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JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM IN A UNIVERSALISTIC AND DIALOGICAL INTERPRETATION

I. The similiarity between the three religions

“Universalism” means a philosophical theory which conceives the Being of our space-time-dimensional world as a wholeness and indivisible unity. However, according to our experience, world is not a simple unity, but shows a multiplicity of different and even opposite entities and phenomena, which partially are in harmony, partially in disharmony and struggle with one other. Thus evidently there is not an absolute but only a relative and limited wholeness and unity. Therefore the question arises for the ontological base of the world, which renders the multiplicity and contrariety of entities to a unity of Being, coordinating them to coherence and harmony, at least in a relative sense.

Now, the three - as they are called - “monotheistic religions”: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, offer an answer to this need and question: “This base is the one and only God!” They claim: There must exist a transmaterial spiritual energy, embracing all the matter of world extended in space and time, creating it toward a universal order; and this energy is to be conceived as a personal one, because the universal world-order reveals intelligence and wisdom. This personality of Divinity is not conceived like a human I, but as the ultimate subject of intelligence and wisdom. So, it expresses an utmost goodness and communicability, which challenges an answer of mankind. The transmaterial and in this sense personal energy which we can call “God” ultimately must be understood as an absolute and infinite unity, because it transcends the relative and finite unity and order of the world, being its creative cause and base.

Thus the religious argumentation comes to the result that there is “God” as an absolute, transcendent and personal reality, working immanently in the world, and that there is only one God, because the world order which is one and which is an indivisible wholeness and unity requires accordingly as its base a one and all-ambracing divine unity. This divine

unity, this one and only God, transcends all relative and finite order and unity, thus being in himself an absolute and infinite unity. If there would exist a plurality of Gods, each of them would possess something that the other ones do not have, and so every single one would be limited and none of them really infinite, absolute and divine, responsible for the whole.¹

The original concrete background and starting point of this conception and argumentation concerning the ontological base of Being was the experience of nature in the Near East - the three monotheistic religions originated there -, according to which man and all creatures seem very exposed, weak and almost lost within the immeasurable wide and vast desert; above it sun and sky work as a mighty transcendent power, from which all life on earth receives its Being and its order. Correspondingly the Godhead is conceived first and foremost as a masculine power transcending nature. "God" is seen as an all-mighty man (he is called "Lord" and "Father") who illuminates the mind of men by the supernatural revelation of his word through the "prophets" and establishes order by his law. All of the three monotheistic religions conceive the ontological base of Being as a transcendent masculine God who super-naturally reveals his intentions, gives his law through the word of "prophets", and is ready to receive the answer of mankind.

Thus world evolution is interpreted as the history of the encounter between creator calling and creature answering, may there be a corresponding and responsible answer or not. In case of responsible human answers world develops as an indivisible wholeness in a harmonic and peaceful way, but inasmuch as mankind does not listen to the voice of its creator, its unity and order is disturbed and world falls into disharmony and suffering.

In respect of these basic points the holistic interpretations of world and history given by the three monotheistic religions coincide. Thus these religions on principle can confirm one another and come together in constructing and developing world's unity and peace, led and impelled by their common religious conviction.

II. The difference between the three religions

But in fact in striving after this aim dialogue and cooperation appear very difficult, because the nearer and concreter explications of world's indivisible wholeness and mankind's historical community and unity differ fundamentally, and this difference derives from divergent explications of their ontological base, i.e. of the absolute unity of the divine Being.

For each monotheistic religion conceives the relation of unity to plurality in its own way. In Judaism unity of divine Being could be supposed - but that is not totally evident - to be structured in a plurality of persons; look, for example, at Gen. 1, 26; there, the creator is cited saying: "Let us (!) make man in our image, after our likeness!" Perhaps the word "us" indicates a community and unity of different persons, a divine "we"; or maybe this expression means only a mode of expression, the so-called "pluralis majestatis", and not a real plu-

¹ Cf. already, for example, the ultimately monotheistic argumentation of Aristotle, at the end of the twelfth book of his "Metaphysics".

rality of persons. In any case, the Jewish God does not clearly reveal himself as being an interpersonal process and interaction in himself.

The Christian God, however, does so explicitly. In the divine "Holy Trinity" God-Father enunciates himself in his adequate personal word, it is his son, who expresses perfectly the whole essence and nature of God; he was sent into the world and has become a human individual, Jesus Christ, mankind's brother, who shared human fate including death on the cross. From the mutual love of God-Father and his Son, emanates their common "Spirit" as the third person in the tri-une Divinity, who was diffused into world in order to penetrate it with divine love and - inasmuch as mankind accepts him - to conduce it to a more and more real unity and indivisible wholeness through heart and mind, returning it to deepest participation in infinite divine unity. Thus, divine personality realizes the original meaning of the word "person", which is derived from the latin "personare" and means "to sound through" and to communicate oneself. However, these three divine persons - and this seems very important - are not understood as three different Gods, because in that case each one would have limits against the other ones and none of them would be really unlimited and divine. Instead of this the one and only illimited divine essence exists in three different personal modes which include each other perfectly: the mode of originally reposing in itself, the mode of being totally enuntiated, and the mode of having perfectly returned to itself. Thus, by including this personal plurality, the absolute unity of divine essence and life is able to descend from its super-natural transcendence and to participate immanently in the plurality, contrariety and suffering of material world and mankind.

But in fact this accentuation of plurality within the unity of divine Being by the Christian belief - which originally and by itself signifies a postive openness to the plurality of the world process - in the course of history, at least in the occidental cultural development, also partially was misunderstood and perverted. This led to extreme and negative phenomena, as an absolute pluralism, immanentism and materialism - as can be seen in the religious schisms and wars, in a specific particularism of ideological groups and ultimately of the individual Ego in different forms of Egoentrism and Egoism, or in the idolatry of money and of economic and technical progress.

