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# The ideational clinch of the Roman Catholic Church and the EU

## The Europeanization of the Catholic clergy's discourse?\*

Petr Kratochvíl & Tomáš Doležal  
Institute of International Relations, Prague

The article explores the so far largely ignored question of the political relations between the European Union and the Roman Catholic Church. It analyzes the deeper mutual ideational influences of the two entities, asking whether there has been a convergence of views about several basic political notions between the Church and the EU. The analysis centres on the Church's approach to four fundamental notions related to the EU – (1) secularism, (2) the individual(ism), (3) free market, and (4) the state, stressing in particular the discursive strategies the Church employs to defend its own position. The conclusion focuses on the relation between the RCC's "theopolitical" imagination and the EU's political form and argues that the surprisingly strong support of the Church for the integration process is not only a result of the *aggiornamento*, but a peculiar example of the Church's ongoing Europeanization. Methodologically, the paper builds on a discourse analysis of almost 160 documents released by the three key Church bodies which often comment on the EU: the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, and the Curia.

**Keywords:** European integration; Roman Catholic Church; Europeanization; political theology; discourse analysis

### 1. Introduction

Recently, studies have started to appear on the relation between the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) (and, more broadly, Christianity) and the European

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Union (EU) (Nelsen et al. 2001; Coupland 2003; Arnold 2005; Gallagher 2005; Jenkins 2005; Knippenberg 2006; Crnic 2007; Faltin 2007; Kratochvíl 2009a and 2009b). The growth of interest in the relations between the RCC and the EU is motivated by at least two factors. First, the RCC and the EU arguably constitute the two most influential non-state actors on the European Continent, even though their relations had been virtually ignored by the academic community of political science in the past. Second, the increasing interest in the Church's political attitudes is also underpinned by the overall "return of religion" in the study of international relations and political science (Fox 2001; Hatzopoulos & Petito 2003).

As promising as the above mentioned studies are, almost all of them are descriptive in nature. This basic approach is quite understandable since the relations between the two entities had been unduly neglected in the past. Hence, data-gathering seemed to be the most important task of all in this field. However, this preliminary phase of scholarly research on EU-RCC relations is over. What is now needed is a more comprehensive analysis of the mutual relations. It is no longer sufficient to point to the ways how European integration has been inspired by the Church, nor does it suffice to show the link between the religious adherence of the founding fathers of the Communities and the Communities themselves (cf. Venneri & Ferrara 2009).

The second problem is that these contributions are almost never rooted in the analysis of the RCC's "foreign policy" or the conceptual issues which lie behind it. Instead, their academic background is either comparative politics or the study of religion. The resulting tendency is a focus on religious and political attitudes of the believers and not on the Church as an institutional structure. Typically, they focus on Christians/Catholics in a particular country (such as the United Kingdom – Coupland 2003) or in a particular region (such the "new Europe" – Crnic 2007). The contributions from within the religious circles tend to be very diverse collections of essays that do not share a common methodological framework. To put it bluntly, a methodologically rigorous comprehensive analysis of the relations between the EU and the RCC is missing.

The third problem lies in the overall focus of both the academia and the mass media on the moments of confrontation between the RCC and the EU. Recently, much attention has been dedicated to issues like the references to God and Christianity in the Constitutional Treaty, the rejection of the nomination of the conservative Catholic Buttiglione for the post of a commissioner and the controversy of the "cross in the classroom" (Schlesinger & Foret 2006; Kerry 2007; Barbulescu & Andreescu 2009). Although these issues are undoubtedly legitimate objects of academic research, the excessive focus on differences leads to a rather static and purely reactionary picture of the Church which does

not reflect the complexity of the institution and the theological and political plurality it covers. The real question is, hence, whether these relatively minor controversies are the tip of the iceberg of much more fundamental differences between the Church and the EU that are based on the widely different value systems of the two institutions, or whether the Church and the Union are rather two largely compatible entities that support each other most of the time.

In this article, we will not focus on the historical evolution of the EU-RCC relations; instead we will try to assess the complex attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church towards the process of European integration. Our academic background is the study of international relations. Hence, we are not so much interested in the comparison of political attitudes of the Catholics from individual EU member states or their respective political parties, but rather on the general interactions of the Union and the Church as two of the key international actors on the European continent. Our key question is whether it is possible to discover in the current politico-theological discourse of the Roman Catholic Church new elements that would correspond with the innovative present day political form(s) in Europe.

To put our argument differently, when examining the relations between the EU and the RCC, we believe it is not sufficient (a) to describe the chronology of the EU-RCC relations or (b) to notice the similarities and/or differences in the institutional set-ups of these two institutions. As useful as these analyses may be, we are convinced that it is also essential to assess the political, social and, indeed, theological views of the RCC leaders since it is these views that have a decisive impact on the current and future shape of the relationship of the two entities. In this sense, we want to explore the argument of the Schmittian political theology in which the alliance of throne and altar was conditioned by the similarity of the basic concepts of the political and theological imaginations of the time (Schmitt 1922, cf. the analysis in Hollerich 2004: 112–3). Applied to the current context, we may ask whether there is a convergence of views about the basic political notions between the RCC and the EU. If the answer is affirmative, an additional question emerges: Is this convergence a consequence of the inspiration the EU draws from the RCC (as Schmitt would have it), or is the growing overlap of positions an upshot of the Church's ongoing *aggiornamento* and its Europeanization (or, to be more precise, its EU-ization)?

