

# **Church and Civil Society**

**The Role of Christian Churches  
in the Emerging Countries of  
Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa**

**for the Konrad Adenauer Foundation  
edited by**

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and  
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# An Introductory Welcome

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*Wilhelm Staudacher*

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you on behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the Philosophical Research Institute of Hanover. I am very pleased that so many of you were able to come today. I am especially grateful to those who have come from various parts of Germany and from overseas in order to contribute to this conference, and who will help us to gain important insights into our chosen topic. They will help us to widen the scope beyond our own issues, and at the same time help us to assess them in relation to the problems we are facing around the world.

Today and tomorrow, we are going to discuss our main topic, namely “Church and Society” with respect to the role of Christian churches in the four newly industrialized emerging countries of Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation has been involved in an extensive examination of the relationship between the Church and politics, as well as the dialogue between their respective representatives for a long time now. For us, this kind of dialogue and co-operation, as well as

work with different religious communities, is seen as something central and vital to our own work. However, we do not give priority to aspects of theology, rather we focus on the socio-political task with which politics, the Church and religion are all confronted.

For us, Christianity offers values and key concepts according to which we orient our political convictions. The formation of political policies which are based on Christian ideals, has been a long standing area of responsibility for the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which is reflected in its international work. The Christian idea of humanity which we hold sets us apart from other organizations with similar work ethics. Even if this task is difficult to fulfil at times, we still focus on it because those who do not base their work on a sound ethical foundation, run the risk of becoming indifferent. The Christian idea of humanity does not offer a fixed status, but rather functions as a crucial challenge to constantly revise our own politics and actions. It is the dynamic principle behind progress and change, and is based on the inherent worth of humankind. It does not supply us any absolute security, but rather it is a means of measurement and a constant challenge by which we can examine our behaviour and the goals of our actions.

This core Christian idea of humanity regards human dignity as inviolable – irrespective of physical or intellectual ability, creed, skin colour, origin or income. Politics which are based on this particular ideal, also have to be able to be measured against it. This is the case not only with respect to social issues, but also societal order, the constitutional state, democracy as well as fundamental rights and freedoms. In order to achieve these, the involvement of Christian churches is indispensable for our work. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation needs them as partners for its national and international programmes. Politics depend on civil society and its participants. We also depend on the voice of the churches and their active involvement in issues that go beyond those of financial capital and labour, and rely on them for ethical perspectives and answers to the fundamental questions of life.

Therefore, we are very pleased that we are able to host this conference together with the Philosophical Research Institute of Hanover. The Research Institute is the first philosophical institute in Germany which is supported by the Church. Their aim is to formulate a generally valid con-

cept of societal responsibility, and as such they pursue a similar goal to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Therefore, we are very happy to have begun this co-operative work, which will hopefully be successful for all concerned.

We believe that philosophy can be used as a conceptual tool for ethical discussions and that theology, given its rich history of experience with regard to religious and moral questions, is vital to any discussion of politics. Therefore, we need the Church and theology in order for political action to have positive consequences for humanity and comply with human rights. We believe that this dialogue does not only incorporate current and relevant themes and their practical and philosophical implications, rather that this joint effort to find new solutions and answers will strengthen the ties between us.

Moreover, I believe that our topic “The Church and Civil Society – the Role of Christian Churches in the Emerging Countries of Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa” will bring us closer together. We have chosen four of the so-called ‘anchor-countries’ of Latin America and Africa, because we believe that large emerging countries such as these have a particular responsibility. We wish to have them as partners in order for them to be able to support us in our efforts to develop the region. They are to assist in developing models which will benefit the whole region, indeed models which will be more appropriate than the hastily developed solutions offered by the industrialized north.

I specifically wish to emphasize here that it is not our intention to ignore the development of the smaller countries. Rather, we see a particular opportunity to be able to convey upon the emerging countries a sense of responsibility for all the countries within their region – not in order to relieve us of our responsibilities, but to strengthen all countries. Therefore, we believe that the selection which we have voluntarily made is well justified. The most important aspect is that our discussion of and with these countries is productive and provides us with many useful stimuli for our practical work. We need this assistance in order to be able to make our future projects better and more effective.

We especially hope that in this respect the Christian churches will readily work with us as partners and sources of inspiring ideas. I believe less and less that politics alone can solve the world’s problems. We need the engage-

ment of civil societies and we should not underestimate the churches in this regard. The churches do not only promote Christian values in an abstract way; they also fight against corruption, against poverty, against social injustice and political implausibility. Stimuli and ideas from the churches in the countries named above can therefore have an effect on the German public. They remind us that this world is one world, and that the problems that exist in their countries can quickly develop into problems which also affect us. We are not only establishing a community of mutual moral support, but we must also stand together in the common search for new solutions.

It is my wish that the results of this conference will have an effect not only on the countries discussed, but also on Germany. These resulting impulses should make clear the importance of the churches for the formation of civil society. However, the churches should not only be regarded as part of the value system, but also as part of the democratic formations of society. The moral and religious insights, powers and traditions which the churches convey must be harnessed for the common good of democracy. In this context, the churches also have a particular educational function. It is not the case that one is simply a democrat, rather one learns to become a democrat, and the relevant social structure for democracy is that of civil society. It is again and again first and foremost the churches who remind us that, as Pope Benedict XVI recently stated, “it is not the rights of the powerful, but the empowerment of the individual through their rights which must be focused on”.

The world wide processes of societal change are happening so quickly, that in my opinion only structures which are anchored in democracy and civil society can enable societies and countries to keep pace with change. If politics wishes not to constantly be trying to catch up with these changes, it must allow itself to rely on the functioning of civil society. Politics should set a framework which should provide guidelines, but more than this, politics should facilitate the processes of democratization and civil society.

I am confident that this conference will be a step in the right direction. I wish to thank Professor Kruip and Dr. Reifeld, as well as their colleagues for the preparation and organization of the conference, as well as for the later analysis and publication of the results. I wish you all an exciting and productive discussion. ■



# Introduction

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*Gerhard Kruip*

In reaction to very simplifying theories of modernization in the 1960s, such as the theory of modernization stages by Walt Whitman Rostow, social scientists in the 1970s and 1980s, thinking about the future of developing countries, emphasized economic and political factors, particularly those which created structures of dependency between centres and peripheries in the international system. They tended to minimize the relevance of different mentalities, cultures and religions. Today, due to differentiation processes among “dependent” countries in the so-called “Third World” and the necessity of explaining these differences, there is a new awareness of such soft factors, including mentalities, political culture and, last but not least, religions as well as the authority and the practice of churches. Also more practically-oriented concepts and principles such as participation of grassroots movements, ownership of policies by those affected by them, as well as a new sensibility to ethnical identities helped to show that those factors cannot be neglected if one wants to get good results from development poli-

cies. Corresponding to this new awareness of religious aspects in the developmental context, the old paradigm of theories of secularization, which predicted that religions would disappear in continually modernized societies, lost its plausibility because there are a lot of “modern” societies with very rich religious presence (see the article by Hans Joas). There is even a kind of new religious productivity in modern or “post-modern” societies, some of whose main characteristics particularly consist in free religious associations outside the context of traditional historical churches (see article by Jean Pierre Bastian) together with other and new forms of religious organization and religious life. This new trend has to be taken into account by those who try to help establish conditions for a region’s development from the outside.

That it is necessary to have a look at religions is particularly true in the case of civil society. In the last decades, not only did the importance of non-governmental organizations grow enormously, but also the participation of religious organizations within civil society developed very quickly. This all took place in a context of struggle against military, authoritarian or totalitarian regimes and the establishment of civil society’s supplementation of parliamentary representative democracy. Christian groups and movements, in particular, began to take part in civil society, willing to be “the voice of the voiceless”. For these groups, not only within Latin American liberation theologies, social commitment and political involvement were and continue to be part of their “progressive” Christian identity. At the same time, external agents of development began to rely more and more on non-governmental organizations, and, of course, on religious movements and organizations which were more or less independent from their churches. The old question of the relationship between Church and State, religion and politics, was therefore posed again. The question as to whether the Church – or rather: the different Christian churches – are themselves part of civil society and whether they comprehend themselves to be, was also discussed very controversially during our conference. The different positions depend on whether I look at civil society and the churches from a sociological point of view, from a political-strategic perspective or whether I apprehend the relation from the standpoint of a faithful believer and convinced Church member. It is also quite clear that this question cannot be answered without having clear concepts of “civil society” and “church”.

On a mere descriptive level, depicting society in categories of topography, we can distinguish different spheres or areas of society: the private sphere, the public sphere, but also those areas dominated by economic interests (market sphere) or political power (the state and political parties). Many investigators conceive of civil society as a sphere within society, namely the sphere outside of profit-oriented economics and outside of power-dominated politics (therefore called “third sector”<sup>1</sup>), but simultaneously outside the bounds of the private sphere. But this topographical definition has its difficulties when you try to locate institutions or organizations within one of these spheres. Some scholars, therefore, tend to see civil society as a category or a kind of network of normatively-defined social actions. These social actions are public communications whose goal is mutual understanding. They rely on forms of solidarity, although not free from conflicts arising from different interests and perspectives. The participants in these kinds of communications emphasize their autonomy and self-organization. They mutually accept differences and form a pluralistic sphere. They reciprocally claim valid moral standards and aim to realize the common good. They practice non-violent forms of conflict resolution. According to this normative concept, communications within civil society are more probable in the areas of non-governmental and non-market interactions, but they occur within those two spheres as well – just like profit- or power-oriented action also takes place within non-governmental organizations. Social action of the kind ascribed to civil society may also take place within organizations of the economic and the governmental sphere. The normative approach also helps understand why interactions typical for civil society are always marked by a utopian dimension: they represent the idea of a just society in which all individuals will be respected and who have recourse to dignity and to certain rights, in which all can participate in collective decision making, and in which conflicts are resolved in a peaceful manner. I think it can be demonstrated that modern democratic societies cannot renounce this utopian dimension without losing their identity and the moral basis of their political institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps, this concept helps to determine whether the churches belong to civil society or not. I would say: not at a whole. The forms of action typically associated with civil society also take place within the churches and among Christian groups. Thus, one could say, churches “belong” to civil

society. But at the same time, churches practice types of social action which do not belong to this category, belonging neither to the category of profit- or power-orientation. They belong to a type of “religious action” which has to be distinguished from the other ones but which cannot be described here sufficiently. Moreover, we have to be aware of the fact that by “Church” we can mean quite different things: From a theological perspective, Church is a reality beyond the temporal world, the “bride of Christ”. From a sociological perspective, we can distinguish a large number of groups, movements, and organizations more or less strictly related to Church authorities. In any case, the latter cannot claim to make up the entirety of “the Church” by themselves, although in many publications “church” and “hierarchy” are simply and wrongly identified.

The relation between civil society and churches involves important challenges for both society and the churches. Society has to learn to accept that religiously-oriented citizens participate in civil society communications motivated by their religious identity and take recourse to religious arguments in discourses within civil society. Nevertheless, despite all well-founded rights to religious freedom, civil society has to be aware of the fact that there are not only “good religions”, but also “wrong” religious ideas. This also occurred and sometimes occurs in Christian churches and movements. There are and there have been religious ideas and religious authorities which propagated violence for religious aims, which in the past and in the present supported military regimes, which denied the claims of tolerance and freedom of opinion, which oppressed their members (particularly the women among them), which helped to form authoritarian personalities and extremely anxious consciences, which didn’t accept necessary differences and respective autonomies between Church or religion and state. Therefore, civil society must help “civilize” religion and rationalize religious forms of life so that religions are able to coexist peacefully with other religions as well as with secular parts of civil society who reject religious faith.

The churches, on the other hand, must learn that they cannot neglect specific modern democratic values, both in their actions within civil society and in intrachurch communications, e.g. in conflicts with ecclesiastical opposition groups. Many churches have to face a past during which their members (at least in part) committed cruelties and crimes that today constitute,

amongst other things, an urgent problem for their credibility. Churches have to realize that their authority is not automatically accepted in society and that they cannot exercise complete control over factors influencing what their members think. Inner-religious conflicts will also be viewed in the public sphere and will be subjected to non-religious criteria of evaluation. They have to recognize that their members not only are religious individuals and as such subjected to religious authority, but that they are also free citizens with individual rights in society – subjects who legitimately claim individual liberties and, perhaps, practice forms of life differing from traditional religious conceptions.

Lively and committed religious groups and churches can contribute a lot to help improve political culture and to form mentalities which help citizens to understand themselves as responsible and participating members of their states. In doing so, churches are a very relevant factor for the development of political culture and social capital. More concrete information as to how this could be achieved depends on various conditions which differ from region to region. By choosing four paradigmatic countries in which Christians play an important role in civil society – Argentine and Mexico in Latin America, Nigeria and South Africa in Africa – we wanted to avoid an overly abstract approach while trying to give some insight regarding concrete situations, their problems, and their specific challenges. This constitutes the main part of the articles in this book. It's quite clear that these countries should not be seen as representative, neither for their continents nor for all developing countries. The situation in Asia, where Christians form very small minorities, is certainly quite different (with, perhaps, the exception of the Philippines).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, I think one can draw some general conclusions<sup>4</sup>:

1. Civil society needs civil rights for all and a minimum of social aid, so that all members of society are able to participate in civil society processes. In many developing countries, these conditions need to be created. Christian churches can and must help establish the preconditions for these conditions by promoting understanding about human dignity and social justice.
2. Civil society organizations need to have access to special knowledge and have to act professionally. As important institutions, the traditional

churches can aid civil society by creating organizations that dispense special knowledge, professional training, and counselling not only for their own members but for a greater part of civil society.

3. One of modernization's large problems seems to be that society becomes more and more complex and confusing every day. People then tend to favour simplistic solutions and believe in populist statements or conspiracy theories, use others as scapegoats and thus remain in a kind of irrational framework which makes good policy impossible. Churches should avoid the tendency they have sometimes shown to oversimplify and polarize. They could support more differentiated views and help create the necessary amount of confidence needed for civil society actions.

4. As organizations with a strong relation to traditional, holistic world views, churches may have problems accepting that modern societies consist in functionally differentiated sub-systems with their own rationalities. For example, for the Catholic Church, it was very difficult during the Second Vatican Council to recognize the "just autonomy of temporal realities" (*Gaudium et Spes* 36), but this is what makes realistic measures in the fields of economics and politics possible without hurting traditional holistic perspectives. By adapting their own perspectives to the complexity of the modern world, churches could contribute more to the necessary process of rationalizing political cultures in many developing countries. This could, for example, be very important in making realistic moral judgements about market economies and would allow a morally legitimated framework for market processes to be established.

5. Another important issue consists in the relation between civil society and political parties. In many developing or emerging countries, political parties are rejected because of their lack of credibility. So getting engaged in a political party seems, for many members of civil society organizations, to be a kind of betrayal of their former aims and moral principles. But civil society cannot replace democratic decision making structures of representative democracy on its own. Civil society organizations are not more representative than political parties. For a better political culture, it would be enormously important for there to be better and more credible political parties. This presupposes that there be credible women and men of moral integrity who often are engaged in civil society but who also have to get

engaged in political parties. To promote this, churches can do a lot, and therefore have a great responsibility.

6. Last but not least, churches have another great advantage: most of them are globally interconnected and some are real “global players”. Since most of today’s problems cannot be resolved on the national level alone, consciousness of global networking’s utility has to be created and capacities for global intercultural understanding have to be promoted. At least those Church organizations which already have global connections could contribute to form and to strengthen the very important vision of the unity of mankind. It is quite clear that the concept of the Unity of the Human Family, as it is used in many ecclesiastical declarations, has important consequences in many fields of ethical reflection about global justice. For instance, in taking this concept seriously, we have to guarantee a minimum of dignity for every child, every woman, and every man – and this implies a kind of social security system on the global level. We must find solutions for a more just distribution of goods, so that the poor will participate in the welfare of the rich instead of becoming poorer and poorer while the rich get richer. We must elaborate rules for international migration, not by starting with national sovereignty but by understanding that national borders and migration policies must conform to a global social responsibility for the poor in other countries. Borders – much like private property is – must be considered as existing under a “social mortgage”. If in principle the goods of the earth belong to everyone, then there must be strict criteria for forbidding others to cross our borders. We need a better and more just distribution of ecological resources so that opportunities for the sustainable development of the poor remain. We need fair play in world trade which forces rich countries to reduce their protection policies in agriculture and allow poor countries a gradual and partial integration into the world market. We need just procedures in global decision making, so that the great number of poor people can be represented proportionally in world institutions which themselves have to be democratic institutions for global governance in benefit of everyone – and that means, primarily, of the poor. Churches as global players should be able to morally legitimize, to motivate, to promote, and to put these ideas so necessary for the survival of mankind into practise.

We hope that the results of our congress and the contributions in this book will help actors in developmental aid organizations – from state organiza-

tions to non-governmental organizations and to the churches – to better understand the importance of religious factors and the role of Christian churches in development issues and to develop perspectives for more effective political action in favour of the citizens of their countries. ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> One of the most ambitious scientific projects about the third sector is the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project; see <http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp>.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. Klein, Ansgar: *Der Diskurs der Zivilgesellschaft. Politische Hintergründe und demokratietheoretische Folgerungen*. Opladen 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> My own perspective is influenced by my investigations about the situations of Church and civil society in Bolivia and Mexico. Cf. "Dritter Sektor und Zivilgesellschaft in der Dritten Welt – Bolivien als Vorbild". In: *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaft 2001*, 168–194; *Kirche und Gesellschaft im Prozeß ethisch-historischer Selbstverständigung. Die mexikanische Kontroverse um die 'Entdeckung Amerikas'*. Münster: Lit Verlag 1996.
- <sup>4</sup> See also the conclusions for international development cooperation by Helmut Reifeld in this volume.



# Does Modernization lead to Secularization?

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*Hans Joas*

Posing the question the way the title does soon leads us into difficulties with the ambiguous nature of the terms used. Therefore, by way of a short introduction, it will be useful to define which meanings are given to the two central terms in this paper and which are not.

The concept of secularization was originally a legal term which was first used exclusively to denote the change-over from monastic orders to “secular priests”. Studies of the history of the concept show that the term first became general currency in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe when large amounts of Church property were transferred to, or taken over by, the state. Such aspects are not the province of this paper. However, in the wake of legal “secularization”, the 19<sup>th</sup> century also saw the emergence both of a philosophical-theological and a sociological discourse on “secularization” – both

of which, regrettably, were fraught with their own types of multiple meanings.

The philosophical and theological narrative was primarily concerned with “genealogical” connections between hallmark features of modern society and culture on the one hand and the Christian faith on the other. In such approaches the accent could be placed on quite different places on the value scale. Thus while some viewed modern society as such a perfect embodiment of Christian ideals that they considered the separation of the Church from state and society as increasingly superfluous, others were more concerned that large parts of society still showed the imprint of Christian ideas and ways of thought that had not yet been fully discarded.

The most salient attempt to untangle the complex of meanings used in sociological discourse is that undertaken by the Spanish-American sociologist of religion José Casanova. He ascribes three separate meanings to the concept of secularization as deployed in the social sciences: the decreasing significance of religion or a retreat of religion from the public sphere or the release of parts of society (such as the economy, science, the arts or politics) from direct religious control. Confusing these meanings gives rise to a great deal of misunderstanding. Obviously clarification of the conceptual terms tells us nothing of the causal relationships existing between such disparate processes. And such elucidation is by no means the last word as the concept of religion itself is fraught with ambiguity. If we speak of the decreasing significance of “religion”, for instance, this can refer to changes in attitudes to faith or in participation in religious practices and rituals or membership of churches and faith-based communities, whereby tendencies to a decreasing significance in one respect by no means imply that they hold equally true in all other respects. People can still be believers without going to church just as they can remain members of a Church even after losing their faith.

Likewise the formula of a retreat of religion from the public sphere – often expressed as a modern “privatization” of religion – is by no means devoid of ambiguity. We need to ask where this private sphere is actually located, whether it refers to a relinquishment of close bonds with the state or with political life in general or whether it rather serves to indicate a withdrawal from open communication in families and small groups to the closed inner

life of the individual. The present context does not allow proper investigation of all these complex interweavings. This paper deals solely with the first of three meanings, treating it in as much depth as constraints of space allow.

The concept of “modernization” too is susceptible of a wide range of interpretation. It is not taken here to indicate the transition to some period of “modernity” in whatever form that might take, but rather as a term for the process of economic growth and its consequences. The various forms these consequences might take and their interconnections are beyond the scope of the paper. Thus the question “Does Modernization lead to Secularization?” should be taken solely to mean “Does economic growth necessarily lead to a decrease in the role played by religion?” – a decrease that can lead to the vanishing point. This paper shall investigate the implied inevitability of this process and not to what exact extent any country, Germany for instance, is currently “secularized”.

Many believers shall no doubt find such a question absurd or irrelevant as their religious convictions do not allow them to see why greater economic prosperity or technological progress should have a deleterious impact on faith. Other believers will take the assertion that modernization leads to secularization at face value as they have developed a view of themselves as an “endangered” species that can best serve faith by resisting modernization in all its forms.

But who actually shares the assertion that forms the subject of this paper, when did it first come about and on what foundations does it rest?

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century this assumption has been shared by an astonishingly broad range of proponents in the social sciences and nearly all the famous names in philosophy. Whilst this might not be surprising for Marxist philosophers and sociologists, the assumption is also shared by such thinkers as Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud and George Herbert Mead, not to mention Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most vehement critics of Christianity. It is indeed more difficult to find those who did not share it. Leading names here are William James and Alexis de Tocqueville, Jacob Burckhardt and Ernst Troeltsch. And whether Max Weber should figure in the list is a debatable point: although his thesis of “the disenchantment of the world” can certainly be read as a contribution to

the theory of secularization, his insights into the inevitability of the personal struggle for salvation can, with equal certainty, be read in a different light. Even the Protestant sociologist of religion Peter Berger predicted in 1968 that by the year 2000 there would be practically no more religious institutions, just isolated believers huddled together in an ocean of secularity. To date there is no conclusive research as to the exact historical point when the assumption of the disappearance of religions first came about. What is meant here is not a history of atheism but rather the prediction that the workings of history itself, without the need for any interventions on the part of militant atheists, would lead to the disappearance of religion. According to our present state of knowledge, it would appear that this assumption can be first found in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century among the early proponents of the English enlightenment who forecast the demise of Christianity by 1900 at the latest. Certain remarks in the writings of Frederick the Great, Voltaire and Thomas Jefferson also foreshadow it. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century these various springs had come together in a mighty river.

What is remarkable is that proponents of the assumption found it so obvious that they were hardly bothered with its theological derivation and empirical investigation. In the light of this we can question in fact whether it is correct to speak of a *theory* of secularization and ask whether it would not be more accurate to use the more lowly term secularization *thesis*. If we look at the implicit assumptions in this literature we find that it is often based on overtly problematic understandings of what religious faith is. Religious faith is taken to be pseudo-knowledge or pseudo-science doomed to impotence by the progress of science, or the consequence of material and intellectual impoverishment to be rendered superfluous by the advent of greater prosperity and a more just social and political order, or products of circumstances in which questions of meaning and the choice between different meaning systems are devalued by authoritarian education and cultural uniformity so that the onset of individualism and cultural pluralism shall force religion into retreat. All such interpretations of faith are fundamentally wide off the mark. To mount a critique, we need a more appropriate definition of faith, religious experience and their interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

However, at this juncture we are dealing with quite a different issue, namely a view of the social reality of faith or in other words with a sociological

critique of the secularization thesis. Let us assume that this thesis applies to Europe – the most secularized part of the world – at least as a description if not as a way of analysis. This brings us a first step nearer to the advocates of the assumption under scrutiny. However, we then need to ask in four stages, (1) whether European exceptions to the secularization rule can be adequately explained by the secularization theory; (2) what does the major exception of the USA look like when viewed closer up; (3) what picture is given from a non-Eurocentric perspective, and; (4) what forms do the older histories of religion take in the secularization thesis. Answers to all these questions can obviously only be given here in a very summary way.

1. There is a general consensus that countries like Poland and Ireland, and to some extent Croatia and the old parts of Bavaria, are exceptions to the secularization rule. Proponents of the secularization theory explain the relative robustness of religious resistance in these countries by the fusion of religious and national identities. The Polish people have certainly always found Catholicism a decisive factor in their resistance to Protestant Prussia and Orthodox or communist Russia while a similar view can be applied to the Irish in their struggle against the Protestant British. It is not my intention to cast doubt on such a connection; what we are questioning, however, is whether religion should be understood as a relic from the past that owes its continued existence to political reasons without which it would be destined to vanish. This standpoint conceals the fact that religious identity in all its clear demarcations is first formed in the same process as that of national identity or at least receives impulses that strengthen or disseminate or perhaps even instrumentalize it from the same process. Political mobilization of religion can lead to the re-emergence of traditional forms of religion where forms of religious practice on the verge of dying out have new life breathed into them or are reinvented as pseudo-traditions. Thus new dangers of exclusion are also inherent in the political mobilization of religion. If national and confessional identities are closely interwoven, it is difficult for a confessional minority not to be identified with the old repressive powers once national independence has been achieved. As the troubles in Northern Ireland show, such lines of conflict are still very much in evidence in present-day western Europe. Even so, in global terms the political mobilization of Islam is currently of far greater significance. Yet here too it would be missing the point to simply regard Islam as a traditional legacy of

the past in the modern world. Similar considerations also apply to the political mobilization of Hinduism in India. What is crucial in all these cases is that we need to abandon the understanding of religion as a relic.

2. Whilst the European exceptions always offer an opt-out of classifying less secularized societies as not fully modern, this option is closed when we turn to the USA. Nobody contests the “modernity” of America just as nobody contests that according to all the indicators – no matter how controversial any particular one might be – America shows substantially and continually higher levels of religiosity than nearly all European societies: religious life in America is flourishing and even highly productive. New forms of evangelism are engendered (TV evangelism, mega churches) along with new, often highly successful, religious movements (Mormons, Pentecostalism). Leading American figures were even pioneers of the internal reforms of the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council. America now sets the tone for the reception of eastern religions by educated sections of the population and indeed nowhere else do all the world’s religions interact and mutually influence one another more intensely than they do in America.

The enduring view that like the European “exceptions” this could be explained by a fusion of national and religious identities (“the Puritan legacy”) was discredited when empirical studies showed that membership of religious communities in the USA has risen fairly steadily from 1800 to 1950 and indeed practically tripled during this period (relative to the size of the population). Thus any talk of a secularization process that has been simply delayed can definitely be ruled out.

Another closely related explanation can also be discounted on empirical grounds: the assumption that the high level of religiosity in America, even though not a legacy of the puritanical Pilgrim Fathers, was part of the baggage brought over by later generations of immigrants. As a great number of these came over from countries like Ireland and Poland, it could be argued that America constituted a kind of geographic displacement of European backwardness or aberrance. It could be equally shown, however, that migration to the USA made migrants in general more active in their religious lives than they previously were. And the same would apply (with a few exceptions) to the waves of migration we are now experiencing.

