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Christian values and human rights: myth or reality in troubled times
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This text will develop as follows. Firstly, it will deal with the notion of values. Secondly, some reflections on the notion of human dignity will be provided and finally, it will discuss the issue of human rights relating it to Christianity and particularly Christian rights.

Nowadays we live in troubled times, on a global, national, local and –sometimes also- on a personal level. In troubled times, people like to look backwards, invent traditions, and tend to think that in the past everything was better. They concentrate on what they call "lost values". Thus, the first issue that will be tackled is the one regarding the concept of values.

On Wednesday the 12th of September 2018, the European Parliament took a resolution "on the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded". Experts think that next year the elections for the new European Parliament will essentially be in favour or against these values.

In March 2015 I was one of the 2 rapporteurs for the national report of ECRI in France. During our visit, two months after the terrorist attacks in Paris, our interlocutors often mentioned the importance of republican values, which, they said, are shared by all. I always asked the same question: Can you tell me what these values are? And I almost always received the same answer: liberté, égalité, fraternité. This answer did not satisfy me. Are we so sure that we all share the same values? And who is defining these values?

In other European countries, when people are asked about values, they may provide a different answer: nation, family, religion. Especially after the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants in 2015, some people insisted on the importance of the values of the western civilisation and especially the Judeo-Christian values, which furthermore needed protection from -among others- radical islamists, and sometimes from Islam in general. Taking the previous point into account I ask myself how many people who share this view are ready to protect these values if they think that they are threatened. And the answer that I give myself is that not many, also among Christians. My view is that these values are seen by many people in the context of the arrival of Muslims migrants they do not like at all.

It is perhaps helpful to have a look at the greater Europe and to say that this Europe shares different kinds of values: religious (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), philosophical (the Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung…), social and economic values as for example, the social market economy or *soziale Marktwirtschaft*, or political values such as democracy, the right to vote and to be elected or political participation.

These values are not an anthropological constant. If equality is a value, it has not existed forever. Without going any further, equality between men and women for instance, is not

fully achieved -even in Europe- as many of you may know from your everyday life experience.

Taking this situation into account, it may be useful to have a look at the core values of both, the Council of Europe and the European Union. For the former, it could be stated that democracy, the rule of law and human rights are its main values. For the latter, one must take into account Article 2 of the treaty of Lisbon, which says:
"The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail".

Unfortunately, in the light of the actual crisis that the European Union is facing, I have the feeling that these values are not shared by everybody –and they are challenged not only in Eastern Europe-.

On top of that, if we define values, we have to try to respect these values ourselves, otherwise our behaviour will be considered as hypocritical and, as you surely know, we do not like to identify ourselves with people who do the opposite of what they say.

Moreover, and to continue this reflection about values it is important to underline that these values are to be seen not only on an individual level, but in a larger context, in the context of political, economic and social structures. If for example you are unemployed, if you suffer from an unjust economic system with structural inequalities, you may probably insist on other values than if you profit from this system.

Then, for all the previously stated, it may be useful to know about the values in different European countries. One of the ways to get some relevant information regarding values in EU countries is through the European Values Study (EVS), a large-scale cross-national survey conducted every 9 years by a consortium of European universities and research centres. In this survey people are asked about –for example- what values are transmitted by parents to children, getting to the conclusion that in Eastern Europe, parents tell more often their children to be industrious, to hardworking, than in Western Europe.

Some of the background for the research of the EVS survey can be found in an article on values published by Loek Halman, who is now the chair of the executive committee:

"Values as justice, freedom, equality, patriotism, and loyalty determine what is considered normal and abnormal, decent and indecent, rational and irrational, desirable and undesirable, good and bad or right and wrong.
The importance and significance of values may be widely recognized and accepted, less agreement exists on the meaning and reference of the term value. There is no consensual definition of values.
Values are mental constructs, and therefore are not visible or measurable directly.
Most social scientists agree, however, that values are deeply rooted motivations, principles, or orientations guiding, steering, channelling, or explaining certain attitudes, norms,

opinions, convictions and desires which, in turn, direct human action or at least part of it" (Halman, 2010).

The EVS considers in the different European countries "two basic value orientations that reflect two fundamental dimensions of change:
First the Traditional/Secular-Rational dimension reflecting the contrast between the relatively religious and traditional values that generally prevail in agrarian societies, and the relatively secular, bureaucratic, and rational values that prevail in urban, industrialized societies".

