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## Catholicism after Christianity

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After the age of revolution (19th century), Christianity was challenged by scientism, which claimed to replace it. Subsequently, Marxism took over scientism's intentions in this replacement endeavour (20th century). For the generations of the second half of the 20th century, omnipresent Marxism held the place of religion. But then, Marxism too ended in disappointment. At the end of the day, we are in the ironic situation summarized by Woody Allen with the quote: "God is dead, Marx is dead, and I do not feel very well today".

At the same time, Europeans nowadays would like to erase our history's religious origin; like some regimes which, after some time, cover the embarrassing characters of their past in old official photos. During the preparation of the draft European Constitution, the question whether to mention Europe's Christian roots in the text was submitted to the European Council. Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Greece and Poland were in favour of this proposal. Jacques Chirac, on the other hand, opposed it, along with Belgium and Sweden. Three countries thus managed to impose their views on everybody else, which clearly indicates the power of the drive to exclude the religious element. In 2012 Slovakia, on the occasion of the 1,150th anniversary of the mission of Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia, engraved the effigies of these saints on the national side of the 2-euro coin. Immediately France, followed by the Commission, asked that the saints' halos and crosses be erased. Public outrage in Slovakia prompted the Slovak government not to comply. When Viktor Orban had a new constitution adopted for Hungary with a preamble underlining "the unifying virtue of Christianity for the Hungarian nation", this gave rise to literally hysterical debates in the European Parliament. Please turn off your mobile phone when entering the conference room. Set portable devices to 'airplane' mode. Forget your private conversations that you will resume later. Turn off your religious beliefs when you enter a classroom, Parliament, conference room. Switch God to "airplane" mode. He has nothing to do with what we are doing. You will resume your private conversation with him when you are done with important things.

All these vicissitudes are just the tail of a comet in a process of paramount importance. Today, a two- thousand-year old history is about to end: modernity, as a process of doubt and uncertainty, has not defeated our Christian faith, but has defeated our Christian identity. It has not defeated our Christian faith: the recent revival of beliefs responds to the search for meaning that all-powerful rationality has not been able to bring about. The moment when people have become convinced that religious beliefs had been erased forever by the age of science, we are witnessing a rebirth of religion in the midst of postmodernism. While in the West writers such as Debray, Vattimo, Engelhardt, now claim to be believers, China now has more believers (more than 100 million) than

members of the Single Party (65 million). There are many examples of this recent development. It is increasingly difficult to say that religion pertains to "stupid people".

Christian faith is not disappearing, but Christian identity is. Christian identity refers to a society in which Christian anthropology and Christian morals characterize our customs, our way of being, our way of thinking and permeate our laws. This is no longer the case. Our laws and morals are inspired by all kinds of worldviews. If a question such as medically assisted procreation or euthanasia is raised, ethical committees are consulted in which all religions, and pseudo-religions, are represented.

Of course, the Christian faith still exists (and is even growing in different places), but no longer provides teachings and inspiration to our societies. The moral, political and legal domination of Christianity has now waned and is increasingly becoming a minority. It is in this sense that we speak of the end of "Christian societies" after two thousand years. What are we becoming then? What can we say about this impressive metamorphosis?

Firstly, I would like to propose an analysis of this intellectual and spiritual replacement. Secondly, we will engage in a more concrete analysis of this minority status and its implications.

## 1

First of all, how can we describe our intellectual and spiritual situation as we are confronted by the collapse of religion that has characterized our continent?

There is much talk of nihilism. Instead, I think we are becoming pagans. The difference between nihilists and pagans is very deep, since they are by no means equivalent.

