»To Be the Soul of Europe«

Images and Metaphors in Pope Francis's Vision of Europe

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On November 25, 2014, Pope Francis gave a speech in the European Parliament, addressing all European citizens with »a message of hope and encouragement.«[1] This speech was followed by four others in which he addressed the problems, tasks and future of the European Community. Pope Francis's speeches about Europe were held in front of different institutions and audiences: at the Council of Europe (November 25, 2014); on the occasion of the conferral of the International Charlemagne Prize of the city of Aachen (April 6, 2016); in front of the heads of state and government of the European Union in Italy during the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (March 24, 2017); and on the occasion of the conference »(Re) Thinking Europe« organised by the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (October 28, 2017).

In these five speeches, Pope Francis frequently uses metaphors to express his »vision«, his »dream« of a Europe to come, but also his criticism of today's European politics. The focus of my analysis in this chapter lies on the role of these metaphors in the argumentative and persuasive strategy adopted by the Pope in addressing European politics. I understand his speeches as discursive practices within a broader discursive (battle)field in which different social and political actors contend with each other for hegemony over the (cultural, political) meaning and (normative) interpretation of the term »Europe«.

The starting point of this chapter is the assumption that metaphors are not merely stylistic tools of linguistic embellishment and ornament, but

1 Pope Francis 2014a, 1.

on the contrary have a heuristic and epistemological value as well as a performative force.[2] On the basis of this assumption, this study analyses Francis's speeches in order to answer the following questions: which metaphors does Pope Francis use to address, criticise and describe »Europe« as it *is* and *should* be? What is their function within the general argumentative strategy of the speeches? Is their use necessary or dispensable for the formulation of normative principles and truth contents?

The chapter is structured as follows: the first part summarises the rhetorical-argumentative strategy adopted in official statements of the Catholic Church in discourses concerning the European integration process and its own relationship with European institutions. The following section specifically examines the rhetorical-argumentative strategy adopted by Pope Francis in his speeches on the future of Europe. I will conclude with a critical discussion of the role played by metaphors in Pope Francis's speeches, paying particular attention to the relationship between normative contents, argumentation and metaphors.

My aim is to underline the fundamental role that metaphors play in discursive and imaginative practices aimed at giving a normative foundation to the project of the European community. Moreover, it aims at problematising and critiquing Jürgen Habermas's claim that, within public and political discourses concerning fundamental values and principles, language should be freed from the ballast of religious signification or, more precisely, that religious persons and citizens should formulate »religious arguments« in a »language that is equally accessible to all citizens«.[3] This claim is based on the problematic assumption that the »normative truth content of religious utterances«[4] can be »translated« into an allegedly existing universally shared language. My main thesis is that not only is such a translation impossible but it is also not desirable, because, firstly, it is not possible to separate normative truth content from the particular, historical stratified language in which it is expressed and, secondly, because the performative force of discourses – both »religious« *and* »secular« – aiming at giving ethical foundation to political projects such as the project of Europe is intrinsically linked to their metaphoricity.

2 Cf. Blumenberg 2010; Ricœur 1975.

3 Habermas 2006a, 12.

4 Habermas 2006a, 10.

1. The Roman Catholic Church and the European integration process

Pope Francis's visit to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe came 26 years after that of Pope John Paul II. The Holy See's involvement in the discussions of pan-European affairs has developed over the course of less than a century, well before the establishment of the European Community. Blandine Chelini-Pont summarises papal thought on Europe and the European Union since 1914 as follows:

> At first, under Benedict XV and Pius XI, European unity was presented as the only means to avoid wars and to tame aggressive nationalisms. With Pius XII, Europe became a vision, founded on a sacred past, where »Faith« and »Truth« had been given by Christ (and the Catholic Church) to European peoples. The pope's role was unceasingly to defend federalism, and to condemn communism and Cold War politics. The popes of the 1960s and 1970s recast Catholic doctrine on Europe as a new utopia, replacing Christendom or the Christian Empire. They coloured Europe with a new concern for the situation of Eastern Europe and the necessity of remembering the common belonging of East and West. They aimed to revive the chance for western peoples to live in a secure, democratic and developed continent thanks to the protective cultivation of Christian values. John Paul II's contribution to this debate remains without doubt the most personal and original. According to him, European unity represented more than a hope for a lasting peace for its people and for the rest of the world. It had become a possible vehicle of salvation for its inhabitants and humanity. […] Its goal was spiritual, and Europe could not reach the best form of society unless it renewed and protected the values which Christianity had encapsulated. John Paul II proposed that Europe build toward this ideal of a humane society, diverse, protected, peaceful and prosperous, with a clearly delineated »political« will, aimed at preserving and promoting inalienable and God-linked values. The legacy of his pontifical teachings continues. His successor,

> Benedict XVI, has shown his intention of perpetuating and developing Catholic teachings on Europe, in exactly the same way.[5]

