

ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

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ABSTRACT: Aspects of the Relationship between Church and State.

The subject of human rights is and always will be topical. The state, as an institution, must deal with its citizens. There is a social contract between the state and its citizens and on the basis of this contract the state must perform certain functions through which its citizens are served.

The Church does not and should not deal with citizens. The Church has a much wider sphere of involvement, namely the Church deals with people in a general way, regardless of nationality, nationality, age, gender, education, wealth, etc.

Conflict has existed since the beginning of time. Conflicts are based on differences that become disturbing to others: differences of ideas, differences of religion, differences of desires, interests that become contrary and actually generate conflict. Based on one's world and life view, people act on conflicts.

Keywords: *Church, state, relationships, institutions, citizens, mission, social contract.*

The subject of human rights is and always will be topical. The state, as an institution, must deal with its citizens. There is a social contract between the state and its citizens and on the basis of this contract the state must perform certain functions through which its citizens are served.

The Church does not and should not deal with citizens. The Church has a much wider sphere of involvement, namely the Church deals with people in a general way, regardless of nationality, nationality, age, gender, education, wealth, etc. By the fact that the Church has a mandate from God to deal with His creatures, i.e. people, it has the widest sphere of action, as well as the greatest authority, with the clarification that the Church's authority is of a spiritual nature and not of another nature, legal, political, or

of the nature of other state authorities.

Thus, because the Church has a much wider sphere of action, we believe that we should look at things from the Church to the State and see where the limits are and where there should be no interference and under no circumstances infringements of each other's territory.

As such, the Church deals with people, and in carrying out this mission, she obviously has to deal with a lot of means. For example: television is a means that the Church uses in terms of fulfilling its God-given mission to care for people. And so we can talk about buildings, various other instruments, books, libraries, ceremonies, but all of these are not ends in themselves, they are only means for the fulfilment of the mission that the Church has from God, which is to take care of people, with the proviso that not in the place of God, who is totally concerned with people and especially with the most important thing, which is the salvation of people.

It has pleased God to associate all His people, associated within the institution of the Church, an institution that will deal with Him, to the limit of their possibilities and the means at their disposal, with people in cooperation with God and in connection with all institutions and social organizations. The Church does not just act in this way in a world of ideas, a world of faith, or in a mystical world, but she acts in the society of that time, dealing with the people of that time, people, who in turn are citizens in relation to the state, in relation to each other, are relatives, friends, co-workers, etc.

The purpose of the Church is one, namely to help people discover God the Creator, and this mandate was entrusted to the Church by Jesus Christ, who said:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.¹

That is, the Church's role is to help people know God and follow Him. The role of the Church is to convey to people what God has done and to convey this message in a way that makes sense to the people with whom it comes into contact. Even more than that, the main purpose of the Church is to help people, so that they themselves, each in turn, discover

1 Matthev 28,19-20.

God. In fact, as Dobrin states, it is in the church that „conceptual and behavioral modeling takes place, concerning God and the relationship with others”.² The basis for these activities of the Church must be found in Holy Scripture, as well as all the other possibilities which the Church uses.

The Church, the instrument that God invented, because it has not always existed, it has been in existence for about 2000 years since Christ, in its evolution in the world has gone from failure to failure and yet in spite of this God is still using the Church, always reforming it, always trying to purify it, always trying to bring it back to its roots, that is to say to His Word, always trying to draw its attention to its mission. Despite these shortcomings, the purpose of the Church has always been fulfilled, because the Church has no standard for guiding people to God. And if one led to God, it did a good thing, and if it could lead more people, that's another thing. The great misfortune occurs when the Church instead of leading people to God, it leads them away from God, that is, it takes the wrong direction, instead of taking it with the mission to people and then to God, it can take it elsewhere: to people, to ideologies, to politics, to anything else.

The state and the Church have always been competitors. When Jesus Christ appeared in history, the state, represented by the authority of the Sanhedrin and the Roman authority, saw in Him a rival, a potential competitor, and treated Him as such. Then Christianity expanded and waves of persecution came upon it, because the Church in its expansion was seen even more as a dangerous rival to the state, sometimes even as an enemy outright. After that came a period of mesalliance between the state and the Church, achieved by means that God did not recommend, when the Church managed to undermine the authority of the state, to penetrate it and even to practically replace it, so that it came to the period of the Middle Ages, that the state represented by kings and princes, received its authority from the Church. If they did not cohabit with the Church they were immediately taxed and even declared heretics.

