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Religious Pluralism and Socio-Cultural Integration

Coming from a European or Latin American background I should like to stress primarily religious pluralism rather than a pluralism of religions – by which is meant a variety of religions – though both exist in my country as well as in Latin America. Religious pluralism permits me to speak in the light of my own background and, I wish to apologize for my being rather hard in my observations, for example, neglecting important religions of small minorities converted from an occidental background to an oriental religion. As already mentioned, it is an altogether different worldview and, consequently, an entirely different approach to social, economic, socio-cultural and political situations, which makes basic worldview so meaningful for any socio-cultural integration of a given culture or nation.

1. The European Context

It has been mentioned before that the major part of Europe in the Middle Ages was an integral, socio-cultural set-up. The state, for from presenting any kind of centralism, was composed of an incredible number of smaller 'states' which were held together against any foreign power, or danger, by an elected king or emperor. This 'state', in such different realizations, was philosophically regarded as the *societas perfecta*, perfect, that is, a self supporting, sovereign and autonomous society, which was able to provide anything a human society would need.

The same applied to the Church. It was called a perfect society too, "*societas perfecta*" not in competition with the state, but as an institution, providing for all the religious needs of this given society, and offering at the same time a real variety. This variety of pluralism, both in the political as well as the religious set-up, was the condition of the cultural integration existing in the early Middle Ages in the main part of Europe. The style of Romanic and Gothic,

though with local and national varieties, is common to all nations of Western and Southern Europe. The universities also were centres of the Sciences in common to all neighbouring nations, for example, the University of Paris, that of Bologna or the first German University of Praha, nowadays in Czechoslovakia.

The temptation to unify and bring about uniformity for a given society and a given religion, seems to be inherent in any structure, once power is present.

2. The Holy Roman Empire of the Germanic Nations

The Holy Roman Empire of Germany happened to become intolerant, once the idea of a perfect society, serving all the common needs of a community was considered an already achieved and everlasting reality. The idea, (or ideal) of *societas perfecta* became an ideology, enabling those who were in power to persecute any kind of reformation, any progressively developing philosophy of state and society.

The same thing happened to the Church. The idea of a perfect religious society became an ideology. Instead of a variety of catholic Churches, with their different origins, cultural backgrounds, different rites and rights, also of necessity of different philosophical and ethical approaches to the gospel, of different theologies, – instead of this pluralism, which would have guaranteed and assured freedom, peace and spiritual as well as cultural riches of Christianity, the outcome was a growing centralism of Rome. This in its turn resulted in the persecution of Christians by their own Church. The Church had become intolerant, instrumentalized in the so-called “Sacred Inquisitions.”

When the Reformation, intended by Calvin, Zwingli and Luther as well as by the Protestants, changed from a religious movement to an institution, the inevitable result was persecution. Persecution, already during the life time of Luther and Calvin, not only of Roman Catholics, but also of Protestant Christians, against those, who considered the “Freedom of Christian Mankind”, (a remarkable word of Martin Luther), a necessity, also given to those who were not in power.¹

1. Joseph Adam Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland*, Band I, pp. 307 ff, 371 ff.

3. The Empire-Kaiser-Reich

Now we should move on to the next period which in my opinion, is meaningful for our subject: Empire-Kaiser-Reich. When Bismark's empire was founded, more by force than by conviction, in the year 1870, the Protestants in the New Reich became the majority by cutting off all German-speaking Austrians living in what we today call Austria, parts of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Italy. It was then that the so-called "cultural battle", the *kultur-kampf*, began.

