Post-Secular Consensus? On the Munich-dialogue between Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas

Olav Hovdelien

Abstract: *Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas met in Munich on the 19th of January 2004 to discuss the topic "The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State." However, in the aftermath of the papers, another and more implicit question has been given more attention; the papers lend themselves to a reading in connection with the on-going discussion of the relationship between religion and social science. In this article I present a reading of the two papers, based on their portrayal of the relationship between the religious and secular descriptions of reality. Furthermore, I shall look more closely at the two speakers' views on what unites the world, as these two themes are intrinsically linked.*

Key Words: Secularism; post-secular; Jürgen Habermas; Joseph Ratzinger; Benedict XVI; theology and social science; politics

The then Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Ratzinger (1927-), and the philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas (1929-), met in Munich on the 19th of January 2004 to discuss the topic "The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State",[1] that is to say, the bonds that keep human society together and the premises for these unifying features. The meeting was organised by the Katholische Akademie in Bavaria, and their choice of topic was hardly accidental. It goes without saying that both Ratzinger and Habermas had clear opinions on the moral foundations of the free state. Their papers have later been published in the book *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion*,[2] which has been translated into many languages. An English edition appeared in 2006.[3]

However, in the aftermath of the papers, another and more implicit question has been given more attention; the papers lend themselves to a reading in connection with the ongoing discussion of the relationship between religion and social science which has played a prominent part in recent years in the fields of philosophy and the social sciences.[4] To put it more precisely: the debate on how to relate religious and scientific descriptions

[1] I would like to thank Dr. Ole Martin Stamnestrø for help in translation and two anonymous peer-reviewers for their constructive comments.

[2] Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005).

[3] Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization. On Reason and Religio.* trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).

[4] See e.g. Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jürgen Habermas *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005); John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

of reality to each other. This debate underpins the dialogue in Munich, and both Ratzinger and Habermas – from their different starting points – touch on the issues involved. In what follows, I intend to present a reading of the two papers, based on their portrayal of the relationship between the religious and secular descriptions of reality. Furthermore, I shall look more closely at the two speakers' views on what unites the world, as these two themes are intrinsically linked.

THE CURRENT RELEVANCE OF RELIGIOUS DESCRIPTIONS OF REALITY

"[T]he assumption that we live in a secularised world is false", writes the well-known American sociologist Peter L. Berger (1929-) in the introduction to his book *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*.[5] Berger hereby distances himself from his own theory of secularisation which he developed in the 1960s—an admirable instance of the ability even of social scientists to confess to former mistakes. Religious descriptions of reality are as much alive today as they were before the Enlightenment, and they have lost nothing of their significance. On the contrary, in the light of the terrorist attacks of the 11th September 2001, it would seem that public commentators have rediscovered this, albeit with a focus on the destructive aspects of religion. The reactions from intellectuals to the terrorist attacks pointed in different directions. On the one hand, there were those who interpreted the terrorist attack, and the ensuing wars against the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, as a confirmation of Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of "The Clash of Civilisations."[6] Julia Kristeva on the other hand posed the question whether the French model and the *laïcité*[7] had now "blown up",[8] whilst others still argued that the need for inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue was greater than ever. What the reactions had in common was the fact that religious descriptions of reality had once more entered the limelight, even if the perspective was a negative one.

However, in addition to the return of the religious descriptions of reality as a political force in contemporary society, there would also appear to be an emerging tendency within philosophy and the social sciences to view these descriptions of reality with more respect. In my opinion, Habermas's paper in Munich should be viewed as an important contribution from a secular philosopher perspective towards the rediscovery of the internal rationality of the religious descriptions of reality, i.e. as coherent systems of thought that deserve their place in the public sphere alongside the secular descriptions of reality. In return, Ratzinger formulated the views of the Church in irenic terms. Thus the dialogue in Munich should be considered an important meeting of prominent representatives of a secular and a Christian description of reality. Furthermore, this was a meeting where the representatives met on equal footing and with a mutual respect for each other.

