

## **Die erwählte Völkerwelt und ihre gewählten Regierungen - theologische Reflexionen zu Nationalstaat und Demokratie**

Chosen World of Nations and their Elected Governments –

Theological Reflections about a National State and Democracy

*„Only Messiah will complete all historical events... That's why no history is able to relate itself to messianic.“*

*Walter Benjamin: Theologisch-philosophisches Fragment, Ges. Schriften 2, p. 203*

### **Introductory remarks**

There is hardly any subject, that is more complex than the question of the relations between religion and society, nation, politics, state and values<sup>1</sup>. There is an enormously great number of publications about it. Just as complex is the concrete challenge, which Latvia and his churches are faced with. You can approach the topic in different ways. I will to speak from the theological (systematic) point of view and put it up for discussion.

I want to start with a note about “civil religion”<sup>2</sup>. This concept shows, that there is an impressive bandwidth of phenomena between the teaching of a church or religious society and ruling state, which seem to be religious: meanings about the essence of life, values, rites and deeper motives for political actions.

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1 You can find a quick overview to actual discussion in the book „Wieviel Religion braucht Deutschland“ of Rolf Schieder, Frankfurt 2001.

2 Compare comments about Bellah in Schieder in reference as above and Francis Fiorenza: Religion und Politik, in: Christlicher Glaube in moderner Gesellschaft Band 27, Freiburg, Basel, Wien 1982 pp. 59-101

For Rosseau it was still a phenomenon, that could be generalized. Now it is a wide spectrum, you can not reduce it on a single denominator. However the word helps to show, that “religion” is not just a marginal phenomenon in a private or cultic corner of life.

From the point of view of pluralistic society churches are parts of different religious statements, languages and events.

The churches by themselves of course have each a universal point of view and do not feel like part of a general. They see themselves able to cover the religious side of life completely. Generally they see other denominations as something, that is not necessary<sup>3</sup>, but they tolerate them and are ready for dialogue.

Karl Barth adopted a special and well known position, he countered christian faith with religion. He gave the definition, that religion is a human action like natural theology and not the revelation of God. That’s why Christianity has the function of enlightenment and there is no need for religion therefore. Religion is in his interpretation a helpless, even a sinful attempt to be like God. If we ignore that last argument<sup>4</sup>, we have to agree with Karl Barth in that point, that Judaism and Christianity largely disenchant the world through of their strict distinction of God and creation<sup>5</sup>.

Now we see that it is not so easy to live in a enchanted world. It seems to be, that we need a quasi-religious dimension, but not in the sense, to have the wish to be like God. We need symbols, common holidays and so on.

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3 An exception for churches is Judaism, and in other way the pluralism of ecumenism, so far in the eyes of some denominations.

4 It is connected with the special definition of sin at Barth.

5 It is a common, but not undisputed opinion, that enlightenment and natural science are a result of Judaism and Christianity, although natural sciences temporally felt themselves as enemies of there religious sources.

The dispute of Augustine and Varro was discussed by R. Schieder<sup>6</sup>.

Varro distinguished three kinds of religion: narrative, reflecting and civil theology (religion), which was necessary for state cults. Augustine was of the the opinion, that reflecting theology is the only one, we need for church. Therefore he entirely handed over civil religion and mythology to secularisation. And we can not differ the state from a band of thieves, if he deceived or had a lack of justice. With other words: Theology is not longer a foundation for legitimation like in pagan ancient times. The measure of state is ethics.

The churches should not abet the state with myths or disguise politics with pious arguments. Also churches should be fully open for everyone in public for questions and critical researches. From this point of view churches would not be an element of civil religion, that would abet or endanger the state as a sanctifying or damning religion. The churches would be at one with the front of enlightenment.

I gave my speech a title, which corresponds with the theology of Church Fathers: Chosen world of nations. The Great Commission demands, that we “teach the nations” and to be learning people. This was understood in Early Christianity in the context of Jewish promise of the pilgrimage of nations, the prophets spoke about. It began with Jesus Christ. God’s choice was at first Jacob Israel, but since Jesus Christ it came to all nations. It means, the choice of God is from this point on not a segregation, but destination and task of mankind. God’s choice changed into general mandate and promise of salvation.