There is in fact a nihilistic/relativistic current in our culture, as violent as it is limited. If we want to analyze its genealogy, we must start from Diogenes the Cynic, then go through de Sade, all the way to Michel Foucault. It is a thought that does not want to change culture, but to disrupt the anthropology that Mauss and Lévy-Strauss used to call "the rock". For example, Diogenes claimed that incest should be practiced. The laws on same-sex marriage are part of this current. This is nihilism, we might argue, since no human society has legitimized this type of practice, although there have been individuals who have supported them (the only example of homosexual marriage we have in history is Nero's, which was nothing more than antics). Diogenes, being a witty and histrionic character, made Athenians laugh, but certainly they would have been careful not to put him in power.... I don't think we should worry too much about this type of intellectual and spiritual anarchism (driven today mainly by the current of French deconstructionism). Our societies will not become nihilistic, because this thought is not practicable. This kind of elitist cynicism makes a lot of noise, but it is not really convincing.

On the other hand, paganism must be taken more seriously, because it is feasible, as the entire history of mankind abundantly shows, and for this reason it is spreading. Let us take the example of other so-called social laws: the one on abortion or euthanasia. These are not nihilistic laws, but typically pagan ones. They mean that human life has value only based on the value that society attaches to it (and not an inherent value, as is the case in Christianity). All societies in the world, except our own, throw children into the river if they are malformed or unwanted, let elderly people – who have become useless – die and admit (sometimes glorify) suicide. When we support euthanasia or abortion, we simply go back to being pagans. Our new contemporary customs go in this

direction: for example, the spread of belief in reincarnation, the wish to be cremated and the ashes spread in a beloved place, Spinoza's fashionability, the pantheism of radical ecology...

This shift towards paganism means that we are going back to the primeval culture of the pre-Christian era (a kind of natural culture, that can be found everywhere, the primordial soup of culture). So, of course, our religions give way to wisdom (of which we see thousands of testimonies in our societies). Wisdom is immanent (we are now back under a Greek sky because we believe that God has abandoned us), and vertical motion has lost its strength in an era in which space prevails over time. Wisdom offers moral principles without a true religious doctrine, and what we strongly reject are doctrines, theologies and catechisms (which remind us too much of the "great ideological narratives"), but we want the good and moral principles that the great narratives themselves have overshadowed. Everywhere we have the feeling religions, whether spiritual or secular, have crushed people. Wisdom implies merging with nature and suppressing Christian dualism (nature-culture, soul-body, etc.).

When we highlight these profound transformations (paganism, revival of ancient wisdom or imitation of Asian wisdom), we realize that it is the fundamental premises of Christianity that are being questioned. I will describe these hypotheses in four points. What is most surprising is that our societies have inverted these premises but cherish their consequences at the same time. If our contemporaries are ready (probably without asking too many questions) to give up this transcendent and monotheistic religion that characterizes our origins, they are not ready at all to give up its fruits, that is, everything that this religion has left us in terms of ethics and culture.

This shows to what extent we are still stuck in this quagmire. Let me explain myself better.

**First point:** the question of truth. It is a Judeo-Christian invention, initiated by the Greeks (Parmenides, Herodotus, Plato). Truth implies both exclusivity (contradictions are not true at the same time) and universality (what is true here is true everywhere, under the same conditions). Today we reject the truth, because we see it as fanatical (actually it used to be!). In many ways, we are going back to the old use of myths that were neither true nor false, on which the ancients based their morals.

Our contemporaries subscribe to religious beliefs based on myths and not on truths. After all, what matters is not whether Christ or Buddha really existed: what matters is their moral impact. Some immanent religions, based on myths, also offer meaning for life, and that is what people need. So, perhaps our destiny is to become easternized ourselves in the near future, contrary to what Husserl wrote: other peoples become westernized but "we will never be Indianized". (in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*).

This evolution characterizes the metamorphosis of a cult into culture. The Christian religion is moving towards the simple status of a culture. Culture must be indifferent to values and beliefs. A religion that becomes only culture must refrain from believing, for example, classes on History of Religions replace Catechism classes. Totalitarian and postmodern countries, which try to suppress religions, use this means whereby they degrade them into cultures. Thus, the interior of Soviet churches and cathedrals has often been converted into museums, such as the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, and many

of our chapels or small churches are no longer places of worship, but only places of tourism and art. It is almost impossible to destroy a religion, even though some regimes such as communism have tried to do so by resorting to violence - on the other hand, a religion can easily be erased if it is turned into a culture. There is an aesthetic detachment from culture that eradicates all forms of belief, as Kierkegaard well demonstrated.

