

STUDIA NAUK TEOLOGICZNYCH  
TOM 12 (2017)

DOI 10.24425/119348

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EUROPE AND HUMAN DIGNITY.  
A STEINIAN DISCUSSION  
OF JOSEPH RATZINGER'S UNDERSTANDING OF EUROPE<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Benedict XVI's *Europe Today and Tomorrow*<sup>2</sup> charts the formation and history of Europe around a mission to reign as a sacred duty, manifested first in the reign of Charlemagne and in the idea of a Holy Roman Empire, and then transposed through many schisms, wars, divisions and crises into the duty to insist on respect for Human Dignity. Benedict XVI thinks this mission to reign as a sacred duty is Christian in origin and that its transformation into an insistence on respect for Human Dignity also is. It is Ratzinger's concern, as he charts the history of Europe, that we would be able on the one hand to face the future of Europe without loss of identity and on the other distinguish between what is oppressive and what is life giving in European culture<sup>3</sup>.

If Ratzinger is right that the mission to reign as a sacred duty translates into a mission to respect and protect Human Dignity by a process of concentrating on the essential, the two are essentially linked. If, moreover, the fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was given at the Wrocław International Conference *Edyta Stein 2016: Europe and its Identity*, Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Wrocław, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Wrocław and Society of Edith Stein in Wrocław, Edith Stein Haus, 15 October 2016. A German version of that paper is submitted for publication in the German section of the proceedings of this conference, edited by Jerzy Machnac. This present version has been restructured and expanded significantly by taking account of a more extensive selection of J. Ratzinger's works. It consequently comes to an adjusted conclusion.

<sup>2</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2007, translated from the Italian original *Europa: I suoi fondamenti oggi e domani*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan): Edizioni San Paolo 2004, second ed. 2005. As the book is written before Ratzinger became Pope but translated and published after, I shall refer to the book's author intermittently as Joseph Ratzinger and Pope Benedict XVI.

<sup>3</sup> This is a theme that is prominent already in J. Ratzinger, *Wendezeit für Europa? Diagnosen und Prognosen zur Lage von Kirche und Welt*, Einsiedeln-Freiburg: Johannes Verlag 1991.

value of Human Dignity is objective, *a priori* and therefore eternal (not in its realisation, but in its essential being, as Stein will tell us), then the mission to reign for the sake of Human Dignity is rooted in a realm that does not pass, as also Ratzinger asserts, in the fundamental value of Human Dignity. This anchorage would mean that it would not be rational for us to renounce the attempt to pursue the mission for fear of losing our identity, since the identity results from the pursuit of the mission in whatever way it turns out to be possible.

I shall argue here that we on this account of Europe can envisage Europe's unfolding into the future while at the same time accept the possibility of a progressive absorption of less essential aspects of its cultural identity into a plurality of ethnic, religious and secular cultures. We can do this if we consider the letting go of non-essential aspects of the mission to reign for the sake of Human Dignity as a concentration on it. As the idea of Human Dignity moreover constitutes a criterion for distinguishing between what is good and what is not in European culture, the concentration on the mission is simultaneously a strategy for internal renewal. I shall argue with Stein that such a mission to reign for the sake of Human Dignity has a community creating function that can explain the formation of Europe as well as its role in the world.

In what follows, I shall first give an account of Ratzinger's history of Europe (1). I shall then concentrate on the mission at the heart of it according to Ratzinger, and explain why, in Stein's view, such a mission would be particularly suited for shaping a people and a continent (2). Finally, I shall discuss Ratzinger's understanding of Human Dignity in the light of Stein's understanding of values (3).

## 1. RATZINGER'S HISTORY OF EUROPE

Europe, according to Ratzinger, is 'a geographical concept only in a way that is entirely secondary. It is not a continent that can be comprehended neatly in geographical terms; rather it is a cultural and historical concept'<sup>4</sup>. Ratzinger understands this concept to be comprehensible only within the context of the global challenges of our time and insists that its purpose is to sharpen our vision of what is helpful and what is harmful<sup>5</sup>. He proposes a concept that, like that of the nation, captures something spiritual involved with a group of people and with a landscape, a concept of political geography. It is, of course, a concept with which we are all familiar, whether within or outside of Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-8.

