Politics and Religion in Europe:

The Case of the Roman Catholic Church and the European Union

Tomáš Doležal and Petr Kratochvíl

Abstract *The rise of religion in international politics is often treated as a self-evident trend of recent decades. But what exactly is new about religion in global affairs that it deserves such focused attention? Is it the growing numbers of believers of major religions, or the increasing fundamentalist tendencies within them? Perhaps, the intensification of religious influence in both international and subnational conflicts or the greater prominence of religious topics in the public sphere? Alternatively, the "religious turn" may only be a temporary phenomenon related to some controversial topics that bring religion and the secular order into conflict. These few examples of different perspectives on what might be interpreted as the rise of religion remind us of how heterogeneous the manifestations of religion are. Not only are the trends within individual religions substantially different from one another, but the interactions between religion and politics take on very different forms in different parts of the world. Our work deals with a particular religious actor, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), in a particular context, the European Union (EU). It is not our aim to reduce the complexity of the politico-religious nexus to just one dyad, the RCC-EU relationship, but since the two entities belong to the most influential actors on the European continent, we are convinced that the analysis can shed new light on the role religious actors play in world politics today. The aim of this work is twofold: to provide a special empirical focus on the recent RCC-EU interactions and to frame it in the broader perspective of a critical examination of various aspects of the rise of religion. We commence our examination with a short discussion of the secularisation thesis, which con-*

tinues to form the background of all discussions about the rise of religion. Secondly, we analyse the recent academic debates about the fundamental conundrum concerning the role of religion in international relations: are we really witnessing a rise in the political power of religion(s) or does the religious turn happen primarily in the minds of academicians who had previously neglected religious phenomena? Following our critical literature overview, we focus on the case study of the relations between the EU and the RCC. Our main question here is whether the RCC has become a more influential political actor in the EU in spite of the persisting secularising tendencies in European societies. Finally, we draw some conclusions from our case study, offering some insights about the specific manifestations of the rise of religion in Europe.

Tomáš Doležal and Petr Kratochvíl

Keywords: religion, Roman Catholic Church, European Union, secularisation, politics

Introduction

The rise of religion in international politics is often treated as a self-evident trend of the recent decades. But what exactly is so new about religion in global affairs that it deserves such focussed attention? Is it the growing numbers of believers of major religions? Or the increasing fundamentalist tendencies within them? Perhaps the intensification of religious influence in both international and subnational conflicts? Or the greater prominence of religious topics in the public sphere? Or is the "religious turn" only a temporary phenomenon related to some controversial topics that bring religion and the secular order into conflict?

Only these few examples of different perspectives on what might be interpreted as the rise of religion remind us of how heterogeneous the manifestations of religion are. Not only are the trends within individual religions substantially different from one another, but the interactions between religion and politics take on very different forms in different parts of the world. Our essay deals with a particular religious actor – the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) - in a particular context, the European Union (EU). It is not our aim to reduce the complexity of the politico-religious nexus to just one dyad, the RCC-EU relationship, but since the two entities belong to the most influential actors on the European continent, we are convinced that the analysis can shed new light on the role religious actors play in world politics today.

The aims of this work are twofold: first, to provide an empirical focus on the recent RCC-EU interactions, and second, to frame it in the broader perspective of a critical examination of various aspects of the rise of religion. We commence our examination with a short discussion of the secularisation thesis, which continues to form the background of all discussions about the rise of religion. Secondly, we analyse the recent academic debates over the fundamental conundrum concerning the role of religion in international relations: are we really witnessing a rise in the political power of religion(s) or does the religious turn happen primarily in the minds of academicians who had previously neglected religious phenomena? Following our critical literature overview, we turn our focus to a specific case study: the relationship between the EU and the RCC. Our main question is whether the RCC has become a more influential political actor in the EU despite the persisting secularising tendencies in European societies. Finally, we draw some conclusions from our case study, offering insights about the specific manifestations of the rise of religion in Europe..

The Secularisation Thesis

It is impossible to explore the role of religion in (international) politics without mentioning the concept of secularisation. Not so long ago, many prominent academic voices – notably in the Sociology of Religion discipline – advocated the view that the future political role of religion will gradually diminish since the religious and public institutions will continue to drift apart, and religion will continue its transformation from a publicly proclaimed, collective endeavour to a set of privately held beliefs. The on-going critique of the secularisation theory has shown, however, how exceptional the position of Europe has been in the creation as well as the deconstruction of the theory. Generations of largely Eurocentric scholars were misled to believe that modernisation is unavoidable and that modernisation's basic form known from Europe will be automatically adopted in a virtually unchanged form in other parts of the world as well. The expectation of the withdrawal of religion from the public to the private sphere was usually associated with the decrease in religiousness and church attendance and/or the generally diminishing importance of religions in social and political life, the institutional separation of religious and political bodies and even the fact that religion is fading away from the

public (especially political) discourse and also from everyday culture.[1]