We notice that erasing the notion of truth undermines sciences (cf. Kuntz) and leads to an inflation of discourses based on emotion or myth (as is the case with the current discourse on ecology). But in our societies, this "regression" is being rejected: see, for example, the critique of "post-truth". Furthermore, we care a lot about universality: we strongly want human rights to extend everywhere, we do not see them as special principles, that only apply to us; we are passionate about science, which by definition supports universal truths. So, we reject the idea of truth that comes from Christianity, but we defend its fruits...

**Second point: inherent** human dignity (= no human being, whatever his value in the eyes of society might be, can be treated as a piece of flesh). However, it is because this certainty is fading that we accept laws such as abortion or euthanasia. However, the only absolute moral certainty that remains is the horror of the Shoah, which reflects a certainty regarding inherent dignity. However, we have lost the foundations of this certainty (human dignity is absolute, because it is the image of God). So we are no longer able to preserve its consistency. Sometimes we question the primacy of man ("animal rights"), sometimes we argue that human beings are only a physical-chemical combination of elements, in other cases we invoke the coming of immortal cyborgs, half human, half machines ..... In other words, we are very attached to this humanism of ontological dignity and kingship that Christianity has transmitted to us, but we are not able to preserve its consistency and challenge it with all sorts of measures and ambitions that might have prepared the ground for a future shoah (the tyrannies that are as young as the morning, mentioned by Chesterton).

**Third point:** we are very attached to the freedom of autonomy, personal conscience, which were founded in the West, starting from a cosmogony in which a God gives freedom to his creatures. It is from this original history that modern democracy emerged here (and nowhere else), first in monasteries, then in Italian cities and then in the Magna Charta of 1215. We cherish democracy. But we do not want to defend the foundations of freedom and personal conscience. What are these foundations? Monogamous marriage and the presence of fathers to allow for the emancipation of children (polygamy and the absence of fathers require authoritarian powers). Secondly, the risk associated with the decisions of freedom. We no longer want to take these risks: we seek safe societies in which everything is based on protocols and not on decisions. We defend consensus, which is the other side of democracy. So, this is another contradiction: we love the fruits of a religion whose principles we deny.

**Fourth point:** the vision of time. Judeo-Christianity, for the first time (with a fleeting exception perhaps among the ancient Mazdanian Persians) abandoned the circular time that was found in all civilizations and introduced a linear time that unfolded towards an end, and corresponded to the rise of transcendence. This linear time is the vector of the hope of salvation and, starting from modernity, the vector of the notions of progress. However, even in this case, a strange inconsistency has emerged. We do not

want to abandon the notions of progress, nor the linear time of hope, but at the same time we are attracted by a new vision of time: catastrophism, which restores a circular time (myths of the struggle between order and chaos). All ecological discourses, irrespective of whether they were introduced by Gunther Anders or not, on the time of the deadline and the time of the end, on the next disasters, mark the end of linear time. Yet we are deeply attached to the world of hope.

If we want human beings not to be treated like pieces of meat, we must give them an inherent value. If we want to use universal principles, to be spread throughout all cultures, we must accept the idea of truth. If we want freedom of autonomy and personal conscience, we must accept both the risk of thinking, as well as the democratic struggle and fatherhood. If we want to save progress and hope, we must save the linear time that unfolds towards an end with all that this implies about confidence in ourselves and in the future.

All these principles, which we care about so much, are the fruits of Christianity and only refer to it. No other culture conveys them.

Hence the inconsistency in which we find ourselves: Christianity is abolished, but Christianity is the spirit of places.

## 2

This situation generates new needs. And the reason why we feel so uncomfortable is because we have not realized it.