---

[5] Peter L. Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999).

[6] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[7] In French *laïcité* is a concept denoting the absence of religious involvement in government affairs as well as absence of government involvement in religious affairs.

[8] Julia Kristeva, "Thinking in Dark Times," *Profession 2006* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2006): 13.

It is perhaps Habermas's paper which has received most widespread attention after the meeting in Munich. This is in large measure due to the fact that his paper reflects a fairly radical development in his thinking with regard to his view of the role of religions in society. If not outright sensational, then at least the revised views of the German philosopher on the validity of religious descriptions of reality can be called nothing less than remarkable. Admittedly, this development in Habermas's thinking had been somewhat in evidence in some of his more recent publications,[9] but his willingness to appear next to one of the most prominent representatives of organised religion *per se* – the Catholic Church – nevertheless came as a great surprise to many who had followed the thinking of Habermas since the 1960s. Habermas has moved from adherence to Max Weber's thesis of the world's *Entzauberung*, and an expectation of an increasing process of secularisation, to a position where he is now willing to admit that religious traditions can be important sources of meaning, identity, and solidarity. As opposed to Weber's inclinations towards cultural pessimism, Habermas tends to evaluate this development positively.[10]

Habermas's newfound interest in religion can at least be traced back to his paper 'Glauben und Wissen' which he delivered in St. Paulskirche in Frankfurt on the 14th October 2001, significantly enough only about a month after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. In this paper, Habermas proposes the necessity of finding a *via media* between the smugly self-confident modern project of secularisation on the one hand, and fundamentalist religious orthodoxy on the other.[11] His renewed interest in religious descriptions of reality reached a preliminary climax in 2005 with the publication of the collection of essays *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*, the paper delivered at the award ceremony of the Holberg prize in Bergen, and the publication co-jointly with Joseph Ratzinger of the book which is the subject of this paper.[12]

It will come as no surprise to anyone that what is commonly termed a religious perspective played a key part in Ratzinger's description of reality. Nevertheless, his clear willingness to enter into dialogue, and his adamant insistence on the necessity of listening to other traditions of faith in addition to Christianity may have surprised a few of his listeners. Let it be stated quite clearly: the paper of Ratzinger is a pregnant expression of his interpretation of the relationship between faith and reason, and their roles as complementary approaches to reality.

Ratzinger has discussed political topics before. In fact he has previously written considerably within this field, even if his writings have largely been met with silence from

---

[9] See Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*; Jürgen Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001); Jürgen Habermas, "Religion in the public sphere," http://www.holbergprisen.no/images/materiell/2005_symposium_habermas.pdf (2005). Accessed 10.9.2008.

[10] Austin Harrington, "Habermas's Theological Turn?," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 1 (2007): 45; Austin Harrington, "Habermas and the 'Post-Secular Society'," *European Journal of Social Theory* 10 (2007): 544; Simone Chambers, "How Religion Speaks to the Agnostic: Habermas on the Persistent Value of Religion," *Constellations* 2 (2007): 212.

[11] Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen*. See Harrington, "Habermas and the 'Post-Secular Society'," 544.

[12] Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*; Habermas, "Religion in the public sphere." See also Arne Johan Vetlesen "Faith in religion. Habermas's post-secular search for Meaning and Solidarity. Comments on Jürgen Habermas's lecture 'Religion in the Public Sphere'. http://www.holbergprisen.no/images/materiell/2005_symposium_habermas.pdf#nameddest=habermas. Accessed 1.8.2011.

the established scholars in the social sciences.[13] Ratzinger has principally interested himself with the tension between secularism and the place of religion in liberal democracy. He has at times criticised tendencies towards relativism, and the modern inclination to embrace all things progressive, without counting the human costs involved in such a programme.[14]