If we skip directly to the outcome of the heated academic debates on secularisation, it is clear that the academic hegemony secularisation once enjoyed has been shattered. Today, most authors agree that from a global perspective, there has been no decline of religion(s) and that the European experience of modernity should not be expected to be repeated on the global scale. To top it off, the theory is challenged on its own turf since the original religion where secularisation was explored – Christianity – has shown to be globally resistant to secularisation. In fact, some branches of Christianity such as Pentecostalism expand more rapidly than Islam—both in terms of the number of adherents and geographic expansion. In contradiction to the predictions of the supply-side religious scholars, even the number of members of the Catholic Church, the most monopolistic of the churches, has been growing.

The problem, however, is that the secularisation thesis has been most frequently criticised because it assumed a universal validity and not because it is inherently flawed. While we may accept the fact that secularisation is not a global phenomenon, we can still be convinced that some areas, most notably Europe, continue to exhibit a number of those features which are associated with secularisation. The fact is that European societies do not demonstrate such a strong and stable "demand" for institutionalised religions as people in other parts of the world (including developed areas of North America, for instance). Also, the regular church attendance has been clearly in decline in Europe over the long-term.

To describe the situation in Europe, Casanova coined the term *unchurching*,[2] Hervie-Léger talked about *belonging without believing* and Davie about *believing without belonging*; stressing the growing role of religious individualisation. The sociology of religion reminds us that when watching only the traditional and the most visible churches, we might overlook other forms of collectively shared or personal belief systems, which can cast doubts over the image of Europeans as being increasingly irreligious. Trying to reconnoitre the relevant spiritual imaginations inspiring Europeans and current European politics is a daunting task. Nevertheless, when discussing Europe's most visible, and demographically, its strongest religious community, the Roman Catholic Church, we can argue that there has not been any significant rise in its European membership, its church attendance or Catholic

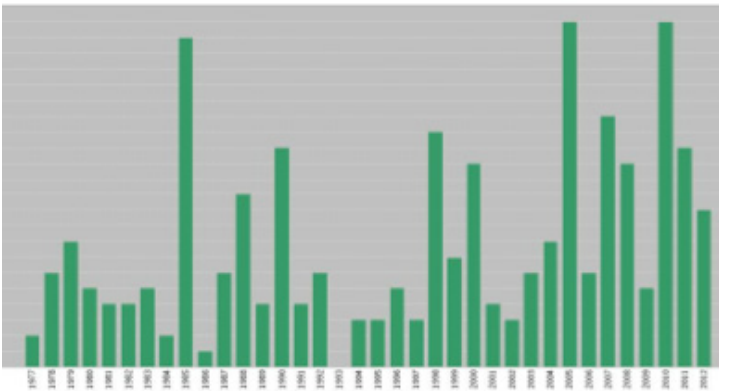
conversion in recent decades.

The Religious Turn in International Relations: A Literature Overview

Given the different developments in different parts of the world, one may wonder what causes the spike in attention to religion in international studies. Robertson and Mews reformulated the question of the resurgence of religious-political interactions to include both sides, not only religious bodies but also the state. They argue that both have enlarged their spheres of operation, and many quasi-religious issues have been taken up by the state, including 'birth, death, old age, sexuality, and other dimensions of individual and collective meaning, suffering and reward.'[3]

Hence, on one hand, Robertson and Mew challenge the received view about the intrusion of religion into secular affairs by pointing to the intrusion of the state into the religious sphere as well. Simultaneously, their studies can be taken as examples of the works written in the pre-Clash-of-Civilization era and as challenging the stereotype that the importance of religion was properly grasped only after the Cold War or even after the 9/11 attacks. The argument that the turn to religion is not such a novel trend is further corroborated by a look at the number of articles with 'religio-' in their titles which were published in journals dealing with international relations (according to the Web of Science database). As we can see in table 1, there is not such an extraordinary increase of such articles within the IR literature as might have been thought.

