it (Schmitt 1927). In other words, the European Union is the ideal testing ground for Schmitt's claim that even this kind of the political rejection of the political is accompanied by a specific kind of theological thought (Schmitt 1922).

Before we start with our empirical task, several caveats are in place here. First, the interpretation of the link between the theological field and the political is closely connected with the discussion about Schmitt's prioritisation of the theological over the political or vice versa. There are many who believe that Schmitt succumbed to the lure of the political, hence making the theological increasingly irrelevant, especially regarding Catholic moral claims regarding the goal and purpose of politics which often seem at odds with Schmitt's views (for the discussion of this point see Hollerich 2004).

² For a critique of this oversimplified view see below.

Our take on this question is somewhat different. We are convinced that what we see in Schmitt's writings is the image of a gradual secularisation of theological terms, which has more far-reaching consequences than perhaps even Schmitt himself originally believed. Starting with the late Middle Ages when theological notions indeed had the power to transform the secular understanding of appropriate political forms, the relevance of theology diminished with the arrival of the modern state and the understanding that politics can be, to some extent, separated from religion (and theology). In the late modern era, even this weak link between academically articulated theology and political institutions virtually disappears. This is not to say that metaphysical images of the age have become obsolescent for politics, but rather that these metaphysical images are so varied and largely independent of the evolution of 20th century Catholic theology that theology in the narrow sense of the word has ceased to be a direct source of political imagination.

This radical secularisation does not imply the loss of any relevance of theological imagination for practical politics but rather a deviation of Christian (particularly Catholic) theology from this imagination. Yet even in this situation, from their own perspectives, theologians and the Church express their views of the various political forms, sometimes from a critical perspective, sometimes in a more laudatory manner. Hence, the link between theological considerations and political reasoning still exists, albeit without the strong radiation of theological influence outside the Church as was the case in the past.

The second caveat concerns the question whether the aforementioned point makes Schmitt (and the Schmittian political thought broadly conceived) part of the camp advocating secularisation theory (among the most prominent of them belong Bryan Wilson, David Martin, Karel Dobbelaere, and Steve Bruce). The answer to this puzzle is a yes and a no. Yes, if we follow Schmitt's line of reasoning concerning the secularisation of theological terms and the diminishing influence of the institutional religion (the Roman Catholic Church) upon politics and society at large. But the answer would be negative if we defined secularisation as the process of the growing independence of the political from the prevailing metaphysical images of a society or an era.

Third, although we appreciate Schmitt's insight into the link between broad theological developments and the shifts in political imagination, this does not mean that we also take at face value Schmitt's account of the specific theological changes, which he sometimes paints with too broad strokes. Let us take, for instance, the basic three stages in theological thinking as Schmitt describes them – transcendence, secularised transcendence and finally immanence and deism (which correspond to the medieval era, the age of the modern state and its decline). Clearly, the shift to immanence of God in theology was not such a universal change as Schmitt would like to have it. First of all, the shift was typical for Protestantism (from Schleiermacher via Ritschl to von Harnack), but exactly at the time of the publication of Schmitt's Political Theology, Barth's groundbreaking writing heralded the end of liberal Protestantism as the mainstream theological position (Barth 1926). If a single feature of Barth's thoughts should be singled out, then it should be the radical transcendence of God and the incapability of humanity to cross the infinite distance between the creation and its Creator. To put it briefly, Schmitt's linear account of the theological evolution runs a serious risk of oversimplification.

What is even more surprising, given the attention Schmitt dedicated to the role of the Catholic Church, is the fact that Schmitt's view of theological developments in the modern era has very little in common with the evolution of the Catholic theology. For example, what Thomism has to say about political form is somehow missing from Schmitt's political theology. Also, in spite of the attempts to move the Church closer to the modern philosophical and political thought in Modernism, the movement never became dominant in the Catholic Church and was relatively quickly suppressed. Thus Schmitt's claim about immanentism and deism is in no way applicable to the Catholic theology of both the 19th and the 20th centuries.