The most plausible explanation now in circulation ascribes the vitality of religious life in America to the plurality of religions in conjunction with an early separation of state and “church” – a separation, however, in which the state adopts a nurturing attitude to all forms of religion and not a sceptical stance as did the secular state in France. Unlike in Europe with its state-protected religious territorial monopolies, in America a person dissatisfied with the politics or theology of a religious community must never drop out into a fringe group or counter-culture, they can always find their niche in the rich and broad spectrum of religious communities. Such communities are more market-oriented and less dependent on the state; they tend to adopt an entrepreneurial not a bureaucratic stance. For instance, Church congregations have no qualms about using marketing instruments like questionnaires to determine the level of satisfaction among their members and prospective members. And as the readiness of members to make donations is of vital importance for the continued existence of the community, it is fostered and promoted by professional forms of management. Market-like conditions promote endeavours to found new “enterprises”. Religious communities do not sit back and wait for new members to join them but rather embrace a proactive stance that combines religious aspects with the daily concerns of the target group (such as migrants). This brings its own set of dangers and off-shoots which are not inferior to those of the bureaucratically structured official churches. So-called “church shopping” is the least of them; to a large extent this is only played out in the Protestant churches and aided by the increasingly wide-spread perception that theological differences between the swath of Protestant denominations are of minimal importance. It refers to an act of free choice (for instance when moving house) to join a new religious community that offers more attractive social or spiritual assets than the old one. In my opinion certain problems arise when religious communities advertise faith or community membership particularly as means to preordained ends. Aspirations for wealth or political power but also for such ideals as a slim body or physical beauty then become endowed with a magic dimension. What we should note here is that the legal and economic conditions underpinning the actions of religious communities appear to be the decisive factors in terms of the secularization effects of modernization. Of equal importance, however, is the question of whether the given plurality of religious communities is perceived as a valuable asset – in other

words whether there is a commitment to plurality as a value. Thus what is decisive for the USA is not the existence of a market of religious options in itself, but rather a fixed institutionalization of religious freedom.

3. The mere act of taking account of the USA can prove unsettling to the Euro-centric point of view. From the standpoint of global history, the idea of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a time of comprehensive secularization is completely untenable. On the contrary this period can rather be countenanced as a time of the quasi triumphalist expansion of religion.<sup>2</sup> A Euro-centric perspective overlooks two essential factors: the religious consequences of European expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the impact of technological innovations on non-European religions.

Obviously, although European expansion did not begin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it reached its peak during that time and was frequently coupled with the efforts of missionaries. It is difficult to outline the effects of missionary work and colonialization in such a short space but it should be immediately apparent that any other description for them is more apposite than that of “secularization”. In Africa and parts of Latin America the spreading of Christianity occurred (accompanied in Africa by the spreading of Islam) even though this was “from the top downwards” so that it required a spreading of the faith across several generations before it was firmly rooted in the population. In Asia colonialization and missionary work tended to encounter cultures and religions that saw themselves as superior to the intruders even though they felt threatened by them. Here we find a spectrum of reactions ranging from a transformation of the own religious traditions in the sense of a partial rapprochement to Christianity to forthright opposition. Especially with regard to Hinduism and Confucianism, observers have noted how these two faiths first constituted themselves as religions under the pressure of the challenges thrown up by Christianity and colonialization. The use of printing presses by the missionaries and the building of churches revolutionized the use of media and construction technology, including those of non-Christian religions. For the understanding of the subsequent development of religion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two factors are of key importance: the development of the state in a post-colonial era and the respective relationships between state and religion. In Latin America we can see a transition from the mainly state-supported monopoly of Catholicism to a plurality of religions, whilst in Africa the failure of states



to achieve or retain consolidation in the post-colonial era is the crucial factor.

4. Most proponents of the secularization theory totally overestimate the actual extent of religiosity in Europe prior to the onset of the modern secularization process. Yet for a very long time even among priests (to say nothing of the laity) knowledge of the faith was in a lamentable, not to say grotesque, state of underdevelopment. Church attendance was meagre and churches themselves were thin on the ground whilst anti-clericalism and indifference to religion was rife, particularly in rural areas. Industrialization in its cradle country of Great Britain first brought with it a significant increase in religious practices and church membership over a long period which reached its peak at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus we cannot talk of the de-christianization of Europe – simply because Europe was never properly “christianized” in the first place; this is how Andrew Greeley once put it, perhaps slightly overstating the case. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw in single newly industrialised countries (like Germany) the tragic alienation of large parts of the urban working class from the church on the one hand and intensive campaigns, often taking the form of re-traditionalized doctrine, for those sections of the population amenable to faith on the other.

None of these remarks suggest that western Europe and a small number of ex-colonial settler-states (such as New Zealand) or a small number of post-communist societies are not heavily secularized. Even so, after the overview given in this paper, it should be difficult to retain a belief in the validity of the thesis that secularization is a necessary corollary of modernization. The reasons why Europe constitutes an “exceptional case” certainly need closer investigation. In many instances the secularization thesis, as has been scrutinized here, functions as a self-fulfilling prophesy. My remarks here were intended to challenge such a prophesy and to provide a modest form of counter-action to its self-fulfilling effects. There are certainly many good reasons why acceptance of functional differentiation on the part of religious communities can only enhance the vitality of their faith. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion see my book *Braucht der Mensch Religion?* Freiburg, Herder Verlag, 2004, to be published in English translation as *Do We Need Religion?* in the Yale Cultural Sociology series, Boulder, Co., Paradigm Publications.

<sup>2</sup> See C. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914*. Oxford 2004, pp.325–365.

# The Churches and Civil Society

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*Rupert Graf Strachwitz*

The idea of Civil Society as part of an overall concept of society is one which is still debated, probably more so in Europe than elsewhere. Although civil society has always existed, the last 400 years of European history have focused our attention on the state and to some extent the market place rather than the third area of public activity, namely the field dominated by individual citizens who congregate on their own accord and without expectation of material gain. Ironically, this idea of a universally responsible national state was developed by political theorists, such as Bodin<sup>1</sup>, as an answer to the religious strife which was widespread in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in some European countries, notably France and Germany. There has been a gradual development from this concept of society to one which seems better suited to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The events in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s have opened many citizens' eyes to the fact that the state should not be responsible for all public affairs. The modern notion of civil society has since won univer-

sal acceptance. It is one in which the grand total of all formalized and informal activities are organized by citizens in the interests of the public good, distinct from material gain, and one in which services are provided, and the duties of advocacy and self-help, as well as watchdog and intermediary functions are given precedence.

To understand this, we need to define quite precisely what we mean when we talk about civil society. Most particularly, we need to define the relationship between civil society, the state, and the market place. I use these three categories because they define the three fields of action that citizens can adopt in society. I must add that this definition is still disputed, but nevertheless, it is widely used within the social sciences and in the public arena.

Before carrying this argument further, I should point to a distinction which is quite often blurred in the German language. Civil Society (*Zivilgesellschaft*) is not the same thing as *Bürgergesellschaft*, sometimes translated as civic society. Whereas the latter denotes a normative concept of society, a society that unfolds in its totality from its citizenry, civil society is the denominator for a fraction characterized by factual and empirical rather than by normative commonalities. It is the concept offered by Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>2</sup>, and many others, and analyzed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by Robert Putnam<sup>3</sup>. He in particular contends that good government depends on the existence of independent informal networks, as does the market, and that the ratio of state functioning can actually be measured in proportion to the degree to which these networks exist.

It has frequently been a topic of discussion whether a religious community is part of civil society or not. The connection between the churches and the concept of civil society is often questioned, both by members of the Church hierarchy and by social scientists. This question is relevant to us in an historical context of state churches and state-church relationships.

In the United States of America, the situation is quite clear. All religious communities, be they established churches or new movements, are convinced they are part of civil society. On the other hand, for example in the United Kingdom, and in many Islamic countries, the religious and political establishments are closely intertwined, and the Church leaders see themselves as part of a universal authority commonly associated with the state. Germany is in the process of adopting a position somewhere between these

two extremes. While the established churches enjoy preferential public status under the Constitution, they would not want to be associated with the state in a strict sense. This position is maintained by the chairman of the German Catholics' lay organisation, and in a more cautious way, by members of the hierarchy. In a conference we organized on precisely this subject some years ago, they both embraced the concept that the churches were part of civil society<sup>4</sup>. My impression is that Protestants in Germany find it more difficult to adopt this position, since Luther's understanding of the relationship between the Church and the temporal ruler is still alive. Generally speaking, I would say that the argument is driven by historical traditions and is anything but clear cut. Certainly, many European Church leaders would contest the inclusion of an established Church in the area of civil society.

It appears to me that Latin America is developing in a different direction altogether<sup>5</sup>. Here, the spheres of society may indeed not fit into the categories developed for the analysis of those of the northern hemisphere. In South Africa, of which I have little real knowledge, I would presume that Calvinist and Anglican traditions contradict each other. While Calvinism would tend to embrace the concept of civil society, Anglicans might be much closer to the concept of a state church, which, after all, still exists in England to this day. Nigeria, being a Christian and Muslim country, would have to look at both traditions, and Islam is usually not oriented towards civil society.

The point I want to make is, however, a different one. The idea that religion is a vital element of society can, I believe, be made more readily acceptable by incorporating a crucial element. It is one developed by Marcel Mauss<sup>6</sup> and others, and is used to describe the differences between the three fields of public activity by Francois Perroux<sup>7</sup>. Perroux attributed the use of force to the state, exchange mechanisms to the market, and the gift relationship to civil society. The idea of a sphere of society in which people give – compassion, time, ideas, and funds – corresponds quite closely to what Hans Joas attributes to faith<sup>8</sup>. Faith, he emphasized, was not primarily a means of rescue in a state of emergency, but a positive sphere of trust and love. This seems to me to be very close to the idea of giving, and if this is true, the fundamental concept of civil society is closely related to that of religion. Thus, in conceptualizing fields of public activity, there appears to be a reli-

gious foundation to civil society which is much stronger than to either the state or the market.

This should not be taken to mean that activity in civil society is necessarily tied to a church, as can be seen in the example of the United States of America where civil society and religion are so distinct from the state<sup>9</sup>. The founding fathers were not Church people. Their conviction that religion was to be practised in a self-organized fashion overruled other considerations. Italy provides an example of the opposite: a gradual disintegration of hitherto closely intertwined fields of activity<sup>10</sup>. However, it is where state and society diverge the most that civil society becomes more political<sup>11</sup>, and when civil society assumes a political role, a church within civil society, but by no means necessarily a church, can provide an alternative order. In some countries where the state is exceptionally weak, the Church, albeit involuntarily, has done exactly that: It has provided a temporal authority, and thus performed a task attributed to the modern state by filling a vacuum. I cannot discuss here whether this is good or bad in a normative sense, but merely state the fact that a civil society, i.e. a voluntary body in this case, transgresses the field of community building and informal interaction, and enters into the domain of keeping order.

To sum up, I would like to point out three things:

1. In talking about religion and churches, we have to be very clear whether we are talking about religious sentiment in the sense of the acceptance of transcendentality, the profession of a particular faith, or a church as an organization. These are very different levels of thought, and in the context of civil society, it is the Church as an organization which we are examining.
2. I would think that the churches have yet to fully adopt the concept of civil society and undergo a process of transformation in this direction. They must depart from their adopted role as a pillar of the state, and profess to be what outsiders see them as, namely a voluntary body. This should help the churches to detach themselves from the growing mistrust towards all governmental structures whereby the modern citizen feels alienated from the state, and by this change the churches can come to be recognized as a subject of trust.

3. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen society disintegrating and its members differentiating themselves from one another. A uniform system of order and authority has become obsolete, and given way to a complex network of systems. Civil Society as such has become an important factor within this network, but not all components are able or indeed inclined to be part of the network in the sense that it provides identity, accountability, a basis for trust, moral authority, and thus in the last instance, order. My final thought therefore is that the Church may well assume a strong position within this network. ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Jean Bodin, *De republica libri sex*, Paris/Lyon 1586/1589.
- <sup>2</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, Paris 1835/1840.
- <sup>3</sup> Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton 1994.
- <sup>4</sup> See Rupert Graf Strachwitz/Frank Adloff/Susanna Schmidt/Maria-Luise Schneider (Ed.), *Kirche zwischen Staat und Zivilgesellschaft*, Arbeitshefte des Maecenata Instituts, Nr. 9, Berlin 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> See Jean Pierre Bastian (in this volume).
- <sup>6</sup> See Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don, Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, in: *L'Année Sociologique*, seconde série, 1923–1924.
- <sup>7</sup> Francois Perroux, *Économie et Société – Contrainte-Échange-Don*, Paris 1960.
- <sup>8</sup> See Hans Joas (in this volume).
- <sup>9</sup> Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed, Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society 1700–1865*, Chicago 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> See Christiane Liermann, *Rosminis politische Philosophie der zivilen Gesellschaft*, Paderborn 2004.
- <sup>11</sup> See Jean Pierre Bastian (in this volume).

# **Protestant Churches, Social Plurality and Civil Society in Latin America**

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*Jean Pierre Bastian*

Religiousness in Latin America is undergoing a change. This is due to the fast-growing Protestant population and plurality of the Latin American religious market. Researchers are becoming more interested in obtaining new perspectives on democracy and social change. For this reason, developments within the Protestant churches have to be seen within the framework of democracy and civil society. Protestants have started to establish and become part of the political power base in Peru, Brazil, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Chile. In these countries, Protestants make up between 15% and 25% of the population. In Argentina and Mexico, where the Catholic Church traditionally has more historical power, they only constitute about 10% of the population. Yet they continue to gain more influence, both local-

ly and nationally, in all of these countries. In the context of the democratization of Latin America, the following question is becoming increasingly important: Which role will Protestants play in stabilizing democracy in Latin America? I would like to try to answer this question with four remarks.

### **1. Latin America: A doubly divided society**

Latin America is something of an exaggerated occident – a country with two layers of societal logic. On the one hand, we can see a modern occidental legal system with a constitution and modern court system. On the other hand, there is a traditional society with its specific order and traditional relationships which resemble patriarchal clientelism.

Latin American countries have societies divided down the middle: the rich, who have all the power, and the poor, who simply try to survive. The former control the economy and politics, the latter attempt to come to terms with an unjust world. This situation could only continue to exist by means of an authoritarian rulership.

The forms of government have taken on the form of dictatorships and populism. Both political regimes are constructed against and with civil society. The autonomy which civil society possesses exists in neither. The difficulty in creating an autonomous civil society is historically preconditioned. The only two forces of the Latin American modernity from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century are the State and the Catholic Church. Both parties either cooperate or compete in order to dominate society. The populist regime organizes society's actors and governs from top down via negotiations. Dictators do the same thing, but without negotiating. The Catholic Church also organizes itself from top down with bishops who offer a general orientation. Believers play no part whatsoever in the government of the Church. Folk-states and Folk-Catholicism are instruments of the highest social classes, used to establish an authoritarian regulation of society. In the 1970s and 1980s, neither the left nor the right gave any autonomy to the majority of the populace living in poverty. Revolution seemed the only path to democracy. But revolution brought new forms of authoritarian government. In this framework, no



democratic movement or politically democratic culture could appear. Civil society wasn't able to create a free society.

But something very unexpected occurred, something from the poor, from the lowest classes of society: the establishment of a social movement with a religious form. This movement is connected with the spread of pentecostalism in the countries of Latin America.

We can say that because a democratic revolution was impossible to carry out, the lower classes sought another option. Because the left was unable to actualize a democratic order, because the Church sought an option for the poor, and because Catholic intellectuals formed their theology of liberation, the poor chose pentecostalism. Why? The answer to this question is bound up with society's pluralism.

## **2. Pluralism in religiousness**

Latin America introduced conscious freedom and religious freedom in various constitutions in the second half of the 19th century. The former were carried out in Mexico with the liberal reformatory laws of 1859 and in Columbia with the constitution from 1853. This broke the ground for new religious movements. Protestant and spiritual movements were laboratories ("thinking groups") in which new democratic behaviour was tried out. But with their schools and their Northern American models, the protestants could never mobilize more than 1% of society. There was no social pluralism. This was the situation up until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Latin America never experimented with religious pluralism. The Catholic Church was the only religious force which was able to reach the entire society. This all changed suddenly with the appearance of religious movements which were vastly different from protestant congregations. Because the first attempted to spread a written and critical culture through schools and liberal education, the pentecostal movement developed a verbal and emotional religiousness, itself hardly connected to folk culture. In the 1950s, when many poor farmers moved into the suburbs of the large metropolises of the continent, these new communities helped the poor to build a brotherly union around a charismatic and patriarchal leader. These leaders were not educated pastors of the protestant congregations, nor like the white or mes-

tizo Catholic priests, connected with high culture. They came from the lowest classes and are always Indian, mestizo or black, without any formal education or educated culture. In the 1970s and 1980s, these men founded hundreds of congregations based on their charismatic leadership. Today, they have a few million members. The most famous examples include the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* in Brazil, the *Luz del Mundo* in Mexico, and the *Methodist Pentecostal Church* in Chile.

### **3. From religious solicitation to political activity**

Glossolalic, thaumaturgic and exorcistic religious practices helped these leaders to obtain both small and large congregations. The media (television and radio) were also important instruments in helping to spread their new folk-based faith. Yet these leaders also created a religious authority which was, however, simultaneously a political factor. There is no secularization in Latin America. Religion and politics work together despite their formal constitutional separation. The Catholic Church deals directly with politics despite the constitution. In the context of Latin America's political culture, of course, in which new religious leaders can mobilize hundreds of believers, political parties (who have suffered in a crisis of legitimization since the 1980s) have taken a great interest in these groups. In the 1970s, negotiations between pentecostal leaders and political parties were initiated. They were trade negotiations: privileges for the churches – for example, not having to pay certain taxes – for congregations' votes in elections or leaders' support of the party and the regime. These things were common, for example, during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.

Afterwards, the 80s and the 90s saw direct political actions resulting from these types of trades. Pentecostal and protestant leaders founded their own evangelical parties and movements in all countries of the region. In some contexts, such as Guatemala, pentecostal Presidents were elected (Serrano Elias in 1991). In other countries, such as Peru, political candidates (like Fujimori in 1990) were elected with the support of evangelical leaders who were members of parliament. In all Latin American countries, no presidential or parliamentary elections can function today without evangelical parties, movements or politicians. These are small parties who seek negotiations with the larger ones in order to gain privileges.

#### **4. Religious pluralism, autonomous civil society, and the democratization of Latin America**

The religious change in Latin America brings with it an important question: Is religious pluralism connected with the autonomy of civil society and the spread of democracy or isn't it?

Tocqueville analyzed how democracy in North American society was only distantly connected to religious pluralism. In today's Latin America, hundreds of new religious congregations are a symbol of civil society's vitality. The question is: how can charismatic and authoritative religious leadership strengthen democratic culture? The answer is that they strengthen a relative democratization. This type of democratization is not connected with liberal democratic culture of individual citizens. There is no individualism in Latin America. The individual is linked to powerful collective participants. This is a result of historical factors, social reforms and economic structural insecurity of the masses. New religious movements contain collective participants who offer spiritual and supportive protection. Their entry into the political arena is bound up with a societal corporatism. Unlike a national corporatism, it does not work from top down but rather from bottom up, and it requires the freedom of civil society in order to function. Today, these new political movements consolidate their political power in order to create new forms of relationships with the state. In Chile, where 15% of the population is pentecostal, their leaders managed to have the constitution changed in 2000. They wanted the same type of recognition from the state as the Catholic Church, which already has a concordat. Now they are able to teach religion in public schools, they have a pastor in the national palace, and, in public negotiations, they have the same protocol rank as the Archbishop of Santiago. For mestizos and poor white people, who never had much recognition in Chile, this new status means "empowerment" and recognition in society, and a form of democratization of society.

The pentecostal movement is growing stronger in all Latin American countries. And in each country, the members of these churches are all very politically active in elections. Mobilization of civil society is the key word here. There is still much corruption and authoritarian behaviour amongst the religious leaders. But in order to remain in power, they need to have good rela-

tions with their own members. That appears to be the only guarantee for more representation – a concept strongly linked to democratization. ■

# **Church and Civil Society in Latin America: Some Reflections on Limits and Possibilities**

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*Veit Strassner*

## **Introduction**

The question whether or not Church forms a part of Civil Society has been widely discussed. Some argued that by reducing Church to the role of a mere social actor, its foundation by Christ and its divine mission in the world would not be taken into account sufficiently. Others pointed out that Church does not fit into the definition of Civil Society as an intermediate sphere between the private or family space and the State. They argued that the close ties between Church and State make it difficult to consider Church as an actor independent from the State, especially in predominantly protestant or orthodox countries with “national churches”. Likewise, in the case of the Catholic Church the influence of diplomatic relations and interna-

tional treaties with the Holy See on Church-State-relations sheds doubt on the Church's proposed independence from State structures.

Without entering into this debate, I would like to follow the line of the Second Vatican Council and argue that church is indeed part of the Civil Society, but is not completely wrapped up in Civil Society. As *Lumen Gentium*, the Councils Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, declares: "Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element." (LG 8). When we are speaking about Church as part of Civil Society, it should be clear that we are talking only about one aspect of this *complex reality*. The *earthly Church* can thus be sub-divided into three different levels: the Church as the institution itself, the organizations belonging to the Church (such as *Caritas*, Church-run development agencies etc.) and finally all the small or medium-scale organizations and movements that exist within the Church-networks with different degrees of integration into Church-structures (like Church-run youth-clubs, lay-movements, human rights groups etc.).<sup>1</sup> As pointed out above the question whether Church as an institution (first level) could be seen as part of Civil Society remains debatable. However, there can be little doubt that the second and the third level mentioned here do form part of Civil Society.

### **The Church as an actor in Civil Society**

When thinking about the role of Church in Civil Society in general and more particular in Latin America, we have to consider certain peculiarities that make Church a social and political actor *sui generis*. The Church is not only one of the world's oldest institutions but also one of the most ancient global players. Due to its structure it possesses a high degree of autonomy and stability. The Church can make use of its own unique well developed country-wide and international networks of persons and institutions.

Regarding the Catholic Church in Latin America we should note the following basic facts: In Latin America and the Caribbean there are 30,202 parishes, and if we also consider other pastoral units as for example mission stations or base communities the number sums up to 95,945 pastoral centers. In this area there are 29,292 different welfare institutions run by the Church (all figures refer to the year 2000).<sup>2</sup> These data give an impression of the extension of Church structures in Latin America. They also reveal the potential of the Church for a contribution to strengthen Civil Society: 95,945 pastoral centers can also be seen as 95,945 voluntary associations of Civil Society, where people meet, get to know each other, learn to trust their fellow citizens, to cooperate with them etc. This is where *social capital* is built and important bases for the functioning of democracy are laid.<sup>3</sup> All these pastoral centers can be crystallization points for further Civil Society groups that emerge in all the spiritual, social and also physical spaces Church structures can offer.

These ecclesiastical networks can be found in all social strata – a fact which is of special importance: The hierarchy has privileged access to the political, economic and societal elites. At the same time the Church is very present in the marginal sectors of society where it plays a significant role in the revealing of social problems, but also in the implementation of social policy programs.<sup>4</sup>

An important difference between Church and other Civil Society actors is the time horizon: As a result of the *stabilitas loci* of parishes, Church organizations and religious orders the inherent temporal and spatial continuity of these groups leaves them with a major advantage. For example in the Paraguayan Chaco the Catholic Church and the missionary order of the Oblates (OMI) were able to sustain help and support over an unusually long period of time. They spent decades helping the indigenous people with their quest for the official recognition of their land properties and ethnical rights. Hardly any other Civil Society actor or development agency would have been able to provide the resources for such a long-term project.

Another important point is the high degree of confidence and trust Latin Americans do have in the Catholic Church. Public opinion polls show clearly that the Church is among the most trustworthy institutions on the continent: 71% declared their confidence in the Church. Only the Fire

Department gained higher scores (79%).<sup>5</sup> This high degree of trust in the Church is of special importance considering the „common regional heritage of distrust“<sup>6</sup> in Latin America and the low level of confidence in political institutions such as the government (36%), the parliament (28%) and the political parties (19%) which normally should have the function of canalizing the citizens' will into political programs. Public opinion studies suggest that Church is still considered a moral authority in Latin America. This is important to remember because – as Jürgen Habermas states – “the influence of the players in the arena depends on the approval from the gallery.”<sup>7</sup>

There is another aspect that distinguishes the Church from most of the other Civil Society groups: The majority of them – especially the interest groups – pursue either their members' particular concerns or those of the organization itself. Examples are for instance trade unions, automobile-clubs, ethnic movements etc. The Church, however, is in most cases a different kind of interest group. It has a universal approach; its involvement in political or social affairs should contribute to the full development of *every* woman and man and not only of its members. Church as a political actor within the Civil Society-sphere therefore acts on behalf of humankind, of the nation or – in the meaning of the “voice of the voiceless” – of specially underprivileged groups.

But political involvement of the Church is not always pursued with exclusive regard to the *bonum commune* or for the defenseless. As all social and political actors do, Church also defends its *own* institutional concerns, like for example legal privileges, the role in the educational market, the integrity of the institution and its personnel etc. In these cases the Church works just like every other actor and should not make use of its moral authority as it does when pursuing her vision of the common good or helping underprivileged groups.

As it has been shown, Church is a very special actor and part of Civil Society due to its structure and infrastructural strength, its high public reputation, and the peculiarity of its motivation and legitimation. Church is therefore a potential “flagship” for Civil Society that other smaller groups can join and where they can find a kind of shelter.<sup>8</sup>



## Church and Civil Society in Latin America

In the wide-ranging literature on Civil Society, there seems to be a certain consensus on two prerequisites for the development and strengthening of Civil Society: First, the formally and factually guaranteed freedom to form associations and the freedom of speech. Second, the existence of certain socio-moral resources and an agreement on a set of basic values which give orientation towards the common good for those participating in Civil Society groups.<sup>9</sup> What is or what can be the contribution of the Church in Latin America to the realization of these preconditions for Civil Society? What are the advantages Church can use in this context and what are possible limitations?

In the last decades – especially in the 70's, 80's and the early 90's – only in a few Latin American countries *civil rights* such as freedom of speech or the freedom to build associations were truly and effectively guaranteed. In many cases not even basic *human rights* were respected. During the military dictatorships and the civil wars in Latin America, one central aim of the authoritarian governments was precisely the dismantling of Civil Society and the persecution of members and leaders of groups and organizations considered dangerous for the National Security.

In many cases, the Church took over an advocacy role in favor of those persecuted by the regime.<sup>10</sup> A very famous example was the *Vicariate of Solidarity* of the Church in Chile that formed a strong and powerful moral opposition to the Pinochet-regime. It also helped the victims of repression and their families and – since censorship did not allow reliable press information – offered counter information on the political and social situation in the country, thereby contributing to the opening of the public sphere.<sup>11</sup> A great number of other Civil Society groups emerged in the surroundings of the Vicariate and other organizations of the Church such as human rights groups, self-help groups, neighborhood-organizations etc. In Chile as in many other countries in Latin America the Church during the time of authoritarian rule used its institutional strength and stability to protest against the neglecting of human and civil rights and thereby helped to create the necessary spaces for the growth of Civil Society. As a “voice of the voiceless“ it supported those who went unheard.

