PERSPECTIVES

RELIGIOUS

RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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A PERSONAL ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS

MODERN MAN AND KNOWLEDGE IN GENERAL, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO FAMILIARITY WITH THE PHENOMENON OF RELIGION AND POLITICS

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One of the interesting and wholly expected consequences of the incomparable advance in and accumulation of human knowledge that characterizes our times is the maturing of the awareness that no individual can be equally well informed on advances in every domain – which in turn has led to familiarity with the fact that the individual may be an expert in one or several kindred domains – while as regards every other branch the lay person has to rely on the knowledge of experts who have dedicated themselves wholly to the branch in question. Experts in various fields are (or should be) masters of the entire spectrum of information relating to their discipline – and are usually aware of the arbitrary and indeterminate nature of the theories that are regarded by the uninformed public as unchallengeable truths and the last word in knowledge. This is true, too, of both the phenomena that are the subject of this article, or rather the mutual relations of which form its subject – with the difference that both the phenomenon of religion and that of politics are so very much present in the everyday life of the modern individual that it seems to all of us that we know exactly what is meant when we say religion or politics, and that both are regarded as a kind of public good that has not yet been privatized or professionalized. While, on the one hand, it is a matter for rejoicing that there are at least some areas of human action and knowledge where the great majority of people are not willing to renounce their own involvement and submit to the reductive status of passive consumer of the scientific truths dispensed by experts but to acquire information appropriate for public consumption when such information has been duly processed, on the other hand this joy is dimmed by the regrettable fact that the degree to which modern man is familiar with these branches over which he claims rights, or pays lip service to such rights at least, is barely greater than his knowledge of those disciplines that have long since been irrevocable surrendered to the experts.

After conducting endless discussions on the subject of religion with various people in various countries, it seems to me that it would not be over-pretentious, nor a false generalization, if I were to say that most of my interlocuters were simply making use of a few arbitrary theories, hypothesis and catch-phrases. Thus, for example, while religious people have the habit of boring their interlocuters with assertions drawn from the arsenal of postulates and dogma of their own tradition (and what religious tradition worthy of the name would acknowledge its own arbitrariness, its own contingency, the extent to which it is determined or constrained by social and historical factors, when the human need to compensate for his transience, relativity and mutability by claiming the right to or possession of the unchallangeable truth of the total, absolute, definitive and

immutable lies very roots of religious thought)[1], atheists on the other hand are inclined to dismiss (with the air of an English aristocrat telling his servants they may withdraw with the words *"you are dismissed"*) any serious discussion on the subject of phenomena that they see as derivative and the fate of which is sealed, with some contemptuous remark about the primitive nature of those who still believe, in the twenty-first century, in theories conceived in caves in the cold dawn of humankind or, at best, in the dark ages. But after wasting the first few minutes of single-minded discussion on generalizations, prejudices, theories, hypotheses and catch-phrases cobbled together for consumption by the religious or atheist masses, it turns out that the majority of people have never given enough time to these phenomena to be able to express some personal view based on reflection or weighing the evidence for different theories. One of the best examples of this endless repetition of the same mantras is the phrase, increasingly common in these parts, of the politicization of religion, often based on the naive conviction that there are clear boundaries between religion and politics and that these boundaries must not be crossed. Unfortunately, things are nowhere near so simple. If religion were to be fully, consistently and uncompromisingly depoliticized, every tradition would be left without the mass of norms and dogmas that should be consigned to the rubbish bin of history as the product of the mundane politics of a given period. Equally, if politics – which is the art of managing human communities – were to be consistently purged of the influence of religion and the religious this would necessarily result in our being stripped of the majority of the institutions on which modern law and the modern state are based, and which are indeed among the achievements of religion. There are few instances of any two concepts so intimately interconnected as are religion and politics. Religions have created states – but states have also created religions. By revolution or gradual influence, religions have changed the way states are ordered – but similarly, the apparatus of states has often altered, adapted or subsumed entire religions.