Finally, we believe that it is essential to differentiate between the metaphysical images of the masses and the educated elite. In other words, should we not explore the images of those who have a decisive impact on the shape of political institutions? If the answer is affirmative, then it is rather doubtful whether the Church and its elite so enthusiastically embraced the political theology of the modern state. In other words, has the alliance of throne and altar been welcome by the Church because of the similarity in the basic concepts (God and monarch) or rather in spite of this? The latter is more likely since the transfer of God-like features to humans was seen as a blasphemy: and indeed, the sovereign power of the monarch was, at least at the beginning of the modern era, heavily criticised by ecclesiastical authors (e.g. Botero/ Continisio 1997, Ribadeneyra 1788).

Research design

Bearing all these considerations in mind, we decided that our research should be focussed not so much on the general shape of the current Roman Catholic theology, but rather on specific pronouncements and specific documents of the Catholic Church regarding the European integration process(es), which are, however, virtually always related to theological arguments.

Our aim was to find out what the key Church's bodies in Europe say about the European Union. To avoid the fallacy of too general descriptions of theological-political shifts (which Schmitt fell prey to), we decided to choose four major notions that are of interest for both the RCC and the EU and so they are frequently discussed in the documents. At the same time, we wanted to link the analysis of these key terms to the general RCC's interpretation of the political implications of these terms as well as to the attitude the Church adopts towards them. For instance, when discussing secular nature of the EU, we were not only interested in whether the Church (dis)approved of this arrangement but also whether the Church (perhaps also under the influence of the integration process) took a more positive theological view of secular state-church relations in general. In other words, we aimed at (1) establishing how positive or negative the RCC's interpretation of the EU's key features is and (2) finding out whether this has repercussions for the RCC's ("theopolitical") position towards these notions in general.

These four notions are secularism, individualism, free market and nation state.³ The first two terms are rather general and as such, they are almost never discussed in EU documents. Instead the notions are taken for granted (e.g. in the form of freedom of religion and individual human rights) and, as a result, they tacitly frame and delimit the debates on other, more specific issues or policies. Yet in the RCC's discourse(s) present in the analysed documents, these two notions clearly constitute a common starting point of a discussion of the EU. Typically, the author of the document or of the address starts with the assessment of the EU's general nature, which allows him to proceed to a more particular issue (such as starting with the EU's human rights tradition and the importance of the individual, only then discussing the EU's migration policies). Hence, the analysis of these two terms seems to be a necessary prerequisite of the analysis of the RCC's position vis-a-vis the EU.

The other two terms, on the other hand, are present in the EU's own deliberations as well, especially in the tensions (1) between a more liberal interpretation of market economy and the proponents of a stronger focus on its social impact and solidarity and (2) between the advocates of a political union ("federal Europe") and those with a more intergovernmental orientation. Surprisingly, our preliminary analysis has shown that the RCC takes a strong position on both these issues when commenting the EU's evolution. At the same time, free market and especially nation state are terms

³ We intentionally do not define these rather vague terms here which allows us to discuss the RCC's various interpretations the Church discourse brings up.

that link our debate back to Schmitt's discussion of the correlation between metaphysics and political form since both the stress on free market and the strong position of the modern state are linked to the period of modern states when, according to Schmitt's political theology, this correlation was fully present.

The total number of the analysed documents is 232, distributed over three most important bodies of the RCC's hierarchy that are based in Europe and that are, at least partially, responsible for the relations with the EU. The first is the Holy See itself and its official website vatican.va which mostly contains addresses by the Popes and other documents published by the Curia (69 documents). The second is the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE, comece.org, 97 documents) and the third is the Council of European Bishops' Conferences which, however, includes also Bishops' Conferences of Non-Member States (CCEE, ccee.ch, 66 documents). These documents cover the time frame of the last twenty years (1990-2010), i.e. the post-Cold War period, with major part of the documents from the first decade of the 21st century. It is important to note that our focus is exclusively on the discourses of the high-ranking clergy, bishops, cardinals and popes. We are fully aware of the fact that the RCC's position should not be reduced to the position of its hierarchy (e.g. the vocal lay initiative "We are the Church" in Austria and Germany), yet for the simplicity's sake, we will use the terms "the RCC", "the Church" and "Church representatives" interchangeably.