Such a participation in politics normally depended on the social commitment and the theological or pastoral visions of both the clergy and especially the hierarchy, which in many cases was reluctant to engage too much in these affairs as political involvement often produced high costs for the Church: On the political side, the Church as an institution itself would face the loss of privileges formerly guaranteed by the State and could become itself victim of persecution and harassment – as the number of persecuted and killed lay Christians, clergy, religious people and even bishops illustrate.<sup>12</sup> There was also a certain risk of losing the autonomy of the own ecclesiastical and pastoral agenda setting. In many cases the consequences of a strong commitment in politics were that Church had to react to the political situations and spent a lot of its energy, resources and personnel on these affairs. It is obvious that as a result the Church was no longer able to spend ample resources on its “traditional” fields of occupation.

Even today with most of the Latin American countries under democratic rule civil liberties and human rights are often neglected. Especially underprivileged groups like the marginal sectors of society, the poor, ethnic groups or (im-) migrants suffer the violation of very basic rights. There are still a lot of the voiceless in Latin America to whom the Church gives its voice. Church can have an important corrective function in supporting these groups who do have unequal access to the public sphere and discourse.<sup>13</sup> But – as past experience shows – this implies certain political costs. Whether the Church in Latin America is willing to pay this price will depend to a great extent on the social and theological thought of the ecclesiastical leaders.

### **Church and the moral resources of Civil Society**

The role of religion – be it in the sense of confessionally organized religion or following the thoughts of J.J. Rousseau in the form of a *civil religion* – was traditionally seen to produce the basic moral consensus and common views on moral bases of a functioning society. Due to the close ties between Catholic Church and State in many Latin American countries the Church was historically seen (and saw itself) as the moral backbone of the nation. For instance in countries like Argentina the allocation of moral values worked not only through the authority of Church, but also by using the

power and institutions of the State and thereby forming a kind of integralism and correspondence of catholic values and interests and public policies.<sup>14</sup>

But in modern, increasingly secularized and pluralistic societies such a role of the Catholic Church is more and more questioned. Even though more than 86% (2000) of the Latin Americans are formally catholic, Roman Catholicism has lost the religious quasi-monopoly: The growth of Protestantism in the last decades can be seen as „one of the most significant cultural changes“.<sup>15</sup> In (religious) pluralistic societies it is difficult if *one* religion or *one* church claims an almost exclusive authority when it comes to questions of the moral value system. It seems to be a great challenge for the contemporary Catholic Church to find its place in civil societal pluralism. In many cases it seems difficult for it to leave the role of the soloist and to integrate itself into the orchestra of Civil Society.<sup>16</sup> In order to be respected as an interlocutor in public discourse, the Church has to find solutions to at least two challenges: Accepting the “rules of the game” and securing its own credibility.

### **The Church and the pluralistic discourse**

First of all, the Church has to accept the factual pluralism of Civil Society. It has to accept the existence of different visions, ideas, concepts of life and of society. From this base it can participate in the public discourse on the moral bases of Civil Society and on the common good. Taking elements of its own doctrinal corpus and traditions it can vitalize and make important contributions to the debate on the political and moral foundation of a functioning civil democracy. As long as it does not attempt to “convince” via religious authority or (ab-) uses her influence on political decision makers, but shares her views and convictions in the public discourse, it can make an important contribution to the compensation of the moral vacuum of a liberal constitutional State.<sup>17</sup>

Leaving aside this normative argument, it is interesting to notice that Church indeed is more effective in pursuing its demands when it does not maintain strong legal or formal ties with the State. As empirical studies suggest, “[t]he evidence also sheds some light on the role and impact of the

Catholic Church in postmodern societies [...]; it is most powerful where institutional differentiation has progressed most but level of religiosity has remained high. This underlines Casanova's [...] assertion that the political role of the churches is most legitimate and effective when they operate not as privileged political institutions but as 'deprivatized' society-oriented, rather than State-oriented, churches."<sup>18</sup>

But it is of crucial importance that Church makes use of the power of convincing arguments and not of authority. This is especially true when it acts like a "normal" Civil Society-actor defending its own particular interests instead of universalistic values. An example of this role Church can play in the civil societal discourse are the attempts of the Argentinean Church to promote a national dialogue on visions for the country after the 2001's crisis.<sup>19</sup>

### **The credibility of the Church**

It is fundamental that the Church not only accepts the procedures of a free deliberative social discourse, but also reaches a high degree of credibility in this discourse which is not based on its traditional role, but also on the conduct of the Church. Two examples should illustrate this aspect.

During the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983) the catholic hierarchy played a quite dubious role that lead some authors to even speak of a "Complicity with the Devil"<sup>20</sup>. It is obvious that such a general judgement falls short of explaining the complexity of the Church's responsibility during authoritarian rule und does not reflect the role of the different groups and individuals within the Argentinean Church and hierarchy. But – as a lot of quite polemic publications show<sup>21</sup> – there is still an implicit and explicit public disapproval of the Church due to her role during dictatorship and the lack of a profound admission of guilt. So far there are no substantial and non-partisan studies on the Church in Argentina during these years. A timid attempt of self-criticism was made by the Episcopate in 1996 to reflect in public on Church's role and public acting during military dictatorship. In this document they regretted the participation of "sons of the Church" in violent actions both of the guerilla movement and the military regime. The bishops also lamented the fact that their public criticism of the violence and

their private interventions on behalf of the prosecuted had not been sufficient to prevent such atrocities.<sup>22</sup> This declaration did not convince the public, let alone the Church's critics. As long as there has not been a profound inquiry of conscience, the Argentinean Church will suffer a lack of credibility – especially on issues like the National Reconciliation or human rights.

Another crucial point for the credibility of the Church in public deliberation on value-foundations of Civil Society and democracy is whether the Church fulfills her own demands. In many Latin American countries the Catholic Church repeatedly calls for better possibilities for the citizens' political participation and in general more transparency and inclusiveness in politics and decision-making. The Church also stood up for more dialogue and openness in conflict resolution.<sup>23</sup> When the Church is making such demands it also has to answer to the question of how these issues are realized *within* the Church. The lack of participation and transparency in decision-making, the often authoritarian solution of disputes etc. reduce the credibility of the Church's demands.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, another great challenge for the Church – not only in Latin America – is finding ways of a better participation, realizing more transparency and fostering dialogue in decision-making and conflict-resolution.

## Conclusion

The Church has been and still is an important part of Civil Society in Latin America. Due to its special characteristics it has a leading role in the public area. It helps to develop and differentiate the spectrum of Civil Society-groups and makes a great contribution to the production of *social capital*. But in changing social, political, religious and cultural contexts it has to find ways to be a respected, effective, credible and convincing actor in the process of public deliberation and in the debate on the moral basis of liberal democracy in Latin America. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I follow here the differentiation of Fritz Erich Anhelm: *Die Zivilgesellschaft und die Kirchen Europas*. Vortrag auf der Sitzung der Kommission „Kirche und Gesellschaft“ der

- Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen Anfang Mai 2001 auf Kreta. [<http://www.loccum.de/materialien/material.html>; 04.10.2006]
- <sup>2</sup> See *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae 2000*, Città del Vaticano 2000, pp. 35–37 and 346–348.
- <sup>3</sup> See for the concept of *social capital* and its importance for democratic life: Robert D. Putnam: *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton 1993; Robert D. Putnam/Kristin A Goss: “Einleitung”, in: Robert D. Putnam (Ed.): *Gesellschaft und Gemeinsinn. Sozialkapital im internationalen Vergleich*, Gütersloh 2001, pp. 15–43.
- <sup>4</sup> See for example the contribution of Norberto Padilla in this book on the role of micro level Church-structures in the coping with the consequences of the Argentinean Crisis in 2001.
- <sup>5</sup> See Corporación Latinobarómetro: *Informe Latinobarómetro 2005. 1995–2005: Diez años de opinión pública, 176.554 entrevistas, 10 mediciones en 18 países*, Santiago/Chile 2005, pp. 55–57 [[www.latinobarometro.org](http://www.latinobarometro.org)].
- <sup>6</sup> Marta Lagos: “Latin America’s Smiling Mask”, in: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 8/3 (1997), pp. 125–138, here p. 129.
- <sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas: “Zur Rolle von Zivilgesellschaft und politischer Öffentlichkeit”, in: ders.: *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*, Frankfurt a. Main 1992, pp. 399–467, here p. 461f.
- <sup>8</sup> See Hans-Joachim Lauth/Wolfgang Merkel: “Zivilgesellschaft und Transformation”, in: Hans-Joachim Lauth/Wolfgang Merkel (Eds.): *Zivilgesellschaft im Transformationsprozeß. Länderstudien zu Mittelost- und Südeuropa, Asien, Afrika, Lateinamerika und Nahost*, Mainz 1997, pp. 15–49, here p. 33.
- <sup>9</sup> See Joachim von Soosten: “Civil Society. Zum Auftakt der neueren demokratietheoretischen Debatte mit einem Seitenblick auf Religion, Kirche und Öffentlichkeit”, in: *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik*, 37 (1993), pp. 139–157, here p. 140.
- <sup>10</sup> See for example Jeffrey Klaiber: *Iglesia, dictaduras y democracia en América Latina*, Lima 1997; José Comblin, *The Church and the National Security State*, New York 1979 or Brian H. Smith: “Churches and Human Rights in Latin America: Recent Trends in the Sub-continent”, in: *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 21/1 (1979), pp. 89–127.
- <sup>11</sup> See Pamela Lowden: *Moral Opposition to Authoritarian Rule in Chile*, 1973–90 (Houndmills/New York 1996); Consuelo Pérez: *Los protagonistas de la prensa alternativa: Vicaría de la Solidaridad y Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas*, Santiago/Chile 1997.
- <sup>12</sup> See for example Martin Lange/Reinhold Iblacker: *Christenverfolgung in Südamerika. Zeugen der Hoffnung*, Freiburg 1980.
- <sup>13</sup> I follow here the thoughts of Herrmann-Josef Große-Kracht: “Demokratie als Verfahren? Habermas’ diskurstheoretische Demokratiekonzeption und die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Kirche und Öffentlichkeit”, in: Walter Lesch/Alberto Bondolfi (Eds.): *Theologische Ethik im Diskurs. Eine Einführung*, Tübingen/Basel 1995, pp. 212–235, here p. 230f.
- <sup>14</sup> See for example Fortunato Mallimaci: “El catolicismo argentino desde el liberalismo integral a la hegemonía militar”, in: Fortunato Mallimaci et al.: *500 años de cristianismo en Argentina*, Buenos Aires 1992, pp. 197–365 or Fortunato Mallimaci: *El catolicismo integral en la Argentina (1930–1946)*, Buenos Aires 1988.

- <sup>15</sup> Brian H. Smith: *Religious Politics in Latin America. Pentecostal vs. Catholic*, Notre Dame 1998, p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup> See for example in the Chilean case: Veit Strassner: Chile, in: Johannes Meier/Veit Strassner (Eds.): *Kirche und Katholizismus seit 1945*. Vol. 7: Lateinamerika und Karibik, Paderborn et al. 2007 (forthcoming).
- <sup>17</sup> See Herrmann-Josef Große-Kracht: “Demokratie als Verfahren? Habermas’ diskurstheoretische Demokratiekonzeption und die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Kirche und Öffentlichkeit”, in: Walter Lesch/Alberto Bondolfi (Eds.): *Theologische Ethik im Diskurs. Eine Einführung*, Tübingen/Basel 1995, pp. 212–235, here p. 232.
- <sup>18</sup> Michael Minkenberg: “Religion and Public Policy. Institutional, Cultural, and Political Impact on the Shaping of Abortion Policies in Western Democracies”, in: *Comparative Political Studies* 35/2 (2002), pp. 221–247, here p. 244; see also José Casanova: *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago 1994.
- <sup>19</sup> See the contribution of Norberto Padilla in this book.
- <sup>20</sup> Anthony Gill: *Rendering unto Caesar? The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America*, Chicago/London 1998, p. 149.
- <sup>21</sup> See for example Olga Wornat: *Nuestra Santa Madre. Historia pública y privada de la Iglesia Católica Argentina*, Barcelona et al. 2002; Hernán Brienza: *Maldito tú eres: El caso Von Wernich. Iglesia y represión ilegal*, Buenos Aires 2003.
- <sup>22</sup> See Conferencia Episcopal Argentina: *Caminando hacia el Tercer Milenio. Carta pastoral para preparar la celebración de los 2000 años del nacimiento de Jesús* (27<sup>th</sup> of April 1996), published in: Conferencia Episcopal Argentina: *Iglesia y Democracia en la Argentina. Selección de documentos del Episcopado Argentino*, Buenos Aires 2006, pp. 699–713, here pp. 706–709.
- <sup>23</sup> See for example the contribution of Norberto Padilla in this book.
- <sup>24</sup> As Roberto Blancarte has shown in his article in this book, the characteristics of inner-church leadership can also have a stimulation effect on Civil Society as many organizations or movements of the Church as a result of decision-making procedures undergo a process of “declericalization” which leads to an expansion and diversification of social movements and Civil Society.

# The Church and Civil Society: The Case of Argentina

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*Norberto Padilla*

Even if it seems obvious, we should state that the term Catholic Church<sup>1</sup> means the whole People of God, not only its hierarchy. It is neither a structure of power in collision nor an alliance with other powers. The Church is immersed in Civil Society but exceeds it, because its message is an eschatological one, and confronts every historical time and every society with the values of the Gospel. The Church is a servant, and Christians achieve their vocation as part of a society, each one according to his or her own responsibility. Man is the way for the Church – a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk – because, as John Paul II wrote in *Redemptor Hominis*, “every man without any exception whatsoever has been redeemed by Christ, and each man without any exception what-



soever is in a way united with Christ, even if man is unaware of it: “Christ, who died and was resurrected for all, provides” – each and every man – “with the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme calling”. Since man is the way for the Church, the way for her daily life and experience, for her mission and toil, the Church of today must continually be aware of man’s “situation”. This means that she must be aware of his possibilities, which keep returning to their proper bearings and thus reveal themselves. She must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavour “to make human life ever more human”, and make every element of this life correspond to man’s true dignity – in short, she must be aware of “*all that is opposed to this process*”<sup>2</sup>.

The pedagogy of the Church since Paul VI and the Vatican Council is dialogue, both with other Christians, seeking full unity, and with non-Christians, in the first place with the Jewish people, and with non-believers. Man is the way for the Church – a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk.

It would be naive to ignore the fact that in the past and even in the present, these principles are not always visible due to the behaviour of Christians and to the difficulty in modern society of understanding the Church as a communion and not just a way of exercising power and influence, or even just being another goodwill association.

### **The contribution of the Catholic Church and other Creeds in strengthening Civil Society**

The Catholic Church has been in Argentina since the first expeditions arrived in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Until the period of Independence (1810/1816), the political and civil societies were determined by Catholicism, at the exclusion of any other religious faith.

The Preamble of the Constitution approved in 1853 extends to “all the people of the World who want to inhabit Argentine soil”, the benefits of freedom and justice. This idea is reflected in many of the articles, including those referring to the establishment of the freedom of worship and of non compulsory citizenship.

The State “supports Roman Catholic worship”, and still does, according to Article 2 of the Constitution. Patronage, as a control over the Church, disappeared in 1966 with an agreement between Argentina and the Holy See that Paul VI called the first offspring of the Vatican Council in Church-State relations.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Church was not struggling for or intending to obtain political power, as was the case in other Latin American countries. The governments that followed the “Organización Nacional” (that is, after 1853/60) had liberal ideas, and often their members belonged to the Masons. Nonetheless, they respected the preeminence of the Catholic Church as proclaimed by the Constitution and kept their distance. Despite the fact that there were many politicians who fought for Catholic principles, a “Catholic party” never existed. Great debates as, for example, those about civil marriage and the exclusion of religious teaching in schools during class hours, ended in defeat for the Catholics. People in the provinces were stronger followers of Church traditions and teachings than those who lived in the great cities, where there was a flow of immigrants. Most of these immigrants, who came from all parts of the world, were Catholics but many of them were non-practising Catholics. In October 1934 an International Eucharistic Congress was held in Buenos Aires, presided over by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, who at that time was Secretary of State. This event fuelled the Argentine people’s faith.

From the Eucharistic Congress emerged a bright and highly educated laity, since the “Acción Católica Argentina” was founded, and influence was extended by means of catholic cultural studies, periodical publications such as the review of culture *Criterio*, and Catholic inspiration which is independent of Church authority still exists to this day.

It is not surprising that many were dazzled by the winds of change coming from Europe such as Italian fascism, the ideas of Maurras, the experiences of Dollfuss and of Oliveira Salazar and later on the Spanish Civil War supporting the forces of General Franco. National-socialism, however, due to its pagan and racist ideology, found few admirers among Catholics. The 1943 revolution and the rise of a new military regime was the apotheosis of the idea of the Cross and the Spade, and as such, the identification of the country as a whole with a model of a Catholic society.

In 1955 President Perón launched a harsh campaign against the Church which reached its climax when two prelates were expelled, and the Curia along with seven other historic churches in Buenos Aires were intentionally set on fire. Many committed Catholics took part in the revolution that overthrew Perón, who first sought asylum in Paraguay. His exile lasted for eighteen years, but the working class did not forget him.

The Church in Argentina showed the tensions of the “aggiornamento” of the Vatican Council, reflected not only in the episcopate but also in the clergy and lay men and women.

From 1968 violence arose, thus frustrating many initiatives of true renewal in the Church. Some, especially youths, chose armed confrontation after “re-interpreting” certain parts of the Gospel in some of the “liberation theologies” (I use the plural in the same sense of the Vatican documents) that linked engagement with the poor with armed struggle, thus identifying the cause of the excluded with Peronism and Marxism. In 1975 the armed forces started fighting the “guerrillas”, and a year later took power. Christian believers could be found on both sides. The voice of the bishops drawing attention to and rejecting the methods used by the military to defeat the subversives, was not heard nor was it strong enough, and even some priests and laymen justified those methods. Others, such as priests and lay persons were imprisoned and tortured, became “desaparecidos” or were murdered in broad daylight.

In December 1978 Argentina and Chile were on the verge of war with regard to territorial and sea claims in the extreme South. The providential intervention of the then recently elected Pope John Paul II opened a process of mediation, which successfully ended after many difficulties, when President Alfonsín was in office. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed in the Vatican and put under the “moral protection” of the Holy See. Such a contribution to lasting peace has been valued by both countries and linked them both in gratitude to John Paul II. There has not been any case since in which the Holy See has directly been involved in an international conflict.

With the return to democracy in 1983, the Church has had to find its place uneasily in a pluralist and open society.

The infiltration of secularism and relativism, the decrease in religious practice, the crisis of moral values has been promoted by sections of the media, international organizations, and even in some cases the State. In addition to all this, the loss of the work ethic (many parents with young children and teenagers have been unemployed or without a stable job for years) and the terrible scourge of drugs and violence have negatively influenced the society.

Christians are not always believable witnesses, so the separation between faith and life can be the cause of scandal, which the media delights in, especially when it concerns the clergy.

Above all, a good question we should ask ourselves is why something so precious and important as the faith and commitment of Christians cannot become powerful enough to transform society. But I suppose it is not only a question which perplexes Argentines.

The problems we are dealing with are: the infiltration of secularism and relativism, the decrease in religious practice, the crisis of moral values, the lack of formation of pastoral agents, the increase of divorce, especially in large cities, couples who live out of wedlock, and people, sometimes from strong Christian homes, who do not baptize their children. These days abortion is seen as an issue, backed by some Government officers (not by the President himself), and organizations of various kinds, and the media. The Permanent Committee of the Bishops Conference, chaired by the remarkable, though low-profile, Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, has developed in its last Declaration a new terminology which can be understood by all, its accurate title being *A matter of life or death*.

Women have become very relevant for the Church and it is expected that their participation will increase further. Not only in Theology, but in the pastoral field as well, and in the celebration of the rites, the teaching of the catechism, and in human promotion, woman has earned a new place that she did not have a few decades ago, and this is as a sign of the times. This corresponds not only to ecclesiastical reality but to politics, university life, the work place and social matters where women demonstrate outstanding and strong leadership.

These times of change in a country clearly marked by the Catholic religion, reinforce the need for a “new evangelization” of its methods.

The “good news of the family” needs to be announced with joy in the path opened by John Paul II and Benedict XVI in his extraordinary description of éros and agape in *Deus caritas est*. This is a priority that needs many pastoral agents, such as married couples who help prepare other couples before and after the wedding, walking alongside the newly weds. It is a hard task to proclaim in an easy, understandable and credible way that fidelity in marriage is possible, that matrimony is the union of man and woman, that it contains respect for life in all its entirety, and to convey the responsibility of parents of transmit their faith to their children.

With regard to the non-Catholic creeds which result from social activism, it can be stated that, as there is no “catholic party”, attempts to form evangelical parties have not been successful either. Political parties, including the traditional Peronism and radicalism, and the moderate right and left, have adherents and voters from all religions. There has been scarce participation in political life by members of those communities, at least up to now.

Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians and later Orthodox Christians, until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were devoted to their own national communities and later became structurally independent of the ones in the mother countries. They became deeply involved with human rights and assumed an invaluable ecumenical engagement.<sup>3</sup>

A growing number of Free Evangelicals, Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists and Mormons, are opening up to an interdenominational relationship. By contrast, there is the “Universal Church of the Kingdom of God” of Brazil, which has an important economic and political influence in that country, and has power which it does not hesitate to use. Their presence is notable on TV and in former cinema halls, which have become temples.

The Jewish community in Argentina is amongst the ones with the largest number of members in America. During the 1990’s there were two terrorist attacks (one against the Israeli Embassy and the other against the AMIA, the Argentine Isrealite Mutual Association) resulting in a terrible number of Jewish and non-Jewish casualties and destruction. The terrorists responsible for these attacks have not yet been found, a shameful consecration of

impunity. It is certain that the origin of the attacks is foreign though there might have been local complicities. The Jewish community has a reputation for its outstanding personalities in the world of science, politics, business and culture<sup>4</sup>. Even though there might have been in the past some unconfessed discrimination, nowadays we are able to say that only a very small number of groups have anti-Semitic prejudices.

Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Islam was given very little attention. Most of the immigrants did not have any religious contact with the faith of their forebears or mingled with the Catholic majority of the provinces where they settled down. Perhaps, Carlos Menem, a son, husband and father of Muslims, contributed to the visibility of this community. It is true, on the other hand, that there has been an upsurge of Islamic religion throughout the world, reflected in Buenos Aires by the imposing mosque built on state-owned soil by the Saudi Kingdom.

### **Christian Churches and the effects of pluralism and secularism within Civil Society**

Although there are no official statistics it is often said that 90 % of the population is Catholic, but the proportion of regular churchgoers is low and does not have any relation or a very isolated one to the Church. The question about religion is not included in the census so religious groups tend to assume approximate figure that are too optimistic. “Humanists”, agnostics and atheists are particularly to be found among students and professionals.

In Argentina, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the State has peculiar characteristics, some of them pertaining to European systems and others to the American system. The State „supports the Roman Catholic worship” (Article 2º of the National Constitution). This means a preeminence that goes beyond mere economic support, while ensuring religious freedom for all. Although the economic support is scarce, churchgoers have the feeling, which is applicable to other areas, that „the State does the paying“, so many of the faithful are not aware of their responsibilities. The Bishops Conference has now implemented the Plan “Compartir” (Sharing), following the trend of a fairer distribution of Ecclesiastic help, and, as a last resort, to be self financing.

Over the last few years, the Church has calmly and respectfully distanced itself from the State, without abdicating its position due to historical and social factors more solid than legal regulations.

At the risk of generalizing, in these past twenty years with regard to the State, two different, clear-cut episcopal styles can be seen. One still clinging to economic and political privileges and power, and the other prevailing one which seeks a clear, sensible and collaborative relationship with the state in which the independence of both is maintained, based on the concepts of “independence and cooperation” inherent in the 1966 Agreement between The Holy See and Argentina.<sup>5</sup>

As stated above, the Church has assumed that, given certain matters and situations, its strength is multiplied by joining forces with the large religious denomination groups.

Indeed, a relationship between Church and State at the highest level is required, but without limiting itself to it. The Church is involved in all spheres of social life: school, human promotion, assisting children, sick and elderly people and prisoners. This forms a series of links, with local authorities, and with the institutions of civil society, in the first place through National “Caritas”. For that purpose, the Church relies on a clergy of reduced numbers, given the amount of requirements, on religious and lay men and women who live and work in the field full time or as temporary missionaries or voluntary workers (we should point to movements like “Focolares”, “Schönstatt”, “Kolping”, “Sant’Egidio”, “Comunión y Liberación” and others). This presence has had particularly far-reaching implications during the important crisis, given the fact that, for example, food and health assistance in Buenos Aires Province was channeled through “Caritas” to thousands of busy dining rooms, schools, hospitals and families, and finds admirable ways of establishing co-operation with other creeds and groups.

In fact, during the 2001–2002 crisis, most of the initiatives for helping the needy came from Church or Catholic based institutions (mainly Caritas, working in 64 dioceses and more than 3000 parishes).

In January 2002, at the peak of the crisis, the Catholic Church offered the “spiritual space” to the UNDP and the Government to lead the organization of the “Mesa del Diálogo Argentino” (The Table of Argentine Dialogue), at

which three bishops were seated. The “table” was open to a wide range of consultations and it suggested reassuming dialogue with the people, contributing to pacification, reinforcing the sense of public matters, adopting actions in order to cope with the serious social problems, and determining a basic consensus for the transition.<sup>6</sup> Through the “Derecho Familiar de Inclusión Social” (Family Right of Social Inclusion) a social programme was launched, the “Programa Jefes y Jefas de Hogar” (Programme for heads of the family). This programme consisted of necessary basic help for the least protected areas. The problem of health care was also tackled through the “Plan Remediar” (Healing Plan) and the prescription of generic medicines. At the end of the first part of the “Mesa de Diálogo”, the bishops informed President Duhalde and declared that they felt great pain due to the lack of commitment shown by the government with respect to the suggested political reforms, but in spite of this did not stop making efforts.

The Episcopate at the Extraordinary Assembly said, amongst other things: “From the beginning of this year we, the bishops, have offered the spiritual space in order to make easier the dialogue among the Argentine leaders. As a result of the meetings the document *Bases para las Reformas* was worked out. This document is a very valuable contribution intended to strengthen the will of recreating the institutions of our democracy. At present, the dialogue is beginning a new, different phase, with the intention that all citizens, without exception, should participate with enthusiasm in the reconstruction of our society.

We commit ourselves to help all, to take this dialogue to every corner of the Nation. We, the bishops, strongly want to inspire, encourage and pave the way for all lay people to be able to accomplish their corresponding missions. Lay men and women have already shown their efficient work at the “Mesas de Diálogo sectoriales” (Sectorial Dialogue Tables), as well as in so many other solidarity enterprises throughout the country. We are persuaded that they, along with other different organizations that work for the good of all, will carry out with creativity and initiative the actions that are necessary for the Nation in this new phase of the dialogue”.<sup>7</sup>

The Diálogo Argentino kept on working with tables in different areas and was locally successful in many cases. As the months passed, although non-governmental organizations, non-Catholic religious leaders and even distin-



guished individuals acting in their sole capacity also took part, its political importance diminished as did the commitment of the Catholic Church bishops. The scarce presence of political parties, businessmen and other production makers was a signal that some real power factors were missing. Once the new government was in power, the Dialogue began to fade away, leaving for many a valuable experience but the bitter awareness that real change needed a bigger commitment to the “common good” or, as the Preamble of the Constitution describes: “the general welfare”. The Table was a relevant experience of the “wisdom of dialogue”, to quote the Prayer for the Fatherland composed by the Bishops Conference in the critical days of 2001.