The structure of the article is quite simple: We will start by presenting our methodology, which consists of a software-assisted analysis of a high number of Church documents on the EU. Then we will proceed to four chosen core areas where the Church's interpretation of the EU's key concepts (secularism, individual(ism), free market, and the nation/state) will be discussed. The conclusion will focus on the relation between the RCC's theological imagination and the EU's political form.

## 2. Research design

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

### 2.1 Criteria for text selection and the key concepts

To gain a representative picture of the position of the Church leaders, we collected texts from the three most important bodies of the RCC's hierarchy, which are based in Europe and which are at least partially responsible for the relations with the EU. The first is the Holy See itself and its official website [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), which mostly contains addresses by the Popes and other documents published by the Curia (51 documents). The second is the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE, [comece.org](http://comece.org), 54 documents) and the third is the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, which, however, also includes the Bishops' Conferences of Non-Member States (CCEE, [ccee.ch](http://ccee.ch), 54 documents). The total number of analysed documents is 159. These documents cover the time frame of the last twenty years (1990–2010), i.e. the post-Cold War period, with a major part of the documents being from the first decade of the 21st century.

All of the three above mentioned websites were searched in May/June 2010 and all the texts on them containing the expressions “European Union” and “European integration” were collected.<sup>1</sup> From these we then selected the documents that met the following additional criteria: (1) the aforesaid time frame, (2) authorship exclusively by RCC members (i.e. non-Catholic and ecumenical declarations have been excluded), and (3) provable authorship by individual high-ranking RCC representatives or the condition of being an official statement of the Holy See, COMECE or CCEE. As mentioned above, the total number of documents fulfilling these three criteria is 159.

An additional document we refer to is the RCC's extensive *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,<sup>2</sup> one of the most recent fundamental formulations of the official Catholic teaching on social and political issues. We analysed its texts

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1. All the collected primary documents were numbered at this point. When quoting those which were included in the final research sample, we refer to them as P1, P2, etc.

2. In the following text we refer to this document as *the Compendium*.

separately not only for methodological reasons but also due to its specific position among the other texts: if we understand the above mentioned 159 documents as a sample of the RCC's official rhetoric, the Compendium represents a certain kind of RCC meta-rhetoric as it reflects, defines, explains and, at the same time, constitutes the RCC's own normative (doctrinal) positions.

To avoid the fallacy of overly general descriptions of theological-political shifts, we decided to choose four major notions that are of interest to both the RCC and the EU and are thus frequently discussed in the documents. At the same time, we wanted to link the analysis of these key notions to the RCC's general interpretation of their political implications as well as to the attitude the Church adopts towards them. These four notions are secularism, individualism, the free market and the nation state. A clear indication of the importance of these four terms for the contemporary Catholic political thought is the fact that that all four of the conceptual fields on which we focus in our analysis are explicitly mentioned in the short introductory note to the Compendium (written by State Secretary Cardinal Sodano).<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 Methodology

Our principal methodological base was contextual discourse analysis (Gee 1999; Wodak & Meyer 2009), but we also employed some elements of content analysis (Manheim & Rich 1991; Krippendorff 2004). The basic difference between these two methodological tools as we understand them lies in the distinction between the quantitative and qualitative elements in the two methods. Content analysis deals with quantifiable data, it focuses on coding the key expressions, analyzes and counts the predicates related to these key *topoi*, and compares these results across various textual units. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, is more interested the general tendencies and argumentative strategies hidden behind the texts. In other words, discourse analysis combines the insights from content analysis with broader contextual considerations and with the analysis of the reasoning that underlies the utterances at hand. In addition, discourse analysis also allows a more critical approach since it can point to inconsistencies between the texts and beyond (for more details see below).

Trying to avoid as many blind spots of these particular methods as possible, we applied multiple methodological approaches: At the beginning, during our preliminary analysis of the documents, we identified and coded the expressions/themes that were potentially relevant for closer investigation. Thus the most basic

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3. We intentionally do not define these rather vague terms here, as this allows us to discuss the RCC's various interpretations of them that are brought up by the Church discourse.

findings presented in this paper are aggregate counts of the appearances of the key concepts (in other words, the appearance frequency of each of the key concepts). These simple quantifications were further contextualized in several ways:

1. they were confronted with the frequency of both related and “competing” expressions/themes, which helped us to see their inter- and intra-conceptual relations;
2. the broader contexts of about 1000 expressions involving the key concepts were analysed, and in doing this, we considered the prevailing tone and the evaluation used;
3. we identified the most symptomatic *topoi* connected with the positive and the negative evaluations.

Although these results are useful in illustrating the appearance frequency of crucial expressions or concepts, they do not necessarily uncover the context and urgency of the discursive use of these concepts. Therefore, upon finishing the quantitative part of our research (or the part using content analysis, which is presented here mainly in the summarising tables), we also employed a slightly modified version of the analysis of basic discursive strategies used by political actors (Wodak & Meyer 2009:27) (which is the part using discourse analysis). We focussed mainly on (a) the definition of the analysed notions (“nominational strategies”), (b) the types of predication used (“strategies of predication”), and (c) the argumentation of the RCC (“strategies of argumentation”). For the analysis we used the atlas.ti software, which allowed us not only to code all the documents more quickly, but it also made possible easy cross-referencing, chronological analysis, etc.