The results of the survey -published in an Atlas- are as follows: "Traditional countries emphasize the importance of religion, deference to authority, parent-child ties and two-parent traditional families, and absolute moral standards, they reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide, and tend to be patriotic and nationalistic. The contrast is formed by countries with 'secular-rational' values, which hold opposite preferences on all these topics, and thus emphasize freedom for individual moral choices and high tolerance for others' opinions and beliefs".

With regard to the second dimension, Survival/Self-expression, an intergenerational shift from an emphasis on economic and physical security above all, towards increasing emphasis on concerns of self-expression, subjective well-being, and quality of life can be observed.

In the results published in the mentioned atlas we can see that "countries that rank highly on survival values tend to emphasize materialist orientations and traditional gender roles; they are relatively intolerant of foreigners, gays and lesbians, and other marginalized groups, show relatively low levels of subjective well-being, rank relatively low on interpersonal trust".

Now, let us come to the so-called Christian values. I confess that before beginning a deeper analysis of a topic I have a look at Wikipedia, but -since we are all limited in time and space- I think that what I found there is enough for starting a discussion. Nevertheless, I agree that some aspects of this text may be seen as a caricature, as "clichés".

As far as Christian values are concerned, Wikipedia first mentions "the New Testament teaching, including the love of God and neighbours, fidelity in marriage, renunciation of worldly goods, renunciation of vengeance, forgiveness of sins and unconditional love". As an essential text they –of course- mention the Sermon on the Mount.

Then Wikipedia has two chapters on the modern use of values in politics, first in what they call worldwide conservative or centre-right politics. They include:
"Censorship of sexual content, especially in movies and on television; the desirability of laws against induced abortion; sexual abstention outside marriage and abstinence-only sex education; the promotion of intelligent design to be taught in public schools and colleges as an alternative to evolution; the desirability of laws against same-sex marriage; support of laws against the acceptance of homosexuality into mainstream society; the desirability of organized school prayer in public schools".

As far as the modern use of values in worldwide liberal or centre-left politics is concerned, the following items are mentioned:

"Support for a culture of empathy and compassion seen as central to Christianity among a diverse range of religions and worldviews; favouring individuals, families (of all compositions) and small communities' interests over the interests of large corporations and the powerful;

Protection of the environment as the product of a deep reverence for God's creation;

The undesirability of war other than as a last resort, and a respect for diplomacy (see swords to ploughshares);

Embrace inclusion and acceptance of immigrants and refugees;

A high, progressive income tax to promote greater income equality in keeping with Jesus' words in support of the poor and against excessive riches;

Promoting Render unto Caesar as an endorsement of secular governance; separation of church and state, religious tolerance, consistent with the concept of Christ's kingdom not being "of this world" and warning against the hunger for potentially corrupting temporal power…

I must insist that these sentences must be considered only as an input for further discussion, but it would be interesting to know how many people will find themselves in one of these categories.

From here, one can come up with yet another set of questions like: What is the difference between values and virtues? Is it possible that values depend on our experiences in our different countries in Western and Eastern Europe? Do we really want to share the same values defined by European institutions, or is this a kind of a totalitarian top down approach? Are the values behind rights? If yes, what is behind values? Could it simply be the meaning of life ("*der Sinn des Lebens*"), a common "soul", or sharing a common dignity that we all have because we are children of God?

Following Thomas Aquinas, the cardinal virtues are justice, wisdom (prudence), courage (fortitude) and moderation (temperance or self-control). To these virtues, the three more theological virtues of faith, hope and charity can be added.

In the ordinary discourse the concepts of values and virtues are considered synonymous, or maybe the values are considered as more theoretic or general while the virtues are considered to be something more pragmatic or the concrete application of values.

Speaking about values and rights, the concept of dignity is mentioned more and more. Is dignity a value or a right? On the one hand, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union we have dignity as both, a value and a right. On the other hand, in the European Convention on Human Rights this concept does not appear neither as a value or a right, but the European Court of Human Rights uses it.

Regarding the relation between dignity and human rights, at least four aspects need to be distinguished: dignity as the foundation of human rights, dignity as a specific human right, dignity as the sum of human rights or dignity as the reason to be of these rights. An inflationary use of the concept shall be avoided since it may become vague or a catch-all

concept that serves the purpose to end all discussions. Thus, a specific right should replace 'dignity' as a concept if we are dealing with a right in particular or with the violation of it.

Nevertheless, 'dignity' should be upheld every time we speak of the inherent core of the human being -the ultimate foundation of human rights- if we aspire to a holistic approach to the human person. As Paul Ricoeur says, dignity is something that is due to the human being because he is human.

