

Fr. Perozich comments —

*I am an American whose perspective is influenced locally for the church and for the world. This comment on Europe by Europeans is enlightening.*

*The **BOLD** highlights in the article are mine because they are statements which stood out to me.*

*The church has lost its way in melding itself with secular society, in promoting leaders who speak worldly values.*

***“Precisely because it specializes in its own function, which is that of speaking of God, refusing to directly pursue aims of a political nature, religion could show itself to be politically much more provocative and relevant than it is in its version of ‘civil religion’.”***

*Yet church leaders are promoting those who proclaim worldly values, and who silence those who speak of God, of faith, of the moral law, of sin, of hell, of salvation.*

*The author shows the lack of Christian faith in Europe. By extension, he shows it to be lacking in the church as well as she adopts the secular agenda surrendering her proclamation of faith in God with a proclamation of immigration, environmentalism, and other secular ideas. He also notes the classic tension between church and secularism, and pronounces that good, and then decries its disappearance which damages both the church and secular movements.*

*Europe lacks faith, and church leadership is not revitalizing it, rather looking to the rest of the world. The result is the depletion of strength of the church and the secular world.*

*The author sees the denunciations by the church of the markets, the promotion of a brand of environmentalism as too human.*

*Church leadership today has an “incapacity to distinguish among religion, morality, and politics,” the differentiation of which is instead one of the most important achievements of European civilization.” “*

*... the fact that it does so without looking at the consequences that an uncontrolled migratory flow could have for European countries indicates a deficit of political realism that is certainly worrying.”*

*“... it is Islam that acts as the catalyst of the main problems of our time.”*

***For the Catholic Church, “this entails a series of consequences that touch upon its organizational and pastoral dimensions, as well as theological-doctrinal.”***

**It, for example, “would do well to keep distinct those who are seeking God from those who are seeking an identity or a religious platform for relaunching their own distrust toward the market economy,” or for “producing social, political, or economic effects of whatever kind.”**

**“But in order that this God may return to being a concept generative of forms of ecclesial and social life, what is needed above all is faith.”**

## **Settimo Cielo**

**di Sandro Magister**

**26 mag**

# **Europe At the Polls. But the Church Must Also Decide On Its Future**



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Today, Sunday May 26, the polls close in the election of the parliament of the European Union. But what is happening between the Catholic Church and Europe? **On the continent that for centuries has been the heart of the Christian faith, most of its inhabitants no longer seem interested in this faith. And vice-versa the Catholic Church, led by an Argentine pope, seems ever less interested in Europe, looking instead to Latin America, to Africa, to Asia.**

It is this twofold “disinterest” that sparks the analysis that Sergio Belardinelli signs together with Angelo Panebianco in this book released on the verge of the elections:

> [A. Panebianco, S. Belardinelli, “All’alba di un nuovo mondo,” Il Mulino, Bologna, 2019.](#)

Both teach at the university of Bologna, Panebianco political science, Belardinelli the sociology of cultural processes. The former is secular, and the latter Catholic, a former protagonist of

that “Cultural Project” which occupied the Italian Church during the years of Cardinal Camillo Ruini’s leadership.

Both share the idea that liberal civilization is “the most important gift of modern Europe to the world” and at the same time “the mature fruit of the Christian tradition.” But while Panebianco carries out his analysis under the geopolitical profile, Belardinelli carries it out under the cultural and religious profile. He titles his essay: “The Catholic Church and Europe.” And he offers us reflections that fully touch on the present and future of the Church.

One of the thinkers to whom Belardinelli makes reference is the Jewish philosopher Leo Strauss (1899-1973), with his thesis of the irreducible antagonism between Jerusalem and Athens, between the pole of revelation and faith and the pole of philosophy and reason. Antagonism that nonetheless is for him also “the secret of the vitality of the West.”

But the drama of Europe today - Belardinelli writes - is that this antagonism between Jerusalem and Athens is extinguished: **“The Europe that abandons the Church and the Church that abandons Europe represent in a paradigmatic way the depletion of the ‘vitality’ of both cities.”**

Moreover the Church, in its current magisterium, “seems to confirm many of the stereotypes that exist among those responsible for the crisis of Europe itself.”

Belardinelli gives this example:

“We do admit that the magisterium of the pontiffs previous to Pope Francis has been too concentrated on so-called ‘nonnegotiable’ themes, like life and family. But are we sure that the fact of now favoring other themes, like environmentalism, the critique of market capitalism or third-worldism, is to be considered a step forward? [...] I have the impression that **the denunciation of the causes of these evils that is coming from the Church today is too ‘human.’** It is a bit as if pointing out the market and laissez-faire as the main culprits -

charges that for that matter are rather debatable - attenuates the tremendous, tragic seriousness of the evil that is being denounced. With the result that the prophetic impulse of the denunciation is weakened precisely through the fact of appearing too bound to the logic of the world, too political and not eschatological enough.”

