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## *Where does the moral groundwork come from in today's society?*

Artykuł ukazuje socjologiczne i moralne dylematy współczesnych liberalnych demokracji wynikające z przyjęcia przez liberalizm charakteru radykalnie sekularnego. Autor podejmuje tak kwestię źródeł tego stanu rzeczy, jak i paradoksów wynikających z poszukiwania przez te społeczności uzasadnień stanowisk moralnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** liberalizm, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, religia, moralność, metaaksjologia, chrześcijaństwo.

The article shows sociological and moral dilemmas of modern liberal democracies resulting from the fact that liberalism has become radically secular. The author raises the issue of the origin of this state of affairs, as well as of paradoxes that arise while these societies search for justification of moral positions.

**Key words:** liberalism, civil society, religion, morality, meta-axiology, Christianity

For many centuries Europe remained internally united. In those times, it was referred to as *Christianitas*. Wars were fought in Europe, but they were civil wars [Cavanaugh 2009]. Independently of internal divides, Christianity constituted the linking element of Europe in religious terms (faith), as well as cultural and civilizational. We will find this perception of matters for instance in Saint John Paul II, who used to say, that the borders of Europe correspond to the scope of evangelisation. This is one of the reasons why many Europeans deem Armenia or Georgia as countries that are closer to them than the geographically less remote Turkey.

Since that time many things have changed in the Old Continent. In the view of Saint John Paul II, radical changes on the cultural and religious map of Europe began in the Age of Enlightenment which, as we read in "Memory and Identity", "opposed what Europe had become as a result of evangelisation" [John Paul II 2005: 101]. From then on the history of

Europe is marked by two competing narratives, which claim to fully explain the meaning of life and the sense of human history. The attitude of the Enlightenment to religion is quite complex and we lack the time to discuss it in detail. Perhaps we could just evoke a short summary by Ernest Cassirer: “Diderot states that deism had cut off a dozen heads from the Hydra of religion, but from the one head it had spared, all the others would grow again. This complete rejection of religious faith in general, in whatever historical form it may appear and no matter what arguments may support it, seems henceforth to be the only means to free man from slavery and prejudice and to open up the way to his real happiness” [Cassirer 1979: 134–135]. Revolution, atheist regimes, and finally 1968 caused the process of liberation “from the yoke of religion” (D. Diderot) to accelerate considerably. In Europe today Christianity has become something of a subculture.

Why is the question about the foundations of social life of such great importance particularly today? Gerhard Lohfink finds the reason for the interest in the fact that “our society fears the symptoms of decline and collapse, and what it is afraid of most is social chaos” [Lohfink 2015: 357]. We, the citizens of Europe, live in a deep awareness of all sorts of conflicts that are affecting our civilisation. The family crisis, the demographic crisis, the immigration crisis, just to name a few. Empty churches, empty school and overcrowded refugee camps. We are concerned that the western civilisation may be slowly petering away. This was emphatically expressed by Pope Francis in the European Parliament: “(...) we encounter a general impression of weariness and aging, of a Europe which is now a «grandmother», no longer fertile and vibrant” [Francis 2014].

Are we then living in a declining era? And if so, the decline of what would it be? Europe will not cease to exist in a geographical sense. Also in a political sense the change does not necessarily need to be radical. Because the pressure on traditional European culture seems to come from two directions: from secularism on one side, and Islamic fundamentalism on the other, the European Union might one day be re-named as the Post-European Union, or the European Islamic Republic. Should this be a cause for our concern, provided the living standards and guarantees of high pensions in the future are maintained, and the everyday life does not change more than in Houellebecq’s novel “Submission”? What should we be defending in the contemporary world?

People more or less know what the islamisation of the continent would bring about. Polygamy, minarets, kebab instead of pork chops, burkini instead of bikini, and so on. What, however, would secularization change in the organization of social life? The answer to the question should begin with an inventory of issues and institutions introduced to

the European culture owing to Christianity. Proving this would be difficult, but making a limited list should be relatively easy.