The political relevance of the Catholic Church within Europe is obviously not limited to the person of the pope. Besides the pope himself, other Church officials and institutional bodies are also responsible for devising the Church's foreign policy. In their study of the public statements produced by the Catholic Church regarding the process of European integration, Petr Kratochvíl and Tomáš Doležal analyse texts from the »three most important bodies which represent the Catholic hierarchy, based in Europe and which are at least partially responsible for the relations with the EU:[6] The Holy See, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE). Since they collected texts published between 1990 and 2010, they did not analyse Pope Francis's speeches. However, in their conceptual analysis of the Catholic Church's discourse regarding the European integration process they identify some key elements of the rhetorical and argumentative strategy that are also present, as we will see, in Pope Francis' speeches. In the following section, I discuss their analysis of central concepts and arguments to highlight the key elements of Pope Francis's rhetorical-argumentative strategy in his speeches.

The first insight of Kratochvíl and Doležal's study concerns the Catholic Church's position regarding secularism and secularisation. The EU is often seen as one of the world's champions in defending secularism and, indeed, secularism has been described as one of the essential underlying principles of the European integration process.[7] As is well known, secularism, understood as the temporal division between the religious and the political, has been viewed unfavourably by the Catholic Church for a long time. However, with its opening towards the modern world (this attitude is called *aggiornamento,* »update«), which has characterised the Catholic Church ever since the Second Vatican Council, its discussion of secularism has become more complex. This is particularly evident in the Church's discourses about the European Union which almost never reject secularism as such, but instead

5 Chelini-Pont 2009, 144.
6 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 105.
7 Willaime 2009.

employ a distinction between two kinds of secularism, one of which is usually labelled as »hostile« and the other, »healthy«. Kratochvíl and Doležal describe the difference between the two thus: »[…] aggressive secularism violates the principle of equality of religious and secular citizens […]. Hence, the secularism that is acceptable to the Church allows for unrestricted participation of religious citizens in the public debate and calls for religious arguments to be as valid in the public domain as those based on secular reasoning.«[8]

The second key element in the Church's rhetorical-argumentative strategy in their interaction with the European Union is the critique of individualism or, more precisely, the distinction between the two concepts of »human person« and »individual«. While individualism is depicted rather negatively and connected with »selfishness«, the dignity and individuality of each person are seen as something that must be protected. As Kratochvíl and Doležal highlight, the Catholic Church's critique of individualism cannot be understood if interpreted by referring to the classic distinction between individualism and collectivism:

> The current Catholic doctrine highlights the centrality, or even the transcendental grounding […] of the human being but at the same time it stresses his/her social embeddedness (in their family, their society, and humankind). Hence, the Church's critique of individualism does not build on the individual-collective dichotomy, but is based on the argument that both human collectivities as well as individuals are equally answerable to superior transcendental principles and absolute moral rules.[9]

Another key element is the critique of a free market economy. While sometimes supportive of the free market when it comes to European integration, Catholic Church representatives strongly and repeatedly criticise its materialism, especially when they address »consumerist culture« or the international economic order. Kratochvíl and Doležal distinguish between two approaches within the Church's position in the liberal market economy: the approach that appreciates the positive effects of the free market, and that which relativises the autonomy of market forces while stressing that »the free market

8 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 111.
9 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 112.

cannot be judged apart from the ends that it seeks to accomplish and from the values that it transmits on a societal level.«[10] The Church's position is perfectly expressed in one of the texts analysed by the two researchers: since »economy and the market need ethics in order to function correctly«, they »must draw moral energies from other subjects«.[11]

The fourth and »most unambiguous result« of Kratochvíl and Doležal's analysis is that »the project of European integration […] repeatedly gets enthusiastic support from the Catholic Church.«[12] According to the two researchers, two strands of Catholic thought and institutional culture merge here: the transnational nature of the Church itself and the emphasis on the priority of the human person over the state. The »quasi-federalist rhetoric by the Church« is accompanied by a strong critique of nationalism, which is based on the »distinction between the nationalist past and the peace, stability, and prosperity brought about by the European Communities/EU.«[13] The integration of Europe is even described in many texts as a role model for the future global political order.