Our principle method was contextual discourse analysis (Gee 1999, Wodak/Meyer 2009), but we also employed some elements of content analysis (coding, predicate analysis, etc.) (Krippendorff 2004). For the analysis we used the atlas.ti software which allowed us not only to code all the documents quicker, but also made possible easy cross-referencing, the chronological analysis, etc.

Healthy secularism vs. militant secularism

One of the key elements which we originally thought would set the RCC and the EU apart would be their different interpretation of secularism. The EU is often seen as one of the world's champions defending secularism and indeed, secularism can be considered one of the essential underlying principles of the integration process (cf. Willaime 2009). Clearly, secularism and the temporal division between the religious and the political had been seen unfavourably by the RCC for a long time. Suffice to quote the Syllabus of Errors of 1864 in which the following statements is seen as an error "having reference to modern liberalism": "In the present day it is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion should be held as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship" (D 1.1.: Pope Pius IX 26.07.1855, X. 77). The anti-modernist oath which required all clergy to "submit and adhere" (D 2: Pope St. Pius X 01.09.1910) to the position stated in the Syllabus was not removed until 1967, hence extending the period of the RCC's extensive condemnation of basic element of secularism long after the establishment of the European Communities.

However, a look at the documents we analysed reveals a profound difference in the assessment of secularism. When speaking about the European Union, Church representative almost never outright reject secularism as such. Instead, they employ a distinction between two kinds of secularism, one of which is usually labelled "healthy", "open" or "sound" secularism, and the other called "hostile", "militant" or "aggressive". The "more open and modern concept of secularism" that corresponds to the situation of "an authentic pluralism" welcomed by the Church is best defined in the following document: "A healthy secularism calls for a distinction to be made between religion and politics, between Church and State, without making God into a private hypothesis or excluding religion and the ecclesial community from public life. A healthy secularism, therefore, does not systematically proceed at a public level, *etsi Deus non daretur*" (D 3: Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone 19.10.2007). The positive acceptance of secularism is contrasted with the other form of secularism that the RCC

wishes to reject since, in its view, it is these “militant and hostile forms of secularism which create discrimination among citizens and leave no space for religious belief and practice” (D 4: CCEE/CEC 23.10.2008).

Hence, the secularism that is acceptable to the Church allows for open and public participation of the religious citizens in the public debate and calls for religious arguments to be as valid in the public square as those based on secular reasoning (cf. with the debate on “public reason” in political philosophy: e.g. Audi/Wolterstorff 1996, Habermas 2006). As Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone puts it, “one has to recognize that a certain secular intransigence shows itself to be the enemy of tolerance and of a sound secular vision of state and society... It must not be forgotten that, when Churches or ecclesial communities intervene in public debate, expressing reservations or recalling various principles, this does not constitute a form of intolerance or an interference, since such interventions are aimed solely at enlightening consciences, enabling them to act freely and responsibly, according to the true demands of justice, even when this should conflict with situations of power and personal interest” (D 5: 15.09.2007). What is fascinating about these accounts of the “healthy secularism” is that exactly when defending the right of Catholics and church communities to present religious arguments in the public square, the Church resorts to purely secular reasoning. Let us notice the stress put on the “demands of justice” and “free and responsible acts of consciences”, which are typically seen rather as key elements of secular argumentation (Ibid.).

Even those suggestions of the Church that should lead to a greater presence of religious arguments in the public sphere are careful not to attack the secular nature of EU institutions in any way. Pope John Paul II claim that “while fully respecting the secular nature of the institutions, I consider it desirable especially that three complementary elements should be recognised: the right of Churches and religious communities to organise themselves freely in conformity with their statutes and proper convictions; respect for the specific identity of the different religious confessions and provision for a structured dialogue between the European Union and those confessions; and respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and religious institutions by virtue of the legislation of the member states of the Union” (D 6: 3).

