Abstract: Many politicians and academics consider European identity as rooted in Christian values. Two main questions arise from this assumption: does the refusal of Christian roots undermine the political identity of Europe? do unbelievers miss the understanding of music deeply connected with the Christian message, in this way undermining also the cultural identity of Europe? This study analyzes these themes, focusing in particular on the role music can play, both in the cultural and in the political field, in order to reconcile believers’ and unbelievers’ positions.

Key words: Bach, beauty, cultural identity, Gestalt, shared values

A large part of the European public opinion considers European identity as rooted in Christian values, but many Europeans distance themselves from Christianity, as believers in a different faith or unbelievers. This poses the following questions: 1) does the refusal of Christian roots correspond to a refusal of the political identity of Europe? 2) do unbelievers miss the understanding of music deeply connected with the Christian message, in this way undermining also the cultural identity of Europe? 3) can music play a political role, reconciling the different positions?

In order to examine these issues, I will analyze at first the concept of European identity. European-ness is a highly attractive concept, which remains politically relevant since the early 1970s, when the European Community was searching for a unified image on the international stage. However, defining European-ness seems quite difficult, because, despite all the attention that has been given to it in the past few decades, European identity is a tremendously vague, slippery, and elusive concept.

Therefore, it might be opportune to take a step back, firstly taking into consideration the very concept of identity. Individual identity is defined on the basis of social values, norms of behaviour and shared collective symbols. Yet applying this principle to the European identity may cause some difficulties, because there is little agreement on the very concept of Europe, both among scholars and common people. This may depend on the conventionality of Europe’s geographical boundary with Asia, but also on the different qualification of the territories bordering the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. In 1957 some of them were considered part of the European Economic

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Community\textsuperscript{62}, and even today some researchers and politicians endorse the opportunity of including them within Europe.

In any case, although it is not difficult to argue that a European identity exists by virtue of Europe’s geographical and historical position\textsuperscript{63}, it shall be taken into consideration that this identity is embedded in a context characterized by an ensemble of cultural, religious, economic and ideological factors\textsuperscript{64}. However, the Latin, Germanic-Baltic, Scandinavian, Celtic, and Slavic areas share some common denominators, which all Europeans may recognize as their own. Among these denominators are Greek philosophy and Roman law, which have been looked at for centuries (and still are by now) through the filter of Christian thought, that transmitted the Judaic heredity to Europe\textsuperscript{65}. As Paul Valéry put it “The European is whoever belongs to a people that has embraced the Roman rule of justice, comprehends well Greek education and has accepted and assimilated Christian teaching”\textsuperscript{66}.

Thus, European identity may be considered from a historical-cultural point of view: there is a commonly perceived pre-national or pre-modern past, when political and intellectual elites across Europe shared the same cultural, linguistic, philosophical and religious framework. Scientists, philosophers, literati, artists, and musicians developed early kinds of networks, creating a common background, in which each of them could build on the others’ contributions. In this way they promoted art and culture as never before, allowing for \textit{shared advances} in practical and theoretical knowledge.

This common past is perceived as still relevant for the successful continuation of the European integration process\textsuperscript{67}, and gives origin to a political use of the concept of European identity, which is reflected in many speeches on European integration. Among them is Vaclav Havel’s address to the European Parliament entitled ‘About European Identity’, held in Strasbourg in March 1994, in which he proclaimed that the European Union was based on fundamental, shared values: “The European Union is based on a large set of values, with roots in antiquity and in Christianity which over two thousand years evolved into what we recognize today as the foundations of modern democracy, the rule of law, and civil society. This set of values has its own clear moral foundation and its obvious metaphysical roots, regardless of whether modern

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\textsuperscript{65} Gianfranco Ravasi, The Mother Tongue Of Europe Is Christianity, in Ulla Gudmundson and Ursula Åhlén (eds.) (2010), \textit{Europe’s spiritual roots}, Government Offices of Sweden, Stockholm, 14-18 \\
\textsuperscript{66} Paul Valéry, “History and Politics”, in Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews (eds.) (1962), \textit{The Collected Works of Paul Valéry}, Pantheon Books, New York, 31 \\
\textsuperscript{67} Walkenhorst, supra note 2
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man admits it or not. Thus it cannot be said that the European Union lacks its own spirit from which all the concrete principles on which it is founded grow. Under Havel’s guidance a Charter of European Identity was drafted, which stressed those traits which were perceived as fundamental characteristics of the new community: Europe should be not only an economic and social polity, but also a community of destiny, values, and life.