For Ratzinger, relativism is a political problem which leads to the denigration of human dignity. He puts forth Christianity as an alternative way of thinking, and a corrective to the relativist tendencies, without proposing a theocratic model of government. According to Ratzinger, Christianity, as shaped by Peter and Paul, represents a healthy attitude to the temporal powers: there is no desire to deify the state, but the separate roles of the Church and the temporal rulers are not to be confused. On the other hand, this way of thinking by no means entails a suggestion that the state should disregard revealed moral truths. The state is not merely an instrument for the exercise of power, but should also ensure the rights of the citizens and the common good. In this connection, Ratzinger refers to Jesus' encounter with the Roman rulers, as described in the New Testament: Jesus recognised the legitimacy of the state and Pontius Pilate's office, but imposed at the same time limits for its authority. This is the proper relationship between Church and state, according to Ratzinger.[15]

HABERMAS: RELIGION MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED AS AN ALTERNATIVE RATIONALITY

Habermas entitled his paper "The Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?" He starts by clarifying that there exists no neutral basis upon which a society can be built. All societies are founded on some kind of religious or ethical basis. As a representative for the Frankfurt school, Habermas does not believe in value-neutrality. The question he wishes to discuss in his paper is what sort of value basis society should rest on and the premises for this, not whether or not it should be based on values. He clarifies at the start of his lecture that he intends to argue in favour of a non-religious post-metaphysical way of legitimising society. He suggests "that we should understand cultural and societal secularisation as a double learning process that compels both the traditions of the Enlightenment and the religious doctrines to reflect on their respective limits."[16]This is not a surprising suggestion from Habermas who has made "discourse" and "ideal speech situation" his watchwords. His grounding of rationality in inter-personal communicative linguistic structures has marked this way of thinking.[17]

Within the wider argument therefore, Habermas rejects the thought that it should be possible to arrive at a moral platform for the state and for society apart from what can be discovered in the free public discourse. He admits that the philosophy of human rights

[13] J. Christopher Paskewich, J.C. "Liberalism Ex Nihilo. Joseph Ratzinger on Modern Secular Politics," *Politics* 28 (2008): 169-176.
[14] Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning. A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 89-90.
[15] Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 57-60. See Paskewich "Liberalism Ex Nihilo," 172.
[16] Jürgen Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?," Habermas and Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization,* 23.
[17] Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handles.* Bind 1-2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981); Juergen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).

originates in the Christian notion of natural law, but he nevertheless maintains, with particular reference to Kant, that 17th and 18th century secular philosophy forms the most important basis for the concept of human rights.[18] The entire philosophical reflection of Habermas himself is based on this very tradition of thought. He undoubtedly stands in continuity with the rationalist philosophy of the Enlightenment. It would indeed be astonishing if he were to break out of this tradition and depart from all of his earlier philosophical reflection.

Even if Habermas does not admit such a discontinuity, it is of utmost interest to note that he says in his paper that naturalistic and scientific world views possess no pride of place in comparison with religious understandings of reality within a constitutional democracy. Habermas writes:

> All that is expected of those addressed by the law is that they do not transgress the boundaries of the law when they exercise their subjective freedoms (and claims). The obedience due to coercive laws concerning people's freedom is one thing; the motivations and attitudes expected of citizens in their role as democratic (co-) legislators are something else.[19]

Furthermore, he writes how important it is that religious and secular citizens treat each other with respect and co-operate in building a just society. This should be their common project, according to Habermas, even if they do not share each other's reasons for engaging in it. Put simply: Members of a society may agree on *how*, even if they disagree on *why*. Religious voices too have their natural and obvious place in society's discourse. The weakness of this way of thinking is apparent: Nothing is really said about the content of the law that is to be respected, and which is supposed to form the foundation for contemporary democratic states, beyond whatever might emerge discursively and through democratic mechanisms. In principle, the foundational laws of a society may have any imaginable content, as long as this is legitimised as a product of a democratic process. According to Habermas, this is what we have to build on; there are no real alternatives.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES AS POST-SECULAR SOCIETIES

It is of further interest to note how Habermas employs the term "post-secular society" to describe contemporary societies.[20] This implies an understanding of religiously based descriptions of reality as present and existing alongside secular descriptions of reality. Indeed, this is how it should be in today's multicultural society. Habermas writes:

> The expression "postsecular" does more than give public recognition to religious fellowships in view of the functional contribution they make to the reproduction of motivations and attitudes that are societally desirable. The public awareness of a post-secular society also reflects a normative insight that has consequences for the political dealings of unbelieving citizens with believing citizens. In the postsecular society, there is an increasing consensus that certain phases of the "modernization of the public consciousness" involve the assimilation and the reflexive transformation of both religious and secular mentalities. If both sides agree to understand the secularization of society as a complementary learning process, then they will also have cognitive reasons

[18] Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?," 20-21.

[19] Ibid., 29-30.

[20] See Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen.*

> to take seriously each other's contributions to controversial subjects in the public debate.[21]

In spite of his post-metaphysical point of reference, Habermas nevertheless now acknowledges religious descriptions of reality as alternative forms of rationality. In other words, they are independent forms of rationality which the secular societal discourse not only has to relate to as abstract phenomena, but forms of rationality which demand respect by virtue of their role as responsible contributions to the societal discourse. Habermas has had to travel a long way here before he has felt able to accede such a place to religions, notwithstanding his continued self-portrayal as "religiously tone deaf" – in the spirit of Weber. We are most assuredly not faced with any kind of religious conversion.[22]

Habermas maintains his methodological atheism. In this respect he remains in Weber's and Berger's tradition of sociology of religion. However, Habermas's new perspectives on the role of religion in the societal discourse manifested themselves through his choice of topic for his paper on the occasion of his being awarded the Holberg prize in Bergen in 2005. His message was that it is imperative for the liberal state to realise the potential for meaning and truth in religion, and that for its own benefit it should allow religious voices to be heard publicly. If the liberal state fails to do so, the danger looms that it may rapidly remove itself from key sources for the making of identity and meaning for its citizens. In this respect, Habermas recognises a peculiar semantic power of religious language not to be found elsewhere, and consequently it is not unreasonable to interpret his message to the effect that societies, such as the West, where Christianity has deep roots, do in fact need Christianity.[23]

So far Habermas, what about Joseph Ratzinger's views on this topic? It transpires that he agrees with much of what his fellow countryman says, even if he argues in a different way, and emphasises other aspects in his paper.

RATZINGER: SECULAR RATIONALITY MUST BE JOINED TO A DEEPER RELIGIOUS FOUNDATION

Ratzinger chose "That Which Holds the World Together" as the title for his paper, with the subtitle "The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a free state", but, unlike Habermas, there was no question mark in the title.[24] Ratzinger's starting point is that it is a characteristic feature of today's societies that they are subject to rapid change, and that the process of globalisation effects an ever greater degree of inter-dependence. Modern technology offers the potential for hitherto unknown ways of positive creation, as well as destruction. This, as he says, gives rise in different cultures to the need for discovering an ethical basis which moves the co-existence in the right direction and facilitates the formulation of a common legal structure which can restrict and regulate the exercise of power.[25]

---

[21] Habermas, "Pre-political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?," 46-47.

[22] Florian Schuller, "Foreword," in Habermas and Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization,* 11.

[23] See Habermas, "Religion in the public sphere."

[24] Joseph Ratzinger, "That Which Holds the World Together. The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State" in Habermas and Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization,* 53.

[25] Ibid., 55.

In the Munich paper Ratzinger warns most forcefully against what he names "pathologies", of both secular and religious kinds. He rejects the "Welt-ethos"-project of Hans Küng as an abstraction without solid basis, and points out that science and reason alone have proved insufficient as an ethical foundation for society. For example, science and reason have not been able to offer adequate protection for the weakest in society. That is why a binding, normative value-basis, illumined by certain principles, is indispensible in order to maintain a society which is both free and good. Both reason and genuinely authentic religious belief are necessary for the maintenance of the moral bulwark of society, according to Ratzinger. Reason and science alone will not suffice. Scientific technocrats need a corrective. So where might this pre-political corrective be found? Ratzinger argues that the solution for the West is to join together secular rationality with its religious heritage in dialogue,[26] but in other parts of the world it may be necessary to find other underlying principles. He writes:

> Today, we ought perhaps to amplify the doctrine of human rights with a doctrine of human obligations and of human limitations. This could help us to grasp anew the relevance of the question of whether there might exist a rationality of nature and, hence, a rational law for man and for his existence in the world. And this dialogue would necessarily be intercultural today, both in its structure and in its interpretation. For Christians, this dialogue would speak of the creation and the Creator. In the Indian world, this would correspond to the concept of "dharma", the inner law that regulates all Being; in the Chinese tradition, it would correspond to the idea of the structures ordained by heaven.[27]

Ratzinger is, in other words, keenly aware of the necessity of being alert to the inter-cultural dimension which must be included, if we are to discuss the foundational principles for human existence today. Such a discussion can take neither Christianity nor the Western tradition of rationality as its exclusive reference point, even if both of these world views consider themselves universal. These two traditions must reconcile themselves to the fact that they are acknowledged as valid only by parts of the human population.[28] Western culture must retain its anchoring in Christian foundational values. There must be an on-going dialogue about what values should form the basis for society between the secular position, such as represented by Habermas, and Christian thinking, as expressed for instance in the concept of natural law. However, with regard to non-Western cultures, Ratzinger seems to be of the opinion that these should develop with close attention to the great religious traditions on which they were originally founded. He expresses these thoughts in greater detail later in the paper:

> It is important that both great components of the Western culture learn to *listen* and to accept a genuine relatedness to these other cultures, too. It is important to include the other cultures in the attempt at a polyphonic relatedness, in which that they themselves are receptive to the essential complementarity of reason and faith, so that a universal process of purifications (in the plural!) can proceed. Ultimately, the essential values and norms that are in some way known or sensed by all men will take on a new brightness in such a process, so that that which holds the world together can once again become an effective force in mankind.[29]

[26] Ibid., 69.

[27] Ibid., 71-72.

[28] Ibid., 77.

[29] Ibid., 79-80.

There are common values shared by all religions, including Christianity, and society ought to be founded upon these values, in Ratzinger's opinion. Human rights should be upheld because they represent true values. Thus a considerable degree of consensus has been reached between the two speakers in Munich. They both enunciate the concern that religious and secular rationalities must enter into a necessary and mutual process of dialogue, with a view to learning from each other. This is the only way humankind can be protected from the latent destructive potential in a separation of religious belief and scientific faith in rationality. It is only natural that a Catholic thinker such as Ratzinger should emphasise the role of reason, with its scientific and technological manifestations, whilst maintaining that it must always be held in check by a system of values.

Herein lays an implicit rejection of the thought that scientific pursuit should be exempt from the world of values, a position which was championed a few generations ago in the aftermath of Weber, but which no longer is considered valid. This way of thinking has not been able to withstand the criticism of the idea of a value-free realm levelled at it by Habermas and his fellow philosophers of the Frankfurt school. The rejection of the positivist ideal for scientific pursuit has been too conclusive. Thankfully, fewer social scientists today remain unconvinced that in order to claim that something is true, it must appear to someone and something, in concrete contexts. Perception of reality is not something external, something additional to "facts", but is rather something which is there from the beginning as knowledge develops.

On the other hand, Ratzinger implicitly rejects postmodern approaches because he holds the Christian doctrine that God created the world. As a Catholic theologian, Ratzinger places great emphasis on the thought that the world was created out of reason and that it has its rational purpose. Another way of expressing this is by calling Christianity a logos-religion. Ratzinger's argument extends beyond the claim that Christianity and secular rationality should be joined together. In addition, it is necessary to engage with other cultures than the Western one, and other religions than Christianity, in order to arrive at a polyphonic value-base for a globalised world. There is much potential theological power in this way of thinking. The insistence on a common platform of values across the spectrum of religious and cultural affiliation poses a number of new questions: What values should be counted as shared values? How does one go about identifying these values? Who is qualified to define these values?

