

ANTON GRABNER-HAIDER

(University of Graz, Austria):

SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

1. The most of the world religions have been intolerant to other believers in their history. Especially is this the case in the so called monotheistic religions: the Jews, the Christians, the Moslems. Only one God should be believed and worshipped; all the other Gods should be damned and demonished. What are the sources of this intolerance? And what is the legitimation for it? What are the consequences for the behaviour of the believers?

The critique of religion in ancient Greek philosophy and in the time of European Enlightenment has shown up and analysed this intolerance. So the critical philosophy has pushed the Christian religion to some processes of learning and changing. But this is not so in the Islamic religion and in Jewish and Christian fundamentalism.

The philosophers Pierre Bayle, Francois Voltaire or John Locke are convinced, that the Christian religion is able to learn and to develop. They have their orientation on the "soft" or "mild" Jesus, as they say. They are thinking, that the feudalistic and aristocratic churches had left the ethical program of Jesus himself; because the bishops, the popes and the inquisitors "have flooded Europe with blood and dead bodies" (F. Voltaire).¹⁾

But some thinkers of the Enlightenment, f.i. Paul Holbach, Claude Helvetius, later Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx can not believe anymore, that the Christian church and other religions are able to learn and to change their doctrines and their behaviour. Therefore, so they are thinking, it would be necessary to bring to end this form and all forms of religion; because they are kinds of illusion, of deception and oppression.²⁾

2. What are the *origins of intolerance* in religions? At first we look to some aspects of cultural anthropology: The early cultures have religions for their clans and tribes; each group has their common ancestors and forefathers, their common Gods, rituals and myths. But these forms of religion have validity only in the group, in the clan, the tribe; not in other groups. There is no claim of monopoly. We can see this in the cultures of hunters and gatherers, of early nomads and peasants.

When the nomads and peasant begin to form bigger groups, tribes and tribe-connections, they have some central myths and rituals. But they do not suppress the religi-

1) K.H. Deschner (Hg.), Das Christentum im Urteil seiner Gegner. München 1986, 68-126.

2) Ders., a.a.O. 126-140, 300-312.

on of the single clans and tribes. They have monopoly of mythology and doctrine, they are believing on many Gods and Godesses.³⁾

We can see this in the Empire of the Babylonians - they respect and support the religion of the captured Jews; also in the Empire of the Persians, the Egyptians; but it is the same in the Indian kingdoms and in Chinese culture. The victors let the losers their religion, their Gods and their rituals. We see this in the Hellenistic Empire of Alexander and his successors, especially in the Roman Empire: All conquered tribes and nations have the right to live their religious convictions. The victors set only a border, if the religious traditions are violating the "good customs" of the Romans, that means the elementary values of society. Therefore sacrifices of men and selfvulneration are forbidden (f.i. the rituals for Cybele).⁴⁾

3. The intolerance of *monotheistic religion*: In some cultures there are "holy people" (priests, prophets, mantics, kings), who make the claim of monopoly in doctrine and ritual. The first time we knew from the king Echnaton in Egypt and his priests, who have proclaimed only one God (Aton). He had forbidden to worship other Gods and Godesses, his priests have destroyed the names of the other Gods. But after the death of the king the monopoly was finished.

In the Jewish culture there are male priests of the God Jahwe, who began to proclaim, that Jahwe is the strongest of all Gods, that he is the only God at all. In their proclamation the other Gods became devils and demons. But it needs a very long time, about 400 and 500 years, until the claim of monopoly can be enforced in the whole people. Some groups are furthermore worshipping other Gods and Godesses.⁵⁾

The Cristians are continuing the Jewish monopoly belief, in a world of many Gods and myths. They say, that Jahwe is the only God over the world, and that Jesus is the only savior of mankind. But some of the Roman philosphers (f.i. Galen, Kelsos, Porphyrios, Symmachus, Julian) ask the Christian teachers, why they are so intolerant and why only the Christians would have salvation. But the Christian teachers are not able to answer.

