

HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH RESPOND WHEN FACED WITH A TOTALITARIAN REGIME?

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ABSTRACT: How Should the Church Respond when Faced with a Totalitarian Regime?

Despite the advances the contemporary world has made in respect of many aspect of its life, the church still faces significant challenges posed by the totalitarian regimes. This paper aims to explore the ways in which the church should relate to a totalitarian regime. In order to do that, the functions of the state as well as the mission of the church will be taken into consideration. In the light of the main issues raised by the totalitarian regimes, there will be suggested various ways in which the church could respond.

Keywords: *state, church, totalitarian regime, authority, neutrality.*

Introduction

Totalitarian regimes are a cruel reality of these as they have been throughout the entire history of human race. Prior to Christian era, people had obeyed and followed the dictators of different kingdoms and there was very little reaction or possibility to oppose the totalitarian system. Apart from the state, there were very few institutions as alternatives to the totalitarian regime, institutions which could have provided the means to take attitude against dictatorship. Instead of being a source of freedom for people¹, religion had been used to control and actually to strengthen the authority of the state in the minds and hearts of people. Therefore, the head of the state

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, *Om-Demnitare-Libertate (Human-Dignity-Freedom)*, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Risoprint, 2019, pp. 201-215.

was portrayed and regarded by people as an incarnate deity, a mediator between people and gods.

The Christian era brought an important change of the way people regarded the state and, on the other hand, the church had a very important role to play in the life of many nations and states. How then had the church reacted when faced with a totalitarian regime? Has the church always had one particular response?

I do not think that there is a singular and a best 'how should' when speaking of the way the church could respond to a totalitarian regime. This is function of many factors and what would fit a situation could not another one. It depends upon how the church understands itself and the state, upon the degree of evil the totalitarian regime reaches.

In this paper I want to argue that the church must react when lives within a state which is totalitarian. There are several things which the church can do as a response to the challenge of the totalitarian regime. The response comes as a normal consequence of a more complex scheme; in order to see how the church should react, I want to show that the totalitarian regime has some problems which affect in a negative way the life and activity, sometimes trying to affect even the very being of the church. To see if such a state bothers the church, I firstly speak the mission of the latter, then of what means and does wrong a totalitarian regime. To understand what is wrong about a totalitarian state, I present shortly what is the purpose of the state, which should be its activity and concerns. After I identified the mission of the church and the problems which a totalitarian regime raises to the church, I want to ask what authority should the church recognize. Bearing in mind whom follows the church, I finally suggest the response of the church to the challenge of the totalitarian state.

The mission of the church

To speak of the mission of the church presupposes to affirm firstly that God who created the world wants to redeem it. In this process, the church plays a central role. In the Christian church, God's Spirit works in a special way and through it God's presence and power are communicated. In the church, God is creating the 'new humanity', a community in which the barriers between human beings are removed and a new way of life based upon love and mutual service is to be experienced. The community of the

church is a demonstration in this world of what God can do by his power. Christ established his church as the *locus* of his mission and the members of the church should fulfill the divine purpose. The church disassociates itself from the 'worldly' principles and the way of life of the human society but, on the other hand, has to admit that it is dependent upon the wider human community; its relationship to the latter is 'neither conformist nor dismissive but rather *missionary* in nature... The missionary church works towards creation's ultimate transformation by the power of God and sees partial signs of this within the present order.'²

The essential mission of the church can be seen in Karl Barth's definition of the church; it is composed of 'those who have found in Jesus Christ their own comfort and their service in bearing witness before the world to Jesus Christ.'³ For Barth, true witnessing is to confess that Jesus is the One who has come as Son of God and to actualise this confession in relation to the contemporary questions which might appear. This is the major responsibility which the church has to stand for and this actually defines its very essence – to be the church is to be a confessing community.

Witnessing for Jesus Christ it is not only about the verbal (homiletical) aspect of the Christian witness but also the power of a genuine spirituality, a daily life lived in the power of the Spirit. It is about making practical the biblical teaching, bringing liberation in spiritual and physical areas, to rescue the poor and the oppressed. Does this mean that one can speak of a Christian political order as the mission of the church? Oliver O'Donovan suggests that 'Christian political order is not a *project* of the church's mission, either as an end in itself or as a means to the further missionary end.'⁴ He too asserts that the mission of the church is 'to witness to the Kingdom of God', whereas Christendom being the *response* to that mission, as a sign that God, in His mercy, blessed it.

