

Annual Craigmyle Memorial Lecture
Catholic Union of Great Britain

‘Benedict XVI and Europe’

12 October 2009

HM Ambassador Francis Campbell

It is an honour to be invited to give this year’s Craigmyle Memorial Lecture to the Catholic Union and to remember the immense contribution Lord Craigmyle made both to the Catholic Church in Britain and to wider public life.

Our title this evening is ‘Benedict XVI and Europe’. Why so? Because ‘Europe’ is a topic that the Pope has returned to many times in his speeches, sermons and writings. Mention of the Pope and Europe often raises preconceived ideas about the Treaty of Lisbon, institutional reform or EU enlargement. However, when Pope Benedict touches the concept of Europe, he rarely focuses on such policy points, but speaks to some of the most profound issues affecting European – indeed global - society. The Pope’s writings on Europe focus on the secular and the religious – how the two interact and the impact on society and its members.

This evening’s talk will be in three parts. First, what Pope Benedict means by Europe and why he is addressing the concept. Second, the difficulty that Benedict highlights with a narrow definition of the Enlightenment which is found in some parts of Europe and how that

differs with the approach to the separation of Church and State found in the United States. Finally, what Pope Benedict sees as the solution to this rupture in Europe's history and how it can be healed.

Europe

What do we mean by Europe? Or more precisely what does Pope Benedict mean when he speaks of Europe? In 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote 'Europe is a geographical concept only in a way that is entirely secondary. Europe is not a continent that can be comprehended neatly in geographical terms; it is a cultural and historical concept.'¹

The experience of war-time Europe goes to the very heart of the Pope's writings on Europe. For him, and indeed for his generation – the greater co-operation between European states following the war was about building enduring peace and preventing future wars. Pope Benedict writes, 'it had become clear that all European states were losers in that terrible drama and that something had to be done to avoid any further repetition of it.' He said, 'instead of competition there would be collaboration, a reciprocal exchange, mutual acquaintance and friendship within a diversity in which each nation preserves its identity while sharing the responsibility to respect the law, after the previous perversion of it.'² Benedict said, 'the process of unification remains a most

¹ Cardinal Ratzinger, November 28, 2000, Berlin. Cited in *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, Joseph Ratzinger, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007

² Josef Ratzinger, 'Europe Today and Tomorrow', Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, p 87

significant achievement which has brought a period of peace to this continent, formerly consumed by constant conflicts and fatal wars.’³

Of the founding fathers of Europe, he writes, ‘they were seeking a European identity that would not dissolve or deny the national identities, but rather unite them at a higher level of unity into one community of peoples.’⁴ According to Benedict, ‘the fathers of European unification took as their point of departure a fundamental compatibility between the moral heritage of Christianity and the moral heritage of the European Enlightenment.’⁵

What is the Problem in Europe?

But today Benedict would argue that that approach of the founding fathers – one which spoke of the moral heritage of the continent – is absent from the debate and as a result Europe is confused. He said, ‘Nowadays we hear much of the “European model of life”. The term refers to a social order which combines a sound economy with social justice, political pluralism with tolerance, generosity and openness, but also means the preservation of the values which have made this continent what it is.’⁶ The Pope’s point is that without reference to those values all the positive attributes that stem from those values are themselves at risk. He argues that Europe needs to be built on solid cultural and moral

³ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Vienna, 7 September 2007

⁴ Josef Ratzinger, ‘Europe Today and Tomorrow’, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, pp. 35-36

⁵ibid, p 39

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Vienna, 7 September 2007

foundations of common values drawn from our history and traditions. He says of Europe's Christian roots, 'they represent a dynamic component of our civilization as we move forward into the third millennium.'⁷

Benedict sees a real crisis of confidence in Europe. He says, 'it must not give up on itself. The continent must not become old in spirit.'⁸

But what is causing that crisis of confidence in Europe? For Benedict it comes down to the rupture between faith and reason ushered in at the time of the Enlightenment and developed in the centuries since then. It is about a Europe cut adrift from its roots and history. Pope Benedict warns against 'the separation from all ethical traditions and the exclusive reliance on technological reasoning and its possibilities.'⁹ Benedict says that rationality is an essential hallmark of European culture. He writes, 'with it, from a certain perspective, it has conquered the world, because the form of rationality developed first of all in Europe informs the life of every continent today. Yet this rationality can become devastating if it becomes detached from its roots and exalts technological feasibility as the sole criterion. The bond between the two great sources of knowledge – nature and history – is necessary.'¹⁰