Kratochvíl and Doležal summarise their results by distinguishing »three basic approaches« or strategies used by the Catholic Church in its discourse about Europe and more specifically about European integration: (a) the strategy of appropriation, consisting of the conceptual reformulation of notions that were rejected by the Church in the past; (b) the strategy of replacement »which seeks accommodation with the EU through offering an alternative term to the notion used in the EU, while hoping that this alternative could be acceptable for the EU as well«; (c) the strategy of rejection which »consists of the identification of some terms with the modern international system (›nationalism‹, ›free market‹, ›nation/state‹ etc.) which allows the Church to adopt a critical position towards the corresponding notions.«[14] According to the two researchers, the most interesting result of their analysis is the Church's insistence that both the institutional set-up and the policy-making processes »are firmly grounded in the Catholic theology of creation and sal-

10 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 112.
11 General Secretaries of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe 2009; quoted in Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 117.
12 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 119.
13 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 121.
14 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 123.

vation (human dignity, solidarity) as well as its ecclesiology and eschatology (the positive view of unification and reservations towards nationalism).«[15]

2. Pope Francis's rhetorical-argumentative strategy

Pope Francis's speeches on the future of Europe basically reproduce the same key elements and rhetorical-argumentative strategies described above. In the first place, they also articulate an explicit critique of secularism: »Regrettably, a certain secularist prejudice, still in vogue, is incapable of seeing the positive value of religion's public and objective role in society, preferring to relegate it to the realm of the merely private and sentimental.«[16] This secularism is not placed on the same level as the secularity of European states and institutions, since secularity is at least implicitly seen as a necessary precondition for an open dialogue with and between different cultures and religions. The Pope applauds the commitment of the European institutions »to invest in intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension« where he sees »a valuable opportunity for open, respectful and enriching exchange between persons and groups of different origins and ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions, in a spirit of understanding and mutual respect.«[17] He underlines »the positive and constructive role that religion in general plays in the building up of society« and refers, in particular, to »the contribution made by interreligious dialogue to greater mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims in Europe.«[18]

The use of the contrast between individualism and the dignity of the person is also very apparent in the Pope's speeches: »Today there is a tendency to claim ever broader individual rights – I am tempted to say individualistic; underlying this is a conception of the human person as detached from all social and anthropological contexts, as if the person were a ›monad‹ (μονάς), increasingly unconcerned with other surrounding ›monads‹.«[19] With this form of individualism Francis contrasts the concept of »person«,

15 Kratochvíl/Doležal 2015, 123.
16 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.
17 Pope Francis 2014b, 6.
18 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.
19 Pope Francis 2014a, 3.

which he understands as intrinsically linked to that of »community« as well as that of »common good«: »Each human being is part of a social context wherein his or her rights and duties are bound up with those of others and with the common good of society itself«;[20] »[c]ommunity is the greatest antidote to the forms of individualism typical of our times, to that widespread tendency in the West to see oneself and one's life in isolation from others.«[21] A particularly interesting concept used by the Pope in this argumentative context is that of »transcendent human dignity«: »[t]o speak *of transcendent human dignity* thus means appealing to human nature, to our innate capacity to distinguish good from evil, to that ›compass‹ deep within our hearts, which God has impressed upon all creation.«[22]

Pope Francis argues that human dignity is the fundamental ideal shared by both Christian churches and secular European institutions: »[t]his contribution [of Christianity] does not represent a threat to the secularity of states or to the independence of the institutions of the European Union, but rather an enrichment. This is clear from the ideals which shaped Europe from the beginning, such as peace, subsidiarity and reciprocal solidarity, and a humanism centred on respect for *the dignity of the human person*.«[23] In contrast to individualism, a person's identity should be understood as »primarily relational«.[24] Not surprisingly, the Pope's argument here revolves entirely around the concept of »family« as the space where relationality is best realised:

> By interacting with others, each one discovers his or her own qualities and defects, strengths and weaknesses. In other words, they come to know who they are, their specific identity. The family, as the primordial community, remains the most fundamental place for this process of discovery. There, diversity is valued and at the same time brought into unity. The family is the harmonious union of the differences between man and woman, which becomes stronger and more authentic to the extent that it is fruitful, capable of opening itself to life and to others.[25]

20 Pope Francis 2014a, 3.
21 Pope Francis 2017b, 2–3.
22 Pope Francis 2014a, 3, emphasis in the original.
23 Pope Francis 2014a, 4, emphasis by the author.
24 Pope Francis, 2017b, 2.
25 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.

The critical discussion of different models and conceptions of the economy also finds ample space in the Pope's speeches. If in certain passages the concept of the economy clearly has a negative connotation – for example when he says that »the time has come to work together in building a Europe which revolves not around the economy, but around the sacredness of the human person«[26] – in others there is a clear distinction between »bad« and »good« economy: »[w]e need to move from a liquid economy prepared to use corruption as a means of obtaining profits to a social economy that guarantees access to land and lodging through labour.«[27] Francis emphasises, in particular, the importance of work for the dignity of the person and the integrity of the family as a central aspect of economic structures:

> The time has come to promote policies which create employment, but above all there is a need to restore dignity to labour by ensuring proper working conditions. This implies, on the one hand, finding new ways of joining market flexibility with the need for stability and security on the part of workers; these are indispensable for their human development. It also implies favoring a suitable social context geared not to the exploitation of persons, but to ensuring, precisely through labour, their ability to create a family and educate their children.[28]

