



## Catholic Social Teaching and Europe

Frank Turner

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### Abstract

The paper describes the settings for an official dialogue between religious communities, including the Catholic Church, and the institutions of the European Union. It goes on to describe some important and necessary contributions that a Christian vision can make to the European project. Finally it considers how far certain styles (rather than content) of Catholic discourse can impede the reception of this vision, and so render effective dialogue more difficult.

### Keywords

European Union, secularity, dialogue, Magisterium, methodology of Catholic Social Teaching

### Introduction

I am a member of the Church, even a professional Catholic. The Church and authentic mission are central to me. I am also a kind of 'believer' in Europe and the European Union (EU), which will be my main but not exclusive focus.<sup>1</sup> I am convinced of the fundamentally positive character of the EU, despite the many criticisms to be made about its functioning and policies – as with any other power-structure. I shan't be surprised to meet some Euro-scepticism here. In the London underground recently, I saw an airline advertisement (for Lufthansa, I may add, not for BA), that began 'Europe – from £49'. I had thought I was *in* Europe.

I believe that the EU enables states to transcend their national identity and interests by exercising political authority together with other states; and by establishing economic arrangements that embody a degree of transnational care for the weaker. Like all powerful collectivities, the EU constantly falls short of its aspirations. But

<sup>1</sup> The EU has twenty-seven member states, whereas the Council of Europe has forty-seven (every European country deemed to be a democracy with a respect, in principle, for human rights, i.e., every European country except Belarus).

the aspiration itself, to construct *by consent* a new kind of political body that relativises the power of sovereign states, that is adequate to the transnational realities of the modern world, is neither simply economic (as successive British Governments of whatever stripe would prefer) nor simply hierarchical, is a remarkable and unprecedented venture. (It does not apply, for example, to the UN, where the nations cooperate – but represent *themselves*.)

My paper has three main sections:

- the openness of the EU to Christian thinking, and the Church's openness to the secular character of the EU;
- the positive contribution, actual and potential, of Catholic Social Teaching to the EU's self-understanding;
- some factors that seem to limit the efficacy of the Church's contribution.

I shall argue that Catholic Social Teaching has much to offer the EU: but that three factors prevent it from achieving its full impact: an unduly negative view of the secular European project, certain aspects of ecclesiology, and a too-limited methodology.

## I. The mutual openness of the EU institutions and the Catholic Church

Europe is 'secular' in that there is a clear distinction (not separation) between the realms of church and state. The path of secularisation was confidently predicted to pass from secularity to secularism, roughly on the 'French model'. I define the key terms as follows:

- **Secularisation** is the prolonged cultural process by which almost every field of study and action is seen to have an inherent logic and autonomy, and is not to be governed by extrinsic religious considerations;
- **Secularity**, in the political arena, entails the procedural impartiality of the state and of civic institutions – between religions, and between religious and non-religious groups. Public debate may occur freely between world-views, but none may claim state sponsorship;
- **Secularism**, more assertive in Europe than elsewhere, proposes the *exclusion* of religious belief and expression from public life. In aspiring to be the legitimate judge of the religious sphere, secularism claims not merely separation from religion but control over it.

The dominant ‘French model’ of secularism derives partly from anti-clericalism (a reaction to the Church’s influence within the *ancien régime*), partly from the paradigm of the French constitution: there are two quasi-absolutes, state and citizen, and every intermediate association is subordinate to these two. (The doctrine has some odd expressions. The socialist Mayor of Strasbourg explained in June that Halal food would be available in the city’s schools in the name of ‘diversity’ but that there would be no fish on Friday – in the name of ‘laïcité’!)<sup>2</sup>

Even though the Church in France has learned to negotiate the *status quo*, no Christian can accept that religious expression be radically excluded from the public sphere (as if God were Lord of only part of our lives). Today, though, the Church acknowledges the *secularity* of the state and the limits to be placed on the Church’s political role. In London, in September, 2010 Pope Benedict said this:

Objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, [aside from] the content of revelation . . . . The role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles.<sup>3</sup>

The Pope insists that the Church neither claims ‘power over the State’, nor wishes to impose what is proper to faith on those who do not share it. He also acknowledges ‘distortions of religion – sectarianism and fundamentalism – which arise when insufficient attention is given to the purifying and structuring role of reason within religion’.<sup>4</sup>