The Pope says of the West, 'it is making a praiseworthy attempt to be completely open to understanding foreign values, but it no longer loves

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Vienna, 7 September 2007

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Josef Ratzinger, 'Europe Today and Tomorrow', Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, p 42

¹⁰ *ibid*, p 43

itself; from now on it sees in its own history only that what is blameworthy and destructive, whereas it is no longer capable of perceiving what is great and pure. In order to survive, Europe needs a new – and certainly a critical and humble – acceptance of itself, that is, if it wants to survive.’¹¹ He says that for multiculturalism to exist it needs shared constants and points of reference.¹²

In his writings, the Pope frequently comes back to the inter-war debate between Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee in highlighting the challenges facing Europe and the West. To recap, Oswald Spengler spoke of a natural law working through the great civilizations; there is the moment of birth, the gradual growth, then the flowering of a culture, its slow decline, aging and death. Spengler’s thesis was that the West had arrived at its final epoch. Toynbee disagreed. He highlighted the difference between material and technological progress on the one hand, and real progress, on the other, which he defined as spiritualization. He admitted that the West was in the midst of a crisis. The cause for Toynbee was that the West had fallen away from religion to the worship of technology, of the nation, of militarism. According to Pope Benedict, ‘Ultimately the crisis for Toynbee was one of secularism’. For Toynbee all was not lost in some sort of path-dependent argument leading to decline and death. Toynbee saw a role for creative minorities and exceptional individuals to avert the crisis.

¹¹ Josef Ratzinger, ‘Europe Today and Tomorrow’, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, p 33

¹²ibid, p 33

Benedict repeatedly comes back to the notion of creative minorities when speaking of the future of the church in the world. But it is interesting to note that Pope Benedict concluded that, ‘ultimately the question of who was right – Spengler or Toynbee – remains open.’¹³ But later he suggests that Toynbee’s optimism in the early 60s would today look outdated. He quotes Toynbee ... “of the twenty eight cultures that we have identified ... Eighteen are dead and nine of the ten left- i.e., all except our own – appear to be mortally wounded”. Benedict asks ‘who would repeat those same words today? And what in the first place, is this culture of ours that has remained? Is European culture perhaps the civilization of technology and commerce that has spread victoriously through the entire world?’¹⁴

Pope Benedict speaks of the different situation in Central and Eastern Europe and laments the absence of analysis of the moral failure as the economic failure of the communist model. He critiques the system that was found in those societies in which the ‘future alone became the terrible deity that ruled over everyone and everything.’ And he says that even though the communist systems have failed above all because of their false economic dogmatism, people ignore the fact that the more fundamental reason for their shipwreck was their contempt for human rights, their subjection of morality to the demands of the system and to their promises for the future.’ The Pope continues, ‘the real catastrophe they left behind is not of an economic sort; it consists, rather, in the drying up of souls, in the destruction of moral conscience. He says, ‘I see as an essential problem in our day, for Europe and for the world, the fact

¹³ibid, pp. 24-25

¹⁴ibid, p 23

that the economic failure is never disputed, and therefore the former communists have become economic liberals almost without hesitation, whereas the moral and religious problem, which was really at stake, is almost completely dismissed.’¹⁵

Ultimately, to get at the issue in the European Enlightenment, I believe we have to compare it to another model which has similar principles of separation, but has produced an entirely different set of results. We will now look at the nature of the enlightenment in Europe and in the United States. In so doing, I am conscious that there were many different forms to the European Enlightenment and the label – European Enlightenment – is itself problematic. But it is clear that the effects on religion of the Enlightenment in Europe and America were different.