Ratzinger traces this concept's history from Herodotus (484-425 BC) who claimed that 'Asia, with all the various tribes of barbarians that inhabit it, is regarded by the Persians as their own; but Europe and the Greek race they look on as distinct and separate'<sup>6</sup>. In this statement 'the boundaries of Europe itself are not specified, but it is clear that lands which today are the nucleus of modern Europe lay entirely outside of the area considered by the ancient historian. Indeed, with the establishment of the Hellenic states and the Roman Empire, a continent had been formed that became the basis for later Europe, although it displayed entirely different boundaries: these were the lands surrounding the Mediterranean, which by virtue of their cultural ties, by dint of trade and commerce, and by reason of their common political system formed altogether a true and proper continent. Only the triumphant advance of Islam in the seventh and eighth Century drew a boundary across the Mediterranean and, so to speak, cut it in half, so that all that had been one continent until then was thenceforward subdivided into three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe'<sup>7</sup>.

As the southern borders moved north through the Muslim conquests, Europe saw a vigorous growth towards the north, including lands that from now on became heartlands: Gaul, Germany and Britain, extending further into Scandinavia. The continuity despite the displacement was 'assured by a theological interpretation of history: in connection with the Book of Daniel, the Roman Empire – renewed and transformed by the Christian faith – was considered to be the final and permanent reign in the history of the world in general, and therefore the association of peoples and states that was taking shape was defined as the permanent *Sacrum Imperium Romanum*. This process of a new historical and cultural definition was completed quite deliberately during the reign of Charlemagne, and here the ancient name of Europe emerged once again, in a significant variation: this term was now used precisely to designate the kingdom of Charlemagne, and it expressed simultaneously the awareness of the novelty and the continuity with which the new association of states presented itself as the political power in charge of the future. In charge of the future because it considered itself to be in continuity with the history of the world thus far and ultimately to be rooted in what lasts forever. Expressed in the self-understanding that was developing in this way was an awareness of being definitive and at the same time an awareness of having a mission'<sup>8</sup>.

Ratzinger continues to trace the history of Europe by including its 'second root', the non-western part of Europe, arising from the Byzantine Empire and stretching as far as Siberia. He sees interestingly Siberia as the first colony of Europe, i.e. as the first territory outside of Europe, which, although populated by

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 13-14.

Europeans, nevertheless is not having a status as a subject of history or indeed as a part of Europe. This concept of an outreach of the mission into lands outside the domain of active sovereignty came to represent a type of outreach that was to be repeated. Other colonies followed, after the Reformation had drawn a different kind of boundary across Western Europe, and eventually the United States formed itself into an independent historical subject now facing Europe. Becoming independent also was a pattern followed by many other former colonies, although not by Siberia so far.

Against the backdrop of national states forming the one definitive sovereignty issuing from the one sacred mission to reign lost currency. 'The dramatic consequences of this are evident in the fact that the great European nations considered themselves entrusted with a universal mission, which necessarily led to conflicts among them, the deadly impact of which we have painfully experienced in the century that just ended'<sup>9</sup>. The pluralisation of the one mission led to each nation state pursuing the mission on its own. Its by-product was a competition for sovereignty and therefore war.

Ratzinger identifies a totalitarian impulse operative within or alongside the sacred duty to reign as this latter was interpreted by Emperors and Popes. This impulse 'always remained alive' in the East and the West alike<sup>10</sup>. It is possibly present in the impulse to reign as such: Ratzinger seems to consider it as a competitor to it, one opposed to it by the fact that it is not rendered sacred by its intention to protect Human Dignity<sup>11</sup>. It may be that the competition with this unholy impulse, with power as such, is the main factor to challenge our identity presently and in general. This impulse might 'win' in the sense of dominating the lands hitherto referred to as Europe, and it possibly could do so by promoting misconceptions of the idea of Human Dignity. The mission to rule for the sake of Human Dignity is not susceptible to be lost, however, as it is rooted in a realm that does not pass. As such, it lies open to move anyone susceptible to feel the motivating power of the value and willing to act accordingly by making it to be the point of their exercise of power.