Last but not least, the Pope's speeches are in line with the Church's general enthusiastic support for the European Union described above. The clear and explicit papal support of the European integration project as a model for a future global political integration finds expression in the passages dedicated to the history of this project. To underline the historic relevance of the process of European integration, the Pope highlights how important it is to remember what happened during the two world wars in the first half of the 20th century:

> In the last century, Europe bore witness to humanity that a new beginning was indeed possible. After years of tragic conflicts, culminating in the most horrific war ever known, there emerged, by God's grace,

26 Pope Francis 2014a, 8.
27 Pope Francis 2016, 5.
28 Pope Francis 2014a, 8.

> something completely new in human history. The ashes of the ruins could not extinguish the ardent hope and the quest of solidarity that inspired the founders of the European project. They laid the foundations for a bastion of peace, an edifice made up of states united not by force but by free commitment to the common good and a definitive end to confrontation. Europe, so long divided, finally found its true self and began to build its house.[29]

As the Pope develops these themes, the use of metaphors represents a key element of his rhetorical-argumentative strategy. The analysis of his speeches shows that he draws in particular on three groups of metaphors. What first catches the eye is the strong presence of metaphors related to construction or building which are scattered throughout all five of Pope Francis's speeches. Through these metaphors, Europe is represented as something that has been successfully built and the construction of which must be continued. In reference to the past, Europe is something that has being built »on the ashes of ruins«[30] and that needed to be »rebuilt […] in a spirit of mutual service«.[31] With regard to the present, Europe is described as »an edifice made up by states« and which, for this reason, is no more »divided«, since now all Europeans live in the same »house«.[32] But construction metaphors are not always used in such a positive way. For example, the Pope criticises more or less explicitly those policies of European member-state and political parties whose purpose is the erection of internal »walls« within the European »house«:

> This »family of peoples« which has commendably expanded in the meantime, seems of late to feel less at home within the walls of the common home. At times, those walls themselves have been built in a way varying from the insightful plans left by the original builders. Their new and exciting desire to create unity seems to be fading; we, the heirs of their dream, are tempted to yield to our own selfish interests and to consider putting up fences here and there.[33]

29 Pope Francis 2016, 1.
30 Pope Francis 2016, 1.
31 Pope Francis 2014b, 2.
32 Pope Francis 2016, 1.
33 Pope Francis 2016, 1.

Construction metaphors are also used for criticising a form of politics which is only focused on »immediate results« and which therefore lacks a long-term political vision and forgets »those experiences that enabled our peoples to surmount the crises of the past«. »What we need today is a ›memory transfusion‹« – the Pope argues – that »can free us from today's temptation to build hastily on the shifting sands of immediate results.«[34] The same image of »building on sand« is used also in another argumentative context where the Pope stresses the fundamental role of the »family« for the future of Europe: »The family, united, fruitful and indissoluble, possesses the elements fundamental for fostering hope in the future. Without this solid basis, the future ends up being built on sand, with dire social consequences.«[35]

The family is not only a central issue that the Pope addresses repeatedly, but it is also the source of another group of metaphors he frequently uses to discuss Europe. First, he introduces the image of today's Europe as a »grandmother« which is »no longer fertile and vibrant.«[36] This image is also taken up in another, later speech and contrasted with that of Europe as a »fertile mother«:

> In addressing the European Parliament, I used the image of Europe as a grandmother. I noted that there is a growing impression that Europe is weary, aging, no longer fertile and vital, that the great ideals that inspired Europe seem to have lost their appeal. There is an impression that Europe is declining, […] that it is more concerned with preserving and dominating spaces than with generating processes of inclusion and change. […] Europe, rather than protecting spaces, is called to be a mother who generates processes.[37]

The same image of Europe as a fertile mother is used later in the same speech for a second time: »With mind and heart, with hope and without vain nostalgia, like a son who rediscovers in Mother Europe his roots of life and faith, I dream of a new European humanism […]. I dream of a Europe that is young, still capable of being a mother: a mother who has life because she respects

34 Pope Francis 2016, 2.
35 Pope Francis 2014a, 6.
36 Pope Francis 2014a, 6.
37 Pope Francis 2016, 2.

life and offers hope for life.«[38] As the Pope argues in an earlier speech, just as Europe is a mother, both member-state and the peoples of Europe should be understood metaphorically as its (or her) children: »all authentic unity draws from the rich diversities which make it up: in this sense it [Europe] is like a family, which is all the more united when each of its members is free to be fully himself or herself. I consider Europe as a family of peoples.«[39]

Another category of metaphors that recurs frequently pertains to the natural world, specifically to plant life, such as »roots« and »fruit«. Pope Francis speaks for example of the »religious roots« and their »fruitfulness and potential« for Europe;[40] of the family that is »fruitful« because it is »a harmonious union of the differences between man and woman«;[41] of the »just distribution of the fruits of the earth« in Europe;[42] of the Church that has to bring back »the pure water of the Gospel to the roots of Europe«;[43] of peace as »the fruit of a free and conscious contribution by all.«[44] We find the most frequent use of metaphors related to natural life in Pope Francis's address to the Council of Europe, where the extended metaphor of the »poplar tree« becomes the image for Europe's self-understanding:

> In one of his poems, [Italian poet Clemente] Rebora describes a poplar tree, its branches reaching up to the sky, buffeted by the wind, while its trunk remains firmly planted on deep roots sinking into the earth. In a certain sense, we can consider Europe in the light of this image. Throughout its history, Europe has always reached for the heights, aiming at new and ambitious goals, driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge, development, progress, peace and unity. But the advance of thought, culture, and scientific discovery is entirely due to the solidity of the trunk and the depth of the roots which nourish it. Once those roots are lost, the trunk slowly withers from within and the branches – once flourishing and erect – bow to the earth and fall. This is perhaps among the most baffling paradoxes for a nar-

38 Pope Francis 2016, 6.
39 Pope Francis 2014a, 5.
40 Pope Francis 2014a, 5.
41 Pope Francis 2017b, 3.
42 Pope Francis 2016, 5.
43 Pope Francis 2016, 5–6.
44 Pope Francis 2017, 3.

> rowly scientific mentality: in order to progress towards the future we need the past, we need profound roots. We also need the courage not to flee from the present and its challenges. We need memory, courage, a sound and humane utopian vision. Rebora notes, on the one hand, that »the trunk sinks its roots where it is most true«. The roots are nourished by truth, which is the sustenance, the vital lymph, of any society which would be truly free, human and fraternal. On the other hand, truth appeals to conscience, which cannot be reduced to a form of conditioning. Conscience is capable of recognizing its own dignity and being open to the absolute.[45]

The image of the poplar tree is here used to link the past with the future, and religious and cultural tradition with scientific and political progress. Moreover, the image conveys the idea that in order to develop in a positive way, Europe must remain grounded in inalienable principles and truths. For the Pope, Christianity, and in particular the Catholic Church, represents the primary actor that has the task of reminding the European institutions what these inalienable principles and truths are.

And finally, the Pope uses Raphael's fresco of the School of Athens as a metaphor to establish a contrast with the image of Europe as a grandmother and criticise current European politics and policies:

> One of the most celebrated frescoes of Raphael is found in the Vatican and depicts the so-called »School of Athens«. Plato and Aristotle are in the centre. Plato's finger is pointed upward, to the world of ideas, to the sky, to heaven as we might say. Aristotle holds his hand out before him, towards the viewer, towards the world, concrete reality. This strikes me as a very apt image of Europe and her history, made up of the constant interplay between heaven and earth, where the sky suggests that openness to the transcendent – to God – which has always distinguished the peoples of Europe, while the earth represents Europe's practical and concrete ability to confront situations and problems. The future of Europe depends on the recovery of the vital connection between these two elements. A Europe which is no

45 Pope Francis 2014b, 3–4.

> longer open to the transcendent dimension of life is a Europe which risks slowly losing its own soul and that »humanistic spirit« which it still loves and defends.[46]

Like the image of the tree, the image of the School of Athens has the function of harmonising or rather creating a bridge between the immanent dimension of politics and the transcendent dimension of religion. The Pope stresses that the resolution of concrete political problems – he often uses the term »crisis«, referencing the economic crisis, migrant crisis, crisis of institutions – is only possible if Europe stands firmly grounded in its tradition of »openness to the transcendent«, a condition *sine qua non* for the maintenance of Europe's »soul«. And what is the »soul« of Europe for the Pope? The answer is predictable:

> At the origin of European civilization there is Christianity, without which the Western values of dignity, freedom and justice would prove largely incomprehensible. As Saint John Paul II affirmed: »Today too, the soul of Europe remains united, because, in addition to its common origins, those same Christian and human values are still alive.«[47]

Less explicit, but perhaps even more exemplary for the Pope's rhetorical-argumentative strategy is a passage in his speech before the European Parliament:

> An anonymous second-century author wrote that »Christians are to the world what the soul is to the body«.[48] The function of the soul is to support the body, to be its conscience and its historical memory. A two-thousand-year-old history links Europe and Christianity. It is a history not free of conflicts and errors, and sins, but one constantly driven by the desire to work for the good of all. […] Europe urgently needs to recover its true features in order to grow, as its founders intended, in peace and harmony, since it is not yet free of conflicts.[49]

46 Pope Francis 2014a, 4.
47 Pope Francis 2017a, 3.
48 Cf. Letter to Diognetus, 6, quoted after Pope Francis 2014a.
49 Pope Francis 2014a, 7–8

