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POLITICAL CHARITY IN THE SCHUMAN DECLARATION – BETWEEN IDENTITY CRISIS AND INSTITUTIONAL ROOTS

ILIE RĂPCIANU
University of Bucharest
Bucharest, Romania
ilie.rapcianu@ftcub.unibuc.ro

Abstract
Identity crises are the most appropriate moments for reflection on one's roots. The European Union is, unfortunately, in such a crisis that leads to institutionalized political instability and growing Euroscepticism. The solution could be a deep reflection on those moments that were the foundation of the creation and foundation of Europe as we know it today, moments that can reveal to us not only the reasons that were the basis of cooperation between states, but also the common values on which they were based. The Schuman Declaration is such a moment. Robert Schuman's speech of May 9, 1950, carries many of the ethical principles that will constitute the common ground of cooperation and solidarity between states with a view to eradicating war. However, this declaration is deeply inspired by Schuman's Christian background, especially by the principles of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. This research aims to present the point of intersection between the Schuman Declaration and Christian social morality; a point identified through the concept of political charity.
Keywords: *political charity; Schuman Declaration; identity crises; social doctrine of the Church.*
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1. INTRODUCTION

Europe, whose beauty, according to Greek mythology, delighted even the gods, was born Christian. It is impossible to imagine European culture, identity or history detached from the categories of Christianity. This certainly does not invoke a confessional discourse aimed at excluding those who do not adhere to the same religious beliefs; rather, it underlines the fact that, to understand the European project, it is necessary to understand the Christian roots of the „Old Continent".

The influence exercised by Christianity over the centuries in shaping European identity constituted a common foundation on which the founding fathers of the European Union – and, in this context, Robert Schuman in

particular – were able to build the ideal of a lasting peace, making war materially impossible.

The contemporary European construction is going through one of the most difficult periods of its existence. Successive crises – economic, migratory, geopolitical and identity – have produced an accentuation of Euroscepticism and a diminution of confidence in the capacity of the European Union to generate cohesion and common political sense. We observe today, also in the trends of politics in Romania, but not only, a growing affirmation of a disproportionate nationalism. In this context, the fundamental question regarding the nature of the European project resurfaces: is the European Union merely an economic and administrative structure or does it represent the expression of a political community founded on common moral and spiritual values, implicitly on the value of political charity?

This presentation proposes a reinterpretation of the Schuman Declaration from the perspective of the concept of ”political charity”, developed especially by the Social Doctrine of the Church, understood not as a simple individual virtue, but as a principle of historical reconciliation, solidarity and mutual responsibility between peoples. The central hypothesis is that the original European project was founded on an ethical-political vision inspired by Christian personalism and the Christian-democratic culture of post-war Europe, and the current identity crisis can also be interpreted as an effect of the rupture between European institutions and their founding moral roots. In this sense, in this conference, I will try to talk about the history of the Schuman Declaration, about the concept of political charity as it is used by the magisterium of the church and about the intersection between the two related areas: the founding of the European Union and the Social Doctrine of the Church.

2. POLITICAL CHARITY IN QUESTION

First, for understanding the problematic of influence exercised by the magisterium of Church above the Schuman Declaration, it is necessary to observe the definition and evolution of the concept of political charity, because only from an evolutionary perspective of the concept can we understand the true meaning of this concept.

Pope Pius XI, addressing the Catholic universities of Italy in 1927, stated that politics is “the realm of the broadest charity, of political charity, of which it may be said that nothing else is superior to it, except religion.” Through this “celebrated” statement (Sorge, 2010, p. 192), Pope Pius XI opened the way to a magisterial reflection that would continue into the present day. The concept of political charity articulated by the Supreme Pontiff in his address would become a fundamental guiding principle for the involvement of the faithful in political life – and thus, indeed, the ultimate purpose of such involvement. Unfortunately, however, Pope Pius XI did not pursue his reflection by offering a precise

definition of this concept, which, as noted above, can give rise to considerable perplexity. Nevertheless, the principle would subsequently be extensively developed and, even when not explicitly cited, would be presented as a fundamental criterion for discerning political engagement.