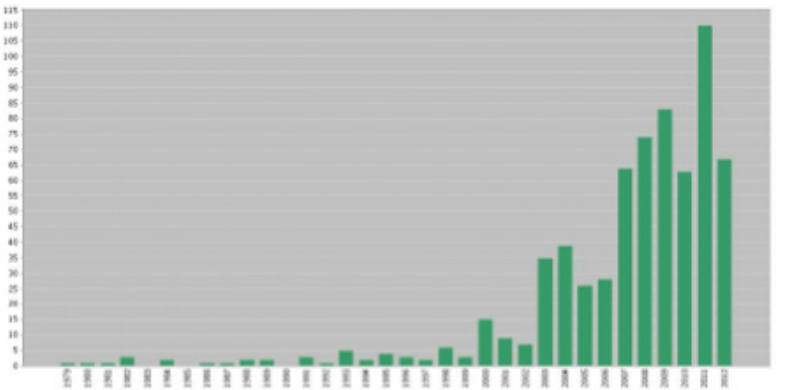
Table 1: Articles and proceeding papers with 'religio-' in their titles published in IR magazines with academic impact accounted for



Source: The Web of Science Database

Table 2 below presents a chronological analysis of the number of citations of papers and articles belonging to the same sample; those with "religio-" in the title. Unlike the total numbers of articles, where the growth has been rather slow, the numbers of citations skyrocketed. Although it is difficult to say whether the growth is a consequence of the increasing role of religion in world politics or whether the topic has become more popular for other reasons, the increase in the overall attention to religion is undeniable.

Table 2: Citations of articles and proceeding papers with 'religio-' in their titles published in IR magazines with academic impact accounted for



Source: The Web of Science Database

The range of topics covered by those interested in the nexus between religion and international politics is very wide. Some authors focus on the religious influence on present-day international relations and explore the 'religious roots of modernity,' both via 'conceptual ties between some IR theories and their religious antecedents' and by looking into the personal religious or theological inspiration of the individual scholars.[4] Others focus on the direct impact of current religious phenomena on international relations. It is unsurprising that questions of security and conflict play a prominent role here and that works dealing with the influence of religion on conflict belong to the highly cited papers.[5] Finally, the studies of Islam, Islamic states and Islamic political theory and practice gained considerable readerships, in particular after 9/11. Mirror reflections of these studies are those analyses which use concepts like "identity" and "othering" and explore, for instance,

Islamophobia or various kinds of fundamentalisms.

Nevertheless, many other thematic links also exist, and they approach ties between religion and international relations from different perspectives. Some use older conceptual tools and focus on the religious agency in world politics, searching for religious actors who influence politics within particular states, who constitute independent quasi-states (the Holy See), or who act as non-state actors (e.g. terrorist groups) or even transnational institutions or networks (both of these last two categories are applicable in the case of the RCC).

Another important cluster of studies includes those which deal with political theology broadly conceived and which explore the theological motivations of political actors or the theological inspiration of various political structures and institutions, often pointing to the overlap between the sacred and secular orders a society upholds. For instance, on the level of domestic politics, Putnam and Campbell show how theological and moral attitudes affect society and politics in the United States.[6] The direct political relevance of the basic tenets of some religious groupings has also been thoroughly studied in the case of Latin America—ranging from the case of liberation theology to numerous studies of Pentecostalism, various prosperity theologies and syncretic Afro-American beliefs.

On the level of international relations, the amount of literature linking theology and international affairs has also been on the rise.[7] In her influential piece, Kubálková even wrote about "international political theology" and discussed the ontological, epistemological and methodological problems the current discipline of international relations encounters when approaching religion.[8] The main conundrum she addressed is the question of whether the re-discovery of religion within the IR discipline will be simply added to the other phenomena the discipline studies or whether an epistemological transformation of the whole discipline will be needed to properly understand the role of religion. There is little doubt that the study of believers and beliefs in spiritual powers may challenge the traditional scientific/positivist positions regarding rationality and "admissible" objects of scientific enquiry.

Kubálková's critique reflects a more general trend within international studies towards a deeper metatheoretical self-reflection of the discipline which opens up to new philosophies of science (such as scientific realism). This is partially caused by the growing dissatisfaction

with the older theoretical perspectives, such as neorealism and neoliberalism. Even though the critique of these approaches was first related to their clash with reflectivist/post-positivist approaches, and to the changing nature of international politics after the end of the Cold War, religion soon became another major challenge for these older theories. It is not only that the stress of neorealism and neoliberalism on utility maximisation and on material power seems to be at odds with the normative motivation of religious actors, but the role of identity, which is of utmost importance for religious communities, has been neglected by these theories as well.

