

Benedict XVI and the Christian Roots of Europe:

An Overview of His Papal Speeches and Addresses

On the Theme of the Christian Heritage of European Culture

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Present day European society is commonly considered to be highly secularized. Indeed, weekly church attendance in most countries in Europe has been declining steadily in the past several decades. While Christianity thus appears to be on the decline, the presence of many non-Christian, mostly Muslim, immigrants, who wish to maintain their religious identity and practices has caused friction in many countries. For example, the question of whether and how women should be allowed to wear a religious veil in public has become a point of hot debate in France and Germany. The issue is compounded further by the conflict of certain traditional values of immigrants with long established principles of basic human rights of freedom and equality that are taken for granted in European society. For example, the right of a man to make decisions for his wife or daughter and the subservient role in society assigned to women in general, which prevents girls and young women from gaining an education and assuming an occupation in society, are considered incompatible with basic human rights.

The importance of religious values was also highlighted during the debate over the European Constitution, which was intended to provide an institutional basis for the European Union. Although the document was signed in 2004, it was ultimately rejected because of disagreements over various institutional issues, including power sharing. There was also disagreement over the question of the inclusion of a reference to the role of Christianity in European history in the Preamble to the European Constitution. The initial draft of the Preamble stated that the basic values of European civilization such as freedom, equality, and the rule of law derived from Europe's classical heritage and the Enlightenment, and was met with protests from representatives of some countries and from Pope

John Paul II.¹ The wording finally agreed on recognized Europe's "religious" heritage while avoiding specific mention of Christianity:

DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law,²

This wording was retained in the official text of the subsequent Treaty of Lisbon,³ initially known as the Reform Treaty, which was signed and ratified in 2007 and came into force in 2009.

While the actual debate over the mention in official documents of the role of Christianity in European society appears to have ended, the Catholic Church, especially in the person of the present leader, Pope Benedict XVI, has continued to assert the importance of the Christian roots of Europe. Historically, the Catholic Church has always been an important presence in Europe, but in recent times it owes much of its public presence to the long and influential pontificate of John Paul II (1978-2005). As the first non-Italian pope in centuries and as a native of Poland, he not only brought a fresh perspective to his office, but he became something of a celebrity on the world stage because of his many travels throughout the world and due to his charismatic personality. He is also considered by some to have played a significant role in the collapse of communism in Poland and Eastern Europe. His successor, Joseph Ratzinger, who reigns as Benedict XVI (2005-), was professor of theology at the Universities of Bonn (1959-1963), Münster (1963-66), Tübingen (1966-69), and Regensburg (1969-1977), and served as Archbishop of Munich and Freising, and held the office of Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith from 1981 until 2005. In this latter capacity he was one of the John Paul II's closest and most influential advisors. Upon the death of John Paul II in 2005, Ratzinger was elected pope and took the name of Benedict XVI. Although not as personally charismatic or comfortable on the public stage, he has continued his predecessor's positive engagement with the world, especially with Europe.

This article aims to shed light on how Benedict XVI, as leader of the Roman Catholic Church, understands the role of religion, especially Christianity, in present day European society. While Benedict has referred to this theme in many of his writings before becoming pope, the matter remains an urgent one for him.

This article will therefore focus on the various speeches and addresses given by Benedict XVI as pope. Benedict has made many public appearances, not only as leader of the Catholic Church, but as the head of state of Vatican City, and has given speeches and addresses in various academic, ecclesiastical, and public settings during his pontificate. By examining these speeches and addresses, the article will describe Benedict's understanding of the "Christian roots" of European culture, and will show how it informs his belief that Christianity is an essential part of the European culture heritage and that this common Christian identity is essential for the formation of true unity in Europe. Finally, it will show how this understanding also serves as the rationale for the positive engagement of the Church with society not only in Europe, but in the world in general.

1. The Christian Roots of Europe

Joseph Ratzinger, upon election as Pope, chose to take the name of Benedict. Popes are at liberty to choose a name under which they will rule the church. Many choose the name of predecessors with whom they wish to identify, or whom they wish to show special respect and honor, such as John Paul I and John Paul II. Their names indicated that they wished to honor and continue the work of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, who commenced and concluded, respectfully, the Second Vatican Council. Likewise, the name Joseph Ratzinger chose had special significance. In an address given on April 27, 2005 at the first general audience since he had become pope, he explained two reasons why he chose the name Benedict.

