

The pope and the EC president – what’s the truth about their relationship?

The pope and the EC president – what’s the truth about their relationship?

The “devout Catholic” president of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, had a meeting with the pope at the Vatican on Tuesday.

The president subsequently went on to meet with Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone, who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Vatican secretary for Relations with States. Van Rompuy gave the pope a book and the pope awarded Mr van Rompuy a “gold medal of the papacy”. It is not clear what Mr van Rompuy has done to deserve such a reward.

The meeting comes at a time when the Catholic Church has become almost hysterical about what it perceives as the rise of secularism across the continent.

“The discussions, which took place in an atmosphere of great cordiality, provided an opportunity for a fruitful exchange of opinions on the international situation, and on the contribution the Catholic Church wishes to make to the European Union,” a Vatican statement said after the meetings. “In the course of the meeting, attention also turned to the promotion of human rights and, in particular, of religious freedom”, a spokesperson for the Holy See declared.

Mr van Rompuy was educated at the Jesuit Sint-Jan Berchmans College in central Brussels, then studied philosophy and economics at the Catholic University of Leuven. He was vice president of the Flemish Christian democrats from 1973 to 1975 and from 1978 he was a member of the National Bureau of the CVP (the Flemish-speaking Belgian Christian Democrat party).

He often goes on religious retreats in the Abbey of Affligem (Flemish Brabant) to “renew his faith and meditate”.

As Catholic propagandist Damian Thompson wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*:

“The wellspring of the Belgian’s Eurofederalism, like that of the EU’s founders, is his Catholic faith. He makes monthly retreats to a Benedictine monastery; even his wife is overawed by ‘the force he can find in his faith’.

“I can already see the words ‘Holy Roman Empire’ forming on the lips of Eurosceptics whose mistrust of the EU draws on a dislike of Catholicism. And perhaps there is just a grain of truth in the jibe: for Van Rompuy is determined to preserve the Christian character of Europe. That’s why he opposes Turkish entry to the EU. As he put it in 2004: “The universal values which are in force in Europe, and which are fundamental values of Christianity, will lose vigour with the entry of a large Islamic country such

as Turkey.” That precisely mirrors the thinking of Pope Benedict XVI.”

Terry Sanderson, President of the National Secular Society, commented: “Without spinning off into the realm of ridiculous conspiracy theory, we do have to wonder what motivates Mr Rompuy’s relationship with the Vatican. Is it entirely healthy and in tune with democratic values? On the plus side, he led a Belgian government that legalised abortion in defiance of the Vatican and the King (who abdicated over the issue), so he might not be the willing puppet of Rome that many suspect he is.

“But to put my mind at rest, I would just like Mr van Rompuy to confirm whether or not he is a member of Opus Dei – the secretive organisation that recruits only the rich and powerful capable of discreetly promoting the Vatican’s agenda through political and financial influence.

“Well, Mr van Rompuy – could you give us a yes or no answer, please?”

See also: [*Van Rompuy reports back to the Vatican*](#)