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CHRISTIAN RELIGION  
IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN CULTURE:  
THROUGH THE LENSES OF JOSEPH RATZINGER

The aim of this paper is to show harmful consequences of eliminating a religion from a culture on the example of contemporary Europe that cuts its Christian roots and develops irreligion. The essence of those consequences can be captured in the expression “cultural suicide.” In order to explain what consequences such a process has and why they are harmful I employ ideas of Joseph Ratzinger on relations between religion, culture and science. Ratzinger gives not just Christian, but catholic views on that matter, but there is a justification for this choice: it is the Catholic Church, which counts 1.254 billion faithful worldwide according to statistical data published in 2013<sup>1</sup>; and Ratzinger himself should be regarded as the most competent and representative exponent of the catholic position, for apart of being a recognized outstanding theologian, he played in the Church crucial ecclesiastic roles: since 5<sup>th</sup> November 1981 Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, since 19 April 2005 pope Benedict XVI, and from 28 February 2013 on the senior pope. In this paper I refer to Ratzinger’s works written before his papal election. For although as a pope he has not changed

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Annuario Pontificio* for the year 2015.

his views, the status of his pronouncements has become somewhat different, for as a pope, he speaks first of all as the leader of a religious community. Ratzinger's papers from before his pontificate are in turn texts of a scholar—a theologian who takes up, discusses and explains (often by means of philosophical arguments) questions regarding Christianity and its cultural role.

### 1. JOSEPH RATZINGER'S NOTIONS OF RELIGION AND CULTURE

The most helpful in reconstructing Ratzinger views will be his book *Truth and Tolerance. Christian belief and world religions*<sup>2</sup> which is a collection of the most important Ratzinger's articles on the place of Christian faith in the world of the variety of religions and cultures. A majority of those texts was written in the 1990s, that is, in the period directly preceding the paramount document prepared under his guidance, which was the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, published on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2000. Becoming acquainted with those texts allows one to understand the arguments (not only of theological, but also of philosophical nature), with which Ratzinger justified theses on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and his Church set forth in the abovementioned declaration.

I will begin with demonstrating Ratzinger's understanding of culture and religion. It is because his views, especially those concerning Christianity and its cultural role, differ substantially from dominant positions held by contemporary scholars who discuss this matter.

#### CULTURE

In his considerations Ratzinger uses the concept of culture that is often dubbed "traditional" or "classical." In his book *Truth and Tolerance* he defines it in the following way: "culture is the social form of expression, as it has grown up in history, of those experiences and evaluations that have left their mark on a community and have shaped it."<sup>3</sup> Such an understanding of culture allows Ratzinger to name its key elements. Since the culture determines the purpose of human existence, perceptions upon which any culture is being built cannot be of a purely theoretical kind. A culture must not only

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

describe the reality, but also evaluate it. As Ratzinger says: “In the first place, culture has to do with perceptions and values.”<sup>4</sup>

Ratzinger emphasises that the necessary condition of formulating a correct answer to the question of what is right and what is wrong is a proper determination of the place of man in the world. This however cannot be satisfactorily accomplished without touching the issue of God’s existence. Taking up this issue is inevitable, for the conclusion will influence in the most profound way the preferred lifestyle and hierarchy of values.

According to Ratzinger only the culture that takes into account the Divine aspect of reality allows any human being to develop fully and leads them to the proper purpose, placed beyond all that is evanescent.<sup>5</sup> He justifies his view by pointing out that the appeal to God as the source of principles and rules upon which a culture is based is in fact the only way to legitimize effectively the view stating their universality, immutability and truth. The descent from the Divine authority explains also why those principles and rules should be accepted and put to practice. In contrast, when a culture stops to appeal to the Divine authority, that is: when the truth of this supra-natural element of culture is doubted, it passes from being true to merely usual and loses its living power.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in Ratzinger’s view, the crisis of faith in God leads inevitably to the crisis of culture.

