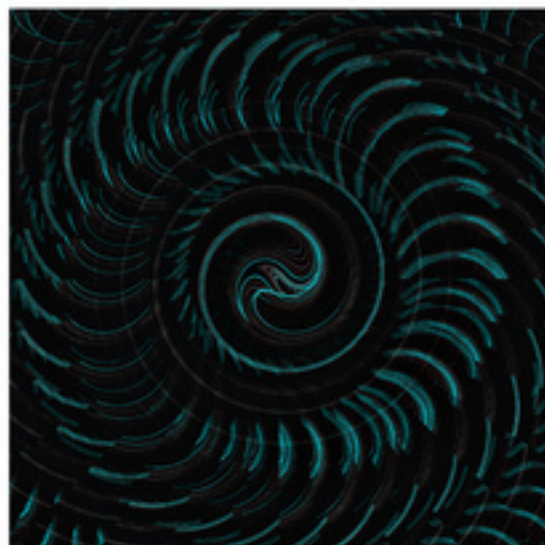Wojciech Kriegseisen

Between State and Church

Confessional Relations from Reformation to Enlightenment: Poland – Lithuania – Germany – Netherlands

Introduction to the English translation

The scope of the issues analysed in this book is defined by the question that lies at the origin of the analysis. Can the interdenominational relations in the Commonwealth of nobles be considered within "the European norm", or is the Polish-Lithuanian model of these relations more appropriately described as far removed from this "norm"? The following will thus consider some aspects of the theory as well as the practice of interdenominational relations in a comparative format to advance towards an answer to this question.

The choice of the Holy Roman Empire of Germany and the United Provinces of the Northern Netherlands as reference points for the Commonwealth of Nobles bears explaining. It is motivated by the conviction that in this case it would be useful to compare states similar in terms of their parliamentary system and their composite structure of a union or a federation, typified by the lack of a strong central authority. As for the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, the comparison has a long tradition, recently analysed by Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg[1]. To quote Michael Oakeshott, it appears interesting to draw comparisons between the areas of early modern Europe where the "politics of scepticism" prevailed over the "politics of faith", or between "civic states" (*civitates*) rather than "corporate states" (*universitates*)[2].

In the states that evolved from an estate-based (early parliamentary system) towards absolutism and confessionalisation processes, so typical of the post-Reformation period, were triggered and then sustained by the cooperation between the established Church and the strong central authority (sovereign). In the Holy Roman Empire of Germany, the United Provinces, or the Commonwealth, the authorities of the dominant (if not always established) Church were unable to rely on the unconditional support of the central authority, whose room for manoeuvre was limited. The consequences of confessionalisation processes for the

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1   H.-J. Bömelburg, "Die Tradition einer multinationalen Reichsgeschichte in Mitteleuropa – Historiographische Konzepte gegenüber Altem Reich und Polen-Litauen sowie komparatistische Perspektiven", *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 53, 2004, 3, p. 318–350.

2   M. Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism*, ed. T. Fuller, New Haven-London 1996; see also idem, *O postępowaniu człowieka*, transl. M. Szczubiałka, Warszawa 2008, p. 211–363.

modernisation of social and state structures are a matter too far removed from the issues discussed in this study, and as such deserve a separate assessment[3].

The separation between the Church and the state, the freedom of conscience, and the religious freedom which results from them – today, all this appears to us a standard of democracy and a "decent" society[4]. It must be remembered, however, that the Roman-Catholic Church officially acknowledged religious freedom as late as on 7 December 1965[5]. This can be seen as the European closure of the process, triggered in the seventeenth century in the northern Netherlands and in England, of forging, accepting and implementing the principle of the separation between the state and the Church. In the nineteenth century, these principles became more common in state legal systems and gained the acceptance of Protestant Churches, but traditionally Catholic countries were relatively slow to adopt them. Even in the early twentieth century these principles met with resistance on their part, and the tendency to resort to "traditional", mild forms of religious coercion was still in evidence, for instance in the administrative and legal practice of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy[6].

The principle of separation between the state and the Church, so strongly associated with the processes of secularisation and democratisation, continues to be questioned by religious fundamentalists, Christian and non-Christian alike, although in Western Europe this rarely happens as openly as, for instance, in Russia or Israel[7]. This is evidenced by writing which currently examines Church-state relations not only from a historical and a philosophical perspective, but also from a political one[8]. Essentially, however, the scope and the model of denominational pluralism in

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3   G. Wąs, "Stosunki między państwem a kościołem na wybranych przykładach europejskich w okresie nowożytnym: powstawanie kościołów terytorialnych", [in:] *Religia i polityka. Kwestie wyznaniowe i konflikty polityczne w Europie w XVIII wieku. W 300. rocznicę konwencji w Altranstädt*, ed. L. Harc, G. Wąs, Wrocław 2009, p. 25–56, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis No. 3148, Historia CLXXVIII.

4   J. Rawls, *Prawo ludów*, transl. M. Kozłowski, Warszawa 2001, p. 95–110.

5   *Declaratio de libertate religiosa Dignitatis humanae*, see http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/i_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decl_19651207; E.-W. Böckenförde, "Wolność religijna w polu napięcia między kościołem a państwem", in: idem, *Wolność – państwo – kościół*, selected and translated by P. Kaczorowski, Kraków 1994, p. 45.