In the year 380 p.C. Emperor Theodosius I. had finished the Roman tolerance of religions, now only the Cristian belief is tolerated. The Roman Gods nad Godesses are degraded and damned, many temples have been destroyed, some priests have been killed. Now only a Christian believer can get an office in the Empire. Some edicts say, that Nonchristians and Christians with an unorthodox belief (Arians, Donatists) can be exiled in other provinces, that pagans and peasants can be whipped or sent into the mines, that "heretics" can be punished with death penalty.⁶⁾ The Roman tolerance have been finished by the Christian bishops and teachers. Christianization of the Roman Empire was not the result of free conviction, it was the result of power and violence.

3) F.R. Vivelo, Cultural anthropology. New York 1978, 46-87.

4) A. Demandt, Die Spätantike. München 1989, 413-455, C. Schneider, Kulturgeschichte des Hellenismus. München 1969, I. und II.

5) H. Donner, Geschichte des Volkes Israel. I. Göttingen 1984, 72-107.

6) A. Demandt, a.a.O. 437-468.

The same is in the history of Islam, this monopolistic religion was spread with "fire and sword". The old Gods and Goddesses are degraded and damned, their worshippers are threaten with death penalty - many texts in the Koran say this.⁷⁾ So we must conclude: No monotheistic religion is the result of free argumentation and conviction.

4. *Some factors of religious intolerance:*

- a) At first there is a political claim of domination; and this claim gets a religious legitimation. The victors in war and policy say, that their Gods are the stronger and that only they should be worshipped. This is a metaphysical projection and assurance of social domination.
- b) An other factor is the claim of absolutism in the interpretation of world. The monotheistic teachers and the political ideologists are convinced, that only their interpretation of world and life is the right; they cannot bear other doctrines and teachings. So they insist, that only their ideas are allowed, other doctrines are forbidden.⁸⁾
- c) The claim of a secret knowledge is an other factor of intolerance. Some persons say, that only they have a revelation of God, that only they knew the whole truth. As we have seen, in ancient cultures the mantics and schamans do not proclaim this monopoly of revelation.
- d) The dualistic world view is an other factor. In many ancient cultures there are two opposite forces fighting against one another, the forces of light against the forces of darkness. And mankind is involved in this cosmic war. But some cultures say, that the opposite forces (f.i. Yinyin and Yang in China) are complementary and fulfilling one another. This is a not military interpretation of cosmic life.⁹⁾
- e) In the monopolistic religions the holy persons are immune against critical arguments. They have the strongest authority, it is not allowed to criticize these persons. With this tabuistic kind of world interpretation only small learning processes are possible. All the doctrines are fixed, critics risk their life. We can see this in the history of natural science in Europe.
- f) The emotional dynamics of guilt is an other factor of intolerance. The religious teachers have a negative image of themselves and of other people; they say, mankind is bad and living in sin - the so called "original sin" or "hereditary sin". Men should tremble of a divine judgement. The consequence is a culture of guiltiness, connected with a high aggressiveness inside and outside.¹⁰⁾
- g) A patriarchal and androcentric image of God in the monotheistic religions has as consequence strong intolerance. In the male God there are no female patterns; therefore female sex is less worth than male sex. In man dominated cultures we knew some myths of degradation of Goddesses; f.i. Athena in Greek myth or Hewan in Jewish mythology. The only God is a patriarch, an intolerant emperor, a strong judge, the highest warrior. Such image of God is a mirror of a androcentric culture, not more.

7) A. Th. Khoury, Einführung in die Grundlagen des Islam. Graz 1987, 80-97.

8) E. Topitsch und K. Salamun, Ideologie. Herrschaft des Vorurteils. München 1972, 13-68.

9) G. Bekey, Die Welt des Tao. Freiburg 1973, 68-95.

10) E. Jones/H. Gerard, Foundations of social psychology. New York 1967, 507-520. S. Schachter, Emotion, obesity, and crime. New York 1971, 48-60.

5. The model of an *authoritarian religion*: All these factors give us a pattern of a closed and oppressive kind of religion. The Christian religion was formed in a feudalistic culture; bishops, popes and inquisitors claim to have the only truth. They had created the institution of "inquisition" to find out the false believers, the heretics and witches, the "enemies of God". To kill these persons was seen as an act of faith (actus de fidei; in Spain: autodafe). This is part of our history.¹¹⁾

The thinkers of European Enlightenment have finished this cruel institution of inquisition, after a long struggle. But today some thinkers have forgotten this history, when they are arguing against the Enlightenment; f.i. some prophets of a new conservatism and of a postmodern culture.

