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IMAGES OF EUROPE PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

ISSEI 2014 - Conference Proceedings
Porto, Portugal

Edited by
Yolanda Espiña





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ISSEI 2014 - Conference Proceedings Porto, Portugal
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Catholicism and Citizenship

Jorge Cunha

Abstract

This text focuses on the discussion of whether the Christian religion promotes democracy and defense of civil liberties or not. It provides an example: the case of the struggle of the citizens of Porto against the bishop for the autonomy of their city, in the XV Century. And concludes two things: it was the religion that gave the people the legitimacy and strength to resist both the royal and the ecclesiastical centralism and that was the central government that encouraged the fight against bishop, considered the king power limiter.

Keywords

Christian Faith, Human Rights, Democracy, Oporto.

The following text is intended to enroll in the general theme “Images of Europe” and the sub-theme “The contribution of the Portuguese thought for the mutual recognition of cultures and peoples”. When approaching the concepts of “Catholicism” and “Citizenship”, we aim to show how Catholic faith, open to rationality, was an element of progress in the recognition of civil rights and democratic organization of the political community. We do not ignore that this point is target of a major conflict of interpretations.

Historically speaking, there were times when Christianity founded the recognition of civil rights and there were other times when the service was the legitimization of an iniquitous state of things with regard to such recognition. All in all, we believe that democratic Europe was thought on the basis of a Christian leaven.

Our aim is to show how this idea can be seen in Portugal, in precise moments of our history. We will monitor the reflection that, in his time, produced a bishop of Porto, Mgr António Ferreira Gomes (1906-1989). Before that, we will try to find an interpretive principle that shows how it is possible to think of Catholicism as the historical origin of plural contexts regarding citizenship requirements, ie, a democratic political ethics.

Catholicism as Ethics and Moral

Catholicism can be seen in two ways: as an ethics and as a moral. In Ricoeur's line, we mean by ethics "an aspiration to the good life, with others and for others, in just institutions" (Ricoeur, 1990, 202). In turn, a moral is the submission of ethical aspiration to trial of the norm (Ricoeur, 1990, 237). The first moment is teleological. The second is deontological. The confluence of these two theoretical moments can serve to interpret very different historical moments as well as the realities of social life, we can see dialectic between the instituting moment and the moment set of normative legitimation of a given context.

Catholicism as an Ethic

Catholicism can be seen as a religious feeling. A feeling that gathers believers around a memory that comes from Jesus Christ, this memory which includes an older imagery, the biblical tradition. In this sense, Christianity is a mystical tradition, an experience. This experience follows a certain description of what is an achieved vision of existence, the situation of humanity in the cosmos, the destination and the origin of the universe, the fair institution and the brotherhood.

While mystical experience and religious sentiment, Christianity is not characterized, leastwise provisionally, by its universality nor by ready source of binding rules. By horizontal and vertical transmission, Christian religion will reach more or less people. But Christianity as a religious faith is very personal and, in a sense, is incommunicable and not even comparable.

However, it is impossible that the reality of religious faith does not become concept, doctrine and personal and social life standard. Otherwise it would have no identity and historical visibility.

Catholicism as a Moral

But Christianity can also be seen as moral. In this second sense, Christianity is seen as culture (language, political and ecclesial institutions, rule of moral life). It is time to assert that Christianity becomes visible and communicable through a dogmatic, a moral, and one worldview. Both embodiments are complementary

and inseparable, but are not entirely coincidental. That is why Christianity met so many historical variants, many forms of inculturation, and so many churches.

This second sense is the one in which Christianity seeks universality, the universality of a culture that is informed by certain principles that can be shared and may order the world according to their source revealed. Christianity became Catholicism, in the original sense of the word.

The process of institutionalization of a feeling is always precarious and surrounded by dangers. This process is guided and founded in human reason. Reason is by nature a fixist reality. In turn, the feeling is unstable. It is characteristic of the latter challenge the reason to go further by instituting a program of life more in line with the teleology of life. The reason, in turn, resists change and tends to close in its final deontological horizon inapprehensibility teleology of life.

Catholicism and citizenship are located in this complex set of interactions. The Catholic ideal of fair institution continuously establishes an ideal of fair institution. The reason appropriates this ideal and gives it moral strength. When the force becomes stiff, it is necessary to think of it again, making evolve founded reality by virtue of founding factor.

Catholicism and Human Rights in Portuguese Culture

Who made an interesting exercise to show the virtues of Portuguese Catholicism to found the demands of citizenship and respect for human rights was Mgr António Ferreira Gomes. An emblematic text issued in 1973 will examine this question (GOMES, 1974). Being a text located on the eve of the 1974 Portuguese revolution, it is noted by a certain desire of a change that, in fact, was imminent. However, there is in the analysis of the Bishop an element of timeless reflection that allows us to read the text in a social ethical horizon.

Catholicism and Citizenship: The Case of the Oporto City

For the former bishop, Catholicism was the factor that put the germs of the development of urban democracy in the City of Porto. António Ferreira Gomes alludes to a study by Jaime Cortesão on "The democratic factors of the formation of Portugal", to show how Porto is a special case throughout the country, as a growing commercial society, increasing wealth and civic consciousness, cosmopolitan

view and a claim of autonomy, in the general context of the new nation, promoting democratic participation and a special sense of social justice. These elements put the City of Porto in a unique tradition of that point of view in Portugal.