Ratzinger points out that the traditional understanding of culture and its necessary associations with faith and religion<sup>7</sup> has been negated by thinkers of the Enlightenment. The division between faith and culture they introduced leads to the critique of the claim that the Christian faith had a quality of universality. In Ratzinger’s view it was a mistake, for “by telling man who he is and how he should go about being human, faith is creating culture.”<sup>8</sup> Such an understanding of faith reveals a double affiliation of man. He is a Christian and at the same time a citizen of a state. This fact of the double affiliation helps to explain how the relations between Christianity and a culture should be shaped. Ratzinger says: “The sacrifice of one’s own cultural heritage in favor of Christianity [...] or the disappearance of the cultural features of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> “Indeed, the very heart of the great cultures is that they interpret the world by setting in order their relationship to the Divinity.” Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>7</sup> “In all known historical cultures, religion is an essential element of culture, is indeed its determinative centre; it is religion that determines the scale of values and, thereby, the inner cohesion and hierarchy of all these cultures.” Ibid., 59.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 67.

faith in the new culture would both be equally mistaken. It is the tension itself that is productive, renewing faith and healing the culture.”<sup>9</sup>

These words show that Ratzinger takes the historical dynamics of a culture for an important part of it. That dynamics is the culture’s ability to transform itself in contact with the changing reality and new perceptions acquired in the process of cultural development. Yet, the openness and changeability of a culture have, according to Ratzinger, their limits. That such limits exist there can be no doubt, because a culture is created by people sharing the same human nature. Ratzinger says: “It seems to me that at this point in particular one cannot avoid reference to the metaphysical dimension. [...] This one being, man, is touched and affected in the very depth of his existence by truth itself. [...] Only in the interrelating of all great works of culture can man approach the unity and wholeness of his true nature.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, when culture rejects its essential element—religion—it stops fulfilling its basic function: providing conditions for spiritual growth of people living in that culture.

## RELIGION

When talking about religion Ratzinger is aware of the complexity of this issue. The complexity in question results from the fact that there exists a variety of religions that can hardly be gathered under a common denominator. This is why in Ratzinger’s opinion any scholarly research on religion should not begin with attempts to formulate its general definition. For the history of the science of religion clearly shows that definitions consecutively proposed by scholars do not help to understand better this phenomenon because of differences between religions.

Instead of formulating one more definition Ratzinger proposes a simple typology allowing for a preliminary arrangement of the pluralistic world of religions. He singles out two types of religion: mystical and prophetic. Mystical religions are typical for the cultures of Far East. By contrast the religions originating from Middle East (Judaism, Islam, Christianity) are prophetic. Since they are based upon the revelation coming from the only God, such religions are necessarily monotheistic. Ratzinger emphasises that “in ‘monotheism’ and ‘mysticism’ we have before us two structures that right from the start are built up in quite different ways. In mysticism, in-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 64.

wardness holds the first place; spiritual experience is posited as an absolute. That includes the view that God is purely passive in relation to man and that the content of religion can only consist of man plunging into God. God does not act; there is only 'mysticism' of men, the gradual ascent to union. The monotheistic way starts from a conviction that is the opposite of this: here man is the passive element upon whom God acts; here it is man who can do nothing of himself but instead we have here an activity on the part of God, a call from God, and man opens himself to salvation through obedience in response to the call."<sup>11</sup>

Such a view on religion brings Ratzinger to two important conclusions. The first of them indicates significant differences between religious traditions, the consequence of which is a claim that all religions cannot be approached in the same way. The transition from the obvious fact of the pluralism of religions to their relativistic conceptualization expressed in treating them as equivalent ways of spiritual development of man, so popular in contemporary culture, is considered by Ratzinger to be an error. His criticism of religious relativism, so widespread in European culture of today, shows that relativism is by far not a new and original idea. It is but another extension to the famous saying of a Roman Consul, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, dated 384: *we cannot all follow the same path to reach so great a mystery*.

