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Pope Benedict XVI: Democracy and Political Myths

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Abstract: The present paper starts from the postulate that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, has had and continues to have a significant role in political debates and in the structuring of the public arena. Expounding – in the context of "God's return" into the life of postsecular society – the vision of the famous theologian Joseph Ratzinger (currently Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI) on democracy and its opponents, this paper also dwells on the manifestations of irrationality in secular religions. Finding its theoretical grounds in myths and utopias, monism of power gives free rein to irrationality in history and ends up in ideology, totalitarianism and crime. Pluralistic democracy, so challenged by enemies from within (relativism, nationalism and communism) as well as without (Islamic terrorism) can be defended and reinvigorated – and Europe alongside it –, Ratzinger states, by restoring Christianity and its values to their rightful place within the public sphere, by means of a fruitful collaboration between reason and faith in the cultural and political life, and by grounding the law in stable, universal ethical principles, which ought to take precedence over any other type of consensus, such as the natural moral law or the dictates of conscience. "The central concern of ecclesiastic policy", according to pope Benedict XVI, is defending and promoting freedom, even to the point of martyrdom, by cultivating the dualism of power.

Key words: Benedict XVI, democracy, political myths, communism, nationalism, "liberation theology", reason, faith, Europe

1. Democracy and its foundations

Commenting on modern democracy, Joseph Ratzinger starts from the ideal of freedom as shaped by the Enlightenment. Democracy emerges, in his opinion, once the freedom of citizens is upheld and safeguarded through state's institutions. When the citizens of a particular state are free, then they can take part in the exercise of power; and by participating in it, they are no longer mere the objects of power, but become themselves subjects of the democratic governance. By reason of ensuring the joint participation in the policy making and the correct management of power, democracy is "the most appropriate form of political order" (Ratzinger 2011a, 230).

Although they are preeminent in a democracy, majorities cannot decide on every matter and they must be overseen, in order to prevent their rule from becoming "as disastrous as a tyranny". Inviolable ethical standards are necessary in order to prevent majorities from opposing, for instance, reason and law. However, when the majority defies these standards, then democracy is grotesquely distorted (Ratzinger, Meier 2005a; Rourke 2010; Jordan 2014).

The debate concerning the ethical grounds of a democratic state was one of Ratzinger's primary concerns. He always considered democracy to be preferable to any form of authoritarianism, but cautioned against its limitations as well as the fact that ethical foundations must take precedence over, and pave the way for, the political order of the state. Quoting Alexis de Tocqueville, Ratzinger fully adhered to the opinion that "the unwritten foundations of law are much deeper and more essential in maintaining democracy, than any written legislation". This idea is central to his understanding of democracy.

In keeping with Franz Oppenheimer, a Jewish author who acknowledged the major part played by the Jewish-Christian world in shaping democracy, Ratzinger insisted on the Christian foundations of democracy. The democratic model, he stated, was based on the monastic constitutions, although Greek democracy admittedly had also given it "decisive impetus". Both the American and the British democracies are based on "the convergence of values originating in the Christian faith". Doubtlessly, the civilization of the Decalogue and the ethical code postulated by Christianity encouraged the Church-state dualism and were conducive to a free society respecting human freedoms and rights. In any case, democracy is inconceivable "without a religious, «sacred» foundation". Failure to establish such foundation results in "the archaic forces of evil" surfacing and "pushing the world towards disaster" (Ratzinger 2006, 270-271). As a creation of the Greek-Latin legacy, the very

survival of pluralistic democracy is jeopardized, if it becomes alienated from its own roots.

Theoreticians of political phenomena, such as R. Rorty and H. Kelsen, hold the opposite view: since it preserves and posits absolute truths and values, Christianity is in their opinion a threat to democracy, which is safer and fares better in a "culture of moral skepticism". To the two above-mentioned thinkers, law should be endorsed solely through a political process, exclusively implemented via the consensus of the community and therefore, only the values adhered to by the majority can be reflected by law (Rourke 2010).