Minority Catholicism is not appreciated by public opinion. Catholics in France are used to Ketman: a practice whereby they hide their thoughts and that originated in Persia (for the heretics of Islam, with reference to Islam/ Buddhism syncretism). Anyone who practices Ketman must know how to pretend and be silent. They learn from an early age that their religious beliefs should not be displayed in the public sphere and that they should even be hidden, unless they want to be considered fools. If they are high school students, they will learn to write their compositions in class, keeping their beliefs to themselves and developing beliefs they do not have. In other words, in an atheistic country like France, Catholics are secret agents of God.

This is one of the needs that are now being imposed on us: minority status is very specific, and we must learn this from Jews or Protestants. When you are in the majority, tolerance, humility and discretion are necessary virtues. When you are in a minority, tolerance is no longer a virtue but a necessity (we no longer have to boast about tolerance as the Church does nowadays: for us, this has become mandatory); virtues are equanimity, patience and perseverance. Secret agents must avoid paranoia.

I would add in this regard that if the laity have effectively internalized the status of minority, the same does not necessarily apply to clerics. It is difficult for Church staff to accept the loss of power, especially if we look at where we come from (a situation in which the Church could threaten excommunication or damnation: given the prevailing beliefs, power over souls was equivalent to power over actions and consciences). Ultimately, this unprecedented situation brings us back to the time of the early Christians. Too often, Church staff acts as if our Christian identity still mattered: speaking with authority on all matters, neglecting the government of the institutions they lead, in other words, adopting arrogant ways that are not suitable for minorities. Especially since, with the demise of Christian identity, it is not only the number of Christians that has changed (dropped), but the behaviour and needs of the faithful who are left have changed as well. They are much more demanding of the Church. Today we are dealing with a rather

traditional and zealous Catholicism, which I would call neoconservative. It is personal and never social. It is the opposite of 20th century Maurassism. People don't go to mass to participate in a social ritual. Religious zeal is evident (kneelers were abolished in the 1960s in all churches, so that all younger faithful kneel on the ground). They are no longer sociological faithful, in search of rites; they are true believers, who hope in the holiness of the Church as in their own. I will not dwell on the disaster that the repeated sexual scandals that are roiling the current Church have caused for this small number of zealous people; the Machiavellians / Maurassians of a hundred years ago would have laughed at all this: instead today's faithful, who are the bearers of a flame that is dying, shed bitter tears.

A minority Church has an even greater duty of perfection, because in this case illicit behaviour exacerbates a decline that has already begun. It is unconscionable for lay people to see the highest Vatican authorities, publicly accused of homosexuality at all levels, not bothering to take immediate action as they should: either issue a justified denial or engage in manifest soul-searching. The Church acts as an institution that rules and dominates, believing that everything that is forbidden to others is allowed to her. The Church has not realized this: as a minority that has been stripped of its power, scandals crush her and discredit her even more.

An additional point: a minority current should absolutely discard particularism and stop being dogmatic. Allow me to elaborate on this point.

Particularism means believing that you are the only person in the world who can make sense of this world. This delusion, this deception, might be suitable for dominant currents that people do not dare contradict. Dostoevsky, a Christian in the world of dominant Christianity, exclaimed: "if God does not exist, everything is allowed". Here's a nice typical regional particularism! As if there were no morality in Asia! Peoples that do not embrace monotheism have a moral sense like we do, to the extent that Péguy wrote as follows, in the Dialogue of History and the Carnal Soul: "that there have been so many peoples and so many souls in which Christianity has not taken root, that it has not reached; so many peoples and so many souls who have lived abandoned, and who, after all, have not fared that bad, unfortunately, therein lies the mystery's secret, its inner recess". To believe or make people believe that if Christianity collapsed, everything else would collapse with it is a deception that, in its current minority status, is no longer credible. Some radical Catholic currents rely on this type of argument, which can only weaken them further. Behind the collapse of Christianity there is no rising crime, nihilism, extreme materialism: but rather the rise of stoic morals, paganism, Asian-style spirituality. Let us stop believing that we are the only people in the world who can give meaning to the world: our minority status should have taught us this lesson to say the least!

