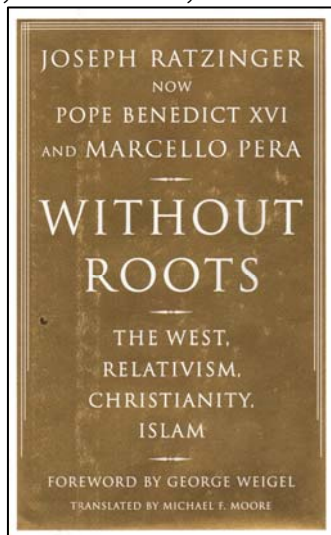


Book Review

Without Roots **The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam**



Ratzinger J, Pera M. *Without roots. The West, relativism, Christianity, Islam*. New York NY, Basic Books, 2006
(Translated by Micheal F. Moore; Foreword by George Weigel)

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In February 2006, the book entitled *Without Roots* was presented to the international public. The English translation of the Italian edition (November 2004), which was co-authored by the Speaker of the Italian Senate, Senator Marcello Pera, and by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and now Pope Benedict XVI, launches a new clear-cut stance on the international media circuits by attributing to *relativism* the responsibility of being one of the major negative conditioning factors of the European cultural milieu and of Western cultures at large.

The erudition with which the two Authors analyse both the issue of relativism and phenomena such as the globalization of cultures and multiculturalism – all issues specifically falling within the scope of cultural psychiatry – is such as to lead me to deem it advisable to review the book in order to enable the scholars of this discipline to take part in a debate that, being conducted from such eminent chairs, is sure to have a considerable influence in giving new shape to the psychological and cultural stands taken in most of the Western world (Note 1).

Without Roots comprises two chapters:

Chapter 1: *Relativism, Christianity and the West*, by Marcello Pera and,

Chapter 2: *Europe: Its Spiritual Foundation: Yesterday, Today and in the Future*, by Joseph Ratzinger;

and two letters written by the two Authors in an exchange of correspondence:

Letter to Joseph Ratzinger from Marcello Pera;

Letter to Marcello Pera from Joseph Ratzinger.

The book is also endowed with the following:

A jacket flap titled: *Can a Civilization Exist Without Any Sense of the Sacred?* , which immediately focuses the reader's attention on the doctrinal essence of the book (in the Italian edition the title on the jacket flap is different);

A *Foreword* by George Weigel, a Roman Catholic theologian (not included in the Italian edition);

A *Preface* by Marcello Pera (also present in the Italian edition).

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The Foreword

After having raised the problem of finding out what actually drives history, if it is politics, economics or human spirit, George Weigel asks the following question: "Indeed, is it possible to imagine anything properly called 'civilization' that lacks a sense of the sacred?". In quoting it, I would like to point out that the question does not raise an issue of faith but rather delves into an epistemological analysis of the sense of the sacred in the development and thriving of a civilization.

The final answer to this question, which forms the backdrop to the entire book, is left up to the two subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, the Foreword gives a clear outline and overview of the topics which are due to be dealt with shortly thereafter. Weigel's analysis starts with a first assertion in the field of demography: in Europe, there is a "demographic vacuum" which is being "filled by transplanted populations...that could become a threat to European democracy." Indeed, the threat is not perceived to come from *external* fundamentalist movements, which landed in Europe at a later point in time, but from *internal* reasons and namely from the fact that Europe performs an "apostasy" of the spiritual roots of its very own civilization (Note 2). The Foreword concludes by underscoring the responsibility of Western culture in re-formatting the culture of the world: "Thus, the issues explored so carefully by Cardinal Ratzinger and Professor Pera have everything to do with the future of North American democratic culture, as well as with the future of Europe".

The Preface

Marcello Pera highlights the fact that the publication of the book issues from their communion of ideas which emerged "purely by chance" from two magisterial lectures delivered respectively by Senator Pera at the Pontifical Lateran University on the 12th of May 2004 and by Cardinal Ratzinger at the Capital Room of the Italian Senate on the 13th of May 2004. The lecturers, having perceived an outstanding convergence of concerns about the spiritual, cultural and political situation in the West and particularly in modern-day Europe, decided to publish the two lectures.