### 3. Secularism: Healthy secularism vs. hostile secularism

One of the key elements which we originally thought would set the RCC and the EU apart is the difference in their interpretation of secularism. The EU is often seen as one of the world’s champions in defending secularism, and indeed, secularism can be considered one of the essential underlying principles of the integration process (cf. Willaime 2009). Clearly, secularism and the temporal division between the religious and the political have been seen unfavourably by the RCC for a long time. Suffice to quote the Syllabus of Errors of 1864, in which the following statement is seen as an error “having reference to modern liberalism”: “In the present day it is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion should be held as the only religion of the State, to the exclusion of all other forms of worship”

(The Syllabus, X. 77). The anti-modernist oath which required all clergy to “submit and adhere” (The Oath 1910) to the position stated in the Syllabus was not removed until 1967, hence extending the period of the RCC’s extensive condemnation of the basic elements of secularism to a long time after the establishment of the European Communities.<sup>4</sup>

a. Definition of secularism

Although both secularism and secularization are discussed in the RCC’s discourse, there is no explicit definition of either term, not even in the rather comprehensive Compendium. In other documents, the expression *secularism* is mostly used as a noun referring to a generally known position, an (anti-religious) ideology or even culture (P2), which is seen as not requiring any explanation. Only twice did we identify definition-like fragments: in one case, secularism was defined as the “priority [of] human means, efficiency and a pragmatic life-style” (P62); in the other, it was associated with the differences in the relations between religion and politics and those between the Church and the State. Definitions of secularization are equally difficult to find; only the particular phenomena as “a progressive and radical de-Christianisation and paganisation of the continent” (P62) or the “de-institutionalization of religion” (P2) are mentioned. Interestingly, even though secularism is often seen as a widespread phenomenon, especially in Western Europe (P2), the Church representatives often challenge the notion that the secularism they criticise is a dominant position in Europe (P2).

b. Predication

This strategy of defining secularism as a negative phenomenon while claiming that it is advocated only by marginal societal groups leads to the need to distinguish this kind of secularism from the kind that is officially advocated by the European Union. As a result, when speaking about the European Union, Church representatives almost never outright reject secularism as such. Instead, they employ a distinction between two kinds of secularism, one of which is usually labelled “hostile” (P40, P60, P62), and the other “healthy” (P40, P60), “open” (P60) or “sound” (P4) secularism. The “more open and modern concept of secularism” (P60) that corresponds to the situation of “an authentic pluralism” (ibid.) that is

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4. We are, of course, aware of the fact that the Syllabus is a very specific document and that other Church documents released in the 20th century might draw a different picture (such as some encyclicals). However, we are not claiming here that the Syllabus is the most important document but that this documents supports our thesis that the position of the RCC has substantially developed. (We are grateful to one of the anonymous referees for drawing our attention to this fact.)



Table 1. “Secularism” and related terms in RCC’s discourse

	expression	total frequency	documents where it occurred	tone or evaluation		
				rather positive	rather neutral	rather negative
the secularism concept & secularism etc.	“secularism”	16	8	4	1	11
	“healthy”	3	1	3	0	0
	“open and modern, inclusive and respectful of all the authorities”	1	1	1	0	0
	“ideological”	1	1	0	0	1
	moral relativism of liberal secularism	1	1	0	0	1
	secularism which poisons	2	1	0	0	2
	“secularist”	3	2	0	0	3
	“secular”	34	21	4	23	7
	hostility “of certain secular currents”, “hostile separation”, etc.	7	3	0	0	3
	healthily secular, soundly secular	3	3	3	0	0
	“secularization”	11	6	0	5	6
	“secularity”	4	2	0	3	1
	comparative/ “competing” concepts					
		religious freedom (162), “Church-State” or “State-Church” relations (29), “truth” (202), “values” (418), notion of relativism (34)				

Notes valid for all the tables: The expressions in inverted commas represent literal quotations, the others are stated in paraphrased form. The most important concepts are in bold. The selection of the expressions related to particular concepts was based on a preliminary reading, the comparative or “competing” concepts offer comparisons in terms of the appearance frequency.

welcomed by the Church is best defined in the following passage from a document: “A healthy secularism calls for a distinction to be made between religion and politics, between Church and State, without making God into a private hypothesis or excluding religion and the ecclesial community from public life. A healthy secularism, therefore, does not systematically proceed at a public level, *etsi Deus non daretur*” (P60). The positive acceptance of one form of secularism is contrasted with the other form that the RCC wishes to reject, which also allows the Church to make claims about the adherence of the EU to the healthy type of secularism (P4).

### c. Argumentation

A basic argument that is frequently brought forth by the Church lies in the claim that the aggressive secularism violates the principle of equality of religious and secular citizens (P60). Hence, the secularism that is acceptable to the Church allows for open and public participation of the religious citizens in the public debate and calls for religious arguments to be as valid in the public square as those based on secular reasoning (cf. the debate on “public reason” in political philosophy (e.g. Audi & Wolterstorff 1996; Habermas 2006)). As Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone puts it, “it must not be forgotten that, when Churches or ecclesial communities intervene in public debate, expressing reservations or recalling various principles, this does not constitute a form of intolerance or an interference, since such interventions are aimed solely at enlightening consciences, enabling them to act freely and responsibly, according to the true demands of justice, even when this should conflict with situations of power and personal interest” (P2). What is fascinating about these arguments about the “healthy secularism” is that it is precisely when it defends the right of Catholics and church communities to present religious arguments in the public square that the Church resorts to purely secular reasoning. Let us notice the stress put on the “demands of justice” and “free and responsible acts of consciences”, which are typically seen rather as key elements of secular argumentation (*ibid.*).