Identity has clearly become a major concept in the analysis of religion in world politics. Nowhere is the renewed importance of religious identities more visible than in security studies. Here, two broad groups of scholars have emerged, divided into those who claim that religion is one of the primary causes of international conflict, and those who argue that religion produces the opposite effect. This distinction applies to both the political and the academic debates about Islam. As Kuok claims, there are 'those that believe that Islam, and in some cases religion as a whole, encourages violence amongst its followers, and those that believe that religion, including Islam, is "a positive force for society."'[9] Similarly, Kratochwil points to the 'puzzling effects of religion on conflict, both its escalation and de-escalation.'[10]

Excellent examples of scholarship linking religion to violence are the studies produced by Juergensmeyer and Huntington.[11] Juergensmeyer's field work focuses exclusively on the various groups with violent intentions who identify themselves with a particular religious tradition, analysing their motivations and their psychological and theological backgrounds. While Juergensmeyer's studies are remarkably well researched, they do not provide any comparison of the religious reasons for violence with alternative explanations. Hence, Juergensmeyer does not tell us much about the possible increase in religious violence or about the relative growth of religiously motivated violence compared to other types of conflicts.

Huntington's thesis is much more general, linking the civilizational identity and values to their religious foundations. While 'the clash of civilizations' thesis has been extensively criticised for its over-generalisation and selective argumentation, nobody can say today whether Huntington's claim is not part of a broader stream of academic studies that – by strengthening essentialist religious stereotypes – can become

a self-fulfilling prophecy. Buruma and Margalit point to this danger, calling it the clash of negative generalisations, and show that the animosity towards the West may have several equally plausible alternative reasons and not just those associated with religious beliefs and identities.[12]

Unlike Huntington's sweeping study of religiously defined civilizations, many other authors carry out nuanced analyses of the trends and shares of religious phenomena in international conflicts such as Fox, Fearon and Laitin who ask similar questions, and in their search for answers, analyse an intimidating amount of statistical information from databases on conflicts from the second half of the 20th century.[13] The resulting explanations however, are dissimilar: one study supports the importance of religion as a contributing factor of conflicts while the other claims that other causes are more relevant than cultural and religious ones.

To conclude this literature overview, we claim that although the number of studies on religion has been growing only very slowly, the topic has moved to the limelight of both international politics and its academic analysis. However, the jury is still out as to whether the role of religion assists in mitigating or promoting armed conflict. It also remains unclear whether the rise of religion in IR studies is a new phenomenon or whether the renewed attention to religion is solely a consequence of the fact that academia was previously blinded to religious phenomena. What has become clear is that sweeping conclusions about religion run the risk of excessive generalisation and simplification. Hence, the way forward seems not to be about developing a general theory of religion but to carry out particular studies exploring the individual cases of interactions between political and religious actors.

The Case of the Roman Catholic Church and the European Union

This section explores one such religious actor, the Roman Catholic Church, and its political interactions with the European Union. In the previous sections (above) we came to two fundamental conclusions: first, while the claim about the universal secularisation of modern societies has been challenged on many fronts, particularly as far as non-Western societies are concerned, the basic tenets of the secularisation thesis seem to hold in most parts of Europe, whereby the EU is often seen as the prime example of this secularising trend. Second, the

rise of the political relevance of religion is a trend that has an impact on the RCC and its role in world politics. Hence, the question arises, which of these (perhaps) contradictory trends prevails in Europe? Does the role of the Church diminish due to the on-going secularisation in European societies or does it increase thanks to the intensification of the political role of religion in the public sphere?

Our starting point may be the observation that the vast majority of all works dealing with the relations between the EU and the RCC have been published only (roughly) over the past 10 years. Although there were earlier works dedicated to the role of religion in Europe, we are currently experiencing a boom of fresh works on European forms of secularism, approaches to religious diversity and other general questions addressing the presence of religion in the public sphere. On one hand, recent scholarship tends to examine Islam in Europe or, more generally, diverse religious factors connected to international migration. Studies of the RCC have, incidentally, also begun to appear, and they are typically associated with the Church's influence on democratisation, its lobbying on the EU level, the RCC's involvement in the drafting of the Constitutional Treaty and its peace-building activities (etc).

This leads us to the second question: whether the growth in academic studies on religion in Europe that focuses on the RCC's role on the Continent is related to the actual growth of the political activities of the RCC in Europe. The ties between the Church and the EU are manifold and they can be divided into different dimensions from diplomatic relations between the EU and the Holy See, and the official dialogue which the European Commission and other EU institutions lead with diverse religious bodies, including the Church, to EU legislation – which reflects the EU's attitudes towards churches and religious communities – and informal and personal links between Catholicism and EU policy-makers and officials.