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6 Schieder pp. 82ff. cf. more detailed also F. Fiorenza like above p.64-69

## Choice and elections

History, which guided us into democracy<sup>7</sup> always knew elections. These elections had the conditions, that only some predicted people had voting rights and eligibility. The conditions were for a long bound to hierarchical societies. Nobility, patrician, certain families of Lords, every time it was a question of birth, which decided, what kind of chances or duty a single person had to rule or to obey. The first radical change of this hierarchical order was the “revolution of the Pope”<sup>8</sup>. The Emperor, and along with him the whole secular pyramid was faced with an opponent of a particular type. Religion made itself to a counterpart of state.

At least we got the general citizenship for everyone. But also for that we had conditions of birth, - like for nationality. The closed nation-state was the embodiment of the early modern era democracies<sup>9</sup>. Nobility based on birth had still interpreted the right and mandate to rule as God’s choice. But now a self esteem of a nation as a society of citizens started to develop, although often only as a civil religious symbolic self esteem. So we have the question: Has an elected citizen the same mandate like a man, chosen by God? Is God giving the right to rule others? One of the answers was the idea of a right, good or quasi-divine system of authority in front of God or history.

For this relation was the understanding of Rom 13 of course important. In Churches it was normal already for long time to elect people for church

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<sup>7</sup> Democracy in the sense of ancient era is not the same like our democracy.

<sup>8</sup> Compare E. Rosenstock-Huessy: Die europäischen Revolutionen, Stuttgart, Köln 1951, 2. edition pp. 131 ff., or also Walter Hartmann: Reich Gottes in Kontexte 4, Stuttgart 1967 pp. 42-50

<sup>9</sup> Also U.S. as a country of immigrants is a „nation“ with this pattern, like the funny discussion about president Obama showed, as they said he was not born in U.S. There are two patterns of nation - state: one of language and culture and the other with citizenship, like in U.S. And now more and more in Europe. The last big and fundamental barriers to overcome suspension of the participation in democracy was the emancipation of woman and her eligibility after liquidation of Jewish Ghettos and slavery.

ministries along with introduction from above.

In fact the Churches assessed the elections also in ordination as a choice of God, but leastwise his function as a serious and special task in responsibility in front of God. Hence it is normal also for government offices to give oath not only to electorates, but also in conscience and in front of God along with law and society as a whole. But also orders of function, competences, constitutions and laws are elected and decided by people and not by revelation of God. In the past peace contracts were written in the name of the Triune God, now we say: “on behalf of the people” or a sovereign state or other.

International law and universal human rights received a quasi-religious highest authority. This is not for granted, as we may think in the Western World. This is evident, when we look at about the Islamic declaration of Cairo, the statement of the Russian Orthodox Church about universal human rights or the reservation of the Peoples Republic of China concerning this. In the Western World the big denominations say, that universal human rights are an appropriate interpretation of the revelation of God.

As taught in Judaism, that the moralistic (second) part of the commandments is valid for all nations, it is common sense for Christians our days: the universal human rights can and shall be demanded for all people, also if they are not Christians, Jews or people from Western Europe, America or Australia. We demand it for the people and not against them. We are fighting only against some rights, if they diminish rights of others or substantiate repression of other people. That is why nobody sees a reason to restrict the universal human rights.

We see ourselves as advocates of the right of all people and we think, Judaism, Christianity and general enlightenment confirm and empower us to do so. This also means, that we have the duty for democratic elections and order. So the circle closes.

It means, no one nation or state, institution or person has an exclusive right, that would be eternal or unlimited, also not the ministry of a pastor or bishop. Election in the sense of democracy is not directed to a person, but the person is permitted to act in an order and to take tasks in a certain time and on a limited scale. An election is the peoples choice, and it is the duty of the people to find a proper person, who can take on these tasks. This is a fundamental difference to God's choice. We are all standing equally in God's choice<sup>10</sup>, there is nobody higher or greater than another. God's choice, our destination, gives us the duty to, in our different functions during our lifetime, do our best in our ways<sup>11</sup>.

## **Church, state and culture**

A normal German citizen would rub his eyes in disbelief to see in the German „Staatslexikon“, how large the space in it is about Church and canon law. It does not correspond to the daily experience. Although also in former East Germany are present in daily and public life, but in general the Churches are not so important for people, one look into the public media shows this. But we have a history, and it was absolutely different. A protestant duke was a lay-bishop of his country. Emperors could fail, if the

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<sup>10</sup> Compare „The Great Theatre of the World“ of Calderon.