The church has a message about the freedom in Jesus Christ and about truth and living in it. It has been said that the best way in which the church reaches its goal is to serve as a conscience for the

2 Nigel G. Wright, *Power and discipleship. Towards a Baptist Theology of the State*, Oxford: Whitley Publications, 1996, p. 25.

3 Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of our Day*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939, p. 5.

4 Oliver O'Donovan, *The desire of the nations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 195.

citizens and for those who govern, being a voice for God's kingdom of righteousness and peace.⁵

Because witnessing to Jesus Christ expresses the very essence of the church, that implies that this work is compulsory for its existence and for reaching the goal which God intended for the church. But the church lives (at least for the moment) within a society, a world which might influence – and surely does – its life; one of these elements the church interacts with and which may have a very important role to play in church's life and actions is the state. What then is the role of the state in relation to the church and its task?

The totalitarian state

The functions of the state

Max Weber defined the state as 'a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of the physical force within a given territory.'⁶ The Bible does not speak of the state as such but about the rulers who are simply 'the powers that be' (Romans 13:1). According to Aristotle, the state is „more of an achievement than a datum” and that it has its roots in the „civic” or social nature of man. This brings us to Thomas Hobbes' social contract, which essentially asserts that the state was established as a result of a deal made amongst individuals to grant some basic freedoms and rights to the sovereign, or tyrant, who rules over them. On the other hand, Christians have spoken of the state as an 'order' of creation along the other two, namely the family and the church. This does not mean that the state is divine in its nature but that it is created by God and its existence in this age is ordained and willed by him.

The New Testament scholar Oscar Cullmann correctly holds that Jesus did not see the state as a final, divine institution. Instead, he accepted it and did not seek to abolish it. The Swiss scholar emphasizes that this mindset permeates the entire New Testament and that Revelation 13 should not be viewed as a deviation from the general message of the New

5 Walter E. Pilgrim, *Uneasy neighbours. Church and State in the New Testament*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, p. 212.

6 Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation' in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills eds. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948, p. 48.

Testament, but rather as a case study of what happens when the state oversteps its bounds and claims what is rightfully God's.⁷ Plato thought that the doctrine of immortality of the soul is of a political importance. He rightly argues that since the state is temporal and the individual permanent, the former must serve the latter.⁸

The functions of the state are regarded by some firstly and foremost in negative terms as repressing active wickedness. Others have provided a more balanced viewpoint, arguing that the state may be more interested in advancing the interests of the populace as a whole rather than only punishing wrongdoers. Aristotle believed that the achievement of *commune bonum*, the common good of the fellowship as a whole, was the state's *raison d'être* and accorded this duty of the state a high priority. According to him, the state was established so that people "might live, and continue to live happily."⁹

One needs to bear in mind that the state expresses – probably better than any other institution – the fact that it belongs to this age; it is more likely to maintain a kind of ambivalence towards the state seen as a perverted, worldly power but at the same time as a channel of just laws and good which can be done for people. Wright develops this argument by referring to Walter Wink who suggests that powers are *simultaneously* good, fallen and to be redeemed; Wright summarizes: 'the powers are good (because they are created), fallen (as a consequence of human alienation from its divine origin), and to be redeemed (through God's work in Christ).'¹⁰

The state possesses and uses force not because its essence is power but because Law must be enforced and justice must be done; so the state is a servant and instrument of God for the preservation of justice and for the promotion of human welfare. This way, the state creates the *locus* within which the church fulfils its goal, its *raison d'être* – to witness for Christ. This leads to the fact that the state seeks for an ethical and a spiritual end. According to John Clifford, the state serves a purpose that is not entirely secular and is instead "really religious in a broad, non dogmatic, non cre-

7 Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament*, London: SCM Press, 1957, p. 18.

8 William Temple, *Essays in Church Politics and kindred subjects*, London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1927, p. 36.