Chapter 1: Relativism, Christianity and the West, by Marcello Pera

The chapter begins with a quotation from Max Weber contained in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which the famous sociologist points to a specific phenomenon that is characteristic of the Western culture: following a dovetailing of circumstances, it so happened that it was exactly in the Western sphere of the world that civilization expressed itself through manifestations that have acquired universal significance.

Weber's theory is re-proposed with a view to indicating the responsibility, for the better or the worse, of Western cultures in having imposed a number of fictitiously universal primacies:

“Modern science, for example, is a Western invention that has a universal value”. This statement is then followed by a criticism of the alleged universality of democracy, of the bill of rights and of liberalism and, more specifically, of “the separation of civil society and state or church and state”. The assumption proposed in this case is that the combination of science and liberalism produced a situation whereby “These and other institutions originate in and are characteristic of the West, particularly Western Europe. They belong to specific periods of Western history, have spread and imposed themselves in other parts of the world, and claim to have universal value”. The first confutations to the West’s primacy seem to arise from an attentive observer of cultural mediation processes who refuses to validate the West’s ethnocentric creations as universal values: “Consequently, to recommend these institutions as universal would be a gesture of intellectual arrogance or an attempt at cultural hegemony, imposed by arms, politics, economics, or propaganda. Moreover it only goes to follow that seeking to export these same institutions to cultures or traditions that are different from our own would be an act of imperialism”.

We soon find out, however, that the criticism of Western imperialism is not aimed at denouncing the West’s actual colonizing tendency but rather at redressing a balance that has now been lost and in favor of which only religion has the task and privilege to disseminate a fundamental, clear and universal message. The remaining part of the chapter then goes on to make a quantum leap. In proposing the assumption whereby only (the Christian) religion is empowered to boast a universal nature, the Author shifts his focus from a correct epistemological analysis to a prevalently sermonizing tone. The construct of religion being a universal form of ethic and moral principles is certainly nothing new. Conversely, what does appear to be uncustomary is the reason given as the principal cause of the degradation suffered by religion’s universal function: *relativism*, both in its philosophical meaning and as the instrument enabling intercultural comparison, is identified as the prime cause of the infection that is eroding the Christian religion and the whole Western civilization and culture along with it.

The criticism made to the West’s relativism is implacable. Western civilization is said to be affected by a sort of confusing “newspeak”: a politically correct but intrinsically deceitful language used “to imply, allude to, or insinuate rather than to affirm or maintain”. This double-dealing new tongue is assumed to make it possible to throw most anything into the cauldron of comparison: “Coca-cola with Chianti, Gaudi with Le Corbusier, Darwinism with intelligent design”. Pursuing this line of thinking, relativism might even reach the point of drawing a comparison “*between* (in italics in the text) aspects of Western culture and their counterparts in other cultures.” After having postulated the unacceptability of the nasty Western habit of wanting to compare everything that is incomparable, the Author reiterates the first three primary causes why the Church lost its battle for the recognition of the Christian roots in the draft of the European Constitutional Treaty: our relationship with Islam, relativism and the negative influence of post-Counciliar relativism on Christian theology.

In the paragraph entitled *The Double Paralysis of the West*, the reason for the West’s feebleness is particularly found to lie in its fear to express itself on the power acquired by the Islamic culture. The West, it is written, “is paralyzed because it does not believe that there are good reasons to say that it is better than Islam. And it is paralyzed because it believes that, if such reasons do indeed exist, then the West would have to fight Islam” (Note 3). The cultural factors that are claimed to have enfeebled the expressive force of the West vis-à-vis Islam are outlined in the subsequent paragraphs: *The Relativism of the Contextualists*; *The Relativism of the Decostructionists*; *The Relativism of the Theologians*.