The first reason is because he wished to identify himself with Benedict XV, who reigned as pope from 1914 to 1922, and is known for his sincere yet failed attempts to mediate peace during World War I and his efforts to alleviate the suffering it caused:

I wanted to be called Benedict XVI in order to create a spiritual bond with Benedict XV, who steered the Church through the period of turmoil caused by the First World War. He was a courageous and authentic prophet of peace and strove with brave courage first of all to avert the tragedy of the war and then to limit its harmful consequences. Treading in his footsteps, I would like to place my ministry at the service of reconciliation and harmony between persons and peoples.⁴

The second reason for choosing the name Benedict was to honor another

person by that name and to draw inspiration from him. This was St. Benedict of Nursia 480-547, known and revered as the founder of western monasticism, which contributed greatly to the spread of Christianity and its culture throughout European history:

The name "Benedict" also calls to mind the extraordinary figure of the great "Patriarch of Western Monasticism", St Benedict of Norcia, Co-Patron of Europe together with Sts Cyril and Methodius, and the women Saints, Bridget of Sweden, Catherine of Siena and Edith Stein. The gradual expansion of the Benedictine Order that he founded had an enormous influence on the spread of Christianity across the Continent. St Benedict is therefore deeply venerated, also in Germany and particularly in Bavaria, my birthplace; he is a fundamental reference point for European unity and a powerful reminder of the indispensable Christian roots of his culture and civilization.⁵

With his choice of naming himself after these two personages, Benedict thus indicated two major themes to which he wished to dedicate his ministry as pope: Following the example of Benedict the XVI, he intended to work for the promotion of peace and reconciliation among peoples. Inspired by St. Benedict of Nursia, he stated his intention to work for the promotion of unity in Europe on the basis of its Christian cultural heritage, that is, its "Christian roots."

In his speeches as pope, Benedict refers repeatedly to these "Christian roots," emphasizing not only the historical significance of Christianity in the formation of European culture, but also the present day significance of Christianity for European society, especially the contribution that Christianity can and should make in the movement toward European integration and in promoting a positive role for Europe in the world.

What he means by "Christian roots" can be garnered from several addresses. For example, during a visit to France in September, 2008, he spoke at a meeting with representatives from French cultural circles, including the Minister of Culture, held at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris, on 12 September 2008. In this speech, Benedict invoked the memory of the famous monk St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and spoke of the cultural achievements and heritage of Western monasticism. He began by pointing out the role of monasticism in the formation of European Culture: "From the perspective of monasticism's historical influence, we could say that, amid the great cultural upheaval resulting from migrations of peoples and the emerging new political configurations, the monasteries were the

places where the treasures of ancient culture survived, and where at the same time a new culture slowly took shape out of the old."⁶

During the course of this speech, he spoke more concretely of the content of this culture, referring to three specific areas of monastic life which nurtured the cultural basis of later European society: The first area of monastic life was the culture of the word, which flows from the basic monastic vocation of search for the Word of God. Since this search involves language it was only natural that the monasteries devoted themselves to the word, and thus established libraries and schools to aid in this pursuit.

The second area is music, which flows from communal monastic praying and chanting. Benedict is well known for his personal fondness for music and piano playing. It is interesting to note that Benedict considers monastic singing as a source of Western music:

This intrinsic requirement of speaking with God and singing of him with words he himself has given, is what gave rise to the great tradition of Western music. It was not a form of private "creativity", in which the individual leaves a memorial to himself and makes self-representation his essential criterion. Rather it is about vigilantly recognizing with the "ears of the heart" the inner laws of the music of creation, the archetypes of music that the Creator built into his world and into men, and thus discovering music that is worthy of God, and at the same time truly worthy of man, music whose worthiness resounds in purity.⁷

The third area of monastic life that contributed to the European cultural heritage is the culture of work, *labora*, the second component of the monastic principle of "ora et labora." Again, Benedict sees the monastic ethos of work, as a way in which human work shares in God's activity as creator of the word, with great ramifications for European society:

Monasticism involves not only a culture of the word, but also a culture of work, without which the emergence of Europe, its ethos and its influence on the world would be unthinkable. Naturally, this ethos had to include the idea that human work and shaping of history is understood as sharing in the work of the Creator, and must be evaluated in those terms. Where such evaluation is lacking, where man arrogates to himself the status of god-like creator, his shaping of the world can quickly turn into destruction of the world.⁸

In the last sentence of this citation, Benedict touches on the danger of man

making himself the ultimate criterion of morality. This is an issue which Benedict addresses repeatedly in his discussion of relativism and the absolute values. We shall return to this point later in this article.