The second of Ratzinger's conclusions is even more important. Also this one is in opposition to modern relativism. In his opinion in order to accept religious relativism it is necessary to admit that the teaching of any of them cannot be true. The only essential thing would be that those teachings matched subjective (and for the most part emotional) expectations of people. One cannot agree with such a stance for a simple reason: religion that does not preach God's Truth stops to be a religion. Ratzinger says: "Usefulness is not wrong, however, if taken for an absolute value, it will become wrong, because usefulness eliminates itself when it stops to relate to the truth."<sup>12</sup>

Ratzinger also emphasises that most of opinion-making voices shaping the culture of today perceive Christian religion as backward and disconnected with the zeitgeist. According to them Christianity embodies conservatism and fundamentalism and the main reason for choosing it by contemporary people is their fear of unknown future and death. Publicity given to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, *Czas przemian w Europie. Miejsce Kościoła i świata* [A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World], trans. Magdalena Mijalska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M 2005), 48.

such statements shows how many opinion-makers do not understand what Christianity is really in its essence. Ratzinger points out that Christianity, when properly understood, goes against temporal cultural fashions and strives to make the presence of God's eternal truths felt in culture. For that reason taking side of Christianity "signifies much rather a choice to be on the side of the rebel, who for the sake of his conscience dares to break free from what is accustomed: this revolutionary trait in Christianity has perhaps far too long been hidden beneath various conservative models."<sup>13</sup>

Such an understanding of Christianity results in Ratzinger's quest to show the unique and universal character of this religion.

#### THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

According to Ratzinger the basis for universalist aspirations of Christianity is the fact that this religion is not a creation of any—even the most outstanding man—but a result of God's own action in the history of mankind by sending His Son to the world. Thus, for Ratzinger the ultimate argument for universalist aspirations of Christian faith is its genuineness guaranteed by God. Ratzinger declares this plain and clear: "All that has been said is quite correct if Jesus of Nazareth is truly the meaning of history, the Logos who has become man, the self-revelation of truth itself. It is then clear that this truth is the sphere within which everyone can find and relate to one another and, in so doing, lose nothing of his own value or his own dignity."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, to follow Ratzinger's train of thought one has to accept such a very strongly stated and endlessly discussed thesis. Ratzinger is aware of this fact, and to support this thesis he calls in a number of facts and arguments. As a result he is able to demonstrate that research on religion led by representatives of many sciences have so far amassed so much data that no serious scholar questions today the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Discrepancies arise with regard to who Jesus was. Some take him for a prophet, others for a teacher of occult science or a mystic, still others take him for a political leader. Whereas according to Ratzinger the life and deeds of Christ become only fully understandable in the light of the assumption that he was really Son of God and the promised Messiah.

The core of Ratzinger's considerations on exceptional role of Christianity (and the Catholic Church as its fullest culturo-institutional expression) is

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<sup>13</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

therefore the distinction between religions that are human attempts to meet Divine reality and the Christian faith based on the Divine revelation passed to men directly by Jesus Christ, the God incarnate. Ratzinger emphasizes that it is its Divine source that constitutes universality of the Christian faith: “The believers in Jesus Christ knew, from the first moment on, that they had the duty of handing on their faith to all men; [...] It was not the drive to power that launched Christian universalism but the certitude of having received the saving knowledge and the redeeming love to which all people have a claim and for which, in the inmost depths of their being, they are waiting.”<sup>15</sup>

The understanding of Christian faith as the universal message of God to men results in Ratzinger’s rejection of the postulate that is dominant in contemporary culture of the West, namely to confine all matters of faith to the realm of private life. According to Ratzinger it is a complete misunderstanding, because “faith is no private path to God; it leads into the people of God and into its history. God has linked himself to a history, which is now also his history and which we cannot simply erase.”<sup>16</sup>

Ratzinger indicates one more indispensable condition to be met in order to define properly the place of Christian faith in culture. That condition is to show correctly the relation existing between faith and rational knowledge. It has to be admitted that it is not an easy task to perform due to two basic errors often committed by authors picking up this topic. The first one consists of reducing faith to just another kind of knowledge. Such a reduction is a mistake because faith is something much more than knowledge. It is not a mere system of notions providing an image of God and of the world. It demands personal engagement without which even an expertise in those very notions would be hardly of any use.<sup>17</sup> Only an actual reception of faith and living in accordance with its principles constitute an adequate answer of man to this God’s gift.

