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## Christianity—the Soul of Europe Inspired by Joseph Ratzinger

Europe is not defined by geographical borders.<sup>1</sup> It is not characterized by such realities as the free market or democracy popularized in many parts of the world. What sets Europe apart from other continents is its culture. Joseph Ratzinger emphasized that Europe is a cultural and historical category<sup>2</sup> and that it is a moral reality.<sup>3</sup> The cardinal drew attention to the profound cultural transformations that took place on the continent. It is first and foremost a crisis of Christianity and of the entire European culture. Europe is an area of profound change. This article presents the above-mentioned processes. Moreover, it analyzes the issue of typically European ideas and values growing out of

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<sup>1</sup> This article synthesizes deepened and expanded new elements of my previous publication: Wiesław Łużyński, *Publiczna rola Kościoła w nauczaniu Benedykta XVI* [The public role of the Church in the teaching of Benedict XVI] (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Europa: Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro* [Europe: Its foundations today and tomorrow], transl. Stanisław Czerwik (Kielce: Jedność, 2005), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Prowadzić dialog ze wszystkimi” [To dialogue with everyone], *Znaki Czasu: Kwartalnik Religijno-Społeczny* 26 (1992): 55.



Christianity and the need to maintain its Christian identity. In analyzing these issues, the author refers to the teachings of Joseph Ratzinger, who was a careful observer and perceptive commentator on cultural changes on the Old Continent. The issues presented set the basic structure of the article.

## **Cultural changes in Europe**

Christianity has shaped the identity of Europe and the nations that inhabit it. Nowadays, however, we observe clear signs of the process of secularization. From the Age of Enlightenment onwards, Christianity has been consistently marginalized and relegated to the private sphere and the realm of emotions.<sup>4</sup> Already as Pope, Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes that

we live in a cultural context marked by a hedonistic and relativistic mentality that seeks to remove God from the horizon of life.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural changes in Europe are moving towards a rejection of the Christian heritage that has shaped the cultural identity of this continent

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<sup>4</sup> Benedykt XVI (where referring to the Polish translation of Benedict XVI's works, the author will list the Polish spelling—Benedykt XVI), "Przemówienie w czasie niezapórów i spotkania z seminarzystami i osobami konsekrowanymi w Altätting 11.09.2006 [Address delivered during vespers and a meeting with seminarians and religious in Altätting 11.09.2006]," *L'Osservatore Romano* (Polish edition) 27, no. 11 (287) (2006): 24; Wioletta Szymczak, and Justyna Szulich-Kałuża, "Religious or Spiritual? Empirical Manifestations of Contemporary Changes in Poles' Self-Declarations and Media Representations]," *Verbum Vitae* 40, no. 4 (2022): 816, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.13903>.

<sup>5</sup> Benedykt XVI, "Przemówienie do uczestników kursu dla spowiedników zorganizowanego przez Penitencjarię Apostolską 11.03.2010 [Address to participants of a course for confessors organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary 11.03.2010]," *L'Osservatore Romano* (Polish edition) 31, no. 5 (322) (2010): 34.

for centuries. Europe experiences doubts concerning its own identity. Secularization is progressing very rapidly there. Christian communities are shrinking and ageing, vocations to the priesthood are in short supply, and churches are losing their social impact. Christianity in Europe is clearly in crisis, along with the culture of the continent.<sup>6</sup> By renouncing its Christian roots, Europe is becoming a continent without a culture of its own.<sup>7</sup> It promotes extreme secularism and rejects the values that shaped it. Deprived of its soul, the continent becomes inwardly empty. One could say that, in a cultural sense, Europe is about to die.<sup>8</sup> The consequences of this cultural and moral crisis become all too evident in the collapse of the institutions of marriage and family, the demographic crisis, the depopulation and ageing of populations, and the loss of the ethical foundations of law.<sup>9</sup> The death of God leads to the death of man. The exclusion of God from the public space has the effect of diminishing the human being and weakening the entire culture.<sup>10</sup>

In response to the process of secularization, Joseph Ratzinger proclaims the inalienability of Christianity in Europe. If important institu-

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<sup>6</sup> Łużyński, *Publiczna rola Kościoła* [Public role of the Church], 228; Stefano Abbate, “Pandemic and Desacralization: the New Political Order Founded on the Bare Life,” *Scientia et Fides* 11, no. 1 (2023): 109, <https://doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2023.012>.