This attitude: to help, resumes the position of the Catholic Church in contemporary Argentina and is a main contribution to a civil society where values of brotherhood, solidarity and compassion must be cultivated.

### **New opportunities for a Civil Society within the context of globalization**

Globalization is a fact that forces us to rethink the ways of transmitting the message of the Gospel in times of change, and not only consider the risks of “foreign influences” jeopardizing our identity and values. We may have to admit that, although statistics read differently, and that Faith has deep roots, especially in the provinces in Argentina, Catholicism can become a minority immersed in a secularized, relativist society. Evangelization of culture needs a renewal of the pedagogy of dialogue for a creative and intelligent relationship with those on the outskirts of the Church, even the world of non-believers, to witness the transcendental values and find common ways to service. There are challenges to be met.

We have mentioned the vital importance of what is, in the social field, directly assumed by the Church institutionally. A steady handover to civil society, setting in their locations leaders and groups taking an active part, promoting a culture of social responsibility, should well be a task for the coming years.

As is the case in many other aspects of Argentina, laity is fragmented and as a result many efforts are made which cannot possibly be connected to each other. This is why networking is necessary.

Although ecumenical and interreligious work was considered by many simply as a reflection of European problems during the years that followed the Council, the engagement of local pioneers, and the example and teachings of the Popes, consolidated these relations in Argentina as well as in other countries of Latin America (Brazil, Uruguay, Chile).

Nowadays the participation of representatives of different religious communities is very frequent at public ceremonies, in educational courses and social work. In this context, the presence of a large Jewish Community and a smaller Islamic one honoring the plural coexistence, must be outlined.

For Argentina, the coexistence of different religions in harmony, at the same time preserving their own identities, is testimony to the possibility of dialogue in society and the juncture of efforts towards peace and to promote the human being as a whole.

Although it is not a religious group, allow me to mention CALIR (Argentine Council for Religious Freedom). Catholics, Jews, Muslims and Protestant lay persons meet regularly to contribute to better legislation in religious matters and to promote religious freedom in a pluralistic society.<sup>8</sup>

Argentina celebrated feverishly the restoration of Democracy in 1983, but today society has been struck by apathy, scepticism and weariness. Political parties are going through a serious identity crisis, many electoral opportunities have been lost, and the groups have been atomized and seduced by the leaders in power at the moment, resulting in new frustrations.

It is impossible not to refer to corruption when analyzing the Argentine situation. Personal enrichment is the main but not the only factor. Some years ago a high government official gave a definition, he said: "I steal for the crown", meaning for the party or just for strengthening power. The accumulation of limitless power favours corruption, and it reduces resistance to that power and allows it to be in control.

Many efforts are made to obtain "justice for all", but courts are hijacked by the overwhelming amount of work, with the results that sometimes the innocent are in prison for a long time and the guilty are released.

Of course this aspect would not have the same opportunities if certain characteristics of political life, and the idiosyncrasies of people without distinction of class or origin did not exist.

One of them is “viveza criolla” (Argentine quickness). Cardinal Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires, referred recently to the “unfortunate attitudes that confine us to the vicious circle of endless confrontations. These whims and fits that aim at easy results, ‘quick profits’, in the belief that our shrewdness will solve all, are they not a significant cause of our current backward state and misery? Are they not a reflection of our arrogant and immature insecurity?”.

Argentina suffers from lack of respect for the law. The Constitution has been recurrently violated, spreading the idea that “every law has its loophole”, and that there is no evil in evading the law. The consequence is the absence of transparent and equitable rules, of “tax contribution citizenship”, of an authority who can use strength without violating human rights. If only 29% of the population believes that government respects the law, another 86% would affirm that Argentina lives most of the time on the verge of law, and 52% would affirm they would infringe the law if they believe they were right to do so, therefore Argentina can be seen an “anomic” society.

Over the last few years, the absence of law has seen a sort of “direct democracy”, which produced tumultuous gatherings that managed to bring down presidents, and were later manipulated by other forces, and the organization of people who wished to influence social issues and fight against crime and violence. The Constitution defines our system as “representative” (Article 1), and states that „the people do not deliberate or govern unless it is through their representatives” (Article 28). It is then imperative that we examine the institutional quality and promote the irreplaceable tools of representative democracy.

Given the situation, is there anything that the Church and other denominations can contribute?

It has been said that the Church, not only the Church in Argentina but also in Latin America, does not support democracy enough. The proof is that Medellin Final Reports do not mention the word democracy at all, but they do talk about justice and peace. The same can be said of the Argentine Episcopal documents up to 1982. Today, this has changed as a result of experience, and the teachings of the Council and the Pontiffs.

Some of these contributions may be:

- respect for secular autonomy, not expecting lay people involved in politics to be just the bishops' executive arm;
- escaping all sorts of corruption;
- encouraging from the Gospel the passion for the common welfare and also politics as a high expression of “social charity”,
- the promotion of the dialogue as an instrument that is necessary for “peace within an order”.

We should bear in mind the prophetic dimension, which is critical from the Gospel of every regime and system, it is „the voice of the voiceless“, and which encourages the practice of charity as one of its fundamental activities.

One of the deficiencies one can see is a prejudiced view of much of modern economic life and free market philosophy confusing all the “market” with evil “neoliberalism”, not making the necessary distinctions so clearly made in *Centesimus Annus*. One can find the rejection of a modern and global society and the longing for a rural society. Cardinal Mejía in his recollections, quotes a general on the eve of taking power: “We shall govern with the encyclicals”<sup>9</sup>. The same concept was President Duhalde’s when taking office. But the Social Church Doctrine is either a government or party programme. It must permeate them and be brought down to situations and times dynamically.

On more than one occasion, politics, which is the object of all criticism, is contrasted to civil society, where the country reserves would be stored. This is a false and dangerous dilemma because both politics and civil society are necessary, and necessarily linked.

Certainly, “we are faced with scenarios where the social role played by the State, the Market and Civil Society are changing towards a model capable of guaranteeing economic and social efficiency within a democratic context, where progress is the result of a growing associating, coordinating and complementing process among various sectors. At the crossing point of these three spheres energy and social creativity flourish”.<sup>10</sup>

Although charity and social promotion activities have not been carried out in the country from the start, the crisis that recently affected Argentina brought along with it a new awareness, which is reflected in the appearance of new forms of associations, surpassing in that way our characteristic individualism.

We could say that in every sense the Argentine people discovered what Tocqueville defined as a key element in the United States, the capacity to form associations. The fact is that there are new networks, centres for retired people, cooperatives, promotion societies, even in most neglected areas, which are a necessary dimension of citizen participation.

On the other hand, various leading companies estimated that “social responsibility” is “an ethical and transparent way of relating to all [the] publics it is in connection with, and setting up business targets compatible with society’s sustainable growth, while preserving environmental and cultural resources for the future generations, and respecting diversity and promoting the reduction of social differences”.<sup>11</sup>

Foundations established by philanthropists and more recently by enterprises and banks must be signalled. The recent search for a type of insertion into social life different from that of the market, has grown in importance. “Strategic social investment”, which is understood as the responsible, proactive and strategic use of private resources with the expected return of long term welfare and development of the society, tends to replace mere assistance. Anyway, the disappearance of the latter cannot happen given the urgency of the needs.

While in the past the State intended to centralize social welfare, this would be impossible today because the State has no way of fulfilling all the needs, and it is understood that cooperation is not competition. In addition to this, non-state organizations offer training opportunities for educational and sanitary agents, and the possibility of reaching places which otherwise would be deprived of the most essential requirements.

In the vast world of civil society organizations there are many men and women who live their lay commitment in that way, and as such represent the Church’s presence in society. In some other cases, people do not share the same values or religious affiliation, but have the same approach with

regard to ethical concerns and social actions. This plurality of convictions flows over and over into a “dialogue of life” towards unity of values.

The times of economic instability have thrown many of the middle classes into poverty, after losing all possibility of social promotion, education, housing and health. This has particularly affected lots of elderly people who have experienced the reduction of their pensions or the loss of lifetime savings.

In summary, the challenge is to accumulate social capital to meet the social debt, to change irritable inequalities by means of policies that favor equality of opportunity, to give deprived sectors access to health, education, housing and security.

We would like to mention three stimulating examples of solidarity and social commitment that developed during the last decade.

One is “la Red Solidaria” (Solidary Network), created by Juan Carr, a pioneer of mass mobilization for solidarity. The leaders of the group say: “Red Solidaria was established in 1995. Since its conception it was meant to contribute mechanisms capable of providing simple and effective responses to situations of urgent need in our community. Red Solidaria is an organization where volunteers are committed on an everyday basis to saving lives, and to improving the quality of life of citizens locally and worldwide. We facilitate a link between those in need and those willing and capable of helping out. We basically believe societies are capable of expanding their potential and means, in order to create effective responses when faced with life-subverting situations, and that solidarity is the force that brings about this capacity in the most powerful and sustainable way. We receive an average of 100 phone calls per day, and this number is multiplied by three in emergencies. In the beginning, most calls were to request something. Currently, 60% of calls are motivated to offering time, medicine, clothes, an organ and so on”.<sup>12</sup>

Another group is “Grupo de Fundaciones” (Foundations Group), composed of seventeen grant makers foundations, most of them belonging to the business world with the following mission and objectives:

- To promote a culture of philanthropy and social responsibility in Argentina.

- To promote a culture of social responsibility among those who may eventually take part in philanthropic activities.
- To support professionalism in the work of foundations.
- To foster the exchange of experiences and practices and encourage joint philanthropic activities.
- To promote favourable conditions for the development of philanthropy and spread the ethical aspects implied in the work of foundations.

GDF carries out exchange meetings and training sessions and it produces, gathers and disseminates information about the grantmaking sector. Besides, it provides documentation and specialized bibliography for those who need material for consultation or has to do some research on philanthropy and social responsibility”.<sup>13</sup>

The third initiative is the “Foro Ecu mico Social” (Ecumenic Social Forum), which is five years old and gathers in a common purpose, Catholic priests, Evangelicals, Jews and Muslims together with businessmen and bankers. The common purpose is to work in an atmosphere of reflection and to spread and promote the idea of social responsibility and direct social engagement in the world of business. One of the ways of doing this is by means of prizes and courses for solidary entrepreneurs, not only for companies but also for non-state organizations as well as initiatives in the educational area and promotion of small business enterprises. It is a renowned interreligious and intercultural place of meeting.<sup>14</sup>

The fact is that the social situation of the country is still expressed in the faces of the neglected people, who suffer from exclusion, lack of access to education and culture, and hunger, in a grain producing country. It is estimated that 34% of the population do not have their basic needs satisfied. The Observatory of the Argentine Social Debt says that 8% of the people interviewed in June 2005 had gone through the experience of being hungry. This means a reduction from the year before (14%). Four out of ten homes lack an adequate habitat (poor housing, crowding, among others). Public insecurity is not confined to certain social classes, at least one every five homes have gone through a violent episode. Two thirds of the homes do not reach the necessary income to cover the cost of basic expenses and essential services. Although unemployment has been reduced, still four out of ten active people have very few opportunities to work, and one out of three is

afraid of losing his / her job or leaving it. One out of three adolescents is outside the formal education system.<sup>15</sup>

These indicators show the essential governmental responsibility to draw plans, guarantee everybody the possibility of access to all aspects of human dignity, promote training, participation and work. Improved economic figures in the last four years have allowed us to overcome the most acute stage of the social crisis, but we cannot deny social differences: “the number of rich people increases and [so does the number of needy] people”. The middle classes, once the pride of the country, are the victims of the economic instability: many of their members have been thrown into poverty, after losing all chance of social promotion, and access to education, housing and health. This particularly affected lots of elderly people who experienced the reduction of their pensions or loss of lifetime savings.

In summary, the challenge is to accumulate social capital to meet the social debt, to change irritable inequalities by means of politics that favour equality of opportunity, to give deprived sectors access to health, education, housing and security. “The crucial demand to achieve equity lies in larger equality as the basis for political freedom. It also implies putting an end to stereotypes and discrimination, and improving access to the legal system and protection for the citizen. This need for more equity entails putting a stop to and setting into balance economic and political abuses of power committed by the elites. In this regard we should point out that only the civil society seems to be in better condition to forge alliances in support of strategies leading to economic growth, institutional reforms, and access to wellbeing resources, under the equality of rights and opportunities”.<sup>16</sup>

In 2005, the at that time President of the Evangelic Church of the Rio de la Plata, (originated in the EKD) said: “I know that this is not new, but I want to stress the need to redouble efforts from all areas of society, those who are aware of the problem and know [what] our responsibility towards those excluded [is], who are also human beings with the gift of dignity given by God. Our responsibility is to reinsert them into society. Measures for the creation of working posts should be devised in coordination with pedagogical and educational measures. The promotion of small business and small enterprises should be linked to learning, and the learning of the elementary and not so elementary crafts.”<sup>17</sup>



### **The identification of development and political consequences**

We would like to highlight some of the contributions received from foreign organizations towards a positive social development.

The Catholic Church in Argentina, as in the whole of Latin America, is grateful to institutions like Misereor, Adveniat, Kirche in Not, among others, where the generosity of the Catholic Church in Germany is most evident, and they do so with an increasingly strategic eye. It has been said there is not only one America, and the same applies to Argentina: the one of the rich, educated, intellectuals and the one of the excluded, of those children and youngsters who will find it very difficult to attain a basic education, are side by side, sometimes only few blocks away and violently related.

Now, we wish to refer to some areas where collaboration would be very welcome:

- Training political leaders for a modern and participative democracy.
- Strengthening civil society for better use of social capital.
- Improving institutional quality in all spheres, the three powers of the National provinces, municipalities, political parties, universities.
- Promoting people of all ages, particularly young people, to become agents of change in their native places.
- The application of the principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church to concrete situations in political, economic and social life.
- Supporting science and research, and their application in the economic transformation of the country.

We would like to conclude by highlighting some of the positive trends in regard to this conference:

- The evolution of relations between Church and State, in which responsibilities of both in their fields and in collaboration with civil society, are enhanced.
- The engagement of the Church with the poorest and the deprived by means of both its institutions and individuals, far from identification with any kind of power.

- The way that the Catholic Church works together with other creeds, as partners in common service in a pluralistic society.
- The “solidarity revolution” as one of the effects of the recent crisis that has helped to strengthen civil society.

We wish to live in a democracy that is open to new trends, without disregarding those values that inspired our ancestors, and which are rooted in the Argentine people, in spite of their trials: work, family, a transcendental vision of the human being, peace, justice, freedom, and solidarity. Without these values not only Civil Society would be harmed, but democracy would become a mere imposition of incidental majorities, lacking ethical support, and this would entail danger for human dignity. ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term Roman Catholic Church, common in the USA and Europe, is not generally used, but rather “the Catholic Church” or even “the Church” is enough, though limited in its identification.
- <sup>2</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, n° 14. March 4, 1979. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).
- <sup>3</sup> The Roman Catholic Bishops Conference, The Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata (originated in the EKD) and the Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida, signed in 1988 a document recognizing Baptism in the three churches. A later document on the Eucharist stayed as a document of the Commission. There are no similar ecumenical documents in Latin America, or at least have not existed up until the very recent present.
- <sup>4</sup> Three current examples are Jorge Telerman, Governor of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, the governor of the province of Tucumán, José Alperovich, and the Minister of Education, Daniel Filmus. They are members of the Jewish community.
- <sup>5</sup> At the time this paper was written, the Jesuit bishop of Puerto Iguazú, Joaquín Piña, has decided to head the opposition list of constituents for the Congress that aims at reforming the Provincial Constitution of Misiones to allow the indefinite re-election of the governor, who has the support of the President. Two nuns and some evangelical pastors are mentioned will form part of the same list. The other bishop of the Province, Juan Ramón Martínez, of Posadas, has backed Piña, who also invokes the approval of Cardinal Bergoglio. Even if they take on the tasks of the laity with all the associated risks, the intention resides not in favouring corporate church issues but the belief that a lack of change within the power structures is negative for the people, especially the most needy.
- <sup>6</sup> Dialogo Argentino, Document *Bases para las reformas. Principales consensos*, 28.02. 2002.
- <sup>7</sup> Documento de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, dado al término de la Asamblea Plenaria Extraordinaria, realizada en La Montonera – Pilar, del 25 al 28 de septiembre de 2002.

- <sup>8</sup> KAS edited in 2003 a book with contributions of members of CALIR and has promoted meetings on the engagement of Christians in politics. [www.calir.org.ar](http://www.calir.org.ar).
- <sup>9</sup> Jorge M. Cardenal Mejía: *Historia de una identidad*, Letemendia, 2005.
- <sup>10</sup> UNDP Argentine Delegation and IDB, Argentine Representation, Social Capital. Towards the construction of the development index for civil society in Argentina, Edilab, Buenos Aires, 1998, p. 23. See also: Study on Non Profit Making Organizations in Argentina, Mario M. Roitter, Inés González Bombal, compilers. The John Hopkins Comparative Non Profit Sector Project- tCEDES, 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Instituto Ethos de Empresas y Responsabilidad Social, [www.ethos.org](http://www.ethos.org).
- <sup>12</sup> [www.redsolidaria.presencia.net](http://www.redsolidaria.presencia.net).
- <sup>13</sup> The foundation's membership and initiatives in [www.gdf.org.ar](http://www.gdf.org.ar). Annexed to this paper is a list of the internet pages of the member foundations and of other institutions working for the common good.
- <sup>14</sup> Its chairman is Fr. Jean-Yves Calvez s.j. and the executive director Lic. Fernando Flores. [www.foroecumenico.com](http://www.foroecumenico.com).
- <sup>15</sup> Report Barometer of Argentine Social Debt, n° 2, Observatory of Argentine Social Debt, Department of Institutional Investigation, Catholic University in Argentina, 2006. [www.uca.edu.ar/observatorio.htm/](http://www.uca.edu.ar/observatorio.htm/).
- <sup>16</sup> Challenges of measuring human development in Argentina, with great deprivation and inequalities, by Salvia, A. in Barometer of the Argentine Social Debt, n°, year 2005, Fundación Arcor-EDUCA, p. 34.
- <sup>17</sup> Pastor Federico H Schaeffer, "Creatividad para que todos puedan acceder a un trabajo digno", [www.foroecumenico.com](http://www.foroecumenico.com).

# **Civil Society and Democratization in Mexico: The Role of Christian Churches**

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*Roberto Blancarte*

## **Introduction: Church and civil society**

In this article I would like to express some ideas concerning the complex relation between Christian churches (particularly the Catholic Church) and the so called civil society in Mexico, in a context of increasing social secularization and democratization of political institutions. My main hypothesis is that in the past three decades, for different reasons, a process of “de-clericalization” of the religious orders and lay Catholic organizations has developed, which has had an important impact in the birth and spreading of new organizations of civil society. I also contend that, in the Mexican case, we can observe an ambivalence of the Catholic hierarchy (e. g. the bishops) regarding the consequences of the process of modernization, secularization and democratization of the past decades.

It is crucial to know how the Catholic Church comprehends this term, based on encyclical letters of the Pope and other important texts. Once we do that, we can understand that the Church does not use the concept as most persons would do in contemporary society, that is, as in opposition to political society. And that the Catholic hierarchy does not consider the Church as part of civil society. From the perspective of Pius IX, Leo XIII, but also the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, there are two societies that exist at the same time: ecclesiastical society and civil or political society, each one with its own power.

If we go back as far as to 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the famous *Syllabus* of Pius IX, published on December 1864, we can read in part six about the “errors of civil society, as such and in its relations with the Catholic Church.”<sup>1</sup> The latter means that if the pontifical doctrine contemplates the existence of civil society, it considers the Church as a different institution. In fact, the concept of “civil society” (*societas civilis*) in pontifical doctrine was simply the equivalent to the general contemporary concept of society in modern sociology.<sup>2</sup>

For Catholic theologians, man is ordained by nature to live in political community (*Institutum homini natura est, ut in civili societate vivat*). Some translations into modern languages interpret the concept of *societas civilis* as “political community” or even as “State”, corresponding with the idea of political community in the Aristotelian sense of the concept of society. That is why it is so important to understand not only that the Church considers itself apart from society, but the pontifical conception of the State and the role of the Church in society.

If man was created to live in political community (in society), the origin of political power cannot be the people but God, author of nature. God himself wanted a supreme authority in society (the State) for the government of the masses. As a consequence, civil society and the State are natural institutions emanating from divine will:

“But, as no society can hold together unless some one be over all, directing all to strive earnestly for the common good, every body politic must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and has, consequently, God for its Author. Hence, it follows that all public power must proceed from God. For God alone is

the true and supreme Lord of the world. Everything, without exception, must be subject to Him, and must serve him, so that whosoever holds the right to govern holds it from one sole and single source, namely, God, the sovereign Ruler of all. 'There is no power but from God'.<sup>3</sup>

The term "civil" is not accidental in ecclesiastical doctrine. It means that it is not the only society in which men live; in addition to "civil society", there is an "ecclesiastical society" with purposes and goals different from the former one. According to Catholic doctrine: "The Almighty, therefore, has given the charge of the human race to two powers, the ecclesiastical and the civil, the one being set over divine, and the other over human, things."<sup>4</sup> According to the pontifical doctrine, alongside civil society,

"The only-begotten Son of God established on earth a society which is called the Church, and to it He handed over the exalted and divine office which He had received from His Father, to be continued through the ages to come. [...] Over this mighty multitude God has Himself set rulers with power to govern, and He has willed that one should be the head of all, and the chief and unerring teacher of truth, to whom He has given „the keys of the kingdom of heaven”. [...] This society is made up of men, just as civil society is, and yet is supernatural and spiritual, on account of the end for which it was founded, and of the means by which it aims at attaining that end. Hence, it is distinguished and differs from civil society, and, what is of highest moment, it is a society chartered as of right divine, perfect in its nature and in its title, to possess in itself and by itself, through the will and loving kindness of its Founder, all needful provision for its maintenance and action. And just as the end at which the Church aims is by far the noblest of ends, so is its authority the most exalted of all authority, nor can it be looked upon as inferior to the civil power, or in any manner dependent upon it. Now, this authority, perfect in itself, and plainly meant to be unfettered, so long assailed by a philosophy that truckles to the State, the Church, has never ceased to claim for herself and openly to exercise."<sup>5</sup>

This conception of two perfect societies (the Church and the State), is important to understand the position of the hierarchy before society. In his encyclical *Diuturnum illud*, about political authority, Leo XIII had already underlined this conception of two societies. Later, he would insist in his

encyclical *Immortale Dei* “about the Christian Constitution of the States”, on this subject:

“Each in its kind is supreme, each has fixed limits within which it is contained, limits which are defined by the nature and special object of the province of each, so that there is, we may say, an orbit traced out within which the action of each is brought into play by its own native right. But, inasmuch as each of these two powers has authority over the same subjects, and as it might come to pass that one and the same thing-related differently, but still remaining one and the same thing-might belong to the jurisdiction and determination of both, therefore God, who foresees all things, and who is the author of these two powers, has marked out the course of each in right correlation to the other. ‘For the powers that are, are ordained of God’!”<sup>6</sup>

The division of the world in two spheres, the ecclesiastical and the secular, is not exclusive of the Catholic thought of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, of the Second Vatican Council, states clearly the difference between civil society and the Church, which “by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system”. And also: “The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other.”<sup>7</sup>

In any case, it is important to underline the fact that the pontifical doctrine considers the Church as a distinct and different society from civil society. Nevertheless, it is clear that, although the Church pretends to be a perfect society, in order to accomplish her mission, she is forced to act through what we call civil society. As the referred Pastoral Constitution states: “The Church herself makes use of temporal things insofar as her own mission requires it.” It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the own conception that the Church has of herself, that is her subjective participation, and the one that in spite of it, the hierarchy or any of the groups that form part of the Church may have had in what we call civil society.

The problem in contemporary societies, as we know, is that, as Leo XIII put it in his time, “the passive subject of both powers is the same one”, that is the citizens-believers. Catholics, according to this doctrine, belong to both societies. As a consequence, the Catholic Church fights for the establish-

ment of a State with public policies as close as possible to Catholic doctrine. Of course, this doctrine of “perfect societies” must face reality because there is no country in the world absolutely catholic, and plural religiosity (including the presence of non-believers) drives or pushes for the existence of Secular States that, even without calling themselves as such, establish the autonomy of politics in front of religions. We can say that the history of Church-State relations in Latin America can be understood as the different reactions to this particular problem. We can also say that, for different reasons belonging to the historical development of the region (increasing religious plurality, increasing democratization and a bigger awareness of human rights issues, including freedom of conscience), in the last decades the idea of the Secular or Lay State has been strengthening, with important consequences for the development of civil society.

### **Religion in the pre-Hispanic world and the colonial period**

In the last five centuries, religions in Mexico have thrived under an apparent and contradictory monopoly of the goods of salvation, at the institutional level, and a profound diversity of religious manifestations that coexist, intertwine, and feed on that monopoly. Resistance, adjustment, and integration are but a few options used by this set of religious expressions, particularly during the colony, to find a relationship with the dominant system of beliefs.

The key to understanding the weak institutional control that has been patent throughout the history of the Catholic Church in Mexico and in Latin America is the endemic scarcity of priests, a fact that also accounts for the strength of what is known as popular religion and the shapes religiosity adopts in the region. Additionally, this means that in spite of being considered a religious reservoir of evangelizing endeavors in the third millennium, Latin America cannot be considered an entirely Catholic region, because the process of “inculturation” has not been completed. In other words, Latin American peoples, in spite of five centuries of evangelization, do not identify with Catholicism the way Asian nations do with Confucianism, Hinduism, and Islam, or Europeans with Christianity. Thus, Protestant churches, Para-Christian religions (mormons, Jehovah’s witnesses, etc.) and other religious movements can also be inserted in the social tissue with



relative ease. This is more evident in the case of indigenous communities, where the process of transformation of religious beliefs is even faster than in the rest of society.

The Catholic Church was part of the colonial State until the War of Independence, but in many other Latin American countries, it continued to be so throughout the nineteenth century. In that regard, the Mexican experience is one of the few exceptions. The current influence and prerogatives of the Catholic Church in many countries of the region can be explained by the survival of this colonial heritage, which stands as a temptation to the governments and the Catholic hierarchy itself. The controlling “jurisdictionalism”<sup>8</sup> or interventionism of Latin American States, including the Mexican State, is a direct consequence of the Royal Patronage and constitutes the prevailing practice in most Latin American countries. The secular State (where it emerged) is thus conceived in many cases as a function of necessary interventionism, rather than a separation of ecclesiastical affairs and public life.

The emergence of dissident religious groups and their growing dissemination throughout Latin America is a clear manifestation of previous signs: Catholic institutional weakness, strength of popular religion, identification of the Church with the State, persistence of “jurisdictionalism”, growing social mobility, and the subsequent increase in religious options. Therefore, a future challenge for the region lies in the management of this new plurality in which tolerance will play a major role. However, tolerance does not seem to be among the main values of the region’s civil or religious history.