I think it is advisable to inform the reader that Marcello Pera, before being elected Speaker of the Italian Senate, held a full professorship in Philosophy of Science at the University of Pisa. This high-ranking tenure endows him with the necessary experience and capacity to argue the pros and cons of the use of relativism, which involve numerous analytical criteria and meta-criteria, both infra and inter-cultural. Despite the sophistication with which the Author conducts his analysis of

relativism, I get the impression that his criticism of relativism is aimed at avoiding an even greater danger than the West's fearfulness in expressing its cultural supremacy over Islam: the most harmful aspect of relativism is assumed to be the possible inclusion of faith among the human expressions relativized by historical circumstances, to the point that the Author exclaims with ill-disguised horror: "However, what if this [faith], too, were relative?"

This is, according to Pera, the real danger of relativism: disguising behind different labels such as post-enlightenment, post-modernism, "weak thought" and deconstructionism, the possibility that faith might be conditioned by epigenetic factors. The possibility that bio-psycho-cultural factors might be involved in the shaping of the ontological category of faith or of a religious experience is not even taken into consideration.

By suddenly embracing Crocian idealism, the Author excludes the possibility that ethical and moral categories might vary over time according to the psychological atmosphere or to the cultural conglomerate inherited, thus making any relativity in the perception and expression of existential categories appear to be absurd: "What one community holds to be true, beautiful, and good is only so according to the criteria by which that community defines them".

Once again, it is relativism that raises "doubt over the existence of solid or ultimate foundations of the concepts" (Note 4), a doubt that could even touch upon the most sensitive aspects of Western culture: "Relativism has also begun to infiltrate, but has not yet expunged Christian theology, the final stronghold [...]. The starting point was the phenomenological observation that there is a plurality of creeds and religions. This was followed by a comparison, a loss of hope in meta-criteria. The end point is doubt in fundamental creeds of Christianity (the final stage, the reinterpretation or deconstruction of the religious facts)".

Once having clarified the harms of relativism, every Western citizen should assume Professor Pera's following statement to be the founding characteristic of his/her identity: "It is true that almost all the achievements that we consider most laudable are derived from Christianity". This is followed by a series of further declarations beginning with the formula "*In truth*" and by the subsequent statement whereby without the image of God, individuals would have no dignity; our values and rights are born from God's sacrifice and, in conclusion, institutions themselves would become questionable, should they be stripped of religion: "In truth, even our institutions are inspired by Christianity, including the secular institutions of government that render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. And the list goes on". Should this prove not to be so, we would all go back to suffering that same condition that is liable not only enfeeble Western culture as a way of conceiving the world, but its very capacity to intervene in global events. In fact, in the paragraph *While the West Slept*, we are reminded that the world is at war and that the West is hardly aware of the war being waged: "In Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechenya, Dagestan, Ossetia, the Philippines, South Arabia, the Sudan, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Palestinian Territories, Egypt, Morocco, and much of the Islamic and Arab world, large groups of fundamentalists, radicals, extremists – the Taliban, Al Qaeda, the Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brothers, the Islamic Jihad, the Islamic Armed Group and many more – have declared a holy war, *jihad*, on the West [...] Why should we not take note of it?"

It is unfortunately true that many Countries are being subjected to an overwhelming state of tension and warfare that often translates into acts of terrorism or interventions by military troops. However, is this outcry for the state of war being proclaimed by the State leader who is worried about the material outcome of this new type of belligerent conflict or by the professor of Philosophy of Science? As an academician, Professor Pera points to relativism as the etiologically pathogenic factor: conflicts are therefore no longer driven by geographical, economic and political causes but rather by a cultural virus that undermines Man's capacity to see and act appropriately. What is the remedy? The remedy suggested by the Author is consistent with what was explained above: to avoid falling prey to weak thought processes whereby we might relativize the actions of the Church to their historical context, thus preventing the Church from being cornered into self-

criticism: “This same concept of error has also penetrated the Catholic Church, which with growing frequency to-day recognizes the wrongs it has done, its erroneous decisions, and its unjust choices. The Church has apologized for evangelizing missions that were not always free of violence. It has apologized to the Jews for accusing them of Deicide and for persecuting them. It has apologized to Galileo for putting him on trial” (Note 5). The conclusion is peremptory: “If the Church draws a line between the infallible truth of its message and its historical practices, and between its roles as the eternal guardian of truth and as the government *pro tempore* of believers, then people might perceive it as no different from any other secular institution that corrects its course over time.”