9 In Nathaniel Mickelm, *The Theology of the Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 67.

10 Wright, p.16.

dal, and non ecclesiastical sense.”¹¹ He listed five key responsibilities for the “ideal state,” including: protecting and granting freedom to each citizen for their personal growth; ensuring justice at all levels; educating everyone to be good citizens; pursuing unity among citizens while putting aside issues that might cause division; and, finally, showing mercy to the needy and poor.¹²

The problem of the totalitarian regime

The state has the right to demand all that is necessary to its existence but if it goes beyond that, then it becomes totalitarian. There is a permanent temptation for the state to ask for more than is ‘allowed’ to claim and receive, for Caesar to demand what is God’s. Dr. Ley, a Nazi leader made known the expectation of his party: ‘the party claims the totality of the soul of the German people’ and Mussolini’s words show that the totalitarian Fascist state covered all departments of human activity and life: ‘No human and spiritual ends, not even liberty can be realized outside the state;... the state is the syntetis and unity of all values, and interprets, develops and intensifies the whole life of the people.’¹³ Here one can see that the state has another function, namely to seek to achieve the ends which the state establishes by uniting and controlling all the powers and activities of the life of the community; the state is superior to the sum of the lives of its members; the individual can achieve her end only if that corresponds to that of state and just because is a member of the latter. This is a grave mistake because the state embraces the entire citizenship and should act for the people.

One of the biggest mistake which British found in Germans when analyzing the sins of the latter in the Second World War was their belief in the amoral state – this belief says that the concept of ‘morality’ does not apply to state, that the state has nothing above it and it should be the judge of its own case. Archbishop of Canterbury replied stating the moral high ground for the Allies: he emphasized that they believe that there is a higher law than that of the state, that not the state is the one which receives the

11 John Clifford, ‘A Baptist’s view on Church and State’, in David Nicholls ed., *Church and State in Britain since 1820*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, p. 125.

12 Idem, p. 126.

13 James Barr, *Religious liberty in the totalitarian states*, London: Allenson & Co, 1938, pp. 38, 17.

deepest allegiance and that the individual and nations should guide their existence after a more sacred set of principle of honour than a state could enforce.¹⁴ Moreover, British clergymen continued arguing that the Bible teaches very clearly that nations are responsible to God for ethical conduct. For example, Israel lost the Battle of Ai because of the Achan's disobedience (Joshua 7:11). The totalitarian state is not its own ultimate authority before which it responds but it exists under the authority of God.

The fact that the totalitarian state draws its own line as it were the ultimate authority is closely related to its understanding of it itself as being an end in itself. In that case the essence of the state is power – physical, material, intellectual, moral and spiritual and its instrument is force. The state will try to achieve its ends by force.¹⁵ In this context the church does not have the freedom to be itself, to fulfill its task, witnessing freely to Jesus Christ. This action (witnessing for Jesus Christ) is alien and not to be allowed by any of the totalitarian regimes as the proclamation of the Christian message voices directly that the state is only a servant of God for the benefit of the people, a means through which individuals are protected in their desire to reach the ultimate goal: to know God and to live for him.

Here is another point where the totalitarian regime fails – it thinks that the individual citizen exists solely for the service of the state and not that the state exists for the individual member. This follows quite easily from the fact that the totalitarian state sees itself as an end, the ultimate goal. Therefore, the interests of the individual are necessarily subordinated to that of the state, which is above the sum of the interests of its members. I think that it is not the state the one which has priority of importance over the individual but I agree with William Temple when says that ontologically 'the human personality has a status, worth and dignity quite independent of the State and superior to that of the State.'¹⁶

Karl Barth saw that the real character of the German National Socialism was that this considered itself and acted as 'a religious institution of salvation', presupposing that 'it itself is able to be and to give to man and to

14 A. J. Hoover, *God, Germany and Britain in the great war. A study in clerical Nationalism*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989, p. 23.

15 Charles Grant Robertson, *Religion and the Totalitarian State*, London: The Epworth Press, 1937, p. 16.

16 William Temple, *Citizen and churchman*, London: Eyre & Spottswode, Ltd, 1941, p. 27.

all men everything necessary for body and soul, for life and death, for time and eternity.¹⁷ Joseph Ton was a Romanian Baptist pastor who spoke out affirming the Christian belief that one can be transformed, made a 'new man' only by God's grace and intervention and not by the Communist ideology, as Communist leaders sustained.