<sup>7</sup> Benedykt XVI, “Przemówienie w Bundestagu 22.09.2011 [Address to the Bundestag 22.09.2011],” in *Uwolnić wolność: Wiara i polityka w trzecim tysiącleciu* [To liberate freedom: Faith and politics in the third millennium], by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, eds. Pierluca Azzaro and Carlos Granados, *Teksty wybrane* [Selected texts], vol. 5. *Polityka i wiara* [Politics and faith] (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II: Fundacja Rozwoju KUL, 2019), 137–138).

<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger, *Europa: Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro* [Europe: Its foundations today and tomorrow], 21, 31–32, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Jorge Martínez-Lucena, “The Issue of Social Control in Late Modernity: Alienation and Narrativity,” *Scientia et Fides* 11, no. 1 (2023): 141.

<sup>10</sup> Łużyński, *Publiczna rola Kościoła* [The public role of the Church], 229.

tions in the Western world, such as human rights, democracy, or tolerance are to survive, it is necessary to build on an axiological foundation rooted in Christianity. Moreover, European unity can only be built on the values that have shaped its identity and are rooted in Christianity. Let us look at selected elements of European culture highlighting their Christian roots.

### **The Christian roots of European culture**

One cannot underestimate the role of Christianity in shaping the European identity. Joseph Ratzinger emphasizes the fact that for centuries it has shaped the system of values, the criteria of judgment, and human consciousness concerning the dignity of man together with his vocation and his rights. Truths of evangelical origin shaped the secular consciousness related to freedom and equality of all people, bonds of brotherhood, and the autonomy of politics and faith. The values of European culture were strengthened under the influence of the evangelical ferment. These are the fruits of the presence of the Church and Christianity on this continent. Their emergence and persistence are closely linked to the continent's message and implicit impact on human and world consciousness. What Christianity taught us as the message of the Gospel, the secular mind remembered as a general human idea.<sup>11</sup> These values have shaped the culture of the West. Their vehicle was the community of the Church. They were propagated by missionaries and preachers. Religious and cultural centers were abbeys and monasteries. These were the clergy, teachers and educationalists who taught the values and educated in their spirit. Bishops and abbots

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Christianity and Democracy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 21, no. 1–2 (2009): 155.

were important patrons of authors of culture.<sup>12</sup> Over the centuries, Europe has identified itself with Christianity. Its heritage consists of Jerusalem, which stands for religious faith; Athens, symbolizing the tradition of philosophical reason; and Rome, which gave Europe a heritage of law. This heritage includes modernity, which one should observe is characterized by immanentism – a reason that is focused on itself and cuts out any reference to transcendence.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the influence of religion, Christian values have become “part of the generally accepted system of social norms.”<sup>14</sup> Nowadays, the Church is a defender of the “secular resources of Christian thought.”<sup>15</sup> A rational legitimation of law and politics draws on the “secularized sources of religious tradition.”<sup>16</sup> The aforementioned values, norms and principles of social life will lose their vitality if they are deprived of evangelical inspiration.