Chapter II: The Spiritual Roots of Europe: Yesterday, Today and in the Future, by Joseph Ratzinger.

Chapter I, as we have seen, continuously highlighted the need to detoxify our culture from the relativism that blurs the truth and the mind of the Church. The words written by the political leader and university professor give a rough sketch of a complex problem that is subsequently addressed in the second chapter, in which Cardinal Ratzinger develops his discourse on philosophical relativism by making a critical analysis of *spiritual relativism*.

The admonishment comes as nothing new: without a strong spiritual thought, free from the fluctuations of relativist thinking, people – in this case Westerners – are doomed to being enfeebled.

The eminent prelate brings to the fore a phenomenon of colossal dimensions: the socially compacting function performed by religious devotion and shared religious dogmas.

In the paragraph *The Universalization of European Culture and the Ensuing Crisis*, Islam (earlier declared by Pera to be inferior with respect to the West) is taken as a model that should induce European populations to become entrenched in their religious roots: “[...] Islam can provide a valid spiritual foundation to their lives”. Europe is the only continent that has lost its religious roots, thus remaining isolated from the world, considering that Asia too has great religious traditions such as, for example, Buddhism, that have been elevated to spiritual powers. (Nota 6)

In order for Europe not to remain excluded from the global movement aimed at recovering spiritual force, it should regain its religious roots: “the religious heritage in all its form had to be reintroduced, especially the ‘heritage of Western Christianity’.” This appeal is irreprehensible not only in terms of inter-religious dialogue or strategy but also from the standpoint of transcultural psychology and psychiatry: namely, the importance of conserving one’s own identity in order to be able to cope with any circumstance that life might bring up.

But, in order to begin recovering the heritage of Western Christianity, it is necessary to come to terms with another type of identity-building root in Western (and non-Western) culture: the earthly achievements of our work, the fruit and the breakthroughs of so many human beings who contribute to worldly affairs with their scientific outlook. Only now can we actually understand why Senator Pera, full Professor at the University of Pisa, made no attempt at defending his colleague Galileo, the scientist: this would have put him at arm’s length from his co-author who, exercising the right to express himself in his capacity of Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, labels science, all of science, as bad: “This scientific facade hides a dogmatic intolerance that views the *spirit as produced by matter* (my italics), and morals as produced by circumstances. According to its dictates, morals should be defined and practiced on the basis of society’s purposes and everything is deemed moral that helps to usher in the final states of happiness.”

This theological statement in relation to a primeval spirituality in which the only function of matter is to provide the mental substrate enabling the representation of the mundane, is unarguably consistent with the position of who is, and speaks as, a Man of the Church. In the case of *Without Roots*, however, we witness an innovative event that has transformed several editorial

conventions: a Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church has decided to entrust his doctrinal considerations not to a publishing company of the Vatican but to one of the most widely-circulated Italian publishing companies, *Mondadori Edizioni*, which is famous for covering a very wide range of popular publications, ranging from romance novels to scientific essays. With the publication of *Without Roots* and its subsequent translation in English, the theological approach to the conception and interpretation of the world is once again suddenly disguised as mundane thinking, this time behind the façade of a popular publishing company (Note 7). The debate on the doctrinal antinomy between spirit and matter, after having pierced the impenetrable pall of the Vatican confines, has now reached the hidden-most folds of public life; a reason, for us, to rejoice.

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Without Roots ends with letters mutually exchanged between the two Authors, in which each one of the two fine-tunes his arguments.