Another statement of Benedict's understanding of the influence of Christianity on European culture can be found in an address given in October 2009, to Mr. Yves Gazzo, head of the Delegation of the Commission of European Communities to the Holy See. Here Benedict takes up Mr. Gazzo's reference to the European Union as an organization of 27 states that share the same fundamental values as a common ground for cooperation, and then proceeds to explain his own understanding of the fundamental values that underlie European culture. First, Benedict points out that these fundamental values are not something that Europeans discovered or gave to themselves, but are derived from the Christian faith, and have developed throughout European history: "These values are the fruit of a long and tortuous history in which, as no one will deny, Christianity has played a leading role." He then goes on to list what he considers these fundamental values: "The equal dignity of all human beings, the freedom of the act of faith as the root of all the other civil freedoms, peace as a decisive element of the common good, human, intellectual, social and economic development as a divine vocation and the sense of history that derives from it are as many central elements of the Christian Revelation that continue to model the European civilization."⁹

It is interesting to note that some of the values to which Benedict refers here have a direct connection with religion, such as "the freedom of the act of faith as the root of all the other civil freedoms," "human, intellectual, social and economic development as a divine vocation and the sense of history that derives from it." However other values, such as equality, the dignity of the individual, peace as a decisive element of the common good, are not specifically religious in themselves.

Benedict gives a further explanation of the content of the Christian heritage during his official visit to Austria in 2007, when he addressed the President, Chancellor, other government officials, and members of the diplomatic corps. In his speech he referred to the Christian roots of Europe and the current movement toward European integration and praised the role that Austria had played throughout history in uniting large parts Europe, as well as its current efforts to promote the development of the European Union. In that context, he spoke of two aspects of the common European heritage: a respect for human rights and idea of the unity of faith and reason. Concerning the first, Benedict goes so far as to say that

the idea of human rights is European in origin: "It was in Europe that the notion of human rights was first formulated. The fundamental human right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself."¹⁰

The second important aspect of the European cultural heritage bequeathed by Christianity is a way of thinking that supposes the unity of faith and reason:

Finally, another part of the European heritage is a tradition of thought which considers as essential a substantial correspondence between faith, truth and reason. Here the issue is clearly whether or not reason stands at the beginning and foundation of all things. The issue is whether reality originates by chance and necessity, and thus whether reason is merely a chance by-product of the irrational and, in an ocean of irrationality, it too, in the end, is meaningless, or whether instead the underlying conviction of Christian faith remains true: *In principio erat Verbum* — in the beginning was the Word; at the origin of everything is the creative reason of God who decided to make himself known to us human beings.¹¹

The question of the relationship between faith and reason is another theme that Benedict refers to in his speeches, and in many of his previous writings. We will return to this point again.

Although Benedict stresses the common European cultural heritage bequeathed to it by Christianity, he also recognizes that there are other elements involved in European culture, including classical Greek and Roman influences, which were brought to fruition through contact with the Christian Gospel. For example, in a letter on the occasion of the Study Day Organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and for Culture on the theme "Culture and Religions in Dialog," dated 8 December 2008, the Pope summed up the two thousand year heritage of Europe:

It is deeply rooted in the large and ancient patrimony of Athens and Rome and in the fertile terrain of Christianity, which proved capable of creating new cultural heritages while at the same time receiving the original contribution of every civilization.... Thus Europe today appears to us as a precious cloth whose fabric is woven from the principles and values spun from the Gospel, while the national cultures have been able to embroider it with an immense variety of perspectives that express the religious, intellectual, technical, scientific and artistic abilities of the *Homo europeus*.¹²

Benedict here maintains that the various national cultures, under the

influence of the values of the Christian Gospel, have helped form a common European culture. In the other direction, Christianity has also contributed substantially to the formation and development of the countries in Europe. In this connection, in his various diplomatic addresses, Benedict refers specifically to the role of Christianity in the history of Iceland, the Czech Republic, and Austria. For example, in the address to government authorities and diplomatic corps in Austria cited above, he concludes by pointing out the Christian heritage of Austria has made it what it is, providing its identity, and that this ought to be preserved in the daily lives of the Austrian people, and not only the historical heritage of its many churches and religious buildings:

Much of what Austria is and possesses, it owes to the Christian faith and its beneficial effects on individual men and women. The faith has profoundly shaped the character of this country and its people. Consequently it should be everyone's concern to ensure that the day will never come when only its stones speak of Christianity! An Austria without a vibrant Christian faith would no longer be Austria.¹³

This question is not merely an academic one. As statistics show, a recent trend of people leaving the Catholic Church in Austria continues. Official statistics of the Austrian Bishops Conference indicate that 87, 393 persons have officially left the church in 2010, resulting in a decrease of 1.4% in the number of the total Catholic population in Austria.¹⁴ Similarly, in an address to welcome Mr. Stefán Larus Stefánson, the new ambassador of Iceland to the Holy See, Benedict spoke of the role of Christianity in the development of Iceland's history, including its development through Christian missionary activity:

As Your Excellency has observed, integral to Iceland's history is the Gospel of Jesus Christ including its missionary dimension. For over a thousand years Christianity has shaped Icelandic culture. In more recent times these spiritual roots have found a degree of resonance in your relations with Europe. This common cultural and moral identity, forged by the universal values of Christianity, is not simply of historical importance. Being foundational, it can remain as a 'ferment' of civilization.¹⁵

It is important to note here Benedict's reference to the common cultural and moral identity which unites Iceland with Europe and which serve as foundational values of not only European society but indeed as values with universal appeal for the entire world. For Benedict, it is this universality of Christian values that

enable European nations to not only to make progress among themselves, but also to contribute to the development of peoples of the world.

Similarly, in an address to civil and political authorities and members of the diplomatic corps on a visit to the Czech Republic in 2009, Benedict takes the occasion to praise the magnificent architecture of Prague, "which is often spoken of as the heart of Europe," and goes on to explain how the meaning of this "heart" can be defined: "surely a clue is found in the architectural jewels that adorn this city. The arresting beauty of its churches, castle, squares and bridges cannot but draw our minds to God."¹⁶

Benedict then continues by maintaining that this beauty is a sign of a greater, spiritual beauty, which Christian faith points to. In essence, the core of the Christian heritage is faith, a faith that looks beyond the physical realities of this life to see the spiritual and transcendent realities that underlie it:

How tragic it would be if someone were to behold such examples of beauty, yet ignore the transcendent mystery to which they point. The creative encounter of the classical tradition and the Gospel gave birth to a vision of man and society attentive to God's presence among us. In shaping the cultural patrimony of this continent it insisted that reason does not end with what the eye sees but rather is drawn to what lies beyond, that for which we deeply yearn: the Spirit, we might say, of Creation.¹⁷

As we have seen so far, Benedict understands the Christian roots of Europe to be the common, fundamental values that all European countries share as their heritage and which have shaped European society throughout its history. These include equal dignity of all human beings, freedom, peace, the common good, human, intellectual, social and economic development, and a sense of history. Benedict also asserts that these Christian roots of Europe provide the basis for a European identity. Furthermore, the basis of true European unity is the cultural and moral values of Christianity, which are even more fundamental than economic or political ties.

It is this understanding of Europe's Christian roots that led him to criticize the Berlin Declaration of March 25, 2007 issued to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which founded the European Economic Community, precursor of the present day European Union.¹⁸ The Declaration, an initiative undertaken during the German Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2007, was intended to give a renewed push to the efforts for

constitutional reform. Benedict criticism focused on the failure to mention the Christian identity of Europe as a source of inspiration in its pursuit of unity. In an address to bishops and parliamentarians attending a convention organized by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) on March 24, 2007, Benedict stressed the Christian identity of Europe and the role of Christianity in the promotion of European unity, arguing that "an authentic European 'common home' cannot be built without considering the identity of the people of this Continent of ours. It is a question of a historical, cultural, and moral identity before being a geographic, economic, or political one; an identity comprised of a set of universal values that Christianity helped forge, thus giving Christianity not only a historical but a foundational role vis-a-vis Europe."¹⁹

2. The Christian Roots and European Identity

From these words, it is clear that Benedict sees these values as essential to European identity, not just in an historical sense, but in a "foundational" sense. It is these values that make Europe what it is, so that to disregard them would result in a loss of identity. Simply put, questioning these values that spring from Europe's Christian roots would bring about an identity crisis:

If, for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the Governments of the Union wish to "get nearer" to their citizens, how can they exclude an element essential to European identity such as Christianity, with which a vast majority of citizens continue to identify? Is it not surprising that today's Europe, while aspiring to be regarded as a community of values, seems ever more often to deny the very existence of universal and absolute values? Does not this unique form of "apostasy" from itself, even more than its apostasy from God, lead Europe to doubt its own identity?²⁰

Furthermore, and for what Benedict is even worse, denial of this identity ultimately leads to "apostasy" or "betrayal" of that which is most sacred, the non-negotiable ultimate value of human life. In an address to the participants in the First European Meeting of University Lecturers, whose theme was "A New Humanism for Europe" Benedict decries a pragmatism that makes the common good into an absolute value in its own right. By abandoning the ultimate value of human dignity in which all other values are grounded, it ultimately betrays the good which it seeks to protect:

A community built without respect for the true dignity of the human being, disregarding the fact that every person is created in the image of God ends up doing no good to anyone. For this reason it seems ever more important that Europe be on guard against the pragmatic attitude, widespread today, which systematically justifies compromise on essential human values, as if it were the inevitable acceptance of a lesser evil. This kind of pragmatism, even when presented as balanced and realistic, is in reality neither, since it denies the dimension of values and ideals inherent in human nature.²¹

