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Towards a New Tolerance: “Religion and Conflict”

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini berfokus pada Kristianitas sebagai puitika eksistensi, yang bisa merupakan sumber kedamaian maupun sumber konflik. Sejauh ia merupakan sumber bagi kehidupan yang baik, ia dapat menjadi inspirasi ke arah gagasan baru ihwal toleransi. Bukan toleransi represif yang hanya menghormati keyakinan lain karena mengganggu keyakinan tersebut sesungguhnya tak penting. Melainkan toleransi yang mengakui keyakinan religius ataupun eksistensial sebagai motivasi dasar bagi tindakan, dalam kerangka hubungan pribadi maupun politik. Maka dalam konflik antar agama, penghormatan atas pihak lain harus didasarkan terutama pada idea-idea etis yang sama di balik segala perbedaan keyakinan.

Key Words:

*Tolerance • peace and conflict • religion convictions • poetic of existence
• ethical behaviour • actions*

Religions in conflict become a major problem when the conflict results in violent confrontation. Violent conflicts are a political problem, because

violence disturbs social order and security. Therefore, no society in which religious conflicts emerge can close its eyes to this problem.

However, the repression of religious groups is rarely a solution to this problem. It must be analysed from a social, economic and, of course, philosophical perspective and then dialogues for solutions must take place. Examinations of the social and economic aspects provide knowledge of how groups behave and about their life conditions, and they can highlight the economic and political forces that have contributed to strengthen the conflicts, but that also could work to reduce them.

This knowledge is useful in overcoming conflicts, nonetheless insufficient. Philosophical analyses are necessary in order to understand the religious forces as such and discover their deeper sources. Moreover, they are necessary in highlighting to what extent religious convictions can be sources for overcoming violent conflicts.

My paper will focus on Christianity because this is the only religion I really know from within. I consider Christianity as a *poetic of existence*, a symbolic talk about life, which is both a source of peace and of conflict. This does not mean that it is a source of both good and evil. Conflicts are not necessarily violent and we should not categorically avoid all kinds of conflicts between convictions. Not only because a conflict may be what Karl Jaspers, in his great work *On Philosophy* (1932), Vol. II, called a loving struggle, a struggle by which we make efforts together to clarify our faith and deep convictions, but also because we may learn from our opponents the strengths and weaknesses of our own ideas. And even if there is a gap between what we ourselves believe and what others claim, the conflict might not be violent, especially if we believe that we ought to love our enemies. That, of course, does not mean that we must agree with them in questions of deep convictions, but, rather, that we must respect them and therefore find a way of living together in spite of our different ways of poeticizing life. However, peaceful conflicts can be perverted into violent conflict and this is the problem I want to consider.

A. The problem

1. Christianity as source of good life

One of the most influential stories in the history of ideas is the story about the Samaritan, who is the stranger who relieves another individual in great pain (Luc. 10, v.30).

As the story tells, "a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho,

and fell among thieves who striped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead". A priest and a Levite passed but they did nothing. Then arrives the Samaritan, and he takes care of the man. But this story is not only one about how to take care of the weak individual, but also a story that says that each of us can take care of the other. Jesus asks: "Which of these three was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" The Samaritan is not a Jew, but he is a human being and as such he can do what neither the priest, nor the Levite did for him. And so the appeal to contribute to the good life is an appeal to all human beings; it is a universal message.

In his recent great book on *Memory, History, Forgetting*¹ Paul Ricœur raises the question of how we can conceive forgiveness of bad or evil actions committed in the past. Is forgiveness simply forgetting? Ricœur understands pardon in relation to guilt, but not to every form of guilt. If we follow the analysis of guilt in Karl Jaspers's 1946 book on *The Question of Guilt*, guilt takes on four forms: Criminal, collective (political), moral, and metaphysical (i.e., the feeling of being guilty by surviving others).²

According to Ricœur, forgiveness can only respond to moral guilt, i.e., to an individual guilt corresponding to what a particular person has done and for which he or she can be held personally responsible. As such, it cannot be politically institutionalized. For example, if all those sentenced for certain crimes are automatically transformed to a lower punishment, this would not be forgiveness but a very dubious reduction of penalty, which might undermine a sense of justice within society. Even worse, if the effect of amnesty granted by the State is that nobody is allowed to mention the crime, then it is referred to as "commanded forgetting." And according to Ricœur, such amnesty is equivalent to "commanded amnesia",³ a manipulation or violation of the human right to memory. It has nothing to do with real forgiveness.