3. Critical reflection on the function of metaphors in Pope Francis's Europe speeches

Both Hans Blumenberg and Paul Ricœur understand metaphor to be a valid and effective rhetorical device which not only increases our ability to understand and experience others, the world and ourselves, but also our ability to make decisions and act in this world. For Ricœur, metaphors show that language is composed of both words and images.[50] Metaphor is a borderline case in which a sentence works with words that are images, and images that are words. This twofold linguistic and visual nature of language allows language itself to refer to the world. For Blumenberg, there are metaphors which are indispensable and therefore legitimate instruments of reason, because, contra Descartes, the ideal of a purely conceptual language is illusory. Blumenberg calls these indispensable elements of language »absolute metaphors«, that is, »*foundational elements* of philosophical language, ›translations‹ that resist being converted back into authenticity and logicality«.[51] Blumenberg's »absolute metaphor« corresponds to Immanuel Kant's definition of a »symbol«: »the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition [*Anschauung*], to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond.«[52]

The language used by the Pope in his speeches, as we have seen in the previous section, is decidedly metaphorical or, in Kant's terminology, symbolic. Why is this so? Could the Pope have expressed his ideas without using metaphorical language, the language of images? What is the function of his metaphorical language? Let's take the metaphors of plant life and construction as examples. These metaphors should be understood as absolute and therefore untranslatable, in the sense that they cannot be substituted by non-metaphorical (or non-symbolic) concepts. Kant himself gives examples of these kinds of irreplaceable and untranslatable concepts: »[T]he words *foundation* (support, basis), to *depend* (to be held from above), to *flow* (instead of to follow) from something, *substance* (the support of accidents, as Locke puts it), and countless others are not schematic but symbolic hypotyposes; they express concepts not by means of a direct intuition but only according

50 Ricœur 1975.

51 Blumenberg 2010, 9, emphasis in the original.

52 Kant 1987, 228, quoted in Blumenberg 2010, 12.

to an analogy with one.«[53] Thus, when the Pope says that Europe has been »built« by its »founding fathers«, that it is »an edifice made up of states«, that it is like a »poplar tree« that, in order to »grow« and to »flourish«, it has to remain »firmly planted on deep roots sinking into the earth«, he creates an analogy between something that can be experienced through sensible intuition in Kant's sense – the growth of a tree, the building of a house – and something to which *no intuition can ever directly correspond*. The reason for this is, ultimately, quite simple: in his speeches, the Pope expresses normative ideas, values, evaluations about objects – Europe, the European Union, the European Community – that cannot be the object of sensible intuition.

The metaphors of plant life and construction are clearly not exclusive to the Pope's speeches on Europe but can be found in virtually any political discourse about national or transnational political entities (and in many other kinds of discourses). Why? Because they can be understood *intuitively* by any person regardless of their socio-cultural context. However, the Pope also uses certain metaphors in a way that are specifically attributable to the rhetorical and discursive tradition of Christianity. This is the case with metaphors related to the sphere of family life. The analogy constructed discursively by the Pope between the family in the »literal« sense and the »European« family is in fact performative in two senses: not only does the analogy succeed in expressing and enhancing the idea that European states and peoples have to be understood as members of a family and Europe itself as a fertile mother, but at the same time it expresses the idea that a certain (Catholic) model of family – heteronormative, with the main purpose to procreate – is the foundation of any form of political community, be it national or transnational. In other words, it is an analogy that produces a certain kind of meaning on both sides of the analogy itself: just as Europe is a fertile mother who gives birth to children destined to live together under the same roof, the »natural« family has the task of procreating those children who will be children of Europe. The same can be said of the metaphor of the »soul of Europe« in which the analogy drawn between the interrelationship of body and soul and the interrelationship of Europe and Christianity is aimed at giving expression to the idea or, rather, to the *truth of faith* that body and soul, as well as Europe and Christianity, are »inseparably linked«.[54]

53 Kant 1987, 228, emphasis in the original.

54 Pope Francis 2017, 1, emphasis in the original.

To avoid any misunderstanding, it should be noted that I am not suggesting that metaphors using the word »soul« or words that concern family life always produce these meanings or that they always carry the same normative principles and values. I am not even trying to say that these metaphors will remain absolutely irreplaceable, forever. In fact, as Blumenberg highlights,

> [t]hat […] metaphors are called »absolute« means only that they prove resistant to terminological claims and cannot be dissolved into conceptuality, not that one metaphor could not be replaced or represented by another, or corrected through a more precise one. Even absolute metaphors therefore have a history. They have a history in a more radical sense than concepts, for the historical transformation of a metaphor brings to light the metakinetics of the historical horizons of meaning and ways of seeing within which concepts undergo their modifications.[55]

The metaphors of the »soul of Europe« and of the »European family« are absolute in the sense that they are part of a complex discursive framework in which the historically stratified tradition of Christianity always directly or indirectly related and still relates to the idea of God, an idea that can be expressed only metaphorically. In other words, their use is necessary for the formulation of normative principles and truth contents that ultimately legitimise themselves with reference to the idea of God. What is as stake in Pope Francis's speeches about Europe is nothing less than the question of the foundation of the moral principles and values at the core of the project of the European community, such as they are codified for example in the European Convention on Human Rights, and which Francis summarises with the notions of »human dignity«, »freedom« and »justice«. According to the Pope, as we have seen, these values are incomprehensible without knowing the history and language of Christianity. The core of Pope Francis's normative ethics is the idea that human beings have a transcendent human dignity, an »innate capacity to distinguish good from evil« and that this capacity has been »impressed upon all creation« by God.[56] In other words, because human beings participate in God's transcendence through the fact that they

55 Blumenberg 2010, 13.

56 Pope Francis 2014a, 3.

have been created by God, they are able to discern good and evil and thus also to recognise their dignity of living beings as God's creatures.