A word or two about the most widespread forms of monotheism and politics

If we concentrate on the five most widespread monotheistic religions today – Judaism, Christianity (in its three manifestations of Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism) and Islam, we shall see that in at least three of these (Judaism, Orthodoxy and Islam) politics are part of the very fabric of the religion, to such an extent that the political elements cannot be eliminated without tearing the whole construct apart, while in the other two cases (Catholicism and Protestantism) it can be said that politics are not an essential part of their creed, although it may often have seemed, throughout their history, as though it were.

Judaism and politics

In Judaism, the Torah is regarded as a set of recommendations for

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[1] Here I shall cite just three classic theses that are a commonplace in the tradition of the three great monotheistic religions, and which tellingly illustrate the absence of will in each tradition to view itself through the eyes of history and to perceive its own cultural contextuality. Judaism is the first legal and philosophical system that stubbornly insisted on total and uncompromising monotheist. Unable to accept the idea that monotheism itself is the consequence of social and historical evolution (to put it in religious terms, monotheism is the truth that was revealed gradually), Judaism makes frequent appeal to an assertion to be found in rabbinic homiletics, and which Maimonides incorporated into his codification of Jewish law

individuals and for voluntary associations of citizens, a collection of personal convictions or an anthology of wisdom – a pre-ordained Divine Constitution providing the basic directions for the establishment of a legal state community (not a metaphysical one) that regulates both issues of doctrines (the prohibition of polytheism or idolatry) and of alternative systems of political administration (a confederation of tribes or a monarchy; a non-hereditary judge as the head of the confederation or a hereditary monarch as the head of a monarchy), of checks on institutions and office-holders (which is one of the basic functions of a prophet), issues of social justice, equality before the law, taxes and, finally, issues relating to civil and criminal law.

The extent to which these provisions are illustrative (which means they should be followed in the spirit, not to the letter) or total (which means that they must be literally implemented in every case) is the subject of undiminished interest and debate between the various Jewish legal schools. All these schools, however, agree that the Torah is not a collection of articles (principles) of faith, but of precepts that regulate every sphere of the life of the community (in ideal circumstances, of the state) including the relatively minor issue (minor by comparison with the others) of dogmatics.

Islam and politics

I shall give precedence to Islam over Christianity because of the major similarities between Islam and Judaism in the self-concept of the two faiths. Like the Jewish attitude to the Torah, Islam does not see the Qur'an as a handbook for the personal spiritual evolution of the individual, but rather as the constitution for the community that it created in its early years and bequeathed to future generations as a legacy to the state. Consequently, the Qur'an deals with the regulation (in broad outline, at least) of every sphere of public and private life, just as does any other constitution. To carry out the Islamic precepts on the public law is as important for the believing Muslim as fulfilling those that prescribe his personal obligations before God. Islamic law, the shari'ah, does not deal solely with issues of doctrine, therefore (such as whether or not there is life after death, whether the destiny of humankind is predetermined, and so on) or ritual (wudu or the ritual ablution before prayers, the formal prayers themselves, halal meat and the like) but also with issues of criminal law. The issue of whether these precepts are illustrative or totalitarian is the subject of a discussion that should be initiated within Islam to a much more central extent.

Christianity in general and politics

In Christianity, in conformity with the fact that it arose as the product of many centuries of fusion between certain Jewish, Greek philosophical and pagan

(see Chapter I, *Prescriptions on idolatry*, in his *Mishna Torah*) according to which everyone was originally monotheist and in possession of the true tradition about God, only later, at the time of Enoch, to begin to worship the sun, the moon and the stars in the same way that they honoured the monarch by honouring his ministers, which finally led to their heirs wholly forgetting the king and continuing to worship only his ministers. There is a phrase in Christian theology that in itself is sufficient to shed light on the typical religious claim to its own absoluteness clad in Christian robes: *"Anima humana de su natura christiana est"* – *"The human soul is Christian by its very nature"*. In its own historicity, Islam attempted to take this to the extreme with the Qur'anic claim that Ibrahim/Abraham and the other patriarchs of monotheism were Muslims, and with the assertion that everyone is born a Muslim, but that his parents cause him, with their human traditions, to stray from this simple, natural truth.