Roman Catholics, as ultra-mountainous, (across the Alps, meaning Rome-minded) became, for the centralistic understanding of state and society during the late 19th century, a real danger in the eyes of Bismark. The outcome of this was, Roman Catholics were prevented from developing a real feeling of being one nation, and that for quite a long time.²

4. The Third Reich

The 'Third Reich', formulated as rule as well as slogan: 'One people, - one nation, - one faith' became, during the most inhuman period German people ever experienced, one people, (*ein Volk*), one empire, (*ein Reich*), one leader, (*ein Führer*), meaning Hitler. Religion was officially substituted by the faith or world-vision (*Weltanschauung*) of National Socialism, which meant, for those who could not see eye to eye with it, such as Christians of different churches and denominations, as well as for Social Democrats, Communists, humanists and leaders of any different organizations, finding themselves inmates of the Concentration-Camps.

It was there that those who happened to survive swore to build a new society and nation, based on spiritual tolerance and the appreciation of values of different ideologies. It is a fact that at least the western part of Germany has been rebuilt by one Christian Party, combining Protestants and Catholics by Social Democrats, and relinquishing Marxism as an intolerant worldview.³

2. Cf. *Saeculum Weltgeschichte* VII, Herder, Basel, Freiburg, Wien, 1975, pp. 240-244.

3. Cf. "Godesberger Grundsatz-Programm, Dokumentation, Grundsatz-programm der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands", Nov. 1959, in: *Heggen Dokumentation* 1, Heggen-Verlag, Opladen, 1975, pp. 38-57.

5. The Spread of new Religions : Islam in Germany

It is a fact that those who first contacted the Muslim workers in our society, (mostly the Turks), were Christians with religious experience - those who were able to appreciate and understand different ethical, moral and cultural values, besides being gifted with an uncommon, widespread optic. Even at a time when the German government had placed severe restrictions on all efforts to unite the families of the Turkish workers, it was once more these who, having accepted and experienced the values of a certain world-view, opposed the government policy, a policy which exactly fitted into the ideology of our sheer materialistic society.⁴

Just one example of an experience in Latin America: It is common knowledge that the West-Indian people became Christians more or less by force. Those who kept on depending the rights of *autochthons* were convinced missionaries, men deeply experienced in religion who fought for the rights of these people (originally Americans), in order to defend their freedom and their religious traditions.⁵

Theology of liberation is the outcome of a broad religious experience of a powerless people. It is amazing to see that it is exactly these powerless people who are able to realize that the West-Indian religious traditions are most meaningful to our religious, socio-cultural values and worldviews.⁶ Side by side, experienced in their religion, people fight against the commonly stated ideology of 'one nation, one faith, and (mostly) one leader', or "Junta", which in Latin America happens to be the reality of dictatorship.

4. Cf. Statements of the representative of the German Bishops' Conference, Bishop Dr. H. H. Wittler, in: "Kirchen streiten für Ausländer", *Frankfurter Allgem. Zeitung*, 21-11-81, also "Kirche unterstützt weiterhin Gastarbeiter", *Kathol. Nachrichten-Agentur*, 26-1-82, and "Nicht Gesetze lösen das Ausländerproblem", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11-5-82.

5. Cf. "Das Leben teilen: Franziskaner unter Indianern", (Othmar Noggler, dr. theol.), in: "Erschaffe mir ein neues Volk", *Brasilienkunde-Verlag Mettingen*, 1982, pp. 106-118.

6. Cf. "Die Stellung der Indianer nach dem Dokument von Puebla", (Othmar Noggler, dr. theol., Vorsitzender des Ökumenischen Ausschusses für Indianerfragen,) in: *Indianer-Reader, Dokumente und Aufsätze zum Aufbruch indianischer Völker in Mittel-und Südamerika* Hg. Ökumenischer Ausschub für Indianerfragen, *Brasilienkunde-Verlag, Mettingen*, 1982, pp. 150-156.

Conclusion

There have been many wars caused by religious quarrels, so-called Crusades, religious wars. It can be taken for granted that behind every single one of these wars there were, and still are, to be found socio-political motives, in particular the anxiety of maintaining power and privileges. They all declare to defend God's will, God's rights and the law and order which serve them, but God has no need of being defended by mankind. Man's rights have to be defended, and that in the broadest possible sense, this being the one and only way to integrate a nation, a continent or even the whole world.