The Catholic defenders of this “correct” understanding of secularism, which is seen as compatible with a greater presence of religion in the public sphere, are careful not to attack the secular nature of EU institutions in any way. Pope John Paul II said, “...while fully respecting the secular nature of the institutions, I consider it desirable especially that three complementary elements should be recognised: the right of Churches and religious communities to organise themselves freely in conformity with their statutes and proper convictions; respect for the specific identity of the different religious confessions and provision for a structured dialogue between the European Union and those confessions; and respect for the juridical status already enjoyed by Churches and religious institutions by virtue of the legislation of the member states of the Union” (P40, P259).

#### 4. Individualism: Human person vs. individual

Similarly to secularism, the concept of individualism is depicted rather negatively when treated directly, regardless of whether the word used to express it is a noun or an adjective (see Table 2). On the other hand, the dignity and individuality of each person are repeatedly seen as something positive or even as something that must be protected. Generally, the notion of a human person represents a crucial topos. The comparison with the occurrence of various forms of human collectivities shows, however, that the RCC's discourse on the individual does not permit any simple conclusions based on the individualism-collectivism dichotomy. The current Catholic doctrine highlights the centrality – or even the transcendental grounding (P62, the Compendium) – of the human being and his/her social embeddedness (in their family, their society, and humankind). At the same time, it is important to stress that the fundamentals of Catholic theology do not permit any recognition of a substantial independence (from God) of either of the two (secular) principles of individualism and collectivism since human collectivities as well as individuals are always seen as equally answerable to superior transcendental principles and absolute moral rules.

##### a. Definition

Individualism, mainly due to its connection to liberalism and the individually conceived concept of religious freedom, became one of the focal points of the ecclesial critique in the past (cf. the Syllabus' rejection of the claim that "every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true." (The Syllabus III. 15) and the claim that "the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization" (The Syllabus X. 80)).

Presenting the content analysis of various terms associated with the notion of individualism, the table above shows that several related expressions are of exceptional importance especially (human, fundamental) "rights" and the concept of "freedom". Surprisingly and in contrast with the prevailing official discourse of EU institutions, the notions of freedom, (individual/human) rights, tolerance and even democracy are not depicted only in a positive context: One document talks about "the mistaken notion of freedom – understood and lived as the self-determination of the individual with no reference point to transcendent and absolute values – which leads to a mentality and attitudes seen in many areas as moral relativism, individualistic subjectivism and nihilistic hedonism." (P62) Similarly, other documents talk about "a false concept of tolerance" (P40), arguing that "the general climate of tolerance poses a great challenge for the Church [*in*] almost all Western societies" (P62).

Table 2. "Individualism" and related terms in RCC's discourse

	expression	total frequency	documents where it occurred	tone or evaluation		
				rather positive	rather neutral	rather negative
concept of individualism	"individualism"	8	4	0	1	7
	"individualization"	2	2	0	0	2
	"individualist(ic)"	8	3	0	0	8
	collectivism, collectivist	1	1	0	1	0
	communitarian	1	1	1	0	0
liberalism	"liberal", "liberalism"	12	8	3	1	8
	"liberal*-ize, -ized, -izing, -ization"	4	4	0	0	4
	"tolerance"	40	23	32	2	7
	"desire(s)"	95	38	70	15	10
	"individuality"	4	2	3	1	0
comparative expressions: concept of the individual	explicit centrality of the human (person) (41), "individual" as a noun (33), "individuals" (90), "person" (331), "persons" (172) "human person(s)" (121), "human being(s)" (111), "human" (1082), "dignity" (450), "citizen(s)" (297), "right(s)" (486), fundamental rights (78), "human rights" (151), "freedom" (435)					
	other comparative/ "competing" concepts					

b. Predication

In the same way as the RCC's official discourse on secularism made the term more acceptable by distinguishing between good and bad secularism, the Church has also adapted the notion of "individualism". Individualism is connected with predicates like "selfish", "subjective", and "pragmatic" (P62). The opposite of the "individual" and "individualism" is not defined as collectivism, but rather as "persons" (P2) and "interpersonal relationships" (P2). The individual and the person are often contrasted in the very same paragraph. Cardinal Bertone, for instance, starts by criticizing those who "insist on so-called modern 'values', on individual rights". As he believes, this forces the leaders of the Church "to defend the dignity and ultimately the good of the *person*" (emphasis added) (P2).

c. Argumentation

Today, the approach employed by the Church toward the individual almost always has a similar structure, which can be best demonstrated by showing how the Church treats individual's human rights. It starts by claiming that human rights are natural and thus they do not depend on historical context. As Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo (P16) put it, human rights "are neither linked to particular situations nor subordinated to determined conditions, but they are demands inherent in the human person as such." This is, in the second step, followed by the claim that human rights are closely linked to the Church's mission in the world and, indeed, constitute a fundamental part of the Christian heritage (P16).

The third step usually underlines the key difference between human rights understood in the liberal sense as rights endowed to the pre-social individual and related primarily to his/her individual freedom to act, and human rights understood as rights related to the dignity of the human person, with the RCC obviously preferring the latter interpretation. As the Synod of Bishops put it, "a freedom taken in an absolute sense and isolated from other values – like that of solidarity – can lead to the disintegration of life on the continent." (P62) Again, the terms "human person" and "individual" are not used interchangeably and these different labels carry different meanings, at times substantially so. For instance, the concept of human dignity is often connected with the right to life from its very conception, hence strongly deviating from the liberal notion of individual freedom (cf. for instance P2; P16; P28).

The distinction between the "individual" and the "human person" is related to the critique of two other notions that are traditionally linked to modern political thought – the market and the nation. For instance, Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* (P40), argues that it is important to build

“a Europe seen as... a community joined together in hope, not exclusively subject to the law of the marketplace but resolutely determined to safeguard the dignity of the human person also in social and economic relations.”