When analyzing the essential values of Europe growing out of Christianity, one should note the dignity of the human person, public worship of God, dignity of conscience, love of neighbor, fraternity and religious–political dualism in the relationship between the state and the church. These elements are but a few on the long list of the rich European culture. However, they do form its foundations. Let us draw

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<sup>12</sup> Wolfgang Huber, “Europa als Wertegemeinschaft,” *Die politische Meinung* Aug. 386 (01. Januar 2002): 64, <https://www.kas.de/de/web/die-politische-meinung/artikel/detail/-/content/europa-als-wertegemeinschaft>.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa: Tożsamość i misja* [Real Europe: Identity and mission], eds. Pierluca Azzaro and Carlos Granados, *Teksty wybrane* [Selected texts]. T. 3, Europa (Lublin: Fundacja Rozwoju KUL, 2022), 15–18, 31–36.

<sup>14</sup> Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Wie überlebt das Christentum?* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000), 107.

<sup>15</sup> Kaufmann, *Wie überlebt das Christentum?*, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Wierzyć i wiedzieć [Believing and knowing],” transl. Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, *Znak* 54, no 9 (568) (2002): 16.

our attention to the Christian origins of these values as interpreted by Joseph Ratzinger – one of the greatest thinkers of modern times.

An issue central to the entirety of social life is the concept of man. Christianity gave Europe the humanism of the Incarnation. Its fruit was the formation of the inalienable dignity and equality of every individual. J. Ratzinger emphasizes:

The figure of Jesus Christ finds a central place in the history of Europe and is the basis of true humanism, of a new humanity. If God became man, then man would receive an entirely new dignity. [...] And when God himself became man, when he even suffered for man, then man participated in the dignity of God himself. Whoever raises his hand against man attacks God himself. Respect for human dignity and respect for the rights of every individual—these are the fruits of faith in the Incarnation of God.<sup>17</sup>

God became man so that man could be elevated to divine dignity. In this admirable dialogue, man turns to the Divine YOU. In this relationship, an individual begins to understand himself as someone who is loved and wanted as a partner in the relationship. An individual discovers that he is someone important, ultimately that he is a person.<sup>18</sup> In this way, he finds the hope and purpose of life and its secure basis.<sup>19</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa: Tożsamość i misja* [Real Europe: Identity and mission], eds. Pierluca Azzaro and Carlos Granados, *Teksty wybrane* [Selected texts]. Vol. 3, Europa (Lublin: Fundacja Rozwoju KUL, 2022), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Europa Benedykta w kryzysie kultur* [Benedict's Europe in the crisis of cultures], transl. Wiesława Dzieża (Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła, 2005), 138.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Wiara – prawda – tolerancja: Chryścijaństwo a religie świata* [Faith—truth—tolerance: Christianity versus religions of the world], transl. Ryszard Zajączkowski (Kielce: Jedność, 2004), 38.

this exceptional bond, he finds a lasting love and meaning to which he can entrust himself with the trust of a child.<sup>20</sup> In this relationship, a man can find the appropriate environment for his personal development. From dignity justified in this way stems the principle of equality for all human beings, the idea of universal and inviolable human rights, and the right direction for human development and social progress.

The fruit of the humanism of the Incarnation in European culture has been the primacy of spiritual values. It cannot be purely material in nature. This does not imply contempt for matter. The Son of God became man, rose from the dead in the flesh, and ascended to the Father. Every individual should have a fair share of the material goods of the earth. However, they are not the highest goods. Moral values take precedence. Therefore, the worship of God is a public value. The fruit of this reverence is the respect shown to man. This is why cathedrals are oases of humanity and human dignity. For the survival of a culture, the maintenance of such a hierarchy of values is necessary. It constitutes the fundamental heritage of European culture, which must be preserved and deepened.<sup>21</sup>

An important element of European culture is the subordination of democracy and law to eunomy, i.e., founding them on moral criteria. Governance should be an expression of a just social order. The law cannot be based on statistics or public sentiment. Legal positivism cannot be the basis of the legal order. The state will become a gang of robbers when lawlessness becomes the norm and the logic of force becomes the governing principle of social life. The law must be based on values that are not subject to manipulation by a democratic or total-