attainments, there are grounds for two different concepts. In the first, Christianity should be construed and constructed as a state community ordered according to the divine precepts, while in the second, Christianity is to be understood and implemented as the relationship between the individual, or group of individuals, with God, aimed primarily at salvation from eternal torment in the next world. It seems self-evident that the first concept owes its pragmatic, practical and this-worldly foundations to classical Jewish sources, while the other is indebted for its foundations to the widespread or universal belief of the Hellenistic world (including at least two streams of post-classical Judaism: rabbinic Judaism and the Essenes) in life after death, which led to the conviction that this world should be seen as a temporary state on the basis of which one's status in the future 'true' eternal life will be determined. In this second instance, the influence of Platonic notions of the world as divided into the world of the ideal (the world of ideas) and the world of reflections and illusions (the material world) is plain to see.

At various periods and in different contexts, Christians have favoured one or another of these two concepts. At the time of the Early Church the clash between two groups was already evident: on the one hand, the Jewish Christians who gathered around Jesus' brother James, and other like-minded followers throughout the Hellenic world (both Judaic and proselytes), who insisted on an ethnocentric concept of Judaeo-Christianity (a people defined by a common law, who lived in expectation of the re-establishment of the ideal order – community, people/state – run according to the Divine law; and on the other hand, the universalists, who came together around the later apostle Paul, who laid the emphasis on personal salvation in the next world, to be gained by personal faith, not by the establishment of a specific state and legal system. With time, under the influence of various social and historical factor, the Judaic element became a minor current in the sea of Christians, and it is fair to say that, particularly during the period of the Roman persecutions of the Christians, the second concept came wholly to dominate the first. Once the Roman emperors had embrace Christianity, however, and then turned it into the state religion, things changed fundamentally, and the Roman Empire overnight became the Holy Roman Empire, God's kingdom on earth. The schism of the Holy Roman Empire into Eastern and Western, and the breakup of the Western Empire into a whole series of newly-created kingdoms and principalities that followed, led to the creation of totally different contexts in which the two alternative concepts of Christianity found expression in different ways.

Orthodoxy and politics

In addressing the most widespread conceptual forms of Christianity, I shall begin with Orthodoxy, since here too the political is so intimately interwoven with the religious that it is closer to Judaism and Islam than Catholicism and Protestantism. In the Eastern Roman Empire the first concept was always prevalent, in which Christianity is not a metaphysical community but the reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth. As a result, Constantinople was proclaimed the Second Rome or the Second Jerusalem (the heir, that is, to the two previous capitals of the Kingdom of God). The peoples who accepted

Christianity from Byzantium (such as Serbia, Bulgaria or Russia) themselves strove to create an Empire that would be heir to the Byzantine Empire and thereby to Rome or Jerusalem. The Slav Orthodox dynasties therefore sought at all costs to relate themselves to the holy Byzantine dynasty – and not a single Slav Christian king called himself, say, king of the Greeks – as yet another way of ensuring the sense of continuity and identification of his empire or kingdom with Byzantium/Rome/Jerusalem. The Serbian Tsar Dušan, whose empire gradually displaced the Byzantine Empire, called himself Tsar of the Serbs and Greeks, while the Russian Tsars, once the Slav Orthodox countries to the south had fallen, one after the other, under Ottoman rule, would often emphasize their links with the Germans, and through them with Byzantium, which was intended to demonstrate that they were the direct heirs of the Kingdom of God on earth, and that Moscow was the Third Rome.

In Orthodoxy, then, this concept of the national church which became a reality, in the past, in a specific state and which is now the guardian of the vow to restore the ideal state of affairs, remains to this day the key element in the concept and self-perception of these Christian churches, as their very names testify beyond doubt: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Rumanian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, and so on.