## 5. The free market vs. the common good

The principle of free market is rarely mentioned directly in our sample of documents and if so, its mention is marked by a contradictory assessment. Thus, we can read both that “[o]n the level of individual nations and of international relations, the free market is the most efficient instrument for utilising resources and effectively responding to needs” (P276) and that the “rules of the market and competition will never give birth to the ideal” (P140, P180). On the other hand, there is a whole section called “Role of the Free Market” in the Compendium, where the concept is dealt with explicitly and repeatedly, and evaluated mostly positively.

The RCC is also quite supportive of the free market when it comes to European integration: “The Church... supports all attempts by the European Union to achieve a more flexible functioning of the market, where further market opportunities have not been developed.” (P276) At the same time, there is a strong critique of its purely materialist dimension, especially in those passages where the consumerist culture or international economic order are dealt with. The frequency of terms like “solidarity” or “subsidiarity” or various attributes of poverty (see the table below) best demonstrates where the accent of the RCC’s rhetoric about economic relations lies.

### a. Definition

The role of free market is explicitly defined in the Compendium as “an economic process with positive aspects” (Letter of Cardinal Angelo Sodano, 29.6.2004). Such an affirmative evaluation, however, does not seem to arise from a deep trust in the principle *per se*. On the contrary, it endures only as long as the market remains “the most efficient instrument” (Compendium Ch7/347) for serving the goals and principles perceived as central by the RCC, i.e. promoting justice, human dignity, and the common good. There are many passages challenging not the free market as such, but its centrality in relation to other priorities, referring, among others, to the insufficiency of market processes for safeguarding the environment (P130) or the inadequate protection of the weak (e.g. exploited migrants) in the labour market (P127, P281). The general tenor is that the “economy and the market need ethics in order to function correctly” or that the “market cannot count on itself”, but “must draw moral energies from other subjects” (P120).

Table 3. “Free market” and related terms in RCC’s discourse

	expression	total frequency	documents where it occurred	tone or evaluation		
				rather positive	rather neutral	rather negative
market	free market	6	5	2	0	4
	“market(s)”	136	31	34	90	12
challenging market as “omnipotent” principle	Common/internal/single (European) market	42	11	14	28	0
	Labour or work market(s)	10	5	4	6	0
	Financial/capital/credit market(s)	6	5	0	1	5
	“market” as subordinated mean	14	12	1	9	4
	consumerism, consumeristic	13	8	0	0	13
	“neo(-)liberal”	1	1	0	0	1
other comparative/“competing” concepts	“solidarity” (771), “common good” (172), attributes of poverty* (341), “cupidity” or “greed” (4), call for new international economic order (3)					

\* attributes of poverty = “poor”, “poverty”, “famine”, “impoverish-”, “misery”, “starv-”.

Hence, when attempting to understand the Church's position on the liberal market economy, it is essential to distinguish two approaches: the approach that appreciates the positive effects of the free market, and the approach which relativizes the autonomy of market forces while stressing that "the free market cannot be judged apart from the ends that it seeks to accomplish and from the values that it transmits on a societal level." (Compendium Ch7/348)

#### b. Predication

The analysis of the predicates related to market reveals that there is a deep chasm between the assessment of the EU's economic model and the assessment of the free market in general. While virtually every mention of the single or internal market is connected with a positive assessment (e.g. P259, P276), the financial market is connected with predicates like "crisis", "speculation", and the "logic of interest and mere profit" (P140), while the authors point to "human greed and the separation of financial market from the real economy" (P249).

We examined also the terms "capitalism" and "liberal(ism)", whether they might serve as a helpful key to understanding the attitude towards the free market and the liberal economic order, when used as predicates. However, we concluded that the former is almost never present or evaluated per se in RCC documents (only "forms of self-centred capitalism" (P62) and "rampant diffusion of capitalism in its strictest forms" (ibid.) are mentioned). In addition it turned out that the latter concept would be a rather confusing indicator as any treatment of liberalism in a purely economic context is avoided by the RCC.

#### c. Argumentation

The argumentation in the analysed documents is related to the key distinction between market-driven self-interest and the accent on solidarity. In some cases, the critique takes on the form of a direct assault on the notion of the free market. For instance, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops talked about "the grave inadequacies of the free market" (P62) and similarly, a meeting of the General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences in 2009 stressed that "due to the economic and financial crisis, we have understood that the market cannot count on itself." (P120) Even more outspokenly, the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (P140) declared that "a society in which each individual, each group, each nation defends only their own vested interests cannot but be [a] jungle."

To sum up, the RCC's approach to liberalism and the free market shares two basic features with its approaches to all the previously analysed notions. First, it distinguishes two perspectives on the given notion (the free market), rejecting one and embracing the other. Second, the understanding of the given notion



(liberalism) which is acceptable for the RCC is then identified with the situation prevalent in Europe and – in particular – in the EU. This is nicely manifested in the comments of the COMECE Secretariat on the draft Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the EU where the Church leaders underline the similarity between their position and that of the EU (P495).

## 6. The nation state: European unity vs. state-centrism

The most unambiguous result of the quantification of our analysis in this section is that the project of European integration, as well as the concept of regional integration per se, repeatedly gets enthusiastic support from the RCC. It seems that two strands of Catholic thought merge here – the first being the transnational nature of the Church itself and the second the stress on the priority of the human person over the state. The RCC also distinguishes between states as the basic units and nations, often understood in the ethnic sense. The words *nation* and *national* are used with rather neutral connotations, as they describe nations as the prevalent social reality of international relations (and thus, they reproduce their nation-centric character). There are also negative references to nations, but these are associated with the consequences of nationalism (and the related xenophobia, ethnic exclusionism, and/or war).