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Wiara i wiedza [Faith and knowledge],” in *Przyszłość wiary: Refleksje teologiczne* [The future of faith: Theological reflections], by Joseph Ratzinger, transl. Jarosław Marecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2019), 31–32, 35, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 21–22.

itarian majority or tyrannical power.<sup>22</sup> This principle is part of the European cultural heritage. The Church's task is to present the basic measures of justice. Her objective is to guard the ethical sources of the law.<sup>23</sup>

One of the foundations of Europe is rationality.<sup>24</sup> What lies at the very foundations of reality is the creative Spirit, or Logos—the word, sense, thought. All created reality is “congealed thought.” It is derived from creative reason, and therefore it is rational and orderly; it contains an inner grammar, regularity, and an order assumed by the Creator. Man is called to discover the truth of being and to develop and manage reality accordingly. The order of the world comes from creative reason. This deeply Christian principle has been adopted by European culture.<sup>25</sup> The reality surrounding humankind is rational in nature. It can be studied, described, and understood in its essence.

The Christian culture that is part of Europe's identity includes the dignity of conscience and respect for its rights. Conscience testifies that God speaks to each person and that each person stands before His eyes. It means that man should open up to Him and seek to know His will. What is more, conscience means respect for freedom. God wants man to meet Him in the freedom of the heart, so that he can believe and live according to his faith in an unrestrained way. Also, the rights of conscience demand mutual tolerance and respect for the values held by each member of society.<sup>26</sup> The rights of conscience were decisive for

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<sup>22</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 37, 80, 120; Wiesław Łużyński, and Wioletta Szymczak, “Normatywna infrastruktura demokracji: perspektywa teologiczna i społeczna [Normative infrastructure of democracy: theological and social perspective],” *Studia Gdańskie* 45 (2019): 247–252, [https://doi.org/ 10.26142/stgd-2019-031](https://doi.org/10.26142/stgd-2019-031).

<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 159, 161.

<sup>24</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 193.

<sup>25</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 111–112.

<sup>26</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 22.



the peoples of Central Europe to resist totalitarian authority and bring about the collapse of communism by generally peaceful means.

The foundations of Europeanness include a culture of neighborly love and social justice. Words from the Last Judgment: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...”<sup>27</sup> are well known to all and belong to the heritage of European culture. They have shaped the way we think, the hierarchy of values, and the way we relate to the weak, the sick, the poor, and the elderly. J. Ratzinger emphasizes:

Christian culture did not build only cathedrals for the glory of God but created hospitals for the sick and the elderly, too, doing so also for the glory of God, whom it worshipped in suffering man. [...] True European culture is not only a culture of reason but also a culture of the heart [...] a culture of mercy.<sup>28</sup>

Christ identifies with everyone in need of help. For Christians, such an understanding of human relationships has great motivating power. Faith defines human relationships. It prompts us to approach the weak, the sick, and the old with love and respect.

Christianity brings the idea of fraternity into social life and creates opportunities for practicing it in the community of the Church.<sup>29</sup> It is a universal idea. Building fraternity with all mankind, as the Enlightenment tradition wanted, is too general and meaningless, and within a class or party, it is limited only to their own members. A representative of another class can be viewed as an enemy. Ultimately, the idea

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<sup>27</sup> Mt 25:35.

<sup>28</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 22–23.

<sup>29</sup> Wioletta Szymczak, *Partycypacja osób zaangażowanych społecznie: Struktura – funkcje – modele* [Participation of the socially involved: Structure—functions—models] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 317–318.

