

The Protestant Christianity and the Political Modernity

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ABSTRACT: The occasion of 500 years from the beginning of the Protestant Reformation – an event of special importance for the central and western Europe – marked decisively the development of the western civil society in the following centuries, representing a reason for reflection and debate on the place and role of the Church in the ampler process of modernisation started in the 16th century. In the Germany of the year 1517, the thesis belonging Martin Luther on the religious consciousness and freedom from the perspective of the public mentality led to the beginning of the later political events, which has as consequences a series of discussions/polemics on the new problem of the relation between the Church and the State and on the role of the modern mentality in this relation. From this perspective, we aim to commemorate the event with an investigation on the evolution and the content of the relations of power between Catholicism and Protestantism, and also an analysis of the radical formulas, of the manner in which the states, on one side, and the Church, on the other side, understood to cooperate, cohabitate and confront each other. In fact, the evolution of the relation between the state and the Church can

characterise the progress of the society, being, in our case, a pertinent indicator of the manner and the intensity with which the modernity and its values manifested at a certain time in the history of the European culture and civilisation and wider than this.

KEYWORDS: Martin Luther, Pope Gelasius, Pope Innocent III, Carol the Great, Protestant Christianity, Oliver Cromwell

State and Church in the medieval Catholicism

In the Orthodox East, the relation between the State and the Church were placed under the sign of a cooperation based on the well-known concept of the Justinian symphony, as explicitly stated in *Corpus juris civilis*: “the greatest blessing of the human kind are the gifts given by God from above through the clergy and the imperial authority. The clergy has as field the divine processes, while the imperial authority has as duty the human objectives; but both of them come from the same source, working together to the embellishment of the human life”¹. Unlike this point of view another perspective on this relation appears in the West, with a new culture and a new conception on life, finding its place in the European culture through successive political instrumentations of the religiousness as well as the policy, the two parts adopting different conduits, illustrating eloquently the visions specific to the West. Thus, starting with Pope Gelasius I (492 – 496), a separation of the areal of competence and responsibilities between the two powers operates, after the model of the two swords governing the world, but, beyond this aspect, the spiritual authority of the bishop of Rome must always be superior to the worldly authority of the sovereigns, as Jesus Christ is superior to the priests. The two instrumentations of Pope Gelasius during the 5th century will lead to a long conflict traversing the Middle Age, between the priests and the royal authority, between the Church and the State. The Montanist vision of Tertullian will be reflected in the new relation Church-state, the position presumed theocratic

of this pope being in direct connection to the manner Rome treated the Monophysite problem and the conflict related to it, with the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I (491 – 518). Its reasons belonged to the controversial primacy of Rome, claimed even from the times of the bishop Victor (189 – 198), a primacy that became a common place during the times of the popes Damasus I (366 – 384) and Innocent I (402 – 417), who put the organisation of the Church to a centralised monarchic principle, characteristic to the state entities. For Leon I the Great (440 – 461), the papal primacy is translated as jurisdictional primacy and universal episcopate, because only the bishop of Rome has *plenitudo potestatis*, permitting the approach and the solution of the church problems and of the theological problems with increased significance, the so-called *causa major*. During Vigilius, captive to Constantinople for a decade (545 – 555), the worldly power of Rome weakened visibly, the statute of the bishop of Rome being reduced to the statute of a western patriarch.

In this relationship between the two institutions (Schmemmann 2006, 34), in the Middle Age, the temporal power has no legitimacy except for the delegation from the religious power. The papal ambitions will have as result the denaturation of the evangelical message and the impropriation of the temporal power. The papal supporters were convinced that the Power is the only emanation from God and the origins of the political power come indirectly from the power of the clergy.