Pretending and doing the things mentioned above, it may be said that the totalitarian state claims divine honours or messianic significance. Its demands are made known to the church and the latter is required to conform. Should the church obey the totalitarian regime? Should the church accept and recognize the authority that state claims to have over it?

The quest of authority over the church

I cannot think of a Christian who would answer this simple question of authority over the church otherwise than that, ultimately, Jesus Christ is the supreme authority. It seems to me that the problem lies in defining what 'ultimately' means to them. Some, citing what Paul says in Romans 13: 1-5 argue that since all government comes from God, the civil authorities were appointed by God therefore those who resist authority are rebelling against God's decision and such an act is bound to be punished. Luther condemned those involved in Peasants' Revolt in 1524 – 5 and said that all those peasants who rebelled to be severely punished, even killed. Calvin attacked some revolutionaries and called them 'those ferocious beasts' because he thought that even a harsh tyranny is better than the disorder of revolt. But is this attitude towards the state really the best when the latter claims worship and renouncement to the veritable Christian faith? What about the good and just things which even the totalitarian state does? For example, even in Nazi Germany, thieves and murderers in a non - political way were punished.

Paul says in Romans 13:1 'everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established' but, at the same time, Revelation teaches that the church fights against the totalitarian regime which has divine claims. Christians are called to obey authorities as long as they keep themselves in the category of 'the servants of God' and to obey even the totalitarian, implicitly demonic regime but only in all those matters which is right to be required.

17 Barth, p. 41.

I suggest that the state, Caesar should not have any claims of authority in matters of the teaching of the church and, in fact, in any aspect which concerns church's inner life. Constantine intervened in the Arian controversy and exiled Arius and his followers, thus confusing the judgement of the church with that of Caesar. He considered himself the religious lawgiver of the empire, the providential instrument for the kingdom of Christ. Constantius, his son, interpreted his power *over* the church as self – evident. Anyhow, the real problem lies in the fact that some Christians (for example, Donatists) thought that Constantine had the right to intervene in the theological disputes, conferring him the authority to decide which side was right and to punish the 'heretics'.¹⁸

This was not because Constantine as a Christian was a wise and gifted elder among the Christian communities but because he connected his position as 'an outside bishop of the church'. One cannot say that Constantine was a demonic ruler claiming divine honours, although one – I believe – can assert that the Roman Empire under his rule and that of many of his followers was a totalitarian regime because they tried to enforce Christianity in all parts of the Empire; later, non Christians were severely punished, even killed. Therefore, I suggest that there should be separation between state and church, although the rulers themselves are Christians.

But the claims of a totalitarian regime rule out God and his authority, as seen in Tecklenburg Confession: 'Ours is a state which cannot hear that there should be another power besides itself, which is not part of it, and which is not within its power' and place Caesar as the ultimate authority, as seen in the words of Herr Kerrl, Reich Minister for Church Affairs in Germany, on 13th February 1937, words which sound more of a blasphemy: 'There has risen a new authority as to what Christ and Christianity really is. That new authority is Adolf Hitler. Christ is the Saviour, but not the Lord of the World!'¹⁹ One can easily see here that, undoubtedly, 'Caesar' is considered to be the Lord of all.

One of the most evident and directly affirmed truths in the Bible is that the only Lord whom the whole Univers has is the God of Christians. Everything is subject to Christ's lordship (Acts 4: 19-20; 5:29). The New Testament says that the Father gave all things into the hands of Jesus

18 T. M. Parker, *Christianity and the state in the light of History*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1955, p. 54.

19 Barr, pp. 38, 52.

Christ – all judgment, all power in heaven and on earth and that because all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father; ‘this is Father’s everlasting ordinance that Christ should be Lord of all, that His authority should be fully recognized and cordially submitted to.’²⁰ This general statement of Christ’s universal authority implies all particulars, one of which could be Christ’s authority over the church.

The authority of Jesus Christ over the church can be read between lines when thinking of him as the creator of all things: ‘for by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him...and he is the head of the body, the church...so that in everything he might have the supremacy.’ (Colossians 1: 16 – 18).