As something purely personal, forgiveness addresses the other to say: You are worth more than your actions. It is the power we possess to liberate the other from his or her own actions, and to open the possibility of a new life for this other person. This pardon is not easy to grant, because it is not simply an obliteration of the past, but rather an acceptance of the other despite the memory we have concerning the person in question. Here Ricœur quotes Jacques Derrida: "Forgiveness concerns the unforgivable".⁴ If it succeeds, however, it alleviates the memory and renders it, after all, a "happy memory".⁵

The third Christian source of the good life I will mention is the fact that

it has created a global community expressed throughout the world in universal religious communities and it has founded the idea of a universally valid ethics.

In Greek stoic philosophy arises the idea of the human being's two citizenships: the national and the cosmopolitan citizenships. But the ancient cosmopolitanism is lacking any institutional form. It was a pure abstract idea of a rational being belonging to a kingdom of thought, common to all mankind.

Christianity however developed the idea of a church expanding its institutions to the whole world. The City of God that Augustine spoke about was a city open for everyone in the world. Thus, it was the first conception of a global community for mankind. And therefore Christianity is the first source of concrete institutions of universal ethics.

2. Christianity as source of conflict

The first Christian source of conflict is the Christian belief in one God having universal power or universal meaning. In fact, the idea of universality, which created a universal community, was also the first source of religious conflict. Given that if you believe in one God, you are opposed to the belief in many gods (and this is true in spite of the dogma of God's Trinity, since that does not mean three gods, but only one that has three manifestations) there is thus a conflict merely by the fact the one God is claimed. This was the oldest conflict that Christians became involved in when they refused to worship the Roman Caesar as a god, and it may still be a reason for conflict when people are asked to place other things higher than their Christian faith.

As it was born in the Middle East and is a main source of European Culture, Christianity easily becomes considered a part of cultural oppositions. Cultural conflicts therein become also religious conflicts. For instance, we see today the scientific technical spirit that has developed in European culture and now looks to dominate the whole civilization. This works to underestimate values other than those that are technical, and is often considered specifically Christian. This contention has even been considered by Christian theologians who have claimed that the Judeo-Christian idea of a Creator of the World laid the groundwork for treating the world as an object of technical interventions.

The Christian idea of mission is another source of conflict. The philosopher Franz Rosenzweig has in his book *The Star of Redemption* (1922) described the relation between Jewish and Christian faith like the relation

between the core and the rays in a star. Whereas the energy is contained within the core, the rays work to send the energy to the outside. That means that expansion, or the mission, is specially Christian. However, mission cannot avoid resistance, and this therefore is a conflict that might be very violent.

In the history of Christianity, the mission has often employed military support, such as in the crusades in medieval Europe. And even today the American president considers his war on terror to be a mission for Christianity and has called it a crusade. After the first stage of the Iraq war, when the US president thought that he had won the war, he declared that the war was finished on the background of these words: *Mission accomplished*. It is of course true that there are other reasons for the Iraq war than the Christian idea of "mission", but apparently the idea of a religious mission is one of the most important.

3. Aggravation of the conflict

The conflicts we have to consider are not only conflicts between religious groups, but also conflicts about the importance of religion as such. And this kind of conflict makes the problem worse.

We see today that conflicts between religious groups are more and more replaced by conflicts between those who fear the scientific modern culture, with its belief in rationality and individual freedom, and those who want to protect this modernity. So the fundamentalists consider modern culture as a threat to faith, whereas modern people consider fundamentalism to be a threat to their way of life.

Therefore appear *secularists* who consider religion as a human weakness and want sharp separation between religion and politics. The reply from the defenders of modernity appears as a claim, already expressed by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes, that religion is a *private* matter which must be excluded from social life and political dialogue. Any social importance of religion is denied. And this strengthens the fundamentalist criticism of modern society.