In Pre-Hispanic times, religion occupied a central place in the life of the peoples of the region. Their daily life, familial relationships, wars, and “cosmovision”<sup>9</sup> depended on their religious conceptions. This document does not seek to conduct a thorough revision of Pre-Hispanic religious conceptions or the role of religion in Mesoamerica. However, we believe it is important to point out the central role such beliefs played in the main civilizations found by the Spaniards in the Americas.

The colonial period (1521–1821) did not bring about fundamental changes in the religious situation. The new gods and deities (including the Virgin and the saints) replaced the old divinities. Furthermore, many sites of worship were witnesses of the mere substitution of old idols for new deities (with Tepeyac and Chalma being the most paradigmatic, though certainly

not the only instances). Christianity became a central element of the life of indigenous peoples, as it already was among the Spaniards. Thus, religion occupied a fundamental place in the daily life of the New Spain settlers.

Three essential features that characterized religion in Novohispanic colonial times would determine the role of religion in the following centuries:

- 1) Concentration of the Church presence in very specific regions (center and west) of the country generated scarce pastoral care and a type of Catholicism that was centered in ritualism rather than doctrine.
- 2) The subsequent development of a sort of popular Catholicism with a marked autonomous and at times anticlerical trend.
- 3) Religion was under the control and management of the State, another common feature of the Pre-Hispanic and Novohispanic eras that would mark, from my point of view, the place institutionalized religion would have in the future. Just as in the Aztec world, where priests were part of the power structure and ensured the reproduction of their cosmovision, thus replicating the central power of the Tlatoani<sup>10</sup> and the ruling caste, during the colony, the Patronage would lead the integration of the Church into the State. The Church was a branch of the colonial administration and the Crown was entitled to intervene in the Church's internal affairs in the Americas. Evidence of this is the fact that if a historian wishes to consult documents on the colonial Latin American Church, they have to go to Seville's Indies Archives –not the Vatican–, where all the documentation related to the colonial administration is located. The Catholic Church in the Americas, ruled by the kings of Spain, was thus part of the sociopolitical and administrative network through which the Crown ruled the Spaniards, creoles, *mestizos*, and the other castes that populated the continent.

The fact that the Church belonged to the State did not preclude the existence of differences between the civil and the ecclesiastical powers in terms of perspective, objectives, and at the institutional level. Indeed, a collaboration of this kind did not preempt the emergence of frequent conflicts between civil rulers and religious authorities, as well as internal rivalries within the Church itself. Note, however, that these differences existed within the colonial "State", not between the Church and the State.

Before Latin-American countries gained their independence from Spain and Portugal, the churches had established a relationship with temporal powers, represented by “the Kings”, “the Crown” or “the Royal power”. The Catholic Church did not “oppose” these powers, as it had set up a cooperative, not a competitive, relationship with them, and once the Patronage was consolidated, such relationship became one of actual subordination. Functions did not distinguish between churchmen and laymen. For example, the Archbishop of Mexico City would often substitute or replace the Viceroy when absent, and civil authorities could intervene in the Church’s internal affairs. Illustrated Regalism would strengthen the trend that eventually led to State interventionism. The Bourbon Reforms of Charles III increased the Crown’s control over the Church (and its finances) in the Americas. The impressive list of Church officials appointed to civil positions in the New Spain is headed by the Archbishop Francisco de Lizana Beaumont, appointed interim Viceroy by the Central Board as a result of the events unleashed by the French invasion to Spain in 1808.

Similar examples were registered throughout the colonial period, because the Crown trusted churchmen, particularly in periods where the absence or death of civil officials left a power vacuum. Such appointments can also be explained by another fact that became more evident in the first independent period of the new Hispanic-American States: since the ruling class could not be substituted in a sudden manner, the elites of the colonial period would continue to be so in the independent period. Therefore, the existence of the Patronage and the fact that the ruling classes could not be abruptly replaced delayed the separation of churchmen and lay officials and the conflict between Church and State. (This situation would persist until the actual division between temporal and religious affairs took form in the collective mind.) The Church was merely a corporation that belonged to the State and churchmen constituted an extremely important element of the ruling class.

### **The centrality of the patronage<sup>11</sup>**

The centrality of the Patronage has to be properly addressed if the relationship between the temporal and Church powers in Spanish America, from

the time of the Conquest until the nineteenth century (and often to this day) is to be understood.

For the most part, the new independent States did not seek at first to dissociate themselves from the Church. On the contrary, by seeking to preserve the Patronage, they considered the Church part of the State, as is the case today – this time under new juridical forms. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, in view of the Holy See's reluctance to grant the new States the right to dissociation, that the liberal Latin American elites reoriented their positions and decided that the best way to achieve their social objectives was through separation. Nonetheless, throughout the first half-century of independent life, all the rulers of the new countries sought to preserve or recover the rights created by the Patronage.

The permanence of juridical and social “ambiguity” towards the Patronage was promoted by the almost complete disappearance of the hierarchy in Spanish America and the state of neglect local churches were in because of the geographical and political distance of the Holy See that did not seem capable of finding an adequate strategy to reach the emerging nations.

No real differences between conservatives and liberals as to jurisdictional pretensions were noted. In practice, most liberators and early rulers of independent Spanish America used all their power to intervene, in accordance with the typical colonial tradition, in the Church's internal affairs, especially in regards to the appointment and continuation of top officials.

Although only some of the newly created republics established the freedom of religion, virtually all of them claimed their Patronage right. The existence of the Patronage was not connected to the problem of freedom of religion and both the Patronage and religious freedom could coexist in a conservative regime. It was not until the liberals associated the rejection of any form of patronage (or agreement with the Church) with religious freedom that the basis of a particular vision of separation of State and Church was established. Therefore, freedom of religion in most Latin American countries was not the result of increased social tolerance, but of political circumstances that led to identifying such freedom with the separation of State and the Catholic Church.

### **Independent Mexico: liberalism and revolution**

In the subsequent decades, independence ruptured the relationship between Church and State, which had been based on common interests controlled by the Crown. The dispute over the control of the Patronage, now in the hands of the emerging Republic, the Holy See's refusal to accept the independence of the new nations, and the alignment of the Church hierarchy with conservative groups would shape the destiny of the State-Church relationship within the context of separation. However, we should ask ourselves if such separation, decreed by the Laws of Reform in 1859, was formal rather than real, because for all practical purposes, the Church continued to operate as a branch of the State in matters of civil registry and social management, among others. At the same time, it is important to make plain that Independence and the discontinuation of the Patronage brought forth the actual separation of State and Church, and that the passing of the Laws of Reform only established officially that the Holy See would now have to regard the Church as an entity no longer subordinated to the State. In truth, the Mexican State would have wanted to preserve the Patronage and its special treatment of the Catholic Church in comparison to the other confessions, as established by the Third Article of the 1824 Constitution, first Magna Charta of the Mexican Republic, which stated, "The religion of the Mexican nation is and will perpetually be Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman". This Constitution added, "The nation protects it [Catholicism] by means of wise and fair laws and forbids the practice of any other". Consequently, the separation that occurred more than three decades later was generated by the new relationship between the Church, who always sought separation in spite of condemning it, and the State, which never wanted separation but was forced to decree it.

The rebellion of Ayutla, which culminates with the ascent to power of the liberals and, later with the 1857 Constitution, marks the beginning of internal wars and reforms, including the Laws of Reform, which after the French intervention (1861–1867) helped to institutionalize the separation of spheres, the difference between public and private, State and churches, politics and religion. The defeat of conservatism, which was final in spite of Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship (1880–1910), led to the glorification of liberalism as the dominant ideology of the regime.<sup>12</sup> The ever-present religion still counts, but now more in the popular and individual spheres than in the pub-

lic or political arena. Under this new scheme of separation of State and Church, religiosity and beliefs no longer belonged to the public realm; they became a personal matter. As the Church was forced to withdraw from the public ambit, religion became increasingly politically irrelevant, although it came back at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century with its social doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

The 1910 uprising led by Francisco I. Madero, an important land owner with deeply rooted spiritualistic beliefs, would bring down Diaz's illustrated dictatorship that had been characterized by positivism and scientific progress. The coup d'état led by Madero's military chief would launch Victoriano Huerta's dictatorship and the true, popular Mexican revolution, whose northern faction was the bearer of profound anticlericalism. The alleged participation of Catholics, organized around the National Catholic Party and the Catholic hierarchy against the Revolution, accelerated the elimination of the Church as a power factor at the beginning of the twentieth century. This event legally marked the conversion of religion into a totally private matter, lacking in social content.<sup>14</sup>

In accordance with the 1917 Constitution, imposed by the revolutionaries, churches did not exist from a juridical standpoint, and religion was to be practiced at temples or homes, never in the streets. Religion was not a public or a social matter. Religious ministers were subject to all kinds of political restrictions, and political parties could not have any confessional references. An individual's religion became a form of belief linked solely to spiritual matters, which eliminated the social character of religious expressions. Furthermore, constitutional reforms went beyond the liberal spirit of the 1857 Constitution by permeating the new constitution with an entirely anticlerical character. The conflict such reforms generated would manifest itself in the form of solid opposition by the Church to the revolutionary regime, which peaked with the *Cristeros* revolt (1926–1929).<sup>15</sup>

In 1938, during the Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1934–1940), with the oil companies expropriation supported by the Mexican Catholic hierarchy, a new stage called *modus vivendi* began. This stage consisted essentially in the Church accepting the State monopoly in social matters, in exchange for governmental tolerance for Church educational activities, which implied that many within the Church had to break with their integrated vision of the world and thus accept liberalism's conceptual separation of politics and

religion. Religion still counted but was relegated to the private sphere, at both the educational and the ritualistic levels. Public education would keep its non-religious character (it even acquired a “socialist” tint between 1934 and 1940), and whenever possible, religious practices would be kept to temples, separate from any social or political manifestation.<sup>16</sup>

The 1992 constitutional reforms, derived from a debate that started at the end of the eighties, discarded most of the Revolution’s anticlerical norms, marking the return of the liberal spirit of the 1857 Constitution. These reforms also accounted for two parallel phenomena: the growing religious plurality that became statistically evident in the fifties (when the percentage of non-Catholics was less than 2% and became 12% in 2000) and the impossibility of keeping religious beliefs to the private ambit without acknowledging their social role.<sup>17</sup> It became increasingly obvious that religion shapes attitudes towards specific public problems, such as health, education, or social justice, and that it was important to acknowledge such a role. Additionally, the growing plurality of religion and the acknowledgement of its new social role made it necessary to establish public liberties (such as family planning, educational and reproductive health policies) that could transcend belief-specific moral norms, which some churches tried to impose to the population as a whole. Consequently, the secular State and public education were widely regarded in those decades as the best guarantors of public freedoms, including religious freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Evidently, we cannot forget that religion is not circumscribed to ecclesiastical matters. In the Church-State relationship we can find a third actor, the individual conscience. In the case of Mexico, conscience has established a link with the State to defend itself against the oppression of the Churches, particularly the hegemonic Catholic Church. However, on occasion, the churches have protected the conscience from the excessive meddling of and even frank persecution by the State. In the twenty-first century, the role that Mexicans apparently want today’s churches to play is that of an agent capable of finding a formula that guarantees the individual and social freedoms of all citizens, believers and non-believers alike.

At any rate, the fact is that Mexico faces a relatively new situation that is redefining the role of religion and how it counts at the national level. Many Mexicans hope that religion’s new place in Mexico should help to strengthen public and private liberties.

### **The building of civil society in Mexico**

Another important subject is the one concerning the particular case of the building of a civil society in Mexico, as opposed to political society in Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization. From this perspective, I would like to stress the role (up to now practically ignored, more than forgotten) of Christians in the fight for democratization of the country, either by means of legal or even violent actions. We all know the message of freedom sent by the Second Vatican Council in conjunction with other secular tendencies that at the end came together by means of different social and political proposals, from the Theology of development to the Theology of liberation, through different forms of political activism under the influence of Marxism or other theories as the Theory of dependence, diffused by the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL).

In this context I would like to emphasize that the internal radicalization in the Catholic Church happens in the middle of increasing political agitation in Latin America and of repression that compels Christians out of clerical positions, that is to forms of secular actions that end with their religious identity. The history of the radicalization of young Christians along with young Communist as the source of most guerrillas in Latin America is still waiting for its author. In any case, the double movement of political repression coming from authoritarian States and the condemnation of Theology of liberation by the Vatican in the late 70's and early 80's promotes the above-mentioned process of "de-clericalization" of most organizations that form civil society in Latin America and Mexico. That would be the indirect and certainly unwilling impact of the pontificate of John Paul II. The consequence of that event was that most of the Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's) that would fight for human rights or for political democracy in society would come in the 80's form Christian inspired organizations or directed by ancient members of religious or lay Catholic organizations. It is clear that in Mexico between half and two-thirds of all NGOs involved in civil rights, human rights, electoral observance, and democratization had Christian origins.<sup>19</sup> In fact, this is something specialists of the so called Third Sector affirm:

"I confirmed also that, in many cases, the roots of those leaders [of NGOs] would be traced to formative organizations of the Catholic



Church and although some of them preferred not to talk much about those times, they accepted to see it as an important period in their lives by the solidity of the formation they had received. Apart from the common past, there were generational differences; the older had been formed in a fighting period in which memories of the ancient combat Church-State had used their own lives to act in different activities in juvenile ecclesiastical organizations. But beyond the links with the Church, almost everyone had studied in the public university, particularly in the National University of Mexico. In that atmosphere they complemented their vision in the middle of the University scientific tradition.”<sup>20</sup>

Certainly, the Catholic hierarchy also contributed to the generation of democratic spaces in Mexican society, creating lay Catholic Non Governmental Organizations, supporting directly or indirectly the democratic demands of society or even organizing “democratic workshops” to develop a democratic culture within the population. But also (and above all) it pushed its own institutional demands and, in so doing, negotiated, as in many other cases, independently of the civil society claims. That was the case of the democratic demands in the northern state of Chihuahua in 1986 and in the first half of the decade of the 90’s. The Chihuahua case was paradigmatic in relations between the Catholic hierarchy and the authoritarian State thus far. The elections of that year in the biggest State of the country were considered a big fraud by a part of the population, including many priests and bishops, in that moment very engaged and supportive of their social environment. The prelates called openly to the closing of the temples to protest for what they considered was a massive fraud. The Chihuahua bishops’ call was indeed a historical allusion to the so called “Guerra cristera”, when the closing of the temples ordered by the Mexican Episcopate had unleashed the uprising of the peasants of the very Catholic Bajío region (the Cristeros) which lasted three years from 1926 to 1929. Facing this situation, the Apostolic Delegate in Mexico (there were no diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Holy See up to 1992) maneuvered in the Vatican so that Rome forced the bishops to suspend or withdraw their threats and actions.<sup>21</sup>

The episode had a double consequence: in the short period the Mexican State, supported by a pervading anticlerical sentiment, reinforced the punitive measures against the priests who would intervene in electoral process-

es. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the case of Chihuahua was an immediate precedent that showed the necessity of reforms, which in the modernizing spirit of the Mexican society, would eliminate the anticlerical nature of the 1917 Constitution and of the Mexican laws to liberalize the action of the churches.

We can then advance the hypothesis that, at least partly, the democratization of the Mexican State is more the unwilling and paradoxical result of the doctrinal intransigence of the Catholic hierarchy (when triggering the de-clericalization of the social and political action of the Christians) than their political project. This had as a consequence that the Christians' action would take place in the framework of secular political organizations, instead of the classical model of ecclesiastical activity of laymen.

The numerous minority Christian churches in Mexico deserve a separate observation, particularly the changes that the constitutional and legislative reforms of 1992 generated in their social and political action. The main consequence of those reforms was the end of the corporatism of Protestantism by the Mexican State. Indeed, since the establishment of freedom of religion in 1867, the protestant churches (like the societies of ideas in general) saw in the new-born Mexican State their most important protector, in front of the omnipresent Catholic Church, politically but not socially defeated. This position was reinforced in the context of the Mexican Revolution, in which process the minority churches constituted themselves as allies of the State in its conflict with the Catholic Church. During many years, *Romans 13*, or due respect to the established authority, was the main reference of those churches, preoccupied to show their patriotism and obedience, in the context of a Catholic culture that denoted them as foreign, strange, or even as a beachhead of American imperialism.

The end of this alliance between the Mexican State and Protestant churches happened at the same time that regulation concerning the churches was liberalized and the bases of the corporative State were undermined. In the presidential elections of 2000, the candidate of the PAN, in a famous campaign meeting with the main protestant leaders, affirmed that the PRI was like the Catholic Church, awakening in their imagination the idea of the necessity to combat the big institutions that had consolidated the corporative Mexican State. In fact, the arrival of the first modern Mexican President

that not only confessed but also proclaimed his Catholic beliefs, did not modify the scheme of pragmatic collaboration between the Mexican government and the bishops of the Catholic Church. But it ended with an alliance based on the idea that the Protestant churches needed governmental protection for the development of their activities or eventual expansion. It was also the beginning of a different approach (from *Romans 13*) for Protestants to revise their participation in the Mexican socio-political sphere. In general, this change has been projected as an increasing intervention in the public sphere (supported by the new legislation that has assured them a juridical and social status up to then inexistent), and by a diversification of political convictions and political definitions, following the general process of democratization and political plurality in the country.

## **Conclusions**

It is clear that the role of churches in the strengthening of civil society and democratization processes is affected by the existence of a more or less competitive, or on the other hand, monopolistic “religious market”. This element must be taken into account every time we observe the role of churches in the consolidation of civil society and democratization, either in Latin America or Africa. It is precisely this ambiguity and paradoxical situation which makes so difficult the positions of most churches in Mexico, considering that as institutions they only contributed involuntarily and unwillingly to the construction of civil society and for the same reason only partially to the democratization of society. This also leads the Catholic hierarchy and most religious leaders (as long as they have not assimilated the consequences of the end of the authoritarian State with whom they used to negotiate their institutional demands) to not accept or understand the full consequences of the establishment (or to do it hesitantly) of a democratic State that responds as much or even more to the necessities and demands of the citizenship than to those of religious leaders. In other words, we could be tempted to remind the Mexican Catholic hierarchy and other religious leaders what the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* asserts when it affirmed:

“The Church [...] for her part, does not place her trust in the privileges offered by civil authority. She will even give up the exercise of certain

rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness or that new ways of life demand new methods. It is only right, however, that at all times and in all places, the Church should have true freedom to preach the faith, to teach her social doctrine, to exercise her role freely among men, and also to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it. In this, she should make use of all the means – but only those – which accord with the Gospel and which correspond to the general good according to the diversity of times and circumstances.’<sup>22</sup>

It is not clear that the Catholic hierarchy or other religious leaders have always had this teaching in mind, because if we have the above-mentioned triangle between Church, State and Individual in mind, we have to recognize that the very German notion of freedom of conscience is not always asserted – a notion which Martin Luther, to their regret, certainly helped to divulgate. That is why, in all efforts of strengthening civil society and democratization, we should bear in mind the centrality of this crucial notion for the amplification of communitarian and individual liberties. ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Pius IX, “Syllabus” or “Resume of the main errors of our time as pointed in the consistorial allocutions, encyclicals and other apostolic letters of our Holy Father Pius IX”, in *Encíclicas Pontificias; Colección completa de 1832 a 1958*. Edición preparada por el P. Federico Hoyos, S. V. D. Vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guadalupe, 1958), pp. 162–168. An English version can be consulted in <http://www.dailycatholic.org/syllabus.htm>.
- <sup>2</sup> Vacant et Mangenot (Eds.) *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. XIV, 2<sup>nd</sup> part (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ane, 1941), pp. 2877–2923. See also José Luis Gutiérrez García (ed.), *Doctrina Pontificia, II, Documentos Políticos*. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1958), pp. 19–38.
- <sup>3</sup> Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei* (November 1884) in *Encíclicas Pontificias* [...] pp. 322–337. English version in [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_01111885\\_immortale-dei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei_en.html), paragraph 3.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, paragraph 13.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, paragraph 8.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, paragraph 13.
- <sup>7</sup> Paul VI, *Constitución Pastoral sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual*, pp. 74–76. English version in [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

- <sup>8</sup> Jurisdictionalism is the doctrine or practice of close surveillance and intervention of the State in the life of Churches.
- <sup>9</sup> Cosmovision indicates, for the Indian Prehispanic world, a global and integral vision of human and celestial activities. It could be translated as “Weltanschauung”.
- <sup>10</sup> Title given to an Aztec king or Emperor.
- <sup>11</sup> The “Patronage” was the juridical-social institution through which the Holy See granted the Crown jurisdictional rights over the Church in the Americas, in exchange for the evangelization of the peoples in the region.
- <sup>12</sup> On the subject of Church-State relations in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Mexico, and political culture see José Gutiérrez Casillas (S. J.), *Historia de la Iglesia en México* (México, D.F.: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1984), Paul V. Murray, *The Catholic Church in Mexico; Historical Essays for the General Reader*. Vol. 1 (1519–1910) and David A. Brading, *The First America; The Spanish monarchy, Creole patriots and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Translated into Spanish as *Orbe Indiano; De la monarquía católica a la república criolla, 1492–1867* (México. D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991).
- <sup>13</sup> Manuel Ceballos Ramírez, *El catolicismo social: Un tercero en discordia; Rerum novarum, la “cuestión social” y la movilización de los católicos mexicanos (1891–1911)*. Centro de Estudios Históricos (México, D. F.: El Colegio de México, 1991).
- <sup>14</sup> Eduardo Correa, *El partido católico nacional y sus directores* (México, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993).
- <sup>15</sup> Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada*. 3 vols. (México, D. F.: Siglo XXI Editores, 1973).
- <sup>16</sup> See Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia católica en México; Desde 1929 a 1982* (México, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992).
- <sup>17</sup> On this subject, see Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas de la UNAM-Universidad Americana de Acapulco. *Relaciones del Estado con las Iglesias*. (México, D. F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Editorial Porrúa, 1992 and José Antonio González Fernández, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, José Luis Soberanes Fernández. *Derecho Eclesiástico Mexicano*. 2<sup>a</sup>. Ed. (México, D. F.: Editorial Porrúa-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1993).
- <sup>18</sup> Roberto Blancarte (ed.), *Laicidad y valores en un Estado democrático* (México, D. F.: El Colegio de México-Secretaría de Gobernación, 2000).
- <sup>19</sup> Gustavo Verduzco, for example, affirms that Jesuits were pioneers in this kind of work, with the closing in 1971 of the Instituto Patria (a school for Mexican elites) and the foundation of Fomento Cultural y Educativo, A. C. (civil association). Other organizations would follow such as: Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Sociales, Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Políticos, Centro de Estudios Educativos. Later we could find for example in “Alianza Cívica”, an electoral surveillance organization, many Christian inspired social organizations and leaders. See Gustavo Verduzco Igartúa, *Organizaciones no lucrativas; visión de su trayectoria en México* (El Colegio de México/Centro de Estudios Sociológicos-Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía, 2003), p. 84.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- <sup>21</sup> Roberto Blancarte, *Una historia contemporánea de México*.
- <sup>22</sup> Paul VI, *Constitución Pastoral sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual*, pp. 74–76. English version in [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

# The Church and Civil Society in Mexico

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*Alfonso Vietmeier*

From the point of view of a practitioner who worked in church and civil society contexts for over 20 years, I would like to contribute my observations as an insider. The topic will be daily life and current discussions amongst those active in organizations and institutions of the Church and civil society. I will attempt to reconstruct the main trends in current discussions with a few theses to the relation of Church and civil society.

## **What does the nexus “Church – Civil Society” look like?**

In the summer of 2006, Mexico is currently experiencing a few “politically hot” weeks, particularly due to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, since the opposition claimed that some of the results were rigged. Almost every form of organization has an opinion on this. This makes it very clear

how many varied forms “civil society” can take in Mexico. I would like to begin with some observations:

- When I leave my house in Mexico City, I see a huge poster on the nearest street corner: “We all voted, all our votes have been counted – now there must be peace!” There are hundreds of these huge posters all over. They contain an unambiguous political message directed against the Presidential candidate from the middle-left. Signed: The Maltese order, Knights of Columbus, and other civil organizations from the Church-oriented right. Civil society?!
- Before the elections: About 500 civil organisations called for a pilgrimage to the Virgin Mother of Guadalupe, thousands participate. The goal of the pilgrimage is to gain the protection of the Virgin Mary for a “good” election result. Religion and civil society?!
- On the other hand: A few days ago, a pilgrimage came to the Basilica of Guadalupe; Christian-oriented groups and organizations positioned themselves on the central square of Mexico City as well as on the main street to voice their protest regarding the election results. Many of them are also members of Christian grass roots communities. Their cry rang out: “Our Guadalupe calls for a recall and recount of votes!” Belief and civil society?!
- I returned from an accompanying trip with a parish located in a small town with a large Indian population. A poster is hanging in the parish meeting room. “Human rights organizations, farmer’s associations, civil organizations, pastors and teachers” send out their plea to support the “Other Campaign”, that of the Zapatists. The readers of the poster are invited to a special meeting with “Commandant Zero”, the current name of the head of the Zapatist revolution, and with “Subcommandant Marcos”. I know a few of the executives of these organizations, since most of them grew up in one of the Church-oriented organizations before these became to close-knit for them. Christian and Church-oriented people and civil society?!
- Several participants are representatives of large agricultural organizations which established a wide national front “Farmers can’t take it anymore!” (¡El campo no aguanta más!) This organization does not con-

sider itself a part of civil society. The co-founder of the “Democratic Front of Chihuahua”, Victor Quintana, said: “They only consist of agitated middle-class people, NGOers. We are a social movement with a broad basis with the people. We know how to suffer and to fight!” He was with me in the advisory board for Social Pastoral Counselling. He continued: “2007 will be a hot year. We won’t allow the last stage of the NAFTA contract to be carried out (free import for corn and beans starting in 2008)! Thousands and thousands of people will be mobilized!” Social movements and / or civil society?!

These observations have shown, that a very varied civil society exists in Mexico, but one which, at the same time, contains differences and tensions that makes it unclear how broadly the concept of civil society here must be construed. Looking at the interlinkage with the concept of “Church”, we can see three concentric circles:

1. The civil arm of the Church structure

The organisations of this type normally require official clerical presence. Organizations like those coming from Caritas should be mentioned here in particular, which work in areas such as people with migratory backgrounds, native Indians, or homeless children (amongst others) or socially engaged Catholic organizations like “Foundation Padre Kolping A.C.” or the civil organizations structured by Church orders, covering areas from kindergartens to helping Aids victims. The two most important human rights organizations in Mexico depend on the Dominican Order (Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco de Vittoria, A.C.) and the Jesuit Order (Centro de Derechos Humanos Agustín Pro, A.C.).

2. Church-inspired organizations

Organizations of this type gain their identity via a strong Christian inspiration while maintaining a church-independent structure. One example is human rights: The network “All Rights for Everyone!” has 60 local and regional centers with four main purposes: Counselling in cases where individual rights have been infringed, systemization and public communication of these cases (PR), educational work (including many courses in local churches) as well as political agendas. The current trend leans towards the



third and least recognized form of universal human rights: economic, social, cultural and ecological rights (DESCA). The four main purposes hold true here as well. Both large organizations (“Pro” and “Victoria”) are important pillars of the network, but 80% of their member organizations are Church-independent even if they are inspired by Christian beliefs.