In a similar vein, in an address at a concert given in honor of Pope Benedict by Horst Köhler, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany, the pope attributes one reason for the success of postwar Germany to the fact that its Fundamental Law, i.e., its constitution, is based on the priority of respect for human dignity, in responsibility before God: "And we owe this largely to the Fundamental Law. This Constitution contributed essentially to the peaceful development of Germany in the past six decades; for it urges people to give priority, in responsibility to God the Creator, to human dignity, priority to every legislative state, to respect for marriage and the family as the foundation of every society, as well as to have concern and profound respect for what is sacred to others."²²

For Benedict, the basic values at the foundation of society are absolute, in the sense that they are universally valid and self-evident to all people, everywhere. Only such values can serve to form a stable basis for society. In an address to members of the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe he stressed the universality of the value of basic human rights: "Keeping in mind the context of today's society in which different peoples and cultures come together, it is imperative to develop the universal validity of these rights as well as their inviolability, inalienability and indivisibility."²³

For Benedict, of course, it is the Christian faith which provides the basis of these universal values. While this may seem naive to many, for Benedict, the Christian roots of human values and rights have a rational basis and thus accessible to anyone who possesses reason. Thus, they can provide a basis for understanding and common ground for building unity among the peoples and states of Europe:

On different occasions I have pointed out the risks associated with relativism in the area of values, rights and duties. If these were to lack an objective rational foundation, common to all peoples, and were based exclusively on particular cultures, legislative decisions or court judgements, how could they offer a solid and long-lasting ground for supranational institutions such as the Council of Europe, and for your own task within that prestigious institution?²⁴

Here Benedict refers to "relativism" another common theme of his, to which he gave prominence in a homily delivered to the Cardinals at a Mass celebrated before the beginning of the Consistory that elected him pope. Rejecting criticism of belief in the Catholic faith as fundamentalism, he instead claims that it is a "dictatorship of relativism" that is the real problem:

Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.²⁵

Practically, however, those values which Ratzinger considers basic, fundamental, universal and inalienable, such as the dignity of human life, from conception to natural death, "and marriage — rooted in the exclusive and indissoluble gift of self between one man and one woman,"²⁶ are not so self-evident, as is clear from the controversy over abortion, euthanasia, and the rights of homosexuals to marriage, which often pit not only Christians against non-Christians, but also Christians against each other.

Actually, Benedict is not unaware of this conflict. However, he insists that there are universal values and that they are based on the transcendent dimension of human nature, the fundamental truth about human nature can only be understood as a God given and therefore inviolable gift. He speaks to this issue in an address to participants of the First European Meeting of University Lecturers in June 2007, whose theme was "New Humanism for Europe."

First Benedict asserts the Christian origins of humanism: "Historically, it was in Europe that humanism developed, thanks to the fruitful interplay between the various cultures of her peoples and the Christian faith. Europe today needs to preserve and reappropriate her authentic tradition if she is to remain faithful to

her vocation as the cradle of humanism."²⁷

He then goes on to exhort the participants to face three issues that he considers especially urgent for higher education to address. The first is what he considers a crisis of modernity, which has led to an attempt to form a humanism without God, a humanism that is based on the premise that humanism is in conflict with theism. Rather, Benedict argues that human dignity, which is the basis of humanism, is guaranteed by the Christian understanding of human nature: "The anthropocentrism which characterizes modernity can never be detached from an acknowledgment of the full truth about man, which includes his transcendent vocation."²⁸

The second issue is the broadening of the understanding of rationality which is often too narrowly defined. For Benedict, faith and reason are not only compatible, but their interplay as an important source of inspiration in the development of European scholarship and education: "The rise of the European universities was fostered by the conviction that faith and reason are meant to cooperate in the search for truth, each respecting the nature and legitimate autonomy of the other, yet working together harmoniously and creatively to serve the fulfilment of the human person in truth and love." Furthermore faith can help reason to broaden itself, to keep it from becoming too narrowly focused only on one aspect of reality: "The concept of reason needs instead to be 'broadened' in order to be able to explore and embrace those aspects of reality which go beyond the purely empirical. This will allow for a more fruitful, complementary approach to the relationship between faith and reason."²⁹

The third issue is the contribution that Christianity can make to the humanism of the future, but only if faith and religion are not treated as irrational or subjective: "The question of man, and thus of modernity, challenges the Church to devise effective ways of proclaiming to contemporary culture the 'realism' of her faith in the saving work of Christ. Christianity must not be relegated to the world of myth and emotion, but respected for its claim to shed light on the truth about man, to be able to transform men and women spiritually, and thus to enable them to carry out their vocation in history."³⁰