As far as church-state relations are concerned, the Church accepts the usefulness of the division between the Church and the state in its entirety, radically breaking with the position defended in the Syllabus, which condemns the error of claiming that “The Church ought to be separated from the State, and the State from the Church.” (D 1.2.: Pope Pius IX 27.09.1852, VI. 55) Confirming our conclusion, another document of the CCEE (D 7: 15.06.2004) argues that “it is one thing to talk about a secular view which rejects the role of religion, but it is something else to talk about the secularity which is an expression of the relationship between Church and state; this latter is a more authentic view.” Even in place where Church representatives speak critically about some EU’s policies or decisions, secularity itself is not doubted. Quite to the contrary, it is seen as something positive, if understood properly. For instance, when speaking about the missing reference to God in the European Constitution, the COMECE stated that “with the complete assurance of the secularity of political institutions, and in absolute respect for all other faiths, we trust in the ability of the IGC, called upon to write the Old Continent’s future rules, to render homage to two thousand years of historical truth...” (D 8: 11/2003)

Human person vs. individual

In the same way as the RCC’s official discourse on secularism made the term more acceptable by distinguishing between good and bad secularisms, the Church has also adapted the notion of “individualism”. Although individualism has not been rejected per se by the Church, its connection to

liberalism and the individually conceived concept of religious freedom made it one of the focal points of the ecclesial critique (cf. the Syllabus' rejection of the claim that "every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true." (D 1.3. Pope Pius IX ., Syllabus III. 15, 10.06.1851) and that "The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization"). (D 1.4. *ibid.* 18.03.1861, X.80)

Today, the approach employed by the Church has almost always a similar structure. It starts by claiming that human rights are natural and so do not depend on historical context. As Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo (D 9: 10.05.2007) put it, human rights "are neither linked to particular situations nor subordinated to determined conditions, but they are demands inherent in the human person as such." This is, in the second step, followed by the claim that human rights are closely linked to the Church's mission in the world, and, indeed, constitute a fundamental part of the Christian heritage (*Ibid.*)

The third step usually underlines the key difference between human rights understood in the liberal sense as those endowed to the pre-social individual and related primarily to his/her individual freedom to act, but rather as the rights related to the dignity of the human person. As the Synod of Bishops put it, "a freedom taken in an absolute sense and isolated from other values – like that of solidarity – can lead to the disintegration of life on the continent." (D 10: Synod of Bishops – 2nd Special Assembly for Europe 1.-23.10.1999) In fact, the analysed documents use much more frequently the term "human person" than the term "individual" or "citizen" which is prevalent in liberal political philosophy. Of course, the different label also carries with itself a modification of its contents, at times a substantial one. For instance, the concept of human dignity is often connected with the right for life from its very conception, hence strongly deviating from the liberal notion of individual freedom (cf. for instance D 5; D 9; D 11: Tomasi 5/2007).

The distinction between the "individual" and the "human person" is related to the critique of two other notions traditionally linked to the modern political thought – the market and the nation. For instance, Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (D 12: 28.06.2003), argues that it is important to build "a Europe seen as... a community joined together in hope, not exclusively subject to the law of the marketplace but resolutely determined to safeguard the dignity of the human person also in social and economic relations." Even more explicitly linking this distinction to Catholic theology, COMECE President Bishop Adrianus van Luyn argued that "theologically speaking, the salvific history runs a personal but not an individualistic course, and is rather interwoven with the salvific history of others and all, this is why we as Christians take a natural interest in our neighbours and the whole of humanity" (D 13: 21.11.2007).

Similarly, the Church couples the defence of human dignity with a cosmopolitan insistence on the need for global awareness: "Individual freedom becomes a false absolute and there is a denial of any comparison with truth and goodness beyond one's own environment or group... Western countries are witnessing a growing indifference and prevalence of a kind of pragmatic materialism" (D 10: Synod of Bishops Assembly 1.- 23.10.1999). Here, mentions are often made to human rights of migrants (D 14: Martino 04/2009; D 15: CCME 05/2001).