In 2001 the European Council established the Convention on the Future of Europe, whose purpose was to produce a Draft Constitution for the European Union. In the sessions of this body some politicians stressed the importance of Christian roots in the definition of European identity. Antonio Tajani, an Italian Member of the European Parliament, affirmed in 2002 that “The churches, and religion, play an important role in maintaining Europe’s social fabric and defining the cultural identity of the whole continent. We must acknowledge the important part played by our Judeo-Christian roots – together with the Enlightenment, Roman law, universities, the Latin language – in creating the ‘idem sentire de re publica’ (shared conception of the State) without which no political community can survive.”

Erwin Teufel, a leader of the German CDU, sustained in his 2003 speech that “There are three hills, on which the Western civilization is based: Golgotha, the Acropolis in Athens and the Capitol in Rome. The European Union should include in its Constitution the values of those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, goodness and beauty, as well as the values of those not sharing such faith, but deriving these universals from other sources.”

In the same year Gianfranco Fini, Italy’s deputy Prime Minister, suggested that the European Union should be described as a “community that shares a Judeo-Christian heritage”, and that, as Europeans, “we must make more explicit the roots of European identity, which we see as part of the value of the Christian religion.”

Embracing these suggestions, the Conservative group leader Elmar Brok submitted the following amendment proposal for Article 2 of the Draft Constitution, modeled on an article in the Polish constitution: “The Union’s values include the values of those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, goodness and beauty as well as of those who do not share such a belief but respect these universal values arising from other sources.”

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However, from a religious point of view, Europe may be considered as divided mainly in two groups: believers and non-believers. The former think that God is the cause of all living and non-living things, and that this world exists due to Him. The latter deny the presence of God: according to them, the creation and existence of this universe is a merely scientific phenomenon. Moreover, the believers are further divided into various religious groups, which differ from one another although their basic tenets are often very similar.

As a consequence of these divisions, attempts to insert a reference to Christianity in the Draft Constitution for the European Union sparked a hard response from more secular members of the convention. British member of the European Parliament Linda McAvan said that any explicit mention of Christianity would "offend those many millions of people of different faiths or no faith at all" and Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel exclaimed that "Europe is not mono-religious".

Therefore, the Convention canceled any explicit reference to God and Christianity, just passing a Preamble proposed by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, France’s former President, which made reference to “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe”, from which universal values originated. Nevertheless, laic research considered also this act as having an illiberal nature, claiming that it “legislated over cultural matters that in liberal democracies are supposed to be left to the free play of debate, research and imagination”.

Therefore, as the Draft Constitution is a political act, it seems that Europeans faced a political problem, which prevented them from considering themselves as a community sharing the same values.

For the moment, let us put aside the politicians’ point of view, and focus on how the academia considered the theme. In spite of some secularization developments, in which the central role was held by works backing the “privatization of religion” as the “central functional conditions for liberal democracy”, many scholars claimed that religion has not been banished from the political sphere. Even if religion moves to the private sphere, they affirmed, “it continues to influence policy because many modern ideologies that influence policymaking have religious origins. Such influence is often indirect but nonetheless important”, for the reason that it affects not only common

74 J.R. Kokandakar, (2013), *Living Good or not Leaving Good*, Partridge India, Gurgaon, 48
people’s views, their perception of events and their actions, but also the views of the policy-makers. Indeed, several researchers consider Christianity as a central component of the identity of many Europeans, both in the private and in the public sphere: among others, Daniel Nexon stressed that “significant aspects of European identity are tied to a long history involving the consolidation of Latin Christendom as a political-religious community”; Also the poet Cees Nooteboom shared this view, affirming that “today’s Europe is above all a spiritual space, whose roots run deep in the history and civilization of the European continent, and can be identified in the shared use of Latin and the belief in the Christian religion.”

From a slightly different point of view, Agustín Menendez argued that, as Christianity is the religion which has marked most deeply the identity of Europe, even believers in different faiths and non-believers should acknowledge that their identity as Europeans is profoundly marked by Christianity. In effect, Christianity either gave birth to or made an outstanding contribution to the formation of European culture, with its literary, pictorial, sculptural, architectural, and musical works.

In particular, thanks to their non-verbal messages, music and the arts might be considered not only as a shared heritage, but also as an effective point of contact between Christians and believers in different faiths, and even, in Robert Coles words, between those who use their spiritual mind and those who just use their secular one. For this reason, it may be interesting to search for a different perspective on the enjoyment of works of art bearing a Christian message, and in particular of the listening to Christian music, looking for common practices and goals which can be shared by believers and non-believers.