### a. Definition

Although the notions of both “nation” and “state” are common, they are rarely defined in the documents. Yet the few definitions present refer to the connection between the political form and the common good of the people united therein. Some texts directly or indirectly cite the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, reiterating that “the political community... exists for the common good: this is its full justification and meaning and the source of its specific and basic right to exist.” (P25)

This general definition is, however, applicable to both the European Union and its member states, allowing the authors of the text to judge for themselves which of these two political forms better fulfils the basic requirement of achieving the common good for the respective society. Interestingly, nation-states are seen either in neutral terms, as the still predominant form of political organization in Europe, or – surprisingly frequently – as political organizations that fail to pass the test of whether they excel in providing for the common good (see below). European unity, on the other hand, is seen as a consequence of the Church’s cultural influence: Europe is defined as a continent “thanks also to the unifying force of Christianity, which has been capable of integrating different peoples and cultures” (P38).

Table 4. "Nation" and related terms in RCC's discourse

	expression	total frequency	documents where it occurred	tone or evaluation		
				rather positive	rather neutral	rather negative
concept of Nation  challenging state-centrism	"nation" or "Nation"	80	30	27	43	10
	"nationalism"	15	10	0	0	15
	"nationalist(ic)"	9	7	0	0	9
	"trans(-)national";supra-national"	17	8	9	7	1
	"United Nations"	59	25	14	43	2
	"subsidiarity"	48	20	48	0	0
	"regional integration"	6	2	6	0	0
	"European project"	18	7	16	2	0
	new Europe	45	16	29	16	0
	other comparative/"competing" concepts	"Nation-State" or "State-Nation" or "nation state(s)" (9), "nations" (253), "national" (360), "state(s)" or "State(s)" as a noun (495), "country/countries" (319), "peoples" (133), "government" (242), "community/communities" (556), "society/societies" (769), "family/families" (921), explicit centrality of the human (person) (41), "integration" (211), "European Union"/"EU" (1631), "European integration" (74), "Continent" or "continent" (168), "international community" (13), (im)migration (345), "global-" (340)				

The integration of Europe is also seen as a role model for the future global political order. Indeed, the idea that “mankind should have its supra-national body” is described as “the vision of the Popes” (P16).

b. Predication

The predicates used in connection with the notion of “nation” and “nationalism” are almost always neutral or negative as well. Historically, European nations were depicted as competitive and warlike actors who “had unfortunately fought one another for centuries” (P2). Such an understanding of European nation-states is interesting because it repeats the foundational myths of the European Communities, thus clearly prioritizing the integration process over its historical alternatives. Interestingly, the embrace of a quasi-federalist rhetoric by the Church also follows the federalist critique of the nation state (cf. Rosamond 2000). Adjectives that are found frequently in the texts in connection with nationalism include “intolerant” and “exaggerated” (P38), “selfish” (P55), and “violent” (P62).

In a stark contrast to this understanding of the nation, the RCC’s assessment of the current state of affairs on the Continent and in particular in the EU leads the Church to the frequent adoption of the predicate “new” (Europe). The “new Europe” (e.g. P40, P60, P62, P140) usually refers to a vision of Europe which, among other things, is built on the reconciliation of national hostilities, thus again clearly indicating the Church’s positive view of the EU.

c. Argumentation

Unlike the RCC’s assessment of secularism and liberalism, which remains conditional, as the Church’s acceptance of these notions is qualified by distinguishing between the allegedly good and the allegedly malignant and aggressive forms thereof, the RCC’s support for European unity as something essentially good is unequivocal. Although in most cases, the allusions to it made use of the phrase “European” and not “the EU”, it is clear that it is the Union that is addressed; often, its institutions are mentioned, and the historical milestones in the post-war integration process are referred to as well. Virtually everywhere, the RCC describes the EU as the embodiment of the peaceful coexistence of people on Earth – our analysis has yielded no result where the Church would express a wholeheartedly Eurosceptical attitude.<sup>5</sup>

The argumentation is typically based on the distinction between the nationalist past and the peace, stability, and prosperity brought about by the EC/EU. Yet it is not only nationalism but also the modern nation state that is seen as

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

fading in Europe. The current Pope (P3) believes that “less and less is modern society with open frontiers allowing itself to be defined in terms of nationality.” Also, if a crisis is mentioned, then it is the “crisis of the nation-state institutions” (P127) that are not capable of bringing security to their citizens (P127). More to that, the RCC remains very optimistic regarding the integration project’s future, thus supporting further political integration. To give just a few of the most telling examples of the Church’s support for the EU, Pope John Paul II argued in 2000 (P24) that the European Union is “a great project” that “has retained its creativity, and that is the best guarantee that it will succeed in securing the greatest good of its citizens” and claimed that “the time seems ripe to synthesise these achievements in an arrangement which is both less complex and more effective.” (P24) Pope Benedict XVI (P3) confirmed the same view of the EU when he claimed that “the regional and national area is increasingly becoming [the] common European homeland.”

The state-centric view of Europe is thus certainly not the mainstream view in the RCC’s hierarchy. Instead, a plurality of actors is stressed, ranging from the EU itself to peoples, states, regions, and families (P62). States and nations are increasingly less seen as *political* actors while being increasingly perceived in cultural and religious terms instead – as “living centres of a cultural wealth” (P7, cf. also CEC, CCEE 23.-29.06.1997) that must be preserved. But even this argument is qualified by the stress on the overall “essential cultural unity” of Europe (P19). There is a multitude of national cultures, but only one “homo europeus” (P19).