A reflection on the topic is usually opened with a reference to the “Böckenförde Dilemma”. It claims, that for a liberal secular state to emerge and to last, it requires a minimal axiological consensus (values), which it cannot produce and so it “lives by prerequisites which it cannot guarantee itself” [Böckenförde 1994: 120]. Böckenförde explicitly asks the question contained in the title of this speech: “Can social morality be founded on a non-religious, secular justification?” [Ibid. 118] It is followed by another: “Must not a secular state ultimately draw on the layers of spiritual life and the sense of those interpersonal bonds that faith bestows on its citizens?” [Ibid. 117] “Can a free society last without religion?” [Spaemann 2009: 143] – asks Robert Spaemann. In both cases, they are theoretical questions. Yet Benedict XVI pointed out in Regensburg that this does not concern any religion, because different religions cause different social consequences. A liberal secular state was born in the context of the Judeo-Christian culture alone.

### **First “liberal” constitution**

What is then the source of “our” basic values, such as human dignity, freedom, equality, equal rights, etc.? Lohfink says: their knowledge came to us through history. They were certainly not something obvious from the very beginning, always and everywhere. They had been «revealed» and offered by God to his chosen people – whatever the meaning of the word [Lohfink 2015: 360]. The Decalogue is the constitution of the first “liberal” state established by slaves who had fled from Egypt. “The Torah – writes Lohfink – is perceived as a model of social order that leads to freedom. It does not, therefore, shape a new state based on the Egyptian model, where Israel had to perform slave labour, but instead bequeaths the very system that was born from freedom”. By no coincidence did John Paul II choose the Decalogue as the topic of his first pilgrimage to the then already free Poland in 1991. “The future of Man and of societies – he said – depends on these ten simple words. The future of the nation, the state, Europe, the world” [Ibid. 361].

In the light of experiences with atheist regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the claim that the presence of Christian inspiration in European culture is a necessary (albeit insufficient) condition for the culture to even survive, seems not to require additional justification. “If there is no divine law, the distinction between good and evil may be set by any kind of decree by anyone and take any kind of meaning” – writes Leszek Kołakowski [Kołakowski 2014: 50]. The point here is not strictly religious. The essence of the problem is how the

Decalogue is translated into the legal system of a free society. A short explanation of how this happened in the history of Europe was proposed by Benedict XVI in his speech in Bundestag:

“In history systems of law have almost always been based on religion: decisions regarding what was to be lawful among men were taken with reference to the divinity. Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never proposed a revealed law to the State and to society, that is to say a juridical order derived from revelation. Instead, it has pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law – and to the harmony of objective and subjective reason, which naturally presupposes that both spheres are rooted in the creative reason of God. Christian theologians thereby aligned themselves with a philosophical and juridical movement that began to take shape in the second century B.C. In the first half of that century, the social natural law developed by the Stoic philosophers came into contact with leading teachers of Roman Law. Through this encounter, the juridical culture of the West was born, which was and is of key significance for the juridical culture of mankind. This pre-Christian marriage between law and philosophy opened up the path that led via the Christian Middle Ages and the juridical developments of the Age of Enlightenment all the way to the Declaration of Human Rights and to our German Basic Law of 1949, with which our nation committed itself to «inviolable and inalienable human rights as the foundation of every human community, and of peace and justice in the world». For the development of law and for the development of humanity, it was highly significant that Christian theologians aligned themselves against the religious law associated with polytheism and on the side of philosophy, and that they acknowledged reason and nature and their interrelation, as the universally valid source of law” [Benedykt XVI 2011].

The transposition of the Decalogue into a system of civil law should not, therefore be done by way of Revelation, but through the intermediary of the natural law, which – though divine in origin – is recognized by the power of the natural reason. “According to this understanding, – claims Benedict XVI – the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers – still less to propose concrete political solutions, which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion – but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles” [Benedykt XVI 2010].

The universal principles of moral ethics are accessible to any person able to use the capacity of the mind correctly, and religion itself adds nothing in this respect. The novelty contributed by religion is its “corrective role” with regard to the natural reason. Religion is to help man in becoming a fully rational being<sup>5</sup>. Firstly, it helps man to free himself from superstition<sup>6</sup> (*superstitio*) [Benedict XVI 2016: 38]. “Reason [therefore] without Christian faith is always reason informed by some other faith, characteristically an unacknowledged faith, one that renders its adherents liable to error” [MacIntyre 2011: 152–153]. A second type of “correction” is to reveal new questions by raising the awareness of such dimension of existence, the “not fully awakened” [Phillippe 1999: 52] mind failed to notice before.