proved to be a fiasco for the system that preached it.<sup>30</sup> The assumptions of Christian brotherhood are different. Christ calls brothers and sisters those who make a personal decision to follow him and do the Father's will.<sup>31</sup> St. Paul, interpreting Christ's message, understands relationships in the church community in a similar way. All believers are one in this community. From the perspective of being in Christ, differences of origin, nationality, group, or social stratum do not matter.<sup>32</sup> Even the Christian master and slave are meant to be brothers in faith.<sup>33</sup> Communion with God strengthens the bonds in the community. According to J. Ratzinger, authentic brotherhood can only be built when based on the fatherhood of God.<sup>34</sup> What is more, fraternity carries further consequences in social life. Most of all, it is a reminder of the equal personal dignity and rights of all people. Everyone enjoys the same dignity. Thus, a consequence of fraternity is the idea of equality for all members of society. The second fruit is civic friendship manifested in solidarity and a willingness to help and care. The enormous potential for fraternity present in Christianity is exceptionally valuable in a society marked by the fragility and temporariness of social bonds and relationships.<sup>35</sup>

Christianity brings to politics the principle of religious-and-political dualism, according to which one is to render to Caesar the things

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo* [Christian brotherhood], transl. Jarosław Merecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Salwator, 2007), 11, 23–27.

<sup>31</sup> Mt 3:31–33.

<sup>32</sup> Gal 3:27–28; Phlm 16.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Tim 6:2; Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo* [Christian brotherhood], 37–44; Wiesław Łużyński, “Chrześcijańskie braterstwo w świeckim społeczeństwie: Refleksje na podstawie nauczania Josepha Ratzingera [Christian brotherhood in the secular society: Reflections based on the teaching of Joseph Ratzinger],” *Teologia i Człowiek* 45, nr 1 (2019): 69–86, <https://doi.org/10.12775/TiCz.2019.004>.

<sup>34</sup> Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo* [Christian brotherhood], 52.

<sup>35</sup> Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo* [Christian brotherhood], 84–88.

that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's<sup>36</sup>. One of the essential principles of Christianity is the separation of the realms of politics and faith. It is this distinction that underpins the Western idea of freedom. J. Ratzinger emphasizes that

the State and the Church must remain in their own order. We Christians do not aspire to a theocracy or to the rule of the Church over the State, and we know that the Church and party must not be mixed.<sup>37</sup>

The Christian faith abolishes the principle of political theocracy and establishes the idea of the secularity of the state. The Kingdom of God does not come by way of political rule but by another way, through conversion of heart and faith, hope, and love, transforming the world from within. Jesus rejects the temptation to reduce his mission to that of a social reformer solving the problem of poverty in the world.<sup>38</sup> His Kingdom is not of this world.<sup>39</sup> Positive secularism, however, implies a rejection of aggressive secularism, relegating religion to the realm of feelings and privacy. A proper relationship between the state and religion presupposes religious freedom and cooperation with the Church. Even a secular state must be based on moral foundations. These, on the other hand, reside in the Christian religion.<sup>40</sup>

The Catholic faith brings to society important pan-human values. It motivates engagement in building a more humane world. It sheds light

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<sup>36</sup> Mk 1:13–17.

<sup>37</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 17–18.

<sup>38</sup> Mt 4:3.

<sup>39</sup> Jn 18:36.

<sup>40</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 67–68; Wiesław Łużyński, “Healthy secularity: Joseph Ratzinger on the relationship between the Church and the State,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 19, no. 57 (2020): 229–231, <http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/article/view/1293>.

on the dignity and vocation of man. It enables the creation of interpersonal relationships in a spirit of mutual respect, fraternity, and solidarity. The Gospel proclaimed by the Church is the ferment of European culture. The values and institutions cherished by Europeans grew out of Christianity. To preserve them, it is necessary to make an effort to maintain the vitality of the Gospel and the presence of the Church in Europe.