In an explicit and decided opposition to the Christian threepersonal conception of divine unity with its chances and dangers, but also for a good deal misunderstanding it as a three-theism, Islam conceives the divine unity not only as an essential, but even as a personal unity and oneness, as the unity of only one person: "Allah" expressively does not mean a divine interpersonality, not a community of persons, but only one solitary person.²

² Cf. Der Koran, aus dem Arabischen übertragen von Max Henning, Stuttgart 1962 (Reclam), Sure 4, Vers 169: Glaubet an Allah und seinen Gesandten und sprecht nicht: "Drei"! Steht davon ab, gut ist's Euch. Allah ist nur ein einziger Gott. (Engl. vom Verf.: Belief in Allah and his delegate, and do not say: "three!" Stop with it, it's good for you. Allah is only one single God.) Correspondingly: Sure 5, Vers 77; Sure 6, Vers 101; and especially against the christian belief, that Allah generates a son: Sure 112, esp. Vers 3; and Sure 19, Vers 36 and 91. - Cf. Ludwig Hagemann, Der Kur'an in Verstdnis und Kritik bei Nikolaus v. Kues. Ein Beitrag zur Erhellung islamisch-christlicher Geschichte, Frankfurt/M. 1976, esp. pp. 149-172; and: Thomas v. Aquin, De rationibus fidei. Kommentierte lat.-dt. Textausgabe, von Ludwig Hagemann u. Reinhold Glej, Altenberge 1987, esp. pp. 38-40 (and 141): Here it is pointed out, that the islamic anti-christian polemic is directed against a supposed "three-theism", an understanding of divinity as three Gods; but that signifies a mis-unfderstanding of the intention of christian belief.

Surely the life-dimensions and actualities of cognition and love also according to the Islam essentially belong to God: God's act of Being and life essentially also is an act of cognition and love; but these acts do not originate divine personalities: the act of cognitional self-penetration and self-enunciation in the Logos does not mean a divine second person as "God-Son". Thus, the Logos cannot personally incarnate in the divine-human person Jesus Christ, as the co-essential Thou and partner of God and brother of mankind; it does not incarnate, but it does in-literate: in the Koran, wherein Allah expresses and enunciates his essence and intentions. And correspondingly, from the divine act of love does not emanate a Divine Spirit as a person of his own, donated and diffused into world; nevertheless God unlimitedly has mercy on mankind and feels pity for it. Thus, in spite of all essential differences, there exist also fundamental similarities in the conceptions of the divine unity which can initiate and favorize a creative dialogue.

III. Points of dialogue

In such a dialogue, each part has to ask the other ones some questions; let us propose: 1. the Islamic questions facing the Christian conception, 2. the Christian questions facing the Islamic conception, and 3. the philosophical-universalistic questions facing both conceptions, the Jewish one included.

1. The Islam could ask Christians if they don't stress too much plurality within the ontological base of Being. The Christians may answer that the Islamic criticism on the Christian doctrine of "the one God in three persons" has misunderstood it as a three-theistic position. But Islam could reply, pointing out a contradiction of this theory with the practical comportment of the Christians. Because at least the historical development of the primarily Christian-influenced occidental culture manifests the tendency to direct and disjoin the context of reality scientifically, philosophically, politically, economically into a plurality of autonomous regions, struggling also for extreme individual rights and freedoms - a phenomenon, which shows an absolutely pluralistic and particularistic consciousness, according to which reality never could be founded in an absolute, unlimited unity. Thus, in fact in the base of Being, plurality is stressed, and every unity ultimately negated.

2. On the other hand, Christianity may ask the muslim if they don't stress too much unity. Because if there is no plurality and partnership of persons in the ontological base of Being then all the world by its ontological base does not seem to be disposed to plurality and partnership. And so it suggests itself practically to deduce from the Koran immediately the principles of politics, economics, science, arts and all parts of culture; and it seems difficult to establish and recognize a relative independency and autonomy between religion and politics and the different cultural regions, and finally to acknowledge a contrary individual moral-consciousness and individual rights - a problem which affects also especially the relation between the sexes.

Evaluating the described opposite accesses to reality in the Christian-occidental and the Islamic-oriental culture, one can expect that by their sincere dialogue there will succeed the

theoretical and practical foundation of world and culture as an indivisible wholeness of different entities. Judaism, as we mentioned above, seems to be clearly decided neither for a pluralistic nor a monistic interpretation of the divine base of Being. Therefore Judaism originally has a certain spiritual openness and relationship to both worlds, and perhaps one day will be able to mediate.

3. But there is to emphasize an ultimate, decisive condition for a dialogue on foundation of the unity of the world: The three religions deriving from super-natural revelation must accept to be challenged by philosophical questions, especially by universalistic needs. All of them stress the absolute transcendence of the ontological base of the world, at least in their real life, and that seems to be a onesidedness. As it seems, the base can be neither absolutely transcendent and different from the world, nor absolutely immanent and identical with it. It cannot be absolutely different, because "foundation" implies an intimate unity - in Being and action - of the base and its product. On the other hand, the base cannot be absolutely identical with the world, because the new forms of Being emerging continuously into the evolutionary world cannot come from nothing - and therefore they require a world-transcendent origin, immanently operating. In any case, in the dialogue of the different points of view, philosophical analysis has not to accentuate super-natural and transcendent, but natural and immanent aspects of the base of Being.

Thus in a critical dialogue of the religions, which has to be realized in a philosophical openness, we can hope to fulfill the present needs of life-preservation by mutual complementation of world-cultures. Such a creative peace and cultural integration is the only chance for survival of mankind and life.