## 7. Conclusion

Our analysis of the RCC’s views of the European integration process shows that the Church has been undergoing not only an a general reconciliation with the modern world (*aggiornamento*), which has been typical for the RCC since the Second Vatican Council, but that a surprisingly strong support for European integration by the Church is palpable as well. The results of our analysis are important for several reasons: First, unlike the image of the RCC in mass media, our conclusions depict the Church as rather cooperative and willing to acknowledge the benefits stemming from the integration process. Second, while some studies have already argued that Catholics are generally more favourable towards the integration than Protestants (Nelsen et al. 2001), no study has so far explored such a large corpus of Church documents that confirm the same conclusion.

The RCC uses two basic approaches: the first lies in the conceptual reformulation of those notions that were rejected by the Church in the past, thus splitting each notion’s *meaning* into two – one that continues to be criticized as bad,

aggressive, or egoistic and one that is rebranded and, consequently, embraced by the Church. This transformation pertains to many issues, ranging from secularism to individualism and liberalism (or the focus on the “human person” as the Church parlance would have it).

The RCC’s acceptance of these terms does not, however, give the answer as to whether it is more supportive of the modern state-centric politics or of the nascent political governance embodied by the EU since secularism, liberalism and individualism are defining features of both liberal democratic states and the EU. It is the second strategy used by the Church that gives us the answer to this conundrum. It consists of the identification of some terms with the modern international system (“nationalism”, “free market”, “nation/state”, etc.), which allows the Church to adopt a critical position towards the corresponding notions. Hence, nationalism is seen as the cause of war and so its influence should be minimized; the unconstrained free market is often interpreted as egoistic and leading to the growth of inequalities and so it should be amended by a strong stress on solidarity; and the nation/state is becoming ever less important and so it should be recast in cultural terms. The critical attitude towards these modern forms of political life brings the Church even closer to the European Union since the EU represents, as many argue, “the first truly postmodern international political form” (Ruggie 1993: 139–140).

In spite of the continually diminishing influence of the Church on both the institutional set-up and the policy-making processes in the EU, the RCC is obviously interpreting the role of the EU in a very positive way. What is most interesting, however, is the Church’s insistence on the view that (1) these positions are firmly grounded in the RCC’s theology of creation and salvation (human dignity, solidarity) as well as its ecclesiology and eschatology (the positive view of unification and reservations towards state-centrism and nationalism). In fact, it seems that the RCC’s rhetoric sometimes projects onto the EU some elements of earthly utopia, depicting it with the same lofty phrases that the EU itself uses – the EU as the fulfilment of the wish for unity and harmony among nations as well as the right mix of freedom and solidarity. Even in institutional terms, the EU is praised as having created the perfect balance between all its constituent elements (P24). To ascertain the extent of the ideational overlap between the two institutions further research is needed. What we have accomplished in this article, is the analysis of just one side of the equation – the attitude of the Church towards the EU. As long as there is no comprehensive analysis of the Union’s views of the RCC, the claim that there is an increasing harmony of views between the two cannot be taken for granted.

Finally, we are also convinced that it would be presumptuous to speak about a simple correlation between the RCC’s “political theology” and the EU’s political

architecture. Instead, our research leads us to the conclusion that it is the Church that has recently refined and redefined its views, hence achieving a greater level of compatibility with the European Union's institutions. Although the Church might have had an affinity to some of the analysed concepts even before the creation of the European Communities (as the Church never tires of stressing this point), the historical comparison shows that the RCC's position on these issues has been continuously evolving. In other words, the relevance of "political theology" today is different from its role in the past: its potential for theological inspiration that had been (mostly unconsciously) tapped by the modern state has now all but disappeared. Without passing any judgment on whether such a shift is a good thing, it is clear that the relationship has been reversed – it is the Church that now tries to come to terms with the fast evolution of current political forms.

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### *Authors' address*

Petr Kratochvíl / Tomáš Doležal  
 Institute of International Relations  
 Nerudova 3  
 118 50 Praha 1 – Malá Strana  
 Czech Republic  
 kratochvil@iir.cz / tomas.dolezal@vse.cz

### *About the authors*

**Petr Kratochvíl** is the director of the Institute of International Relations, where he functions also as a researcher. He leads courses at the University of Economics in Prague and Metropolitan University Prague. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Perspectives*, and a Member of the Editorial Board of another journal, *Mezinárodní politika*. His areas of interest include European integration, Russian foreign policy and International Relations theories.

**Tomáš Doležal** lectures at the Faculty of International Relations at the University of Economics in Prague. His Ph.D. project explores the conceptualization of religious and cultural aspects of identity in the discipline of International Relations, and his long-term interest in religion and culture resulted in a cooperation with the Institute of International Relations in Prague on a two-year research project on the political theology of European integration.

## Appendix

### *1. Quoted primary documents of the research sample*

**P1:** Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino. “Erga migrantes caritas Christi: A Better Pastoral Response for Migrants in Africa.” *People on the Move* N<sup>o</sup> 109 (Suppl.) (2009): 37 Last modified April, 2009. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/pom2009\\_109-suppl/rc\\_pc\\_migrants\\_pom109-suppl\\_erga%20africa%20martino.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2009_109-suppl/rc_pc_migrants_pom109-suppl_erga%20africa%20martino.html).