The second mistake consists of emphasising the irrational character of faith, which is meant to be, by words of Karl Barth, “a sheer paradox, which can only ever exist contrary to reason.” However, Ratzinger emphasises that Christian faith is not blind, but “offers healing for the reason as reason, not to overpower it or to remain outside it, but in fact to bring it to itself

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>17</sup> “Faith is a path, and it is characteristic of a path that it only becomes recognizable if you [...] start following it.” J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 145.

again.”<sup>18</sup> The source of rationality of Christian faith is the fact that the world is a reasonable and free creation of God. “Creative reason from which descends the objective and rational order of things [...] as well as the inner harmony of the human heart, is at the same time moral reason, which is love. Man exists to recognise traces of this reason, and, by doing so, to improve all things in conformity with what they really are.”<sup>19</sup>

Ratzinger’s views on relation between faith and knowledge can be deemed a modern version of the problem authored by St. Thomas Aquinas. Such an appreciation is supported by Ratzinger’s own statement about errors in defining relation between faith and reason, all of which emerged when their original unity, “which had finally been brought into a systematic form by Thomas Aquinas, was torn apart less by the development of the faith than by the new steps taken by Enlightenment. We could suggest that Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant are points along the way in this process of separation.”<sup>20</sup>

## 2. IRREPLACEABLE FUNCTIONS OF FAITH IN HUMAN LIFE

On the basis of the above considerations one can see that according to Ratzinger faith plays in human life a fundamental, perennial, and irreplaceable function. In order to justify that claim Ratzinger usually refers to metaphysics and philosophical anthropology. He says: “Why has faith still any chance at all? I should say it is because it corresponds to the nature of man. [...] His longing for the infinite is alive and unquenchable.”<sup>21</sup>

According to the views here presented religious faith in God brings three important elements into human life and into culture built by men:

- ◆ A new source of knowledge, more perfect than merely human knowledge: Revelation coming from God;
- ◆ Models of a proper purpose of life and actions leading to achievement of all that the purpose represents (saints, prophets, etc.);
- ◆ Helpful means to achieve the purpose of life (such as prayer or sacraments);

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>19</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Czas przemian w Europie. Miejsce Kościoła i świata*, 96.

<sup>20</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

So important a role of religion in human life results in man's basic spiritual need being the need for freedom to confess one's own religion (not only as an individual, but also on social plane).

### 3. IRRELIGION OF CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN CULTURE: A PROFILE

The attitude of contemporary European culture towards the very religion that has been shaping it, Christianity, I call by the name of "irreligion." I am aware that this term is not a precise one, but I think that it covers best the mutual relation of the two, at least on the level of ideas. This reservation is indispensable because in practice the culture which we live in is something even more than just irreligious and atheistic culture, that is, a culture that negates the existence of God and sets aside all religious doctrines as fiction. The negation of God and Christianity is today so profound that it is necessary to talk about a culture that displays actual enmity towards them. Testimony to it is being bore by a growing number of actions taken to eliminate God and Christian religion from all of the culture's areas. These actions do have results. Even the authors of the fundamental documents shaping the European Union do forget about Christian roots of Europe. It appears to be incomprehensible, because as Ratzinger stresses: "Christian roots of Europe are simply a historical fact. [...] It is therefore hard to comprehend where such a strong defiance to the obvious facts comes from."<sup>22</sup>

The status of religion in contemporary European culture is summed up by Ratzinger as follows: "there are indeed areas of life—and not a few—in which, once again, it already takes courage to profess oneself a Christian. [...] The danger of a dictatorship of opinion is growing, and anyone who doesn't share the prevailing opinion is excluded, so that even good people no longer dare to stand by such nonconformists. Any future anti-Christian dictatorship would probably be much more subtle than anything we have known until now. It will appear to be friendly to religion, but on the condition that its own models of behaviour and thinking not be called into question."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, An interview for the KAI, July 2004; available at <http://www.niedziela.pl/artukul/1491/Chrzescijanstwo-jest-droga-ktora-winnismy> (accessed: 20.03.2016).