Interestingly, the relationship between the notion of »human dignity« and the notion of the human being's likeness to God also plays a major role in Jürgen Habermas's reflections on the legitimisation of the modern constitutional state and more generally on the foundation of normative principles. According to the German philosopher, the modern constitutional state legitimises itself through democratic decision-making processes. The self-image of the constitutional state develops in the context of a contractual tradition based on »natural« reason, that is, exclusively on public arguments to which all people should have equal access. The assumption of a common human reason thus forms the basis of justification for a secular state that is no longer dependent on religious legitimation. In other words, the constitution of the liberal state can legitimise itself argumentatively independently of religious and metaphysical traditions.[57] Characteristic of Habermas's thought is the conviction that throughout the history of humankind, and especially in the modern age, language has increasingly taken the place of religion, and rational discourse that of the experience and symbolisation of holiness. For this process he coined the expression of a »linguistification of the ritually sacred«:

> The authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts. The disenchantment and disempowering of the domain of the sacred takes place by way of a linguistification of the ritually secured, basic normative agreement; going along with this is a release of the rationality potential in communicative action. The aura of rapture and terror that emanates from the sacred, the *spellbinding* power of the holy, is sublimated into the *binding/bonding* force of criticizable validity claims and at the same time turned into an everyday occurrence.[58]

Basically, what Habermas is asking for when he writes that »religious utterances must be translated into a generally accessible language«, is a *de-sacrali-*

57 Cf. Habermas 2006b, 253.

58 Habermas 1987, 77–78, emphasis in the original.

sation of the normative content of religious utterances. In fact, he argues that this desacralisation has already taken place in the west through an increasing appropriation of semantic content from the Judeo-Christian tradition through philosophy:

> The mutual penetration of Christianity and Greek metaphysics did not, of course, bring about only the spiritual form [*geistige Gestalt*] of theological dogmatics and a Hellenization – not in every aspect beneficial – of Christianity. It also promoted philosophy's appropriation of genuinely Christian content. This work of appropriation found its expression in heavily laden, normative conceptual networks such as: responsibility; autonomy and justification; history and memory; beginning anew, innovation, and return; emancipation and fulfillment; externalization, internalization, and embodiment; individuality and community. It is true that the work of appropriation transformed the originally religious meaning, but without deflating or weakening it in a way that would empty it out. The translation of the notion of man's likeness to God into the notion of human dignity, in which all men partake equally and which is to be respected unconditionally, is such a saving translation. The translation renders the content of biblical concepts accessible to the general public of people of other faiths, as well as to nonbelievers, beyond the boundaries of a particular religious community.[59]

Habermas's argumentation is based on the assumption that a) certain aspects of religion are untranslatable into a generally acceptable language, which is why, to be accepted in the democratic process of political deliberation, they must be »filtered« through an operation of secular translation; b) it is possible to separate certain truth contents of religious utterances from their sacral »ballast« and to resignify them in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens. Habermas thus believes in the possibility of identifying truth contents in the religious contributions and of incorporating them into the philosophical discourse by »using a description […] from the universe of argumentative discourse that is uncoupled from the event of revelation.«[60] As Badredine Arfi puts it,

59 Habermas 2006b, 258.

60 Habermas 2002, 74–75.

> Habermas wants the language of his discourse to no longer follow the twists and turns (*tropoi*) of religious discourse. His concepts such as, for example, the idea of the equal and unconditional dignity of all human beings are not metaphors; they are, by dint of discourse, products of de-signification of the religious figures and thus constitute new figures, absent from religious discourses. Habermas's secularizing translation thus begins with a de-signification of the truth contents of the religious figures that strips the religious discourses from their religious signification.[61]

I am very sceptical of this theory of translation of religious language into a secular one. Let us take Habermas's own example of a successful translation of a religious »truth content« into a secular one: Habermas argues that the notion of human dignity is a translation of the religious notion of the human being's likeness to God, a translation by which the sacral substratum of the religious notion is thrown away, set aside. What remains is the purely conceptual, non-metaphorical notion of human dignity.