The cosmopolitan rhetoric of the Church sometimes takes on an implicitly anti-state character. While not attacking the state as the basic political unit directly, it often mentions other units as the basic ones, including the family and ranging up to the whole mankind: "In an era of rapid technological and scientific progress, it will be necessary to reach beyond classic political approaches to more fundamental notions and values, such as human dignity, solidarity, family life, or stewardship of the earth" (D 16: John Paul II 21.05.2002).

Quite surprisingly, RCC representatives frequently combine their critique of a too strong economic orientation of the modern world and the cosmopolitan critique of nationalism and state-centrism with a very positive assessment of the European integration. Both in the most general terms and in more specific pronouncements, the RCC has repeatedly interpreted the EU as virtually fully in line with the Church's position. For instance, in spite of minor differences (which, however, received a sustained negative media attention to the "God clause" in the Constitution), most RCC documents related to the Convention on the Future of Europe were surprisingly positive. Typical is the statement of the COMECE which claims that "the Charter starts from the concept of human dignity and places the human person at the centre of the Union's action, and to this extent is inspired by the Judaeo-Christian image of humankind" (ibid.: D 16) , irrespective of whether the direct allusion to God and Christianity is made or not. The same attitude applies to the assessment of the EU in general. Pope John Paul II (D 12: 28.06.2003) claimed that "the European institutions promote the unity of the continent, and, more profoundly, are at the services of mankind". To give another example, Pope Benedict XVI (D 17: 01.12.2005) talks about the EU as "a model to imitate." Although all these claims are invariably underpinned by the insistence that the principles the EU is built on, such as the respect of human rights and democracy, are inspired by Christianity, this kind of argumentation only further strengthens the wished-for closeness between the EU and the RCC.

Solidarity vs. free market

Closely related to the distinction between the liberal conception of the individual and the RCC's stress on human dignity is the division between market-driven self-interest and the accent on solidarity. Surprisingly often, the critique takes on the form of a direct assault on the notion of free market. For instance, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops talked about "the grave inadequacies of the free market" (D 10: 2nd Special Assembly for Europe 1.- 23.10.1999), "the rubbish heap of an exaggerated liberalism" and it also held that the "ever-expanding "individualistic tendencies" which lead to a society whose purpose is to foster the private interest of its members rather than, as once held, to promote the ideal and the common good." (ibid.: D 10) Similarly, a meeting of the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences in 2009 stressed that "due to the economic and financial crisis, we have understood that the market cannot count on itself." (D 18: 13.07.2009) Even more outspokenly, the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (D 19: 09.-12.2009) declared that "a society in which each individual, each group, each nation defends only their own vested interests cannot but be the jungle."

Again, the RCC's approach to liberalism and free market shares two basic features with all the previously analysed notions. First, it distinguishes two types of liberalism, rejecting one and embracing the other. The understanding of liberalism which is acceptable for the RCC is then identified with the situation prevalent in Europe and – in particular – in the EU. This is nicely manifested in the comments of the COMECE Secretariat (D 20: 18.10.2000) on the draft Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the EU: Speaking about the position of the Church, it asks "liberal or anti-liberal? Thus, we can see an evident significant convergence with humanistic liberalism in placing a human person in the centre of its prism. On the other hand, what makes RCC's rhetorics distinct (especially contrasting with neo-liberalism) is a strong stress put on social dimension of every person (manifested by also central concept of solidarity – or even fraternity – in Catholic social teaching as well as present in the discourse of the *analysed materials*)." (italics added by the authors)

Sometimes the identification of the model favoured by the Church with the dominant situation in Europe is even more explicit: "Solidarity, understood as valuing every person in society, can essentially serve as a different, more fruitful approach in resolving social tensions in European society and in all societies of the world. In this work, Europe can provide an important message of peaceably living together. Such a plan, after the Christian model, is becoming more diffuse in