Ratzinger does not discuss this in more detail in his paper, but it would have been very interesting if he had pursued these problems. Furthermore, he hardly touches on what might be termed the multicultural challenges of today's society. That is to say, the fact that today's societies are increasingly marked by the co-existence of differing cultures, partly woven together, partly distinct. "Foreign" cultures do not only exist in other parts of the world. They are increasingly felt also in Europe. Viewed in this light, Ratzinger's analysis of cultural diversity appears perhaps somewhat lacking in nuance at this point. Cultural diversity is no longer to be found merely at a macro societal level, in addition to a sub-cultural level in today's society, but also at an individual level, by virtue of the increasing tendency to individual compositions of cultural components. The same holds true for religious expressions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Habermas and Ratzinger wished to meet and exchange ideas. This may be viewed as a natural development of Habermas's renewed interest in religion, as evidenced by his paper "Glauben und Wissen" delivered in Frankfurt in 2001. Against this background, it would be natural to imagine that Ratzinger would have been an interesting interlocutor even then. Similarly, it should come as no surprise to anyone that Ratzinger from his point of view saw that importance of meeting with Habermas, even more so when the topic was to be the relationship between faith and reason and the foundational values for society. These are central issues in Catholic theology, and have been prominent themes in Ratzinger's thinking both before and after he became pope. The Munich paper is thus representative of his theological reflection.

Nor is dialogue between leading Catholic thinkers and representatives of other world views and faith traditions a new phenomenon. Ever since the days of the apostles Peter and Paul, the Church has engaged in dialogue with alternative schools of thinking within the contemporary philosophical and ideological contexts. The intense exchange of letters between Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758) and the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire is but one example of such a dialogue.[30] This attitude of dialogue can be said to be a natural continuation of the premises laid down by the Second Vatican Council. The Council supported the notion of human rights, where the position of the Church in society is rooted in the right to freedom of religion as a central human right. Furthermore, the Council encouraged dialogue and co-operation with all men of "good will." It is thus a core concept in Benedict's thinking on human societies that it is possible for the Church to open itself to today's situation, without rejecting received faith and doctrine. Benedict has thereby placed himself in the centre of the Church, in between progressive phantasm and pre-conciliar reaction. Furthermore, the dialogue with Habermas shows that Benedict XVI possesses intellectual capacity and intellectual courage to engage in debate on equal footing with one of the leading intellectuals of Europe. In addition, and possibly more importantly, it shows that he is interested in such an engagement. In Benedict the Church has been given a pope with a clear interest in dialogue with his contemporary leading thinkers.

Habermas has been known as a clear critic of contemporary society for some time, and has never been afraid of challenging dominant values, albeit from different premises than those of Benedict. His relatively new-found interest in religions as alternative suppliers of rationalities, points to an interesting development in his thinking. The dialogue in Munich showed that fruitful dialogue between representatives of secular and religious descriptions of reality may be possible, even if the starting point is one of vastly differing opinions. Even though Habermas and Ratzinger pursue different lines of argument in their papers, and partly employ different vocabularies of analysis, it is nevertheless interesting to note the remarkable degree of convergence on the operative level. This makes it possible, at least to a certain extent, to speak of a post-secular consensus based on the dialogue in Munich. Both Ratzinger and Habermas propose a *via media* between smugly arrogant secularism and religious reflection which forgets the decisive role of reason.

---

[30] Schuller "Foreword," 17-18. Virgil Nemoianu, "The Church and the Secular Establishment. A Philosophical Dialog between Joseph Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas," *Logos* 2 (2006): 17.

Author: *Olav Hovdelien,* has a *Ph.D in Religion, Ethics and Society from University of Agder, Norway. He is currently Associate Professor at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Department of Early Childhood Education in Oslo, Norway, where he teaches in the field of Religious Studies and Ethics.*

Email: Olav.Hovdelien@lui.hio.no