In addition to emphasizing the contribution of Christianity in the formation of the basic values that form a consensus for realizing European unity, Benedict also points out that this Christian heritage continues to provide inspiration for modern society. For Benedict, the Christian heritage, is an essential part of

European culture, and only by recognizing it will Europe fulfill her role in the world. Europe as whole will be able to meet the challenges it faces if it keeps true to the Christian understanding of the nature of man: "The immense intellectual, cultural and economic resources of the continent will continue to bear fruit as long as they continue to be fertilized by the transcendent vision of the human person, who constitutes the most precious treasure of the European heritage. This humanistic tradition in which many very different branches of thought can be recognized, makes Europe capable of facing the challenges of the future and of responding to the expectations of its population."³¹

Similarly, unless Europe understands its own cultural identity, it will not be able to make a contribution to the advancement of other peoples and the development of the other parts of the world. As Benedict said in an address to participants of the First European Meeting of University Lecturers in June 2007, "the effort to reconcile the drive to specialization with the need to preserve the unity of knowledge can encourage the growth of European unity and help the continent to rediscover its specific cultural 'vocation' in today's world. Only a Europe conscious of its own cultural identity can make a specific contribution to other cultures, while remaining open to the contribution of other peoples."³²

Again, in his above mentioned letter on the occasion of the Study Day Organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and for Culture on the theme "Culture and Religions in Dialog," Benedict held up European humanism as a model not only for Europe, but for the world as whole, and spoke of the responsibility that accompanies it: "In this sense, we may affirm that Europe has had and still has a cultural influence on the entire human race, and cannot fail to feel particularly responsible not only for its own future but also for the future of humanity as a whole."³³

In a similar way, on his visit to the Czech Republic referred to above, Benedict also made mention of the role of Europe in the world and its past and future contribution to the progress of world civilization:

At the present crossroads of civilization, so often marked by a disturbing sundering of the unity of goodness, truth and beauty and the consequent difficulty in finding an acceptance of common values, every effort for human progress must draw inspiration from that living heritage. Europe, in fidelity to her Christian roots, has a particular vocation to uphold this transcendent vision in her initiatives to serve the common good of individuals, communities, and nations.³⁴

3. The Christian Roots and the Present Role of the Catholic Church in Europe

So far, we have seen how, for Benedict, the Christian roots of Europe not only provide it with its essential identity but also the basis for its contribution to the progress of European society and, in a wider sense, to world civilization. At the same time, it is these Christians roots that serve as the rationale for the Catholic Church to promote the movement for Christian unity and justify the Catholic Church's engagement with other European political and social organizations that are working toward the achievement of practical cooperation and unity.

As pope, Benedict is not only the head of the Catholic Church, he is also the head of state of Vatican City, and as such, there is also a political dimension to his activities. This is already evident from the above citations of his addresses to government officials and diplomats. While Benedict, as we have seen, often refers to the Christian roots of Europe in describing the role of Christianity in the formation of European culture, he seldom refers to the role that the Church and the papacy have played in political developments in Europe throughout the centuries of European history. However, he does refer to the role of the Vatican since the twentieth century in an address to participants in a study congress organized on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the Lateran Treaties that created the present Vatican City State.

In this address, he refers somewhat vaguely to the "turbulent historical process" that led to the creation of the Vatican in its present state, and sees the anniversary as an occasion of "deep thanksgiving to the Lord who guides the destiny of his Church through often turbulent events in the sea of history." He then proceeds to give the present system of Vatican City government a positive evaluation as a means for ensuring the freedom of the Church to carry out its mission:

Thus it may be said that throughout the eight decades of its existence, the Vatican State has proven itself a flexible instrument equal to the demands made on it and that continue to be made on it by the mission of the Pope, the needs of the Church and the ever mutating conditions of society.³⁵

Benedict also praises his predecessor, Pius XI, as the principal mover in the Lateran Pacts that created the Vatican State, and how its establishment helped the Church to better carry out its mission in the modern world: "Vatican City State, which came into being subsequent to the Lateran Pacts and in particular the

Treaty, was also considered by Pius XI as a means of guaranteeing the necessary independence from every human power in order to enable the Church and her Supreme Pastor to accomplish fully the mandate received from Christ the Lord."³⁶

There is, of course, room to debate just how much practical influence the Pope and the Vatican have had and continue to have in the world. Note for example the controversy over the role played by Pius XII in World War II – whether he did all that he could under the circumstances, as his defenders claim, or whether he should have been more forceful in his condemnation of the Nazi persecution and massacre of the Jews in the Holocaust. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the Vatican today is an internationally recognized legal entity that enjoys diplomatic status, and does not hide its intentions to use that status wherever it sees it as beneficial to carrying out its mission. In fact, Benedict points to the relative weak political power of the Vatican as a sign that its existence and significance are of a different dimension:

The *Civitas Vaticana* is, in truth, an almost invisible point on the geographical maps of the world, a minute and defenceless State unequipped with dreaded armies, seemingly insignificant in the great international geo-political strategies. Yet this visible guarantee of the absolute independence of the Holy See was and is the centre of outreach of a constant action on behalf of solidarity and the common good. And is it not perhaps true that for this very reason this small piece of land is watched everywhere with great attention?³⁷

Indeed, as Archbishop Paul Gallagher, a Vatican diplomat since 1984, who served as Special Envoy / Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg from 2000 to 2004, points out, even in the centuries where the pope actually wielded temporal power in the Papal States, his spiritual authority was always exercised independently of it. The fact that the pope could serve as an arbiter between opposing nations was not because of his temporal power, but rather because of his internationally recognized spiritual authority. Even today, the direct influence of Vatican City as a political and legal identity is negligible. Its influence rather comes from the mission of the Church's outreach to humanity in general. In any case, the Vatican as of 2005 had diplomatic relations with 178 countries, twice as many as when John Paul II took office in 1978.³⁸

It is clear that Benedict also sees the role of the Church in the world and in

Europe in the same way, that is, as promoting international cooperation and peace as a means of carrying out its ministry of the Gospel:

Thus may believers always be ready to promote initiatives of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in order to encourage collaboration on themes of mutual interest, such as the dignity of the human person, the search for the common good, the building of peace, and development. In this regard the Holy See has given special importance to its own participation in the high-level dialogue on understanding among religions and cultures and on cooperation for peace, within the framework of the 62nd General Assembly of the United Nations (4-5 October 2007).³⁹

And again, in his address Mr. Gazzo, head of the delegation of the commission of European Communities to the Holy See in 2009, Benedict describes how he sees the role of the Church in Europe. It is essentially one of reminding Europeans of their Christian roots and calling them to keep true to the fundamental values at the core of this heritage:

For all these reasons, Mr Ambassador, the Holy See follows with respect and great attention the activity of the European Institutions. . . . The Church desires to "accompany" the construction of the European Union. For this reason she permits herself to remind the Union of the founding and constitutive values of European society so that they may be promoted for the good of all. . . . When the Church recalls the Christian roots of Europe she is not seeking a privileged status for herself. She wants to act as a historical memory by recalling first and foremost a truth increasingly passed over in silence namely, the undeniably Christian inspiration of the founding Fathers of the European Union. More profoundly, she also wishes to demonstrate that the basic values come mainly from the Christian heritage which still today continues to nourish it.⁴⁰

Actually, the Vatican is actively engaged in various international organizations, including many European institutions that promote international cooperation. For example, the Vatican has membership in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), has diplomatic relations with the European Communities and observer status with the Council of Europe. It also has membership in the Development Bank of the Council of Europe, the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (also known as the North-South Centre), the Partial Agreement on Democracy through law (also known as the Venice Commission), and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.⁴¹

By its very nature, of course, the Catholic Church is a supranational institution. As the bearer of faith that promises salvation to all of humanity, it has always claimed the allegiance of people without regard to national, linguistic, or racial borders. Throughout its history, its faithful, from whatever nation, have always looked to the pope for moral guidance. It is only natural that the Catholic Church and its faithful should show sympathy for and even actively support the movement toward European unity.

In fact, studies of cross sections of EU citizens show that Catholics more consistently favored European integration than Protestants or those without any religion. According to the researchers, "rigorous controls for political engagement, partisanship, ideology, economic vulnerability, age, sex, education and class could not explain away religion's effects. The independent influence of religion proved resilient, robust — and in analysis of data from 1973 to 1998 — durable over time." The same study however, seems to suggest that a decline in religious commitment could result in a lessening of support for European integration.⁴²

Furthermore as Benedict notes in this address to Mr. Gazzo, many of the leaders of involved in the post World War II reconstruction of Europe, such as Konrad Adenauer in Germany, Robert Schuman in France, and Alcide de Gasperi in Italy, were indeed motivated by their Christian convictions. As leading members of the postwar Christian Democracy movement, their political philosophy was consciously based on Christian principles of human dignity and social justice. Benedict paid homage to their political progeny in an address to the members of the European People's Party (EPP) on the occasion of its Study Days in Europe. The EPP is a centre-right parliamentary group with members from seventy-parties. It traces its roots back to Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and Alcide de Gasperi and the earliest stages of the movement for European integration.⁴³ In his address Benedict commended the group for its support of the Christian heritage of Europe, which he believes will serve to help increase the awareness among Europe's citizens of belonging to a common civilization. "I therefore appreciate your Group's recognition of Europe's Christian heritage, which offers valuable ethical guidelines in the search for a social model that responds adequately to the demands of an already globalized economy and to demographic changes, assuring growth and employment, protection of the family, equal opportunities for education of the young and solicitude for the poor."⁴⁴