The EU institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council) are explicitly secular, though their three current presidents are all publicly known as Christians: two are Catholic, one – the Polish one! – is Protestant. They are *not* secularist, though in the European Parliament it sometimes seems procedurally permissible to attack the Church, but not to defend it. Any sense that such secularism would become

<sup>2</sup> <http://prophetie-biblique.com/forum-religion/islamisation-occident/strasbourg-hallal-laicite-poids-mesures-t1711.html>

<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with the Representatives of British Society, Westminster Hall, London, 17 September, 2010. ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20100917\\_societa-civile\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100917_societa-civile_en.html)). See also the Archbishop of Canterbury’s address on the same day: (<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/946/the-fraternal-visit-of-pope-benedict-xvi-to-archbishop-rowan-williams>)

<sup>4</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* §.56 acknowledges religious fundamentalism and does not merely project it outwards to Islam or to the US religious right. However, the Pope never, as far as I know, acknowledges what might be the characteristic ‘Catholic fundamentalism’ – the tendency to treat magisterial documents in an uncritical way that we no longer treat, for example, the Scriptural sources. I return to this point below.

normative has vanished. Instead, there has emerged *post-secularism*: the sense that it is futile and unjust to dismiss religious convictions from the public sphere. The emergence of post-secularism has its intrinsic logic.<sup>5</sup> But for our purposes, the *extrinsic* factors are of special interest:

- the collapse of the great atheistic, religion-suppressing, twentieth-century movements, especially since these movements (led by such as Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot) destroyed more lives than religion ever did. No one can nowadays systemically attribute violence to religion;
- the rise of Islam – which everyone realises cannot plausibly be restricted to the so-called private sphere;
- the entry into the EU in 2004 and 2007 of states with very different models of church-state relations than that of, say, France.

In France itself, a rebalancing is under way. At the Lateran Palace, in December 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy articulated a ‘laïcité positive’. Laïcité remains ‘a fundamental claim to liberty – freedom both to accept and reject religious belief and practice. Political decisions would never be made in France on religious grounds. However, he argued, the roots of France are ‘essentially Christian’. ‘It is very important that one’s political reflection and conscience are illuminated by the ‘spiritual’ – by views that refer to ‘norms and convictions free from immediate contingencies’. For this reason alone, secular France ‘needs convinced Catholics’. Admittedly, ‘convinced Catholics’ seem here to be regarded only as vague witnesses to transcendence: still, the cultural wind is shifting in France, though Sarkozy predictably drew a storm of criticism from the French left.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> a) It is acknowledged that religious consciousness, far from being a danger to society, is a civic asset, forming in believers a strong sense of community, moral seriousness, personal integrity and civic responsibility.

b) It is unjust and irrational that religious people are asked, in the name of tolerance and cultural pluralism, to keep their beliefs and norms ‘private’ in order to avoid disturbing the public project of secularism. Ejecting religious belief from the public realm excludes from discussion many people’s deepest beliefs about human life: so it injects public debates with a sense of unreality, while denying the pluralism that one claims to safeguard;

c) this so-called ‘private realm’ to which religion is *ex hypothesi* confined is in no way removed from politics but is *itself* politicised: thus, for example, the nature of the family is now a key and contested issue of *public* policy.

<sup>6</sup> Francois Hollande, first secretary of the Parti socialiste, a presidential candidate, said absurdly that it was ‘*une vieille rengaine de la droite la plus cléricale*’ – an ‘old tune of the clericalist far-right’! Jean-Pierre Chevènement begged a number of questions simultaneously by defining laïcité as ‘the belief that it is within our human capacity to define the common good in the public space, so eliminating the empire of dogma’: as if certain forms of secularism were not themselves dogmatic, and as if religious articulations of the common good bypassed human capacities.

In the EU itself this rebalancing has led to Article 17 (TFEU) of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Treaty acknowledges ‘the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States’, recognises ‘their identity and their specific contribution’, and promises ‘an open, transparent and regular dialogue’ (each of these adjectives being defined) with these churches – as also with philosophical and non-confessional organisations. There has long been a political dialogue between the EU institutions and religious groups, to which others sometimes objected. Now the dialogue has a firm legal basis. Churches and church institutions are deemed ‘interest partners’: not ‘lobbyists’ (they lobbied hard not to be called ‘lobbyists’), not antagonists.