This trajectory is articulated at length by the same Supreme Pontiff in the Encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, in which, addressing totalitarian ideologies, he states that social love, together with justice, can redefine social relations, since these virtues constitute the soul of action directed towards the common good (Pope Pius XI, 1931, no. 88). A similar interpretation can be found in the Encyclical *Mater et magistra* of Saint Pope John XXIII, which specifies that justice and social charity constitute the "supreme criterion" for the activity of political and economic institutions, drawing explicitly on the Encyclical of Pope Pius XI (Pope John XXIII, 1961, no. 39).

In this regard, the Second Vatican Council, taking up the idea of political charity, solemnly expresses the dignity proper to political life and states that "political life," – whose purpose is the good of all that is, the common good – requires a certain strength and, above all, love (Second Vatican Council, 1965, no. 75). Likewise, in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens*, Pope Paul VI recognizes politics as an exacting form – "although not the only one" – of service to others (Pope Paul VI, 1971). Mention should also be made of the message delivered by Saint Pope Paul VI on Pentecost in 1970, in which he called for the inauguration of a new, axiologically grounded sociology which, by recognizing the dignity and rights of all human beings, could inaugurate a "civilization of love."

From the very rich magisterium of Pope John Paul II, I shall limit myself to two uses of this concept. In the Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, the Pope asked whether human progress, so visible and so beneficial in certain respects, truly leads to an increase in social love (Pope John Paul II, 1979, no. 15). In the Encyclical *Dives in misericordia*, John Paul II emphasizes the primacy of love over justice (Pope John Paul II, 1980, no. 4) and states that love alone can reveal to human beings their true nature and of elevating human relationships to the level of fraternity (Pope John Paul II, 1980, no. 14).

Nor does Pope Benedict XVI depart from the concept of political charity; rather, he develops and applies it in a particularly well-articulated manner. Both the Encyclical *Deus caritas est* (2006) and *Caritas in veritate* (2009) are devoted extensively to the "problematic" of charity. In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict employs the terminology of "social charity," identifying it with the involvement of the faithful in political life – an involvement that must be animated by the charity they are called to live out in its social dimension (Pope Benedict XVI, 2006, no. 29). Similarly, in *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict affirms that charity exists at the level of macro-systems, including the political system itself (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, no. 2), and that this political path of charity is

pursued through the exercise of one's mission toward the ultimate end of politics, namely, the common good (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, no. 7).

It is worth noting that the Supreme Pontiff who would devote the most extensive magisterial treatment to the concept of political charity is Pope Francis. As early as his programmatic document, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis highlighted the importance of this form of political engagement, praying for an increase in the number of politicians who recognize the lofty vocation to which political life is called – the vocation to charity (Pope Francis, 2013, no. 205), explicitly citing Pope Pius XI. The most extensive development of the concept under consideration can be found in the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (2020), where he identifies the criteria that characterize such charity. "For an individual to help a needy person is good, but when he joins with others in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, he enters 'the realm of the broadest charity, political charity,' Pope Francis states (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 180). The Supreme Pontiff further describes this form of charity as an imperative love directed toward the creation of healthier institutions (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 186), institutions capable of providing the necessary space for individual acts of charity. As he explains:

> Charity is to stand close to a person who is suffering, and charity is also everything that is done, even without direct contact with that person, to change the social conditions that cause their suffering. If someone helps an elderly person cross a river—and that is itself an excellent act of charity—the politician builds a bridge, and that too is charity. If someone helps another person by providing food, the politician creates a job for that person and practices a high form of charity that ennobles his political activity (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 186).