Nowadays, however, the ethical grounds of democracy can no longer be ensured by reason and science alone, nor by faith and religion alone. This is because both science and religion have been afflicted by "sicknesses" that have undermined their credibility. Under these circumstances, the ethical backgrounds of democracy can only be provided by "correlating reason and faith" (Ratzinger 2011a; Hoping 2006; Lobeira 2011).

Ultimately, the democratic system can only function provided that "core values, let us call them «human rights», are acknowledged by everyone as valid and cannot be denied by the majority" (Ratzinger 2014, 227).

Certainly, Ratzinger is not among those who labor under the delusion that an ideal democracy might exist. Especially since democracy has ever been threatened and attacked from both within and without. And Europe itself with it.

2. Challenges faced by Western democracy today

Democracy has been considered to be the political system most open to the transcendence, since it provides the environment where most people may reflect on their origin and their ultimate destiny and, implicitly, the meaning of their existence (Pin 2015). However, like any living, evolving system, pluralistic democracy cannot offer any "absolute warranty" and "does not automatically generate the conviction that, despite all its insufficiencies, it is the best possible form of state" (Ratzinger 2014, 247).

The threats that may endanger democracy to the point of destroying it are, first and formost, religious and ethical ones. The most important and most dramatic threat, undermining the very foundations of pluralist democracy, is the crisis of transcendence – manifest through agnosticism, atheism and, finally, nihilism. "The loss of transcendence evokes the flight to utopia. [...] The destruction of transcendence is the actual amputation of human beings from which all other sicknesses [in society] flow" (Ratzinger 2014, 254). Amputation of transcendence reduces man to a being coming from nowhere, heading nowhere, rootless and without any

ultimate goal, a victim of the absurd, the irrational, subject to complete control. "Robbed of their real greatness" and deprived of the nostalgia for the Kingdom, people begin to seek for an escape in secular "kingdoms", and fall into the state which Manes Sperber termed *reverie.* "This boredom with what we have is increasing today, and with it increases the propensity for anarchy, in the belief that the hoped-for perfect society should exist somewhere. Today no one would content themselves with the Enlightenment belief in progress. But a sort of secular messianism has deeply pervaded the collective consciousness" (Ratzinger 2014, 247). Atheism – the "spirit" underlying all the totalitarian systems of modern history –, now reiterates the macabre "mystique of the Reich", a "kingdom" for which great efforts are still being made in order to have it installed, against of the backdrop of the nihilism engulfing today's world (Ratzinger 2014; Palade 2009a).

The illusion of such "kingdom", the secular messianism and the "imminent eschatology" are all sustained by myths. And the myth that engendered the political utopias of the modern era, was the myth of autonomous, self-sufficient reason. With Francis Bacon started a "unilateral understanding of the concept of reason". "Only quantitative reason, the reason of calculations and experiments, is in principle acknowledged as reason; every a-rational thing must be gradually overcome and reduced to the same type of «exact» knowledge" (Ratzinger 2014, 251). The cardinal then goes on to mention Martin Kriele, who had reversed the relationship between science and pragmatic reasons and had reduced ethics and politics to matters of physics. Through a bizarre "dialectics of modernity", reason's progress reaches such momentum that it comes to jeopardize both individual life, by means of genetic engineering, and the world's life, through the atomic bomb.

Once transcendence is forsaken, this inevitably triggers an ethical crisis, tantamount to distorting values, giving up freedom, responsibility, and conscience. However, a society "freed" from all these "burdens" and profoundly "relaxed" due to its relativism, creates the premise for "perfect tyranny". While "the Christian ethical foundations of democracies are eroded day by day, it is replaced by an anthropology of utopian freedom" ready to fabricate myths of salvation and of an ideal world *in via.* The pragmatic man, the man of advantages and disadvantages, substitutes good and evil for profit and non-profit. In a society freed from religion and morals, good is no longer the result of man's ethical effort, but the outcome of structures achieving economic profit. Reason and mechanisms gain the upper hand over man and ethos. "Salvation" itself is no longer an ethical process, but the success of political-economic activity (Ratzinger 2014; Ratzinger 2002).