A second example is economics of solidarity: Economy and Ecology and their corresponding political agenda are important here. The national meeting has now had its fifth annual meeting, this time in Tlaxcala, with 150 participants from 90 organizations. Many of these were born in the social pastoral scene but have since grown up and become independent. Their main points of interest is establishing local and regional networks of solidarity-based markets between producers (cooperatives) and consumers, including credit institutions.

### 3. Civil organizations with active Christians

“The Church” can often be too rigid in its organizational structure. That is why many leaders in civil society who were once engaged in Church-oriented activities (youth work, social pastoral work, family planning, etc.) certainly felt a high degree of identification and learned much (motivation and values, social relationships and methods), as well as had a few conflicts, but who have now opened their view to other horizons. A high percentage of leaders from civil organizations who made civil society a public phenomenon came from this scene. One example would be the “Alianza Cívica, A.C.”. In the 90s, when halfway acceptable elections in Mexico was a goal many hoped to attain, a nation-wide civil system of election control was established. The national elections in 1997 saw about 80,000 civil election observers, the majority of which came from Church parishes or other Church-inspired organizations. Through the years, this developed its own “scene”. Christians in social movements should also be mentioned in this context.

In the form of an intermediate conclusion I would like to make three main points here:

1. Many things have been called “civil society” in the past 15 years. These are growing in name and number. The concept of civil society is attractive and thus, unfortunately, makes it susceptible to becoming a mere

sign of the times. For this reason, it is important to examine real existing phenomena more closely.

2. Like society itself, the slice of it known as “civil society” is complex and full of contradictions. It is important to see its composition as manifold.
3. Religiousness, Christian motivation and Church-based institutions are omnipresent forces in this context. We have to speak about “context overlappings” and “interconnectivity fields” between civil society and religion. This will have to be examined more closely.

### **Current state of the discussion**

In order to avoid confusion, I would like to engage in some conceptual clarifications. The three main concepts of our discussion are “Church”, “Civil Society” and “Emerging Nations”. All three require more precise definitions and differentiations.

1. Is Mexico an “emerging nation”?

The answer to this question depends upon whom it is you are asking. It will be answered in the affirmative by decision-makers in capitalistic economies, by those who teach economics at large private universities, and those who influence economic politics. This is a relatively small and unchanging group of people. Their international agenda involves the efficient handling of the NAFTA contract, expansions in the American continent (ALCA), the next round of debates in world trade organizations (OMC), and the increasing Chinese presence in important sectors of the Mexican economy (textiles, electronics, etc.). In this context, “emerging nation” marks the conscious transformation from the third to the first world and active participation in neo-liberal globalization. This is a world of itself, and the Church is present here as well, especially in the form of organizations such as Opus Dei and the Christian Legions with their “laymen in civil society” and their own institutions (up to and including universities) which train excellently qualified decision-makers. They see themselves as Christian powers in the free market economy, but emphasize simultaneously their duty to society. The supporters of a particular sector of the civil society are at home here (see some of the anecdotes above).

The question of “emerging nation” is negated by a large proportion of the critical intelligentsia in state universities and civil society as well as by the social movements mentioned here. The memory of President Salinas’ (1988–94) proclamation at the beginning of the NAFTA-contract (“And now we step into the first world!”) still haunts many, while the Zapatist revolution began in the “South” at the same time. I should mention the financial catastrophe which began with the Zedillo regime (1994), the seven million undocumented workers in the US, and much more. Mexico has, in fact, fallen behind: instead of “emerging”, one should rather speak of “drowning”, at least from the perspective of the large majority of the population still living under the poverty line. Data from many studies demonstrate this.

A large proportion of the population is obviously so caught up in the daily pressures of surviving that the question of “emerging” is shrugged off and seen as cynical. The dependence on the United States is perceived as total, survival can only be maintained by money from migrant workers there who now supply the second-highest percentage of the gross national product (right after oil).

“Emerging nation” can also be understood as a complex growth process which contains a societal differentiation at its core: The establishment of an urban reality, an unusually large increase in the service sector and media, a plurality of cultures, and manifold state-run institutions to take care of all of these elements. The source of civil society can be found here in the development of civil participation and engagement in order to influence political and economic policies on a normative level (“Agenda Civil”). In this sense, a social-ethical component is always present in civil society.

## 2. Who and what is civil society?

In Mexico, of course, a more intellectual debate can also be heard regarding the identity of that which we call “civil society”. Arguments from Hegel and especially Tocqueville are most readily apparent at universities. In the 1980s, Carlos Pereira was one of the main proponents of this (expanded) view of civil society in Mexico: Whatever is not in the hands of the government or in privately run economic institutions is the “third sector” and thus “civil society”, from philanthropic movements to churches and the Red Cross, up to and including NGOs. This logic is present in the way that civil

society is made public, especially in the mass media (see the anecdotes above).

On the other hand, taking into account Mexico's particular history, "civil society" is a system critical concept for this critical sector. On the theoretical level, Gramsci's arguments play an important role here. As I mentioned, in the 1990s, it was important to radically change the political system. It wasn't until the 1980s that certain minorities were able to leave the "system" and transform themselves into "independent social movements". Together with the (typically urban) world of the NGOs, an "organized civil society" was born with an agenda whose main purpose was instilling democratic processes, in particular "clean elections observed by independent organizations". This historic-political background makes it clear that – unlike the urban civil sector, comparable with grass-roots movements – there are other goals, concepts, methods of struggle and organizational forms. It wasn't until 2000 that there was a mutual approach between social movements and civil organizations.

"Church", with an emphasis on its aspect as a social institution, needs to be understood as an expression and active part of civil society. But since Church is also a "religious institution" (A.R.), it also transcends civil society. Almost all non-Catholic religious organizations have a similar outlook.

### 3. Who and what is Church?

First of all, it is helpful to differentiate the following three dimensions which often tend to get blended together: 1. belief, 2. religiousness or religion, 3. Church.

Belief is a very personal or intimate experience. This dimension sees life as a gift from God (grace) and as an answer to this gift in the form of responsibility (ethics). Many decision-makers of Mexico's civil society perceive their engagement within it as being founded in this form of belief. This belief can be Church-oriented, but does not have to be.

Religiousness / Religion is the socio-cultural mediation of belief by means of signs and symbols in certain rites, all of which may vary greatly depending on the cultural environment. In Mexico, there is a rich tradition of these religious expressions. Since social and civil movements and organizations

also require signs and symbols, mixing religious and civil ones is therefore not so unusual. Particularly amongst the poor majority (clases populares), religion is inseparable with the collective struggle for survival. Social and civil movements also have religious expressions and invent new ones all the time: syncretism is an age-old phenomena which will not go away any time soon. People and groups of people can utilize these religious expressions without themselves being religious. They can be affiliated with a church, but do not have to be.

There is a general trend towards separating “church as such” (that is: chapels, priests, etc.) from “politics” (that is: parties, political positions, debates). This overlaps with that which is called “laicism” in Mexico: the state, with all its various public institutions, emancipated itself from a feudal structure (including the “church”) and put the “church” back in its place.

“Church”, however, is a historically developed organizational form of religion. It has, on the one hand, formulated and mediated an ideological package (dogma and catechism), and, on the other hand, developed a structure (hierarchy) to uphold the organization. There can be devout Christians who are not members of the Church or who distance themselves from it, but there are also Church members who are not really believers. It is not uncommon for religiousness to be independent of any Church hierarchy, since religious reality, particularly considering that the majority of the population in Mexico is much less Church-oriented than those in Germany. A pastor in Mexico has got to take care of up to 20 or 30 thousand baptized members (in urban areas) or 20 to 40 villages. Self-organization and autonomy play a much larger role here. At the same time, the Catholic Church has gone through a strong phase of differentiation, and thereby developed a manifold number of orders and lay organizations in what has become an almost bewildering variety. In all of these organizations, different ideological tendencies can be found. Those who consider themselves more socially oriented, or who either work in civil organizations or who are connected with them, conceive of themselves as a kind of “civil society within the Church” as well as a kind of “leavening” for society as a whole, having their own causally dynamic agenda.

Represented in all places, social classes, and sectors, “church” is omnipresent in Mexican society. Civil society and the implementation of its

agenda is thus unthinkable without the presence of civil organizations (either Church-oriented or those with Christian inspiration) or without the presence of Christian decision-makers. But this is not “the Church” as a hierarchical structure.

The trend is heading towards a multi-religious society, weakening the Catholic monostructure. This cannot, of course, be misunderstood as a weakening of belief and religiousness.

### **Society in a crisis – civil society as an element of hope**

Mexico is a complex country. There are many aspects to Mexico, and this variety is much less homogenous as that which can be found in Germany. I would like to mention four main aspects here:

1. Mexican society is split in many ways: The northern half and the south, the indigenous Indian population (over 10 Million) and the mestizos, those living in an urban megapolis and those in the country, the shamelessly rich and the poor, those living well in ghettos and those in hovels, the millions in Mexico’s informal economy (nearly 150,000 people in Mexico City alone sell something or other on the street) and the high unemployment causing over a million youths who cannot find work to emigrate to the north (particularly in the US). Social pressure is growing. Who can assuage it without causing society to explode?
2. Existing political structures and their organizations are not capable of handling these problems. The “PRI system”, in place for over 70 years, has become obsolete and lost the elections in 2000. With their loss of power, they now control only 28% of the parliament. The system itself, however, has hardly been restructured at all. Like a jury-rigged car, it can hardly keep itself moving. The populace have lost their trust in the institutions. Not only is the social security system inadequate, it can no longer be financed. A structural reformation is desperately needed, and radical changes need to take place, yet there are no role models upon which to base these changes and no one with power to develop or implement them. The new President has started his office with 35% of the votes and a possible informal coalition with the rest of the old party.

How can the country possibly be governed without a real majority for the next 6 years?

3. The private sector is also not in its prime. It was a part of the system for too long. During that time, it lived over its means, often only from public commissions and contracts, resulting to bribery to keep it afloat. While this resulted in a number of crises, it established itself as part of the “culture”. At the same time, high finance became radically transnationalized. Banks continue to make incredible profits, but these are almost completely in foreign hands. Since middle-class businesses are basically bankrupt, the informal economy is growing out of control.
4. This helps to explain why civil society started to become one of the main aspects of hope in the 1990s and why it continues to gain popularity today. Compensation plays a role here, but also with processes of social and collective subjectivization, whereby self-consciousness in these matters has started to develop. I see the key problem in high hopes: too many expectations are being set on civil society. It is still too weak, atomized, dependent on foreign financing, overburdened with unrealistic wishes coupled with poor organizational capacity and lack of professionalism.

### **A new era is dawning**

In complex processes of societal change, the last decade has seen the development of a different “system” of social organization at the global level. Economically and politically, socially and culturally (and that includes: religiously), our societies have long ago transcended traditional agrarian societies, urban industrial societies, and also (from a religious perspective) milieu-oriented Christianity. This is true not only for Latin America, but for the entire world.

Structural reforms such as these can take generations to complete, bloody (or bloodless) wars can accompany them. They can and should, however, be conceived of as a peaceful and liberating transformation. Mexico is currently in the middle of this complex crisis, but yet far removed from creating a real consensus with the corresponding strategies and actions. It is, however, certain that a continuously broadening circle within civil organizations

is principally clear on the elements of a consensus and a minimal agenda. Bridges to other sectors exist at the same time: academics, in government, in the economic sector and, of course, in churches.

The Church has more anxiety about changing than it has power to change, yet the power is there. The concept of „church“ requires one more elaboration. Historical experience seems like a dead weight, especially within Church hierarchy. It is caught off-guard by the development of civil society in the middle of the dawning of a new age. The vast majority of bishops and a large portion of the clergy cannot handle the changing societal processes adequately; secularization, lay movements, emancipation, and other phenomena are, for them, cause for fear. Fear is a poor advisor. This is one of the reasons why Mexico’s potential for change is suboptimal.

The year 2000 was an important landmark for the building of self-consciousness and of will to change while maintaining a critical view of its own structure. This will to change became evident in a pastoral statement: “From the encounter with Jesus Christ towards solidarity with everyone.” Similar hopes are held for the upcoming CELAM general meeting in Brazil (in 2007). Things are changing because the people themselves are changing along with the circumstances. There is pressure from without as well as from within.

Simultaneously, there is a creative minority within the Church which is willing to learn and express solidarity. This minority is tightly interwoven with organizations in civil society – something I have attempted to demonstrate above.

## **Conclusions**

Where are we headed and what should we do? What I have said above, it seems to me, entails the necessity for rethinking what we can and need to do in the future.

1. The three main concepts of our conference, “Church – Civil Society – Emerging Nations”, require an exact definition and differentiation. This is reason enough for us to think more about these issues and to engage in intense debate about them.



2. The growing importance of civil society cannot be denied. “State” and “Market” both have a complex historical polarization, by which “Market” has, for quite some time, been the center of the magnetic field. “Civil Society”, however, has become increasingly important. The relationship between classic and new forms of social movements needs to be researched, as well as the broad selection of civil organizations, including their agendas, working methods, and organizational forms. An exact diagnosis “ad intra” is required.
3. Civil society is also causally effective and can be a factor for change. It can spread its influence onto the market and state segment. How can this be seen in connection with economic processes for solidarity (including commune financing, ethically-oriented consumer behaviour, fair trade, etc.) and with state institutions (including heterogenous advisory boards, commissions, etc.)? Ethical competence will play an ever-increasing role here. All of these issues require further study.
4. The Church is present in all of these fields. But in which form? An exact diagnosis “ad intra” (civil society within the Church) is very important here, as well as clarifying how the Church is connected with processes in civil society.
5. In a global world, all of the different levels need to be observed: From local, regional, and national levels to the continental. How they are interconnected needs to be studied. An important concept is “glocalization”: local action paired with global strategy. ■

# **Observations on the Social Role of the Christian Churches in the Emerging Countries of Africa**

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*Peter Molt*

## **The question of civil society in Africa**

The idea that “civil society” can play a major part in the process of democratization is a fairly recent concept. Generally speaking, civil society is understood as being a network of social organizations which – in contrast to state institutions – strive for the realization of humanitarian and democratic ideals, and contribute to the public good, without seeking to obtain political power. They are seen as playing a key role in supporting political democracy because they both strengthen constitutional powers, and at the same time prevent their abuse. They also demand greater governmental responsibility with regard to the welfare of their citizens. This concept com-

bines participatory, republican, communitarian and neo-Marxist theories of democracy. It is in fact a normative concept – following the ideas of Tocqueville – even though it is often linked to the role of the societal and civil associations that contributed to the formation of American democracy. In Europe, however, it was the social, economic and cultural associations and their affiliated political parties which played a greater role in forming the foundations for democracy. The comparison between the history of American democracy and that of the European democracies exemplifies the variety of different possible paths which can lead to the social foundation of the modern democratic state. Given that this has been the case for western democracies, it is even more so the case for non-western countries.

In contrast to the political model in which there is the institutional separation of a well organized civil society from the autonomous state bureaucracy, the African model is based on the interpenetration of the social and the governmental spheres. National institutions which combine a societal function with an efficient bureaucratic system have only a rudimentary organizational base – if they exist at all. Furthermore, the greater part of African society is still organized along traditional lines, which means that people seek security within the extended family and in geographically or ethnically defined communities. It is difficult for a human being whose identity is so closely connected to either their family or a geographically / ethnically bound group, to become involved in national societal goals.

The prerequisites for a constructive civil society do not exist in nearly every part of sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa, which underwent a different process of political and social development. With regard to the citizens' associations in the other African countries which are involved in general public welfare, they lack, for the most part, the necessary societal base and financial resources that are needed in order to realize their aims. The majority of social organizations are in fact shaped by specific and local interests.

Since the start of the third democratizing wave at the beginning of the 1990s, organizations which claim to support the idea of civil society have received and continue to receive significant support from the western donor countries, either by means of official bilateral and multilateral development agencies or by non-governmental organizations. Despite the promotion of

greater political awareness and education, along with a “capacity building” approach to civil society – even in the democratized states, the consolidation and development of this process of protecting public welfare has not been achieved. Rather, a hybrid structure has emerged as a result of foreign support, but this structure has not been able to fulfil expectations. Organizations which support civil society remain dependent on foreign subsidies and, furthermore, they remain subject to both foreign and domestic political interference. This confirms that the attempt to successfully transfer western institutions and social structures to societies of developing countries remains a problematic venture. African societies are too different and too complex for the successful transference of European and American institutions and the corresponding Western mentality. Western models and concepts are simply not appropriate, and Africa has to find and develop its own political ideas, forms and systems.

Realistic and pragmatic political concepts that orient themselves to each respective system of power probably provide better chances for the expansion and strengthening of democracy and responsible governance. Institutions and regulations which limit power have a long tradition in Africa, a tradition which has been altered and reshaped by the centralized bureaucratic and authoritarian institutions of colonial rule. The post-colonial state grew out of those colonial structures, and was based on the idea that only a strong centralized power could lead to the successful building of a nation (so-called “nation building”). This must be changed. The stabilization and establishment of order within African states is more likely to be achieved by means of “checks and balances” resulting from pluralism, competition between different lobby groups and the integrative abilities of the political parties. This development path is certainly less demanding and cannot really be planned, but seems to be a much more promising prospect with regard to the control of power and the public finances. If there is no control over the system of governance, the evils of corruption, patronage and nepotism cannot be held in check. Elections are certainly an essential part of this process, nevertheless they can only realize their goal if there is order within the state organizational structures, and if the constitution and the elections are perceived as legitimate by the population. A further prerequisite is the acceptance of constitutional state power and its principles by the elites.

### **Church communities and democracy**

Pragmatic compromises by elites, which are important for the beginning of a democratic process, are, however, in the long run not enough for the legitimization of a political system based on public welfare. Only basic values that are acknowledged or at least accepted by the majority of the population and which form the basis of the political community, can achieve a long-term legitimization. Here, the Christian churches of Africa are facing an immense task for which, however, they are not yet adequately equipped.

For African Christians, the Church as a basis of a religious community plays an important role as their religiosity is deeply embedded within their way of life. In contrast to the European tradition of state churches, and the American tradition of religion as a foundation stone of their democracy, in Africa the state and religious communities belong to different spheres of life. On the other hand, the churches still have paramount importance in many countries with respect to the education system, and health services, as well as welfare work.

The involvement of the churches in creating a legitimate political order has, however, been a fairly recent development. Only since the major changes of the 90s, have the churches fully recognized and accepted their role in maintaining peace and supporting a legitimate political order. Then Christians took the lead in the founding of organizations which support civil society. However, due to the way in which the churches define themselves, it is difficult to allocate them a role in the process of building a civil society. Additionally, the scope within which the churches can act on a political level varies to a great degree. As the conference papers on South Africa and Nigeria showed, the position of the churches are very different in these two countries. Therefore, if we consider the role in civil society which Christian churches can play, we have to keep these differences in mind.

Most of the Church communities in South Africa were originally founded by white immigrants. The apartheid regime, which had a specific Christian background, influenced the mentality of even those Church communities which were opposed to apartheid. Public life in South Africa is determined by elites who recognized that the political or democratic compromise was the only chance to avoid a civil war, and that it is the only way to achieve positive developments in the future. This compromise of the civil

elites is supported by organizations that are engaged in promoting civil society. Public engagement of the Christian churches nowadays must undoubtedly still focus on the stabilization of this compromise. However, they also urgently have to deal with the following issues: the mitigation of the social disparities within the Black African population, the gap between the rural and the urban, social justice, and the economic prospects of the poor, as well as the immigration question. If these issues are not tackled, the majority of the poor will not develop a positive attitude towards democracy.

The Nigerian churches, however, originate from missionary churches, and to some degree the missionary work unfortunately resulted in an ethnic bias from which many conflicts have sprung. Moreover, Nigerian Christians face a very marked and to some degree expansive and fundamentalist Islamism. They are confronted with the task of joining with the moderate Islamic elements to pursue the goal of reaching a compromise through dialogue. The political unity of Nigeria still remains over-reliant on the power of a dominant elite which combines the religious and the militaristic. Also, a mutual evaluation of beliefs and convictions by political and social elites has not generally been acknowledged up to now.

All this makes it difficult to accurately assess the African churches' self-definition, their willingness to partake in civil society and the future prospects of the churches and other peripheral civil society associations. In terms of their self-conception, their aims and their mentality cannot be analyzed or understood in isolation from the political order itself. This is also the case with regard to national identity in its respective specific pluralities, the different cultural identities, and the various elites who are battling for political power.

On the other hand, it is indisputable that the engagement of the churches and their congregations within these countries is essential in order to create a value system which will help secure peace and social equilibrium in each of the respective governmental systems. Here, the churches in South Africa and Nigeria have an additional responsibility as the stability of these states has a direct effect on the neighbouring countries. In the long run, no country can ignore their position as regional role models whose influence extends well beyond their own borders.

### **External support for democratic change**

With regard to the support of the church communities by international churches, relief organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations must, provided that it goes beyond the provision of financial help to promote democracy and public welfare, consider what kinds of movements, networks and actors (including civil society associations, of course) are important or could become important for the democratic process.

Here, dialogue which focuses on how co-operation will be achieved, plays an important role. With regard to this issue, the northern partners have a particularly important responsibility. It far too often is the case that they succumb to the temptation to push forward their own ideas and opinions. Indeed, they are inclined to promote to their partners in Africa an ideal concept of a civil society and of a global community which is presented in an idealistic way, which bears little resemblance to reality and the opportunities that are open to them. Often it is of more importance and would be of greater use to discuss the pragmatic possibilities open to them which would ensure the stability of their states and their regions. This would include a discussion of the terms and rules controlling the rivalry between the political and social powers which are willing to accept a non-violent regulation of power.

It remains the task of Church co-operative developmental programmes to support self-help initiatives and to motivate the active participation of as many people as possible, especially those who are poor and marginalized. Nevertheless, even within this context it remains vitally important to encourage the acquisition of knowledge and the process of reflection with regard to the political and social order. It continues to be important to support all the actions that are taken to deepen the population's political awareness and their political participation. The key aim is to support local non-governmental groups and self-support groups which strive for an improvement in the basic living conditions of those at the lower end of the social scale. Western Non-Governmental Organizations cannot only limit themselves to ideal conceptions, 'advocacy' and 'capacity building', but will also have to continue to give concrete forms of aid. The famous principle 'small is beautiful' which was popular thirty years ago is still valid nowadays because competition between many local aid programmes not only

results in material improvements, but also promotes a social dynamic in which changes at the lower level ultimately bring about greater democracy in the society as a whole. This dynamic has the potential, in the long run, to mobilize and develop into a foundation for a civil society. ■



# The Church and Civil Society: The Case of Nigeria

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*Obiora Ike*

The aim of this paper is to show that the *Christian churches* together with *Civil Society*, have a role to play in influencing constructive and positive social change at the cultural, economic and political levels of nations, in this case Nigeria. Such change is necessary for the transformation of society towards the common good. It follows that this is the challenge facing many developing countries such as Nigeria in their genuine search for credible and sustainable systems that can maintain their efforts to build credible institutions and partnerships. If this is done, the polity can be stabilized to guarantee peace and promote solidarity in our fragile communities.

It follows therefore that the basic questions for my presentation as already conjectured are: How can the Christian churches contribute to the establishment of civil societies? To what extent are Church institutions recognized as participants in civil societies? Do they take any political responsibility and what kind of political influence do they exploit? The answers to these questions, which form the thrust of this paper, are manifold, different and contentious.

I argue, however, that Christian churches have both a mandate and a mission to assist in this search for answers to these questions, based on their organizational, institutional, and technical capacity, as well as their personnel and their many years of local and international experience founded upon credible human and spiritual values. Christian churches have a role to play in transforming the social order. As the organizers of this conference stated in their call for papers:

*“The churches – as well as other religious groups – have continued to play a part in the ongoing process of societal modernization and have contributed to the concurrent discourses on civil society. In some instances the churches have actually gained in importance and have reached a new level of significance. [...] Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that within the Christian Churches there are also a lot of different movements, and their influence on society cannot be fully evaluated at the present time.”*

Within the Christian churches, there are also various movements, ranging from the moderate to the fundamentalist and the extreme, which may suggest that one cannot give a blanket response to the thematic without clarification of concepts. For if not properly qualified, religion could even impede people’s active participation as citizens and hinder their rational economic behavior instead of supporting it. The theme of “*Church and Civil Society*” comes to straighten the position of the churches as active and dynamic agents within the society, which, although “*faith based*”, have a capability and momentum for social mobilization, value creation, prophetic engagement and concrete action. The Christian churches have the potential to transform and complement the efforts of government in achieving these aims. The Nigerian example is a good case study and I am glad to share our experiences.

### **Focus on Nigeria**

Nigeria is Africa’s most populated nation, with 150 million people (according to the June 2006 census). With a large Christian and Muslim population of over 50 million people each, and many adherents to indigenous and traditional religions, Nigeria remains a country which has a diversity of religions, cultural settings, language groups numbering over 350 and ethnic

groups of over 400. What holds Nigerians together is surprisingly a belief in their deep religiosity founded on the traditional African and cultural values of co-existence, the ability to take part in reconciliation and interest factors. What could also split Nigeria is the inability to manage the great positive potentials which these values of religion and religiosity bring with them.

Nigeria, and indeed much of Africa, has been blessed by a benevolent creator with abundant human and mineral resources, with rich varieties and diversities in the spheres of both Church and society. Yet, there is abject poverty and the general misery of the people is traceable to human factors such as failed leadership, the colonial and neo-colonial past, and oppressive structures of injustice and sin. These include a myriad of vices too numerous to mention, such as bad governance which has been teleguided and promoted by successive military dictatorships and bad civilian governments; the exploitation and degradation of the environment on a scale not previously seen; desertification of large areas of the country; deforestation of the mangrove forests; oil spillages and the destruction of the Niger delta and other solid minerals of Nigeria, sometimes without social or corporate responsibility by businesses and corporations either in terms of the people or the earth; the mismanagement of scarce resources; ethnic bigotry; corruption and the economic disparities of a people so richly endowed, yet so unable to manage these resources due to other global and international aspects of an unjust world economic and political order, and the religious fanaticism which hopelessness drives people into when all hope is lost. This is the background to the growing Islamic religious tensions in Nigeria which often lead to violence and destruction.

On the topic of religion and what it means for Africans generally, we chose the wise and true words of John Mbiti who writes in his book on the *Religions and Philosophy of Africa* that African peoples “*eat, dress, live, think, work, dance and breathe religiously. Indeed, every activity of these people is founded on religion, be it name giving, food, dance, celebration to mention but a few*”.