For a considerable part of the late 19th and 20th century, we lived with the impression that – broadly speaking - the world was gradually becoming more secular and less religious. However at the start of the 21st century we have come to realise that although this statement applies to Europe and some other areas of the world - namely Canada, Australia and New Zealand - it is not a global trend; indeed the reverse is the case

So rather than ask why the US – for example - is so religious we should ask why Europe is exceptional? In part the answer is historical. Europe has a particular structure of Church-State relations which is not found

¹⁵ibid, p 29

elsewhere. We have unique constitutional connections (or at least a history of such) between Church and State. Religion in Europe has over the centuries been in some way or another more identified with power. The argument goes that as people rejected different types of political power they also had to reject religion because the two were so intertwined. Pope Benedict says that one of the effects of the French Revolution, was that ‘in the realm of ideas, this meant that the sacred foundation for history and for the existence of the state was rejected; history was no longer gauged on the basis of an idea of a pre-existent God who shaped it; the state was henceforth considered in purely secular terms, founded on reason and on the will of the citizens.’¹⁶ He goes on, ‘Religion and faith in God belonged to the realm of feelings and not to that of reason.’¹⁷ The Pope says that for the first time in history this gave rise to a division between Christians and secular persons.

Professor Gertrude Himmelfarb describes the Enlightenment, at least on the continent of Europe, as very anti-clerical and even to some extent anti-Christian.¹⁸ That was not the case in America. She writes “in France the essence of the Enlightenment – literally, its *raison d’etre* - was reason. “Reason is to the philosophe”, the *Encyclopedie* declared, “What Grace is to the Christian”. “Here reason was not just pitted against religion, defined in opposition to religion; it was granted the same absolute dogmatic status as religion.”¹⁹ Jurgen Habermas, the German

¹⁶ibid, p 21

¹⁷ibid, p 21

¹⁸ Gertrude Himmerfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: the British, French and American Enlightenments*, First Vintage Books, New York, 2005,

¹⁹ Gertrude Himmerfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: the British, French and American Enlightenments*, First Vintage Books, New York, 2005, page 152

Philosopher and Social theorist, also contrasts the forms of secularism found in Europe and the US. For Habermas, the US form of secularism leads to ‘a flourishing plurality of more or less autonomous religious associations’. The European form tends to see faiths as negatives.

Scholars of Church and State have described the separation in the US as something which also protects the churches from the power of the state, whereas in Europe it is seen more as the reverse. This brings us back to the very nature of the American Enlightenment which was heavily influenced by the British Enlightenment. The separation of church and state in the US did not signify the separation of church and society. On the contrary it was all the more rooted in the society because it was not prescribed or established by the government.

Himmerlfarb writes that “In a sense, the French Enlightenment was a belated Reformation fought in the cause not of a higher or purer religion, but of a still higher and purer authority: reason. It was in the name of reason that Voltaire issues his famous declaration of war against the church. This was not however the Enlightenment as it appeared in either Britain or America, and where religion whether as dogma or as institution, was not the paramount enemy. The British and American Enlightenments were latitudinarian, compatible with a large spectrum of belief and disbelief. There was no kulturkampf in those countries to distract and divide the populace, putting the past against the present, confronting enlightened sentiment with retrograde institutions, and creating an unbridgeable divide between reason and religion.”²⁰

²⁰ *ibid* pages 18-19

Himmerlfarb put it thus: “reason illegitimised not only the Catholic Church, but any form of established or institutional religion and beyond that any religious faith dependent on miracles or dogmas that violated the canons of reason.”²¹

Context is all-important. The Enlightenment in Europe had a baggage quite unlike America. Religion played a very different role in the society. In the 18th and 19th centuries, religion often found itself on an opposing political side to those looking for greater liberty and freedom. Often this led to religion being presented as opposed to modernity. Secularism thus became a self-fulfilling prophecy; to be modern was to be secular. In Europe (particularly in France) this has led to an Enlightenment which was about a ‘freedom from belief’. But for Himmerlfarb, “In America, if the Founding Fathers did not look upon religion as the enemy of liberty, neither did the churches look upon liberty as the enemy of religion.”²²

And of course the context was entirely different in the United States. The early settlers were ‘People who did not want to belong to a state church, and went to the United States and intentionally constituted a state that did not impose a church and which was not perceived as religiously neutral, but as a space within which religions could move and also enjoy