Psychologists agree about the importance of two fundamental human motives, the desire to reduce uncertainty and the desire to obtain pleasure: these are the reasons why humans feel a wish of making sense out of what surrounds them, and generally speaking they want to make sense of their whole life experience. Perceiving a “good form”, or Gestalt, underlying a figure or a music piece, and thus experiencing the beauty of the organizing principle that gave shape to that

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81 Fox, supra note 23, at 59
84 Cees Nooteboom, (2012), Schimpfen gehört dazu, in “Die Zeit”, 9 August 2012, 44
88 Rudolf Arnheim, (1992), To the rescue of Art: Twenty-Six Essays, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 249
work of art, may elicit in the listener an aesthetic experience of delight and even joy. This, in turn, may cause in him or her a strong wish to repeat this experience, searching for further occasions of feeling this kind of delight. Indeed, it could be said that the longing intrinsic in finite beings brings them to strive toward something beyond the moment and beyond themselves, maybe toward a final and infinite goal.\textsuperscript{89}

It is precisely in this sense that George Santayana maintained that “there is a real property in calling beauty a manifestation of God to the senses, since, in the region of sense, the perception of beauty exemplifies the adequacy and perfection which in general we objectify in an idea of God.”\textsuperscript{90} Also Jacques Maritain shared this view, claiming that “the beauty of anything created is nothing else than a similitude of divine beauty participated in by things.”\textsuperscript{91}

Starting from these assumptions, it could be said that the experience of finite beauty implies the unavoidable (although perhaps unconscious) coaffirmation of an infinite Beauty: the reality believers call God.\textsuperscript{92}

This experience may be particularly intense in listening to Johann Sebastian Bach’s music. As a matter of fact, his music can be appreciated by absolutists, referentialists, formalists and expressivists: absolutists and formalists praise the structural perfection of his works, the well-proportioned construction of their forms. Referentialists and expressivists admire in particular some characteristics of these pieces, such as rhetorical and other representational devices which are inextricably enmeshed in their structure.\textsuperscript{94} By means of them, these scholars claim, the piece “speaks to the listeners”, referring to fundamental elements of Christian faith. In those listeners’ opinion, it is thanks to these peculiarities that Bach’s music still lives today, and ministers to the listeners’ ears, hearts and minds.\textsuperscript{95}

In short, absolutists and formalists maintain that Bach’s music is so effective because it can and should be enjoyed as pure sound and form, without connotations of extra-musical elements. In this sense they back a rationalist, “unbelieving” approach to Bach’s music. On the contrary, referentialists and expressivists stress that what makes Bach’s works so powerful is that they

\textsuperscript{89} Richard Viladesau, (2000), \textit{Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art and Rhetoric,} Paulist Press, Mahwah, 43

\textsuperscript{90} George Santayana, (1955), \textit{The sense of beauty: Being the Outline of Aesthetic Theory,} Dover, New York, 8

\textsuperscript{91} Jacques Maritain, (1974), \textit{Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry,} University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 34

\textsuperscript{92} Viladesau, supra note 32, at 42-43

\textsuperscript{93} According to Leonard Meyer, there are different understandings of what music means. Absolutists believe that the meaning of a music piece lies solely within the work itself, without reference to anything outside it. Referentialists argue that music also conveys meanings that in some way refer to the nonmusical world of concepts, actions, and emotions. Formalists believe that the way meaning is perceived in a given piece is primarily intellectual, through understanding of its musical patterns and relationships. Expressivists claim that the feelings and emotions that those musical relationships arouse in the listener are more important. Leonard Meyer, (1956), \textit{Emotion and Meaning in Music,} The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 103


\textsuperscript{95} Rick Marschall, (2011), \textit{Johann Sebastian Bach,} Thomas Nelson, Nashville, 2
convey religious meanings and can therefore be assimilated to very sermons in music. In this sense, expressionists support a “believing” approach.

However, the conflict between these two groups of listeners can be resolved quite easily: in fact, according to A.B. Marx’, in Bach’s music “form cannot be separated from content; it shapes a content that lies ready in the spirit, comes to consciousness, elevates itself to reason, and is expressed in a rational and at the same time utmost expressive way”96. In this manner the perfect beauty of Bach’s works’ rational form can be appreciated at the same time as a secular value by unbelievers, and as a religious value by believers. As a consequence, both the believers’ and non-believers’ approaches can bring listeners to enjoy Christian music, and generally speaking the whole common cultural heritage, enhancing their sense of sharing recognized values in music and aesthetics. These values, in turn, may constitute the basis on which a shared European identity may be built.

To conclude, the common cultural heritage can be the basis on which a shared political view could be built; Christian music should not be considered as dividing listeners, but rather as uniting them in a shared appreciation for beauty; listening to music appreciated by all listeners (although because of different reasons) can play a political role, helping in reconciling the different positions. This may contribute to the improvement of a greater awareness of their shared European identity, urging them to a stronger cooperation in politics and civil society.

References