In a closed and totalitarian system, both in religion and in policy, the individual has only a few worth, it must subordinate under the group and the rulers. There is no right of free thinking and speaking, it is a synchronisation of thinking and valuating. Everybody must be obedient to the authorities, criticism is not possible, a blind faith is necessary. Very often religious systems are connected with political systems, the authoritarian structures are quite the same. Some political ideologies are imitating the religious systems.¹²⁾

6. The model of an open and *human form of religion*: Is such a form possible at all and was it realised somewhere in history? It is orientated on the values of European Enlightenment, on the ideas of humanity for all people, on the rights of men for all, on freedom of conscience, on tolerance of thinking and behaviour. There is no claim of an absolute truth; also religious doctrines are relative and dependent from culture. There is no monopolistic worship, now absolute image of God; the divine world is transcendent for men, the believers cannot know it exactly. "Deus semper maior", as the Romans say. The divine dimension is unrecognizable and unpronounceable - as in the Taoistic religion.

There are many forms of religion and many ways to the divine world, there are many kinds of revelation. All peoples and nations are elected by God, there is not only one "elected people". In every culture the divine dimension is symbolised and expressed in an other form, but it must be the same creator of all men and nations. Therefore the dialogue between the cultures is possible and helpful.¹³⁾

Men and women have the same value before God, every individual has the right to self development. The rights of men are not divisible, but their realisation is not possible in every culture in the same speed of time. The images of God are connected with the experience of caring and loving, of a succeeding life. We can see such forms of religions in beginning f.i. in early Buddhism, in the Taoistic tradition, partly in the early Jesusmovement, as E. Fromm argues.¹⁴⁾

11) R. Rill, Die Inquisition und ihre Ketzer. Linz 1982, 34-54.

12) M. Rokeach, The open and the closed mind. New York 1960, 140-152. Th. W. Adorno, u.a., The authoritarian personality. New York 1960, 140-152. A. Grabner-Haider, Ideologie und Religion. Wien 1981.

13) E. Fromm, Psychoanalyse und Religion. Zürich 1966, 48-78. W. James, The varieties of religious experience. New York 1902, 106-138.

14) E. Fromm, a.a.O. 84-125. A. Adler, Religion und Individualpsychologie. Frankfurt 1975, 69-95. A. Grabner-Haider, Kritische Religionsphilosophie. Graz 1993, 367-406.

7. To *present situation* of religion in Western Europe: We can see some trends, which are overlapping one another.

- a) Many people are leaving their churches, because they cannot believe their doctrines and they cannot follow their moral positions. Some sociologists call this trend the "secularization" of religious contents.
- b) But there is a contrary trend in the same time: many people are looking back to ancient mythology, to the doctrines of ancient cultures and religions. So they are looking to Indian, to China, to Japan, to the old American and African cultures. Some of them are dreaming of a new time for mythology. But it is a selective reception of ancient world views.
- c) An other trend is going to closed and authoritarian form of religion. We have strong fundamentalistic movements (in the USA), traditionalistic mainstreams in the Catholic church, a flood of biblicistic teachings in the Protestant churches. All these movements are struggling against a critical theology and the knowledge of human sciences; they refuse a cognitive and a personal learning in religion.¹⁵⁾
- d) Similarly there are developing many new religious movements and denominations with an authoritarian and totalitarian structure. There are the so called "sects" with a rigid morality and oppressing doctrines. The rulers claim from their followers a blind obedience, they must give up their civil existence and their property. Many of these movements have economical and political interests, they are organizing a concentration of money and capital. We can think of the Mun-Sect or the Scientology-Movement; they use and abuse religion for other purposes.¹⁶⁾
- e) Also the political ideology of the "New Right" (Nouvelle Droite, Alain de Benoist) provide connection with mythological roots. Partly they are relating to Christian fundamentalism; f.i. they say, in the bible there are no human rights - therefore we do not need them in society. Partly they relate to the mythology of ancient European cultures, of the Celts, the Germans, the Slaves. Then they say that the Christian doctrine has been formed by the slaves and it would be the morality of slaves - this is the conviction of F. Nietzsche. The men also rulers ("Herrenmenschen") need a new doctrine of domination.¹⁷⁾
- f) In the Christian churches there is a movement of renewal and revival, primarily on the base. Many people are regretting the old doctrines and values, they are looking for new contents, which are compatible with a scientific view of world and life. So they are selecting their old traditions and experimenting new forms of an open and human religion. Primarily women are engaged in a Feministic theology and spirituality. These movements in the churches are growing up.¹⁸⁾