### “Emergency” strategy

A mind which is not enlightened by faith has a narrowed cognitive horizon, due to which it more easily commits mistakes in its pursuit of universal moral principles. Saint Augustin explains God’s “emergency” strategy in the following words: “the hand of our Maker in our very hearts has written this truth, «That which to yourself you would not have done, do not do to another» (Tobit 4: 15). (...) But lest men should complain that something had been wanting for them, there has been written also in tables that [commandments] which in their hearts they read not. For it was not that they had it not written, but read it they would not. There has been set before their eyes that which in their conscience to see they would be compelled” [Augustin 2017]. Saint Augustin points to two internal obstacles that are encountered by human rationality: the first is the lack of good will on the part of man, who refuses to read; the second is losing the capacity to read the text inscribed in the heart, since, in a way, man abandoned himself, and went “outside”. God decides to reach man “from the outside”, and to set the text written down on stone tablets before his bodily eyes. “(...) and as if from without the voice of God were brought to them, to his own inward parts has man been thus driven (...). But because men, desiring those things which are without, even from themselves have become exiles, there has been given also a written law: not because in hearts it had not been written, but because you were a deserter from your heart, you are seized by Him that is everywhere, and to yourself within art called back”

<sup>5</sup> “If there is only one *logos*, the *logos* of Christ requires of me as a philosopher nothing else than a more complete and more perfect activation of reason; not more than reason, but *whole* reason. Let us repeat this phrase, whole reason; for it is this problem of the integrality of thinking which will prove to be the core of the whole problematic” [Ricoeur 1968].

<sup>6</sup> “Also the Simple man is enlightened by the Power of faith, because he sees what others, who are not yet so wise, do not see. In this sense faith is enlightenment. The Greeks called the baptism *photismós*, enlightenment, coming to the light, becoming sighted. My eyes have opened. I perceive a completely new dimension that I cannot see with my bodily eyes, but that I register also corporally, in the sense that I recognise being able to see in these beautiful trees something more than trees” [Benedict XVI 2016: 38].

[Ibid.]. The Decalogue, as the revealed law, appeals to man's innate capacity to distinguish good from evil, to that "«compass» deep within our hearts, which God has impressed upon all creation" [Francis 2014].

The long-term effect of the mentioned decision taken by the Christian theologians is the model relation between the political and religious domain referred to as sound or rightful secularity. Its application in practice "frees religion from the encumbrance of politics to be enriched by the contribution of religion, while maintaining the necessary distance, clear distinction and indispensable collaboration between the two spheres" [Benedict XVI 2014]. Until the 80ties of the past century it seemed that Europe managed to perform a fruitful synthesis of two previously confrontational currents in thinking: Christianity and the secularism of enlightenment. Unfortunately, the western legal culture has currently found itself under threat. "There have been – claims Benedict – a dramatic shift in the situation in the last half-century". Natural law, the previously natural link between the two discourses, and constituted the unquestioned foundation of legislation, became an idea that people "are nearly ashamed (...) to mention [Benedict XVI 2011].

### **Radical secularisation**

The last fifty years are times of radical secularization. The process changes a great deal in the perception of man. When following contemporary European politics, it is easy to notice two currents that invoke two distinct anthropologies. The legalization of abortion, the introduction of the "day after" pill, *in vitro* fertilisation, surrogacy, selective eugenics, experiments on human embryonic stem cells, creating human chimeras or hybrids, marriage as a union of any two people, involuntary euthanasia of children and people "who consider their lives fulfilled", or the "social infertility" recently proposed at the UN forum refer to a completely different vision of mankind, than the one that shaped Christian Europe. We are dealing in Europe with an anthropological dispute that has not as yet been definitely settled. On the one hand, we have – to apply Thomas Sowell's terminology – constrained anthropology, where man is aware of the existence of two types of ethical limits attributed to his actions: one type linked with man as a creature, a being dependant on God, and the other related to the original sin, which means he makes decisions prudently, aware of his own fallibility, and tendency to choose evil. On the other hand, we are dealing with unconstrained anthropology, where man is perceived as a random product of evolution. The evolution process, or the process of the development of human abilities does not entail a pre-defined limit; "man's perfectibility is absolutely indefinite" (A. N. Condorcet). It is delineated neither by the Creator, nor by man's the propensity for evil, which is a feature of only some, as yet unenlightened people. Because ethical and cognitive perfection