<sup>23</sup> *Sól ziemi. Chryścijaństwo i Kościół katolicki na przełomie tysiącleci. Z kardynałem Josephem Ratzingerem rozmawia Peter Seewald* [The Salt of the Earth: The Church at the End of the Millennium: An Interview of Peter Seewald with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger], trans. Grzegorz Sowiński (Kraków: Znak, 1997), 132.

Elaborating on this matter Ratzinger emphasises that the believers in Christian religion who live in contemporary culture belong to many different churches. These affiliations play a big part in the reception of their opinions. Within this culture the situation of the Catholic Church is particularly difficult. In contrast to protestant communities, where an evolution could be observed leading to repossession of attitudes, rules and values of contemporary culture, the Catholic Church emphasising the need to observe the immutable, God-given laws is perceived “as a foe of progress and as a self-defensive institution, which rests, I think, on [...] defensiveness of those, who refuse to tolerate the Church’s objection to many of their conforming attitudes.”<sup>24</sup>

This critique of the Church teachings and questioning the culture-producing role of Christianity suggest that the phenomenon of religion in contemporary European culture cannot be described with those popular sociological concepts like “secularisation of culture” or “privatisation of religion.” For these processes, although important, are but side-effects of expelling Christian truths and Christian system of values from this culture. It is a harmful action, because Christianity cannot be replaced by alternative forms of religiosity, which are creations of men, not God. The illusory nature of their propositions results from the fact that man admittedly is able to create his own religions and Decalogues, but cannot make his own heaven.

This is why Ratzinger approaches new forms of religiosity with criticism. He says: “There appears equally widespread and rather vaguely presented position which could be defined as longing for spirituality and religious experience. It would be wrong not to appreciate it, but perceiving it as the beginning of a new return of faith [...] is groundless. For this longing often stems from dissatisfaction with insufficiency of technical world; it hides within itself nostalgic elements, and most of all a deep skepticism towards man’s calling to truth.”<sup>25</sup>

The irreligious attitude of modern culture is thought-provoking most of all for one reason: its source, atheism, is a position that had become popularized no sooner than the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From a historical point of view its rapid growth cannot go unnoticed. It has to be agreed that it was an impressive success. Here is the culture that for centuries kept faith in God as its foundation, and this culture all of a sudden goes through a profound change

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>25</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Czas przemian w Europie*, 91.

of an attitude towards religion. Not long time ago professing one's faith had been considered as a natural human act. And the question that required answering and arguments was "why don't you believe in God?" The tables have now turned: believers are expected to explain themselves.

But looking at the irreligion of modern culture from the point of view of Christianity it is difficult to find words of admiration. By rejecting religion European culture has casted aside one of the main pillars on which it stood. Ratzinger reminds us that it were the Church's activities that caused the culture to transmute into something truly human-friendly: "As a matter of fact, it was Christianity that first gave rise to an organized care for the sick and weak and a whole organization of charity. Christianity was also responsible for the growth of respect for all men in all stations of life. It is quite interesting that when the Emperor Constantine recognized Christianity, he felt it was his very first duty to introduce legal changes that freed Sunday for all, and he took care that slaves obtained certain rights."<sup>26</sup>

Without spiritual guidance of the Church European culture plunged into crisis. This is a crisis all the more deep and difficult to overcome because it affects the realm of values. Ratzinger formulates his opinion on this crisis in the following words: "That evident fatigue of Europeans—physical and biological—is surely the symptom of ideological and spiritual fatigue. It is a proof that Europe does no longer believe in values that have created this continent. But most of all it testifies to egoism which consists in wanting to live only for one's own self. I hope that this process is not irreversible. History can always bring surprises.

Coming to conclusion I could say that the danger for Europe is [...], denial of its own self. [...] But there is still hope that even a minority, if only truly committed and spiritually empowered, can give this old Europe a new life."<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. CONSEQUENCES OF EXCLUDING RELIGION FROM CULTURE

The rejection of God and of religion—as it has happened in Europe—is a part of a long-term process which, as a result, has limited the area considered to be available to human rational knowledge. Such a result stemmed

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<sup>26</sup> *Sól ziemi*, 189.