The modes of this dialogue remain to be worked out. The EU hopes to avoid incorporating an extra phase of bureaucratic consultation. The religious partners still have to convince sceptics that they are interested in the wider world, not only in defending religious rights and positions. One difficulty arises because the Christian contribution derives less from any detailed technical expertise, but from its anthropological perspective. Discussions at that fundamental level are uncongenial to EU institutions, where officials are specialists, not generalists and require pragmatic results. A second problem arises because the European Commission wants to avoid the invidious task of deciding who validly represents, say, the Catholic Church. It leaves the choice to the European bishops’ secretariat, COMECE, which will hardly name delegates seen as dissenters.

I have described a new, cautious openness on the part of the EU. What of the Church? Here, too, despite its long-standing appeals for the establishment of dialogue, openness is qualified.<sup>7</sup>

*Ecclesia in Europa*, Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation following the Second Synod of Bishops on Europe in 2003, is a document about the Church, not about Europe as such. Nevertheless, it takes a stark view of contemporary European culture and politics. §.7 regrets the ‘loss of Europe’s Christian memory and heritage... [the] practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots’. A vision of Europe is created which ‘ignores its religious heritage, and in particular, its profound Christian soul’.<sup>8</sup> §.9 goes further: ‘Forgetfulness of God led to the abandonment of man’, leading to ‘the

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful summary of papal approaches to European politics, from 1945 to the beginning of the reign of Benedict XVI, see Anthony O’Mahony, ‘The Vatican and Europe: Political Theology and Ecclesiology in Papal Statements from Pius XII to Benedict XVI’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 9 (2009), 177–194.

<sup>8</sup> The Pope acknowledges various sources of the authentic values of contemporary Europe but ‘these inspiring principles have historically found in the Judaeo-Christian tradition a force capable of harmonizing, consolidating and promoting them. This is a fact which cannot be ignored’ (§.19, cf also 24–25).

unrestrained development of nihilism in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality', conveying the impression of "“silent apostasy” on the part of people who have all that they need and who live as if God does not exist.'

Agnosticism is here represented as a 'forgetfulness', as if Europeans would once again acknowledge God if they paused to 'remember'. 'Europe is called above all to rediscover its true identity... those fundamental values, acquired through a decisive contribution of Christianity... the affirmation of the transcendent dignity of the human person, the value of reason, freedom, democracy, the constitutional state and the distinction between political life and religion.' (§.109)

Some values mentioned here were perhaps more evident in the Reformation than in the Church which preceded it and opposed it: for example, the possibility of critical thinking and of resistance to authority. More generally, English lacks the useful French distinction between 'christianisme' (the ethos of communities of faith) and 'chrétienté' (the visible, institutionalised realisation). The concept of 'heritage' conflates these two dimensions. What is primarily rejected (rather than 'forgotten') is the 'Christian heritage' in the form of *Christendom*, in which the profession of faith was buttressed by the Church's control of the political and cultural sphere.<sup>9</sup> According to Paul Ricoeur, what was rejected was the bargain through which the Church blessed political power (now desacralised) and the State favoured ecclesiastical institutions (now marginalised): what Ricoeur called 'unction' and 'sanction'. The Church was stripped of its capacity to coerce. That is why M. Sarkozy sees *laïcité*, even in his moderated form, as *essential claim to freedom*. Although the Magisterium now affirms the autonomy of the secular political order, one cannot read this modern affirmation back into the 'Christian heritage' as when *Ecclesia in Europa* claims that the positive characteristics of the democratic state derive 'decisively' from Christianity.

I have developed this argument because *Ecclesia in Europa* underpins subsequent papal interventions on Europe.<sup>10</sup> In May 2007, I was

<sup>9</sup> In *Christendom*, as Paul Ricoeur explains, Church and State were mutually supportive. There was an exchange between 'unction' and 'sanction'. The Church blessed the State and the State offered the force of the 'secular arm' to defend the Church (for example, against heretics). Each supplied what the other intrinsically lacked: spiritual power for the political order, and material constraint for the spiritual order. See Ricoeur, "“Tolérance, intolérance, intolérable”," in *Lectures, I: Autour de Politique (La Couleur des Idées)* (Seuil, Paris, 1991), 295ff.

