



‘Religions and Ideologies,
Polish Perspectives and beyond.’

International Council of Christians and Jews
in cooperation with the
Faculty for International and Political Studies
of the Jagiellonian University Cracow.
2011 Conference, July 3-6.

Presentation by Dr. Hans Hermann Henrix
Wednesday July 6, Collegium Novum, Cracow
Panel A: „Enemies or allies? The relations of religions and states after Nazism
and Communism”

Even if religious practice in Europe seems to be diminishing inexorably, the European public is giving greater attention to relations between religion and politics or religion and the state.¹ There are several reasons for this. One of the decisive reasons is the growing presence of Islam in Europe. The immigration of Muslims over the past decades has brought about challenges to the way people belonging to various religions live together, and these are new challenges for the European states. In this, the theme “Religions and States” includes an aspect that touches on the interior politics of the individual countries. In addition, there is an aspect that has to do with foreign politics. In Muslim countries, an “Islamist connection between religion and power”² has developed, which also has an influence on international relations between states. Something comparable can be said regarding other fundamentalisms such as the specifically nationalist tendency in India's Hinduism which acts in an aggressive manner. Thus there are multiple reasons for our theme, which asks whether the relations between religions and states are characterized by enmity or whether their nature is more that of an alliance.

The workshop's working title is right to remind us of experiences with National Socialism and Communism. For they both defined the relationship between religion and state as “hostile”.

¹ Michael Minkenberg/Ulrich Willems, Neuere Entwicklungen im Verhältnis von Politik und Religion im Spiegel politikwissenschaftlicher Debatten:
http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/KVIMDT,0,0,Neuere_Entwicklungen_im_Verh%20nis_von_Politik_und_Religion_im_Spiegel_politikwissenschaftlicher_Debatten.html#art0.

² Wolfgang Huber, „Die Religionen und der säkulare Staat“. Talk given at the Reformation reception in Vienna on October 30, 2006: http://www.ekd.de/vortraege/2006/061030_huber_wien.html.

National Socialism saw the state ideologically as a totalitarian state system. Its aim was the dissolution or elimination of all religious autonomy: the National Socialist state itself was to be the religion, and it expressed its politics in somber pseudo-religious language.

Communism had and still has a system of “theoretical separation” of state and religion. On the one hand, it claims freedom of religion for its domain. But on the other hand, in reality it suppresses the religious activities of its citizens, or it limits them to a large extent, or puts an end to religion.

Whether or not religions and states can already be or can become “allies” depends on the conditions, the circumstances and also the learning processes on both sides. During the course of history, developments and learning processes have often led to the distinction and separation of religion and state. According to my thesis, a distinction and separation of religion and state is necessary so that relations between them can be formed in the sense of an “alliance”. In saying this, I am not thinking of the model of a State-Church, in which the head of the state is at the same time the head of the Church; this is the case in Great Britain, Norway and Denmark, where the Church's organization is determined by the state without the freedom of the Church being affected.³

There are various models or systems with different characteristics for distinguishing and separating state and religion. When the separation is “strict”, it is called a separatist model. Among others, the USA and France have such a separatist model. In the USA for example, there is no religious instruction in state schools; on the side of the state, the Churches and faith communities are not asked to pay taxes nor are they given financial support. And yet, the religious factor has not simply disappeared from the public. Thus, the dollar bears the inscription, “In God We Trust”. And it is hardly possible to speak of a secular climate in the USA. On the other hand, it is possible to call France a state with a secular character. The French law separating religion and state has been valid for more than 100 years and was promulgated in 1905 after intense arguments within society. Since then, the cathedrals are state property and the parish churches and chapels belong to the communes. That looks like a subordination of the Churches under the state. Welfare institutions of Christian origin and with a Christian orientation are required to have their own organizations. The Church's activity is limited to the private domain. The “negative secularism” contained in this system has been criticized by none less than President Nicolas Sarkozy. He would like to develop a “positive secularism”, which acknowledges the positive contribution of religions to French society and fosters the participation of religious faith in public discourse.⁴