<sup>11</sup> The function of a minister in a congregation is a clear example, because he is elected at one side, on the other side he encounters his congregation independent with Gods Word.

did not understand to cooperate with the pope.

Even as Napoleon crowned himself, the Pope was beside him.

Today we have massive restrictions on both sides or poles of the society. Not only the Churches are nowadays sometimes like niche societies, also the state is not the same. The Church has lost many “children” during secularisation, and the state is more or less an institution only to fulfil certain functions. It has to restrict its activities in many areas by definition. State is not any more the absolute power or authority, it has to give and guaranty freedom also from itself to media, universities and art. The state is also partitioned in executive, legislative, administrative litigation and departments, who also have to work independent from each other. For a long time already it is not the main constellation of Church and state any more, that is constitutive for society.

What relationship do Churches, congregations, Christians, liturgy and preaching have to public society as media, art, communities, social institutions, schools, theatre, film, literature, science and philosophy? The relationship between state and churches or political parties is only one dimension among others. A Church can have good contracts with the government, much more important are its relations with other public institutions, confessions, religions and aspects of private and public life.

Church set free a lot since middle ages: university, art, theatre, music, but also media, the critical counterpart of state. They are all independent now by definition. Every time one of them becomes dependent, for instants, on a party or state it is a danger for society. Totalitarian times taught us, how important these freedoms are.

This way the Church has gained its own freedom and independence. The loss of public relevance is only seemingly. We have all possibilities to express ourselves. But we are in temptation to withdraw ourselves into a comfortable and harmless insignificance.

Church is living at a watershed. God set us free with the eschatology and the messianic from the illusion to arrange salvation. This is not possible for states and society, and it is the task for churches to make this clear through its existence as a church. To say it like St. Augustine in a paradox way: If the state does not want to offer the last and highest justice, it can avoid to be a band of criminals, because it is willing to take without fear mercilessly criticism from different sides. This criticism confirms, corrects and carry the state. It is only the task of the state, to guarantee limited peace and luck, not salvation. It has only to promise, what it can fulfil. The game of politics is, never to try to be perfect, to be ready to go every time and to be improved.

### **Israel and the nations**

God had chosen Israel according to the Old Testament, it means not a class of priests or something we could compare to what, we call Church today as a part of a society. Israel had (or has) a prophetic task in the world not only in messianic time, like we can read in the book of Jonah, who had to preach to pagans in Nineveh. So the service at the temple in Jerusalem also had the function towards all nations, as they should come to Zion in the days of the Messiah. This pilgrimage of nations is the subject of the Great



Commission in Mat 28.

We can not find our God's choice in a special class of clergy or very pious people in special representative functions of monasteries or congregations, a church as a institution or preacher. But all Christians should worship, - on Sunday with Word and sacrament and in public life in all aspects of human life. There are no advantages for any nations. This kind of God's choice is not a selection. God turned to all nations in Christ. And because there is no perfect salvation for individuals on earth, it is also a rough misunderstanding of fundamentalists, who have the speculative wish, to bring Christianity also to the last nation to fulfil God's will. We can not save something in the sense of the history of salvation. God not want to be reliant on people.

According to the objection of W. Benjamin we have to define the relationship of salvation and our earthly tasks, respectively the chance of Metanoia, the renewal of our thinking and living. That we can not relate our history to the Messiah does not mean, that our believe would be without consequences for world and life. The directions are opposite, W. Benjamin compares it with the flight of an arrow. The goal of longing for happiness is something in earthly life. The Kingdom of God is also a "silent approach" and both are moving towards the future, but to a different kind of future. The seed of the Kingdom of God is laid in the soil of created life. The Messianic is related to the earthly.

As Jesus cured and forgave sins, we can try to make it better in our imitatio Christi ("Nachfolge") and forgive the debts of our neighbours. Love is one of the most important aspects of churches, because that is where heaven and earth seem to touch already.

There are different reasons for the need of “religion”. One reason is the ability of religion to connect, to build and confirm relationships. It is symbolic, needs recognizable rites and beauty, but this does not mean to withdraw from critical reflection. Church is a religion of revelation, not occultism<sup>12</sup>. Church needs religion especially for the direct relationship to God in faith, but also for the whole complex of reconciliation. “Religion” is only one aspect of Christianity and church among many. We should not let ourselves be reduced to be only a religion, like Judaism is more than the life in the Synagogue. Or to say it (as Christians) like W. Benjamin: We don’t relate ourself to Christ, but God shapes our history with his Word and Sacrament by promising redemption, we can’t get by ourself. God redeems, but it is nothing, that happens during our time. History of salvation (“Heilsgeschichte”) is not an increase of salvation but approximation of it. Only God is the cause of salvation. We can see God only in faith and through the human Jesus Christ during our lifetime. All history is secularized and “Heilsgeschichte” in the same moment.