<sup>10</sup> Magisterial documents are strongly *intertextual*, justifying their positions not only by analysis of the world but by citing earlier texts. A changed position tends to be marked simply by ceasing to restate the earlier view.

present at an address of Pope Benedict to a conference marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.<sup>11</sup> He described Europe's identity as 'a historical, cultural, and moral identity before it is a geographic, economic, or political one'. He said that the continent is on a long road to reconciliation, towards which the development of the EU is ordered, so graciously endorsing a fundamental element of the EU's self-image from its beginnings in 1950 as the European Coal and Steel Community. But the core of the message derived from *Ecclesia in Europa* is:

Is it not surprising that today's Europe, while hoping to be seen as a community of values, more and more seems to contest that universal and absolute values exist? Does not this unique form of 'apostasy' from itself, before even from God, lead to doubts about its identity?

This seems a strange argument. Values *always* come into tension with each other, so it is possible to be a 'community of values' without proclaiming any single value to be 'absolute' (and only one 'value' could *logically* be absolute): values *must* be 'weighed' to be interpreted and applied. A Catholic appealing to the value of 'human dignity' may readily conclude that euthanasia is morally unacceptable. A humanist invoking the same value (or a value with the same name) may infer that when one's life 'loses dignity' euthanasia becomes justifiable. The Swiss clinic *Dignitas* lays explicit claim to this value. One cannot settle the conflict of interpretation simply by proclaiming the value.

Like John Paul, Benedict uses the term 'apostasy' – although this time in a special sense – to mean a betrayal of *one's own* identity. Speaking to a Catholic audience, he presumed this identity rather than elaborated it. But the text itself was distributed well beyond that audience.

I suggest, then, that secular European politicians and officials are inhibited from attending seriously to Church teaching by their sense that the European project itself is seen by the Church as 'apostasy' (a fierce criticism). Secondly, since Catholic Social Teaching presents itself as being inserted in a comprehensive anthropological and doctrinal framework, those who reject the whole are unlikely to engage with the parts.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20070324\\_comece\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2007/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20070324_comece_en.html)

<sup>12</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* incorporates 'life issues' in Catholic Social Teaching. But the Church is simply not a partner in European Union discussions on abortion, bioethics, etc., since it is seen as absolutist, so that dialogue would be futile.

## II. The contribution of Catholic Social Teaching to the EU project

Two basic concepts of Catholic Social Teaching – subsidiarity and solidarity – have entered the linguistic bloodstream of the EU, although neither term is used in the EU in its full Catholic meaning. I note this only in passing,<sup>13</sup> and select three elements of Catholic Social Teaching that offer a salutary challenge to the practice of the EU: the mutually constitutive character of charity and justice; the migration policy that absolutises European interests against urgent human need; the primacy of ‘human flourishing’ over any given element of that flourishing, such as economic prosperity.<sup>14</sup>

### A. Charity and Justice

*Deus Caritas Est* argues that ‘love’ is a single reality, with different but inseparable dimensions (§.26–28).<sup>15</sup> *Caritas in Veritate* further develops this argument. ‘Charity goes beyond justice, because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his” . . . I cannot “give” what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice . . . Justice is the primary way of charity . . . (§.6). ‘This is the institutional path – we might also call it the political path – of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the pólis’ (§.7).

Whereas, to be fully human, a person must integrate charity and justice, one cannot require love of a *state*. However the argument of *Caritas in Veritate* has an analogue in terms of the EU’s *policy coherence*. The EU’s *development* policy – animated by ‘charity’ – is impressive (ECHO is the largest humanitarian fund in the world). Its *trade* policy (significantly the only policy field in which the EU

<sup>13</sup> In Catholic thought, solidarity is the moral imperative that flows from the communal character of human life: what affects others affects me. It entails a commitment to the attainment of a just social order, and seeks deeper unity for the sake of the common good. Every year’s report of the European Commission is studded with the word ‘solidarity’ – meaning any policy that promotes ‘social cohesion’ and international development, without commitment to dismantle the unjust structures from which the EU may benefit at the expense of others. Subsidiarity’, a concept that bears on every level of social organisation, becomes in the EU a code-word for defending the prerogatives of member states over against ‘Brussels’: to favour what in Brussels jargon is called the inter-governmental method against the ‘community method’. Mrs Thatcher was the great proponent of national sovereignty against the EU, whilst steadily undermining local government powers within the UK, as against the power of central government.

<sup>14</sup> Catholic Social Teaching will rarely distinguish between policies of the EU collectively on the one hand, and policies of some or most or all member states on the other: this distinction is naturally basic in EU debates themselves.