About 500 years ago, the Reformation taxed all the Church's deviations. Martin Luther and others said: We must return to the original purpose of the Church. First of all the purpose of the Church is not to be a builder of cathedrals, it is not a conclave in which the policies of the state or

2 Emanuel Dobrin, *Importanța și necesitatea comunicării mesajului Evangheliei pentru actuala generație de adolescenți influențată de mass-media și tehnologia informațională*, Cluj Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2020, p. 250.

states or the policies of the world are to be made. The Church is not a place where fortunes are made, the Church has another mission. The representatives of the Reformation were calling the Church back to Scripture. The Church also used education as a means of controlling society.

Then came the French Revolution which further undermined the authority of the Church, denying it altogether, promoting reason as the panacea that would bring peace and prosperity to the world, and that didn't happen anyway. After these events there was a backlash, people went in a certain direction, which they found very interesting, that of science and scientific research, very good indeed, but they went beyond the frontier of science and went to the philosophy of science, starting from the premise that God does not exist. And then they built a whole philosophical pseudo-scientific religious edifice outside of God. This lasted for a while, and then there was another setback in which some scientists started saying that God does exist and the universe didn't just happen. And after all this came the current of secularisation, which mankind has been experiencing for about 100 years. People, some tempted by scientific theories, others simply uncaring, others revolted by the practices of the Church, and so people came to say they no longer needed the Church. They didn't explicitly say that people no longer needed God, they said that people no longer needed the Church, with all its ministries.

A Christian must be a good citizen towards the state, which means that he must respect the Constitution and the laws of the country, not to be careless about the things that happen around him, beyond the duty to pay taxes to the state and besides all this to care about the community (called town, commune, village) in which he lives. The Christian's attitude towards the state has nothing to do with, or is not based on, a visceral reaction against any state official or any state employee who is not doing his job. The Christian's attitude towards the state is one of conscious involvement, based on a contract with the state. Every citizen has his part to play in his dealings with the state, i.e. being a good citizen. This point is also emphasised in Holy Scripture:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou

then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.³

As a faithful man, i.e. towards the Church, man must be a good member of the Church, into which freely and without anyone's consent man has chosen to enter, and towards God man should be a grateful and reverent creature, because in fact man depends on Him.

What should a Christian do when he finds that the Church he belongs to is not doing its job as it should? The Church to which one belongs includes that man who is dissatisfied with his Church. The Church is really about people, not its structure or hierarchy.

In that Church, man must first do his part, because his obligation to the Church is actually to God. The Church is only an interface, an instrument, a means of divinity. Even if the priest or pastor does not do his job, this does not exempt any believer from doing his duty, because in fact man's relationship with the Church is his relationship with God.

What does a citizen do when he notices deviations?

If there are deviations of the state, the citizen must sanction them through the means established by the Constitution and the laws of the state, to apply civil disobedience - as defined in Christian ethics,⁴ and finally, if he no longer likes that state, he can go to another.

If it is about the Church's deviations, the Christian has some tools: to say his point of view, to open the Bible and point out the Church's de-

3 Romans 13, 1-7.

4 Ieremia Rusu, „Drepturile omului și neascultarea civilă din perspectiva eticii creștine”, *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință*, Conferință Parlament 28 decembrie 2021, Vol. 9, Nr. 3 (2021), Rotaru, Ioan-Gheorghe (Ed.), Editions IARSIC, Les Arcs, France, 2021, pp. 274-291.

viations, and that Christian must remain as a Christian should be, to be an example first. And if the Church gets so far away from God that the Christian finds that there is a gulf between what he says and what he practices, then he has every right to leave that Church and position himself somewhere else where he will find the greatest closeness between what he says, says, and what that Church does and between what he says, says, and what God does.

And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.

And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.⁵

The Saviour Jesus Christ says in that scriptural passage two things: that man owes his taxes to the state, whether there is a king there, or any other form of government, because the state has some expenses for the benefit of man. Whether or not the state does them properly is another discussion.