6   A. Dziadzio, "Wolność wyznania i sumienia a przymus religijny w austriackiej monarchii konstytucyjnej (1867–1914)", *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* 45, 1993, 1–2, p. 65–85.

7   See U. Huppert, *Izrael. Rabini i heretycy*, transl. T. Misiak, Łódź 1994.

8   J. M. Wood, *Church and State in Historical Perspective: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography*, Westport Conn. 2005; J. J. Owen, *Religion and the Demise*

contemporary Europe is an internal problem of the Churches, in particular in the debate over the relations between Christianity and other religions. In this sense, the issue is far from resolved, with the arguments of the supporters of pluralism in the relations between religions and denominations countered by the influential advocates of competing approaches: religious exclusivism or inclusivism[9].

The Polish historiography of the second half of the twentieth century, and in particular in the strand which continued the research commenced by Stanisław Kot, was dominated by the tendency to regard the interdenominational relations in the Commonwealth of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries as diverging from the "European average" in the positive sense. We like to discuss the high level of religious toleration in the Kingdom of Poland, and even more so in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania[10], although at least as far as the nobility in the second half of the sixteenth century is concerned, the equality of rights is a more appropriate term. On the other hand, in journalism and opinion writing, as well as in literature popularising historical research, especially authored by non-Polish writers, "kładzie się nacisk na pewne przejawy zjawiska nietolerancji znane w stosunkach polskich głównie od końca XVII w" ("there is a continued emphasis on certain manifestations of intolerance known in Polish relations mainly from the late seventeenth century onwards")[11]. As a result, two notions compete in the public opinion: the stereotype of a fanatically Catholic Commonwealth, shaped as early as in the eighteenth century, and the image of Poland as "a country without stakes", popularised in the twentieth century. The former prevails in works published outside Poland, the latter in domestic ones.

Less frequent are moments of reflection over the reasons why the Polish-Lithuanian state of the second half of the sixteenth century had the reputation

of Liberal Rationalism. The Foundation Crisis of the Separation of Church and State, Chicago-London 2001; J. Fox, A World Survey of Religion and the State, Cambridge 2008, Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics; Journal of Church and State, published by JM Dawson Institute of Church and State Studies, Baylor University (Waco, Texas, USA), also publishes works concerning these issues.

9   The declaration Dominus Iesus prepared by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2000, seen as an expression of exclusivism, is a debate with the arguments of pluralists, see J. Hick, Piąty wymiar. Odkrywanie duchowego królestwa, transl. J. Grzegorczyk, Poznań 2005.

10   M. Kosman, Tolerancja wyznaniowa na Litwie do XVIII w., ibidem, 18, 1973, p. 95–123; T. Wasilewski, Tolerancja religijna w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim w XVI–XVII w., ibidem, 19, 1974, p. 117–128.

11   S. Salmonowicz, "O tolerancji religijnej w 'modelu polskim' (XVI–XVIII w.)", [in:] idem, Kilka minionych wieków. Szkice i studia z historii ustroju Polski, Kraków 2009, p. 23–44, quotation from p. 23–24.

of a "paradise for heretics" and the determinants of the process of abandoning the equality of rights in favour of an increasingly restricted denominational toleration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It thus seems interesting to ask whether the denominational equality of rights in the times of the Warsaw Confederation, the religious toleration of the seventeenth century, and the extensive restrictions of this toleration in the eighteenth century truly sets Poland apart from the rest of Europe[12]. At the time when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth of nobles was a haven for dissidents in the sixteenth century, were they indeed so consistently persecuted in other European countries? Was the eighteenth-century "Polish intolerance", condemned by Voltaire, in such a stark contrast with the European backdrop and practice?[13]

The research material I have used for this study were obtained from Polish, Austrian, Dutch, German, and Swiss libraries. I thus owe a substantial debt to the authors of the works referenced in the footnotes, and although I cannot enumerate all of them, there are some names I would like to recall here. Many years ago, my interest in the issues of interdenominational relations was spurred by reading the works of Marek Wajsblum and Janusz Tazbir; I am particularly indebted to the work of Ernst Kantorowicz and Quentin Skinner, two scholars whose books helped me uncover the beauty of the history of ideas devoid of an ideological entanglement. I wish to thank Dr. Maciej Ptaszyński for inspiring conversations and his assistance in locating and checking source texts from the Reformation period.

The present version of the study of the interdenominational relations in the Early Modern Commonwealth as compared with the Holy Roman Empire of Germany and the United Provinces of the Netherlands is substantially different from the original version, published in Polish by Wydawnictwo Naukowe *Semper* in Warsaw in 2010. The chapters which I believed to be of interest primarily for the Polish reader have been removed; the remaining text has been revised and edited. Finally, I wish to thank all the reviewers, collaborators, librarians, and archivists whose help and criticism I have relied on. They have allowed me to remove at least some shortcomings of my work; the remaining ones are my own responsibility.

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12 A. Manikowski, "Czy siedemnastowieczna Rzeczpospolita była anomalią wśród innych państw europejskich?", *OiRwP* 37, 1993, p. 79–87.

13 W. Dzwigala, "Voltaire's Sources on the Polish Dissident Question", [in:] *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century,* 241, 1986, p. 187–202; M. H. Serejski, *Europa a rozbiory Polski. Studium historiograficzne*, Warszawa 1970.