The letter from Prof. Pera to Cardinal Ratzinger

The letter takes a colloquial tone in reiterating the concepts previously expressed in Chapter I on the failure to introduce Europe's Christian roots in the European Constitutional Treaty which, having been "infected by an epidemic of relativism", was consequently deprived of any religious reference.

In the following section, it is possible to appreciate the considerable effort made at attempting to overcome the Christian-secularist divide with a view to achieving a common renovating stance. The path suggested is to compound behind a "*civil religion*" and, more specifically, a "*non-denominational Christian religion*". In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to also address those who have not professed their faith: "How can secularists participate in the mission of a non-denominational religion?"

In order to better clarify his proposal, the Author illustrates the nuances of the term "secularist" (Note 8). The difference between secularists and believers does not lie in their devotion, or lack thereof, to a religious creed as much as in the construction of a different hierarchy of the values of life. More specifically, the difference between secularists and believers "lies in the *origins* that each group ascribes to their values. For secularists, values come from elsewhere: evolution, education, reason, natural light social influences, or other factors. For believers values come from Revelation: they are a divine gift, given to us through transcendence. While for secularists, values are *constructed* by human effort – through immanence – for believers they are *given* by God." The letter ends by again launching the appeal to take the road of non-denominational religion as, should we fail in this attempt, we would be obliged to consider the possibility of an "absolute profanity" and of "an absolute vacuum in which neither the happy majority nor the creative minorities can exist".

Excerpt from the letter written by Cardinal Ratzinger to Prof. Pera

The letter begins with Cardinal Ratzinger congratulating Pera for his extraordinary lecture on relativism.

In this letter too, the colloquial tone used enables the reader to easily follow the major issues that are addressed with great depth and expertise.

Reference is immediately made to Pera's proposal to promote a non-denominational Christian religion while also taking into consideration the possibility of establishing a Christian civil religion, on the basis of some of the observations made by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, in which he traced the existence in America of a democracy inspired to Protestant Christian religious and moral principles. In America, these Christian cultural and religious roots had a welding effect that never materialized in Europe where, on the contrary, a "sharp opposition

between Catholics and secularists” still persists. The subsequent pages show his talented hand-stroke in portraying the history of religious beliefs and illustrate the steps that led to the creation, in Catholic countries, of a new “denomination for a new category of individuals: *lay people*”, after the Schism of the 18th Century.

One of the main reasons underlying the ongoing degradation of European values can be singled out exactly in a “lay” dimension that not only supports “free thinking and freedom from religious constrictions” but has actually led to the “exclusion of Christian contents from public life. This exclusion leads to the tendency on the part of modern conscience to treat the entire realm of faith as ‘subjective’”.

The letter then goes on to raise concerns over the growing flattening out of values that is intrinsic to relativism: “In recent years I find myself noting how the more relativism becomes a generally accepted way of thinking, the more it tends toward intolerance, thereby becoming a new dogmatism [...] I think it is vital that we oppose this imposition of a new pseudo-enlightenment, which threatens freedom of thought as well freedom of religion.” (Note 9)

The letter ends by launching an appeal to start a wide-reaching debate between believers and secularists.

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In concluding this review, I cannot abstain from thanking the two Authors for having, in their particular way, brought to the limelight such a topical issue, i.e. the stumbling blocks of philosophical relativism. Thanks to the analysis performed in the book, a careful reader and a scholar in cultural psychiatry in particular, is driven to make a distinction between philosophical relativism and cultural and relational pluralism, as empirically applied by transcultural sciences to life events.

Despite the flourishing of an ever-increasing number of scientific articles focused on the study of religious experiences (Note 9), there is nonetheless still an insufficient number of contributions like *Without Roots* whose crucial point lies in the effort made to make an in-depth analysis not only of the meaning of philosophical relativism (addressed by Pera) but also to shed light on that phenomonic area characterized by the concomitance of a multicultural dimension and of the sphere of the sacred, which has acquired a fundamental importance both in our studies and in the consideration of top-ranking religious authorities: “Multiculturalism teaches us to approach the sacred things of others with respect, but we can only do this if we, ourselves, are not estranged from the sacred, from God. We can and we must learn from that which is sacred to others.” (addressed by Ratzinger).