Ratzinger identifies this mission as Christian in origin, and indeed sees the factual development of Christianity as the reason why the mission took root in

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 21-22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> In *Wendezeit für Europa?* (p. 95) Ratzinger claims that if the state is not based on justice, it regresses to be a band of robbers. Whether Ratzinger upholds this normative concept of the state in *Europe Today and Tomorrow* is unclear. That the basis for a politics in accordance with Human Dignity is justice (*Wendezeit für Europa?*, p. 99) and that thus the claim to rule in accordance with Human Dignity certainly does allow for the state to form, based on justice, is clear already from *Wendezeit für Europa?*. Stein does not have a normative concept of the state; to her, a state can exist as totalitarian. As it as such has negative value, the state does not itself have a value. It is possible that the Ratzinger of *Europe Today and Tomorrow* would tend to agree with her.

the lands we today call Europe. The mission is in what it accomplishes similar to the a-historical idea of a society ruled by law, presented by Habermas as relying on the principle of Human Dignity<sup>12</sup>. However, it is not identical to it, in that the mission to reign for the sake of Human Dignity comes both with the motivating power of the value of Human Dignity and with the express calling or task to provide leadership for the sake of it by an authority mostly understood to be transcendent. The mission thus is the task of establishing and re-establishing the reign of a principle, whereas the constitutional state of law, however supported by procedures and democracy, does not by itself have the power to regenerate and renew itself whenever the constitution and democracy becomes compromised by the pursuit of power.

In his debate with Habermas Ratzinger speaks of two cultures of the West, which he refers to as the Christian faith and secular rationality<sup>13</sup>. Ratzinger's identification of the sacred mission to reign with the task to rule for the sake of Human Dignity stands in some contrast with this. In *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, he sees in Christianity the driving force and in the secular state of law a by-product, or indeed a result. Whether referred to as a relationship of complementarity or polarity the recognition of distinct legitimate spheres for religion and a secular state is characteristic of the culturally Christian sphere of the Western world.

If seen in the light of the idea that the mutual interaction between Greek thought and Judaism prepared the event of Christianity as the Christians expressed their central belief through the Greek language and presented the Messiah as the *Logos*, it may be possible to see the re-separation of secular rationality and Christianity as something that occurred with the Enlightenment<sup>14</sup>. However, for the formative years of Europe, the traditions were not distinct, and thus 'this inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical enquiry was an event of decisive importance not only from the standpoint of the history of religions, but also from that of World history – it is an event which concerns us even today. Given this convergence, it is not surprising that Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other

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<sup>12</sup> See J. Habermas, J. Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularisation. On Reason and Religion*, ed. F. Schuller, transl. B. McNeill, C.R.V., San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2006.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> In his Regensburg address (September 12, 2006) Benedict XVI says: „The encounter between the Biblical message and Greek thought did not happen by chance. The vision of Saint Paul, who saw the roads to Asia barred and in a dream saw a Macedonian man plead with him: «Come over to Macedonia and help us!» (cf. Acts 16.6-10 [8]) – this vision can be interpreted as a «distillation» of the intrinsic necessity of a rapprochement between biblical faith and Greek enquiry”. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html), p. 3 of 8.

way around: this convergence, with the subsequent addition of the Roman heritage, created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe<sup>15</sup>.