characterises only enlightened people, they, as the elite/avant-garde of humanity, should play a leadership role as if in the place of the unenlightened crowds [Sowell 2007: 9–20]. Quite characteristically, the “new anthropology” is introduced to the system in a top-down manner. And if confronted with the counter-action of the people in the form of, let us say, a referendum that questions the will of the elite, the latter swallow the bitter pill with a sense of moral and intellectual superiority. The unenlightened people cannot, out of definition, be right in a dispute with the enlightened elite. Adopting the atheist point of view in thinking about the organisation of society cancels out the objective constraints on decision-making within a political community, leaving complete and limitless power in the hands of “the power-holding group”; it eliminates all inhibitors in a democratic system, postulating, at the same time, for restrictions of the right to conscientious objection. Making political thinking immanent transforms politics into a battle of interests, in which the strongest win. Simultaneously, the scope of political responsibility is limited to the present/to the immediate, hardly considering the broader time horizon that includes future generations. Most probably one of the effects of thinking within this reduced time perspective is the currently experienced demographic and environmental crisis. Let us recall the warning pronounced by John Paul II in the European Parliament in 1988: “(...) if the religious and Christian foundation of this continent in its role as the inspiration of ethics and in its social effectiveness is ever marginalized, not only will the heritage of the European past be denied, but also a future worthy of the individual European and, indeed, all Europeans, believers and non-believers alike will be seriously compromised” [John Paul II 1988].

### **Beyond radical secularisation**

The problem is not limited only to the weakening or lack of Christian inspiration in the secularized liberal state. The point is that the secularized liberal state is not able to give a meaningful answer to the problems of the modern Western world. Is not able to give a decent response to the above mentioned ethical challenges, neither resolve the causes of the demographic crisis, nor even survive in the face of the growing in strength Islam. Pierre Manent in a book *Beyond Radical Secularism*, which relates directly to the social and religious context in France, says, among other things, that “the liberal or emancipatory project, famously formulated by Cleremnot-Tonnerre in December 1789 – «to refuse everything to the Jews as a nation, and to grant everything to Jews as individuals» – proved to be a patent failure in the twentieth century” [Manent 2016: 29]. The Holocaust is in this sense the proof of the dramatic failure of the liberal model of the state. As recently the liberal state has been further weakened, it is no longer able to atomise the society, reducing members of religious communities to “the French citizens of Jewish confession” (or other confessions), nor to offer these individuals a sense of community over divisions, feeling of

being a *member of a large whole*, because is not able to propose to them any great, unifying idea. This empty space is now being taken by Islam, which intends to make religion not only a moral condition or a constant theme of common life, but also a collective project, a great ambition and a common dream [Ibid. 35–38]. The dominant opinion, according to which secularism should have the power to transform the Muslims way of life, making Islam only a subject to individual choice and an implementation of individual rights, and should accomplish this by referring only to the good will and the teaching of “Republican values” is – according to Manent – completely wrong [Ibid. 44–45]. Secular liberal state is trying to bring to the “disappearance” the problem of Islam, but not to solve it. The state had long ago renounced the ambition to guide the activities of citizens, but of all the forces is now trying to organize their perception of social life. It has the ambition to decide what and how people see around them. “They proceed as if social life was a spectacle and as if the parts of the body politic were objects the perception of which were subject to command: politics becomes a *mise en scène*. Through ever more empathetic words and gestures, they go to great lengths to command us not to see” [Ibid. 75]. Muslims can be made to disappear from the public scene only if those who are not Muslims will not be named any more. It is primarily about Christians. Old residents of France are not allowed any more to determine themselves by membership in the Christian community, and the name of this community is forbidden in public speech, even in situations where, if only for historical reasons, its use would be completely natural. This way, paradoxically, the only legitimate community in public square become Muslims. However, the introduction to the public language of the term “Islamophobia” makes any discussion about Islam censored. “We can speak of Muslims to say that they have too few mosques and of Christians to say that they have too many churches” [Ibid. 74]. Any attempt to discuss another religious topic is suspected since the very beginning. It is postulated, therefore, that Muslims should speak in public only to express their legitimate complaint and it is pre-supposed – at the same time – that each Muslims’ voice is an expression of the legitimate complaint. Public debate in this way is transformed into a tearful quarrel for equality, justice and non-discrimination. In practice Muslims do not take part in this artificial discussion as community, what makes that no one asks them about their vision of social life or how they would like to change the live of the entire community of citizens. In a “faceless” society, perceiving itself through the prism of individual human rights, in a society which understands itself on the likeness of dust, which incidentally settled just on this and not on another geographical place, also to Muslims is difficult to say what kind of society they would expect. “(...) human rights imply the pure and simple disappearance of Islam as a form of common life. [But] Muslims are too attached to their moral practices and to their religion to give into the temptation to become «modern individuals» by disappearing as Muslims” [Ibid. 81].

