Article

The Theological Foundation of Democracy According to Ratzinger

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Abstract: When the Cold War was ended in 1989, Francis Fukuyama wrote, three years later, his very well-known book proposing a quite original thesis. He argues that the end of fascism and of communism means the triumph of Eastern liberalism in history. Following a Hegelian perspective, Fukuyama said contrary to Marx that communism, like the other previous economic-political systems that are not liberal, has been only a step to achieve a liberal society. So it happened in Russia and in Eastern Europe, and so it seems to be happening with the progressive opening of the market in China. Today, more than twenty years after Fukuyama wrote, it is time to ask whether secular liberal Western societies still appear to the eyes of humankind to provide the best option. In fact, with the economic crises in Europe, with the austerity imposed on many people and affecting deeply the lives of at least one generation, are liberal societies at risk? Does the growth of the Islamic state after the Arab Spring question the foundation of democratic principles? Considering also Russia and the geo-political problems in Ukraine, can we say that the East has become or is in the process of becoming really democratic? Is the growing popularity of political parties opposed to the European Union, and often embracing anti-democratic ideologies, compatible with Fukuyama's thesis? It is true, we must say that the American philosopher whom I mentioned assumed that, even if liberal economic-political systems were the best option, their triumph was not automatic and necessary in the long-term. However, Francis Fukuyama recently wrote a new book in which he analyzes a kind of contemporary democratic recession in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a recession that he sees as having delayed the democratic triumph all over the world and over history he announced in the nineties. For me, it is quite interesting to notice how Joseph Ratzinger shares, even if from a different perspective, the concerns of Fukuyama. The German theologian, who became the Pope during a time of political and economic crises, experienced the dictatorship of Nazism and was a protagonist of the Second Vatican Council, in which the Catholic Church accepted positively the principles of democratic society. While, in the past, the relationship between the Church and the "so-called" democrats was characterized especially by confrontation, it seems to me that today, Christianity encourages and is best able to preserve democratic principles. Furthermore, the originality of Ratzinger's theology consists not only in reconciling the main liberal democratic values with Catholic thought but especially in showing that the condition of the possibility of democracy resides in such Christian theology: democratic values are intelligible and grounded within such theology.

Keywords: Ratzinger; democracy; Dignitatis Humanae; liberty of conscience; hermeneutic of reform

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"It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried". (Churchill 1950)

1. Introduction | Fukuyama's Statement

When the Cold War ended in 1989, the political philosopher Francis Fukuyama wrote an article—"The End of History?" (Fukuyama 1989)—and three years later published a well-known book (Fukuyama [1992] 2006) proposing a quite original thesis. He argues that the end of fascism and of communism means the triumph of occidental liberalism in history: if fascism ended with the triumph of a war, communism showed itself to be economically and socially unsustainable.[1]

Following a Hegelian perspective, Francis Fukuyama says, contrary to Karl Marx, that communism, like the other economic-political systems that are not liberal, is only a step to achieve a liberal society. So it happened in Russia and in eastern Europe, and so it seems to be happening with the progressive open of the market in China.[2]

Today, more than twenty years after Fukuyama wrote, it is time to ask whether secular liberal Western societies still appear to the eyes of humankind to provide the best option. In fact, with the economic crises in Europe, with the austerity imposed on many people and affecting deeply the lives of at least one generation, are the liberal societies at risk? Does the growth of the Islamic state after the Arab Spring, seen by many has the beginning of democracy in such countries, question the foundation of democratic principles? Considering also Russia and the geo-political problems in Ukraine, can we say that the East has become or is in the process of becoming really democratic? Is the growing popularity of political parties opposed to the European Union, and often embracing anti-democratic ideologies, compatible with Fukuyama's thesis?

It is true, we must say, that the American philosopher whom I mentioned assumed that, even if liberal economic-political systems were the best option,[3] their triumph was not automatic and necessarily for the long-term.[4] However, Francis Fukuyama recently wrote a new book in which he analyzes a kind of contemporary democratic recession in the first decade of the twenty-first century, which he sees as having delayed the democratic triumph all over the world and over history that he announced in the nineties.[5]

For me, it is quite interesting to notice how Joseph Ratzinger shares, even from a different perspective, the concerns of Fukuyama. The German theologian, who became the Pope during a time of political and economic crises, experienced the dictatorship of Nazism and was a protagonist of the Second Vatican Council, in which the Catholic Church accepted positively the principles of democratic society.[6]

While, in the past, the relationship between the Church and the "so-called" democrats was characterized especially by confrontation, it seems to me that today, Christianity encourages and is best able to preserve democratic principles. Furthermore, in the political domain, the originality of Ratzinger's theology consists not only in reconciling the main liberal democratic values with Catholic thought but especially in showing that the condition of the possibility of democracy resides in such Christian theology.

The paper is structured in two main parts: the first part consists on a description of the change effected in the Second Vatican Council regarding the way the Church conceives democracy; in the

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1　　Cf. (Fukuyama [1992] 2006, pp. 287–93).
2　　Cf. (Fukuyama [1992] 2006, pp. 96–97).
3　　"That liberal democracy in reality constitutes the best possible solution to the human problem" (Fukuyama [1992] 2006, p. 338).
4　　Cf. (Fukuyama [1992] 2006, p. xxii).
5　　Francis Fukuyama admits that the Arab Spring could imply a recession in the increasing of democracy that we had been seeing since the nineties (Fukuyama 2014, pp. 427–28). "Political institutions develop over time, but they are also universally subject to political decay. This problem is not solved once a society becomes rich and democratic. Indeed, democracy itself can be the source of decay" (Fukuyama 2014, pp. 461–62).
6　　"Fundamental Christian human values supporting, indeed implying, *inter alia*, a pluralist democracy for Europe, built on its own non-relativistic kernel" (Corkery 2009, p. 113).

second part, it is argued, following Ratzinger's theology, that democratic principles have, indelibly, a Christian theological foundation.