## 2. HOW A MISSION TO REIGN CAN SHAPE A CONTINENT

Ratzinger's account of the formation and history of Europe fits well with Edith Stein's analysis of the state as a social reality<sup>16</sup>. Europe is not, of course, quite, or yet, a 'state' in the sense of ruling out 'national' sovereignty, although some complain that it is in fact a super state, and that it does precisely overrule national sovereignty. What we can see today, and maybe could see since the formation of Europe, is both a competition between and a co-ordination of sovereignties in Europe, in a way that is both preparative for integrating them in the higher sovereignty of Europe and allowing for the possibility that Europe can fall apart along ethnic or religious fault lines.

Stein regards the state as:

1. incorporating a community;
2. being sovereign by the making of positive law, and
3. existing in a global context as a subject of history<sup>17</sup>.

Both Europe and its member states can be said to have these characteristics, depending on where one recognises the sovereignty to lie as regards particular matters, and thus both can be recognised as states in so far as they are sovereign<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4 of 8 [10]).

<sup>16</sup> E. Stein, *An Investigation Concerning the State*, ed. and transl. M. Sawicki, (*Collected Works of Edith Stein* vol. X) Washington D.C.: ICS Publications 2006. Translated from *Eine Untersuchung über den Staat*, now critically edited by I. Riedel-Spangenberg and published in *Edith Steins Gesamtwerke*, Bd. 7, Freiburg im Bressgau: Herder, 2006. For the various types of social formation see also E. Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, ed. M. Sawicki, transl. M. C. Baseheart, M. Sawicki, (*Collected Works of Edith Stein* vol. VII) Washington D.C.: ICS Publications 2000. Translated from *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, now critically edited by B. Beckmann-Zöller and published in *Edith Steins Gesamtwerke*, Bd. 6, Freiburg im Bressgau: Herder 2010. Please also see M. Lebech: „Study Guide to Edith Stein's Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities” in *Yearbook of the Irish Philosophical Society* 2004, ed. M. Lebech, Maynooth: NUI 2004, p. 40-76. To be reprinted in a revised and expanded version by ICS Publications.

<sup>17</sup> *An Investigation Concerning the State*, I, §1, §2, §3 and II, §5.

<sup>18</sup> The United States of America display a similar structure: the individual states are sovereign in some limited matters, whereas the federal government is in others. The member states in Europe have retained not only a much larger cultural diversity, but also a more significant autonomy than is the case in the United States of America.

A state, for Stein, is a 'sovereignty' in that it legislates, and in that it is constituted by its subjects as theirs, either directly or because of their ethnic, cultural or religious loyalty to a group, whose state it is. It is thus not essentially bound to a specific territory (although it is bound to some territory because of the needs of its subjects), but instead to a set of reasons that makes its subjects identify it as of importance for them and for others, and/or as legitimate. It depends on the subjects' identification of themselves and of their solidarity with various types of people and cultures, whether they consider a state 'their' state, and how important they consider it to be. The subjects can consider themselves and the state obliged by principles or values. The state cannot do so by itself, since it knows of values only through the people making it up. However, a state may adopt and have a constitution that binds it to principles to which the subjects may appeal and which forms the basis for its state of law.

A sovereignty shaped by a sacred mission to reign in order to safeguard Human Dignity would seem for most people to be in their interest since such a sovereignty would be bound to respect the principle of Human Dignity and therefore them. However, the fact that it is a mission adds the dimension that someone else in authority over and above the state, whether God or the human being itself, recognises the value of Human Dignity and has commissioned 'us' (and therefore the state) to commit to the realisation of the principle. This aspect underlines the responsibility of the subjects for the state, as only their commitment will commit the state through its constitution to respect Human Dignity. Those individuals who consider themselves bound by other human beings, even if not by God, can share in this responsibility and maybe even consider it a mission. The mission thus underlines the responsibility to God or others over and above the state for the commitment to a value He and they also value, and which He and they can be counted on to assist in realising. A sovereignty bound by such a mission might command considerable support in terms of subjects who would find this mission something with which they could identify, and as something, they themselves would be prepared to pursue or value and hence attempt to realise by their actions. It is difficult to imagine anything that could be more in the interest of all and more legitimate in the view of all, even if it is at the same time very demanding<sup>19</sup>. In so far as this is the ideal sovereignty that in fact makes us identify Europe with all its concrete ethnic, religious and cultural loyalties, it reaches into the sphere of what does not pass. It might well for this reason precisely be destined not to be associated exclusively with a particular set of ethnic, religious and cultural loyalties, but to transcend them all. If it is not this ideal that makes us identify Europe, but instead geographical, ethnic or cultural features not related to this ideal, then Ratzinger's account of Europe is