The RCC and the EU: The Catholic Side

To describe the ties between the EU and the RCC, we have to introduce the basic institutional structures the RCC created specifically for cultivating strong relations with the Union. The strongest Catholic body directly representing the RCC is the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE). The COMECE was established in 1980 following the first direct election to the Europe-

an Parliament. The COMECE itself describes the event as 'opening up new horizons'[14] for the cooperation between the RCC and the European Communities, but equally important for the establishment of the Commission was the 'aggiornamento' and 'the spirit of the Vatican II Council.'[15] The proclaimed objectives of the Commission are to

> monitor and analyse the political process of the European Union, to inform and raise awareness within the Church of the development of EU policy and legislation, to maintain a regular Dialogue with the EU Institutions (European Commission, Council of Ministers and European Parliament) through annual Summit meetings of religious leaders, Dialogue Seminars, various Conferences and by taking part in Consultations launched by the European Commission, and to promote reflection, based on the Church's social teaching, on the challenges facing a united Europe.[16]

While, officially, the COMECE is represented by its members – bishops from individual EU member states – the shifting focus of the COMECE is best grasped by looking at the Commission's Secretariat in Brussels. On one hand, the COMECE and its Secretariat often bring up issues which are of special relevance for the Church; on the other, the Secretariat often takes up the issues discussed by the EU and passes them along onto the agenda of COMECE meetings. These issues include concepts such as sustainable development, new environmental challenges (etc). Interestingly, these new issues then often gain theological clout since the COMECE typically supports its position on these new issues with theological argumentation in addition to other kinds of arguments. The most general example of such a "theologisation" of European integration is the EU´s stress on unification of Europe and the need to overcome the ethnocentric and xenophobic tendencies in European societies, which the RCC supports by theological references to the universality of salvation and the equality of human beings in the eyes of God. In other words, the COMECE not only serves as a formal bridge between the RCC and the EU, it also contributes to the Europeanisation of the Church and legitimises the integration process by providing theological justification for it.

There are also other Catholic bodies which are visible in EU politics, even if these are not directly attached to the Holy See. Caritas Europa and the Jesuit European Social Centre are two Catholic organisations that have been very active in the sphere of social policy and consultan-

cy. Although the Jesuits have never officially represented the Vatican in Brussels, they did provide the Church leadership with information about the integration process prior to the establishment of the COMECE. Today, the Centre intensely cooperates with the COMECE – for instance, they jointly publish the journal entitled *Europe Infos*. The Centre is also associated with the ecumenical Chapel of the Resurrection, which, among other things, offers space for the dialogue among those who are involved in the integration process.

The COMECE, the Jesuit European Social Centre, and Caritas Europa also serve as a source of expertise for Catholic policy-makers in the EU. They often release comments on EU draft legislation, in particular concerning social, ethical/bioethical, and environmental topics. These bodies also organise seminars and maintain both formal and informal contacts with individual officials, politicians and their groupings. To put it bluntly, the Catholic bodies in Brussels engage in lobbying EU policy-makers, trying to convince them that they should vote in line with the RCC's views.

Other bodies which discuss EU-related issues include the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Neither of these two however, fulfils as important a role in the EU-RCC relations as the COMECE. As far as the former is concerned, it not only represents the clergy from EU member states but also those from other European countries. So, while the CCEE adopts positions on European integration from time to time, its focus is much larger and its knowledge of the working of the EU much more superficial. The latter also deals with the integration process in Europe, but the RCC is but one of its many members (including, among others, many Protestant denominations), and the positions of the CEC are thus not necessarily identical to those of the Catholic Church.

As complicated as the evolution of the institutional ties between the RCC and the EU has been, the establishment of the official diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the EU was even more protracted. The Apostolic Nuncio has been accredited to the European Communities since the 1970s but it was only in 2006 when the first Head of the EU Delegation in Rome was accredited to the Holy See. The EU Delegation in Rome itself admits that in this case it was the EU that caused the asymmetry in diplomatic representations by both sides, stating that only 'with this accreditation, the European Union brought the relations to an appropriate footing of reciprocity.'[17]

The RCC and the EU: A Textual Analysis

Another important way to view RCC-EU relations is the analysis of references to religion(s), religious bodies and churches in the basic EU treaties (see table 3). While this perspective does not tell us much about the concrete interactions between the EU and the Church, it demonstrates the trend leading from the absolute silence on religion in the early treaties, via the first references to religion in the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997, and to the stress on the regular dialogue with the churches in the Treaty of Lisbon. However, the intensification of the relations which is evidently present there does not necessarily translate into smooth relations. First, the growing importance of religion also means a stronger resistance to its influence, as witnessed during the debates about the preamble of the Constitutional Treaty and the absent reference to God and/or Christianity therein. Second, even today, the role churches are assigned is limited to the traditional domains such as social and ethical issues.