It is equally important to note that Pope Francis identifies three essential characteristics of political charity. First, there is a preferential option for those who are last, suffering, and poor (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 187), which seeks to rediscover the dignity of the peripheries. Political charity is also open to all (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 190), thereby creating the possibility of dialogue and encounter. Finally, good politics is characterized by tenderness (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 194), expressed through proximity and concreteness. The Supreme Pontiff concludes his reflection on political charity by stating that "politics is more noble than the appearances of marketing" (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 197).

In his first document, *Dilexi te*, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that, in the dramatic situation in which we find ourselves, "charity has the power to change reality" (Pope Leo XIV, 2025, no. 91). This first major document of Pope Leo's pontificate, devoted to a significant extent to the Church's social doctrine and to concrete engagement on behalf of the poor, contains, alongside extensive citations from previous pontiffs, a clear invitation to an engagement in love that transcends barriers and knows no limits. Love is "a way of looking at life and

living it," and through this form of charity, "the Church, which knows no enemies to fight, but only men and women to love," becomes the Church "that today's world needs" (Pope Leo XIV, 2025, no. 120).

Observing this historical development of the concept of political charity, it seems readily understandable to ask whether an institution itself can love – particularly when this question is posed in the context of an institution's influence on the founder of an institution such as the European Union.

2.1. Theoretical Propositions of Applicability

The fundamental question concerning the possibility of an institution demonstrating itself capable of love has guided various philosophers and theologians, particularly those working within the field of ethics, to respond to this proposition in different ways or to advance original approaches.

In this regard, B. Sorge emphasizes the Christian's vocation to engage in the promotion of the Gospel even within the political sphere, a vocation rooted in Baptism, while cautioning against absolutizing politics (Sorge, 2010). For Sorge, politics is a sphere in which the Christian vocation to communicate and promote the values of the Gospel must be expressed, while he simultaneously draws attention to the danger that could arise from a form of totalization of politics. In other words, politics is not the sole sphere of evangelization, but it must be one of the spheres in which the Christian vocation finds expression. This perspective is particularly significant because it enables us to connect the mission of promoting Christian values with the Baptism that one has received. In Schuman's life, which constitutes the particular case examined by this article, his identity as a Christian was a defining characteristic that guided the whole of his existence.

At the same time, the theologian Luigi Alici begins his analysis of social charity from a distinctive observation. He argues that the existence of a legitimate state presupposes the existence of a people, which, in turn, requires harmony in order to function properly. This harmony is grounded precisely in a "heartbeat in unison," that is, in the sharing of a common love, since, even within the socio-political sphere, "everything begins and ends with love" (Alici, 2019, p. 12). Alici's approach begins with the concept of the state and the question of its legitimacy, rather than with the personal vocation of each baptized person, which he merely presupposes. In this sense, the people constituting any state require a certain harmony in order to function, and this harmony has no other genuine foundation than charity lived out even in its political dimension.

It is also worth mentioning Luigino Bruni, who overturns the conventional economic paradigm of contract and friendship by introducing the category of an *agapic economy*, capable of establishing healthier forms of social relations. He argues for a necessary gradation between these economic paradigms, while

warning against the danger of conflating them: “let not the contract accomplish what friendship accomplishes, and let not friendship accomplish what agapic love accomplishes,” since this form of love, identified by the term agape, is, according to Bruni, *transitive*: A gives to B, and B, in turn, gives to C (Bruni, 2015, pp. 7–8). Since economics also stood at the heart of Schuman’s efforts to reform Europe in order to put an end to war, we discover here a sphere in which the practical dimension of charity can be brought into relief, precisely in order to attain a state of solidarity in which the common good becomes superior to private and exclusionary goods.