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<sup>19</sup> The state of law referred to by Habermas as relying on Human Dignity could correspond to this. J. Habermas and J. Ratzinger: *The Dialectics of Secularisation*.

in need of completion or indeed incorrect. On Ratzinger's account, however, and it is not impossible that most Europeans would agree with him, cultures are or can be called European to the exact extent that they are in conformity with this mission. However, it may well be unclear to many what exactly Human Dignity means and to what it refers. It seems that Ratzinger counts among these, in so far as his concept of Human Dignity, as can be seen from the following, is not completely clear.

### 3. RATZINGER'S UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE LIGHT OF STEIN'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF VALUES

Ratzinger raises the question of: 'what is capable of keeping alive the intrinsic identity of Europe through all the historical metamorphoses. [...] to put it even more simply: What is there, today and tomorrow, that promises human dignity and a life in conformity with it?'<sup>20</sup>

If these words are not to be taken as an expression of mere desperation, one can interpret them, as I have done so far, to signify the progressively conscious identification of the sacred mission to reign with the mission to protect Human Dignity (i.e. with the mission to create conditions in which Human Dignity is respected). The awareness of the sacred mission would thus include an intrinsic but implicit understanding of the idea that the ideal of a sacred reign is for the sake of Human Dignity. Such an ideal and mission does represent a promise for today and tomorrow. Institutions and customs formed and reformed by attention to this ideal are needed to protect Human Dignity concretely, but once the ideal is presented, such institutions and customs can be realised by those who are responsive to it, whoever that might be.

However, Ratzinger also claims that 'Faith in God the Creator is the surest guarantee of man's dignity'<sup>21</sup>. By this he cannot really mean that our faith in Christ would or could guarantee the ideal existence of the value of Human Dignity, in so far as it as a value as such resides in a realm beyond our valuation, a 'realm that does not pass'<sup>22</sup>. God is himself the only possible guarantee of the

<sup>20</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Wendezeit für Europa?*, p. 108: „Gerade nach dem ungeheuren Missbrauch des Rechtspositivismus im Führerrecht des Dritten Reiches, in dem Unrecht Gesetz geworden und der Staat zur Rauberbande degradiert worden war, war man sich bewusst, dass jede Rechtsetzung auf Werte gegründet sein muss, die sich unserer Manipulation entziehen. Deren unbedingte Achtung gibt erst der Freiheit des Entscheidens ihre Würde und ihrem tragenden Grund. Deshalb weiss das Grundgesetz auch um die Grenzen des Mehrheitsprinzips. Und es weiss, dass diese Unantastbarkeit

essential being of values such as Human Dignity, in so far as they can be likened to Ideas present in Him, in the *Logos*, before the beginning of the world.

As a value, however, Human Dignity is in need of realisation in the world, i.e. it is in need of being realised (i.e. valued and acted upon) by human beings, without which it will remain ideal, and not inform human relationships. Human beings need to respect Human Dignity in order to guarantee its realisation by them: God cannot do that for us, because it is precisely in respecting it that we realise it.

It is possible that faith in the Creator, as far as it involves appreciation for the value of human beings as it clearly does in the case of the Christian faith, goes some way to encourage the realisation of the value of Human Dignity by us. It does not guarantee this realisation, however, as is all too evident from believers in the Creator or indeed Christians engaged in activities that do not respect Human Dignity. The totalitarian tendency can take root because we cannot guarantee the value response of others, and, realistically, even of ourselves, sinners as we are. Believing God has commissioned us to reign for the sake of Human Dignity, however, allows us to know that God is interested in the realisation of Human Dignity and that He therefore will help us to realise it. To accept the mission from Him makes it meaningful to implore Him for His assistance for the task.