Now, it is clear that the notion of »human dignity«, as Habermas uses it, is a concept and not a metaphor. In contrast, the religious notion of the human being's likeness to God is clearly metaphorical, because every notion or representation of the nature of God is by definition, as we have seen, metaphorical or, in the Kantian terminology, symbolic: »if a mere way of presenting something may ever be called cognition […], then all our cognition of God is merely symbolic.«[62] The »truth content« that all human beings are equal is articulated through a metaphor, that is, in Kant's word, through the transportation of the reflection on one object of intuition (»human being«), to another concept, to which no intuition can ever directly correspond (»God«). And what happens to the notion of the equality of all human beings if we eliminate this image? What remains is a literally »amorphous« notion, a »truth content« without a (metaphorical) form, incapable of expressing meaning. In fact, without metaphorical articulation, it is not possible to answer the question: why is it a truth that all human beings have equal and unconditional dignity? The fact that many secular citizens are firmly convinced of the truthfulness of the notion of human dignity is, I believe, not a demonstra-

61 Arfi 2015, 497.

62 Kant 1987, 228.

tion that it is possible to express this »truth content« in a purely conceptual way, using non-metaphorical language. On the contrary, I believe that this demonstrates that in certain secularised religious notions there is a »secret index« which recalls previous religious meanings without making them explicit. As Blumenberg argues, »the phenomena of secularization derive to a large extent from [the] linguistic genius [of Christianity], from the familiarities that it produced, the transferable materials that it left behind it, and the residual needs that are associated with its materials.«[63]

It is very important here to stress that I am not saying that the idea of human dignity is an essentially Christian or, more generally, religious idea. Following theologian and ethicist Hille Haker, I rather believe that the idea of human dignity is rooted in the human experience of bodily vulnerability, that of ourselves and of others: »Vulnerability encompasses the radical ambiguity of human relations. We do not ›naturally‹ develop into agents; rather, we are addressed and shaped by others *as* (potential, actual, or former) *agents*, in order to *see ourselves as* agents, beings who are able to act on one's own account.«[64] Vulnerability is »ontological, because it does not matter whether we feel vulnerable or invulnerable: human beings *are*, by their nature, vulnerable, i. e. susceptible to be affected by incidents and/or conditions beyond their control.«[65] Vulnerability is »the condition for a most basic openness to the world«[66] and the experience of oneself as vulnerable »involves an understanding of the self as being shaped through its relationships to others, to its world, and environs.«[67] The idea of human dignity is intrinsically linked to this universal experience of vulnerability, and it would therefore be erroneous to consider it as the product or result of a particular culture or religion.

Experiences, however, can be shared and become the basis of collective projects and actions only if they are articulated discursively by the means of historically stratified elements of language. As Habermas himself stresses, the collective generalisation of the idea of human dignity took place in Europe through the »appropriation of motifs and figures of thought from

63 Blumenberg 1985, 114.
64 Haker 2020, 138–139, emphasis in the original.
65 Haker 2020, 139, emphasis in the original.
66 Haker 2020, 150.
67 Gilson 2014, 86.

the Judeo-Christian tradition.«[68] The fundamental problem with Habermas's thought thus lies not in the misconnection of the historical role played by religion in the articulation of fundamental notions of modern and contemporary ethics, but in his theory of the translation of religious language into a secular one. This theory reproduces the Cartesian illusion according to which it is possible to free language from its metaphorical and sacral »substratum«, that it is possible to »filter« language in order to produce a purely conceptual language, accessible to all individuals regardless of their origin, faith, cultural context, and so on. What this illusion hides is the fact that the fundamental values and principles underlying modern and contemporary secularised thought are the result of a secularisation that cannot free the language through which these values and principles are expressed and articulated from its metaphorical and sacred ballast, because, ultimately, »the human relationship to reality is indirect, laborious, delayed, selective and above all ›metaphorical‹.«[69]

The metaphors and images in Pope Francis's speeches should thus not be understood as »mere« decorative elements nor simply as sophisticated means of persuasion, but as necessary components of a discourse of truth aimed at giving a religious and ethical fundament to the normative values and principles at the core of the project of the European community. I agree with Habermas when he writes that »religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life.«[70] However, it is misleading to affirm that »the truth content of religious contributions« should only be allowed to »enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making if the necessary translation already occurs«,[71] because these truth contents are articulated by means of untranslatable images and metaphors. The goal should thus not be the illusory attempt to »translate truth contents« for an alleged »secular public«, but rather to understand, critically interpret and explain how these truths are articulated linguistically and rhetorically. Such an approach, I believe, not only allows us to better understand the language and rhetoric as well as the positions, assumptions, convictions, and goals of (religious)

68 Habermas 2011, 28.
69 Blumenberg 2010, 415.
70 Habermas 2006a, 10.
71 Habermas 2006a, 10.

institutions and social actors, but also to become more aware of the fact that without metaphors, without images, it is not possible to give form and expression to fundamental values, ideals and principles.

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