2. Part I: Democracy at the Second Vatican Council

With the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Church changed the ecclesiology, seeing the church as a *People of God* (LG 9). This ecclesiological change flowed from the acceptance and integration of democratic principles. In fact, as Joseph Ratzinger said, the kind of ecclesiology that emphasizes collegiality, sinodality, and equal dignity of each member of the Church itself contains a "clear democratic tendency" (Ratzinger and Meier 2005, pp. 23–24).

So, it seems to me necessary to clarify the relationship between the Church and democracy following the hermeneutic of reform strongly defended by Ratzinger.

2.1. The Church and the Understanding of Democracy before the Council

The question concerning the relationship between Church and democracy has two main points: primarily, how the Church conceives democracy and its legitimation from a Christian theological point of view; secondarily, to what extent are democratic principles operative, from an ecclesiological point of view, inside the Church. The analysis of the present paper is focused on the first point.[7]

Thus, historically speaking, we see a general condemnation of the concrete democracies from the very first beginning of the liberal states in Europe after the French Revolution.

In 1791, Pius VI condemned the French constitution as having "the goal of eliminating the Catholic faith" and condemned also the universal right to an "absolute freedom."[8] This is a reaction against a contingent historical situation. It seems to me, indeed, that Pius's words should not be interpreted as a condemnation of general principle but rather of a concrete system that has the goal of eliminating the Catholic faith. In addition, it is interesting to notice that, in such magisterial documents, "freedom" and "democracy" are condemned always with an adjective: in this case, "absolute freedom." Really, in Pius VII's apostolic letter *Post tam Diuturnas*, the condemnation of the liberty of cult, could be also interpreted in this particular context of reaction against agents using democratic principles and the language of liberty to make Christianity disappear from public sphere.[9]

Following this tradition, which emphasized the critique against the liberal societies that were growing in Europe, Gregory XVI wrote an important encyclical, *"Mirari Vos,"* in which the Pope criticizes that "liberty of conscience" comes from "indifferentism."[10] Pius IX, in the encyclical *"Quanta Cura"* and also in his famous *"Syllabus,"* followed his predecessors, condemning that type of religious liberty, political liberty, and liberty of conscience that is the consequence of naturalism, rationalism, and atheism (Murray 1967, p. 112).

"At this time there are found not a few who, applying to civil intercourse the impious and absurd principles of what they call Naturalism, dare teach "that the best form of Society, and the exigencies of civil progress, absolutely require human society to be constituted and governed without any regard whatsoever to Religion, as if this [Religion] did not even exist, or at least without making any distinction between true and false religions." (. . .) namely, "that the liberty of conscience and of worship is the peculiar (or inalienable) right of every man, which should be proclaimed by law, and that citizens have the right to all kinds of liberty, to be restrained by no law, whether ecclesiastical

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[7] Though the Council's ecclesiological conclusions, presented in *Lumen Gentium* cf. (Second Vatican Council 1964, pp. 860–909), preceded the theological conclusions of *Dignitatis Humanae* cf. (Second Vatican Council 1965, pp. 930–32) the "democratic tendency" was already present, implicitly, providing the principles from which the Council redesigned the ecclesiology. According to Ratzinger, the ecclesiology of the Council can be synthesized by the word *communio*, even if this word "did not occupy a central place in the Council" (Ratzinger 2010, p. 106).

[8] Cf. (Pius VI [our translation from the Italian]).

[9] Cf. (Pius VII 1814, pp. 240–47).

[10] Cf. (Gregory XVI 1832, pp. 561–62).

or civil, by which they may be enabled to manifest openly and publicly their ideas, by word of mouth, through the press, or by any other means" (*Quanta Cura* 3).[11]

Of course, as we will see afterwards, there is also a clear discontinuity, or better, a novelty, in the Second Vatican Council: the church had condemned the liberty of conscience and of religion and yet accepted it in the Council. As John W. O'Malley would say, something happened during the Council.[12]

Through the examples given above, Ratzinger's opinion regarding the excessive separation between the pre-Council Church and the post-Council Church is supported.[13] The appearance of such a discontinuity, in fact, is diminished, in the extent that the condemnations of liberty—and against democratic societies and institutions—are understood to have been made in a particular context of confrontation between those societies and institutions that positioned themselves against the Church and the public expression of Christian faith. Not only that, but we must also see that the magisterial documents in which such condemnations appear do not assert a categorical condemnation of the principles but condemn that liberty that is a consequence of atheistic philosophies.

> Summarizing, as Benedict XVI said to the Roman Curia in the *Pope's Christmas Address* of 2005,

> It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists. In this process of innovation in continuity we must learn to understand more practically than before that the Church's decisions on contingent matters—for example, certain practical forms of liberalism or a free interpretation of the Bible—should necessarily be contingent themselves, precisely because they refer to a specific reality that is changeable in itself. It was necessary to learn to recognize that in these decisions it is only the principles that express the permanent aspect, since they remain as an undercurrent, motivating decisions from within. On the other hand, not so permanent are the practical forms that depend on the historical situation and are therefore subject to change. (Benedict XVI 2005b, §59)

In this speech, Benedict XVI argued in favor of a hermeneutic of reform, the opposite of a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture, regarding the Council's interpretation.