<sup>15</sup> Justice is the responsibility of the state: indeed ‘it is the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics’: (justice, note, not economic growth, or power, or even ‘freedom’ which is a part of justice).



acts with full authority on behalf of member states) derives from the paradigm of a harsh competitive struggle among the EU, the USA and the emerging economic powers of China, India and so on. Yet the sustainable development of poorer countries depends far more on just trade than on official development aid.

I offer one example: for five years our Jesuit European Office has conducted advocacy on the theme of corporate social responsibility on the part of mining companies active in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The European Commission and the member states insist that codes of such ‘CSR’ remain *voluntary* – therefore, that corporations operating abroad are legally speaking virtually unchallengeable. Even the EU’s own ‘Raw Materials Initiative’ of 2011 seeks to assure Europe’s supplies of strategic minerals from Africa and elsewhere, while paying little attention to the impact of mineral extraction on human rights and the environment in those countries where the minerals are found, and whose governments lack the capacity to enforce standards against foreign-based international corporations. (The governmental budget of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a country the size of Western Europe with a population of 60 million and with immense mineral resources, is roughly equivalent to that of the city of Antwerp.) Corporate lobbying and the EU’s self-interest have institutionalised a stark division between ‘charity’ and ‘justice’, and a practical denial of ‘solidarity’.<sup>16</sup>

## B. Refugee, Asylum and Migration Politics

The EU’s migration policy deserves to be mentioned. On 3 August 2011, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Munich, reported that 1820 persons had died in the Mediterranean between January and July 2011, while trying to reach Europe from North Africa. Migration and refugee policies, which the member states rightly seek to harmonise as far as possible, have become progressively harsher. The ‘Fortress Europe’ model gains increasing currency under the pressure of right-wing political movements, and of national political parties aware that no one ever won votes by defending the cause of migrants.

Here is another split between ‘charity’ and ‘justice’. The most severe migration crises occur outside Europe. Refugees and desperate ‘economic migrants’ pass, sometimes in hundreds of thousands, from Libya to Egypt or Tunisia, from Darfur to Chad, from Côte d’Ivoire to Liberia, from Somalia to Kenya. In such cases, the EU is supportive and financially generous. Its largesse presumes the almost unlimited openness of countries that we may otherwise little respect. Yet this year, in the face of far smaller (though substantial) numbers trying to come to Europe, even the Schengen Agreement itself was jeopardised.

<sup>16</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc\\_id=894&userservice\\_id=1](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/newsroom/cf/document.cfm?action=display&doc_id=894&userservice_id=1). See for example, the trade and regulatory policies set out in § 2.1.

The EU's main collective investment, through 'Frontex' has been to increase efficiency in *turning away* migrants. The Church is among the foremost defenders of migrants, almost everywhere in the world, even when otherwise timidly conservative: episcopal conferences, as well as the Holy See. Its response is practical as well as theoretical. The Jesuit Refugee Service, founded thirty years ago, has grown uniquely among Jesuit organisation. This sense of the Church as a truly global community is what we mean by 'catholic', and is the best possible base from which to challenge the European politics of exclusion.

### C. Politics, Economics, Human flourishing

I focus on a single argument of *Centesimus Annus* (1991), which attributes to the state:

the task of determining the juridical framework within which economic affairs are to be conducted, and thus of safeguarding the prerequisites of a *free economy* [my emphasis], which presumes a certain equality between the parties, such that one party would not be so powerful as to reduce the other to subservience (§.15).

Pope John Paul confronted the pervasive sense that after the defeat of communism there was no brake on market capitalism. *A fortiori*, his argument counters the then prominent thinkers of the 'New Right' such as Friedrich Hayek, who rejected *any* attempt to manage or limit the working of the market so as to produce some desired social outcome. New Right thinkers argued that it is illegitimate or even meaningless to evaluate 'society' as if it had to fit some *a priori* ideal of justice (such as 'a certain equality between the parties'). Since individuals have diverse goals, the very notion of a 'desired social outcome' merely reflects the coercive power of the state and the prejudices of bureaucrats. On this view, 'social justice' and *individual freedom* are divergent, even irreconcilable. Against Hayek's claim that the 'free market' is the core of human freedom,<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Hayek's best-known book argues that the State's acceptance of the role John Paul II would later prescribe for it sets society on *The Road to Serfdom*. On the contrary, Hayek and his followers take the 'free market' to be the principle of social life, and the only 'neutral one': as Hayek writes in a famous article, amusingly called 'Why I am not a conservative' (1960),

It is part of the liberal attitude to assume that, especially in the economic field, the self-regulating forces of the market will somehow bring about the required adjustments to new conditions, although no one can foretell how they will do this in a particular instance.