### **Christian Europe as a task**

Christianity has inspired and shaped European culture for centuries. Religion is always at the source of culture. It is religion that affects the depths of the human spirit and shapes art, customs, and the hierarchy of values. Fraternity, solidarity, the belief in the dignity and equality of all human beings, and responsibility in the exercise of freedom cannot be established externally. It is impossible to simply enforce truthfulness and honesty by following the rules of common life. The motivation to act in the spirit of love of neighbor cannot be imposed from outside.<sup>41</sup> Reason is capable of grasping the rules of social life, but it is incapable of establishing a brotherhood that is rooted in the fatherhood of God.<sup>42</sup> These are moral categories that can be developed within the family, school, or community of faith. The state alone will not establish values that form an axiological infrastructure to ensure its proper

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<sup>41</sup> Zbigniew Wanat, "Sprawiedliwość dzięki miłości w świetle encykliki Benedykta XVI *Deus caritas est* [Justice thanks to love in light of the encyclical of Benedict XVI *Deus caritas est*]," in *Bóg jest miłością: Komentarz do encykliki Benedykta XVI* [God is love: commentary to the encyclical of Benedict XVI], ed. Wiesław Łużyński (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2015), 144.

<sup>42</sup> Ratzinger, *Chrześcijańskie braterstwo* [Christian brotherhood], 52.

functioning. One can say that the state is inadequate in this area. It needs the Church's help in this respect.<sup>43</sup>

Christianity has shaped the values of the modern world, many institutions of civil society, charitable works, and the ethical foundations of the democratic world. Christianity was the inspiration for the values that shaped European culture. No man is an island. He always lives in a specific spiritual context. He inherits the culture cultivated by previous generations. This heritage cannot be ignored. In order to form a specific identity within oneself, one needs a social and moral infrastructure that constitutes the axiological context of human life. Individuals can exist without shared values, but that is impossible in the case of societies. Culture, on the other hand, has deeper roots that are religious in nature. It has been shaped on the Old Continent by two millennia of being influenced by the Christian message. We are heirs to this great spiritual heritage. It is in this culture that we find individual and social identity and basic social principles. There is a religious element at the core of Indian, Babylonian, Jewish, and Egyptian civilizations. Religion is a guide for all societies. This is also the case with Christianity and European culture and civilization.<sup>44</sup> The cultural soil of Christianity, however, has not been given once and for all. Each generation, guided by its responsibility for a democratic political order, must cultivate the values that constitute that order. It

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<sup>43</sup> Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Wolność—państwo—Kościół* [Freedom—state—Church], transl. Paweł Kaczorowski and Grzegorz Sowiński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1994), 86.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Dobranski, "First Amendment Jurisprudence: The Religion Clauses," in *Die Bedeutung der religion für die Gesellschaft: Erfahrungen und probleme in Deutschland und dem USA*, ed. von Anton Rauscher, Soziale Orientierung, Band 17 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004), 138; Anton Rauscher, "Die Maxime Religion ist Privatsache," in *Die Bedeutung der religion für die Gesellschaft: Erfahrungen und probleme in Deutschland und dem USA*, ed. von Anton Rauscher, Soziale Orientierung, Band 17 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004), 97.

seems that the detachment of societies from the Christian foundations of their culture leads to a crisis of democracy; the contradiction of ideas of human rights multiplies when considered without a wider anthropological and ethical context. Thus, a major challenge for democratic societies is to maintain democratic institutions when their ethical, axiological, and religious foundations are eroding.<sup>45</sup> Cultures are formed through a long historical process. However, they can pass away extremely quickly if parents, teachers, and educators do not pass on the values that shaped them to the next generation. If there is no intergenerational transmission of cultures, the culture will erode and disintegrate. Beliefs and decisions based on values and their viability in society depend on people's awareness. Culture is embedded in society. It is vibrant and strong as long as society is aware of the values that are culturally important. They must be nurtured, protected, and passed on to the next generation. Society and the state should protect and develop these values for their own sake and to preserve their identity.<sup>46</sup> J. Ratzinger states that

a state that is agnostic towards God and builds law only on the opinions of the majority becomes a band of robbers from within. [...] Where God is excluded, the principle of a band of robbers prevails, in various forms, either strong or soft.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Jude P. Dougherty, *Religion – Gesellschaft – Demokratie: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), 24.