This growth of civic autonomy generated a conflict that seems to be against the bishops of Porto, seen as limiting this autonomy. But things may not be so.

Mgr António noted that historians in general, even Jaime Cortesão, take sides against the bishops, when it comes to interpreting the conflicts that arose in these urban democracies. But, in his view, this point is poorly explained. Popular struggles would be instigated by the central power, which prevented the urban autonomy to pursue its integration policy. Therefore, there wouldn't be a fight of the City against the Church but, in the background, another fight. In a deeper sense, the fight would not be the people against the Church, but the central government against the Church, as it is the sign and guaranty of the civil autonomy. Increasing the fight against the bishops, the Crown was trying a way to impose the absolute power that was arising in the XV century. The democratic factor is the people, as a believing people, who, just as believer, is opposed to the despotic political power. The author justifies his thesis with a historical analysis of detail; nonetheless, this is not the time to expose it here.

We could give other examples, having regard to the text, including the testimony of Bishop Thomas Becket resistance to the pretensions of the King, the same who was forced to sign the Magna Carta by the nobles and the people. One can also mention the case of the Swiss Confederation that was set up as an example of democracy under the influence of St. Nicholas of Flue in The Stans Convention.

The conclusion is obvious: Christianity with its worldview and its political morality, lays the foundation for recognition of civil liberties. Catholicism and culture were in tune to give in Porto, an urban democracy. This balance was in danger when the king wanted to include the City the general political and bought the lordship to the Bishop. This intervention of the central government led to the regrow of the political rights of the people. The same happened in Spain with the process of royal centralism promoted by the Catholic Monarchs.

Catholicism and Human Rights

There is no doubt that theology played a positive role in the development of the concept of fundamental human rights. Let us quote a passage from St. Thomas Aquinas: "Two points are to be observed concerning the right ordering of rulers in a state or nation. One is that all should take some share in the government: for this form of constitution ensures peace among the people, commends itself to all, and is most enduring, as stated in *Polit.* ii, 6. The other point is to be observed in respect of the kinds of government, or the different ways in which the constitutions are established. For whereas these differ in kind, as the Philosopher states (*Polit.* iii, 5), nevertheless the first place is held by the "kingdom," where the power of government is vested in one; and "aristocracy," which signifies government by the best, where the power of government is vested in a few. Accordingly, the best form of government is in a state or kingdom, where one is given the power to preside over all; while under him are others having governing powers: and yet a government of this kind is shared by all, both because all are eligible to govern, and because the rules are chosen by all. For this is the best form of polity, being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, in so far as a number of persons are set in authority; partly democracy, i.e. government by the people, in so far as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers" (S. Th. I-II, 105, 1).

Portugal was born in the context of such acknowledgments. The country has his fictional creation (the Cortes of Lamego). The rights of the people are visible in certain institutions and in moments of the history. The restoration of independence in 1640 resorted to a foundation like this used in Salamanca and Coimbra.

The justification of the "ius gentium" (law of nations) by Francisco de Vitoria, and continued by Francisco Suarez, develops as a continuation and deepening of this medieval Catholic theory. Modernity is not as original as is sometimes assumed.

For much interested in the justification for the existence of human rights rooted in biblical and Christian idea of dignity, interiority and indefinability of the human person. Apart from Greek and Roman elements, this older idea is at the basis of any democratic system.

Catholicism and the justification for a Rational Morality

One of the elements that enable civic coexistence in a pluralistic society like ours, is the possibility of a rational justification of moral, dispensing, methodically, but not really, of religious beliefs and other elements own particular worldview of ethics, in the sense we gave it before. Nevertheless, this justification was a battle of the schools of Salamanca and Coimbra since at least the XVI century. In this sense, the theoretical possibility of overcoming the Old Regime, ironically taken against the absolutist and “Catholic”, has its basis precisely ... Catholic theology.

We can also give another example. The portuense thinkers who argued for the Republic (especially Sampaio Bruno) justify its republican moral in a metaphysical (ethical) root believer, not to say Christian (Gnostic). Admittedly, that was not the idea prevailed in 1910. But we can say that retains the shape of Christianity, when you develop something, a keen sense, resembles the old thinking of “natural law”, as a principle of limiting power and defense of the person within the political institution. This idea prevailed in Porto thinking, by Leonardo Coimbra and Alvaro Ribeiro.

Conclusion

We are aware of the controversial nature of the rereading that we present. Someone can certainly ask how it was possible that Catholicism has been the ideology that legitimized monarchical absolutism, the Inquisition, a certain type of colonialism, the Portuguese “Estado Novo”? The purpose is not to whitewash the past. Theology and theologians have their responsibilities when they accept the strange role of justifying unjust politic powers. Each historical context has its theologians, in this bad sense. But theology has more senses. Our intent is to show the other side that usually is not called into evidence. The Christian religious sentiment is always available to found new forms of moral and social setting. Ernst Bloch said that the Church best possibility is... to generate heretics! On many occasions, these “heretics” represent the true feeling and the ability of moral regulatory innovation. We could say the same of cultural evolution that we say about Catholicism.

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Endnotes

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