> On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call "a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture"; it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the "hermeneutic of reform," of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God. [14]

2.2. The Insight of "Dignitatis Humanae" (1965)

This kind of hermeneutic of the Council, against the separation between the Church of the Council regarding the one before, was already present in Cardinal Ratzinger's thought.

> Non c'è una Chiesa 'pre' o 'post' conciliare: c'è una sola e unica Chiesa (. . .) il concilio non intendeva affatto introdurre una divisione del tempo della Chiesa (. . .) l'intenzione del Papa che prese l'iniziativa del Vaticano II, Giovanni XXIII (. . .), non era affatto di mettere in

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[11] (Pius IX 1864, pp. 588–90)
[12] "Something of great significance was happening" (O'Malley 2008, p. 199).
[13] "Ratzinger wants to avoid any pre- and post-Conciliar dichotomy" (Rowland 2009, p. 30). In fact, Ratzinger affirmed that "there are no leaps in this history, there are no fractures, and there is no break in continuity. In no way did the Council intend to introduce a temporal dichotomy in the Church" (Ratzinger 1985, p. 35).
[14] (Benedict XVI 2005a)

discussione il *depositum fidei* che, anzi, entrambi davano per indiscusso, ormai messo al sicuro. (Ratzinger 2005, pp. 33–34)

These are the words said by Cardinal Ratzinger to Vittorio Messori in 1985. Thus, according to Ratzinger's interpretation of the Council, the content of *Dignitatis Humanae* derives from the *depositum fidei*, without contradicting the main Christian principles, preserved by *Tradition*, that allow the defense of democracy in general. This means that the content of Christian faith affirms that faith's assent can only be realized in freedom and that human nature can achieve the truth because is participatory in the divinity.[15]

In fact, the document of the Second Vatican Council on "social and civil freedom in matters religious" starts from the "human dignity" which constitutes the basic principle of human rights and the consequent freedom of conscience and religion that should be used responsibly.

> A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man, and the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty. The demand is likewise made that constitutional limits should be set to the powers of government, in order that there may be no encroachment on the rightful freedom of the person and of associations. (*Dignitatis Humanae* 1)

In the "hermeneutic of reform," which I have chosen to follow here, the change regards more the starting point than the conclusions that are a consequence of such a starting point: in fact, while the magisterial declarations against the political liberal systems, such as Pius IX's *Syllabus*, derive from a particular response against the attack to the faith of such concrete historical systems that were defying the Church, *Dignitatis Humanae* departs from theological general principles, which imply the general conclusion of liberty of conscience.[16]

> First, the council professes its belief that God Himself has made known to mankind the way in which men are to serve Him, and thus be saved in Christ and come to blessedness. We believe that this one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men. (. . .) all men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and His Church, and to embrace the truth they come to know, and to hold fast to it.

> This Vatican Council likewise professes its belief that it is upon the human conscience that these obligations fall and exert their binding force. The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.

> Religious freedom, in turn, which men demand as necessary to fulfill their duty to worship God, has to do with immunity from coercion in civil society. Therefore it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ. (*Dignitatis Humanae* 1)[17]

Carefully reading this document, it is difficult to put it in radical discontinuity and rupture regarding the precedent doctrine of the Church. It is not an integration of a relativistic pluralism

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[15] "He [Ratzinger] agrees with the basic principle of the Conciliar document *Dignitatis Humanae* that religious observance can never be coerced. None the less, he argues that the state must recognize that a basic framework of values within a Christian foundation is the precondition for its own existence and it must learn that there is a truth which precedes it and makes it possible" (Rowland 2009, pp. 112–13).

[16] Cf. (Pink 2012)

[17] (Second Vatican Council 1965, p. 930)

because the "one true religion" is still affirmed. Indeed, it is about assuming that human conscience can assent personally, as a free response to Revelation, to the divine law. Faith, thus, cannot be imposed because this approach is intrinsically against God's wishes. In other words, Christian faith believes in human dignity as an indelible consequence of its *depositum fidei*: only through a dialogical process, in which human conscience is respected, can faith be realized in a Christian point of view.

> Truth, however, is to be sought after in a manner proper to the dignity of the human person and his social nature. The inquiry is to be free, carried on with the aid of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue, in the course of which men explain to one another the truth they have discovered, or think they have discovered, in order thus to assist one another in the quest for truth.

> Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it.

> On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. (*Dignitatis Humanae* 3)[18]

This touches the very important point of the present paper. As we see through *Dignitatis Humanae*, the main democratic principles of participation and dialogue constitute a consequence of Christian theological assumptions. To believe in a humankind participative to the Trinitarian God imply assume that human person has an ontologically dignity, which conscience and freedom must be respected.

> Freedom is identical with ontological dignity, which of course makes sense only if ontological dignity is really "dignified": the gift of love and being given in love. That is why the pedagogy of freedom is guidance in this ontological dignity, education for being, education for love, and thus guidance in Θείωσισ, guidance in divinization. (Ratzinger 2008, p. 188)

The theology of Joseph Ratzinger makes us enter into the metaphysical principles that democracy must assume, even if only implicitly, principles that have a theological origin.[19] Hence, the German theologian will not defend democracy in Fukuyama's way, by pragmatically affirming that it is the "best option" that humankind has available. Ratzinger's defense of democracy, following this conciliar reformation, will be also reasonable, but always with a theological and ontological legitimation of using it:[20] who is a human person, in its nature created by the Trinitarian God.