In its turn, the ethical crises entail the crisis of law: in the absence of moral norms, "law loses the very grounds supporting it". If the ethical realm no longer is to be defended, for it pertains to the subjective, private

sphere, then law becomes "the mirror reflecting the prevailing views". But lacking a solid foundation, law may easily fall victim to manipulation. And it is common knowledge that dictatorships start by manipulating law or even discarding it. Ultimately, absolute power replaces law, and absence of law is tantamount to the abolition of human dignity and freedom. The prerequisites that ensure the functioning of democratic mechanisms, Ratzinger concludes, are: establishing ethical foundations of law; placing authority and power under the control of law; and guaranteeing the inviolability of law from the part of political authority (Ratziger 2007; Ratzinger 2014; Pin 2015; Twomey 2015).

All these crises – manifestations of a broader crisis of European culture, find a common expression in the ideology of relativism, which underlies democracy today. Relativism is actually the very "prerequisite" and "philosophy" of democracy (Ratzinger 2007; Ratzinger 1998; Ratzinger 2005b; Ratzinger 2005c; Wiedenhofer 2010; Miceli 2012; Paskewich 2008; Michnik 2007; Luciani 2015). Although he does not deny it a certain relevance within the political realm, Ratzinger deems relativism responsible for the dismissal of truth and good by transferring them from the sphere of the objective into the sphere of the subjective, and from the sphere of metaphysical reason into the sphere of practical, pragmatic reason and utilitarianism. Moreover, the German philosopher perceives relativism as "dogmatism", "dictatorship", "prevailing philosophy", "religion of the modern man" and "the central problem for faith today". In the framework created by relativism, the "firm" moral values and the "strong" truths of Christianity are met with increasing reluctance, for as soon as they are proclaimed, they are perceived as "threats" to personal autonomy and freedom. Christianity itself, with its claims to provide absolute Truth, is increasingly regarded as suspicious (Ratzinger 2007; Rourke 2010).

3. Political myths: past and present

3.1. Communism and nationalism

Of all the materialistic, atheistic political currents afflicting Europe and its democracy, communism was deemed by Ratzinger to be the most dangerous enemy. It reunited all the above-mentioned threats and remained dangerous even after its demise. Communism rejected the entire world history preceding it, and was "the most radical antithesis of Christianity itself, as well as any historical form bearing the imprint of Christianity. [...] Consequently, Marxism is a creation of Europe but, at the same time, it is the most vehement denial of Europe" (Ratzinger 2014, 247).

When journalist Vittorio Messori asked him about the most dangerous of the current atheisms, the cardinal pointed to Marxism. This

is because Marxism "employs people's religious energies for political purposes, directing them towards a mere earthly expectation, which is the opposite of the Christian endeavor towards eternal life. This distortion of the Biblical tradition deceives many believers, who in all good faith are convined that the cause of Christ is the same as the one proposed by the heralds of the political revolution" (Ratzinger 2011b, 190).

In his encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (§53), pope Benedict XVI points out that in order to avoid both individualism, on the one hand, and collectivism on the other hand, the person and community should not be regarded as part and whole, respectively, and one should not be subordinated to the other, because "the relation between individual and community is a relation between one totality and another". Political order and community should neither absorb, not annul the person, as happened under communism (Curran 2014). Also, in his encyclical *Spe salvi*, the Pope resumes the topic of Marxist utopia and the notion of progress. "Marx's fundamental error" was to presume, and foster the illusion, that the New Jerusalem could be accomplished in history via "the expropriation of the ruling class, with the fall of political power and the socialization of means of production". Closer investigation reveals that the Marxist ideology trampled down human freedom and promoted the myth that material, economic prosperity brings about redemption in history, from the outside (§21). Actually, the promise of the "kingdom" – as a kingdom obtained by man alone through progress, without the aid of God – can only lead to the "perverse end" (§22-23). Commenting on this encyclical, Tereza-Brândușa Palade remarked that its author sees the process of reason's emancipation, started with I. Kant, culminating in extreme theoretical forms with Marx and totalitarian practical forms with Lenin and the Russian Revolution (Palade 2009b).