If we cannot guarantee our prioritisation of Human Dignity, it is because we are also enamoured of other values. Such values as progress, science and freedom present challenges to Human Dignity<sup>23</sup>, in that they might be preferred to Human Dignity in practise and not only in theory. Whether we do this is in our hands to the extent that we can convince ourselves and others. It is possible to be distracted from this task by manipulations of the concept of Human Dignity, presenting it to us, for example, as a meaningless concept.

When Ratzinger says that ‘The inviolable nature of human dignity ought to become the fundamental untouchable pillar of ethical regulations’<sup>24</sup>, one could regard it as an attempt to exorcise distorted expressions of the idea, and to formulate Human Dignity in a way that is not subject to demagogical manipulations. Human Dignity, as far as it is a dignity, means that it is first among values (i.e. that it has other values following on from it) and that it therefore should be preferred to these other values following from it precisely because they do follow from it. By saying that Human Dignity ‘ought’ to be a pillar of ethical regulations, Ratzinger probably means that it ought to function as the basic principle of inter-human relationships, because it is highest among values by virtue

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von Werten, die allein die Unantastbarkeit der Würde des Menschen und so seine Freiheit schützt, darauf gründet, dass es diese Werte wirklich gibt und das wir vor ihnen Verantwortung tragen“.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, p. 62-63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

of it being a dignity. What he therefore insists on with this statement is that Human Dignity ought to be respected for what it is: a fundamental value entitling human beings to respect as such, a fundamental value motivating human beings to respect each other<sup>25</sup>.

When Ratzinger further says: ‘The inviolability of human dignity means also that this dignity is valid for everyone, that it has a human face and belongs biologically to the human race’<sup>26</sup>, he reiterates that Human Dignity means the dignity that pertains to human beings as such (and therefore belongs to the human race as such). That dignity belongs ‘biologically’ probably is intended to mean that it pertains to each individual belonging to the biological species of human beings. As a fundamental value, of course, dignity is not biological and cannot belong ‘biologically’, since it belongs to the realm of the spirit as a motivating power characteristic of, or pertaining to, meaningful entities, in this case human beings.

Ratzinger seems to indicate as much when he states that ‘There are [...] self-subsistent values that flow from the essence of what it is to be a man’<sup>27</sup>. I have argued elsewhere, using Stein’s account of values and her phenomenology in general, that Human Dignity refers to the judgement, implicitly accomplished in the expression, that human beings have dignity as such<sup>28</sup>. On this account, Stein, like Ratzinger, would regard Human Dignity to pertain to the essence of the human being, i.e. as the fundamental value of the human being, which ought to be recognised as such.

However, when Ratzinger goes on to say that Human Dignity ‘vanishes’ when man is ‘produced’<sup>29</sup>, then it seems to me that he underestimates the ideal existence of the value and therefore is led to think it goes away when it is not respected. That, of course, is not the case, if you understand values as Stein does, namely as objective or ideal motivating powers, which are not dependent on us for their motivating power, although they are dependent on us for their realisation. The objective ideality of the value is something Ratzinger does seem to be aware of when he locates the sacred mission to respect Human Dignity in a realm beyond time. He also explicitly talks about the real existence of values (in particular of the value of Human Dignity) before which we have responsibility and which establishes them as beyond our attempts at manipulation<sup>30</sup>. What is compromised when Human Dignity is not respected is the respect due to it, a respect that might well be incompatible with manipulation, and with bringing the human being into existence in conditions of manipulation.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Lebech, *On the Problem of Human Dignity. A Hermeneutical and Phenomenological Investigation*, Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann 2009.

<sup>26</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> M. Lebech, *On the Problem of Human Dignity*, Part III.

<sup>29</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow*, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Wendezeit für Europa?*, p. 108-109.