Table 3: Development of Legislation on Religious Issues in the EU Treaties

EU Treaty	signed	links to religion, faith, and churches
Treaties of Rome	1957	not mentioned
Merger Treaty - Brussels Treaty	1965	not mentioned
Treaty of Maastricht on European Union	1992	not mentioned
Treaty of Amsterdam	1997	'...combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.'
		'...the Community and the Member States shall pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage.'
		'Declaration on the status of churches and non-confessional organisations: The European Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States. The European Union equally respects the status of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.'

Treaty of Nice	2001	not mentioned
(the non-ratified **Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe**)	(2004)	Preamble: 'Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law...'
>>>		'In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.'
	2007	Article 17: 'The Union respects and does not prejudice the status under national law of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States. The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.'
Treaty of Lisbon		Article 17: 'The Union equally respects the status under national law of philosophical and non-confessional organisations.'
		Article 17: 'Recognising their identity and their specific contribution, the Union shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations.'

Other official documents of the EU also demonstrate the complexity of the relations between the EU and the RCC and other churches. The most comprehensive repository of both official and unofficial documents of the EU is the EU's own website (eur-lex.europa.eu), which contains hundreds of thousands of documents such as treaties, legislation, preparatory acts, EU case-law and parliamentary questions. There are two general features that we observed when analysing the EU documents. First, and quite surprisingly, a high number of documents which include the terms 'Catholicism,' 'Christianity,' 'God' and even 'secularism' deals with issues connected to non-EU territories such as China, Laos, Iraq, Turkey and Tunisia (to name a few).

The second general observation is that the aforementioned terms were framed in secularised language in the documents. This means that although we speak about "religious concepts," their specific spiritual or transcendental dimension is not visible, being overshadowed by a

more earthly perspective in the documents. Topics like discrimination and other issues related to human rights predominate (whereby Catholics are usually in the position of victims). But various forms of critique of the RCC are also common, ranging from criticism of the tax advantages for the Church in some countries to that of the financial assistance to the RCC in Poland and various controversial policies of the Church (concerning, for example, the use of contraceptives, issues related to HIV, etc.).[18]

Analysis of Church documents is equally enlightening. When analysing the most important online archives of the RCC dealing with the EU, we discovered that the highest levels of the Church hierarchy support the integration process and EU institutions to a surprisingly large extent.[19] Both the papal pronouncements – speeches and encyclicals – and speeches of other members of the Church leadership assess European integration very positively. However, these references to the EU are often connected with the stress on the role of Christianity in the integration process and the interpretation of Christianity as the basis of European identity, European values or European unity as such. In other words, the EU is commended, but the RCC qualifies its support by the continuous call for a return to the supposedly Christian roots of the integration process claiming that it is 'necessary first of all to go back to Christianity.'[20]

While both entities support each other rhetorically, a deeper look at their interpretations of both the origin and the purpose of the integration process reveals fundamental differences. The RCC's insistence on the Christian roots of Europe is only very rarely taken up by EU leaders. EU documents seldom mention either the 'Christian heritage' or 'Christian roots.' While individual examples can be found of cases where some parliamentary groupings or individuals mention the oppression of Christians/Catholics abroad or discuss the (missing) reference to Christianity in the preamble of the failed Constitutional Treaty, there is definitely no united chorus celebrating Christianity or Catholicism as the spiritual core of the EU.

Recent Developments between the RCC and EU

While both the Catholic support for, and the normative overlap with, the EU are tentative and conditional, there can be no doubt that, recently, the interactions between the RCC (and churches in general) and the top representation of the EU have accelerated. An official dialogue

started between EU institutions and churches, religious communities and non-confessional organisations. The personal engagement of EU leaders has played an important, and often underrated, role in it. For example, Barroso's personal interest in the upgrade of the diplomatic relations between the RCC and the EU constituted the main impulse for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two entities at the highest level. Insiders also stress the role of the activities of (former) President Jacques Delors as well as the openly Catholic attitudes of President Herman van Rompuy in this respect.[21]

Delors was instrumental in establishing the initiative *A Soul for Europe*, whose aim was to reinvigorate the integration process after the Cold War and draw churches and religious communities into more intense dialogue with the EU.[22] Another platform which is attached to the European Commission and which also links its origin to Delors is the *Dialogue between European institutions and churches, religious associations or communities and philosophical and non-confessional organisations*. The initiative stresses the need for regular dialogue with the churches, arguing that the communication with the churches 'offers an opportunity to engage in the European integration process,' allowing 'for an open exchange of views on pertinent EU policies between EU institutions and important parts of European society.'[23]

Even the name of the Dialogue stresses the equality of religious and non-religious organisations, underlining the strictly secular nature of the Union. Indeed, there are groupings in the European Parliament such as the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics, which focuses on the equal treatment of various religious and non-religious associations. The Platform does not maintain direct contact to the RCC,[24] but its proclaimed mission indicates that it can be seen as an institutionalised opposition to the growing political influence of churches.[25]

The most recent legislative step in this matter is the introduction of the relatively short but essential Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which 'has lifted the dialogue from good practice to a legal obligation, enshrined in primary law.'[26] High-level annual meetings with the three presidents of the EU institutions are the most visible part of the dialogue, whereby each of the meetings is associated with a specific topic which is high on the EU agenda and which is simultaneously seen as relevant by church representatives as well. For example, the 2012 meet-

ing focused on the notion of solidarity.