Thus, in the next part of the present paper, it will be shown that democracy is a consequence of Christian theology and has the foundation of its own principles in such a theology.

3. Part II: Christianity as the Guarantee of Democracy

Following Ratzinger's argumentation, the defense of democratic values in the Second Vatican Council was not a rupture regarding the doctrine preserved inside the Catholic tradition among time. In fact, the pronunciation of such values, especially in *Dignitatis Humanae*, drives from theological Christian principles.[21]

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[18] (Second Vatican Council 1965, p. 934.)

[19] "Modern science, for example, is a Western invention that has a universal value. So, too, are liberalism, separation of civil society and state or church and state, the rule of law, the welfare state, democracy (...) I feel obligated to mention that no serious attempt to account for these great moments in history has ignored the contribution of Christianity" (Pera 2007, pp. 1–2). In fact, as Thomas Woods argues, it is not a coincidence that those values and democratic institutions were born in a Christian cultural context (Woods 2012, pp. 189–96).

[20] "The two great cultures of the West, that is, the culture of the Christian faith and that of secular rationality, are an important contributory factor (each in its own way) throughout the world and in all cultures (...)" (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, p. 75).

[21] "En conclusion, la doctrine de *Dignitatis Humanae* est pleinement traditionnelle (...) cette liberté, la vrai liberté, la liberté digne des enfants de Dieu, que protège si glorieusement la dignité de la personne humaine." (Murray 1967, pp. 145–46).

In this sense, as it will be explained afterwards, Ratzinger's theology proposes a kind of Christianity, no *fideistic* nor *nominalist*, from which democracy can be theoretically intelligible and historically preserved.

3.1. How to Make Democracy Intelligible

Inside Western culture, scientific knowledge and a society in which rational human beings can dialogue and choose their common principles democratically have grown.

> Participation in community life is not only one of the greatest aspirations of the citizen, called to exercise freely and responsibly his civic role with and for others, but is also one of the pillars of all democratic orders and one of the major guarantees of the permanence of the democratic system. [22]

It is very clear that, for the present Catholic doctrine, the contemporary Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church defends explicitly the democratic system, following very close the Second Vatican Council. In the quote above, we see the affirmation according to which the Christian principle of participation is its guarantee. This principle, which rejects with democracy any kind of totalitarianism, implicitly has a common nature between all human beings, from which a dialogue and a communion is possible, instead of the violence of imposing a particular will onto others.

This reasoning is very present in Ratzinger's theology: the German theologian is not a conservative of the ancient regime but rather a man who wants to defend the main principles from which a plural and democratic society is possible. Thus, reason, coupled with a belief in the human capacity of universal Truth, is the condition of possibility of democracy, of religious freedom, and even of an intercultural dialogue.

Ratzinger argues that, where there is no common understanding of nature among human beings; it is not possible to discover a common truth, nor build a shared project based on a common desire, nor reach an agreement on universal human rights because there is no common ground.[23] Christianity's belief in natural law allows it to respect other cultures and even to integrate into its system some philosophies and principles that came from outside the *rivelatio* sphere: one culture can contribute to another in our lives under the condition that there is a possibility of each human being, by reason, to grasp a common truth and that this is possible under the condition that natural law is true. "His [Ratzinger's] genealogy of modernity does not follow the school of thinking which reads modernity as an entirely new culture, completely severed from all Christian roots. He believes that it is entangled with the Christian heritage however much secular liberal political elites may want to deny this."[24]

In fact, Ratzinger argues that dialogue requires analogical ontology. This means that if particular beings are equivoque in nature and univoque in ontological value, the relationship between different beings, different persons, will be violent. A communion is not possible between beings that have a completely different nature, intelligibility, and will. Democracy requires a common nature between men, which is assured in the Christian doctrine of the participation of the logos of the world in the divine one.

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[22]　(Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005, §190)

[23]　Thus, the problem of nominalism is that assumes an equivocal ontology—this means the presumption that each human being is absolutely unique and that there is no common nature among human beings or all other things that do exist. This prospective, according to Ratzinger, would pose the risk that democracy would become, not the place where human beings discuss and freely build according to their opinions, but rather a society fragmented in different groups that fight against each other, instead of communicating their ideas and life experiences. It is also interesting to notice that Ratzinger criticizes nominalism in this sense because it allows for an arbitrariness that could permit terrorism and religious fundamentalism ((Benedict XVI 2006a (*Faith, Reason and the University*), §7). In fact, politics is at the service of justice if we presume the Common Good in a society, which fundament resides on natural law. So, in this sense, Ratzinger says that to *preserve natural law it is also important to have an analogical ontology* in which all the truths are in reference to a universal and absolute Truth, which human beings cannot reach completely cf. ((Benedict XVI 2006a (*Faith, Reason and the University*), §7–9).

[24]　(Rowland 2009, p. 107)

One final element of the natural law that claimed (at least in the modern period) that it was ultimately a rational law has remained, namely, *human rights*. These are incomprehensible without the presupposition that man *qua*, thanks simply to his membership in the species "man," is the subject of rights and that his being bears within itself values and norms that must be discovered—but not invented. (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, p. 70)

The guarantee of democracy, and the assurance that a totalitarism of a particular arbitrary will shall not operate, is in the presupposition that human beings share a common nature.[25] This presupposition, implied in Christian theology, sees humans as beings able to achieve truth and communion because they are the image of the Trinitarian God, who is a community of person and the logos that created all the universe.