In addition to the system of “strict” separation of religion and state as in the USA or France, there is the model or system of “moderate” separation. Germany has this model. It does not exclude cooperation between state and religion. Rather, its form of separation is open to cooperation on both sides. Among its preconditions are freedom of religion, the ideological neutrality of the state, and the autonomy and self-determination of the faith communities. The relationship between the state and the Church is that of partners and it is regulated by means of so-called *Staatskirchenverträge* [contracts between the state and the Churches]. The state respects the social importance of the Churches and recognizes their work for the common good. The faith communities of Churches and of Judaism have the status of a

³ Alexander Hollerbach, Article „Staatskirche“, in: LThK IX (2000), 899f. or Ralph Ghadban, Staat und Religion in Europa im Vergleich: http://www.bpb.de/veranstaltungen/STZS3V,0,0,Staat_und_Religion_in_Europa_im_Vergleich.html.

⁴ Article „Separation of Church and State“: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state.

statutory body under public law or corporation of public law. Such a statutory body is organized according to public law and acts accordingly. The religious corporations of public law such as the Churches and Judaism may impose Church or religious taxes; these are collected by the state tax authorities in the name of the faith communities. There is a particularly intense partnership and cooperation in the area of social services, hospitals, counseling services, and charitable institutions. Many of these are maintained by the Churches and receive state support. Church relief organizations are among the most respected institutions involved in development aid, which requires particularly close coordination between state and Church projects. For hospitals and prisons, the state guarantees the access of religious pastoral care. Such pastoral care is also an integral part of the army. Religious education is a regular subject in state schools, whereby the student can choose "ethics" as an alternative. Kindergartens and schools belonging to faith communities receive state support. Many state universities have theological faculties. The Faculty for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg is recognized by the state and cooperates closely with the Heidelberg University. The Abraham Geiger Kolleg rabbinical seminary that was founded in Potsdam in 1999 is both legally and organizationally an independent institution for teaching and research and is incorporated into the Potsdam university. Some universities have Islam Institutes with the task of forming imams, or such institutes are being established. Religious symbols can be seen in public places, what however does lead to arguments. After disasters that move and affect the nation as a whole, public religious services or prayer gatherings are accepted on a broad scale.

The system of "moderate" separation of state and religion is accepted by a large percentage of Germany's citizens. This system does not presuppose any fundamental hostility between religion and state but is rather based on a constructive and positive organization of their reciprocal relations. It mutually respects autonomy and is open to diverse and differentiated cooperation. In order for Germany's Catholic Church to be able to affirm this model internally, a process of transformation was necessary in the Church, because historically, for quite some time the Catholic Church had wanted a system that would closely link the state and religion, with recognition of Catholicism as the state religion. For a long time, it seemed to the Catholic Church that a system of separation of state and Church was only a stopgap measure. In contrast, the Second Vatican Council accepted the individual's freedom of religion and gave up the desire to be given a privileged position by the state authority.⁵

The "moderate" separation of state and religion takes into account the preconditions for the citizens' freedom of religion, for the state's ideological neutrality, and for the autonomy of the faith community. In this model, the relationship between state and religion has the character of an "alliance". An expression of this alliance can be, for example, that the faith communities are expected to take note of a surrender of the public conscience. Because of their self-understanding, the Churches and the Jewish community can comply with this expectation of society, as can be seen in the biblical admonition through the prophet Jeremiah "to seek the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7). This alliance is not free of tension.

⁵ On this: Alexander Hollerbach, Article „Staatsreligion“, in: LThK IX (2000), 905-907; David Seeber, Politik und Kirche, in: Ulrich Ruh/David Seeber/Rudolf Walter (Ed.), Handwörterbuch religiöser Gegenwartsfragen, Freiburg 1986, 357-362, 360.

But it has good potential for solving newly arising problems in the area of politics and religion.⁶

⁶ Thus, for example, it is being discussed in the Federal Republic whether Islam in Germany can or should receive the status of a corporation of public law and thus receive a legal position comparable to that of the Churches. However, according to the supreme court decision of the Federal Administrative Court, the precondition for this status is that a faith community be organized to a certain extent. However, Islam does not have any organizational structure but only the Islamic community that encompasses all Muslims, the "Umma". Therefore, some Muslim spokespersons are demanding an alternative form of cooperation agreement that is recognized by the State. Cf. Ayyub A. Köhler, Die strukturelle Assimilation des Islam in Deutschland: <http://www.enfal.de/news12.htm>.