The implementation of Article 17 is not limited to the highest levels. The strongest platform of the European Parliament, the European People's Party Group (EPP) maintains its own variety of activities in the sphere of dialogue with the churches, such as joint conferences with religious leaders and the co-organisation of seminars on religious freedom, social issues and the discrimination of Christians (etc).[27] Yet, the attitudes towards Article 17 in the European Parliament differ. The mentioned Platform for Secularism in Politics is, unsurprisingly, very critical of both the Article's provisions and the appointment of a Vice President of the Parliament responsible for contacts with religious and non-confessional organisations. The Platform is convinced that this gives an unfair advantage to 'organised religion over secular voices' because 'not all convictions and beliefs held by European citizens are organised.'[28]

Conclusion

The main question explored in this article asked about the recent political interactions between the EU and the RCC. Our main conclusion is that the number and intensity of interactions have been continuously accelerating over the past 20 years. Particularly after the signing of the Lisbon Treaty, the informal contacts between the Church and the Union have shifted from the older – predominantly informal – ties to the new, more formal and institutionalised relations. The RCC gradually increased its presence in Brussels through its direct representatives (the COMECE) and other, semi-autonomous Catholic organisations. These are intensely engaged in lobbying and in daily communication with EU politicians and its bureaucracy.

As important as the formal political representation of the Church in the EU is, a substantial part of the RCC's activities revolve around an almost invisible network of informal contacts, which include religious advisers to EU policy-makers (such as Presidents of the European Commission), the ties between church lobbyists and many members of the European Parliament, and advisory and consultation bodies related to the RCC which provide EU legislators with political and legal arguments supporting the views of the Church. Advocacy, lobbying, consultations and networking—these are the pillars on which the current activities of the RCC stand in the EU policy-making arena.

Additionally, there is much evidence to support the claim that the

influence of the RCC is limited. The most visible failures of the Church to push through its views include the battle over the reference to God in the European Constitution, and the EU's policies regarding sexual minorities. The conclusion of our analysis is, therefore, quite straightforward. It is clear that we cannot talk about a renewed alliance of the throne and the altar when discussing the interactions between the EU and the RCC. At the same time, two trends have recently gained strength, both of which make the Church more visible in EU politics. The first is the overall growth of interest in religion in the EU, albeit this interest is often connected to negative stereotypes about religion, fear of religious fundamentalism and the failing integration policies of many EU member states. The RCC, whose relations with the EU have been relatively smooth, constitutes a reliable discussion partner and an ally of the Union in most of the problematic areas. The second trend is the learning process of the Church, which is growing more apt at using various formal and informal channels of influencing the policy-making in the EU.

Paradoxically, as the secularisation of Europe continues, the Catholic Church – and other churches and religious communities – is becoming more important since it represents a visible and still relatively large minority. At the same time, the Church is capable of clearly formulating its views, which – although they are at times at odds with the EU's mainstream – are still defended in a way that is compatible with the fundamental EU values. Hence, on many fronts, the EU and the RCC have indeed formed an uneasy alliance which legitimises the integration project in the eyes of the Union's Catholics and gives the Church a greater say and a greater visibility in EU politics.

This paper has been written as a part of the research project The European Union and the Roman Catholic Church: Political Theology of European Integration supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, Grant No. P408/11/2176.

Notes

1 See for example: Philip S. Gorski and Ates Altınordu (2008), 'After Secularization?,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, pp. 55-85 and Daniel Philpott (2009), 'Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12, pp. 183-202.

2 José Casanova (2006), 'Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration,' in Peter Katzenstein and Timothy A. Byrnes (eds) (2006), *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, Cambridge UP.