I am convinced that there is not a single anthropologist, sociologist, psychologist or cultural psychiatrist who does not respect and give value to the importance of the religious dimension of individuals. Of course, there can be no multiculturalism without due respect for what is considered to be an absolute value by others: specific religious beliefs, faith in God, the concept of divinity or simply the feeling of liberty. Similarly however, we cannot have disrespect for those who confide in the albeit tiny values acquired through personal experience. The ultimately intrinsic characteristic of multiculturalism is indeed the respect for people’s right to avoid or to border on the sacred, exactly like their right to exercise their worship of God.

This is the sense that I would like to draw from the closing comments of the Chapter written by Cardinal Ratzinger, when he invites *creative minorities* to voice their opinions with a view to making Europe a better place: “We do not know how things will go in Europe in the future. The Charter of Fundamental Rights may be a first step, a sign that Europe is once again consciously seeking its soul. Here we must agree with Toynbee that the fate of a society always depends on its creative minorities.”

Unarguably, it is only thanks to the creative minorities that we will be able to mediate between *sciences* and the different phenomenic expressions of the *sacred* dimension. Science is probably less of a universal a concept than the sacred, as it implies a subjective approach in seeking out the material rules regulating nature. Conversely the sacred, intended as an ontological dimension, although variably imbued with local connotations, indeed appears to be a universal phenomenon as, from our perspective, *the mental functions supporting its mundane manifestations are similar among the majority of human individuals, whatever their culture of belonging.*

Thus, the focus of scientists is the *ontology of sacred thought* and not God, who naturally falls within the sphere of competence of theology.

This distinction is essential if we are to prevent science from bearing the blemish of an *a priori* refusal of theological God, a characteristic that pertains more to heretics than to scientists.

I would like to emphasize this consideration because the first part of *Without Roots* seems to be driven by the wish to put a limit to scientific inquiry and it is indeed strange that a university Professor should put a limit to investigating *all and any* worldly phenomenon.

In fact, it is Senator Pera's continuous reference to the concept of devotional faith that spurs scholars in the subject to raise further questions with a view to perfecting the method with which to find a common connotation of faith. As a matter of fact, homogenizing the whole concept of divinity to faith in the monotheistic God or limiting the feeling of transcendence only to the *Deus otiosus*, as outlined by Pettazzoni, has a secondary curtailing effect: to hierarchize the feeling of a divinity within a cone of cultural authority in which it is not clear if the great variety of religious expressions proposed by a myriad of different cultures populating the Earth are ranked on the basis of a dogmatic Truth, of the number of followers or of the pugnaciousness of the faithful. (Note 11).

The book only quickly skims over these issues which unquestionably require an interdisciplinary approach of study.

In the Italian version of the book circulated in Italy, a country that is sufficiently homogeneous in terms of religious belonging, the reply to some of the assumptions put forward are prevalently drawn from household conversations of lay intellectuals and politicians (Notes 12, 13).

Now, with the publication of *Without Roots*, the debate can be widened not only in Italy but world-wide, in compliance to the specific wish of the Authors.

As I started by saying at the beginning of this lengthy review, I hope that the debate might be enriched not only with the contributions of our eminent colleagues who, in the course of their prolonged clinical practice spent their efforts to remove the aura of heuristic invisibility which surrounds the spiritual dimension. This would however entail the arduous task, as William James put it, in turning the spiritual dimension into "an intellectually respectable object of study" (Note 14).