Beyond this moment of symbiosis between the laic power and the spiritual power, the Middle age can be characterised by the systematic preoccupations of the popes for consolidating their power. This particularity of the medieval western Church is illustrated by pope Nicholas I (858 – 867), around whom the papacy gained a more accentuated aspect of a worldly empire, organised as pontifical theocracy, the tangible representation of God on earth, the reason and the norm for all the social settlements and practices,

because the rights and the prerogatives of the pope come directly from Jesus Christ.

Obviously, this vision contributed fully to the deformation and the denaturation of the evangelical message related to the relation of the Church with the state, which delimited explicitly and without doubt the areas of action and responsibility of the State and of the Church. In fact, the policy of the medieval popes expresses the real danger of the clergy going toward pure worldly ambitions, when the bishop tended more and more to act like kings, the emperors of a super-kingdom over all kingdoms of the world, as Gregory VII Hildebrand (1073 – 1085) said, changing the mitre with the crown. He also considered that the western Church is the mother of all Churches and nations and imposed to England, Spain, Poland, Hungary, etc. to become his vassals, expressing the protection offered by Rome to the laic state entities. At his turn, Innocent III considered that “the pope is smaller than God and greater than the man” and claimed the figurative possession of the two swords from Luke 22:38, the prerogative of emperor of the worldly and religious things in the same time. The sovereigns, having the quality of *dominium orbis christiani*, must be obedient to him. From the same perspective, pope Boniface VIII (1294 – 1303) emitted “Unam Sanctam” (1302), synthesizing the secular accumulation in the papal fight for primacy in the European policy, postulating the presumed sovereignty of Rome, meaning he was the only one who can give and take the power of the kings and emperors. In this context, marked by the accelerated depreciation of the spiritual and moral status of the institution of the pope from Rome, a position as that belonging Bernard of Clairvaux (1091 – 1153), rejecting the idea of primacy, due to the fact that “*praesit ut prosis, non ut imperes*”, is not at all surprising.

On the other hand, involving so much in the European policy, the popes could not remain outside its antagonisms. Instead of being

neutral, Rome will prefer political engagement, leading the popes to political situation with no way out. Thus, Henry IV (1084 – 1105) will not hesitate to impose Clement III (1080 – 1110) as “anti-pope” instead of Gregory VII Hildebrand, provoking the well-known fight for investiture, requiring the harmonisation of the power relations between Rome and the Roman-German Empire through the so-called “Calixtine transaction”, adopted in Worms by Calixt II (1119 – 1124) and Henry V (1086 – 1125); a century later, the conflict of the emperor Friederich II (1220 – 1250) with the papacy made Gregory IX and Innocent IV to call to crusade against him, after Innocent III imposed vassalage to England, under the menace of the French invasion, led by Philip August (1180 – 1223). After all these, the captivity of the popes to Avignon (1309 – 1377) and the Great Schism only reflect the major crisis that was one century before the debut of the Reformation, an institution which should embody what the Christian religion has the best to say in the world.

Chronologically, the first reaction of rejection toward this type of religious and civil policy of the papacy appears under the form of the Conciliarism, considered to be – in the works of Marsilius of Padua (1270 – 1342), in *Defensor pacis* and William Occam (1270 – 1349), in *Dialogus* – a solution for the harmonisation of the actions from Rome with the Holy Gospel and for the end of the abuses of the Curia, also as possible solution and method of safeguarding of the prestige and the authority of the Roman Church. In these circumstances, the “conciliating” Councils of Pisa (1409), Konstanz (1414 – 1418) and Basel (1431 – 1447) imposed the reformation of the Church *in capite et membris* and, in parallel, stated (Konstanz, 1415) the superiority of the authority of the council in relation with the authority of the pope. The intellectuals of those times, including those involved in the life of the Church, were situated constantly on positions favouring the Conciliarism, and the rejections of the papal pretensions to *plenitudo potestatis*. Thus, in *Defensor pacis* – a

work written together with Jean de Jandun -, Marsilius de Padua left to the laic – whose chosen representatives, priests and bishops, met in the Council – all the power in the Church, because, according to the theories of Jean de Paris, in *De potestate regia et papali*, only they possess the elective and legislative powers. The opposition of this quasi-Protestant radicalism is the more moderate position belonging to John de Salisbury (1115 – 1180), who, in *Policratus*, envisions the power of the papacy cohabitating with the power of the princes, the first having the right to limit the second, because the society is nothing else than the symbiosis of materiality and spirituality.