Hayek thinks that state intervention tends inevitably towards 'serfdom' – but that the market is 'neutral' and 'self-regulating' yet embodies 'freedom'. John-Paul would regard it as pseudo-religious blind faith to 'assume' (Hayek's own word) that the market 'will somehow bring about the required adjustments, though no one can foretell how'.

*Centesimus Annus* contrasts a ‘free-market economy’ with a ‘free economy’, because justice and freedom are mutually dependent. Where an economic system is absolutised at the expense of other dimensions of life, ‘economic freedom’ alienates and oppresses the human person (§.39).<sup>18</sup> As one might say nowadays, the possibility of human freedom requires *both* the common good and the defence of ‘common goods’, such as air and water: water at least being manifestly subjected to market logic.

Now the EU does *not* absolutise the market. Its social policies (social cohesion, structural funds, even the Common Agricultural Policy) seek to compensate for market outcomes. President Barroso has commented furiously on the speculation that derives vast profits from betting on the bankruptcy of states (not least since the prophecies may become self-fulfilling by drastically raising the cost of those states’ borrowing). However, the EU does come close to absolutising the notion of economic growth. The current EU ten-year framework strategy, ‘Europe 2020’, adopts the slogan, ‘Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’. Some kinds of growth are deemed better than others: but growth itself is non-negotiable. It has become a functional absolute.

I give one unlikely, ominous example. This year, the EU’s Commissioner of Education and Culture, Andrea Vassiliou, made a series of presentations about education in EU. Her Commission’s Report of April 2011 outlines statistical targets for 2020: reducing the proportion of ‘early leavers’ from 14.4% to less than 10%, raising the percentage of those in tertiary education from 32% to 40%, assuring increased opportunities for lifelong learning. So far, so good. As to the *purpose* of these programmes, she lists three ‘policy priorities’: (1) Help Europe compete globally; (2) Equip the young for today’s job market; (3) Address the consequence of the economic crisis. In an article ‘Securing Future Prosperity’, she wrote of higher education reform *in the service of ‘the EU 2020 strategy’* [my emphasis].<sup>19</sup> Universities need to be reshaped ‘to meet the needs of a fast-developing global society and economy’. The ‘knowledge triangle’ of education, research and business should ensure that students ‘gain access to the latest scientific knowledge’ and ‘the opportunity to apply this knowledge in the business environment’. At no point does Ms Vassiliou recognise a role for universities in – for example – generating critical perspectives on the business environment, some elements of which have led to the present financial crisis; still less does she seem to

<sup>18</sup> The French philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuis suggests that ‘the economy contains violence’ – the word ‘contains bearing a double sense: ‘*C’est-à-dire, qu’elle en contient et qu’elle la contient, la limite, la rend tolérable.*’ (cited by Jean Boissonnat, *Dieu et l’Europe* (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2005) p.157).

<sup>19</sup> In the Parliament magazine: <http://www.theparliament.com/policy-focus/culture-education/culture-article/newsarticle/securing-future-prosperity/>

envisage any critique of the hegemony of economic considerations. It is a crippling reductionism to represent education, a fundamental and potentially life-enhancing cultural system, as almost exclusively an instrument of economic growth. In the face of such a discourse (which truly is a kind of ‘forgetting’), the EU needs Catholic Social Teaching’s insistence that prosperity is only one feature of a good society.

### III. The problem of the Magisterium in Catholic Social Teaching

In Brussels, I sometimes present Catholic Social Teaching to Christian organisations that advocate at the EU, such as CIDSE and Caritas Europa. That is a lesser challenge than articulating the teaching directly in the political arena, or being invited to do so.<sup>20</sup> The challenge pertains to the whole genre of ‘magisterial’ literature – in our context, notably the encyclicals that are the central pillar of Catholic Social Teaching. I have argued that the EU needs such perspectives. Being no less African and Latin American than European, the Church can challenge sectarian political interests: its universality is not an abstraction but an *experience*, and governments recognise this, if sometimes grudgingly. However, this literary genre, like any other, has certain limitations. Since magisterial documents do not incorporate methodological discussions, they do not themselves draw attention to these problems. It is helpful that *readers* acknowledge them.