<sup>46</sup> Lothar Roos, "Glaube in der Zivilgesellschaft," in *Die Bedeutung der religion für die Gesellschaft: Erfahrungen und probleme in Deutschland und dem USA*, ed. von Anton Rauscher, Soziale Orientierung, Band 17 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004), 269–271, 276.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Czas przemian w Europie: Miejsce Kościoła i świata* [The time of transformation in Europe: The position of the Church and the world], transl. Magdalena Mijalska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2005), 120–121.

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Christianity is essential for the preservation of this culture and the continuation of the institutions that grow out of it. A valid question must be asked: would the values and institutions of the democratic world, such as human dignity and human rights, the subordination of law to economy, the rational reference to reality, the culture of charity and social justice, fraternity, and the autonomy of religion and politics, which grew out of the Christian heritage, survive without a religious background? Referring to the teaching of John Paul II, Ratzinger claims that

if the religious and Christian foundation of the continent's culture were to be deprived of its influence on the ethics and shape of societies, this would not only mean a denial of the entire heritage of Europe's past but also a serious threat to a dignified future for the people of Europe. And to every single one—both believers and non-believers.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, the disappearance of churches would be a spiritual catastrophe for Europe, the consequences and magnitude of which we cannot foresee.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

Europe is a cultural and historical category. Culture is the element that makes Europe distinct among other continents. Christianity played an important role in the formation of European culture, influencing the depths of human consciousness for centuries, shaping hierarchies of values, influencing social customs, the legal system, architecture, and

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<sup>48</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 183.

<sup>49</sup> Ratzinger/Benedykt XVI, *Prawdziwa Europa* [Real Europe], 122.

many other ideas and social institutions. What Christianity taught and brought up was remembered by secular reason as a universal humanist idea. They are secular resources in Christian culture. However, nowadays, a profound process of secularization of the Old Continent is taking place. Europe is rejecting the Christian values that have shaped it. Therefore, Joseph Ratzinger draws his readers' attention to the Christian origins of the values typical of Europe. The Christian humanism of the Incarnation shaped awareness of human dignity and rights. The fruit of a religious culture that positions God at the center of reality is the primacy of spiritual values. The postulate of the compatibility of state law with natural law derived from God contributed to the subordination of law to economy. Belief in the creative Logos formed a rational reference to reality, which, as the fruit of creaturely reason, is orderly and capable of being studied and described. It is related to the dignity of conscience, through which God speaks to man. The first and most important commandment, "love of neighbor," has contributed to the formation of a culture of love and social justice. Belief in a God who is a father has formed a conviction of the equality of all people and fraternal relations. Christ's imperative to render to Caesar what is imperial and to God what is divine became the foundation for the idea of the autonomy of politics and faith, the state and the church. Christianity was indeed a powerful spiritual force that shaped Europe's identity. The cultural soil of Christianity, however, has not been given once and for all. Every generation must cultivate and revitalize the values that constitute Europe. Therefore, a legitimate question can be asked: Can Europe's essential ideas and institutions survive without Christian inspiration?





## Christianity—the Soul of Europe. Inspired by Joseph Ratzinger

### SUMMARY

Europe has a Christian soul. The values, customs, and institutions of the social life of the European nations crystallized under the animating influence of Christ's gospel. One can speak of the inalienability of Christianity on the Old Continent. There is an inextricable bond between Europe and Christianity. Following Joseph Ratzinger, the article presents European values and ideas growing out of the Christian heritage: the humanism of the Incarnation, the primacy of spiritual values, the subordination of law and democracy to eunomy, a rational approach to reality, the dignity of conscience and recognition of its rights, the culture of love of neighbor and social justice, the idea of fraternity, and religious-political dualism in the relationship between the state and the Church. Maintaining Europe's Christian identity is therefore a task for Christians and all those who want its characteristic ideas and institutions to survive.

**Keywords:** Europe, Christianity, church, Joseph Ratzinger, values, culture

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