**P2:** H. Em. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. “Address of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.” Address presented at the inauguration of the third study session of the seventh international conference on “The Religious Factor and the Future for Europe”, European Institute Lecture Hall, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, September 15, 2007. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/card-bertone/2007/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20070915\\_univ-jagellonica\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/card-bertone/2007/documents/rc_seg-st_20070915_univ-jagellonica_en.html).

**P3:** Benedict XVI. “Address to H.E. Mr. Martin Bolldorf, the new ambassador of Austria to the Holy See.” Castel Gandolfo, September 18, 2006. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060918\\_ambassador-austria\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060918_ambassador-austria_en.html).

**P4:** Benedict XVI. “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the European People’s Party on the Occasion of the Study Days on Europe.” Vatican, March 30, 2006. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060330\\_eu-parliamentarians\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060330_eu-parliamentarians_en.html).

**P7:** John Paul II. “Address on the occasion of the reception of the International Charlemagne Prize of the city of Aachen (Germany).” Vatican, March 24, 2004. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2004/march/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20040324\\_premio-carlo-magno\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2004/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20040324_premio-carlo-magno_en.html).

**P16:** Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo. “Lecture at Sophia University, Tokyo.” Tokyo, May 10, 2007 [http://www.vaticanstate.va/EN/State\\_and\\_Government/Structure\\_Governorate/Presidency/President/2007/10\\_May\\_2007-p-1.htm](http://www.vaticanstate.va/EN/State_and_Government/Structure_Governorate/Presidency/President/2007/10_May_2007-p-1.htm).



**P19:** Benedict XVI. “Letter on the occasion of the study day organized by the Pontifical Councils for Interreligious Dialogue and for Culture on the Theme ‘Culture and religions in dialogue.’” Vatican, December 12, 2008. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20081203\\_culture-religioni\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/pont-messages/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20081203_culture-religioni_en.html).

**P23:** Benedict XVI. “Address to H.E. Mr Pekka Ojanen, Ambassador of Finland Accredited to the Holy See.” Vatican, December 1, 2005. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051201\\_ambassador-finlandia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051201_ambassador-finlandia_en.html).

**P24:** John Paul II. “Address to the Presidents of the Parliaments of the European Union.” Vatican, September 23, 2000. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2000/jul-sep/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20000923\\_european-union\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2000/jul-sep/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000923_european-union_en.html).

**P25:** John Paul II. “Address to the Polish Parliament.” Warsaw, June 11, 1999. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_11061999\\_warsaw-parliament\\_en.html#top](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_11061999_warsaw-parliament_en.html#top).

**P28:** H.E. Msgr. Silvano M. Tomasi. “Address of H.E. Msgr. Silvano M. Tomasi.” Intervention by the Holy See at the 60th World Health Assembly, Geneva, 14–23 May 2007. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/2007/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20070521\\_who\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2007/documents/rc_seg-st_20070521_who_en.html).

**P38:** John Paul II. “Documenta.” Last modified 2000. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_cultr\\_20000615\\_doc\\_ii-2000-doc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_20000615_doc_ii-2000-doc_en.html).

**P39:** John Paul II. “Contribution to the Convention on the Future of Europe.” Commission of the Bishops’ Conference of the European Community (COMECE). May 21, 2002. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/cultr/documents/rc\\_pc\\_cultr\\_20021509\\_doc\\_iii-2002-doc\\_en.html#0](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_20021509_doc_iii-2002-doc_en.html#0)>.

**P40:** John Paul II. “Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation: ‘Ecclesia in Europa.’” To the Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, Rome, June 28, 2003. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20030628\\_ecclesia-in-europa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa_en.html).

**P55:** Pope John Paul II. “Letter of John Paul II on the occasion of the Ecumenical Meeting ‘Together For Europe’ held in Stuttgart, Germany.” Ecumenical Meeting “Together For Europe”, Stuttgart, May 6, 2004. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/2004/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_20040508\\_meeting-stuttgart\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20040508_meeting-stuttgart_en.html).

**P60:** Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. “Address of Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.” Address presented at the Congress “Religious Freedom, a Milestone of the New Europe”, organized by the Institute for Advanced Religious Studies and the Paul VI Ambrosian Foundation, Gazzada – Varese, October 19, 2007. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/secretariat\\_state/card-bertone/2007/documents/rc\\_seg-st\\_20071019\\_fond-paolo-vi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/card-bertone/2007/documents/rc_seg-st_20071019_fond-paolo-vi_en.html).

**P62:** The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and Libreria Editrice Vaticana. “Jesus Christ Alive in His Church. Source of Hope for Europe. Instrumentum Laboris.” Synod of Bishops – Second Special Assembly for Europe, Vatican City, October 1–23, 1999. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_19071999\\_europe-instrlabor\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_19071999_europe-instrlabor_en.html).

**P116:** Archbishop Paul K. Bakyenga of Mbarara. “Communion and Solidarity between Africa and Europe.” Symposium Episcoporum Africae and Europae SECAM CCEE, Rome, November 10–13, 2004. <http://www.ccee.ch/ressourcen/download/20080512151228.doc>.

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**P127:** H.E. Archbishop Antonio Maria Vegliò. “Analysis and interpretation of the Church in relation to the changes brought about in Europe by migration and mobility-A theological perspective.” VIII CCEE European Congress on Migration, Malaga, April 27–May 1, 2010. <http://www.ccee.ch/ressourcen/download/20100427190135.doc>.

**P128:** “Communion and Solidarity Between Europe and Africa in the Age of Human Mobility, Migration as a new point of evangelisation and solidarity.” SECAM-CCEE seminar, Liverpool, November 23, 2008. <http://www.ccee.ch/ressourcen/download/20090417090312.doc>.

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