Conclusion

To sum up, what in Benedict's view has Christianity contributed to European civilization? In addition to the cultural contributions of monasticism, that is the culture of the word, music, and the culture of work, there are the fundamental human values underlying modern society: the equal dignity of human beings, freedom, peace, active development of society as a god-given vocation, and a sense of history. And it is precisely these Christian roots that make Christianity a continuing source of inspiration for European cultural unity and integration. This is also the justification for the Catholic Church to promote the movement for European unity and integration and to engage actively with those institutions that are seeking to advance cooperation and realize unity among the European nations and among the nations of the world. In essence, for Benedict, the Christian roots of Europe provide it with its "identity," which it is in danger of losing by forgetting those roots.

Apart from his continued appeals to acknowledge the Christian roots of Europe Benedict, the positive engagement of the Vatican with organizations and institutions working for cooperation and unity in Europe and throughout the world, Benedict has also set up a new organization within the Catholic Church for the "re-evangelization" of the Western world. This new organization the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, the first pontifical council to be erected in more than twenty-five years, was established in a letter in the form of a *motu proprio* on September 21, 2010. In establishing the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Benedict explained his rationale: "what all the Churches living in traditionally Christian territories need is a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace."⁴⁵

It is true that neither the term "new evangelization," nor the rationale behind it originated with Benedict. However he has made it his own priority. In this document which established the new Pontifical Council, Benedict cited the concerns of his predecessors for the problem of the growing secularization of Western society and its concomitant weakening of Christian faith. Paul VI had issued an Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975, which addressed the theme of the Church's mission to evangelize the whole world, including those areas in which many of the baptized had fallen away from an active Christian life or lacked sufficient understanding of the faith. Likewise John Paul II, in December 1988, had

issued a post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Christifideles Laici*, in which he referred to areas where Christianity had previously flourished, but where the faith was now exposed to the effects of secularization and indifference to religion. In the same way, John Paul II's post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* issued on 28 June 2003 after the Second Synod of European Bishops held in 1999, emphasizes the role that Christianity has played in the formation of European civilization and offers the support of the Church in the promotion of unity, all based on the premise of the Christian roots of Europe. He concluded the document with the following challenge: "Europe, as you stand at the beginning of the third millennium, open the doors to Christ! Be yourself. Rediscover your origins. Relive your roots."⁴⁶

Now at age 83, Benedict appears to be relatively healthy and may continue in office for several years. In any case, it may be safe to say that a pope who consciously chose to name himself Benedict after two personages who played important roles in European history will continue to devote his papacy to what he sees as his mission to remind Europe of its Christian roots.

NOTES

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[<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:310:0003:0010:EN:PDF>]
- 3 Treaty of Lisbon Amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, 2007/C 306/01 *Official Journal of the European Union* Vol. 50, 17 (December 2007), p. 10.
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9 Address to Mr. Yves Gazzo, Head of the Delegation of the Commission of European Communities to the Holy See, 19 October 2009.

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11 *Ibid.*

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[http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20081203_culture-religioni_en.html]

13 Meeting with the Authorities and Diplomatic Corps, Hofburg, Vienna, Friday 7 September 2007.

14 Kathweb Katholische Presseagentur Österreich

[<http://www.kathpress.at/site/nachrichten/database/36865.html>]

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[http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/june/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070601_ambassador-iceland_en.html]

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- 25 Mass «*Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice*» Homily of His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals, Vatican Basilica, 18 April 2005.
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- 35 Address to Participants in the Study Congress Organized on the Occasion of the 80th Anniversary of Vatican City State, Clementine Hall, 14 February 2009.
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- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Paul Gallagher, "The Holy See and Europe: an Enduring Commitment," in James Barnett, ed., *A Theology for Europe: the Churches and the European Institutions*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 93-95.
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- 40 Address to Mr. Yves Gazzo, Head of the Delegation of the Commission of European Communities to the Holy See, 19 October 2009.
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- 42 Brent F. Nelsen and James L. Guth, "Religion and Youth Support for the European Union," in: *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* Vol. 41, No. 1, (2003), p. 89.
- 43 See the description of the EPP on its official website at <http://www.epp.eu/> party.
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