When Human Dignity is compromised, i.e. when it is not respected as a dignity and instead subordinated to other values, the compromise, apart from resulting in allowing physical or psychological destruction of the person not being respected, also affects the character of the one who violates Human Dignity. From here it contaminates the culture both by contagion and by providing a bad example and precedent. The suffering of the one whose dignity was violated, in contrast, itself testifies to the fundamental value of Human Dignity (*ecce homo!*). Far from preventing the value from motivating others, the ideal will continue to call and motivate whoever open him or herself to its motivating power, also when it meets them from the person whose dignity has been violated. What can and does prevent others being motivated is on the one hand contagion (operating unconsciously) and on the other peer pressure (operating through fear). It is the ideality of the fundamental value of human beings entitling them to respect that accounts for the fact that we cannot call Human Dignity a European idea, except in the sense that Europeans also have had it.

We cannot either claim it to be a Christian idea in the sense that it should rely on Christian doctrine or faith to be adequately conceptualised. It is possible that the Christian culture sociologically favours its being adequately conceptualised and respected. To establish this would be a matter of an empirical investigation, which would be very difficult to accomplish, the results of which would almost certainly be very controversial. That they would be controversial testifies to the fact that most people, whether Christian or not, owns the idea of Human Dignity as the moral standard that underpins the Human Rights tradition. None of these people are likely to be separated from the idea willingly.

However, Ratzinger wants to go deeper still. He wants to claim that faith in the Creator itself is more worthy of the human being than having no faith. That believing that the world comes from creative reason is more reasonable and more in accord with Human Dignity than the contrary. ‘Die grundlegende Alternative, vor die uns der Gang der Neuzeit stellt, besteht in der Frage: Steht am Anfang aller Dinge das Unvernünftige, ist die Unvernunft der eigentliche Ursprung der Welt, oder kommt sie aus der schöpferischen Vernunft? Glauben heisst, die zweite Alternative ergreifen, und nur sie ist im tiefsten Sinn des Wortes „vernünftig“ und menschenwürdig<sup>31</sup>.

In many ways the modern human being does not dare to believe that it is possible to approach truth by our questioning at all. According to Ratzinger, however, ‘this false humility denigrates human beings; it makes action blind and feeling empty<sup>32</sup>. We do need to be certain we can know what is true. Only the belief that the world is ordered and knowable, possibly underpinned by faith in the Word of God, can ground a claim or a mission to reign for the sake of Human

<sup>31</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Wendezeit für Europa?*, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78. My own translation.

Dignity.<sup>33</sup> The one who does not believe in the possibility of knowing principles would not come upon the idea of governing in accordance with them, except with a view to deceive others, since it is not possible to govern in accordance with principles you cannot know. That is why it is so important for Ratzinger to emphasise that Europe must export not only its technology and knowhow, but also its inner origin and meaning: the knowledge of the *Logos* as foundation for all things, which allows us a view of the true as a measure for the good<sup>34</sup>.

Ratzinger thus thinks that ideas, as well as actions, can be in accordance with Human Dignity and also be beneath it. He mentions for example the idea that the good could not be distinguished from material goods as one that would be beneath Human Dignity<sup>35</sup>. The good, and the common good, when conceived in accordance with Human Dignity, is not reducible to material goods: materialism is an ideology beneath Human Dignity.

That ideas can be in accordance with Human Dignity or contrary to it, is an idea Ratzinger attributes to Robert Spaemann. It is, despite its apparent obviousness, quite an original idea. It explains why the teaching of ideologies such as Marxism and Positivism, without respect for their integration with culture and religion, can lead to resentment in those taught, as they feel their dignity and that which allowed for the deepest and most interior of the personal life of the soul has been taken away in the process<sup>36</sup>. 'Permissivism' can have the same effect, even when it is merely displayed, as in cinema<sup>37</sup>.