Complementary to Conciliarism, the abuses of Rome are consistently repudiated by the ante-reformators. Thus, John Wycliff (1320 – 1384) insisted in *De ecclesia* (1379) on the supremacy of the laic power in front of the religious power, manifesting toward the end of his life hostility toward papacy, which assimilated him to Antichrist. After Wycliff, Jan Hus (1369 – 1415) will contest also the ideas of the papacy, as the superior status of the popes as successors of Saint Peter and their quality of deputies of the Saviour, together with the not too Catholic idea of predestination. Finally, using prophecies and visions – later confessed as false – Girolamo Savonarola (1452 – 1498) exposed in his sermons all kinds of abuses of the popes, creating in Florence, for a short time, a citadel of austerity and evangelical morality.

The Reformation and the secularisation of the politics

Appearing in a climate marked by an increasingly accentuated and diversified opposition toward the papacy, the Reformation will postulate the principle *Solus Christus*², because “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” – 1 *Timothy* 2:5, rejecting the Catholic vision on the divine-

human ministry and the power based on its theandric character and hurrying implicitly the evolution of the central and western European society toward the modern state. In spite of the fact they manifested solidarity for the rejection of the pretensions of superiority and the intrusions of the religious power in the political state problems, the visions of the main leaders of the Reformation cannot be considered as homogenous, bearing the mark of the vision and the specificities of the doctrine belonging to each Reformatted leader.

a) The first Reformer, Martin Luther, insists in his main thematic work, *To the Christian nobility of the German nation concerning the reform of the Christian estate*, on the inoperability of the Roman-Catholic presumptions related to the necessity of the institutionalize interference of the two powers³. In its visions, their areal is completely different, although both serve to governing the society, being complementary in a certain degree: the spiritual governing has as aim the eternal life and the Kingdom of Heaven, while the laic power, administered by State and achievable through authority and sword, aims exclusively the functioning of the society.

In fact, Luther sees the state as pragmatically expression of the will of God in relation with the humans; the divine origins of the state is out of discussion “for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God” – Romans 13:1. Its meaning is to promote, by the force of the authority, the will of God, as long as the laic power “is the minister of God to thee for good” and “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” – Romans 13:4. As a result, in the situation when the officials are “God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing” – Romans 13:6, the sovereign is nothing else than a doer of the divine will in relation with the Earthly citadel, even if he can be a tyrant or can prosecute the believers, because “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” – Romans 13:2. Although, theoretically, autonomous

in relation with the state, the power of the Church must come first, because “we ought to obey God rather than men” – Acts 5:29, even if, based on a divine mandate, the state is considered as responsible in extreme situations as the abdication of the Church and if the clergy from the authentic Christian teaching and values. Luther puts the Church and the state in the situation of developing a bi-univocal functional relation, where the first teaches the believers to be obedient to the state and loyal to the sovereign, while the second defends and protects the community.

Beyond this general perspective, we must highlight the fact that Luther’s vision on the relation between the state and the religious authority marks in the history of the Church the beginning of modernity, reversing completely the premises of the medieval papal theocracy.