3 Robert Robertson cited in Stuart Mews (1989), *Religion in Politics: A World Guide* (Longman: New York, USA), p. vii.

4 Daniel Philpott (2000), 'The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations,' *World Politics*, 52, pp. 206-245; Jonathan Fox (2007), 'The Rise of Religion and the Fall of the Civilization Paradigm as Explanations for Intra-State Conflict,' *The Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20, pp. 361-382; Petr Kratochvíl (2009), 'The Religious Turn in IR: A Brief Assessment,' *Perspective: Review of International Affairs*, 2, pp. 5-12, Vendulka Kubálková (2009), 'A "Turn to Religion" in IR?,' *Perspectives: Review of International Affairs*, 2, pp. 13-42.

5 See, for example, J. R. Seul (1999), '"Ours is the Way of God:" Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 36, pp. 553-569; C. B. Laustsen and Ole Waever (2000), 'In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitisation,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29:3 and Jonathan Fox (2004), 'The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945-2001,' *Journal of Peace Research*, 41, pp. 715-731.

6 Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell (2010), *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Simon and Schuster: New York, USA.

7 See Vendulka Kubálková (2000), 'Toward International Political Theology,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29, pp. 675-704; Mika Luoma-aho (2009), 'Political Theology, Anthropomorphism and Person-Hood of the State: The Religion of IR,' *International Political Sociology*, 3, pp. 293–309; Petr Kratochvíl and Tomáš Doležal (2010), 'The Roman Catholic Church and European Integration: A Study on the Limits of Schmitt's Political Theology,' This paper was presented at the SGIR Conference in Stockholm, 9-11 September 2010.

8 Kubálková (2009), pp. 13-42 and Kubálková (2000), pp. 675-704.

9 Lynn Kuok (2007), 'Editorial Introduction,' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20, pp. 353-354).

10 Friedrich Kratochwil (2005), 'Religion and (Inter-)National Politics: On the Heuristics of Identities, Structures, and Agents,' *Alter-*

natives: Global, Local, Political, 30, pp. 113-140.

11 See Mark Juergensmeyer (2003), *Terror In The Mind Of God: The Global Rise Of Religious Violence*, University of California Press and Samuel P. Huntington (1993), 'The Clash of Civilisations,' *Foreign Affairs*, 72, p. 22.

12 Ian Buruma and Avîšay Margālît (2004), *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism*, Atlantic Books: London, UK.

13 Fox (2004) and James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War,' *The American Political Science Review*, 97, pp. 75-90.

14 For a history of COMECE see: 'History of COMECE,' COMECE, available at: <http://comece.eu/site/en/whoweare/historyofcomece> (accessed 26 November 2012).

15 Ibid.

16 See 'Who we are,' *COMECE*, at: <http://comece.org/site/en/whoweare> (accessed 26 November 2012).

17 See 'Delegation of the EU to the Holy See, to the Order of Malta and to the United Nations Organisations in Rome,' *European Union*, available at: <http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/rome/eu_holy_see/work_with_holy_see/index_en.htm> (accessed 01 December 2012).

18 Consider, for example, the local property tax-exemption for the Catholic Church in Italy, and the exemption from the tax on construction in Spain.

19 The document archives at the official websites of the Holy See <www.vatican.va>, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union <http://comece.eu> and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences <http://ccee.ch/>.

20 See 'Letter of John Paul II on the Occasion of the Ecumenical Meeting "Together For Europe" held in Stuttgart,' *The Holy See*, available at: <www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20040508_meeting-stuttgart_en.html> (accessed 01 December 2012).

21 An adviser for religious issues at the European Commission interviewed, 22 June 2012.

22 The aim *was to give the Union* 'a spiritual and ethical dimension,' and the argument was that 'every organisation that officially represents a religious or philosophical tradition with a European structure can become [a] member.' See 'Dialogue with Religions, Churches and Humanisms,' *European Commission*, at: <http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/archives/activities/dialogue_religions_humanisms/sfe_en.htm> (accessed 01 December 2012) and the European Cultural Foundation, <www.eurocult.org/uploads/docs/407.pdf> (accessed 01 December 2012).

23 'Dialogue with Churches, Religious Associations and Communities and Philosophical and Non-Confessional Organisations,' European Commission, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/activities/outreach-team/dialogue/index_en.htm> (accessed 01 December 2012). Hereafter 'dialogue 1.'

24 A representative of the COMECE Secretariat interviewed on 19 June 2012.

25 'Mission,' The European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics, available at: <http://politicsreligion.eu/mission/> (accessed 01 December 2012).

26 'Dialogue 1.'

27 'Intercultural Dialogue,' EPP Group Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue, available at: <www.eppgroup.eu/interculturaldialogue/default_en.asp> (accessed 01 December 2012).

28 See 'Open Letter to President Buzek on Article 17,' The European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics, available at: <http://politicsreligion.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Open-letter-President-Buzek-Art-17-20110712.pdf> (accessed 01 December 2012).