Chapter 6
Religion, Church, and Public Space

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ABSTRACT

The present text is divided into three chapters and deals with the intrinsic religious dimension of man as being of communion from an ontological viewpoint and in relation with God, her Creator and Supporter in this mundane existence. This existence is open to eternity as a real personal and communitarian communion in the dynamics of spiritual growth. For Christians, the Church is the path of genuine and redeeming communion with God the Trinity as shown in the foundational biblical metanarrative, typologically interpreted by Christian theology, and spiritually experienced by practicing believers. Sacramentally, this happens through prayer, through the reading of the holy text, and the liturgical and Eucharistic gathering that celebrates the real sacrament of God’s presence for us. The relation between the Church with the State in modern and postmodern times testifies to the change in mindset that has occurred by means of the ideological absolutisation of the state and the theoretical marginalization or atomization of religion. On the one hand, this shows the inconsistency of the project and on the other hand, the impossibility to fight with the religious soul of humanity, the religious dimension inherently and intrinsically structured in the ontological relationship between human and divine, in any mundane historical context.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is natural to man and represents the horizon of the ontological relation to God. God Himself, in the logic of religion, informed man in illo tempore about this kinship passed on to humanity and inherited under various shapes during the history. Religion offers the image that, at the beginning of human history, there was a paradise where God and man were familiar with each other. The Bible offers the same image of the beginning of time when God spoke to the first man in paradise. That communion and communication is grasped as a religious dimension of human life. Due to the effect of sin and evil on human knowledge, in the sense of perverting and diminishing true knowledge, man lost that primordial and heavenly religion of a communion and knowledge of God as natural and familiar to him/her; man
was summoned by God Himself in the logic of Hebrew-Christian revelation to the unique religious truth. God’s alliance to man in the Old Testament and its fulfillment in the New Testament is the horizon of knowledge and the relation of man with God as Church in the holy communion of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Modernity with its rationalism and postmodernity with the ideology of decentered pluralism, without founding and supporting narratives of a supreme truth against the present ontological and metaphysical background, lie at the basis of the current religious identity crisis; this led to the rise and spreading of various surrogates of spiritual development and religious practices threatened by the anthropological profile that made history in the Western Christian cultural area and post-Christian one according to the ideology of secularization. Furthermore, ideas according to which religion leads to conflict, intercultural or intra-community tension are fuelled; they are easily induced to the secularized, atheist man, “without roots” in a religious, cultural, national, or global tradition. On the contrary, rooted in God’s Revelation as the true expression of divine love for the man created in His image, beyond all historical, political, ideological, scientist reductionist approaches, religion should be the horizon of peace, harmony, love, human and communitarian fulfillment in face of God in real communion to Him.

RELIGION

Nowadays we are witnessing a large debate about religion. Theology, philosophy, sociology or the psychology of religion deliver much research to a market of ideas, along with reflection, ways to interpret and receive religious ideas, beliefs rooted in different living religious experiences and traditions, missing sometimes the core of the issue in a society that lost this fundamental human dimension which underlines the deep human subject and its complex inner structure. The concept of *homo religiosus* is an asset, an essential given for human existence which is a relation with divinity in people’s conscience, a *forma mentis* which symbolizes man’s communion and familiarity with God shown in the multiform universal religious phenomenon. According to Christian hermeneutics “religions appear in their authentic elements as a providential training for Christ’s coming – *preparatio Evangeliae*” (Davhamony, 1992, p. 1127). The origin of religion is in God and God revealed Himself to man from the beginning. God Himself maintains this relationship with man in fidelity and truth in order to teach humankind the true saving religion beyond the human fall and sin.

Sin had noetic, cognitive, affective, and volitional consequences on the human person in the sense of the diminution or even loss of true spiritual and religious dimension that perpetuated itself and shows in the present skepticism, scientific naturalism, a monist materialistic vision especially promoted and maintained by the educational system and academia nowadays; this is a reminiscence of modernist Enlightenment and postmodernist pluralism. There is in our institutions a “widespread doubt and agnosticism with respect to the very existence of God. But if we don’t know that there is such a person as God, we don’t know the first thing (the most important thing) about ourselves, each other and our world” (Plantinga, 2000, p. 217, cf. Moreland and Craig, 2003, p. 74). To be a human being means to be in relation with your God, to have a God, in a long and established religious tradition verified by day-to-day experience. To be a religious person means to participate in the cultic ritual, to read sacred texts, to have been taught by the spiritual leader of the community via dialogue, reading, prayer, with mutual trust and in the love that comes from the original source, i.e. from God as being, infinite and loving personal substance as there is love in one’s being and He is present in all reality levels. In the religious order, the believer feels that
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