The Saviour expands there in what he says, actually delimiting two territories, and he says so: There is a territory where the legitimate authority is Caesar, that is, the state, and there people must behave as good citizens, and there is a territory, which also overlaps the territory of Caesar, where the authority is God's.

As citizens, in fulfilling their specific obligations as citizens to the state, they should be aware that, in fulfilling those obligations, they are actually serving not people but God. In that passage there is on the one hand a separation of territories, and on the other a superimposition of them on the higher level of a Christian's citizenship. A Christian is actually supposed to be the best citizen. The two institutions must not interfere with

5 Mark 12, 14-17.

each other, as the Saviour and the Constitution say, and international law is supposed to state.

The citizen may use any legal forms of citizen protest, which are stipulated by law. Thus he can protest, within constitutional limits, against things that are considered to be wrong. Through this form of protest, the citizen has something to say to the state in the sense that certain things are not going well, and the citizen has certain claims on the state.

What we do always affects at least 3 people: it affects us, it affects the other (whether an individual or a collective) and it affects God. Whatever we do as people, in whatever direction, whether we act or don't act, all 3 categories of people are affected in one way or another. Man, according to the Christian faith, neither in this life nor in the next, will lose his citizenship, now a citizen of a country, then a citizen of the Kingdom of God and as such man must get used to being a good citizen.

If the State has failed to fulfil its obligation to a Church and has thus violated the law, causing it certain harm, legal action is justified to resolve the situation. This fact is mentioned by God.

The Christian and restrictions

The period of the two years of the pandemic was not a comfortable and pleasant period, on the one hand because we can talk about a very real danger, sometimes harsh, on the other hand because under the pretext of public danger, namely that of endangered public health, the authorities abused the limitations, the restrictions. And when there are restrictions, the citizen, the believer in particular, is faced with the freedom to exercise his faith according to all the rules he has accepted. And in this respect there have certainly been intrusions by the state into the life and privacy of the individual and certain rights have been violated. It is no less true that many believers have violated the right to protect their fellow human beings with regard to the danger of the Covid virus, in the sense that although there was a real danger, they did not impose on themselves a minimum of conduct that would protect the other. It is regrettable that Christians, who are expected to have high standards, to have values and to treat their neighbours (fellow human beings) as at least as important as any of us, have treated their fellow human beings with disrespect, proving that man treats even himself with the same disrespect.

Going beyond this, speaking of religious rights, the Christian is inclined to see only what rights he is guaranteed. We believe that this pandemic has been exploited too much politically and perhaps the churches have been too docile about it. Perhaps the churches, which are public interest organisations, and which constitute, from a certain point of view of legal status, a majority of the civil sector, quite late in the day began to speak out and tell the authorities that they have some limited powers with regard to the rights of believers.

The principle of separation of powers

From Holy Scripture it is concluded that the human being is corruptible, corrupted, fallible and not infallible.

And God, taking into account that by the appearance of sin in the world, the human being is fallible, subject to error, sought a mechanism by which the speed of the spread of evil and the possibility of preventing or correcting errors would be higher. For this reason God has decided that in spiritual things He will give authority to the Church and give responsibility for civil matters to civil authorities.

The Apostle Paul even calls the civil authorities either with the word priest or deacon of God for the realm of earthly goods. The idea is that by giving power to some in one area and to others in another area, when one errs in his area of authority, the other can still correct him, temper him. For example: if there are several religious denominations in a country, one that is more numerous, stronger or more rebellious can abuse the rights of the other and persecute it, and because this happens under the authority of the state, the state intervenes so that there are no conflicts between churches, cults, and the state must exist in such a way that there are no conflicts between churches. In this way the state can be an element of restraint even in relations between churches. At the same time, the Churches can tell the State about certain laws that are contrary to Christian principles and values.

Churches also cannot demand that laws be in favour of Christians, but they can demand that laws do not hinder the religious life of Christians.

If a union is made between the state and the church, then there are no longer the two elements to counterbalance or balance each other, and there is a greater possibility of error or even corruption. The church in un-

ion with the state can claim to be infallible and can impose all its projects, just as the state, relying on the church, can solve certain problems, obtain votes, etc.

The Church must be separate from the state, but not silent in relation to the state, but a voice in relation to the state. A religious organisation is accountable to God, being focused and set according to God-given laws. In such a situation such a religious organization behaves in harmony with the laws and principles that God gives it and when someone, the state or someone else seeks to hinder its work, then that religious organization does not have to dialogue with the state (please...), but it will affirm its principles.