What does it mean for Europe? If Islam will be spread in the space devoid of any political form, in which all forms of common life are undermined or even “driven out” under the pretext of defending individual rights, the only that can meet Europe is Islamization. Islam in fact will become “the sole collective reference in a space otherwise devoted to the dispersion or anarchy of individual rights” [Ibid. 83]. Europeans therefore could stand one day to find that outside Islam there is no salvation ... for Europe. This way can come to us “Islamization by default”, because, on the one hand, Muslims came not to Europe to convert it, but in search of better living conditions, on the other hand, the Europeans “never had the chance to accept or to refuse Muslim immigration, since the official interpretation of rights dictated that Muslims be considered exclusively as rights-bearing individuals and in no way as bearers of a collective form” [Ibid.]. Terms as “equality”, “secularism” and “Republican values” – says Manent – mean disqualification of all the common forms of life just because they have not been selected by each individual or because they do not please each individual. If mankind would had begun its adventure by the adoption of such rules, no family, no city nor religious community would ever have appeared. For in this case the “Republican values” are considered as “the disposition that make it possible to live together without having anything in common” [Ibid. 86]. In other words, Manent argues, that the so-called constitutional patriotism as the foundation of common life in the Kantian republic, embodied a day by the European Union, is precisely what prevents the common life and even the survival of the community in the existing real (French) Republic. Therefore, what the Europeans urgently need is just a representative government. This government, however, is only possible at the national level. Such a government should “command” Muslims “to establish independence from the various Muslim countries that send out imams, and that finance and sometimes administer or guide the mosques” [Ibid. 89]. Clear marking of the border between Islam external to the state and Islam internal to it would allow defensive attitude/policy to the external and friendly to the internal one. The problem is that the characteristic of Islam is its “imperial” lack of distinction between the internal and external. But the granting of specific concession to Islam to the blurring of the boundary between the outer world and the inner, and therefore the “exemption” from the obligation of obedience and loyalty to the state authority, would be “an act of political and therefore spiritual submission” [Ibid. 91] to Islam.

### **A boat with two paddles**

In a Christmas crib in an Italian parish a boat with one oar was placed. This was a clear reference to the picture inspiring the imagination of Europeans since St. Benedict. The patron of Europe, however, sketched a boat equipped with two paddles with an inscription on each of them; one inscription reads *ora* – “to pray”, the second *labora* – “to work”. Moving

on – says this message – requires balanced traction on both paddles. Who would disregard this equilibrium may indeed be very busy, but will spin around his own axis. He can be so busy that will even not notice this fact. It seems that the boat with one oar is a perfect metaphor for modern Europe composed out of individuals focused only on work and consumption. Europeans swirl so quickly that they do not notice what is obvious to the neutral observer coming to Europe from the outside. Should he join this puppet dance? Can people blame him, that he is staying aside and decides to arrange his own life “aside”, within a community, which is superior at least in this sense that still involves both oars?

In recently published interview with the Pope Benedict one can read: “Europe no longer functions as the obvious centre of the Church in the world, but in her universality, she is present on every continent. (...) In the European continent faith has weakened so much, that even for this reason it can provide the proper driving force for the Church in the world, and for the faith in the Church, only to a limited degree. (...) On the other hand, when I see the power of bureaucrats, the theorisation of faith, politicising and lack of vital momentum that is in addition very nearly crushed by the weight of an excessively expanded structure, I am relieved that also different trends are visible in the Church around the world and that Europe itself is receiving missionary work from the outside” [Benedict XVI 2016: 55]. One can treat these words as a wish for the Church in Europe to free itself from the burden of bureaucracy and to become again a prophetic sign for the European inhabitants. But also as a wish for Europe itself, to re-discover in its own Christian inspiration the motives for life, a common dream and a great ambition, to avoid that the recent Nobel Prize, which usually is granted to people at a certain age, would become for it a kiss of death.

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