For our context in this work, this “*religiosity*” is important as a point of departure as it is fundamental to the reality of the Church as an organization. Religion brings with it spiritual wisdom and meaning with respect to

God, the world, morality, man and society. This is what Nigeria needs at this time, to have people and organizations with rational religious faith and belief in Nigeria, its people, its resources and therefore its future. It means the gifts of patriotism, the ability to fight corruption, the ability to govern oneself and promote good governance, the rule of law, transparent economic practices, respect for human rights, promotion of freedoms of both individuals, groups and women, the encouragement of education and health initiatives, counseling of the aged and disabled. Following the Africa Synod, the Catholic Bishops of African Rome pleaded for a collaboration and partnership between the Church and the State in African countries as the Synod conclusions contain in the document *Ecclesia in Africa* of Pope John Paul. These Synodal conclusions include an agenda to promote: *Proclamation, Inculturation, Dialogue, Justice and Peace and the means of Social Communication.*

### **The Church and Civil Society**

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in 1965 reflected in profound detail on the role and place of the Church and Christians in the modern world. In its statement published in the last document of that Council known as the decree *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church determined that it had a mission from its founder and a role to play in the life of the world. The document states very clearly that the Church must “*consider the signs of the times and translate them in the light of the Gospel*” (GS No 2). In this understanding, events, situations and the aspirations of people have a direct link to faith and the role of organized religion in offering a response that is concrete and healing. In this approach, long-neglected scripture passages make new sense. The demands of the Gospel are applied to the massive injustices prevalent in modern society, both national and global, and are translated to reflect on their relevance as to how a better life can be achieved. Thus, faith and life are linked. Far back in 1963, Pope John XXIII understood this challenge, for in the Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra*, he writes:

*“Though the Church’s first care must be for souls, how she can sanctify and make them share in the gifts of heaven, she concerns herself too with the exigencies of man’s daily life, with his livelihood and education and his general welfare and prosperity” (Mater et Magistra, No 3).*

Applied on the universal level therefore, there is a challenge for participation in the world-wide call for institutional and individual engagement, especially of the Christian churches in actions that lead to societal transformation. These include activities that border on areas where the state is a competent provider of goods and services. These include: the promotion of education, social services, health issues, healing wounds, reconciling divided peoples with the ingredients of justice, development and peace, promoting the rule of law, support for the demands of accountability and transparency, good governance, and the principles of democracy upon which the stability of a nation depends. Christian engagement on these matters could be effectively done through the knowledge and spread of the Church's Social Teaching which anchors the need for Church and Civil Society to promote the Common Good. This is the practical ambient for realizing the ambition of the role the Church and Civil Society in the transformation of Nigeria from *poverty to wealth, ignorance to knowledge, apathy to action, backwardness to progress, disease to health and from exclusion to an all inclusive society*. It is no wonder that the document of the synod of Bishops on the theme *Justice in the World* in 1971 states very clearly that:

*“action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the teaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church’s Mission for the salvation of the human race and its liberation from oppressive situation”.*

Earlier, the great Pope John XXIII had declared that achieving such an aim was possible on the conditions of knowledge and the spread of the Social Doctrine of the Church:

*“But today more than ever, it is essential that this doctrine be known, assimilated, and put into effect in the form and manner that the different situations allow and demand. It is a difficult task indeed, yet a most noble one. To the performance of it we call, not only our own sons and daughters scattered throughout the world, but also men and women of goodwill everywhere”.* (*Mater et Magistra*). Concluding, the Pope calls for the unity of thought and action. *“It is not enough merely to formulate a social doctrine. It must be translated into reality. And this is particularly true of the Church’s Social Doctrine, the light of which is truth, justice its objective and love its driving force”* (*Mater et Magistra*).

Since this is the thrust and the understanding of the issues, the current debate in some circles should actually not be focused on whether the Christian churches and faith based organizations as well as religious groups and indeed religion as such could play a role in the positive transformation of the world and society at large, for here they belong as citizens. There are civic obligations and it is clear that they must be engaged. *Rather the debate is on whether the Christian churches could in themselves be described as part of Civil Society.* This, of course, is a debate which is difficult to conduct for it touches on areas that deal with the mandate and mission of the Church, and are beyond the competence of temporal authorities. They are accepted as given in many societies since they are transcendent and affect the self-understanding, identity, essence and Mission of the religious organizations involved themselves, beyond which external bodies may want them to be or attribute to them. Of course this point of view is an expression that may not be generally shared, hence the debate.

Paragraph 76 of the document of the Second Vatican Council *Church in the Modern World* states that it is highly important, especially in pluralist societies, that a proper view exists of the relation between the political community and the Church. The position of the Catholic Church is such that:

*“she must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. In their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and autonomous”. Yet by different titles, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. The more they co-operate reasonably, the more effectively they will perform this service to everybody’s advantage. Man is not confined to the temporal order. The Church rooted in the Redeemer’s love, helps to make justice and charity flourish more vigorously within nations and between nations. She preaches the gospel truth and brings the light of her teaching to be on every province of human affairs with the witness of her faithful. Thus she respects and promotes political liberty and responsibility. Always and everywhere the Church must be allowed to preach the faith with true freedom, teach her social doctrine, carry out her task among men unhampered and pass moral judgments even on matters considering politics when fundamental rights or the salvation of souls require it (Gaudium et Spes, Para. 76).*

From the above, it is clear that the Catholic Church does not understand its destiny or see its existence as one that is clearly a part of Civil Society. The Church is a global player and has remained so even before the birth of virtually all the modern nations and Civil Society organizations that exists today. This historical role and the core of its Mission to heal, to sanctify and to lead and to reconcile all things in Christ, places the mandate of the Church as one that has even a Mission to bring back to the heavenly Father the gift of both the State, civil society organizations, the private sector, communities and individuals, most of whom are fragile and broken, into a reconciled whole. The Church in her self-understanding stands as the agent of Christ in the service of evangelization to entire creation and mankind. *“Go into the whole world proclaim the good news of salvation to all creation”* (Matthew 28:20).

Indeed, the Catholic Church (and some other Christian churches) understands its Mission as one that is moral and transcendental, hence a divine mandate that is before the state, beyond the state and yet in the service of the state for the salvation of the state, its peoples and all humanity. Because of this claim to transcendental origins in God, who in Christ has given the Church its mission, mandate, end and means, the Church cannot easily be called a part of Civil Society. Yet, the Church collaborates very closely in an integral manner with both State, the private and public sectors and all people of goodwill in building up a sustainable human society. This position, clear as it is, could pose problems if not well understood. It is the task of the current debate to make reasonable propositions, in order to find a proper balance in the advanced views so that a correct understanding and role for the Christian churches can be found. The purpose of the Church is mission for the integral salvation of mankind. It is not just a mission that targets simply the temporal satisfaction and provision of peoples’ needs and freedom that is meant. That would be too limiting. The Church works towards the total salvation and liberation of mankind – body and soul and the reconciliation of entire creation in Christ with God.

But does this imply that the Church is beyond the state and the civil society? A response to this question is not easy for this is a question that has universal appeal. Religion and religious values and institutions have affected virtually every nation, people, culture and race on earth. The experiences may be different, but people see religious institutions as God’s mission that

is even beyond the state. In some instances from the historical point of view, the state was even placed under religion. God was considered the absolute maker and creator of the universe upon whom all power depends: “Power and Might are in his hands” as the psalmist writes. In our time and age, it has become very urgent to achieve a proper balance between the roles of the churches and religious organizations, and reassess their competence vis-a-vis the state. Collaboration, joint partnership and inter-dependence appear as the right concepts to apply in connection to this.

### **Challenges and activities of the Christian churches in Nigeria**

Christian missionary enterprise started in Nigeria in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, around 1850 with various Christian denominations involved, particularly, the Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Evangelicals and other Protestants engaged in the work of evangelization. Later, the African Christian churches emerged with their emphasis on inculturation and the mixture of the western received euro-centric Christian faith and their traditional practices. The phenomenon of the Pentecostal Church in Nigeria is very current and therefore falls outside the scope of this work. Just for the sake of reference, Islam had previously been in Nigeria particularly in the northern parts for centuries. In Nigeria, the Catholic Church together with other confessions and religious groups, often acting separately in the past, contributed differently and on various levels towards building up a genuine foundation for the emergence of Nigeria, a country that is struggling to emerge within the international community as a nation that guarantees human freedoms, the satisfaction of human wants and the preservation of the integrity of its peoples. Christian missionaries have especially championed and contributed to Nigeria’s development in the past and present historical epochs, and this is expected to continue into the future by engaging in many activities:

- *Fight against the slave trade and abuse of human dignity:* The fight against the slave trade and other manifold abuses against human worth which according to history records was an abhorrent and nefarious denigration of human dignity. The slave trade was the business of selling human beings from various African nations through the North Atlantic Ocean axis to Europe and the Americas; but also on the trans-Saharan



axis to Arabic nations; as well as on trans-Indian Ocean axis to Asia. The slave trade was fought against and stopped by humanists, philosophers, free thinkers, groups of enlightened people acting with a Christian and human conscience. Much later on, the work of Christian missionaries within Nigeria itself made the complete stop of this trade possible. By fighting against the slave trade and stopping it effectively, those Christian churches in both the West and Nigeria who collaborated, fulfilled their mandate to enhance the sacred dignity and worth of individuals and indeed the black race. Missionaries such as the Anglicans and the Catholics set up centres where ex-slaves were received and rehabilitated, given education and guaranteed protection. They also purchased and paid the price due on ex-slaves whose slave masters demanded the original price paid for them, to mention but a few of the activities related to this traumatic and shameful practice of slave dealings and the trade of human beings as goods.

- *Decolonization:* The fight for decolonization was also championed by various interest groups, humanists, politicians, some Christian persons and the indigenes themselves who came to realize the monumental injustice which colonialism brought with it. Today, the Christian churches are leading in the decolonization campaign as we have witnessed in the cases of South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Biafra (which did not succeed then) and many other nations, and the promotion of education for all.
- *Health:* The promotion of health, social institutions and welfare homes in the pre-nation state of Nigeria was mainly a primary method of evangelization by the emergent new Christian missionaries. Orphanages were built to cater for the socially disadvantaged in many rural areas by Catholic Missionaries; hospitals were constructed in the urban and peri-urban centres since under colonial rule, the British in Nigeria did not care for the rural areas and the lives of people there, but focused on infrastructure within some urban towns in pre-colonial Nigeria. These hospitals and the training of adequate personnel both within and without Nigeria and the supply of equipment and drugs helped in no small measure to guarantee the foundations of a healthy nation. Today in Nigeria, the Catholic Church remains the largest and strongest health services supplier amongst all the Christian and religious denominations in the country.

- *Education:* The promotion of educational institutions such as schools, evening bible classes, centres for learning at the primary, secondary, tertiary and skills acquisition levels. Through the schools, people were empowered and encouraged to fight for their own liberation, engage the oppressor, gain independence and the self-reliance which education brings with it; they also supported cultivation of culture, morality and conscience as ingredients of good character and the overall impact of education in nation building. It is on record that the best schools in Nigeria to date are those with Christian origins and backgrounds. With meagre resources which are much less than what the State has, mission and Christian churches have built up massive training programmes and educated millions of Nigerians at all levels from childhood to adulthood. This is an area where collaboration and partnership is called for, instead of the hostile state attitude to mission schools and even the complete take over of such schools at a certain period of the nation's development at the end of the Biafra war. Education is key to a nation's development. In Nigeria the products of Christian missionary schools participated actively in nation building as politicians, teachers, administrators, entrepreneurs, civil servants in both the public and private sectors and community leaders. Upon these products of Christian mission schools rests, to a great extent, the human and social capital which the people of the nation can showcase as their strength and asset. Christian churches made this possible and this has continued in the absence of European missionaries as the local priests and educated elite have continued to see education as one key area where the Nigerian state has failed and where they, the Christian missions themselves, cannot fail.
- *Social mobilization potentials:* The power of mobilization of people and the reality of grassroots support and control of the churches over their believers is a factor which is critical in Nigeria. African peoples believe their religious leaders, and respect the impact of religion on their own personal life and destiny. Not to be religious is to be un-African and indeed un-Nigerian. Christian churches have a potential as social organizations to influence their followers, not just in a prayer or faith encounter but even on social and political matters. Through this mobilization, people were encouraged to go out to vote and to effect changes in their society on the social, economic and political levels. This element of grass-

roots mobilization is highly relevant and critical in today's Nigeria. Even though the Churches did not found political parties or make their members join the political parties as these were more ethnic at the outset than religious, they could with the present state of things at least influence the process of a credible election by election monitoring, calling for a boycott of elections, influencing candidates for political posts, and indeed they do influence who gets what post in some relevant government and political postings.

- *Leadership roles:* The Nigerian Christian churches seem to be assuming greater responsibility in leadership roles. The Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria often writes public statements many of which are orientations of the State and the citizenry towards higher values, and the position to take on matters where a stand should be made. This leadership role means that the bishops and priests are consulted by various stakeholders in matters concerning the common good and public good.
- *Missionary awareness:* The country with the largest number of seminarians and persons entering the seminary to become priests in the Catholic world of today is in Nigeria. Statistics from the Vatican show that this is followed by India and Poland; Nigeria is now ready to send missionaries to other countries of the world including Europe, America and Asia, countries which once sent their own missionaries to Africa. In assuming this internal God-given gift and role as a missionary producing country, Nigeria is now gaining respect from the Catholic Church as a leader in the provision of trained agents of evangelization who work, not only in their own countries, but even abroad. No one can doubt the great influence of a country known as a provider of missionaries. Alongside countries which produce technology, ICT merchandise and other goods, this is a notable achievement and a worthy contribution of the Nigerian Church to universal Christendom at this age and time.
- *Constructive criticism of the state and advocacy:* Nigeria is a country where the Christian Churches are both loyal to the state, yet are the greatest critics of the state. Because of the weight of the opinion of the Christian religious groups leaders, the Christian Association of Nigeria has emerged. This is a union of all the five major groups of Christian religious denominations and its voice is heard alongside the singular voices

of the Bishops or their positions in plural as is often noted under the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) and other voices which attract both international and local attention. With respect to religious matters, the state listens to the adherents of these religions and the citizenry.

- *Promotion of dialogue:* The promotion of dialogue of life and of religions especially with Islam and traditional societies, with the modern world and technology and with the various levels of society, is one that falls squarely to the portfolio of the Christian churches. Dialogue is all about finding common ground in the search for truth without necessarily compromising one's own position. Dialogue minimizes the urge for the use of violence and other means in the settlement of issues. With a large percentage of Muslims and Christians, numbering on either side over fifty million people, Nigeria has the largest population of these religious groups, more than any other country on the continent. Its challenges therefore in maintaining religious peace and harmony are a must, difficult as it may be.

### **Moving Nigeria forward – The role of Christian churches**

There are definitely challenges that face Nigeria at this period in its search for unity and progress as a great nation within Africa. With the background of several years of attempts and failures caused both by historical, contingent, human and natural factors, the Christian churches cannot stand aloof and watch as the nation falls apart, and its great mission of reconciliation and announcing the good news of salvation is thwarted. It has become clear that with many years of military dictatorship, the Nigerian State became a failed experiment whose fabric and architecture had to be rebuilt. This is the challenge of the present times. Making this possible demands enormous sacrifices by all and sundry including individuals, NGO's and civil society organizations, local and national actors, private sector lead organizations, communities, the international community, and of course religious and traditional leaders. The churches fall into this category. Thus, the entire drive towards nation building to which the churches are called to act together as stakeholders and salvage the nation, cannot be achieved through prayer and preaching alone. This is good but not enough. It has to be followed by concrete action as is currently carried out by the various agents of the Catholic

Church in Nigeria in the commissions for development of justice, peace and caritas. These activities have to be intensified. Such action can be played out by articulate programmes that address and support the national and public efforts of the politicians in the following areas:

- promotion of the rule of law,
- support for economic stability with programmes for sustainability,
- enhancing good governance,
- assisting the state in the monitoring of elections to avoid rigging,
- advocacy work which makes the Church the voice of the voiceless,
- supplying assistance in education, health and other social projects,
- collaborating with government in the fight against poverty at the grass-roots levels,
- maintaining a high ethical profile and calling for justice, peace and reconciliation,
- building communities for peace and educating its own members in tolerance,
- leadership and focused action,
- helping to build inclusive and integrated societies.

Using the agenda of the *Eight Millennium Development Goals*, the Secretary General of the United Nations, *Mr Kofi Annan*, recognized the role religious and church leaders can play in building the civil society and the nation. According to him:

*“The eight Millennium Development Goals are a set of simple but powerful objectives which, together, make up the world’s agreed blueprint for building a better world. They have been embraced by donors, developing countries, civil society and major development institutions alike. Enlightened religious leaders and scholars of all faiths also have a key role to play. Their advocacy can influence political leaders and ordinary citizens alike. Their teaching and guidance can inspire people to new levels of responsibility, commitment and public service. And by their example, they can promote interfaith dialogue and bridge the*

*chasms of ignorance and misunderstanding. The decisions taken at the 2005 World Summit, and the mobilization of Civil Society groups throughout the world, offer encouraging signs of gathering political will to reach the Goals. I encourage religious leaders and scholars to do their part in defeating poverty and hunger, and in delivering the world's poorest and most marginalized people from despair."*

## **Conclusion**

We come to the conclusion of this reflection and offer some suggestions as to the fundamental values and choices which the Christian churches and indeed all religious groups may need to emphasize as crucial for the survival of society. These values are of priority in the promotion of core principles that sustain the nation. They stem from the Christian conception of life and society as envisaged in Catholic Social Thought, and even find parallel in the wisdom of traditional Nigerian wisdom, thought and practices in ancient culture, therefore they are not necessarily borrowed principles. I state them simply here in the form of a summary:

### **1. Religious and social dimensions of life are linked**

The "social" human construction of the world is not "secular" in the sense of being outside God's plan, but is intimately involved with the dynamic of the reign of God. Therefore faith and justice are closely linked together. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965 N.39).

### **2. Dignity of the human person**

Made in the image of God, women and men have pre-eminent places in the social order, with inalienable political, social, legal and economic rights. The fundamental question to ask about social development is: what is happening to people? (*Populorum Progressio*, 1968, N.8 -26).

### **3. Option for the poor**

A preferential love should be shown to the poor, whose needs and rights are given special attention in God's eyes. "Poor" is understood to refer to the socially and economically disadvantaged, who as a consequence of their status, suffer oppression and powerlessness (Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* 1971, N.23)

#### 4. *Love and justice are linked*

Loving one's neighbour is an absolute demand for justice, because charity manifests itself in actions and structures which respect human dignity, protect human rights, and facilitate human development. To promote justice is to transform structures which block love. (*Justice in the world*, 1971 N. 16 and 34)

#### 5. *Promotion of the common good*

The common good is the sum total of all those conditions of social living – economic, political, cultural which makes it possible for women and men to readily and fully achieve the perfection of their humanity. Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good. (John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, N. 65)

#### 6. *Political participation*

Democratic participation in decision making is the best way to respect the dignity and liberty of people. The government is the instrument by which people co-operate together in order to achieve the common good (Christmas Message).

#### 7. *Economic justice*

The economy is for the people, and the resources of the earth are to be equitably shared by all. Human work is the key to contemporary social questions. Labour takes precedence over both capital and technology in the production process. Just wages and the rights of workers to form trade unions are to be respected. Women and disabled people, migrants and unemployed people share fully in the profits of the production process in solidarity. (John Paul II, *Laborem Excercens*, 981).

#### 8. *Stewardship*

All property has a “social mortgage”. All people are to respect and share the resources of the earth. By our work we are co-creators in the continuing development of the earth. (John Paul II, *Laborem Excercens*).

#### 9. *Global solidarity*

We belong to one human family and as such have mutual obligations to promote the development of all people across the world. In particular, the rich nations have responsibilities toward the poor nations and the structures of

the international order must reflect justice. (Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967)

**10. Promotion of peace**

Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon order among humans and among nations. The arms race must cease and progressive disarmament take place if the future is to be secure. In order to promote peace and the conditions of peace, an effective international authority is necessary. (Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1967). ■



# The Role of Christian Churches in the Democratic South Africa

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*Smangaliso Mkhathshwa*

## **Introduction**

In his book, *White Boy Running*, Christopher Hope writes about his childhood in what he calls a “Catholic ghetto” in Pretoria, South Africa, in the 1950s – growing up in a small area comprising a Catholic parish, a Catholic girls’ convent school and a Catholic boys’ school, all in the same neighbourhood and surrounded by the pervasive presence and all the symbols of white Afrikaner nationalism. A ghetto indeed! Catholics, labelled the “Roomse Gevaar”, needed to develop strategies for survival and self-preservation.

This description of one single microcosm of social construction characterizes something of what I believe is the most enduring temptation of Christian churches vis-à-vis their relationship to society and to the state,

namely the temptation to fall into a ghetto mentality. Examples abound from the earliest history of the Church in its relation to Judaism from which it sprang; from its relation to the Roman Empire; and from the Catholic Church's counter-reformation strategies which made it thoroughly inward looking, preserving itself against the Protestant movement.

A corollary of the ghetto mentality is, of course, elitism. As another of our South African writers, Breyten Breytenbach, describes it:

There are few phenomena I find more loathsome than the elitism of those who think in terms of a small privileged group – those who regard their vocation as sacred, and who deign occasionally to plunge into the warm crawling masses, to surface again for fresh air. (*A Season in Paradise*, p.153)

### **The Church in the world**

With regard to our theme – “The Role of the Christian Churches in Civil Society” – from my introduction you will have no doubt gathered that I wish to discard any allusions to ghetto-ism and elitism. And I do so, not from political convictions, but from Christian convictions. I believe Christ himself rejected the temptation to be part of a group such as the Essene community, deep in the desert, where he may have been able to live his message in pristine purity. His mission, instead, is an incarnational one. He emptied himself to assume our human condition. He “dined with tax collectors and sinners”. He describes his followers in the terms of “light”, “salt”, and “yeast”. And what is common to these three gospel images is that they all, as it were, penetrate from within, they influence, they are intrinsically a part of the very realities they suffuse.

Pope John XXIII understood this well when he called for the Second Vatican Council in 1962. It was a call for his own church to open its doors and windows wide. Perhaps we have yet to see the full effects of this historic ecumenical council, especially in its understanding of the church's role in the world, sharing the joys and hopes, the fears and anxieties, of all of humankind. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1). He called for what he called “aggiornamento” – bringing the church up to date.

I take my cue from John XXIII. For him, there are few areas in which, either as a society itself, or through individual members, the church cannot act as a “leaven” – as yeast, salt, and light. But he also made it clear that the solution to social problems must be the concern of *all* people, not just the church, not just the state, not just charitable organizations. His encyclical *Pacem in Terris* was, indeed, addressed officially to “all people of good will”.

And so for me the “role of Christian churches” cannot be external to civil society. It must be internal to that, of which it is part. It cannot be isolated from it, but must be involved in it. But, in the spirit of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, all is not well in Denmark. Or in the words of Benjamin Franklin, “Lighthouses are more helpful than churches!” Still fresh in my memory is the recent Nelson Mandela Lecture delivered by the South African president, Thabo Mbeki. In many ways this speech is an indictment of the Christian churches in South Africa. How is it that the country’s president is drawing on biblical texts and Christian symbols, and filling the gaps religious leaders should be addressing in his call for what Mandela called the “RDP (reconstruction and development) of the soul” of the country? What Mbeki is doing is, in effect, searching for the salt and the leaven the country needs for moral regeneration. Gone are the days of a vibrant ecumenism in South Africa when the churches were united in their opposition to apartheid and in their fight for justice. Many churches have since withdrawn into narrow denominationalism. But let me be fair. While this may be a public perception, it is not the whole truth, since there are elements within the Christian churches that are making a wonderful contribution to civil society, in the areas of education, gender equality, health care, treatment and care for people with HIV/AIDS, and the like. However, the operative word is “elements”. It is necessary for me to attempt a brush stroke analysis of the Christian church in South Africa.

Christianity comprises almost 80% of people of faith in South Africa. Yet it is far from homogeneous. Indeed, one would have to say that Christianity in South Africa is so diverse, ranging from mainline Christian denominations, to evangelical/pentecostal groups (mostly of the American variety), to a vast array of African independent churches, that it would take a genius (or perhaps only God!) to show how all these disparate elements actually subscribe to the same belief! However, in keeping with my introductory com-

ments, I want to centre my analysis on what I called the fundamental choice facing Christianity, namely, either withdrawal into an elitist ghetto, or, immersion in the harsh realities of civil society. Using this contrast as a yardstick actually makes my analysis quite easy, for against these standards I see, sadly, that today the greater part of Christianity within South Africa – certainly within the hierarchical church structures – would see itself as pitted against the state, and making every effort to preserve its autonomy in relation to “creeping secularism” and the apparent de-Christianisation of the Constitution and the legislative and social process.

Examples that come to mind, firstly in a more distant history and in various countries, are civil legislation on divorce, the decriminalization of adultery, etc. These examples point to the churches’ loss of impact and influence. In our current South African history, issues that are being tackled – within a Constitution that subscribes to freedom of religion within a secular state – are abortion, HIV/AIDS, and same-sex civil unions. Naturally, religions can and may have problems with some of these issues. But that is not the point. The point is we no longer live in the “Holy Roman Empire”. The days of “Christendom” – where the church could impose its own moral norms on the rest of society – are over.

What we see increasingly are elements of Christianity within South Africa that are simply not able to be boldly prophetic, but opt rather for the tactics of squealing, pointing fingers, blaming and general negativity – all from within the comfort zones of their so-called orthodox purity.

I wish to highlight the contrast between these negative attitudes and what I earlier termed “being boldly prophetic”. What do I mean by this? Here I believe we are getting to the heart of our topic today: the role of Christian churches *in newly industrialized developing countries*. From my perspective, clearly this context will call for a very different role than, say, the role of the Church in *apartheid*, a system which clearly demanded absolute denunciation and total removal. Today we are trying to develop a new civil society, and that calls for a different approach, a different strategy, an emphasis on constructive dialogue and incarnational involvement. To be “boldly prophetic” in this context requires a shift from de-enouncing to announcing. In other words, a positive partnership which, while respecting the role of constructive criticism, sets the tone by example, affirmation, support and involvement.

Yes, it is fair to acknowledge that a great test exists for the Christian churches in the face of social trends and public policies that may contradict their teachings. But as I say, they can declare war and hurl denunciations, anathemas, and excommunications in all directions. Or [...] they can use reasoned argument and common sense in mature and consultative dialogue, obtaining government's good faith, and insulting no one. This is, as your original brief in inviting me to this conference suggests, the only way forward for the Christian churches in their attempts to deal with "the effects of pluralism and secularism within civil society."

### **Globalization and economic behaviour**

With regard to the other aims of this conference, time does not permit me to develop all the points in much detail. However, regarding "globalization and economic behaviour" I can do no better than draw on the Mbeki speech to which I already alluded – his Nelson Mandela Lecture – as here he touches on another concern of this conference, namely, the economic behaviour of citizens and their general attitude towards the agglomeration of social capital within their environment.

Mbeki pulls no punches when he reflects that the values of the capitalist market – of individual profit maximization – tend to displace the values of human solidarity. He quotes the philosopher, Karl Polanyi, for whom the capitalist market destroys relations of "kinship, neighbourhood, profession and creed", replacing these with the pursuit of personal wealth by citizens who have become "atomistic and individualistic". Mbeki identifies the demon of our society as the one who advises us "with rhythmic and hypnotic regularity: get rich! Get rich! Get rich!" This, says Mbeki, is the grand deception that distracts us from the real task of development within the new experience of liberation as a nation. He takes to task those who define liberation as personal enrichment. Instead, he argues, all South Africans "share a fundamental objective to defeat the tendency in our society towards the deification of personal wealth as the distinguishing feature of the new citizen of the new South Africa".