This theological-philosophical reflection reveals a fundamental progression. Sorge identifies the general framework, namely, the vocation of every Christian to engage in political life; Alici, by contrast, provides the driving force behind this vocation – love as the foundation of harmony and of the state; while Bruni illustrates its practical mode of application through the agapic economy. Building upon the premises of this progression, as well as upon the specific content of the concept of “political charity,” we can examine whether Robert Schuman’s political project – and, more specifically, his Declaration – was influenced by the Church’s Social Doctrine and by the ethical and social values promoted by Christianity.

3. THE SCHUMAN DECLARATION AND THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE

The Europe of 1950 was marked by the trauma of the Second World War. The material and moral destruction produced by the conflict made it impossible to return to the old European balance based on national rivalries and rather local interests. In this context, the project formulated by Robert Schuman aimed not only at the economic reconstruction of the continent, but above all at the historical reconciliation between France and Germany as the basis for a truly lasting peace that would make war impossible from a material point of view.

Schuman's speech cannot be understood exclusively in terms of political realism or economic pragmatism. His intellectual formation and proximity to European Christian-democratic circles contributed to the articulation of a vision of Europe as a space of solidarity and the common good. This article does not aim to present an exhaustive biography of Schuman, but it is important to mention that Mayne even said that Schuman lived simply like a priest (Mayne, 1996, p. 24; Chaplin, 2016, p. 27), and his religiosity was extremely serious. Equally, at the time, he was nicknamed "the saint in a business suit" (Langley, 1982, p. 8; Krijtenburg, 2015, p. 154). Also, the ideas of Christian personalism, developed by thinkers such as Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, profoundly influenced the political culture of the founding fathers of the united Europe (Langley, 1982). Personalism affirmed the centrality of the dignity of the person and the need to build a political community based on cooperation, responsibility and solidarity. In this paradigm, politics is not reduced to the

management of competing interests but becomes an instrument of reconciliation and the achievement of the common good.

The text of Robert Schuman's Declaration of 9 May 1950 is imbued with concepts advanced by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. In this regard, Schuman's intellectual and spiritual background helps explain his decision to draw upon Christian values in his vision of social organization. Thus, Schuman called for a "de facto solidarity" that would enable the creation of a space for lasting peace. This solidarity presupposed a profound reconciliation between France and Germany, achieved by overcoming the misunderstandings that had fragmented the European continent and ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the two World Wars. Such solidarity cannot be properly understood outside the intellectual and spiritual framework that inspired Schuman – namely, the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Solidarity, or, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "social friendship," constitutes a remedy against the "structures of sin" within society (Pope John Paul II, 1987, no. 37). Solidarity is a visible expression of "social charity" (Pope John Paul II, 1991, no. 10), insofar as it entails recognizing the other – whether an individual, a group, or a nation – as a person rather than as an instrument to be exploited in the pursuit of hegemonic or imperialist objectives (Pope John Paul II, 1987, no. 39), objectives that would inevitably lead to conflicts of the most devastating kind. This vision was also shared by Schuman. He sought to establish a de facto solidarity that would lead to the "elimination of old oppositions" and remove the possibility of a new war (Schuman, 1950).

The text of the Schuman Declaration contains one of the fundamental formulas of the European construction. Even if the purpose of the Declaration may seem at first glance to be purely economic, yet in the first part, a theoretical substantiation of the practical principles enunciated in the second section of the declaration, we encounter principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church enunciated since the Encyclical *Rerum novorum* of Pope Leo XIII (1891). Schuman mentions that the main purpose of the organization that France and Germany will found is that of maintaining peace and calls, in this sense, for a de facto solidarity. Schuman says: „Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity" (Schuman, 1950). This „de facto solidarity" represents more than an economic mechanism of interdependence. It expresses the idea that peace can be guaranteed by transforming relations between states into a community of mutual responsibility. In this sense, solidarity becomes an institutionalized moral category.