This means that democracy implies the absolute respect of the dignity of human beings. Only from this respect is it possible to pledge the principle of participation, which guarantees democracy: participation to the community is important only in the presumption that human individuals can achieve some shared truth regarding a shared nature in the common place.

Hence, in order to preserve this respect, of the absolute dignity of humankind, it is necessary to assure a universal reasonable criteria, according to which in the common place the possible pluralism must respect this main principle and the nature of men and the world, instead of the arbitrariness of individual willing. "It is not the law of the stronger, but the strength of the law that must hold sway. Power as structured by law, and at the service of law, is the antithesis of violence, which is a lawless power that opposes the law (…) in this way that arbitrariness can be excluded and freedom can be experienced as a freedom shared in common with others" (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, p. 58).

In this sense, Ratzinger introduced the concept of *dictatorship of relativism* as a new kind of totalitarianism, which threatens the Western democratic values in the contemporary societies. "We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires."[26] The only way to avoid the arbitrary of the willing of the strongest is establishing a law that is intelligible to all human beings rationally and, with a theological presupposition, that is ontological connected to truth of human nature.[27]

This is the context from which, inside Ratzinger's work, the critic emerges, not against the scientific theory of evolution but specifically against the "social Darwinism." This ethical application of a biologic theory means the imposition of arbitrariness in human societies: the law of the strongest. The only way to refute this tendency is accepting Christian theology, that reality is the operation of the principles of love and reason instead of the chaos of arbitrary will and process. "Contrary to the ethos of social Darwinism, Ratzinger holds that the ethos of Christianity must consist in love and reason converging with one another as the essential foundation pillars of reality."[28]

3.2. A Non-Nominalist Christianity

Christianity contains the theological principles that allow us to conceive human beings as persons who share the same nature, differentially, in order to have relationships among them and communicate reciprocally. This anthropology, implied by the Christian principles exposed before, is not compatible with a nominalist ontology.

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[25] "In all cultures there are examples of ethical convergence, some isolated, some interrelated, as an expression of the one human nature, willed by the Creator; the tradition of ethical wisdom knows this as the natural law. This universal moral law provides a sound basis for all cultural, religious and political dialogue, and it ensures that the multi-faceted pluralism of cultural diversity does not detach itself from the common quest for truth, goodness and God." (Benedict XVI 2009, §59).

[26] (Benedict XVI 2005a)

[27] Thus, it is not possible to accept relativism and democracy at the same time: the law of the arbitrary force and will of the strongest will determine the situation cf. (Pera 2007, pp. 127–28).

[28] (Rowland 2009, p. 63)

In this sense, the Scotist nominalist is criticized by Ratzinger. In fact, when the separation between God's domain and natural world is exaggerated, we lose the possibility of conceiving participation.[29] This theological tendency derives from a prospective that tends to emphasized the omnipotence and transcendence of God, as do nominalism and Islam.[30] Effectively, the theological principal that God is radically separated from the world, nature, and human beings is the result of God's arbitrary will, instead of participate in the same divine logos.

So, on one hand, particular beings became ontologically univocal, in the sense that all kind of beings and forms of existence have the same value (there is no gradualism, nor hierarchy, of Being) (Milbank 2013, p. 50). On the other hand, the essence of each particulars being became equivocal regarding the others: if particular beings do not participate in the same being, they have nothing in common.[31]

This kind of ontology has anthropological and practical consequences. If there is no common nature among individuals, the only way that a person has to achieve its own will is imposing it against others who do not share it and for whom it is unintelligible. Therefore, the belief in a common nature among men allows intelligibility for a society within which human beings are in *comunio*. Only if there is a common human nature is it possible to share ideas, communicate principles, to achieve agreements, and established political consensus and systems wanted for all.

In the nominalist presupposition, according to which there are no universals, meaning no common essence among individuals of the same species, the coexistence the same public square will necessary be from a violent dynamic. This means that the ontology needed by a peaceful democracy is not an ontology of difference, implicit in every nominalist approach.

From my point of view, criticizing nominalism in order to assure peace in human pluralistic societies, Ratzinger seems quite close to Radical Orthodoxy movement. "Radical Orthodoxy project and the theology of Benedict XVI share a common core, and a very similar reading of the cultures of modernity and post-modernity."[32] In fact, as Ratzinger shows the contradictions of contemporary relativism as a false pluralism, authors of Radical Orthodoxy, such as John Milbank and Conor Cunningham, present post-modern Nietzscheanism—radical libertarianism—as a narrative in which only violence is intelligible. Both Ratzinger and Radical Orthodoxy see in Augustine's ontology and vision an alternative.

Using Milbank's terminology, is a matter of opposing an ontology of peace to an ontology of violence, presumed by Social Darwinism's law of the strongest. Hence, the way of arguing consists in showing that every narrative contains, necessarily and implicitly, an ontology: this is, a way to conceive reality and how reality is produced and performed. This is interesting, because post-modern Nietzscheans wants to liberate philosophy and culture from ontology. "For the secular postmodernists, Nietzsche became the only true master of suspicion: the thinker of a 'baseless suspicion' which rests, unlike the suspicion of Marx, Freud and sociology, on no fundationalist presuppositions" (Milbank 1991, p. 278).