In Belardinelli’s judgment, the Church today “often gives the impression of falling into that moralism, rather in fashion, at the basis of which there seems to lie a sort of **incapacity to distinguish among religion, morality, and politics,**” **the differentiation of which is instead one of the most important achievements of European civilization.**

And he gives this other example:

“When the Catholic Church makes itself the bearer of a message of acceptance in safeguarding the dignity of every man, regardless of his religious or cultural affiliation, it implicitly defends the best identity of Europe. But the fact that it does so without looking at the consequences that an uncontrolled migratory flow could have for European countries indicates a deficit of political realism that is certainly worrying, [...] not compensated by any other side, neither by the European institutions, nor by the national states. [...] Europe thus appears as a continent adrift, forgetful of itself, precisely at the moment in which a protagonist is acting on the geopolitical scene for which pluralism and freedom are not at all a given: Islam. It is from Islamic countries that most of the desperate who are knocking at our doors come; it is of Islamic origin, the terrorism that in recent years has bloodied the main European capitals; it is the Islamic countries that do not tolerate the presence of Israel in the Arab world; in a few words, it is Islam that acts as the catalyst of the main problems of our time.”

Another thinker to whom Belardinelli makes reference is the German sociologist and philosopher Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998), who he says “makes so much sense he could sell it”

when he maintains, “if we want to take secularization seriously,” that **“religion, politics, science, economy, in a word, all the social systems, specialize more and more in their own function.”**

**For the Catholic Church,** “this entails a series of consequences that touch upon its organizational and pastoral dimensions, as well as theological-doctrinal.”

It, for example, **“would do well to keep distinct those who are seeking God from those who are seeking an identity or a religious platform for relaunching their own distrust toward the market economy,”** or for **“producing social, political, or economic effects of whatever kind.”**

Belardinelli writes:

**“The social utility of faith in the God of Abraham and of Jesus Christ is beyond dispute.** As the classics of sociology teach, from Max Weber to Niklas Luhmann, the main cultural forms of the West - rule of law, market economy, science and technology - have in the Judeo-Christian religion their conditions of possibility. On closer inspection, however, one must recognize that all these advantages are accessories; that is, they are advantages that faith, without diminishing their importance in any way, has been able to produce simply because it has been able to keep alive in society the sense of something that, being valuable in itself, has offered these in surplus, meaning the sense of God.”

**It follows from this that “secular society, as surprising as the thing may seem, has an urgent need that somewhere there should be someone who talks about God in a language that is not too mundane.** [...] But of what God must one speak? With Pascal it is certainly opportune to get out of the unjust perspective of the ‘God of the philosophers’ and get into that of the ‘God of Abraham and of Jesus Christ.’ However, it does not seem reasonable to me that this God who is love and mercy should be conceived of in stark contrast with ‘the

perfect being, creator and lord of heaven and earth,' as recited in the catechism. [...] A God who is not all-powerful and did not create the world cannot be God. As Leo Strauss and Joseph Ratzinger well understood, just to mention two significant names, the world has meaning only because it was created by God. [...] But in order that this God may return to being a concept generative of forms of ecclesial and social life, what is needed above all is **faith.**”

This citation of Ratzinger is striking in the thick of a discourse on God, which is also the heart of those “**Notes**” published in April by the pope emeritus, outlining his vision of the current crisis of the Catholic Church.

But what Belardinelli calls for is not “to talk about God,” which would involve the estrangement of the Church from the world. On the contrary:

“It implies a clear awareness, [...] as well as the trust that it is precisely that which is specific about religion, meaning discourse about God and about faith as its privileged ‘medium,’ that produces that ‘background noise,’ as Luhmann calls it, which is also able to make itself heard over the other social systems, constraining them to take it into account. [...] **Precisely because it specializes in its own function, which is that of speaking of God, refusing to directly pursue aims of a political nature, religion could show itself to be politically much more provocative and relevant than it is in its version of ‘civil religion’.**”

The Church must have no fear of this conflict, Belardinelli concludes. Because, as Strauss said, “**there lies precisely in this conflict the secret of the ‘vitality’ of Europe and of Western culture.**”

While on the contrary “there lies in the weariness both of politics and of religion the true problem of today’s Europe.”