It should also be reminded that 'dignity' often refers to an individual morality but, at the same time, the structural stance of the phenomenon shall not be forgotten.
That structural stance of 'dignity' implies that it is violated within a society based on inequalities. If those inequalities are pre-programmed by the structures of economic systems, the violation of dignity is evident. The discontent, the indignation that is currently articulated by different parties in the world need to result in a new social model that respects the benefits of market economy as well as the benefits of a solidary and egalitarian society. If the model is not found, I violent revolutions may unfortunately become inevitable.
A society that accepts the death by starvation of millions of innocent children is a society that tolerates a flagrant violation of human dignity.

Finally, regarding Christian values I would like to mention the Christian ban on consanguinity, that is, the prohibition of marriages among cousins after a certain grade. This could help to understand another dimension of values in the context of the value of family.

When people are asked about the values that are important to them, a great majority answer family. In this context, it is the kinship type of family that will be analysed. In a study about the topic, Jonathan Shulz writes:
"In the early medieval ages the Church started to prohibit kin-marriages. The study reveals that kin-marriages are negatively associated with political participation and institutional quality. [...] The ban on consanguinity gained momentum in the 8th century."

In another article on this topic, he wrote about the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) psychology:
"Populations with less intensive kin-based institutions historically are psychologically WEIRD today: they are more individualistic and independent but less nepotistic, conformist, obedient…
Socially, populations with weaker kin-based institutions reveal less in-group loyalty, diminished moral particularism and greater trust, fairness and cooperation with strangers. The longer a regional population was exposed to the Church, the higher their measures of individualism-independence and generalized trust and fairness and the lower their measure of conformity-obedience.
To sum up we can say that the Church, through the MFP (marriage family program) inadvertently contributed to what psychologists have termed WEIRD psychology". For the same reason, it could be added that the Church also contributed –unconsciously- to an open society.

From this point, a sort of provocative question could be formulated: in an open, multicultural society with different kinship models, what about social inclusion and the risk of tension that it may imply?

Let us come back however, to the general notion of Human Rights before trying to answer the question about the so called Christian Human Rights. Do we want to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the UDHR on December 10? If the answer is yes, what should be celebrated: the rise of human rights 70 years ago, or the end of human rights today with Trump, Erdogan, Putin and Xi Jinping? A more general question: when speaking about human rights, what are for you the most important rights? And to what declaration are you referring? Human rights are rights, so we need to know them if we want to act as HR defenders against HR violations.

The formulation of different rights must be contextualized since they depend on power relations, and at the same time, power relations depend on political constellations or coalitions. Hence, they may arise out of compromise. In a wider context, this consideration leads to the question if Human Rights, as a dominating idea in international relations, will one day disappear or give way to other terms that had not come into fruition earlier because of the dominance of the idea of Human Rights.

Another important aspect is the frame of the texts announcing those rights. Even if the universal validity of the Declarations is aspired to, they are still subjected to the control of the Nation State. However, the new role of the international courts of justice must be taken into consideration. Concerning the State itself, Human Rights can on one side strengthen the role of the State, but this role can also be undermined as well, reinforcing the rights of the individual against the State.

The relation between rights and duties is another issue that is reflected over centuries in the different Declarations, sometimes directly, as in the 1795 version of the French declaration or in the *African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights* (also known as the Banjul Charter), sometimes indirectly, for example if the rights of one person induce the duties of another person. Since the cultural background is also relevant in this regard, one could ask: Do rights apply more to Western and obligations to Eastern cultures? Or are there certain periods where one or the other is emphasised? Those are questions that have been and will continue being object of inquiry.

Moreover, and in order to simplify the issue we are dealing with, it should be underlined that two different approaches to the notion of Human Rights can be distinguished.
If we have a *broader* approach to Human Rights -that means if we want to identify Human Rights dimensions, for example ideas of liberty, equality, solidarity, inclusion, justice in different texts or experiences- we can have a look at the different religions. In the main texts of these religions we find the notions of love, solidarity, obligations towards the other.
If, however, we take a *narrower* approach of Human Rights, then the following definitions of Heiner Bielefeldt and Lynn Hunt can be useful.

As Heiner Bielefeldt points out, the following three conditions must be fulfilled in order to speak of Human Rights: A normative universalism, an emancipatory aim as well as a political

and legal intention. Considering the normative universalism, we find that rights are "inherent" (18th century), which is to say "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (1948). When we mention the emancipatory aim, we think about the right of self-determination for every human being. Finally in the political and legal intention rights are addressed to the State which has 3 obligations: To respect, protect and fulfil.