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[29] "In contrast with the so-called intellectualism of Augustine and Thomas, there arose with Duns Scotus a voluntarism which, in its later developments, led to the claim that we can only know God's *voluntas ordinata*. Beyond this is the realm of God's freedom, in virtue of which he could have done the opposite of everything he has actually done. This gives rise to positions which clearly approach those of Ibn Hazm and might even lead to the image of a capricious God, who is not even bound to truth and goodness. God's transcendence and otherness are so exalted that our reason, our sense of the true and good, are no longer an authentic mirror of God, whose deepest possibilities remain eternally unattainable and hidden behind his actual decisions. As opposed to this, the faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between his eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason there exists a real analogy, in which—as the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 stated—unlikeness remains infinitely greater than likeness, yet not to the point of abolishing analogy and its language." (Benedict XVI 2006a, §7). "It involves an insistent critique of the nominalist shift in Scotus and Ockham (...) says is in broad sympathy with other ongoing theological movements, such as Radical Orthodoxy" (Rowland 2009, pp. 26–27).

[30] "But for Muslim teaching, God is absolutely transcendent. His will is not bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality." (Benedict XVI 2006a (*Faith, Reason and the University*), §4).

[31] Cf. (Milbank 2013, p. 51).

[32] (Rowland 2009, p. 28).

In the post-modern approach, the category that determines moral criteria is emancipation: human being shall be liberated of any doctrine that limit his possibilities of life.[33] The will, the desire, of each person exists to be realized in the world. No philosophical systems to deduce moral principles that constrain life to precede its natural intuition. No ontology of abstract and universal essences to which individuals must adapt. "Yet all the recent French neo-Nietzscheans, if not Nietzsche and Heidegger, are loath to renounce the emancipatory claim (. . .) For it is *this* subject which remains the only possible subject of a discourse of emancipation."[34]

In this post-modern approach, declared by the contemporary neo-Nietzscheans, Milbank detects this ontology of difference, within every single human being is absolutely equivoque from the others in essence and univoque in ontological value. Emancipation is conceived as the possibility to realize the primordial instincts, the private desires, the arbitrary will inside human beings, against the containments that the world, society, and the other impose. This is, indeed, the notion of *Übermensch* that Nietzsche proposes as ideal of the future noble humans. "No universals are ascribed to human society save one: that it is always a field of warfare. And yet this universal history of military manoeuvres is also to be regarded as in some sense liberating, as assisting the emergence of an *übermensch*, or a post-humanist human creature."[35]

This conception of liberty and emancipation requires a violent attack from which the person emancipates, meaning to achieve the realization of the desire overcoming the limits of contingency within human beings' live. The desire, the individual will, is not valuated but rather is the criterion for acting. The only sense that gives intelligibility for human life is achieving these immanent desires: no matter where are they from and why they exist, they are the point of reference from which emancipation is conceived. They must be performed in order for human life to be accomplished in the only possible sense; they are the only criteria that gives intelligibility to human lives.

This post-modern neo-Nietzscheanism suggests, in practical terms, a Social Darwinism. Every human being is unique in his own will. His desires are arbitrary and determined his way of life and choices. Some will achieve to realize them, imposing their will to the world and to the others; and the rest, the weak people (using the Nietzschean terminology], will not satisfy their aspirations, remaining in a total absurd life. In fact, this has implicit the law of the strongest, which is arbitrary.[36] "The protection of an equality of freedom therefore collapses into the promotion of the inequality of power. And it is here that a problem arises. If freedom effaces itself in favour of arbitrary power, then how can one ever talk of there being more or less freedom in one society rather than another?" (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, p. 279).

As Milbank notes, thus, this kind of approach implies violence as a metaphysical principle from which reality is performed and understood. The *will-of-power* becomes the only metaphysical category that determines the anthropology and morality.

This kind of ontology conducts to an establishment of totalitarianism of some particular will, while it destroys the intelligibility of a public square within men lives peaceful for the common Good. "In consequence, every new disguised, or semiovert version of a Kantian practical reason put forwards by Foucault, Deleuze or Lyotard always succumbs to reapplication of the Nietzschean reduction of liberty to power. The neo-Nietzscheans cannot, in consequence, wriggle out of the implication that, while nihilism may be 'the Truth', it is at the same time the truth whose practical expression must be 'fascism'."[37]

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[33] Because of this, Ratzinger states that democracy of participation is not compatible with the contemporary claim for radical emancipation (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, pp. 58–59).

[34] (Milbank 1991, p. 279).

[35] (Milbank 1991, p. 282).

[36] For this reason, the Fathers of the Church, following Origin, stated that philosophy was important because it defended the natural values against despotism and arbitrariness of political powers (Ratzinger 1973, pp. 62–63).

[37] (Milbank 1991, p. 279.)

This is precisely what Ratzinger argues against the dictatorship of relativism: without a universal truth, common to and shared by all human beings, the arbitrary of the strongest particular will tends to be impose against others within the public square.

> We have the development of human possibilities, of the power to make and destroy, that poses the question of legal and ethical controls on power in a way that goes far beyond anything to which we have yet been accustomed. This lends great urgency to the question of how cultures that encounters one another can find ethical basis to guide their relationship along the right path, thus permitting them to build up a common structure that tames power and imposes a legally responsible order on the exercise of power. [38]

This "common structure," intelligible in the ontology of participation of beings in the divine's essence, allows *comunio* instead of violence. Is this sense, a healthy democracy is possible, and also, from an individualistic point of view, the *eros* element of human desire is not possessive in violent terms.

> Yet *eros* and *agape*—ascending love and descending love—can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to "be there for" the other. [39]

In an analogical ontology, within the participation of human beings in the same original Being is conceived, the satisfaction of multiples desires of different persons inside the public sphere is intelligible. In a communion, there is a polarity of *eros* and *agape*, of giving and receiving, of possessing and being possessed, without violence and imposition, but in real freedom in which fullness of human nature is achieved. Only from this polarity can *eros* and *agape* be intelligible because they are conceptual and ontological complementariness.