b) Unlike his German predecessor, Jean Calvin did not manifest a constant positioning in the problem of the reports between the laic and the religious power, his oscillations being influenced by the political evolution and especially by the persecutions on the French Reformed people. Thus, until 1560, Calvin considered that the secular authorities – magistrates – emperors, kings, princes – have and exercise the power with the approval of God, with the main aim of regulating the human interactions and prevent/ fight the degenerations of the social behaviour, partly continuously menacing the humans, due to their state completely fallen. Moreover, the magistrates may be seen as representatives of God, models with holy greatness for all the believers; like Luther, Calvin considered that the members of a society must manifest unconditionally obedience in front of the laic rulers, inclusively in the situations when their moral behaviours and public actions are reprobable. Still, Calvin avoids – unlike Luther – to accept and theorise the complete obedience of the Church in front of the authorities, even in exceptional circumstances, considering that the autonomy of the Christian community must be

complete, because the kingdom of spirit and the political kingdom are not communicable, being administered by different kings and different laws. As result, the authority of the magistrates – exponents of a temporary power from God – has divine origins only when it is connected to the problems of the political kingdom. After 1559, when the French Calvinists institutionalised the administrative and military organisation, opposing openly the Catholic monarchy, Calvin revises the previous thesis of unconditionally obedience to the authorities, without compromising / repudiating the previous positions, affirming that the counter-action of inferior authorities against the arbitrary magistrates aims in fact to preserve the limits of the kings' power. Becoming legitimate, the riposte against the abuse of power of the authorities must not manifest as armed riposte, as Calvin himself advised the Admiral Gaspard II of Coligny (1519 – 1572) in 1561.

We also mention that Calvin followers will give other dimensions to the idea of resistance in front of the magistrates' arbitrarium, as relevantly expressed by Theodorus Beza (1519 – 1605), who, in *De jure magistratum* (1574), writes that the riposte in front of the abuses and persecutions may be inclusively armed, an opinion contrary to Calvin's opinion.

c) The Anabaptists – the first confessional expression of the radical wing of the Reformation – based their vision on the relations between state and Church on their own doctrine particularities and especially on their specific ecclesiology, separating them clearly from the Luther's followers. Instead the concept of Church of the people – *Volkskirche*, they operated with the concept of Church of believers, regenerated through a baptism based on the personal belief and the public confession of adhering to the mysterious body of Christ. The Anabaptists insisted on the irrevocable conflict separating them from the others, an antagonism they responded to only through the continuous effort of building the Visible Church

on earth, a communion of those reborn, a specific concept stated and theorised among others by Menno Simons, Dirck Philips and Balthazar Hubmaier.

In the vision of the Anabaptist Reformation, the fall of the church has as one of the main causes in the cohabitation of the community and of the Christian clergy with the state, because, when the Church and the state had united, the Church stopped being a Church (William R. Estep). In any case, the Church and the state cannot be a unique *corpus christianum*, because the symbiosis process initiated by Constantine compromised completely *Ecclesia*, leading it completely astray from the only valid organisational and functional model – the apostolic one, reflected by the New Testament. These positions did not include any allusion to a putative hostility toward the state. In fact, the Anabaptists saw the state as a legitimate entity in relation with the world outside the Church, with the non-Christians, its utility being to maintain the order, punish the evil deeds and the evil people, aspects upon which the believers should be neutral, because the Christians do not use the sword, which is worldly and they use the Christian discipline – according to Bern Disputation, 1538. In this context, the Anabaptists considered that the representatives of the worldly power, the magistrates, possess and exercise the power with the consent of God and for reaching the aims validated by God.

The main particularities in the Anabaptist thinking related to the relation with God/ the spiritual authority and State/ the worldly authority can be synthesized as follows:

1. Respecting the will of God – as quantified by the Holy Scripture – transcends any human commandment or acting imperative required by the state; the Anabaptists admit to respect the authority and its demands, under the condition of preserving the will of God; some demands of the state – as witnessing under vow, duties related to violence, etc. – are repudiated from the start;

2. The exercitation by the magistrates of the state power bears the sign of the command of God, aiming to punish the evil and protect the good; this power is exclusively related to non-Christians; the authority of the magistrates ends at the gates of the visible Church;
3. The idea of State Church, under the patronage and the protection of the state, is profoundly incompatible with the Anabaptist thinking, based on the belief that such a construction might transform in a persecutory entity on the criterion of faith.