Ideas, which do not allow the human being to live in and from its innermost being and consequently are not in accordance with Human Dignity, prevent society to be in its public and communal aspects a moral society. They institute a society in which that which gives the human being dignity and constitutes him as such does not count<sup>38</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

We have seen that Europe, for Ratzinger, is a concept of political geography, identified by a mission to reign to protect Human Dignity. We have seen that this

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 85. „Nicht wenige sind der Meinung, dass es lieber umgekehrt hätte gehen sollen, dass man Europa hätte befreien müssen vom Christentum und von dem Herrschaftsanspruch, den es aus seiner Wahrheitsgewissheit ableitet“.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

mission is rooted in what does not pass and at the same time calls us to realise the value of Human Dignity by creating institutions to promote respect for it. We have also seen that understanding Human Dignity with Stein to be the fundamental value of human beings entitling them to respect, allows us to clarify the mission and therefore to distinguish it from what does not pertain to it by its essence. Furthermore, that the mission encourages faith in the Creator as an attitude in accordance with Human Dignity.

Europa i godność człowieka.  
Steinowska dyskusja a rozumienie Europy u Josepha Ratzingera

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule omówiono refleksje Benedykta XVI dotyczące formowania się i historii Europy w świetle powierzonego człowiekowi zadania panowania, które jest nie tylko jego świętym obowiązkiem, ale także podstawą jego godności. Analizy dokonano w świetle poglądów Edyty Stein na temat związku między formacją wspólnotową a obiektywnymi wartościami. Po pierwsze, zostały ukazane poglądy Ratzingera na temat rozumienia Europy w wymiarze polityczno-geograficznym. Po drugie, omówiono misję formowania Europy w świetle refleksji Ratzingera oraz również według sugestii Stein. Misja taka będzie szczególnie odpowiednia dla kształtowania ludzi i kontynentu. W trzeciej części omówiono rozumienie godności człowieka Ratzingera w świetle koncepcji wartości autorstwa Stein.

Słowa kluczowe: godność człowieka, Joseph Ratzinger, Edith Stein, Jürgen Habermas, Europa, zadanie panowania.

Europe and Human Dignity.  
A Steinian discussion of Joseph Ratzinger's understanding of Europe

Summary

This article discusses Benedict the XVI's charting of the formation and history of Europe around a mission to reign as a sacred duty for the sake of Human Dignity in the light of Edith Stein's insights into the relationship between community formation and objective values. First, an account of Ratzinger's understanding of Europe as a concept of political geography is given. Secondly is discussed the mission at the heart of the formation of Europe according to Ratzinger, and how such a mission would, according to Stein, be particularly suited for shaping a people and a continent. The third section discusses Ratzinger's understanding of Human Dignity in the light of Stein's understanding of values.

Keywords: human dignity, Joseph Ratzinger, Edith Stein, Jürgen Habermas, Europe, mission to reign.

### Europa und menschliche Würde.

Eine Steinsche Diskussion mit dem Joseph Ratzingers Verständnis vom Europa

#### Zusammenfassung

Im Artikel wird eine Darstellung von Entstehung und Geschichte Europas im Zusammenhang mit dem Herrschaftsauftrag unternommen, verstanden als eine heilige Pflicht um der menschlichen Würde willen im Lichte der Ausführungen von Edith Stein über den Zusammenhang zwischen der Bildung von Gemeinschaft und objektiven Werten. Zuerst wird das Verständnis Ratzingers über Europa als ein Konzept der politischen Geographie dargelegt. Im Weiteren wird der Herrschaftsauftrag im Zentrum der Entstehung Europas gemäß den Ausführungen von Ratzinger diskutiert sowie die Frage, wie ein solcher Auftrag, nach Stein, besonders geeignet sein könnte, dem Menschen und dem Kontinent eine Gestalt zu verleihen. Im dritten Teil wird das Ratzingersche Verständnis von der menschlichen Würde im Licht des Steinschen Verständnis der Werte dargelegt.

Schlüsselworte: menschliche Würde, Joseph Ratzinger, Edith Stein, Jürgen Habermas, Europa, Herrschaftsauftrag.

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