Europe.” (D 10: Synod of Bishops Assembly 1.- 23.10.1999). Indeed, it is the preferred term of solidarity that the Church representatives contrast to individualistic consumerism, solidarity which is seen as the key principle of Europe, as another text of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences entitled “Solidarity is the Soul of Europe” demonstrates. (D 21: 24.04.2004)

European unity vs. state-centrism

If the RCC’s assessment of secularism and liberalism remains conditional, qualifying the Church’s acceptance of these terms by distinguishing between the good and the allegedly malignant and aggressive forms thereof, the stress on European unity as something essentially good is unequivocal. Although in most cases, the allusions made use of the phrase “European” and not “the EU”, it is clear that it is the Union that is addressed; often, its institutions are mentioned, and the historical milestones in the post-war integration process are referred to as well. Virtually everywhere, the RCC describes the EU as the embodiment of the peaceful coexistence of people on Earth – our analysis has not yielded a single result where the Church would express a wholeheartedly Eurosceptic attitude.⁴

To give just a few of the most telling examples of the Church’s support for the EU, Pope John Paul II argued in 2000 (D 22: 23.09.2000) that the European Union is “a great project” that “has retained its creativity, and that is the best guarantee that it will succeed in securing the greatest good of its citizens” and claimed that “the time seems ripe to synthesise these achievements in an arrangement which is both less complex and more effective.” (ibid.: D 22) Pope Benedict XVI (D 23: 18.09.2006) argues that “the regional and national area is increasingly becoming common European homeland.”

Interestingly, the embrace of a quasi-federalist rhetoric by the Church also follows the federalist critique of the nation state (cf. Rosamond 2000). In general terms, the RCC’s critique is aimed at modern nation states and nationalism which is often interpreted as egoistic and prone to war. The distinction is often made between nationalism and patriotism, and exaggerated nationalism is consequently rejected. Hence, the previous Pope (D 24: John Paul II 06.05.2004) mentioned the need to overcome “selfish nationalism.”

Yet it is not only nationalism but also modern nation states that are seen as a fading in Europe. The current Pope (D 23: Benedict XVI 18.09.2006) believes that “less and less is modern society with open frontiers allowing itself to be defined in terms of nationality.” Also, speaking more concretely about the EU itself, global challenges are mentioned which constitute “a reality which no Member State can face alone.” (D 25: Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People 12/2001) Sometimes, Church representatives go even further than the EU does – for instance calling for “supranational production” of textbooks and teaching aids, again with the aim of overcoming nationalistic attitudes. At the same time, cosmopolitan tendencies are palpable in these statements too. A common statement by the Conference of European Churches and the CCEE (D 26: Conference 23.-29.06.1997) warns against the replacement of particular European nationalisms by “Euro-nationalism”, which is seen as a “dangerous aberration.”

The statecentric view of Europe is thus certainly not the mainstream view in the RCC’s hierarchy. Instead, a plurality of actors are stressed, ranging from the EU itself, to peoples, states, regions, and families (D 10: Synod of Bishops Assembly 1.- 23.10.1999). States and nations are less and less seen as *political* actors, but rather in cultural and religious terms – as “living centres of a cultural wealth” (D

⁴ The only exceptions seem to be related to the Holy See’s support for national ethical issues that contradict the common ethos of the EU (see, for instance, P2). And even here, calls for a more autonomous positions are not present.

27: John Paul II 24.03.2004) that must be preserved. But even this argument is qualified by the stress on the overall “essential cultural unity” of Europe. (D 28: Benedict XVI 03.12.2008) There is a multitude of national cultures, but only one “homo europeus” (ibid.: D 28).

