

Boisi Center for Religion

In any case, theology, religious studies, and social science draw their consequences out of the new situation of the last decade by coming up with detailed empirical and historical studies concerning the interdependencies of religion and politics world-wide. Thereby, two main approaches of scientific discovery can be distinguished: the first ones take mostly place within social science, especially in regional studies. They discuss the

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To start with the former: What is interesting in Castoriadis' Political Philosophy as it had been mainly conceptualized in his book „The Imaginary Institution of Society“ from 1975⁴ and besides other aspects, is his emphasis on the importance of the dimension of meaning for any adequate understanding of societies in general and politics in special. Societies do

members of a society experience it as more than an accident or a convenience; they experience it as of their human essence. And, inversely, the symbols express that man is fully man by virtue of his participation in a whole which transcends his particular existence¹³. Thereby, his interest is guided by his conviction that only through deep

the political as the basic form of human self-interpretation through discovering an order in reality differed. Like Castoriadis, Voegelin shares the importance of the human capacity to imagine construing a symbolic world-view that helps people to get orientation in their life and for their existence. But for Voegelin already this imaginary competence of man does not result out of a pure/mere projection (or even illusion). Moreover the partial benefits (and their can be no absolute one's as long as history exists) of human imaginary are grounded in reality because it is reality in itself that is – to some extent – symbolic, or more precisely shows an imaginary dimension. “Imagination, as a structure in the process of a reality that moves toward its truth, belongs both to human consciousness in its bodily location and to the reality that comprehends bodily located man as a partner in the community of being. There is no truth symbolized without man's imaginative power to find the symbols that will express his response to the appeal of reality”¹⁵

Again, the similarities between Voegelin and Castoriadis should not disguise us that their conceptions are based on completely different methodologies and theoretical impacts. Though both thinkers understand human history as the crucial medium in which human beings and societies asks for (ultimate) meaning and represent them by institutional

Axial Age is simply the name for the period in human history that obviously has influenced the following centuries most extensively by challenging the old symbiotic order of divine (transcendent) and mundane (immanent) reality, especially when it comes to questions of political power and leadership.

However skeptically Voegelin remained towards the Axial-Age-Theory in general and towards Jasper's version in special, he nevertheless accepted that during this time between 800 and 200 BCE in Old Israel and Greece, in China and India (and perhaps as well in Persia) a radical and important breakthrough has happened by the emergence of new forms of symbolism using first time in human history universal categories (like humanity, humankind etc.) and by imagining new models of a universal, moral order inspired by transcendental or transcendent visions/images/imaginings of the „Good“, that almost always were visualized by “God” or “gods“. Voegelin speaks of „multiple and parallel leaps in being“¹⁶ (“*Seinsprung*”). The meaning of human existence, the meaning of political power and of human action, was from then on conceptualized through religious symbolisms that focus on real tensions that lie in the heart of the relation between God and King, God and man, the divine and the mundane reality.¹⁷ By interpreting social order radically through the perspective of a divine and universal (all-encompassing) counter-reality the former sanctified traditional order got into question and was often transformed. Therein, one very basic reason can be recognized why all so-called world-religions tend to act offensively in political affairs, as the subtitle of my talk

Religions. The limitations of my argumentation are quite obvious: I only have treated to political theorist, Voegelin and Castoriadis, who are not very prominent in the current debate on the problem of the „Theological-Political“, to mention at least one other thinker would be necessary to discuss, namely Leo Strauss¹⁸. Of course, there are some good reasons for my selective approach, not only because of our strict time schedule. One of them results from the fact that contemporary Political Philosophy often take for granted the only way out of political problems with religions would be to stress on the “true” secular nature of politics. In consequence, one often easily underestimates or even completely ignores the symbolic and imaginary dimensions of politics. This is why I have concentrated my argumenation so much on the concepts of Voegelin and Castoriadis. Compared with this my own imbalance much more lies in excluding the question of discursive power of politics that shapes both: language and action, *legein* and *teukein*. Thus, a critical genealogy of symbolic pattern of religious and political vocabularies could help to disclose/uncover/reveal the hidden and implicit mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion within the institutions of social imaginaries and world-views through which every society is constituted in their everyday ritual practices as well as in their organisations and institutions of economy, bureaucracy, arts etc. Especially for Axial-traditions with their emphasis on moral universalism this point – the question of inclusion and exclusion – calls for higher attention and care. For any further work on this topic in my view central insights were already given by the writings of Michel Foucault.¹⁹ (By

¹⁸ Cf. H. Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, Cambridge Univ. Press: New York 2006.

¹⁹ Cf. M. Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, Random House: New York, 1972, as well as: *Power. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault Vol. 3*, New Press: New York 2001.

that the late Foucault has focused his considerations very much on a concept of self-

which is so central for the sphere of religion, our discussion may be endless but more or less fruitless when it comes to their output/results.

On contrary my argument for a Political Ethics of World Religions that is sensitive to both, cultural contexts and human history, refers to a hermeneutic of the foreign and follows an option of – what Michael Walzer once called – an „iterative universalism.“²²

For Christianity, to come at least in the very end to my own profession as a Systematic Theologian, one crucial task would be to ask what is really meant in the Apostle's Creed when „power“ is only twice predicated of God, namely of God as the Creator and of God as the last Judge, both in combination with the symbol of the Father. And what consequences lie in that concept of divine power when it comes to human empowerment in being responsible towards Creation; and finally, why is it then that in the most serious situations of life the ideal of Christian existences calls for an attitude of radical detachment and self-sacrifice (cf. Phil 2: 5-11). The challenges for Christian Ethics that is neither naive nor simplistic, but keeps its eyes open to real politics – in my view – are enormous and – sorry for that – not even approximatively considered yet.

²² Cf. Michael Walzer, Two kinds of Universalism