### **The Task of Church in human history**

What is the public task of Church? It should “teach” the peoples, to understand and keep the commandments of Christ. I think, we forgot to realize the revolutionary character of this task. This means that there is something, what all nations comprehend, people of different generations and cultures, but not in sense of a whole and its parts, but in sense of dialogue and discourse. We should love our enemies. The Great

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Octavio Paz: Essays 2, „Die dichterische Interpretation“ Frankfurt 1980 pp. 9-42

Commission implies an ethic, nobody can and is allowed to withdraw. “One” ethic does not mean standardised ethic with eternal character. It means, that all people are related to each other. Every one can be my neighbour and I am commanded to love him. There is no principal restriction in responsibility.

Church looks forward to the “Lord” of all people, that is messianic, christian. In this relationship to Christ, who will come (and we can not attract him) we say: Nothing is eternal on earth, no rule, also no casuistry of God’s commandments. We translate or confront the rules of the Kingdom of God in our world of cultures. We bring it into our times and withdraw the eternity from it in this way. Because of that they will not be wrong, but they lose their eternity. We have to take it from the source of revelation every time anew for each nation, generation, for each day in my life. That is why we need a “liturgy” as a service to God’s creation and as a perception of the work of God that is serving us.

Church offers this place of reception in public as a confrontation with the Kingdom of God. With this it is demonstrated that no kingdom on earth is eternal and absolutely binding.

And at last the third area of the duties of churches: forgiveness and church discipline. This area is a special topic in Lutheran reflection.

First step of this own activity of churches is the question of sin and guilt. This is not only about ourselves. We ask for forgiveness not only for our own salvation, but also for reconciliation. The measure of this knowledge is justice and love. Sin, transgression of God’s commandments, is not a measure for all people, like legislatives do with laws. It is the reason, that churches are not good for authoring “values”. Sin belongs to the

relationship between God and the human, not in general but face to face. That is why it is the wrong way if people ask about more or less sins, consider the balance between them and the ask about number of “sins”. God, enforces commandments and responsibility, has expectations, that we can recognize, how we can to do better (“Buße” - repentance; the German word has the word stem of “better”). God does not brand us guilty so that we accept us as evil and failures. This is not the game of our faith: we have to be desperate, so that we will be longing for redemption. God wants to show us ways to make it better, to do right and let the will of God be done. To be hallowed his name is the opposite of sin, but not to fulfil the law with the help of works of mercy. Nobody could do that. God wants to liberate us. He does not charge our sin, absolution is a part of our way to the Kingdom of God, not already a part of Last Judgement, but promised salvation and anticipation of it. The aim of repentance and absolution are our liberation, But this liberation is not only for comfort, it is a preparation to do better in life. The aim is to be a better human, not to escape from the world and a difficult life.

The next task of Church is to live in hope. My life will end in a grave, they are wars and unpunished crimes, but God can bring us salvation with his New Creation. It is our task to demonstrate this hope.

So we have four mandates as Christians and Church:

- seek more justice together with all people,
- teach all peoples with all their differences to get in good relationship to each other
- guide people to Metanoia with the help of Gods offer of forgiving
- preach the Kingdom of God as a promise

All these points we see in Holy Supper. Totally unknown people share bread with each other and are together as an image of coming reconciliation and forgiveness, not like in a game, but real.

Church is according to that not a private matter, hobby of soul or institution for private redemption. God is not interested in a club of redeemed servants, who give honour to him in contrast to unbelievers and who are ready to trust him. The will of God is to redeem all people and not to hive off the best from corrupt mankind as saints.

### **How state and society should handle Church and religions**

If churches would act as I said they should, no state of the world, who is willing to endeavour justice, peace and freedom should have a problem with it. But politicians and officials are not as altruistically as they should be. Also parliaments have to be controlled by constitutional and administrative courts.

About handling the three abrahamitic religions we can refer to what W. Ullmann said about “left” terrorism: we can criticize them with the help of their own conditions and aims. Concerning the task of bringing peoples together with good relationship towards one another W. Ullmann saw “the Jewish Question” as a test question<sup>13</sup>.