<sup>27</sup> J. RATZINGER, An interview for the KAI, July 2004.

from the fact that in the European culture—as Joseph Ratzinger shows—reason had been named with two terms and notions: *intellectus* and *ratio*. The notion of *intellectus* had been built upon the thesis that the world is a reasonable and free creation of God, therefore the entire reality is permeated and orderly managed by Divine reason. The acceptance of such a thesis led to a conclusion that the entire reality works in tune with rational and intelligible laws deduced and discovered not only by sciences but also by philosophy and theology. As a consequence two of the most important life-issues of a human being—religion and morality—were placed within the area of *scientia*.

Today however the European culture is dominated by a narrow understanding of reason by the notion of *ratio*. Only what can be empirically verified is deemed reasonable (rational). This way morality and religion found themselves outside the area of scientific knowledge—they are considered to be irrational and subjective. According to Ratzinger, today's demarcation of the frontiers of science reveals not a progress but a sickness of human thought: “to sick reason any statement about permanent values, every defense of reason's capacity to know truth, seems to be fundamentalism. Nothing remains but dissolution or ‘deconstruction’ [...]. Reason that can no longer recognize anything but itself and what is empirically certain is paralyzed and self-destructive.”<sup>28</sup>

The negation of Christian religion and its basic conviction that the universal and accessible truth really exists led to a deep crisis of modern culture. It is the crisis with consequences accurately pointed out by Ratzinger: “Systematic exclusion of the Divine element from everything that shapes human life and history, [...] is [...] entirely new, and at the same time really dangerous feature of this peculiar European products, which we call Marxism. I believe, however, that the identical combination in somewhat looser form is functioning in Western world also outside marxist thinking. If it was to be successful, it would mean an Europocentrism in a wrong sense of that term, and besides it would be the end of what could make Europe a positive power in the world.”<sup>29</sup>

Due to its antireligious (and more precisely: antichristian) attitude contemporary European culture has become a culture which treasures above all

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph RATZINGER, “Poszukując pokoju” [Searching for Peace], in IDEM, *Europa. Jej podwaliny dzisiaj i jutro* [Europe: Today and Tomorrow], trans. Stanisław Czerwik (Kielce: Jedność, 2005), 93.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 114.

material values and prefers a consumptionist lifestyle as the most appropriate one. Religion is a thing which this culture tries to forget altogether. But because that task—at least so far—seems to be impossible to accomplish, it permits in ‘the spirit of tolerance’ religion to be cultivated by individuals in their privacy. However, actions aiming on confining religion to the realm of privacy, as evident as they are in contemporary culture, clearly show, that the authors who postulate such a course of events do not understand at all what religion really is. For aside of the individual plane it also has the equally important communal one.

Looking at modern religiosity from the perspective taken up by Joseph Ratzinger it has to be noticed that every attempt to weed out religion from culture is not as much inconceivable as it is downright harmful. It is clearly indicated by the fact that in modern Western societies—the societies that have been exposed for a long period of time to the promotion of consumptionist and hedonistic lifestyle—the need for searching out ways of spiritual perfection has not faded out. Yet, the antireligious attitude of contemporary culture causes people living within it not to know their own religious tradition anymore. When it comes to their axiological and religious quests which shape their very worldviews, they are left all alone without hope for any kind of support from the people that are in this culture acknowledged authorities. Moreover, “due to technical advantage of the ideology of progress those great moral traditions upon which relied societies of old are being destroyed, while dark practices of witchcraft and magic still thrive or even gain influence.”<sup>30</sup>

So it is not strange that the attitude towards religion represented by contemporary European culture meets an outright criticism of Ratzinger. He says: “If man cannot use his reason to ask about the essential things in his life, [...] but has to leave these decisive questions to feeling, divorced from reason, then he is not elevating reason but dishonoring it. The disintegration of man, thus brought about, results equally in a pathological form of religion and a pathological form of science.”<sup>31</sup>

According to Ratzinger Catholic Church plays the part of “salt of the earth” in culture. Its role is irreplaceable by any other institution and it consists of being the depositary of Divine truth and universal moral values showing people their proper purpose of life. Its indispensability is best proved by the history of nazism and communism: two great atheistic

<sup>30</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Czas przemian w Europie*, 116.