As for Lynn Hunt, Human Rights require three interlocking qualities: Natural (inherent in human beings), equal (the same for everyone) and universal (applicable everywhere). To this, she adds that: "They only become meaningful when they gain political content." Lynn Hunt's definition however, induces a paradox of self-evidence: If Human Rights are self-evident, why do they have to be declared?

The 1940s, with the establishment of the UN in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, are the most researched period of the history of Human Rights. Nevertheless, the question arises if the heavy emphasis on this period does not lead to aberrations in the sense that wider issues and larger contexts may not have been taken into account. Although the year 1948 marks a break in traditional historiography, this is challenged by new approaches to the history of Human Rights.

Samuel Moyn is one of the key actors in this debate about the reorientation of the history of Human Rights. He believes that Human Rights made sense for a large part of the population only after 1968, gaining their contemporary meaning only on the ruins of earlier political utopias. For him, the specific contribution of historians in the debate on Human Rights relies on the location of the moment when Human Rights started to influence the ideas of a large number of people leading their actions in a new direction. These ideas then penetrated their daily thoughts and life and legitimised a certain moral view of the world, nationally and internationally, while they simultaneously led to the disappearance of other perspectives. Moyn's radical approach has been questioned, and the discussion continues.

Despite all the previously mentioned, there remains a shift between texts and reality. What can I do with Human Rights Declarations if I am poor and too weak to defend myself? This question was already debated in the 19th century and is again of utmost importance within the context of the financial and economic crisis. In my view however, Human Rights are the result of a learning process and they respond to experiences of injustice and suffering and because of that, narratives based on publicly articulated experiences of injustice have to be added to the narratives based on written documents.

Finally and taking everything said into consideration, we arrive at the question we want to address: Are there any specific Christian rights? And if the answer is yes, where are they codified?
If we speak about Christian human rights, I believe that we want to know –among many other things- if the universal human rights are influenced by Christian thinking and I will limit myself to this aspect.

This issue is discussed in Samuel Moyn's book "Christian Human Rights" published in 2015. Generally speaking, I would say that the essential message of this book is to insist on the influence of Christians and of the Catholic Church on the development of human rights in

the 20th century. As it is widely acknowledged, the "historic relationship between Christianity and human rights is an ambiguous one".

When a handbook on human rights has a chapter on Christianity and Human Rights, you normally find the second Vatican Council, and also *Pacem in Terris*; they are considered as the turning point in the attitude of the Catholic Church concerning human rights. If freedom of religion is mentioned, this unfortunately often means that religions insist on this freedom for themselves and not for other religions; if there is only one truth and you are convinced that you have this truth, that you are right, it seems that you do not want others to have this freedom.

Unfortunately, the persecution of religious opponents does not only belong to the past. In an expert meeting in Münster the political scientist Tine Stein points out "the performative self-contradiction of the Church": "while ad extra, the Church has made human rights the normative measure for politics after Vatican II, ad intra, the recognition of human rights has not developed further since the 1980s" (Stica, 2013).
The main idea for Christians is that behind the rights you have God who created men and women in his or her own image, everyone with the same dignity.

Regarding this issue, Ronald Osborn remarks that: "Even if the language of 'rights' was not explicitly or formally used, the New Testament invested every person with a previously unimaginable worth. Instead of struggling to attain *dignitas* as a scare commodity in competitive rivalry with others, all persons were now summoned to live in generous solidarity with their neighbours as persons of dignity and worth equal to their own.

From the same perspective, Robert Traer outlines that when talking about Christian rights, the standard of the law must be sought outside the law. Christians agree that all affirmations of human rights are grounded in the transcendent reality of God. Human dignity is the standard for law since: "man precedes the state" (Rerum Novarum, 1891).

Getting back to Moyn's book, his general thesis is: "Through this lost and misremembered transwar era, it is equally if not more viable to regard human rights as a project of the Christian right, of catholic conservatives, not the secular left (Moyn, 2015, p.8). Moreover, in an interview Moyn says that he himself was "surprised and puzzled by why it was the Pope, more than anyone else, who organized his thinking during World War II itself around human rights. In the 1940s, when the UDHR was propounded human rights were most often championed by Christians and often as an explicitly Christian project. Even an early human rights NGO like Amnesty international, founded by a fervent convert to Catholicism named Peter Benenson, hardly escaped Christian trappings in the beginning, with its votive candles lit for prisoners of conscience. This story of Christian genesis was lost so rapidly because Christianity itself collapsed, at least in terms of formal membership and religious lifestyles".
Moyn starts with the speech of Pope Pius XII for Christmas 1942. In this address human dignity is central as the Pope mentions different peace points, being "Dignity of the Human Person" among them:

"He who would have the Star of Peace shine out and stand over society should cooperate, for his part, in giving back to the human person the dignity given to it by God from the very

beginning […] He should uphold respect for and the practical realization of […] fundamental personal rights:

- The right to maintain and develop one's corporal, intellectual and moral life and especially the right to religious formation and education;
- The right to worship God in private and public and to carry on religious works of charity;
- The right to marry and to achieve the aim of married life;
- The right to conjugal and domestic society;
- The right to work, as the indispensable means toward the maintenance of family life;
- The right to free choice of a state of life, and hence, too, of the priesthood or religious life;
- The right to the use of material goods, in keeping with his duties and social limitations."

In this quote, the influence of French philosopher Jacques Maritain can be easily detected since it underlines a personalist view on human rights. It is also useful to keep in mind that for other scientists like James Chappel, the notion of rights-bearing individuals was not foreign to mainstream Catholic thinking already in the 1920s and early 1930s (Chappel, 2015).

Later on, in 1980 during an ecumenical gathering, a consultation sponsored by the World Council of Churches with the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Pontifical Commission Justitia et Pax, three theological approaches have been identified to the justification of human rights:

"The first approach proceeds from the creation and considers the source for human rights to be implicit by natural law. A second approach insists upon the experience of God's covenant with his people. The New Covenant in Christ is the criterion for dealing with historically developed natural and human rights. A third approach takes the event of the justification of sinners through the grace of God to be the basis of freedom and from there proceeds to the responsibility of persons for their neighbours. […] However, the consultation affirms that a common understanding does exist in the basic doctrine that all theological statements on human rights derive from the Christian anthropology of the human person created in the image of God".

To this, it could be also added that for Christians there is no distinction between the different categories of rights and in this sense, they defend what we could call "Total humanism".

From a similar point of view, Robert Traer points out that Christian love requires the primacy of social rights. In this context, David Hollenbach SJ (Claims in Conflict 1979) suggests to formulate 3 strategic moral priorities:
1. The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich.
2. The freedom of the dominated takes priority over the liberty of the powerful.
3. The participation of marginalized groups takes priority over the preservation of an order which excludes them.

In order to go further into our reflections on the influence of Christian rights and to complement everything that has been already mentioned, it could be useful to concentrate not only on the church, but to have also a look at other religions, for example Judaism; and to think about a multireligious genesis. Nevertheless, I will leave this exercise to future inquiries.

Before coming to some concluding remarks I would like to mention an important topic for the future: social equality. The debate regarding this issue is as follows: How is it possible that 70 years after the UDHR social inequality persists to exist despite the fact that many efforts have been made to defend and promote social and economic rights?. One of the reasons that may explain this could be that today the neoliberal economy is dominating, and this creates new challenges that did not exist in 1948. I invite you to make your opinion on this, and also, of course, to think about possible solutions to diminish social inequalities. This is our job, and failing is not allowed. If we as J&P do not do our best to find a settling for this injustice, who will? Perhaps in a near future the concept of social equality will be more important than a lot of other Human Rights.

In conclusion, some suggestions can be extracted from this text:

First of all, we should provide a definition of 'values' whenever we are using the concept. At the same time, we should ask others for a definition of the same concept when they are speaking about them.

Secondly, Christians should participate with others in Human Rights networks. Whenever possible, Christians should engage in their churches and never forget the social dimension of the rights derived from their faith.

Thirdly, it should be noted that -for everything previously mentioned- Catholicism does not only consist in spirituality. Although I am not a theologian, I would say that it is mentioned in the Letter of James that faith is quite dead if good works don't go with it.

Furthermore, we should insist on rights that have a priority for Christians in our troubled times like, for example: those concerning the refugees, the right to life from the beginning to the end of life and religious freedom -not only freedom for your religion but freedom for all religions- amongst many others.

On top of that, we should fight for rights also inside the church. Our church also is in troubled times, in a real crisis so we need a real paradigm shift. With the engagement of my friends in the different Justice and Peace Commissions, with my friends working in the framework of the social teaching of the church, I have not the intention to leave this church, at least for the moment. Fight for rights for people who are considered to be at the periphery of the church, for example LGBT people who want to live their faith inside the church (see Pope Francis: "Who gives me the right to judge?"). Fight also for democracy inside the church.

Finally and most importantly, we should not forget our method: nonviolent conflict transformation that allows coming out of conflicts in direction to a long lasting peace.

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