The Protestantism and the beginning of modernity

The contribution of the Protestant thinking to the political and social modernity is incontestable. Ending the millennial tradition of the theocracy of the Pope, the Protestants will begin in the 17th century the modern state, which is not denominational and grants unlimited religious freedom to its citizens. This type of state will separate completely the civil rights from the religious beliefs, as explicitly highlighted by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1791: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*; this model spread gradually in the Western Europe, even if, during the revolutionary France, the Civil Constitution of Clergy (1790) aimed to create a national confessional entity, using the tradition of the French Church⁴.

The road to the fundamental idea of modernity, represented by the separation of the Church by the State, was not easy. We only mention the fact that Lutheranism – in Germany and the northern countries – and Calvinism – in Switzerland and Netherland – experienced the support and the cooperation of the

civil authority with the religious one. In the same time, in USA, the English Reformed theologian Roger Williams (1603 – 1683) entered in conflict with (1633 – 1634) with the separatist Puritan colonists from Plymouth, Massachusetts, being arrested in order to be sent in England. Moreover, in the Metropolis, during the republican government (1649–1653) and during Oliver Cromwell’s protectorate (1653–1659), the disputes between the Presbyterians and the Baptists manifested in acute forms, especially inside the army established by the protector lord– New Model Army, requiring discussion to Putney, where the Presbyterianism was declared a state religion, a situation that lasted between 1660 and 1689. Some of the main points in the discussions are presented briefly as follows:

a) After Roger Williams limited the prerogatives of the state to the civil problems, preserving the freedom of consciousness that will transform religion into a strict private matter, William Penn (1664 – 1718) will establish in Pennsylvania a state entity, model for the religious freedom and tolerance during those times. William Penn’s visions on the religious freedom – all people are equal in front of God – was adopted by Thomas Jefferson and the founding fathers and reflected in the First Amendment of the Constitution.

b) John Locke (1632 – 1704), the first important European Illuminist thinker – he participated in 1699 to the writing of the Constitution of the American colony of Carolina, where the Anglican Church became official and the others denominations were tolerated – established, in *Letters concerning Toleration* (1689 – 1692), a rigorous system related to the freedom of religion and religious practice, based on the premise that tolerance is the essential feature of the real Church, because the real believers must “depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:19). Per se, religion – as doctrine and cultural practice – cannot converge in any point with the civil jurisdiction of the magistrates and cannot be the subject of its intrusion, because:

1. The magistrates have no authority/ responsibility on the religious aim, the deliverance of the believers;
2. In its content, religion “resides in the inner belief of the mind, without which nothing is pleasant for God”; thus, it will always be odd from the power of the magistrate, which “resides only in the exterior force of the man”;
3. The adhesion of the magistrates to one of the many religious beliefs can show “ignorance, ambition or superstition”.

c) Initially a Roman-Catholic, the Calvinist professor of philosophy and history to Sedan and Rotterdam, Pierre Bayle (1647 – 1706), a former constant supporter of the concepts of tolerance and religious freedom, issues previously approached in *Commentaire Philosophique* (1686 – 1688) and detailed in *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), has a vision on the relation between state and Church, which foregoes the vision of the encyclopaedists and of the illuminists.

In essence, the coordinated of Pierre Bayle’s thinking may be synthesized as follows:

- ✦ The invocation of the biblical text for justifying the prosecutions and the punitive measures of the civil authorities is inopportune completely; this type of attempts must be ignored;
- ✦ The fact that the reality of the religious conflicts is undisputable must not lead in any case to the conclusion that the existence of a multitude of denominations could be the cause of the disputes, which could mean a predisposed character of tolerance, “dangerous for the state”; on the contrary, the antagonisms between religions have as origins the permanence of their reciprocal intolerance.