<sup>31</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Truth and Tolerance*, 158.

dictatorships of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They demonstrate that “the fall of the Church, the disintegration and the absence of the faith as a formative power actually does drag the world down into the abyss. [...] We can say with a certainty backed up by empirical evidence that if the ethical power represented by Christianity were suddenly torn out of humanity, mankind would lurch to and fro like a ship rammed against an iceberg, and then the survival of humanity would be in the greatest jeopardy.”<sup>32</sup>

So if contemporary European culture is to survive the Church should continue to be its essential element playing the role of a spiritual guide. Because “the Church cannot give orders to the world, but she can, in times of helplessness, propose solutions.”<sup>33</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The above analysis shows that the elimination of religion for European culture did not achieve the aim of liberating human beings from “religious oppression,” of developing tolerance for “the otherness”, and of letting people leave they lives in accordance with their private worldviews. On the contrary, this process has threatened the realization of humanhood of the human being. It limited human aspirations to the “here and now,” without giving any guidance in thinking about what is eternal. And since one cannot eliminate such topics from human thinking, people go to witches, astrologists etc. (there are even such officially recognized professions). Rationality in society decreases, in spite of the great scientific development. Moreover, culture acquires a different status: it is source of amusement, not a realm of personal development. The title of Neil Postman’s book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*<sup>34</sup> sounds as a warning. Christianity’s claim to universality included universally valid moral rules and principles. Without that we are doomed to building a society deprived of universally valid moral rules and principles. If we add to that the decrease in rationality and the thesis that no truth about values are accessible, then a terrible alternative appears: norms are in hand of those who are here and now convincing to majority (in democracy) or those who are in power.

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<sup>32</sup> *Sól ziemi*, 195.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>34</sup> Neil POSTMAN, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

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CHRZEŚCIJAŃSTWO  
WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ KULTURZE EUROPY  
– ROZWAŻANIA NA BAZIE POGLĄDÓW JOSEPHA RATZINGERA

## Streszczenie

Artykuł podzielony jest na dwie części. W pierwszej, odwołując się do poglądów Josepha Ratzingera, rekonstruuje prezentowane przez Kościół katolicki stanowisko na temat roli, jaką religia odgrywa w kulturze. Przedstawiam również sposób rozumienia kultury i religii, na którym to stanowisko zostało oparte. Przedstawiam też argumenty, za których pomocą Ratzinger uzasadnia tezę o wyjątkowej naturze chrześcijaństwa i jego znaczeniu dla tożsamości kulturowej Europy.

Druga część artykułu wskazuje na realne skutki eliminacji chrześcijaństwa ze współczesnej kultury europejskiej. Pokazuje, że współczesna kultura Europy przestała być powszechnym sposobem wyrażania wartości, które umożliwiają osobisty rozwój człowieka. Dziś kultura Europy jest coraz częściej redukowana do roli jednego z wielu źródeł doświadczeń uprzyjemniających ludzkie życie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** religia; chrześcijaństwo; Kościół katolicki; kultura europejska; Joseph Ratzinger.

CHRISTIAN RELIGION  
IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN CULTURE:  
THROUGH THE LENSES OF JOSEPH RATZINGER

## Summary

The article is divided in two parts. The first part reconstructs the stance of the Catholic Church regarding the role of religion in culture with reference to the views of Joseph Ratzinger.

It also presents the understanding of culture and religion upon which this stance has been based. Moreover it sets forth arguments with which Ratzinger has substantiated the thesis on unique nature of the Christianity and its importance for the cultural identity of Europe.

The second part of the article asks the question of actual consequences of elimination of Christianity from contemporary European culture. It is pointed out that the culture of Europe can be no longer the common way of expressing values which secure personal development of a human being. Today the culture of Europe is more and more often reduced to the role of one of the many sources of experience providing for 'feeling good' and pleasure.

**Key words:** religion; Christianity; Catholic Church; culture of Europe; Joseph Ratzinger.