What this means in practice is a commitment to the concept of "the common good" (*Bonum Commune*). If anything, this is where I believe the churches are most challenged to play a role. It is surely the task of the

churches to encourage, not only their members, but “all people of good will” to work towards this in all areas of social and political life. It is interesting that, in a conference in 2004 on the “Role of the churches in African civil society”, hosted by the Norwegian Interdenominational Office for Development, (which at that time studied the DR Congo, Ethiopia and Cameroon), reports found that the churches played an essential role by promoting equity and democracy through service delivery. Furthermore, the key values which the churches promote are respect and dignity. Specific to the churches’ contribution to the common good, according to this 2004 conference, were two things, namely: (1) that decentralized church structures made for a good information systems; and, (2) that churches’ international networks gave access to special competence and expertise when needed. This makes an exchange of experience possible where all may benefit from the experience of others across borders.

Of course, the notion of the “common good” covers a multiplicity of aspects of social and political life. Time does not permit me to develop all of these, but allow me to touch on a couple of areas, one that is particularly dear to me as former Deputy Minister of Education, and another that is of grave importance in the total political empowerment of our people. I wish, therefore, to focus briefly on *education* and on *land*.

## **Education**

Statistics from the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa reveal that in the area of education, huge racial anomalies still exist. The gap between the educational qualifications of the majority black population group and the white group remains wide. Here too we feel the influence of globalization, where even education is privatized and succumbs to the laws of competition, elitism and individualism. If, on the other hand, we are going to see education in terms of ‘the common good’, then surely it calls for a national commitment to the elimination of illiteracy, ignorance and exploitation. One recalls here in the 1990s the picket lines in Johannesburg of workers and employees demanding time off and appropriate structures to further their education! Clearly, the challenges of education remain enormous, and one which neither the state nor the Christian churches can afford to neglect.

One must never underestimate, too, the potential of education in promoting anti-racism. Integrated schools – and here I should point out that within the first five years of South Africa’s democracy, 28% of all schools were racially integrated (cf. Ministry of Education, *Manifesto on Education and Democracy*, 2001) – have the possibility of becoming models for our new society. One cannot emphasize enough the role of the churches here, not only in promoting equity, but in setting an example, as indeed they did in the past.

## Land

With regard to land, once again there are enormous disparities within the country, requiring that the issue be dealt with justly and fairly. Liberation from oppression such as apartheid would be an empty pipedream without a new sense of belonging, of rooted-ness, of attachment to the land.

The first potential for the churches lies in their own ownership of land. Studies have been undertaken by various churches in this regard, and one thinks back with gratitude to the initiative taken by the late Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban, who in 1986, mandated the report on the utilization of rural lands owned by the Catholic Church in KwaZulu Natal. Hurley was not one to treat the findings of this report with mere academic interest. He put words into action. A small example was the way he handed over ownership of a large piece of land belonging to the church to a group of dismissed factory workers, which enabled them to feed their families and in due course, after the success of their court case, to continue as a cooperative. Land and economic empowerment are two sides of the same coin. Another example is the St Wendolin’s project of Mariannhill, which ceded 600 acres of the monastery’s property to land redistribution for displaced people. Today it is a thriving suburban settlement.

The redistribution of land in a post-apartheid society is both necessary and inevitable. The churches have an excellent opportunity to make a positive and prophetic contribution by examining, (1) their own utilization of land, (2) giving the lead in the tough process of redistribution, (3) proclaiming justice and hope for people, beyond liberation from oppression to a new sense of belonging to the land of their birth.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges of reconstruction and development in South Africa are enormous. Despite remarkable inroads into the improved quality of life for people through housing, access to water, sanitation and electricity, there is so much more to be done. The scope of this lecture has hardly done justice to the few areas I have been able to cover, let alone those which require reflection in their own right. I am thinking, for example, of the challenges of unemployment, the plight of underpaid domestic workers, the scourges of crime (both violent and white collar crime), the high rate of diabetes, malaria, tuberculosis and so many other facets of any developing nation.

Do the churches have a role to play? The question begs another question! How can the churches not play a role? As one of the Vatican's synodal documents states: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel." (Synod of Bishops, 1971, *Justice in the World*)

With regard to the role of the Church within civil society, this quote brings us right back to the concept of 'the common good' – a concept Pope John XXIII defined as the sum total of all those conditions of social life that enable people and organizations to achieve complete human fulfilment. A commitment to achieving those conditions demands of the Christian churches a hands-on approach, a partnership with the state in dialogue, consultation and cooperation. Indeed, South Africa's progressive constitution has created enough space for inter-sectoral dialogue to make this possible.

In a word, what I am calling for requires an approach which was described by the Second Vatican Council in its document on "The Church in the Modern World", *Gaudium et Spes* (GS 74):

Individuals, families, and the various groups which make up civil society are aware of their inability to achieve a truly human life by their own unaided efforts; they see the need for a *wider community* where each one will make a specific contribution to an even broader implementation of the common good. ■



# **An Open Church in an Open Society**

## **Civil Society as an Element of Theological Ethics<sup>1</sup>**

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*Heinrich Bedford-Strohm*

Thinking about the issue of the open church in an open society, nowadays necessarily involves the concept of civil society. The concept of civil society is based on there being a social landscape that is shaped by pluralism. This requires not the merging of the individual and community, but a situation in which the *differences* are maintained and the *relation* between them stabilized. In order to reflect and understand this concept of theological ethics, it is of great importance that there is a clear separation between the *two* fields. Neglecting the difference leads to the eclipse of the individual by the community, and this results in a particular susceptibility to authoritarian ways of thinking and behaving. However, neglecting the relationship between the individual and the community can also have problematic consequences. An understanding of diversity, which one may or may not regard

as “postmodern”, which threatens to confuse self-*determination* with self-*centredness*, in which individuals or their respective supporting communities to some extent withdraw from communicating with other individuals or communities, is in its extreme form nothing other than a programmatic mutual lack of interest. It is often connected to the doctrine [or if you like “philosophical agenda”?] of the particularity of all forms of thought. The claims of others to represent the truth are not challenged argumentatively, rather they are defended by reference to the relativity of *all* truth.

This type of suppression of communication contradicts the central ideas of the concept of civil society. The concept of civil society, especially in its liberal communitarian variant, is derived from self-determination *as well as* from the relationship to others. It encourages the creation of identity in the functioning individuals and communities of society *as well as* a dynamic of mutual interaction. If one examines the regulated process with regard to the conflict of what truth is, those convictions that are put forward which claim to represent the truth are not only *compatible* with the idea of civil society, they even contain an immense *degree of problem solving power* with respect to the most difficult dilemma of a liberal democracy. This problem has been defined by Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, the former judge of the Federal Constitutional Court: “The liberal, secularized state is based on certain prerequisites which it cannot itself guarantee.”<sup>2</sup> In the context of a civil society, it is only through a passionate engagement which focuses on the pursuit of the truth, that moral resources can be mobilized – and this is something which cannot be prescribed by the liberal state in an authoritarian way.

Given that engagement in the context of civil society implies an orientation which goes beyond the protection of the rights of the individual, the traditional economic liberal variant which emphasizes the freedom of the individual and rejects state interference can only be seen as falling short of the ideal of civil society. The concept of freedom within civil society (and this dimension only really comes into focus in the liberal communitarian variant of civil society) is *communicative freedom*.

The term *communicative freedom* points to a related theme in the field of theological ethics which Wolfgang Huber has particularly focused on over the last ten years, and has also been taken up by Jürgen Moltmann. In the

light of this related theme, the liberal communitarian concept of civil society can be seen as the development, within social theory, of the Reformation understanding of freedom as *communicative freedom*. From the particular Reformation perspective which arose from Pauline doctrines, freedom is not understood as *arbitrary*, but as a *concept which defines relations*. Freedom and human fellowship are not mutually exclusive but are understood as mutually interrelated interpretative concepts. This specific Reformation idea of freedom is nowhere more clearly encapsulated than in Martin Luther's frequently quoted declaration on which he based his work "*Concerning Christian Liberty*": "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one".

The terminology in which Luther formulates his thesis needs to be revised. From today's perspective, the relationship between the two elements, which here is seen as precipitating freedom, cannot be expressed with the words "to be a servant" or "to be subjugated". These words can too easily be understood as *contradictory* to freedom rather than, as Luther intended, conveying the *process of self-definition* leading to freedom. However, the content of his thesis has scarcely been more current than today. The question as to how social cohesion can actually still be achieved is being posed now more often than ever before, and given this, Luther's 486-year old thesis is unexpectedly modern. In a nutshell one can say that: *The updated Reformation concept of freedom is the theological-ethical answer to Böckenförde's thesis*. Since the liberal state cannot create or reproduce the foundations from which it grows, it is dependent on individuals and communities who voluntarily and enthusiastically take part in public debates, and whose engagement does not stem from selfish motives.

The particular strength of an understanding of freedom as communicative freedom lies in the specific definition of the relationship between the individual and the community, which overrides negative alternatives. For a long time service for one's community was seen as being a self-sacrifice, stemming from the virtue of *selflessness*. A communicative understanding of freedom facilitates the theoretical conception of an experience which many people in society have, that loving oneself and loving one's neighbour do not have to be mutually exclusive, and in fact are closely connected. The structure which indicates civic involvement is a structure of reciprocity. The

maximization of personal happiness is in no way at odds with community wellbeing. Rather involvement in issues which affect the general wellbeing leads to experiences which give meaning to an individual's life, and create a network of varied social interactions which can be regarded as an enrichment of it. *Communicative freedom* is therefore nothing other than an interpretation of the biblical commandment, freed from moral judgements: Love thy neighbour *as thyself*.

It is apparent that Church and theology have every reason to present themselves confidently as active parts of a liberal-communitarian civil society. Churches and theologians will not be seen as socially relevant or interesting if they align themselves to a widespread modern interpretation of freedom as subject-centred, and if they merely provide theological reinforcement for this concept. Rather they must actively and passionately incorporate the concept of communicative freedom into social discourse. As Rudolf Weth rightly asserts: "The affirmation of pluralism stemming from sound theological reasons is precisely not the renunciation of Christian witness, but rather the view that nothing is to be gained here from a Christian monopoly on truth, and that all is to be gained from the words of the Gospel itself."<sup>3</sup> Civil society itself is also dependent on the maintaining of values and the living out of convictions and beliefs in real life. According to Wolf Rainer Wendt, religiously motivated and socially organized activities "are of great worth for civil society because they show that both the individual and the faith community can reach a point of reciprocal meaningful fulfilment, and demonstrate how this can be done".<sup>4</sup> The actuality of the declaration of belief is "the wine to the water of civil existence".<sup>5</sup> With regard to seven aspects, I wish to theoretically clarify what kind of contribution the Church can make to the political culture of a civil society.

In Germany, due to its particular constitutional status, the Church has a particularly important opportunity. Although their status as a public institution is legally recognized, this is not accompanied by state interference in how they fulfil their role. The legal status of the churches in Germany demonstrates the importance of religious freedom for regenerative powers in a liberal democracy. Within the field of theological ethics, according to my *first* thesis, communicative freedom imposes upon the Church the task of *making use of the opportunities afforded by religious freedom*, and participating as an independent and critical voice in public debates in the civil society.

The public reaction to the discussions following the economic and social declaration of the Church published in February 1997 showed the great degree of influence which the Church still has.

More than any other large social organization, the Church brings together people from very different cultural and political social backgrounds. Using the Gospel as a basis for discussion, and its powers of social formation and orientation, according to my *second thesis*, the way can be paved for a consensus which will be of future significance for society. In a democracy there is always a danger that the process of the formation of political convictions becomes a mere arena for the conflict between different social interest groups. It is often the case the result of this process only represents the current societal distribution of power. The *representative consensus*, which is achieved from the basis of a common Christian sense of global responsibility, strengthens the democratic discourse in that in contrast to pure political interests, it focus on trying to achieve a fair and just society. That this is not merely a pious wish is demonstrated by pioneering “representative consensus” in the proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) such as the *Ostdenkschrift* (memorandum on East Germany) or even the less well known declaration of the EKD working group on long-term unemployment (1987) which paved the way for a cross-party state programme of aid to combat long-term unemployment. The consultation process, which led to the economic and social declaration should also be mentioned again here. The fact that many participants in the discussion subsequently changed their position is one of the most significant features of this process.

According to my *third thesis*, the Church has a many branched *network of communities* whose potential should be harnessed for the benefit of civil society. These communities have a varied profile which is productive in its inclusivity and acceptance of difference. This stems from their clear conviction in the Christian message, and is to be seen not only in the community’s key areas of focus and in their constant engagement. The Church network incorporates pressure groups for such issues as the environment and peace keeping, as well as whole parishes who grant asylum, and synods who comment on various current issues. On all these levels the problems which exist within the sphere of community are brought to light and are incorporated into political and social debates. These communities, which are closely con-

nected by means of the Church network, possess the necessary profile for organizations which seek to play an effective role in civil society.

My *fourth thesis* underlines this particular aspect. The Churches and their international alliances, be it under the auspices of the ÖRK (World Council of Churches) or the Vatican, have a particularly exceptional potential to function as the forerunners of a *global civil society*. Unlike most other large civil organizations the Church network of communities is globally organized and oriented. Not only in terms of their membership numbers, but also in terms of their particular internal structures, this potential of the Church network exceeds by far that of NGO'S (Non-Governmental Organizations), such as Greenpeace which are often mentioned in this context. In light of the sense of helplessness which the challenges of economic globalization tend to trigger, it is all the more urgent to harness this potential. Konrad Raiser has rightly made the connection between the conciliatory process of the ecumenical movement for justice, peace and the protection of God's Creation, and the concept of civil society. According to Raiser, the conciliatory process has proven itself to be "an expression of, as well as an instrument of the newly awakened consciousness of civil society. In the Church sphere this process has conveyed the living experience that the Churches are not identical with their institutional image, but have the potential to be a dynamic force in civil society, and bring about real social change".<sup>6</sup>

My *fifth thesis* is concerned with the role of churches in the *regeneration of the moral fabric of society*. The publicly relevant values which are taken from religious doctrines, and contribute to the development and maintenance of the fundamental social consensus, should not be understood as mere social adhesive. The significant and concrete problem solving potential which these values have, can only be fully effective, if they are employed as a critical evaluation measure in societal debates. These values, which can also be termed 'civil ethics', include the inviolability of human dignity, the protection of the disadvantaged, the struggle for freedom from oppression and violence, and the protection of the natural environment. These values, which are based on biblical traditions and the theological doctrines of Creation, the Trinity and the Cross, have proved themselves to be vital resources for a fulfilled life in society in general. As Francis Schüssler Fiorenza has rightly emphasized, the churches as interpretative communities of substantial normative potential, with regard to their reli-

gious tradition, provide a key and much-needed organizational platform for discourse on questions of ethics.<sup>7</sup> If the discourse on civil society is similar to ‘beating heart’ of society (Bert van der Brink),<sup>8</sup> then these key values can be seen as the oxygen without which this discourse would soon collapse. Organizations such as churches, where there is a continuous process of change and development, can be seen as the lungs of society.

My *sixth thesis* deals with the specific contribution which the Church can make to the culture of a civil society. This contribution stems from a core aspect of the Church’s message: the *liberating power of forgiveness*, the notion that wrongdoing can be called “sinful” without extenuation, yet can also then be forgiven, is an idea whose relevance extends far beyond the sphere of the individual. In the light of the prospect of forgiveness, self-criticism can be seen as self-consolidation, rather than self-deprecation. In civil society, awareness of one’s own fallibility and limitations is one of the most important fundamentals of a discourse which aims to be more than a clash of intellectually dressed up particular interests. The awareness that one’s own and another’s guilt can be forgiven, promotes a culture of conflict in which there is mutual acceptance and a willingness to learn, and which therefore offers a particular potential for differences to be traced back to their objective foundation. To put it plainly: every sermon which preaches God’s graciousness towards humankind and every instance of the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of Communion, as it finds its expression in the church service make a contribution to the strengthening of the culture of civil society, a contribution whose effect spreads throughout the whole of society. Countless historical examples point to the fact that the ability to recognize and to forgive sin can have a fundamental impact on the political culture both on a national and international scale. The process of reconciliation of the Germans with those peoples in the former Soviet Union, Poland and the Czech Republic is an example of this, as is the work of the Commission for Truth in South Africa, and the difficult process of re-examining the historical discrimination against the Black population of America. It is without doubt not a coincidence that in all these cases, the churches made significant contributions to the process of reconciliation.

The six theses which I have formulated give rise to a *seventh* overarching *thesis*. *The churches* in their institutional form and in their message *are predestined to take on an active role in the support and maintenance of a cul-*

ture of civil society. As places within the community which promote communicative freedom, the churches contain, albeit within the bounds of their everyday reality, the promise to partake in active engagement, but not have too narrow a focus, to support pluralism, but not arbitrary choice, to be rooted in particulars, but not to lose sight of the universal perspective, to focus on the needs of others', but not to deny one's own needs. The liberating power of forgiveness facilitates a sober view of the dimensions of reality, in that the churches themselves continually struggle to fulfil the demands which they make of themselves. In this respect the points which have been mentioned can be seen as both contributions to be made and tasks to be carried out.

Particularly in a situation in which the churches in many regions in Germany increasingly have a minority status, in that their religious message is losing resonance, especially among the younger generation, it is of key importance that the perception of their own deficiencies and the disappointment arising from the sense that their message is only weakly heard, do not lead to the loss of *religious self-respect*. The Church will only gain in popularity and influence again, when she opens herself up to the power which exists within herself, when she overcomes that which Wolfgang Huber has termed '*self-secularization*', when she consciously expresses the public relevance of her message. A negative examination of oneself is definitely not the answer to ever-declining Church membership. The following declaration of Paul reflects the way ahead for the Church to visibly become a public and engaged Church in a civil society: "Now the Lord is that Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3, 17). ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this text was published in: Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Gemeinschaft aus kommunikativer Freiheit. Sozialer Zusammenhalt in der modernen Gesellschaft. Ein theologischer Beitrag* (Gütersloh 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> E.-W. Böckenförde, "Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation", in: *Säkularisation und Utopie. Ebracher Studien. Ernst Forsthoff zum 65. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 1967, pp. 75–94 (93), (translation K. Gautier).
- <sup>3</sup> R. Weth, "Erinnern an Gottes Reich. Positive Religionsfreiheit der Kirche und weltanschauliche Neutralität des Staates in der Zivilgesellschaft", in: N. Becker/E. Dehnen (Ed.), *Dienen – Ordnen – Planen. Festschrift für Erhard Krause*. Neukirchen 1997, pp. 143–168 (168), (translation K. Gautier).



- <sup>4</sup> W. R. Wendt, "Bürgerschaft und zivile Gesellschaft. Ihr Herkommen und ihre Perspektiven", in: idem, *Zivilgesellschaft und soziales Handeln. Bürgerschaftliches Engagement in eigenen und gemeinschaftlichen Belangen*, Freiburg 1996, pp. 13–77 (58), (translation K. Gautier).
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 59 (translation K. Gautier).
- <sup>6</sup> K. Raiser, "Die Logik der Kommunikation. Der konziliare Prozeß ist Ausdruck der Zivilgesellschaft", in: *EK 7/1995*, pp. 399–403 (402), (translation K. Gautier).
- <sup>7</sup> F. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Die Kirche als Interpretationsgemeinschaft. Politische Theologie zwischen Diskursethik und hermeneutischer Rekonstruktion", in: E. Arens (Ed.), *Habermas und die Theologie. Beiträge zur theologischen Rezeption, Diskussion und Kritik der Theorie kommunikativen Handelns*, Düsseldorf 1989, pp. 115–144 (132).
- <sup>8</sup> B. v. d. Brink, "De civil society als ‚kloppend hart‘ van de maatschappij: drie filosofische visies", in: *Civil society*. VUGA, Den Haag 1994, pp. 49–86, quoted in: W. R. Wendt, *ibid* 45f.

# Prospects of Development Cooperation

## Reviewing the Discussion

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*Helmut Reifeld*

The main aim of the conference on “Church and Civil Society” was to analyze the political role of Christian churches and the possible contribution they can make to the development process in the four important emerging nations: Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa. How can the Christian churches in these four countries contribute to the establishment of civil societies? Are they included in or excluded from the formation of their respective civil societies? To what extent are Church institutions there recognized as participants in social and political developments? Do they take any political responsibility and what kind of political influence do they exploit?

Another very central question was whether – if the Christian churches can positively influence the development of these countries – this could also

have a positive effect on the neighbouring countries. Could, in fact, the whole region profit from this and could it be used as a basis for further reforms to be introduced in the near future? With these questions in mind, the conference was mainly focused on the following four key discussion points linked to the main topic. Even if many of the questions remained unanswered, they themselves and the considerations they raised deserve to be kept on record.

The *first* point was an assessment of the success of the Christian churches in establishing a civil society within the four countries mentioned. In this regard, the consequences of the development of a civil society that result from the Church's self-restricting measures on the one hand, and social activism on the other hand, were of great interest. Emphasis was put in discussing the role which the concept of 'religion' plays in the context of transformational and modernization processes as well as whether 'religion' does, in fact, have a modernizing effect. In general, the impact of Christian churches in all four countries is mainly based on their often uncompromising option for the poor, particularly at the grass-roots level. In addition, their priorities for the arrangement and composition of social life were equally clear: Church representatives stood and stand for dignity of the human person, for the linkage not only of love and justice in theory but of religious and social dimensions within society, for the promotion of the common good and democratic participation. Particular emphasis was set on the special role which Church representatives played in severe conflict situations, such as those under the Apartheid regime in South Africa. At the same time, however, participants were reminded that churches are certainly part of civil society but that they are not *only* part of civil society. In the end, they are much more than that; they act – according to the Gospel of John – in this world, but “they are not of the world” (John. 17,14).

A *second*, related point of the discussion was in which way Christian churches are agents of change and how they could be supported with regard to their attempts to deal with the effects of pluralism and secularism within civil society. People who actively participate and who are committed to the Church, as well as members of the clergy, have to be made aware of their responsibility as far as the ongoing societal changes are concerned. They have to accept the consequences of modernization and should not let their attitudes be influenced by anti-modern and romantic sentiments. An impor-

tant aspect is to differentiate between the Church as an institution and the church as a movement in which laypeople play a key role. One main question was how important direct relations between the Church and state at the highest level are in comparison to the activities of the Church on a more fundamental social level. At the same time, activists asked: “How could churches not play a role in politics?” In several African countries, missionaries helped to bring independence about. From that time onwards, the churches were always close to changes within the society. They functioned as a central pillar for the support of human rights and democratic freedom. For the future, strengthening civil society needs to be linked with strengthening of civil liberties. This is not only true for freedom of religion but for freedom of opinion, of expression, and of other political freedoms as well.

A *third* point of the discussion – again closely linked with the former one – concerned new opportunities for a civil society within the context of globalization and regional development. The role of the churches and the concept of ‘religion’ were reflected and reconsidered on the basis of (a) the citizens’ participation in politics, (b) their economic behaviour, and (c) their general attitude towards the agglomeration of ‘social capital’ within their environment. In this regard, several questions were raised (though not all of them answered): In what way do local churches react towards their surrounding social and cultural context? Do they take of this context into account when they define themselves? How do they react to the broader context of globalization and its effects? Are they willing to reconsider their own attitudes with regard to these issues? Participants were reminded that – as a rule – churches managed to combine solidarity with globalization. They “control” the largest networks, on the global as well as on the national, on the individual as well as on the institutional level and from the smallest village to state capitals. These networks provide access to people and thus influence the formulation of political decisions. The phrase that churches act not only as “global prayers” but, simultaneously, as “global players” now seems to be coined. Nevertheless, they act as advocates for justice and they keep a close look on market conditions. For them, fair market conditions are more important than free and liberal ones, and protectionism is not necessarily evil. In the case of Latin America, the special role of churches in the discussion about liberation theology was reflected, where Church representatives actively shaped the image of a democratic society.

The influence of Christian churches via the “all African Bishop’s dialogue”, for instance, or within the Latin American free-trade zone was pointed out as immense.

A *fourth* and final aspect is related to the impact on international development cooperation and to the possible identification of developmental and political consequences. There was great interest in the opportunities as to how outside organisations (for example: partner institutions in Germany) can contribute to achieving positive societal development. From the point of view of some representatives in the German government and especially from German partner (donor) organizations, the churches in the four respective countries are even regarded as “born” agents of development cooperation. They are highly appreciated in their own right, honoured for their ways of handling plurality, and closely linked with many partners in their home country. They are valued as “strong, independent and authentic”. They offer a combination of ethical guidance and political orientation. Christian relief organizations in particular, so the common opinion, deserve highest respect because their ability to mobilize additional support appears to be endless.

With regard to the Millennium Development Goals, participants strived to get a holistic view, not focusing on the political role of churches only. The so called “MDGs” can only be successful if they comprise all living conditions of the poor. In this regard, churches may perhaps be treated separately but religion may not. Religious freedom is not only an inherent part of development; it is an element of political life. Religion is always public and never only private; it is an element of social belonging and of cultural identity. Thus, Churches function as a sort of moral anchor for development cooperation. In this capacity, they exercise a great influence. But at the same time, they face two severe problems: One was termed “parochialism” (the temptation to limit ones scope of action to the own parish); the other is “clericalism” (the habit of giving too much credit to hierarchical positions). If we take into account the Church’s position and the role of religion in the newly emerging countries of Latin America and Africa, both these problems need to be tackled.

In the secularized industrial nations of the West, but also in developing and newly emerging countries, there is little agreement on the answers to many of the questions raised above. These questions have sparked intense debate

– in politics as well as in political science – particularly within the rapidly developing countries of Latin America and Africa where Christian churches still play an influential role in public life. Although in these countries the stance of Christian churches towards the concept of a civil society has changed over the course of time and has developed differently from country to country, the problems are nonetheless similar. The churches – as well as other religious groups – have continued to play a part in the ongoing process of societal modernization and have contributed to the concurrent discourses on civil society. In some instances, the churches have actually gained in importance and have reached a new level of significance. In addition, the focus has also been on the emerging trend of anti-modernism, as well as the question whether religion can play a part in promoting development within societies which are undergoing a process of rapid transformation.

Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that within the Christian churches there are also a lot of different movements, and their influence on society cannot be fully evaluated at the present time. Within the Christian churches there are also fundamentalist movements or forms of religion that impede people's active participation as citizens and hinder their rational economic behaviour instead of supporting it. There are, moreover, extremely ambivalent ethical attitudes with regard to the requirements for sustainable development within the context of globalization.

In the course of the discussion it was sometimes difficult to separate what was said about religion from statements only related to Church institutions. This reflects the fact that for many people, their involvement in religion goes far deeper than that with the Church. It might also have an impact on our concepts of civil society. Some doubts remained as to whether the perceptions of civil society prevalent in the West are always transferable to countries in continents outside Europe. Here the positions of Christian churches differ widely, depending on the way these churches came there or developed different cultures of dialogue. But in spite of all differences, the roles of churches in the four selected countries also have a lot in common. The positions they take towards poverty, political participation and other questions of social order; their attitudes towards religious pluralism and plurality within; and finally the way they deal with problems of secularism and modernity are discussed in the contributions to this volume. Christian

Churches proved to be reliable partners on equal footing. They collaborate substantially in the shaping of society, of political conditions, and of structural change. As agents of development cooperation, however, there seems to be one aspect which distinguishes them from all others, and this is their habit of being self-critical. ■

## About the Authors

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