In this sense, a libertarian perspective of the chaotic desires will not allow the achievement of this polarity, which constitutes the only chance of a plural society composed by diverse persons be harmonic and peaceful. "Applying this theology one concludes that for Benedict XVI the sexual revolution of the 1960s should be opposed (. . .) because the underlying vision of the dignity and meaning of human sexuality offered by 1960s Freudians, Nietzscheans, and New Age sex therapists is really not truly erotic. It is not only destructive of human dignity and integrity but it takes the paths out of the whole experience."[40]

This polarity between *eros* and *agape* is present is all dimension of human life, not only regarding sexuality: is also present in the communion of a dialogue between different subjects that, freely, constructs in harmony a public space to live together. In other words, *eros* and *agape* are elements that are present in democracy, in political terms, not only because they constitute an indelible part of human nature but also because they are dynamics that conducts to the union of different individuals.

This integrity of both elements as intrinsic parts of love sustains a Christian social action, in favor of a society respectable of human dignity within which men and women can achieve their fullness. In other others, the political doctrines are also performed by the contents of Christian faith.

> The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas

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[38] (Habermas and Ratzinger 2006, p. 55.)
[39] (Benedict XVI 2005c, §7)
[40] (Rowland 2009, p. 71)

of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this *service of charity.* [41]

Hence, in order to concretize love in the social structures of human societies, we must presume an ontology within which all human beings share some kind of nature, which participates in a Being who is entirely love. Only under this condition, the *logos* of the human being, will be love itself, meaning that only from an analogical ontology toward the fount of Being as love as such, would it be possible to see love as the primordial metaphysical principle that creates reality, instead of the Nietzschean one, the will-to-the-power.

> The 'commonness' which now embraces them both is not the commonplace of the given neutral terrain, nor of the act in its initial conception, but instead of the new differential relationship. The question of the possibility of living together in mutual agreement, and the question of whether there can be a charitable act, therefore turn out to be conjointly the question of whether there can be an 'analogy' or a 'common measure' between differences which does not reduce differences to mere instances of a common essence or genus. In other words a likeness that only maintains itself through the differences, and not despite nor in addition to them. (Milbank 1991, p. 290)

The Christian option for the *logos*, that includes the necessity of a philosophical dialog with different cultures and systems of thought, is also an option for a narrative that interprets reality from the love point of view, because the origin of all the real sphere is the Trinity: the ultimate reality is *love* because that is what divine nature is. "This constitutes a tradition of thought, language, and vision capable of eliciting our will and our reason toward our final end—the God who as Trinity is charity. This vision must necessarily be repeated, and in so doing the natural is graced."[42] John Milbank and his fellows are also very philosophical at this level, because he does not impose the Trinitarian doctrine to human sphere, but he tries rather to show how such a doctrine is consistent with human nature and human aspirations at a phenomenological level.

The argument consists in showing that a life determined by the metaphysical principle of will-to-power is inconsistent with existent human life. In fact, human individuals are necessarily born in a historical and communitarian context within which they grow. So, desires, human will, and aspirations are created from a communitarian language and culture to which individuals belong necessarily. In other words, as post-modernity assumes, human individuals are actors inside a narrative, but they were born in such a narrative without autonomously choosing or creating it. Something is given, and this something is communitarian, and from it, thoughts, desires, decisions, and actions are made by human individuals.

> To argue that the natural act might be the Christian (supernatural) charitable act, and not the will-to-power, is therefore to argue that such an 'analogical relation' is as possible a transcendental conception as the positing of an a priori warfare. And what is more, the former conception permits a purer 'positivism', a purer philosophy of difference, still less contaminated by dialectics. For a priori warfare not only supposes an ineradicable presence of the negative, it also supposes its dominance, as giving the only possible meaning-in-common. [43]

This means that human beings, and their desires, are intrinsically communitarian. Hence, the relationships between human persons cannot be merely temporally or instrumental in order

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[41]　(Benedict XVI 2005c, §19)
[42]　(Milbank 2003, p. 217) This vision from love as the main principle of all kinds of realities is very present in Augustine's theology of the history, which is share both by Ratzinger cf. (Rowland 2009, pp. 3–4) and by Radical Orthodoxy (Milbank 2002, pp. 9–10).
[43]　(Milbank 1991, p. 290)

to achieve such desires, but they must rather be permanently active. In this sense, we can say that the human desires, thoughts and aspirations, which are in the origin communitarian, and must be satisfied liturgically. This means that a full achievement of such desires and aspirations must be realized not in the extreme autonomy of contemporary individualism but rather in a communitarian context within which they were born.

> Cultural metaphors are sites where a certain cultural isomorphism, linking disparate fields, condenses (. . .) For the condensing of iconic meaning takes place because of a collective, public attraction. They are generated out of, furnish and foster a public participation (. . .) we come to understand the constitution of a certain knowledge; that which makes such knowledge possible (. . .). It is not what has caused them that is of central significance, but rather how they came to be, and what they allow to be, believed by the society producing and produced by them. It is in this way, then, that we might speak of analyses of these metaphors as disclosing the 'unconscious of knowledge'. The analyses are the cultural equivalents of biopsies; an examination of the tissue of the social body at a given point in time and space. (Ward 2001, pp. 15–16)

In summary, at a phenomenological level, it is possible to see that human beings are intrinsically social subjects that must live and realize their fullness in a social context. In order to assume the possible of a peaceful coexistence of such individuals in the same common place, which is one of the great desires and aspirations of human beings, we must presume the possibility of a *comunio*. The Trinitarian doctrine and the Christian belief that human beings and the world participate in God's nature is also foundation of such peaceful coexistence among men at an ontological level.