Reviewed by Goffredo Bartocci

NOTES

1) Before being elected to the papal seat, Cardinal Ratzinger engaged in numerous debates with secular intellectuals. Among these multidisciplinary debates, the most outstanding took place with the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas in Munich, on the 19th of January 2004. Their talk engendered the interesting book entitled "*On the Relation Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion*" (Routledge, 2004). In the Italian translation ("*Ragione e fede in dialogo*", Habermas, J & Ratzinger, J., Venice, Marsilio, 2005), the book contains an introduction by G. Bosetti titled: *Idee per una convergenza postsecolare*, which summarizes the main issues touched upon. Bosetti

underscores the convergence between the two speakers on the use of the term *post-secularism* in finding a connotation to our modern-day era thanks to which religious traditions and worship communities have gained new and unexpected political relevance: “Post-secular indicates a dimension of social and cultural life in which the secular and religious linguistic domains make an effort to mutually translate and understand each other.” The chapter by J. Habermas is entitled *What the Secular Philosopher Concedes to god* and the one by Ratzinger, *Reason and Faith: a Mutual Exchange for a Common Ethic*.

2) The term “apostasy” has a clearly negative meaning: according to the Webster’s Dictionary, it means “the renunciation of a religious faith”. In the Byzantine era, it implied the offence of high treason against the Empire. The term is in fact attributed to the Roman Emperor Julian who, in the years between 361-363 A.D., attempted to reinstate Hellenism. I found the theses put forward in the treatise *De diis et mundo* (Milan, Adelphi, 2000) by Salustius, a collaborator and friend of the Emperor Julian, to be extremely balanced and topical. As can be read in the introduction by R. Di Giuseppe, Julian’s treason has no relevance in terms of his being heretic as it was merely a political choice in trying to balance out the scope of authority between the State and the Christian religion.

3) I agree that the French Revolution of 1789 introduced innovative elements in Western culture through the separation of State and Church, something that never occurred in the world of Islam. With regards to the fears of the West of clashing with Islam, the West seems to have a split behavior: on the one hand, the United States and many European armies have shown their muscle by waging a pre-emptive war on Muslim populations but, on the other hand, they exhibit the fear, stemming perhaps from a strategic tolerance or, at times, a tendency to relinquish secular values (this also applies to the complex case represented by the publication of the comics with the effigy of several holy figures, including the Prophet Mohammed) and to *culturally* stand up to the manifestations of Islamic faith from a behavioral standpoint.

4) Prof. Pera quotes and picks up on what previously expressed by Ratzinger on other occasions: “in a way, relativism has become a full-fledged religion for modern Man” (from *Truth and Tolerance*, 2004, Ratzinger, J.) or that relativism is the greatest problem of our epoch (from *Osservatore Romano*, issue of 1st of November 1996).

5) Here, he clearly deviates from the stand taken by Pope John Paul II with his public rehabilitation of Galileo.

6) See the connections between Asian philosophies and psychiatry in: *Asian Culture and Psychotherapy: Implications for East and West*. (Edited by: Wen-Shing Tseng, Suk Choo Chang and Masahisa Nishizono), University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, 2005. Reviewed in WCPRR Vol. 1 (2) 2006.

7) Cardinal Ratzinger, even more so than the Speaker of the Italian Senate, reveals his capacity to take part in public debate in a “public language” instead of a “religious language”, thus complying with the theorem laid down by Rawls and Habermas, according to which: “clerics or propounders of other ideologies can indeed come to the fore and present their doctrines for what they are but on condition that they are willing to defend the principles and policies set forth in their doctrines by ‘bringing up appropriately public argumentations [...] Catholics can certainly argue against certain consequences of genetic engineering but if they wish to do so in their exercise of public reason in order to propose or modify a law, they must use arguments that are

appropriately political and not based on faith” (from “*On the Relation Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion*”, bibliography in Note 1).

8) The translation into English of the Italian term “*laico*” posed a problem, as highlighted in Michael F. Moore’s Translator’s Note: “Although the Italian word *laico* shares with the English ‘lay’ the primary meaning of non-clerical and the secondary meaning of non-professional, in religious discourse it also refers to non-believers, who could be variously rendered as agnostics, or secular people. In political discourse it has a long and complicated history in Italy owing to its association with the main opposition parties during the period in which the Christian Democrats governed the country”. In Pera’s section of the book, when the term “*laico*” is used to designate a category of people, it is translated with the terms *agnostics* or *secularists*. Conversely, in Ratzinger’s letter, the original term *laico* was left as such.