Another issue is related to Dogmatics: it loses much of its effectiveness in a minority situation. In this case (in my opinion), It can be beneficially replaced by phenomenology, because the latter is able to provide universal arguments to doubtful minds. We can no longer argue that a child needs a father because Thomas Aquinas said so: the argument of authority no longer holds up in a minority situation, because even those who accept authority cannot use it (if we want to demonstrate that a child needs a father, we must link this to the need for freedom, based on an existential reflection - to argue that

medically assisted procreation without a father goes against God's plan, is not productive in an atheistic society).

Let us push this concept even further: we have seen natural law everywhere because we were in the majority, we have somehow taken over the universal although it does not really belong to us. Allow me to quote Paul-Louis Landsberg, a German personalist: "I must confess that I do not see how something that is practiced, accepted and often glorified among all non-Christian peoples can be against natural law" (cf. *Essays on the experience of death??*, Le Seuil 1993, p.123). At this point in history, we must realize - the author added (p. 142) - that Christian morality is not "a universal natural or reasonable morality", but "the manifestation of a paradoxical revelation in our lives". We do not have a monopoly on the description of natural law. This awareness would be an intellectual revolution for us, but it would allow us to emerge with honour (abiding by truth) from our majority status. There is a behaviour I believe we should shun in the circumstances in which we find ourselves: I am referring to the behaviour adopted not by the Church staff, but by a large number of lay people. It is what I call belief ideologization. Some groups of Christians, frightened by modern and postmodern processes, tend to turn their beliefs into a sort of ideology. This rigidity, which can range from vehement affirmation to radicalization, affects all cultures or religions, including inner ones, when they feel threatened by a change in customs and beliefs. We can see this happening with some Muslims, or others. Among Western Catholics, since the end of the last century, a zealous and active conservative fringe has emerged, dedicated to reaffirming principles and foundational values that postmodernism has planned to destroy.

The ideologization of religions and traditions ushers us into a sharply divided world, that will soon become Manichean. Beliefs become more certain. Tolerance disappears. A culture that feels threatened rallies its troops like a country at war. It is a sort of institutionalization of something that used to be unclear and left to the whims of history. But it is a rigid institutionalization, that etches/engraves frightened beliefs into marble into marble to prevent them from fleeing.

People might think that the ideology of threatened beliefs is a reaction to the fragility of convictions, that acknowledge their inability to face an aggressive, enviable and irresistibly victorious modern culture. Catholics who engage in the effort to explain why the the traditional family must be defended, do not believe for a second that they can make the postmodern giant budge by even one millimetre. They already see themselves as defeated no matter what. But they don't want posterity to see them as passive by-standers or accomplices. They ideologize their beliefs because they fear they cannot exist otherwise. Refusing to despair or – even more so – abdicate, they take the side of a sort of spiritual battle *ad majorem dei gloriam*, a clarion ring in honour of the ethics of conviction....

Finally, Islam's proximity is useful to Christianity. Faced with a conquering Islam, and brought to a climax by Western guilt, ethereal and rational pagan wisdom will not withstand this shock. Only Christianity will be able to resist Islamist pressure, because Christ's biography is not entitled "History of Raids". By this I mean that, in a world that cherishes morality, Muhammad will never be able to compete with Christ's ethical perfection.

Lastly, we should highlight that the establishment and survival of Christianity (as a society of Christian culture) is not our goal - Christ himself did not seek this, nor did Paul later. We can only sow seeds that can convert hearts, knowing that our heart must be converted first. The Church is not a large trade union/syndicate?, as people used to believe. Young Catholics, who are mobilizing in large numbers, resemble the early Christians, those of the Letter to Diognetus: "They reside in their homeland but as domiciled foreigners. The experience of their fathers gives them a certainty: our task is not to produce societies in which "the Gospel runs our States", but rather, to use the words of Saint-Exupéry, to "walk slowly towards a fountain".