As new as this attitude towards the modern state may seem, Church representatives argue that already prior to the conception of the EU, the principle of a multi-level polity had been advocated by the Church: “It is a source of deep satisfaction for me to see that the fruitful principle of subsidiarity is increasingly invoked. Put forward by my predecessor Pope Pius XI in his celebrated Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, this principle is one of the pillars of the Church’s social teaching. It is an invitation to distribute responsibility at the various levels of political organization of a given community – for example, regional, national, European – so that only those responsibilities which the lower levels are unable to exercise for the sake of the common good are transferred to the higher levels.” (D 22: John Paul II 23.09.2000) To sum up, the self-identification of the Church’s teaching with the support of the EU’s system of governance could not be greater.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the RCC’s views of the European integration process shows that its assessment of the EU is not only a result of the Church’s ongoing reconciliation with the modern world (*aggiornamento*) that has been typical for the RCC since the Second Vatican Council, but that a surprisingly strong and ever stronger support for European integration is palpable as well.

The RCC uses two basic approaches: the first lies in the conceptual reformulation of those notions that were rejected by the Church in the past, thus dividing the notions’ *meanings* in two – one that continues to be criticised as bad, aggressive, or egoistic and the other that is renamed and, consequently, embraced by the Church. This transformation pertains to many issues, ranging from secularism to individualism and to liberalism (or the focus on “human person” as the Church parlance would have it).

The RCC’s acceptance of these terms does not, however, give the answer as to whether it is more supportive of the modern state-centric politics or of the nascent political governance embodied by the EU since secularism, liberalism and individualism are defining feature of both modern states and the EU. It is the second strategy that gives us the answer to this conundrum. It consists of the identification of some terms with the modern international system (nationalism, free market, nation/state, etc.), which allows the Church to adopt a critical position towards these notions. Surprisingly, this position is almost always identical with that of the EU. Hence, nationalism is seen as the cause of war and so its influence should be minimised; free market is interpreted as egoistic and as leading to the growth of inequalities and so it should be amended by a strong stress on solidarity; the nation/state is becoming ever less important and so it should be recast in cultural terms. With all of these interpretations, it is virtually impossible to ascertain whether they represent the views of the RCC or the position of the European Commission – so similar are their positions.

In spite of the continually diminishing influence of the Church on both the institutional set-up and on the policy-making processes in the EU, the nigh identical positions of the two institutions are hard to miss. What is most interesting, however, is the Church’s insistence on the fact that (1) these positions are firmly grounded in the RCC’s theology of creation and salvation (human dignity, solidarity) as well as its ecclesiology and eschatology (the positive view of unification and reservations towards statecentrism and nationalism). Hence, the Schmittian adequacy of the metaphysical imaginations of the RCC and the progressive political form (of the EU) remains preserved. In fact, it seems that the RCC’s rhetoric sometimes projects onto the EU some elements of earthly utopia, depicting it with the same lofty phrases which the EU uses itself – the EU as the

fulfilment of the wish for unity and harmony among nations as well as the right mix of freedom and solidarity. Even in institutional terms, the EU is praised as having created the perfect balance between all its constituent elements (D 22).

Contrary to Schmitt, we are nevertheless convinced that it would be presumptuous to speak about a correlation between the RCC's theology and the EU's political architecture. Instead, our research leads us to the conclusion that it is the Church that has refined and redefined its views to render them more similar to those of the European Union's institutions. Even though the Church might have had prior affinity to some of the analysed concepts even before the creation of the European Communities (as the Church never tires of stressing), the historical comparison shows that the RCC's position on these issues has been changing tremendously in the last hundred years. In other words, today's relevance of political theology is different from its role in the past: Its potential of theological inspiration that had been (mostly unconsciously) tapped by the modern state has now all but disappeared. Without passing any judgment on whether such a shift is a good thing, it is clear that the relationship has reversed – it is theology that now tries to come to terms with the fast evolution of political notions and institutions.

One question, however, waits to be answered: Is the plurality of political arrangements in Europe (multi-level governance) and elsewhere a reflection of the increasing plurality of metaphysical images of the universe, or is there a unifying theme to all these seemingly random developments? Here, political theology conceived in the broadest sense, not as a denominational discipline, but rather understood as the era's comprehensive theopolitical imaginations remains as powerful a tool of analysis as ever.

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