The magisterial perspective claims an over-arching teaching authority, holding together ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’, so it can engage with those of no religious belief, while drawing on Scripture and Christian doctrines and traditions as a privileged source of light for Christians. However, it functions in a culture where authority is not ‘over-arching’, but is plural and contested. People will not accept magisterial claims unless their experience gives prior ground for trusting the Church.

Second, even if ‘reason and revelation’ are held together, the term ‘reason’ here has a special sense. *Caritas in Veritate* contrasts two types of reasoning, between which we are ‘forced to choose’: ‘reason open to transcendence or reason closed within immanence’ (§.74). The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* refers to *orthós logos, recta ratio*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The groups which actively consult our Jesuit office are those with clear Christian links – mainly the group of the European People’s Party, the centre-right. (The group no longer includes the Tories, who emigrated from that group, seeing it as too Europhile, being now part of the fringe group of ‘European Conservatives and Reformists’ with an explicitly anti-federal programme.) We work with Greens or Socialists, but we have usually to take the initiative. Conversely, the EPP is less likely than are the Greens and the Socialists to support our work on justice issues.

<sup>21</sup> See also *Fides et Ratio* (1998) § 4. ‘It is as if we had come upon an *implicit philosophy*, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a

In the secular sphere, however, what interests policy-makers is not *recta ratio* but *critical reason* – where arguments are tested through criticism.

The notion of analytical and critical reason is, of course, not *alien* to Christianity. John Donne wrote in the seventeenth-century, ‘we must as well dispute *de veritate* as *pro veritate*’.<sup>22</sup> Magisterial documents, however, avoid this process. Claiming authority, they do not ‘dispute’.<sup>23</sup> Neither the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nor encyclicals seek to justify by reason the position taken, nor discuss opposing arguments that are finally rejected. The material itself is in no way ‘fundamentalist’, but it invites a *reception* that is not far from fundamentalist: it calls for assent to conclusions, dissociated from the supporting thought-process.

This avoidance of debate is reinforced by Pope Benedict’s preferred usage (or that of his English translators) ‘Catholic Social Doctrine’. (In the official English text of *Caritas in Veritate*, the expression ‘social teaching’ occurs four times, the expression ‘social doctrine’ more than twenty times.) Whether or not it is the Pope’s intention, to speak of ‘doctrine’ removes the text from the sphere of publicly contestable discourse. Thereby it may leave those outside the Church, who by definition do not accept Catholic ‘doctrine’, at a loss to know how to deal with it.

It follows, too, that magisterial discourse presumes the vitality of a complementary Catholic discourse that is properly critical, engaging with due modesty the positions of the Magisterium. Once questioning stops, answers are hollow: but the questions are perennial, and arise from within Christian faith as well as from outside it.

There is a second problem. The Magisterium cannot itself dissolve the necessary tension between *authority* and *competence*. A deceased friend of mine, Joyce Poole, wrote this, in a book about her experience of being a Catholic doctor:

general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, *orthós logos*, *recta ratio*.’ To be sure this concept of reason is not narrowly Catholic: Plato’s *nous* (inspired, imbued with religious insight) is not Cartesian rationalism.

<sup>22</sup> Yet because I thought that as in the pool of Bethesda. there was no health till the water was troubled, so the best way to finde the truth in this matter was to debate and vex it (for we must as well dispute *de veritate* as *pro veritate*). (John Donne, *Biathanatos*, 1608)

<sup>23</sup> In his personal christological writings as Pope, Benedict XVI has invited such free reaction and scholarly debate. But he thereby defines a different literary form than that of the encyclical. The 1986 US Bishops Pastoral on the Economy, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (USCCB, Tenth Anniversary Edition, 1997) exceptionally – I think, uniquely – included a process of extensive public consultation.