9) The opposition to relativism was the fulcrum of the homily delivered on the 18th of April, 2005 in which Cardinal Dean Ratzinger outlined the program for the upcoming pontifical election. In the last centuries of the history of the Holy Roman Church, it had never occurred, as it did in this case, that the reader of the homily was also eligible for election. The day prior to opening the election process, Cardinal Ratzinger pointed to the dangers and the tidal waves that would sweep the Pontiff over in the aftermath of John Paul II: “To have a clear faith – he exclaimed – is often labelled as fundamentalism”. The adversary to combat, he heralded, is “the dictatorship of relativism” that overturns every rule in sacrifice to the idol of the Self” (In *Repubblica*, 19 April 2005, *Il Manifesto di Ratzinger: non cediamo al relativismo*, by M. Politi).

10) For an update on the latest contributions in the study of spirituality and the sacred, see: *Transcultural Psychiatry*, December 2005, Vol. 42 (4), entirely devoted to the topic of “Spirituality & Religion”.

11) Issues of the same nature as those set forth in *Without Roots* also arose during the Conference entitled “*Religion Spirituality and Mental Health*”, which was held between 15-18 October 2003 at the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai, Egypt, and organized by the Egyptian Association of Psychiatry with the sponsorship of the World Psychiatric Association and of the World Health Organization – Middle East Section. In fact, the conference debate centered on the possibility of hinging upon and reinforcing patients’ religious beliefs as a strong treatment option. This spiritualistic attitude was also considered to be useful in strengthening the cultural atmosphere in the West, which was thought to be weak if compared to Muslim populations. At the time, I dissented on the strategic use of the spiritual dimension. The paper I presented, which was entitled “*Transcultural Psychiatry and Spirituality: How can we succeed in bridging the epistemological gap between spirituality sine substrato and psychiatry with an organic substrate?*” dwelled upon the persistence of a theoretical antinomy between spiritualistic theology and pragmatic sciences which is yet to be solved.

12) In his book “*Dibattito sul laicismo*”, Eugenio Scalfari underscores how reliance is increasingly made on communication based on archaic and sadly familiar languages, such as “God is not neutral” and “God is with us”, in launching the historical mission of turning America into the Empire of Good in battle against the Empire of Evil. Still the same book points to the paradox of those who invoke “A Crusader God who answers to the name of Christ, even if He has little relation with the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth as handed down by the evangelists”.

13) A significant portrayal of relativism can be found in: *A Passo di Gambero: guerre calde e populismo mediatico*, Eco U. (2006), Milano, Bompiani. Prof. Eco focuses on the media’s

uncouthness in describing the debate between Science and Faith: "...on the one side are the so-called *theocons*, who accuse secular thinking of 'relativism' and, on the other side are some of the representatives of secular thinking who speak of 'fundamentalism' in referring to their adversaries. What is the meaning of 'relativism' in philosophy? That our representations of the world cannot exhaustively reflect its complexity but are invariably perspectives thereon, each of which contains a germ of truth? There have been and there continue to be Christian philosophers who support this thesis."

14) See the Chapter titled: *Spunti metodologici per uno studio della dimensione del sacro*, by GG. Rovera, in *Psicopatologia Cultura e Dimensione del Sacro* (Ed. G. Bartocci). Rovera underscores the fact that it is possible to approach the study of the sacred dimension from several different perspectives: the feeling that deity is a possibility, the method of 'relational cultural plurality', the micro-phenomenic grounds underlying the psycho-social construction of reality, the radicalization of subjectivity in the hermeneutics of religious experience, the sacred dimension considered as a pre-category of the cognizable in the historicized inter-relation with different cultures.

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