There are also situations where some representatives of the state, unfortunately, at different levels, often do not do what they should do, but do what they think is important for them to do.

For example, a smaller religious organisation, it is nevertheless a reality in a country and as such should be taken into account alongside other religious organisations, even if they are larger and more influential.

There is often confusion between political involvement and civic responsibilities. Political involvement means being on the side of a certain political party, even joining a political party, while civic responsibilities mean something else entirely.

For believers, Moses, even though he had a calling from God, went and got involved in negotiations with Pharaoh about getting Israel out of Egypt. When he went to negotiate with Pharaoh Moses was actually making official relations. As a representative of the Jews, that is, the Jewish national minority, he went to talk to the representative of the Egyptian state, negotiating until he succeeded in freeing the people from Egypt. Pharaoh told him that he was not afraid of them, because they were few compared to Egypt, which was very large at the time. Moses showed him that he should not mess with Moses, that when he messed with Moses he was actually messing with the Jewish people, and when he messed with the Jewish people he was actually messing with the God of the Jewish people, and that the God of the Jewish people cannot be overcome. When Pharaoh realized that he had an opponent at least equal to, if not stronger than himself, he began to react.

Daniel, a Hebrew servant in Babylon, became a high dignitary of state in the Babylonian and then Medo-Persian empires, and this cannot

be condemnable, but from a biblical perspective, condemnable can only be the situation when one reaches such a position of dignity, being involved in a political struggle.

In the area of respecting religious freedom or preserving the rights of the Christian under conditions of restriction, the issue is twofold; on the one hand the responsibilities of the community, and on the other hand the responsibilities of the individual, because both the Church and the individual have certain parts to deal with in terms of religious freedom.

Religious freedom has two components: external freedom and internal freedom. There are also Christians who are not actually converted and because they are not converted they fail to experience inner freedom, but claim to enjoy outer freedom. Religious freedom and freedom of conscience is first of all an inner freedom, which means first of all that you as a human being experience freedom within yourself, so that there is no freedom and nothing from the outside to prevent you from keeping the faith that you have in your being. When a believer comes to have that freedom, he will not be frightened by anything concerning his faith, always being determined to go forward.

People who want their rights to be respected must first identify themselves with them, to gain inner freedom, which is in fact the freedom of which Christ speaks: And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ⁶, and the moment one is set free by the truth there will be no chain to hold him. The Apostle Paul was in prison for years not to preach the Word, yet from prison he wrote letters to churches, received visitors. Why? Because chains could not enslave him.

Causes of conflict

Human conflicts are based on differences that are disturbing for the other: differences of ideas, differences of religion, differences of desires, certain interests that become contrary and generate conflict. Man's attitude to conflict is actually based on his view of the world and life, whether or not he is aware that he has a certain view of the world and life.

The most correct view of the world and of life is the one that God has revealed to us as humans, namely that we live in an ordered, harmo-

⁶ John 8,32.

nious and beneficial universe and that our world has been affected by the emergence of a conflict generator and as a result of this conflict generation we need to intervene in a special way so that first of all the primordial conflict between man and God can be resolved, as well as the conflicts at the human level, intervened on various levels. If a person has this conception that God is the Creator, the One who expresses the rules of life, the One who creates harmony and who desires and maintains it, then we have some benchmarks to guide us and to shape our attitude.

Our world is not only imperfect, it is also a territory of conflict by definition, a world of war. How exactly people position themselves in this war, what they pursue, how they deal with the attacks and challenges people face, depends on the one hand on their conception of the world and life, and on the other hand on whether they call for help from outside the human being. There are conflicts that one cannot manage alone, conflicts that go beyond one's own ability to manage and so man feels the need for external help.

In reality, peace is not just about ending war, peace is also about repairing the causes of war. So conflicts don't end just because people have put an end to them or because they have applied strategies. Conflicts are generated by causes and until those causes are resolved, conflicts do not really end. Tolerance is the ability to withstand adverse circumstances. Christians and all people of good faith must go beyond this concept of tolerance and develop understanding for beliefs and practices that not only differ from their own, but even conflict with them.

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