The church is the example before the whole world of the working of the principle of the new creation, principle which was in the first creation too: God’s will is supreme; in Jesus Christ, God’s will is restored to supremacy, so here, in the church, self – will must be utterly abolished but trying to do the holy will of God.²¹

‘Christ is Lord’ determines to have an understanding of the state which deprives it and its leaders of divine dignity and allows them only a servant role. Facing this problem of what the Nazi Party claimed from people, representatives of German confessional churches asserted their belief known as ‘The Barmen Declaration’ (1934): ‘Jesus Christ is... God’s mighty claim on our whole life. We repudiate the false teaching that there are areas of our life in which we belong not to Jesus Christ but another Lord.’²² Barth, one of the most prominent figures among those who gathered at Barmen emphasized that there is one confession which the church should make: Jesus Christ as *one* Lord.

The response of the church to the claims of a totalitarian regime Neutrality?

A totalitarian regime abolishes the human nature of that country’s inhabitants and annihilates their human freedom, does not allow the church to proclaim its message, as the latter and its own philosophy of existence

20 James Dick, *The authority of Christ over the individual, the Church, and the nation*, Strain & Sons, 1983, p. 6.

21 Dick, p. 12.

22 John H. Leith, *Creeeds of the churches*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973, p. 520.

would be mutually exclusive. I think that one cannot speak of the neutrality of the church, as long as the totalitarian regime fails and makes intentionally all these mistakes. Karl Barth, thought that the church cannot really be neutral when realizes the double character of the German National Socialism (this double character can be ascribed to any of the totalitarian regimes) as a political experiment and as a religious institution of salvation (as mentioned earlier).²³

Compromise?

After the blood – Revolution in December 1989, there were some bishops who made very interesting confessions; they wanted to ‘repent’ for collaborating with the former Communist regime. In May 1997, Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Nicolae Corneanu of Banat publicly confessed his capitulation to the demands of the Securitate (the secret police in Romania) in suspending five priests back in 1981.²⁴ In March 2001, the priest Eugen Jurca confessed his compliance with the Communist regime and he gave the reasons which were behind his collaboration: the *fear* that there was no one to protect him if he refused those who asked him to collaborate, the *coweredness* – he was afraid of being sent off the university and on the other hand, he says that he wanted to get a scholarship for further studies, *ignorance* – he did not have any political knowledge or experience or ‘life experience’ and *desperation* – he said that did not trust enough in God’s help.²⁵ Although there were few bishops who confessed their compliance, not all of those who had done that prior to December 1989 had the courage to say it publicly.²⁶

Compromise has been the solution which churches have embraced in many totalitarian states. These churches have reached different degrees of accommodation to the worldly power; they thought it would be better

23 Barth, p. 29.

24 Janice Broun, ‘Romanian Metropolitan confesses collaboration with Securitate’ in *Frontier*, No. 4, 1997.

25 ‘Open letter to church’s hierachies and civil Romanian society’ in *Evenimentul zilei*, 26 June 2001, No. 2665, p. 3.

26 Unfortunately, the number of clergymen who collaborated with Securitate is big, most all of them doing that in a way or another. Some had done terrible things – one priest in Timisoara closed the door of the cathedral in the center of the city when many people were looking for a refuge as the army was shooting in them because they were manifesting.

and safer for the life of the church to accommodate to the situation that exists, to become part of it if they want to go on living. The 'extreme', uncompromising attitudes of the first Christian generation are no longer possible, as it would be better – they say – to normalize the political power and to parley with it.²⁷ This happens because the church loses its spiritual power and becomes more 'political', actually trying to achieve political influence and power and to make use of it when its interests are threatened. This is a kind of 'preservation' of the church, of its institution but it seems to me that people are generally forgot and used to achieve church's goals.

I think that a very important role in the willingness of the churches to accommodate to the existent regime is played by their understanding of the church – state relations. For example, Orthodox theologians speak of a *symphonia* between church and state; neither of them – they say – should control the other but respect and complement one another. Church and state may be seen as partners in the complex process of the development of human beings but Orthodoxy proposes 'a system of harmony and mutuality (*symphonia* and *synallelia*) between church and state.'²⁸

The state supports the church, therefore when things change on state's side, the church seeks to accommodate to the new situation to follow its understanding of the relations between the two. In this *symphonia*, in a compromise which the church would make, is there any room for freedom to preach or teach? Does not the church lose its institutional autonomy trying to please the leaders of the worldly powers? The church should remember that spiritual integrity and its fellowship with God take precedence over the citizenship of its members in this world. Then priorities change and pleasing the state or doing anything regardless the morality and correctness of that action just for its survival, is not the best thing to do. The compromise - I think - is not the right solution when dealing with the totalitarian state.