The famous theologian had no tolerance whatsoever for the doctrine of progress put forth by Hegel and repeatedly criticized and rejected the materialistic and deterministic theories of history. He saw in these theories of irreversible historical progress, be they Marxist or liberal, the expression of a secularization of Christian expectations and eschatology (Rowland 2008).

In *Europe Today and Tomorrow. Adressing the Fundamental Issues / Europa. I suoi fondamenti oggi e domani* (2004), Ratzinger cautions that the economical failure of the communist system did not involve its actual demise. Not only did the former communists turn into liberals in the economic realm, but the moral diseases of communism – "dryness of soul and destruction of conscience" – are perpetuated in the former communist countries. "Thus, the untied knot of Marxism continues to exist even today: the shattering of man's original certainties about God, himself, and the universe. The decline of a moral conscience based on inviolable values is still our problem and may lead to the self-destruction of European consciousness" (Ratzinger 2011c, 208). Admittedly, after the

fall of communism, against the backdrop of a precarious economical and political situation, the former Soviet Bloc countries did not restore communism, but neither did they become more open to the Christian set of values. Instead, what occurs in these countries, "is the perpetual burnout of souls, the constant dullness and resignation; lack of hope is gaining the upper hand" (Ratzinger 2006, 279-280).

Ratzinger is no less critical against another great political enemy of Europe and pluralistic democracy: nationalism (Ratzinger 1998, 109-113). This is not a novel fault in history, but is rather "an archaic vice", "the modern radicalization of tribalism". As it happens with communism also, the ghost of nationalism still haunts Europe, and poses serious risks to its democratic foundations. But, if God is the foundation of ethos and law, Ratzinger warned, neither the world proletarian revolution, nor the nation, can be the *summum bonum*.

In early modern times, the French Revolution favored the shaping of nations by replacing the monarchic unity with the national unity. Later, during the 19th century, several European peoples constituted nations (Italy, Germany, Poland, Russia, etc.). However, the nationalistic fever increased dramatically after the first World War, when some European nations "mythically overestimated their own nations", to various degrees. Without denying the universal, nationalism subordinates it to the particular; according to it, world unity could be achieved, but starting from one's own nation. Divinity itself was placed in the service of the national ideal. "Historically, nationalism did not only push Europe on the brink of destruction, but it also ran counter to what Europe essentially is, from the spiritual and religious standpoint" (Ratzinger 2014, 283).

During a lecture delivered at Reinhold Schneider Society in 1972, Ratzinger also spoke about the German national-socialism. Since to Hitler, conscience and ethics were nothing but constructs which one must relinquish, this means that "destroying conscience is the real prerequisite for totalitarian control and domination. Where conscience is at work, there is a barrier against dictatorship and against human arbitrariness, there is something sacred which remains inviolable and which eludes any control, from within or without, in an ultimate form of sovereignty. Only the absolute of consciousness can be opposed to the absolute of tyranny; only the acknowledgement of the inviolability of consciousness can protect man against other men and against himself. Only its reign can guarantee freedom" (Ratzinger 2014, 203). Cardinal Ratzinger noted obvious affinities between national-socialism and Marxism and concluded that the ideology of Aryan supremacy was extended into the communist ideology of peace and prosperity.

Both national-socialism, and Marxism perverted reason, alienated faith, and denied State and law, which were seen as "obstacles in the path of freedom". State and law were replaced with realities perceived as superior, such as the will of the people in national-socialism and classless

society in communism, respectively. Both forms of totalitarianism were thus based on perverse doctrines, born of a twisted understanding of reason, of political ethics independent from God, and of an erroneous understanding of the human person (Bot 2015).

Although the "nationalistic heresy" continues to exist as an European heresy, its force is much diminished in the context of the united Europe and the broader context of globalization (Ratzinger 2002; Ratzinger 2014).