In this sense, Christianity assures a global intelligibility of faith and of human life in circularity. On one hand, the theologian principles consent the intelligibility of an analogical ontology required for the intelligibility of peace in human relations. On the other hand, desires and aspirations for peace by a subject who is intrinsically communitarian corroborates the Christian doctrine of Trinitarian love as the ultimate principle of reality. As Augustine wrote, "If you see charity, you see the Trinity."[44]

4. Conclusions—Ratzinger's Contribution

"Indeed it is evident that Christianity, however degraded and distorted by cruelty and intolerance, must always exert a modifying influence on men's passions, and protect them from the more violent forms of fanatical fever, as we are protected from smallpox by vaccination. But the Mahommedan religion increases, instead of lessening, the fury of intolerance" (Churchill 2010, p. 29). These words, declared by Winston Churchill, a British politician and a professed Christian Anglican, touched on Ratzinger's argument and its timeliness today. In fact, on one hand, Churchill shows how Christian religion influences social relations and political principles. On the other hand, the British emblematic statist affirms, without reservations, the dangerous influence that Islam could have on human relations and international politics.

Today, Christianity is undoubtedly losing its influence in Western societies and institutions. However, the fragility of democracy is following this tendency. As Francis Fukuyama notes, even if democracy is the "best option," its triumph is not necessary in the long-term (Fukuyama 2014). Hence, the growing number of Islamic states in the Middle East and the increasing of anti-democratic movements and regimes in the West question us about how to preserve democracy and its foundations. Because of this, Joseph Ratzinger proposes that humankind live "as God exists," even if we are unbelievers because only God, the Christian one, can assure a full intelligibility to the principles from which human dignity, civil participation, and political representation.[45]

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44 (Benedict XVI 2005c, §19)
45 Cf. (Pera 2007, pp. 34–36). Ratzinger is clear on this: after the fall of communism in Europe, the dangers of nihilism and relativism—both are linked—could threaten European democratic systems and societies: "Wer den Marxismus

From my point-of-view, this way of arguing is quite original, at least from a Catholic theologian. Ratzinger, instead of arguing with deductions from universal principles, shows the practical consequences of atheism, of agnosticism, of Islam, and of Christianity.[46] Then, our German theologian argues that only from Christianity can democracy be intelligible. In fact, to preserve human dignity, and to promote a culture of dialogue that presumes the possibility of civil participation of all human beings in a common project of society, only inside the Christian tradition it is possible to find the foundations of such anthropology, which conceives of human nature as compatible with those democratic principles.

In this sense, Ratzinger, like Benedict XVI, appealed to the political agents in Europe to assume the Christian heritage of their democratic values as a constitutional part of the European identity.

> By valuing its Christian roots, Europe will be able to give a secure direction to the choices of its citizens and peoples, it will strengthen their awareness of belonging to a common civilization and it will nourish the commitment of all to address the challenges of the present for the sake of a better future. I therefore appreciate your Group's recognition of Europe's Christian heritage, which offers valuable ethical guidelines in the search for a social model that responds adequately to the demands of an already globalized economy. [47]

In this sense, Ratzinger's theology does not consist in imposing Christian faith to others or convincing them to use old Christian aggressive apologetics. One of Ratzinger's contributions, though, consists in showing that, in such a complex time as our own, the defense of Western culture and its values—such as democracy, dialogue, civic participation, and political representation—is not separated from Christianity as an indelible part of the European identity.

> 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. [48]

Europe is secular, yes. But it is so because of its Christian identity. Christianity is a religion that believes, not only in God, but in human dignity and in the human capacity for dialogue, cooperation, and the construction of a social common project.[49] In other words, if we want to be in communion instead of violent arbitrary relations or a fragmented society, we should assume that Christian principles will help.[50]

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aufgibt, hat damit noch nicht automatisch eine neue Lebensgrundlage gefunden. Der Verlust einer ehedem das Leben tragenden Ideologie kann sehr leicht auch in Nihilismus umschlagen, und das wäre dann wirklich dir Herrschaft der sieben schlimmeren Geister. Wer aber könnte sich verbergen, dass der Relativismus, dem wir heute alle ausgesetzt sind, ein wachsendes Gefälle zum Nihilismus entwickelt?" (Ratzinger 1991, pp. 106–7).

[46] In this sense, Ratzinger refers the "spiritual forces" of Europe that are able to preserve and sustain Western democratic values as part of European identity (Pera 2007, pp. 65–66).

[47] (Benedict XVI 2006b, §2)

[48] (Benedict XVI 2011, §5)

[49] This kind of argumentation is still present in the Papacy of Pope Francis. In fact, when the contemporary Pope went to the European Parliament, he said in his address, that we should return to the fathers of the European Union project in order to understand that the dignity of human person is connected with the transcendent sphere, preserved by Christian tradition, which should never be forgotten cf. (Francis 2014, §7–10).

[50] As Marcelo Pera would said, that is why we should be called Christians: "credenti o no, praticanti o no, per essi [per i Padri della Chiesa] dobbiamo dirci cristiani, perché il loro liberalismo si fonda su una teoria etica e religiosa cristiana. E così deve essere il liberalismo, se vuol dare un fondamento solido alla propria dottrina." (Pera 2008, p. 54).

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