²¹ibid, page 152

²²ibid, page 211

organisational freedom without being simply relegated to the private sphere.’²³

But Pope Benedict says, ‘of course, in Europe we cannot simply copy the United States: we have our own history. But we must all learn from one another.’ He says that he finds it fascinating that ‘in the United States they began with a positive concept of secularity. An intentionally secular new State was born; they were opposed to a State Church. But the State itself had to be secular precisely out of love for religion in its authenticity, which can only be lived freely. And thus, we find this situation of a State deliberately and decidedly secular but precisely through a religious will in order to give authenticity to religion. And we know that in studying America, Alexis de Toqueville noticed that secular institutions live with a de facto moral consensus that exists among the citizens. Benedict says, ‘This seems to me to be a fundamental and positive model.’²⁴

On Europe, Tocqueville said, "The unbelievers of Europe attack the Christians as their political opponents rather than as their religious adversaries. They hate the Christian religion as the opinion of the party much more than as an error of belief, and they reject the clergy less because they are the representatives of the Deity than because they are the allies of government. I am fully convinced that this extraordinary and

²³ Cardinal Ratzinger, Interview on Vatican Radio, reported in Zenit on 25 November, 2004

²⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, April 15, 2008

incidental cause is the close connection of politics and religion in Europe.”

This finds resonance today among many sociologists and theologians. Professor Peter Berger said recently “There is a secularist ideology, very powerful in Europe that is opposed to Christianity. There is that thing called secularism, and it can be very fundamentalist.”²⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger said, ‘as a result laicism is no longer the guarantee of many convictions, but establishes itself as an ideology that imposes what must be thought and said.’²⁶ ‘What seemed to be a guarantee of a common freedom, is being transformed into an ideology that is turning into dogmatism and endangering religious freedom.’²⁷ Rowan Williams describes it as ‘programmatic secularism’. “A form which sees any religious or ideological system demanding a hearing in the public sphere as aiming to seize control of the political realm and to override and nullify opposing convictions. It assumes that the public expression of specific conviction is automatically offensive to people of other (or no) conviction.”²⁸

The Solution

But there are positive signs that the rupture caused between the secular and the religious by the enlightenment and the French Revolution are

²⁵ Peter Berger see <http://pewforum.org/events/?EventID=136>

²⁶ Cardinal Ratzinger, Interview on Vatican Radio, reported in Zenit on 25 November, 2004

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Rowan Williams, speech to the Vatican Academy of Social Sciences, Vatican City State, November 2006

being re-examined. This is a key task for Pope Benedict when he addresses the theme of Europe. His aim is to heal the rift with the enlightenment and not to turn the clock back. For Pope Benedict religion and reason need each other. He acknowledges that, ‘there are pathologies of religion, as we can see, and there are pathologies of reason, as we can also see. God or the divinity can become a way of making absolute claims for one’s own authority and interests. Such a partisan image of God, which identifies God’s absolute character with a particular community or its areas of interest and thereby raises things that are empirical and relative to the status of absolutes, dissolves law and morality. Good is then whatever serves my own power, and the difference between good and evil collapses in practice. Morality and law become partisan.’²⁹ Pope Benedict says that ‘Faith in God, the idea of God, can be manipulated, and then it becomes destructive; this is the risk that religion runs. But reason that cuts itself off from God completely and tries to confine him to the purely subjective realm loses its bearings and thus opens the door to the forces of destruction. He says, ‘Whereas the Enlightenment was searching for moral foundations that would be valid – even if God did not exist – we must invite our agnostic friends today to be open to a morality – as if God did exist.’³⁰

The risk of this intolerance within secularism can lead to the loss of a common grammar or language which society needs to function in the medium and long term. Alasdair Macintyre characterizes this as Thomistic ideals coming up against Rousseauist ideals and this lack of a

²⁹ Josef Ratzinger, ‘Europe Today and Tomorrow’, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007, p 93

³⁰ *ibid* , p 96

common language or ability to reach consensus could lead to a Nietzschean amorality of total chaotic relativism.³¹ Benedict has said, ‘There can be no peace in the world without genuine peace between reason and faith, because without peace between reason and religion, the sources of morality and law dry up.’³²