Cardinal Ratzinger did not hesitate to critically examine Christianity's political effects which could undermine democracy. These negative effects are: a) Christians fostering, on the one hand, the desire to withdraw from the world, and on the other hand the attitude of anarchic opposition to it; b) rejecting justification by deeds, and stressing saintliness derived from grace, which led to ethical maximalism and the inability to make concessions to the world and the state; c) encouraging intolerance towards the other religious beliefs, since Christianity has never accepted to become part of a pantheon but asserted it is the religion of the one, supreme truth, which led to the "risk of theocratic extension" (Ratzinger 2014).

3.2. "The Liberation Theology" – a political myth exported in red sacerdotal garb

Founded in the 1970s by the Peruvian philosopher and theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (n. 1928), "the Liberation Theology" (expounded in his *Teologia de la Liberation*, 1972) invoked the need for Christianity to become actively involved in safeguarding the world, as long as people suffer from poverty and injustice. Christianity was thus challenged to convert orthodoxy into orthopraxy, that is, to preach God through acts of charity. The enormous social inequalities across the Latin America favored the rapid spread of this liberation movement, which in the name of social equity, had taken concrete action against poverty. To aid the poor, "base ecclesial communities" were established, which were led by laypersons in the areas where priests were missing. Leftist sympathizers – clergymen and monks adhering to this movement, were involved in armed combat as well (Ratzinger 1986; Ratzinger 2014).

Since this movement was gaining momentum throughout the Latin American countries, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith provided two sets of *Instructions* (in 1984 and 1986, respectively), regarding the foundations and orientation of the "liberation theology". Following the theological assessments carried out by cardinal Ratzinger, pope John Paul II firmly denounced this pseudo-theology. This rebuttal resulted in its gradual disappearance (Ratzinger 2014).

In the 1984 *Instruction on certain aspects of the "theology of liberation"*, the Congregation pointed out that – although it supported the cause of freedom and of righteous fight agaits poverty – it had to denounce

dangerous ideological deviations which did not serve the cause of the poor in any way. But even before the publication of *Instructions* concerning the "liberation theology", the cardinal had taken stance on this issue, in a private capacity and not in his official capacity as a prefect (Ratzinger 2011b, 168-188). He had done so during the discussions of Bressanone (August 1984), where he had started from the remark that "liberation appears to be the platform, the banner of all cultures today, across all continents. Adhering to this tenet, the search for «liberation» has spread across denominational borders in various cultural environments of the world" (Ratzinger 2011b, 170). In his opinion, the general insistence on the topic of liberation and the world's involvement in the search for freedom and liberation, evinces a "growing alienation", generated by the absence of God from people's lives – absence which in fact entails bondage.

The platform of the "liberation theology" is strikingly similar to the secularist, Marxist liberation platforms; today it is known that this theology was not produced by Christians who pursued communism, but by communists who pursued Christians, attempting to attract them on their side (Pacepa 2015). Although he notes that the "liberation theology" is singular, in that it "does not fit into any of the accepted categories of heresy" and also that "it cannot be denied that the whole edifice has an almost irresistible logic", Ratzinger condemns the opinion of its adherents, according to whom any theology must be practical, in other words political; otherwise in its "idealistic" form it does nothing but serve the interests of the oppressors. Any divergence from this understanding of Christianity as a "socio-political liberation praxis" would confirm the fact that the Church sides with the rich oppressors, "that is, against Jesus Himself". The supporters of the "liberation theology" came even to be convinced that a partisan attitude, or party membership was "the fundamental presupposition for a correct hermeneutics of the biblical testimony". "The Kingdom" – central not only to the Gospel, but to Marxism as well – can only be realized by following Jesus' "praxis" and taking concrete action so that the material, historical reality may be transformed int the "Kingdom of God". For, in fact, "action is truth" (Ratzinger 2011b).

Through the "liberation theology" – ideologically born in Europe and exported from there, through intellectuals' activity, to the Latin America – "myths and utopias created in the European West" were transferred; this is why Ratzinger sees this political theology as "a form of cultural imperialism" and not at all a spontaneous creation of the underprivileged masses of people. He is even more straightforward in pointing out that, once it had lost its grip on the West, the Marxist myth was exported under theological disguise, to the Third World by intellectuals actually finding themselves very far from the "actual socialism" (Ratzinger 2011b).