I shall try to look closer at this problem by a philosophical analysis of the relation between religion and politics.

B. Dealing with the problem from a philosophical position

1. Religious conviction and ethical behaviour

I consider that there is a middle term between religion and politics, and this is ethics. So the first problem is to analyse the relation between religion and ethics.

Not only rational thinking, but also ethical behaviour has a universal dimension that crosses the frontiers between countries and cultures. Furthermore, ethics is perhaps even more universal than rationality by the fact that it seems to be more difficult to agree on what rationality finally is than what the good life is.

Ethical behaviour is grounded in visions, ideas and principles. It is true that ethical visions originate in *stories* about the good life and these stories are very different from culture to culture. But from the stories arise *ideas* about practical truth that can be tested in practical life. Such an idea is the idea of care of the other. In order to protect and develop this idea different *principles* are formed to protect the life we want to take care of, such as the principle of respect for autonomy, dignity, integrity and vulnerability.

These visions are originally parts of religious representations, wherein ideas and principles may be universalized visions that only retain from the visions what has been recognized as universally valid by a large group of people over a long period of time.

Universalized visions that have ethical meaning are those that express concern for the good life for everyone. The story of the Good Samaritan is an example of a vision in an ethical narrative that has been universalized, and other stories like this may be developed in order to support the idea of care for the good life between people.

But and this is the important point - different visions belonging to different religious or semi-religious universes of stories and representations may *motivate* the same ethical behaviour. For instance, the care of victims suffering after a tsunami or other natural disaster may be the same, even if it is motivated by different religious convictions.

Philosophy can argue in ethics and politics, not in religion and theology. Ethics and politics concern possible behaviour within personal and social life, whereas religion and theology focus on life and society as a poetic of life and existence and thus express our deeper convictions about our conditions and possibilities.

Ethics may play an important role as motivating force in politics. Of course, there are other motifs in politics besides ethical ideas; there are also

economic interests and desire for domination, etc. Nonetheless, ethical reasons may belong to the motives.

Consequently, philosophy can contribute in overcoming political and religious conflicts by revealing agreement in ethics.

2. Attempts to solve the Conflicts

From European history we know many conflicts between religious convictions, especially after the Reformation when Catholics and Protestants became involved in many violent conflicts. The solution in order to end the wars was the famous idea: *Cuius regio, eius religio?* Religion according to the region, that is, according to the confession of the prince (cf. Augsburg peace treaty 1555 and the Westphalian peace treaty 1648).

But this was only a short-term solution. In fact, this was a suppression of the freedom of conscience, and therefore all philosophers of the Enlightenment refused it.

Another solution that was proposed to solve the conflicts can be seen today in the quarrel between fundamentalist and rationalists. Here the solution proposed is the secularisation of ethics and politics. But, as the Danish expert in political science, Ole Wæver, has stressed in a recent speech much discussed in Denmark, religion is not a purely private affair and cannot be limited to privacy, but must also have its public symbolic expressions. Moreover, ethics and politics are not purely rational discourses, since they must be grounded in deep convictions about life, society and nature.

Therefore, I argue that religion cannot be removed from the motivations we have in ethics and, to the extent that ethics plays a role in politics, religious motivations cannot be removed from politics. However, I also argue that there can be different religious motivations for the same behaviour in ethics and politics.

The solutions should imply that we tolerate politics that are allied with religious convictions and are motivated by these convictions, but in practice they are actually compatible with political behaviour common among people who have other convictions and motivations. This means that we must consider the idea of tolerance.

3. Tolerance according to the Enlightenment

1. Pierre Bayle

Tolerance according to the Enlightenment made a sharp distinction

between moral (norms) and religious convictions, cf. Pierre Bayle in his *Commentaire philosophiques sur ces paroles de Jésus Christ «Ê Contrains les entrerÊ»* (1686-87). He was convinced that insight into what is good and bad does not arise from religious dogmas, but rather from intuitions in human consciousness. Religious representation was therefore denied any importance within ethics and the morality of the citizens.