Here there are signs that all is not lost. Even those who acknowledge that they are tone deaf when it comes to faith can see a utility for religion even if they do not share its creed. Jurgen Habermas appears to be one such philosopher. Habermas said, “it remains the case that liberal societal structures are dependent on the solidarity of their citizens. And if the secularisation of society goes off the rails, the sources of this solidarity may dry up altogether. That could well slacken the democratic bond and exhaust the kind of solidarity that the democratic state needs, but cannot impose by law. This would lead to the transformation of the citizens of prosperous and peaceful liberal societies into isolated nomads acting on the basis of their own self interest, persons who used their subjective rights only as weapons against each other.”³³

Charles Taylor writes, “Western modernity, including its secularity, is the fruit of new inventions. It should not be depicted as a rupture, but as an evolving story of human history with the secular and the religious dimensions not juxtaposed, but emerging from the same story.”³⁴ Pope

³¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘After Virtue, University of Notre Dame Press; 2nd Edition (August 30, 1984)

³² *ibid*, p 93

³³ Jorgen Habermas cited in ‘Habermas and Ratzinger ‘Dialectics of Secularisation’, (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2006, page 35

³⁴ Charles Taylor, A Secular Age, Belknap Press 2007

Benedict echoes a similar theme when he writes, 'It seems to me obvious today that secularism in itself is not in opposition to the faith. I would even say that it is a fruit of the faith because the Christian faith was a universal religion from the very start and consequently could not be identified with any single State; it is present in all States and different in these States. It has always been clear to Christians that religion and faith are not politics but another sphere of human life.... Politics, the State, were not a religion but rather a secular reality with a specific role... and the two must be open to each other.'³⁵

But as much of the original rupture happened in France, so too the solution appears to be emerging from there. President Sarkozy said, 'secularism should not be a denial of the past. To uproot is to lose meaning; it is to weaken the foundation of national identity and to drain even more the social relationships that have such a need for memorable symbols'.³⁶ In a speech given in Rome in December 2007,³⁷ President Sarkozy said "I am calling for a positive laicism, that is to say, a secularism that watches over freedom of thought, of belief and unbelief, does not consider religion as a danger, but as an asset." He said, 'Religion, and in particular the Christian religion, with which we share a long history, are living patrimonies of reflection and thought, not only about God, but also about man, society, and that which is a central concern for us today, nature." Returning to the same theme last September when he greeted the Pope in Paris, President Sarklozy said, 'It would be crazy to deprive ourselves of religion; [it would be] a failing

³⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, interview on way to France, 12 September 2008

³⁶ President Sarkozy, speech in Rome, 20 December 2007

³⁷ President Sarkozy, speech in Rome, 20 December 2007

against culture and against thought. For this reason, I am calling for a positive secularity," he said. "A positive secularity offers our consciences the possibility to interchange -- above and beyond our beliefs and rites -- the sense we want to give to our lives." "Positive secularism, open secularism, is an invitation to dialogue, to tolerance and respect. It is an opportunity, an encouragement, a supplementary dimension to the political debate. It is an encouragement to religion, as well as to all currents of thought.'³⁸

Benedict XVI speaks of a commitment to a 'healthy secularity,' based on collaboration, respect and dialogue. The Pope said, 'Only in these conditions of healthy secularity can a society be constructed in which diverse traditions, cultures and religions peacefully coexist.' 'totally to separate public life from all valuing of traditions, means to embark on a closed, dead-end path.'³⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, when Pope Benedict talks about Europe he is not entering into the day to day affairs of Europe or the European Union, rather he is attempting to heal an intellectual rupture caused at the time of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He does not see faith and reason as enemies, but as allies. He does not see the Enlightenment as

³⁸ President Nicolas Sarkozy's Welcome Address to Pope Benedict XVI, Paris, 12 September 2008

³⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, message to new Ambassador to San Marino, 13 November, 2008

alien, but as something which grew out of faith. He sees reason policing faith, and faith policing reason. Pope Benedict rejects the inevitability and lack of hope in Oswald Spengler's thesis of decline and he allies himself to the position advocated by Toynbee. Of Toynbee, Pope Benedict writes, 'he was right when he said that the fate of society always depends on creative minorities...Christians should consider themselves a creative minority of this kind and contribute what they can so that Europe can recover the best of its inherited patrimony and thus be useful to the whole of humanity.'⁴⁰

Ladies and Gentlemen thank you.

⁴⁰ Cardinal Ratzinger, Interview on Vatican Radio, reported in Zenit on 25 November, 2004