Despite the derisive labelling targeting him – "«servant», «lackey» of the upper classes" –, the cardinal never hesitated to assert the theological

unacceptability of mixing together "the Bible, Christology, politics, sociology, economy" and made it clear that "one cannot make abusive use of the Scriptures and theology, in order to absolutize (or idolize) a social-political theory. [...] If, on the other hand, the revolution is presented as sacred – mixing up God, Christ, ideologies – then an enthusiastic fanaticism arises and can lead to the worst injustice and oppression, actually denying what the theory proclaimed" (Ratzinger 2011b, 192). The belief that political means are redemptive, able to obtain Salvation, is a messianic myth, a "political religion" ending up in totalitarianism. Turning Christian eschatology into political utopia, actually empties hope of its content and thus "abuses the mystery of the Kingdom of God in order to justify political irrationality" and inevitably falls into what Leszek Kołakowski termed "political idolatry" (Ratzinger 2012; Ratzinger 2014).

3.3. Democracy under assault from a new salvation myth: Islamic terrorism

From the outside, but lately even from within the Western world, Islamic terrorism has been threatening democracy and world stability in general. A monotheistic religion, the Islam belongs doctrinally to the sphere of voluntarism, not to that of faith rationality, as pope Benedict XVI pointed out in his thought-provoking address delivered at Regensburg (12 September 2006). Characterized by the "reduction to unity" of the powers, Islam does not encourage the separation between faith and law, between religion and state. This is why "Islam is not simply one religion that may become part of the liberal space of a pluralistic society. If we think so, as it sometimes happens today, then the Islam is modelled after Christianity and not perceived as it intrinsically is" (Ratzinger 2006, 291-292). Moreover, "the Islam obviously is the very counter-model of pluralistic democracy and consequently cannot become its foundational power" (Ratzinger 2014, 259).

In his analysis of the Islamic world, in *A Turning Point for Europe? / Wendezeit für Europa?* (1992) (Ratzinger 1998, 152-156), Ratzinger noted that the current revival of the Islamic world is due to the economic (and implicitly, political and military) advancements of Islamic countries, as a result of the important position held by oil on the global market. He also warned that the terms *integrism* and *fundamentalism*, employed by Europeans to designate the revival of Islamic religious consciousness, as well as the behaviors accompanying it, are inappropriate and misleading. The new awakening of Islam started with Iranians' reaction against the immorality propagated by the film industry in the Western European and American world – immorality they perceived as an attack against their ethos. The Islamic political and military fanaticism was justified by literal respect for religious traditions, while the revolutionary interpretation of Islam provided the argument for the necessity to fuse Western, Marxism-

inspired terrorism, and Islamic terrorism. The Islam will continue to hold great attraction power over both the Thirld Word, and the secularized, uprooted Christians to whom Christianity has lost vitality. Of course, the cardinal distinguishes between a "noble" Islam, epitomized by the king of Morocco, and an extremist, terrorist Islam (Ratzinger 2006) and notes that terrorism is not rooted in the Quran, but in "man's self-authorization" (Ratzinger 2011). "He admitted the potential pathologies of the religious, using as a main example the actions of extreme Islamic fundamentalism, while immediately pointing out that these are partially stimulated by a desperate and exasperated need to affirm religious faith in an increasingly materialistic world" (Nemoianu 2006)

In his debate with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, Ratzinger remarked that the possibility to employ power in destructive ways stringently calls for ethical and juridical control over power, including religious power. In the aftermath of the second World War, mankind lived in the fear generated by the production of the atomic bomb; today, the world lives under the threats of terrorism and genetic manipulation. However, in *Europe in the Crisis of Cultures / L'Europa nella crisi delle culture* (2005) the cardinal cautions that although fear of the terrorist threat – with the use of nuclear and biological weapons – is justified, resorting to global control systems, akin to dictatorships, is neither realistic nor desirable.