Resistance

In face of the challenge of a totalitarian regime, Karl Barth is warning: 'Woe to the Church if she sleeps while Jesus Christ Himself is in some trial and

27 Jacques Ellul, *Violence. Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, London: SCM Press, 1970, p. 9.

28 Vigen Guroian, *Incarnate love: essays in Orthodox ethics*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983. p. 144.

we should be watching along with Him!²⁹ I believe that the church must take attitude regarding the totalitarian regime and that is *resistance* – there is no room for neutrality or compromise.

Resistance is possible because Christians have this firm conviction that this world belongs to God and he is the one who will ultimately determine its destiny.³⁰ In what follows, there are presented the elements which I think the resistance should consist of.

Dialogue

In the 1960s, the relations between church and state in East Germany improved than they had been up to that moment and than they were in another Communist countries. Church and state held high – level conversations which had benefic results: they agreed to respect the ideological differences, to cooperate in areas of common social and political concern, and to resolve political differences through dialogue rather than confrontation.³¹ The state continued to discourage people to be members of the church but at least the church had some rights and enjoyed some liberties which made possible to fulfill at its mission if it wanted. The church had the courage to speak for its liberty and somehow making space for its development warning the state that there an area which should belong to it exclusively.

Anyway, a dialogue between the church and the totalitarian regime is a very rare thing to happen as the latter claims that it has the whole and unique truth. If possible, the church should hold conversations with the state making known to the latter its mission and state's duties.

Preaching

Oscar Cullmann concludes that the way the church should resist the totalitarian demand of the state is two – folded: negatively, to persevere in the refusal of the idolatry demanded of the state and positively, to persevere in the Christian preaching.³² The latter is or brings, par excellence, the best critique to the idolatrous state and its claims – the Christian preaching should speak out naming the demands of the state as what they are: oppo-

29 Barth, p. 19.

30 Pilgrim, p. 171.

31 John P. Burgess *The East German Church and the end of Communism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 46.

32 Cullmann, p. 84.

sition to God. This requires courage and sometimes (quite often) a price to be paid. It is church's duty to speak prophetically in crisis times.

Nonviolence

Civil disobedience, public witness and even protest in defiance of the state are permitted by Revelation but there is a line drawn at violent resistance – 'they that take the sword shall perish by the sword'.³³ In the whole New Testament the ethic of nonviolence and love for the enemy are some of the most prominent teachings. Christians are called to follow Christ's example, as seen in the central Christological image in Revelation, as the Lamb who suffered, was slain but rejected even the idea of an armed resistance on his behalf.

A nonviolent response presupposes an utter faith in the action of the Holy Spirit, a deep conviction that God accomplishes his will not through violence on the part of man but church's obedience and sacrifice make room for the power and action of God to manifest itself.

It is well known the case of the Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was arrested and then hanged because he was part of a plot which tried to kill Adolf Hitler but failed. It is very interesting that that before trying to kill Hitler, he resigned from the Confessing Church, as he knew that that church would not approve of any act of violence. Bonhoeffer explained why he wanted to be part of that plot saying: 'If I saw a drunk driver racing down on the street, I would not consider it my duty to bury the victims of the madman. It would be more important to wrench the wheel out of his hands.'³⁴ He saw his gesture and of the other Christians who were ready to use violence not as a church decision as such but 'as a matter of Christian conscience to which they must be obedient in exceptional moral circumstances.'³⁵ I want to question and at the same time do not agree with his understanding that one can speak of doing something which is a 'matter of Christian conscience' without being related to church's life or teaching or principles. To put it in another way, there nothing 'Christian' outside the life, teaching and principles of the church.

33 Pilgrim, p. 207.

34 Audrey Constant, *No compromise. The story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, Religious and Moral Education Press, 1983, p. 19.

35 Pilgrim, p. 207.

Christians may be encouraged by the example of a non Christian who secured his country's independence through an absolute nonviolence – Ghandi liberating India. It is true that he had to deal with Britain but not with a totalitarian regime – anyway, this proves once more that nonviolence can succeed when people are ready to embrace it.