The point of intersection that is of relevance to our research lies precisely in this understanding of solidarity as an expression of social charity. Solidarity among peoples, which, in Schuman's vision, entails an equitable distribution of resources through the establishment of a European community of coal and steel,

constitutes an expression of political charity – a form of love that looks beyond the pragmatic organization of profit toward a society of peace and a civilization of love. Solidarity, however, cannot be created through a single plan or achieved instantaneously; rather, it requires sustained common efforts (Schuman, 1950), underpinned by a shared determination to prevent the tragedy of war and destruction.

Political charity, in the sense proposed by the Church's Social Doctrine, designates precisely this capacity of politics to transform antagonism into cooperation and conflict into shared responsibility, to nullify the factors that determine poverty and social injustice (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, no. 207–208). While individual charity, viewed as a personal virtue, involves directly helping a person in need - essentially direct contact; political charity is a broader concept that involves transforming institutions and systems from within to achieve the common good. The Franco-German reconciliation is the clearest expression of this logic. After centuries of conflicts and after two devastating world wars, the community project proposed a new political paradigm based not on domination but on collaboration. In this sense, the European Coal and Steel Community was not only an economic institution, but a mechanism for the moral and political pacification of Occidental Europe. In this sense, the very materials that constituted the raw material of the First World War – coal and steel – are converted into the material of peace in Schuman's thinking.

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION – RE-READING THE DECLARATION

Rereading the Schuman Declaration allows us to recover an often-forgotten dimension of the European project: that of politics as a practice of reconciliation and solidarity. The concept of political charity does not imply the transfer of a religious virtue to the public space in a confessional manner, but rather the affirmation that the European political order needs a moral foundation that goes beyond simple technocratic or economic logic. Pope Pius XI, addressing Catholic universities in Italy, said in 1927 that politics is „the domain of the vastest charity, of political charity, to which it can be said that nothing else is superior, except religion". With this statement that „remains famous" (Sorge, 2010, p. 192), Pope Pius XI opened the door to a magisterial reflection that will continue to this day. The concept of political charity that the Sovereign Pontiff enunciates in his speech will represent the fundamental line for the involvement of believers in politics – thus becoming the goal of such involvement. Subsequent magisterial development has shown us that political charity does not refer only to the category of involvement, but to the very motivation on which the entire political life is based. It is not the institution that loves, but the people who make it up who, looking at their brothers and sisters, see faces, and not numbers, who need to be helped, supported and, above all, loved. This is how

Pope Francis expressed himself in the encyclical Fratelli tutti, in which he offers ample space for reflection on political charity understood as a force for universal fraternity.

The relevance of Schuman's vision of solidarity and peace based on shared responsibility among states becomes evident in a Europe faced with political polarization, institutional distrust, and identity fragmentation. Recovering the ethical dimension of European construction does not mean abandoning political modernity but rediscovering the principles that made European reconciliation possible after the war.

The Schuman Declaration can be interpreted not only as a founding act of European economic integration, but also as a document of a political philosophy of solidarity and reconciliation. The idea of „solidarity in fact" expresses the attempt to institutionalize an ethic of mutual responsibility between states and peoples. The current identity crisis of the European Union highlights the limits of an exclusively technocratic construction and the need to return to the symbolic and moral dimension of the European project. In this perspective, the concept of political charity offers a relevant interpretative key for understanding the institutional roots of a united Europe and for reflecting on its political future. Therefore, rediscovering the intellectual and moral heritage of Europe's founding fathers can represent not only a historical exercise, but also a resource for the regeneration of the contemporary European project. Such a programmatic discourse inspired by the principles of personalism will impose on the construct of the European Union an axiological structure – based on common values – which will be strongly highlighted by the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007. Even if after 2005, after the failure of the European Constitution project, the trust and legitimacy of the construct lose relevance, nevertheless, the axiological foundation, on that de facto solidarity announced by Schuman, allows the re-evaluation of a „common ethical floor" – as the philosopher Luigi Alici expressed it – for the promotion of the common good and, above all, of a European identity that finds its roots in values and not – necessarily – in institutions or bureaucratic structures.

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