8. *Conclusions:* What are the sources of religious intolerance? Probably the same as for political and ideological intolerance. Is it possible, that fanatical tendencies are inborn, or are they educated and indoctrinated? Are they the product of social-

15) P.M. Zulehner und H. Denz, *Wie Europa lebt und glaubt*. Düsseldorf 1993, 17-51.

16) F.W. Haack, *Scientology*, München 1993. Ders., *Die Sekten*, München 1986.

17) A. de Benoist, *Aus rechter Sicht I, II*. Tübingen 1978.

18) K. Gabriel, *Christentum zwischen Tradition und Postmoderne*. Freiburg 1992, 177-203.

sation in early life? With a high probability we can say, that the second is the case. Probably nobody is born as a fanatic and authoritarian person, such attitudes are formed by early communication with relating persons and by experience of life.¹⁹⁾ It is partly the cognitive and partly the emotional socialisation, in which patterns of guilt, dynamics of anxiety, negative images of self and others are learned. Also the projection of the own negative qualities to other persons, to so called "enemies", is trained and imitated. An authoritarian form of religion gives the legitimation for intolerance and aggression. The monotheistic religions give the strongest legitimation for fighting against the enemies of God.²⁰⁾

But the revival of ancient and new mythology is ambiguous and ambivalent. Because many of these doctrines have authoritarian structures and oppressive consequences. If we cannot escape the mythological interpretation of world, we can choose, what kind of myth and doctrine we will follow.²¹⁾ In a free and democratic society we have the possibility to choose, therefore we should defend this society.

The best way to do this is, to unfold the critical modes of thinking. Only critical rationality can help us to see the consequences of our religious and political doctrines. Criticising ideologies we should put two basic questions: a) What are the conditions for development of a doctrine? b) And what are the consequences of a doctrine for social life?²²⁾

But we cannot dispose our basic values at our pleasure, as some prophets of a "post-modern culture" say to us. The values of humanity and the human rights we cannot dispose, this would be very dangerous for us. The religious and the political tolerance has a border, if these basic values are violated. Also religion is not free to do everything. In postfascistic societies it is forbidden to revive fascist ideas and doctrines. But it is not forbidden to awaken repressive doctrines of religion. This can become a political problem.

We have not a guarantee, that we can preserve the values of humanity and human rights for all people. For the stronger these values and rights are not insecure. A closed and authoritarian form of religion is a danger for these values and rights. But an open and human form of religion can contribute a lot to preserve these foundations of democratic societies. But as K.R. Popper says, nobody can promote this aim, who undermines the belief on critical rationality.²³⁾ In the Catholic church there is a deep gap between the hierarchical system and the basis of the church. The Polish pope is engaged in a "New-Evangelisation" of Europe, mostly with a feudalistic system of religion. In this system there is no place for the principles of Enlightenment, not for human rights and humanity for all. But it is the basis of the church, which do not follow this conservative program. Many critical Christians of both churches are engaged in an open form of religion and an open society. Also history in religion goes on.

19) R.F. Bales, Interaction process analysis. Cambridge/Mass. 1959. M. Argyle, Social interaction. London 1969, 179-200.

20) H.C. Triandis, Einstellungen und Einstellungsänderungen. Weinheim 1975, 4-12.

21) A. Grabner-Haider, Strukturen des Mythos. Frankfurt 1989.

22) K. Salamun (Hg.), Aufklärungsperspektiven. Tübingen 1989, 133-196.

23) K.R. Popper, Alles Leben ist Problemlösen. München 1994, 239-268.