Catholicism and politics

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the rapid Christianization of the newly created barbarian principalities and kingdoms, the Holy See emerged as both the spiritual and secular (political) power. The Pope was simultaneously the secular leader of his country and the spiritual leader of the entire Catholic world, which made him first among equals in relation to the bishops of other regions, and Prince of Princes in relation to other secular rulers. The Popes became rulers in accordance with the interests of the ideology, the Vatican oligarchy and their personal interests. It should not be forgotten, however, that secular princes, too, tried to use every kind of influence possible over the selection of the Pope, and at times even had a pope removed from office and another instated in his place. It is true to say, though, that the fact that Catholic countries were no longer united under a single secular ruler led to the emergence of the awareness that different 'national' states were an inevitability, and that the Church was the supranational spiritual community. Over time, then, a certain modus vivendi came about in the Catholic world in which secular and ecclesiastical authorities existed in parallel and fulfilled two different functions. The king and the aristocracy were called upon to run the affairs of this world, while the Church's concern was preparation for the next. This implied that the Church had the right to exercise influence over rulers in everything that had to do with the next world, such as holding the proper beliefs, carrying out the prescribed rituals, the persecution of heretics, and so on. The boundary between the doctrinal and the mundane was not clear even then, and much of European politics at that time could be

reduced to the power struggles between the princes of the Church and the secular princes.

Protestantism and politics

It is hard to imagine the history of Protestanism, from Luther and Zwingli to the present day, without the support of the German secular princes. The purely religious reformist movements that preceded Luther (such as the Albigensians and the Waldenses), which did not enjoy the support of the secular authorities, were unable to hold out against the power of Rome. The background to the support of the German princes for Luther and Protestantism was primarily of a political nature (the only obstacle to their complete sovereignty and autocracy was the Pope in Rome), and only secondarily of a doctrinal nature. It would be much the same, later, when at the height of the political struggle between the Vatican and the throne of England, the independent Anglican Church was created by imperial decree, a church that differed at that time from the Roman Catholic Church only in that its bishops served the throne of England not the Pope.

In the freedom of the New World, the transplanted Protestant churches carried still further the principle 'unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's', which already existed in Catholic Europe.[2] It would not be inapt to mention at this point that the principle of religious freedom in the various states of America did not originally relate to non-Christian communities. Religious freedom meant primarily the freedom of Christians from the Vatican, or in other words the freedom of various Protestant denominations to live according to their own consciences (for which one should read: according to their own interpretation of the Bible). Thanks to the fact that in much of the New World there was a clear distinction from the very start between various denominational forms (which were a matter of individual choice and not imposed by law) and the supradenominational general Biblical values

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[2] A New Testament saying ascribed to Jesus, to which the adherents of the universalistic Pauline concept make frequent reference, and which is aimed more at personal salvation than at the law and the formation of a specific state.

which were frequently incorporated into the laws of individual states. This led to a powerful awareness of the division into denominational laws (which were a personal matter) and the universal divine laws (something similar to natural law) which it was incumbent upon the state to impose upon all its subjects. Later, freedom of religious confession was extended to non-Christian communities too (in the classical Anglo-Saxon formalistic legal manner, the fact that the constitution did not explicitly state that this right related solely to Christians was exploited to this end). All in all, in the United States today the issue of affiliation to a certain specific denomination is no more important that belonging to a given badminton club. This does not mean, however, that the supradenominational, universal religious values do not have a central impact on American politics. At times there are attempts to find as comprehensive a name as possible for this supradenominational influence of the religious, a name that would embrace as many different sub-groups as possible, such as for

example 'Judaeo-Christian values', thereby evoiding the influence of a specific denomination on politics and ensuring the influence of the religious in general.

Conclusion

Differing concepts of the state, religion and their mutual relations evolved according to various social and historical circumstances in different parts of the world. The denial of the political nature of the ethno-national concept embedded in the very foundations of Judaism or of the various Orthodox churches, or the denial fo the fact that historical Judaism and historical Islam do not see themselves primarily as salvational religions (focused on the personal salvation of the individual in the world to come) but also as communities with a divine mandate to create a model society that will be run entirely according to the divine laws, does not contribute to discovering a consensual solution that could lead us from perpetual conflict to the ease and comfort of peace.

Any future common endeavours in mutual respect and convivencia of the members of different religious or ethno-religious communities, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, must take full account of the existence of this undisputed political dimension in these religious traditions. The author of these lines would like to believe that in the future, thanks to an agreed and coordinated humanist but also theocentric interpretation of the norms and deeply rooted forms of the different religious traditions using the inner patents that exist in every religious tradition, it will be possible to achieve far more than has been achieved by various other methods to day.