The authority of the Magisterium of the Church in matters within its competence is not here being questioned but there is an authority too residing in those of us who have a lifetime of listening in close and frank contact to the problems of ordinary people.<sup>24</sup>

The distinction between authority and competence derives from the famous essay of Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation' (1919). He distinguished 'the ethics of conviction' from the 'ethics of responsibility': on the one hand, clear and unambiguous principles; on the other hand, the work of those who cannot avoid *responsibility for consequences*. Each ethic is indispensable. Paul Ricoeur suggests that the 'ethic of responsibility', if it lacks a firm sense of conviction or principle, may fall into mere pragmatism (perhaps the cruder form of situation ethics). The ethic of conviction (Ricoeur gives the example of the Sermon on the Mount) articulates an 'optimum ethic' and is necessary to orient action towards the good of humanity and of each person. But the ethic of conviction, *taken alone*, without a careful and competent analysis of the specific situation, 'falls into moralism and clericalism'.<sup>25</sup> Now political decisions are the paradigm of 'responsibility'. Only those involved can determine how far any principle applies in a given situation and how far it gives way to other principles, according to some 'hierarchy of good'. This is the realm of the classic virtue of prudence.

To be Catholic is to share a world-view (though not necessarily every expression of that world-view). But on Pope Benedict's own account it is not the Church as such, still less the Holy See, which is competent in politics, in development and so on, and therefore not the Magisterium, which can judge how to make principles effective in the world of public policy.

Finally, almost in passing (though the point seems significant in practice), I wish that some magisterial texts avoided immodest expressions. A claim recently in vogue that 'the Church is an expert in humanity' is better not made for oneself, especially at a time when scandals have brought the Church into disrepute.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, I regret a sentence of *Caritas in Veritate*, §.78: 'A humanism which excludes God is an inhuman humanism'. A Christian may well hold that the

<sup>24</sup> Joyce Poole, *The Cross of Unknowing: Dilemmas of a Catholic Doctor* (Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1989), p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Tâches de l'éducateur politique," in *Lectures, I: Autour de Politique (La Couleur des Idées)* (Seuil, Paris, 1995), 241–247.

<sup>26</sup> It appears in the Prologue of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, it comes in the *opening sentence* of the 2004 Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the 'Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World'. It appears to derive from an address of John Paul II, though on that occasion he said something more innocent: 'There is a need for heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity' – a different matter.

denial of God leads to a 'less than fully human humanism'. One ought not to say more.

The need for a properly critical but Catholic reception of the Magisterium seems timely in the face of the forthcoming Synod on the 'New Evangelisation'. 'Ubi cumque et Semper' of September 2010, establishing the new Pontifical Council, lists among its objectives 'to promote and to foster... the study, dissemination, and implementation of the Papal Magisterium' and 'to promote the use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as an essential and complete formulation of the content of the faith for the people of our time'. The Magisterium is an *instrument* of evangelisation, however privileged, not itself the *content* of evangelisation: and the Catechism can hardly be 'essential and complete', as if new questions and insights might not emerge the day after publication. In the worst case (we need not assume this will come about) the 'New Evangelisation' would undermine ecclesial dialogue with a secular world.

#### IV. Conclusion

*Caritas in Veritate* was held back for several months, from the reasonable concern to avoid saying anything about the fast-moving financial crisis of 2008–9 that would later seem silly. It was issued on 29 June 2009, on the eve of the Swedish Presidency of the EU. A few days later, travelling on the Brussels metro, I met a senior EU official who is a pillar of the Catholic lay movement in France, theologically literate. He had just returned from a meeting in Sweden with officials of the new presidency. He told me that *Caritas in Veritate* had attracted a surprising degree of political interest. However, what struck my friend's secular colleagues was that one or two brief paragraphs are devoted to each of a series of pressing issues (population, economic ethics, the natural environment, etc), even though 'the Pope had obviously not listened to many social scientists'.

The social encyclicals written with the authority that rightly demands the respect of the Catholic community, offer a rich expression of the relationship of faith to contemporary public life, including the life of Europe. However it is neither congenial to, nor readily understandable by, secular democracy which proceeds by debate, by mutual criticism, at best courteous and mutually enriching, at worst strident and itself capable of fundamentalisms. On the side of the Church, the teaching needs not only to be of high intellectual quality. It needs to be presented in such a manner, as to commend itself in dialogue to those with secular policy responsibility. Second, the potential impact of the teaching depends on the broader ecclesial context. If the Church's own life is not seen as open to debate and

critical reason, it will not be a credible partner for those who take these ideals as fundamental to mature democratic politics.

*Frank Turner SJ*  
*Jesuit European Social Centre (JESC)*  
*rue du Cornet 51*  
*1040 Brussels*  
*turner@jesc.net*