Conclusions

A result of secular accumulation, the modern relations between the state and the Church have the quality of ensuring the freedom of faith and religious practice – also to refuse a faith. The normative frame created by modernity guarantees the unlimited exercitation of the rights derived from the freedom of consciousness, a freedom for which many Christians suffered and even died. For the Church – seen as global community of the witnesses of the faith in the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ – the modernity brings the separation between the state as immediate effect of the constitutional law order; the Church appropriates more and more “the image of a specialised institution [...] limited to the administration of the people’s deliverance, its influence on the political life materialising, when possible, as moral aspect and private lobby” (Professor Ioan I. Ică). Such a social positioning of the Church – although it can be interpreted any moment as unfavourable, from the perspective of concretising its potential for disseminating love, goodness and morality in the society – has the merit of being “liberated from the temptation of the [secular] power, somehow being limited to concentrate on its fundamental missions and to highlight its inner spiritual force (Professor Ioan I. Ică).

Notes

- ¹ W. Kroll, *Corpus Juris Civilis*, III, Berlin, 1928, p. 35 – 36. On the issues discussed in this sequence of our study, the following works in Romanian seem to us as most relevant: Teodor M. Popescu, Teodor Bodogae, Gheorghe Stănescu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. I, EIBMBOR, București, 1956; Ion Rămureanu, Milan Șesan, Teodor Bodogae, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. II, EIBMBOR, București, 1993; Pr. Nicolae Chifăr, *Istoria creștinismului*, vol. I – IV, Trinitas, Iași, 1999 – 2005; John Bossy, *Creștinismul în Occident*, Humanitas, București, 1998, Pierre Riche, *Europa barbară din 476 până în 774*, Corint, București, 2003; Denis Căprăroiu; Eugen Denize,

- Nașterea Europei medievale*, Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2008, Vintilă Horia, *Dicționarii papilor*, Saeculum I.O., București, 1999 ș.a..
- ² Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Editorial", *Scientia Moralitas. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol 2, No 1 (2017), p. XI.
- ³ The main bibliography in Romanian for this sequence of our study is: Timothy George, *Teologia reformatoarelor*, Editura Institutului Biblic „Emanuel”, Oradea, 1998, Jean Paul-Willaime& William Estep, *Istoria anabapțiștilor*, ed. Cartea Creștină, Oradea, 2006, *** *Libertatea religioasă. Contribuția istorică a bapțiștilor în dezvoltarea acestui concept*, Cartea Creștină, Oradea, 1995, Keith Randell, *Luther și Reforma în Germania, 1517 – 1555*, ediția a II-a, All, București, 2002, Idem, *Jean Calvin și Reforma târzie*, All, București, 1996, Martin Luther, *Scrieri*, vol. I – II, Logos, Cluj-Napoca, 2002 – 2003.
- ⁴ For this sequence of our study, we also used the following works: Giampaolo Romanato; Maruio G. Lombardo; Ioan Petru Culianu, *Religie și Putere*, Polirom, Iași, 2005; Ion Dumitru-Snagov, *Relațiile Stat-Biserică*, Gnosis, București, 2006; Jonathan Israel, *O revoluție a minții. Iluminismul radical și originile intelectuale ale democrației moderne*, Tact, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, Karl Lowith, *Implicațiile teologice ale filosofiei istoriei*, Tact, Cluj-Napoca, 2010; John Locke, *Al doilea tratat despre cărmuire*, Nemira, București, 1999; Idem, *Scrisoare despre toleranță*, Nemira, București, 1999; Andrei Marga, *Reconstruirea pragmatică a filosofiei*, Polirom, Iași, 1998; Ioan-Vasile Leb; Gabriel-Viorel Gardan, *Chipuri și scene din istoria creștinismului american*, Presa Universitara Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2008; *** *Istoria filozofiei moderne și contemporane*, Editura Academiei, București, 1984; *** *Biserica în misiune. Patriarhia Română la cea aniversar*, EIBMBOR, București, 2005.

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