Another reason for which I think nonviolence is the attitude which the church should have when resisting the totalitarian state is that if the church used violence to set aside the leaders of the totalitarian state, it becomes itself an totalitarian instrument because it wants to enforce something although good, using the instrument which every totalitarian regime would use – force.

Patient endurance

Nonviolence implies that the church chose to deal with the problem of the totalitarian state another options, among which endurance is one of the most important. The church is called to endure not the perverted claims of the totalitarian regime but to endure patiently because of its reaction to the demands of the state. The church should accept the fact the state is ready to do anything to reach its goals, to oppose violently what the former believes and teaches. I speak of endurance within the context of resistance, as the former is an important ingredient of the latter: a successful resistance against the totalitarian state means to have the courage and the power to survive in the midst of problems – enduring something does not makes one disappear but it makes her stronger.

Endurance is based on the willingness to wait patiently God's fulfilling of his promises. Apostle Paul had a hope in the midst of troubles: 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; stuck down, but not destroyed' (2 Corinthians 4: 8-9). As the well – known saying 'The blood of the Christians, the seed of Christianity', endurance has a spiritual importance – it is a very important virtue. Why would not the church regard the totalitarian regime as a time when it is tested, a time when God allows this evil in order to work on his church to sanctify it?

Prayer

One of the things the church could do best and helping the most through it, but it actually does least is praying for the totalitarian regime, for its

leaders and that God's will will be done and that regime will be casted out. The church may sometimes forget that behind these totalitarian regimes, there are demonic powers which want to perverted what God intended for the benefit of the human kind. Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 6: 12 'For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.'

Prayer is the engine which supports and empowers the whole life of the church and which may give courage when necessary and a better understanding of how God sees those particular things. Barth saw the very important role which prayer plays in finding the most appropriate ways for the church to respond to the totalitarian regime: 'she (the church) will not speak without being silent.'³⁶ He argues that to pray means that one brings her neediness before God, that one is thanking him, that one trusts in him and that one accepts that her neediness is a sign of God's judgment, but at the same time hoping in his grace.³⁷ For him, praying is not an optional thing but an obligation.

Being the church

I think that the church can make the best decisions when facing a totalitarian regime, when trying to resist it, only when the church seeks to be itself, to be and to do what God wants it to be and to do.³⁸ It should not accommodate to the existing system, should not seek political power or emphasize its institutional status regardless to costs but to give priority of importance to the spiritual life, to its helpless, powerless and needy members. The church is called to be 'the salt and the light of the world', called to point to Jesus, to challenge people with Good news. The church has a message to bring, another principles of life to be lived; when it compromises and seeks other interests, it is actually weaker and it fails to reach its initial goals. The church can best resist the totalitarian regime by being itself, by being the church.

36 Barth, p. 59.

37 Idem, pp. 60 – 61.

38 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, "Biserica lui Dumnezeu, sursa unui Râu al Vieții și al Vindecării" („The Church of God, Source of a River of Life and Healing”), in *Argeșul ortodox*, Săptămânal teologic, bisericesc și de atitudine al Arhiepiscopiei Argeșului și Muscelului, Curtea de Argeș, anul XI, nr. 564, 20– 26 sept. 2012, p. 5.

Conclusion

The church has a very difficult time when the state within which exists is totalitarian and it cannot remain silent; the message which the church must bring before the world suffers because of the dictatorship, therefore the church should do its best to help to create a context in which it could be itself and fulfill its purpose. The totalitarian regime claims what is God's, so the church finds itself in the situation to choose between the two. I think that the church should not capitulate under the pressure of the regime but resist it. This resistance to the dictatorship has its limits – the violence. Trying to hold dialogues with the exponents of the regime, continuing to bring God's message in the midst in this hostile medium, enduring and being ready to pay the price despite the possible high costs, realizing that the church is involved in a spiritual war with the evil powers which are behind the totalitarian regimes and trying hard not to lose from its sight the mission which it has, its nature, the impact which it should have on people's lives more than seeking to have political influence. It should not forget that in this very difficult action which may take time and energy, the church is not alone but it is sustained and encouraged by God, its creator and redeemer.

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