2. J.-J. Rousseau.

Whereas Luther and Leibniz wanted to subordinate politics to a religious vision, Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed the opposite: religion is subordinate to social life. He speaks in *The Social Contract* (1762) about la *religion civile*, the civil religion, which differs from Christ proclaiming a kingdom that is not of this world. The preaching in the Gospel is too good to be true; it cannot be practiced in a society where different people must show mutual respect. A civil religion is needed that has only a few positive dogmas, i.e., about the existence of the Deity..., the life to come, happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked as well as the sanctity of the social contract, and it must only have one negative dogma, that being intolerance.

Of course, in Rousseau's *Emile* religious education is an essential part of the education of the child. It belongs to the formation of the heart by a "natural religion" of ideas that come from the inner voice or reason alone.⁶ The confession of the savoyard vicar⁷ is a rational religion, which includes the belief in a divine will that moves the Universe and in an intelligent order of nature, which includes the conviction that moral evil is our own work. Thus, this confession demands that man fulfil his obligations. Moreover, Rousseau claims in *The Social Contract* that "there is a purely civil profession of faith, the article of which it is the duty of the sovereign to determine, not exactly as dogmas of religion, but as sentiments of sociability, without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a faithful subject" (*The Social Contract*, tr. by Henry J. Tozer, ed. by L.G. Crocker, Washington Square Press, 1967, p. 145)⁸

3 John Rawls.

Today the classical idea of tolerance can be located in the philosophy of John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice* from 1971. He argues that tolerance is built upon the idea of equal liberty. Thereby he expresses the central point claimed by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.

However, tolerance cannot be limited to respect for the individual as abstract entity and one's capacity for "rationality". It must also include

respect for his or her convictions.

The problem of the idea of tolerance according to the Enlightenment is that a pure rationality or a minimal rationality, which could be common for all people, is very difficult to establish. Rationality is always linked to a certain idea of what we finally think about ourselves, our social life and about nature.

4. Towards a new idea of tolerance

We need a new idea of tolerance because the idea, that rationality as theoretical science and as means for technical action unites people, is not as powerful as the philosophers of Enlightenment thought.

But ethics as good action and ideas of the good life is much more powerful for uniting humanity. Because we can claim that we are united in common conceptions of the good life without devaluating deep convictions as driving forces in life. Thus, religious differences can be tolerated and we can respect them, not because they have no real influence in ethics and politics, but on the contrary because they are crucial as motivating factors or deep motives of ethics and politics.

The idea of tolerance according to the Enlightenment was in fact what Herbert Marcuse, the philosopher of the youth revolts in 1968, called repressive tolerance. The tolerance claimed by philosophers such as Bayle, Rousseau or G. Lessing (in his famous play *Nathan the Wise*), i.e. tolerance according to the Enlightenment was a way of excluding religious convictions from politics in order to prevent wars based on religious reasons. These convictions were only allowed insofar as they were denied any importance for the concrete life.

However, if we do not hold contempt for religious conviction and we tolerate differences, this should not then lead to a relativistic view of religion. Relativism is also devaluating. Rather, we shall consider that the truth in this matter is a practical truth (which is *prima philosophia* according to Levinas), and as such is an infinite ideal that imposes humility in dialogues with others along with the duty to listen to others. We must listen to others who tell about their convictions in order to see what we could learn from them, and also in order to be clearer about ourselves, about what we really stand for. In that sense we are still claiming, as the philosophers of the Enlightenment, that the only attitude that cannot be tolerated is intolerance.

Therefore I believe, that we, in order to overcome violence in conflicts concerning religion, must recognize that unity in basic attitudes does not

exclude differences in deep convictions.

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End Notes:

1. Paul Ricoeur, *La memoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Editions du seuil, 2000); English translation: *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004.
2. Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (1946); (Munchen: Piper, Taschenbuchausgabe, 1974), p. 31-50.
3. Ricoeur, *La memoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, p. 585-589.
4. *Ibid.*, 605ff.;cf. Jacques Derrida, "Le siecle et le pardon", *Le monde des debats* (decembre, 1999).
5. Ricoeur, *La memoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, 643ff.
6. Garnier, *Emile ou de l'education* (1762),p. 361.
7. *Emile* , Book IV, p. 320