As we are faced with religious aggression and terrorism, we increasingly strongly need to gain insight into religions' mainsprings, and find solutions to overcome the dramatic impasse in which the world is today. To achieve this, pope Benedict XVI reminds that two possible solutions have emerged: the "therapeutic" solution of a unifying "world ethos" (originally put forth by the German theologian Hans Küng), and the peaceful-radical solution of giving up religion altogether (often invoked by secularists). The former solution envisages a transfer of the religious into the sphere of ethics, while the latter simply proposes to eliminate religion from the public arena. The pontiff, however, rejects both solutions. Although he agrees that it is necessary to share common ethical tenets and to have a universal definition of goodness, he notes that these desiderata cannot be provided by today's religions or science. This is why he seeks a solution in the common natural law and the "correlation between reason and faith, reason and religion, which are called to mutual purification and cleansing, and which need each other and must acknowledge each other" (Ratzinger 2011a, 242). Intertwining faith and reason aims both to have reason purify and oversee religion, and have religion purify and oversee reason. Only such a mutual checks and balances system can protect reason and science, on the one hand, and faith and religion, on the other hand, from the seduction of political myths, new and old, which have threatened and are still threatening democracy and world peace.

The Pope firmly rejects the argument employed by secularists for their failing to mention Europe's Christian roots in the Preamble of the European Constitution. In fact, Muslims and non-Christians do not feel threatened, as secularists claim, by Christianity and the Christian moral values, "but by the cynicism of a secularized culture that denies its own foundations" and by "the attempt to build the human community absolutely without God" (Ratzinger 2011a, 154, 155).

As today's Islamic terrorism bases its ethical and religious claim of legitimacy on the argument that oppressed, wronged peoples must be protected against the atheism, immorality and arrogance of the powerful, it actually constructs a new myth of salvation (salvation from the claws of the evil, decadent developed world).

4. Conclusions in the horizon of an Enlightenment with a difference

The secular culture originating in the Enlightenment, which has engendered European "exclusive humanism" (Ch. Taylor), has been keeping religion away from the public life and the state structures. It has deemed itself to be the only one able and entitled to promote and safeguard democracy and citizens' rights. However, to Benedict XVI, secular culture is neither universal, nor sufficient to "keep the world together". Therefore, it is high time that the old Enlightenment – which idolized reason and fuelled the utopias and political myths of modernity – were replaced by that Enlightenment anchored in the Divine Logos, the one able to awaken reason from the slumber that engenders monsters, and from under the spell of secular religions, restoring it to its heavenly dignity (Ratzinger 2011a; Ratzinger 2007; D'Arcais, Ratzinger 2006; Horkheimer, Adorno 2016).

Undergoing a deep crisis of cultures, prey to disquieting self-hatred, on the one hand, and facing the external threats posed by Islamism and terrorism, on the other hand – Europe is experiencing, against the backdrop of globalization, a cultural and political crisis that impinges upon European democracy. According to Benedict XVI, safeguarding and reinvigorating this democracy, on which the future of Europe depends, could be achieved by: 1) acknowledging the role and importance of God for the public life, and rejecting intolerant ideologized secularism; 2) acknowledging and re-embracing Christian values and faith; 3) rediscovering the central role of law, as well as its limitations; 4) acknowledging and preserving the constitutive European values: freedom of conscience, human rights, and freedom of science. Certainly, pluralistic democracy exists thanks to several principles derived from Christianity: the inalienable character of God-given human dignity; the rational, universal character of the moral law; the separation between lay and religious authority; a unifying ethics preceding and transcending the state

(Ratzinger 2014; Ratzinger 2002; Rourke 2010; Twomey 2015). All these confirm the fact that in today's and tomorrow's cultural, spiritual and democratic Europe, Christianity naturally holds a substantial role. A role which, however – to the consternation of pope Benedict XVI and many others – the preamble to the EU Constitution downplays.

In agreement with Václav Havel, Benedict XVI repeatedly pointed out that the ultimate "forum" of political action, and the ultimate guarantee of freedom against tyranny, is conscience; that conscience which too often – and with such severe repercurssions – politicians leave behind them in their bathrooms.

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