About other religions we have to say, that the word “religion” can not really comprise abrahamitic religions and for instant Hinduism or anthroposophy.

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13 W. Ullmann: Demokratie – jetzt oder nie! Perspektiven der Gerechtigkeit, München 1990 pp. 96ff.

So we have no reason from the point of view of the churches to think about it in another way than general commitment, that all people are free to believe, think and say what they want to, and have their rites. It is worrying, when denominations diminish under the cover of “religion” rights of individuals and mislead people. Protection rights churches have can change into instruments against human rights. If this happens, society or state has to work against “religion” in the name of human dignity and freedom. This is important especially in relation to different kinds of fundamentalism, also in Church and Judaism. There is no excuse for obstruction of enlightenment, it is not allowed to avoid human rights with the argument of freedom and granting human rights for others.

„Ein Staat kann erst dann für sich in Anspruch nehmen, die moralisch fällige Emanzipation vollzogen zu haben, wenn er sich von allen Resten einer Geschichte emanzipiert hat, in der es für erlaubt galt, die Kriterien und Forderungen der Menschenwürde außer Kraft zu setzen, sei es durch physischen, psychischen oder gesellschaftlichen Druck.“<sup>14</sup> - “A state can only claim to grant the morally necessary emancipation, if it emancipated itself from all relics of that history, which allowed to suspend criteria and demands of human dignity through physical, psychic or public pressure.” It is theologaly and politically very suspicious, if one tries to authorise political acting with God or religion. Christian ethic does not have to rely on the argument, that God said something about it. The main commandment is love: all its ethics are based on justice and welfare of people anyways. We can learn in contrary, God’s Word and command accord and exceed this measure.

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14 W. Ullmann ibidem p. 101

Of course we know, how people as Christians argued in Orient and Occident with the name of God against other, and that more and more churches abstain from it now.

It belongs to the division of public functions, that state and church do not instrumentalize each other. They can and have to criticise each other. Criticise does not mean to judge, but to find their positions opposite to each other. An important difference of all different public institutions including politics and Church as the place of worship is, that all public institutions are temporary phenomena. This is not a lack, but their character as a part of creation. The invisible appears in visible, like Hebrew 11,3 says, but then it is a part of visible things and temporary, depending on decisions and situations. This is the reason, that all these institutions and people need a counterpart. A human can not go to the Archimedean point outside of the world. If he thinks, he could with the help of rites, laws or values catch eternity into his time, he overestimates himself. We may need eternity to accept the temporary as being just temporary. But eternity does not need ephemeral. When the state criticizes and governs Church, it is their secular side. In the time of Reformation discerned between “circa” and “in sacra”. The churches as institutions and with their clergy are secular. A minister wears his white robe during worship and not on the street.

Gerhard Ebeling pointed out, that salvation is something that people cannot succeed in. But Church is the place of preaching it and its concrete place of the promise of it.<sup>15</sup>

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15 Gerhard Ebeling: Das Verständnis von Heil in säkularisierter Zeit, in: Kontexte, Stuttgart 1967 pp. 5-14

God opposes salvation as the realizable and predictable. It takes effort by encouragement and that we do not need to have fear death, princes or the devil. Preaching is another thing than to have social Utopia and ideals, which all have a limited time like every thing human. So it is similar to Walter Benjamin<sup>16</sup>, who said, that the messianic and desire of happiness are opposed to one another. Happiness and the profane are destined to fall at last. It is directed to man in his concrete existence. Salvation orients us to God and eternity. Both directions correspond with another and enhance each other. The promise of salvation shows to the profane, what is impossible to fulfil on earth. Salvation outlines and characterize imperfection of all terrestrial and transitory in this way and shows its permanent possibility of improvement. There are no “eternal values”, but the redeemed human. We can understand it with at the example of love, which is strong as death as we all know. Love knows, that the other is never disposable, calculable and to plan. At this point we could think about the philosophy of E. Levinas, which is rooted deeply in Judaism. Love is not an ideal, but a promise, which never can find fulfilment in actual matter of facts, it is immense in its profoundness. In love each moment points beyond itself. An ideal knows casuistry and reifications. Love is every time different and does not know a measure. It is not transitory happiness and that is why also an image of God, of salvation for God is love. He is love, but not as an idea. Love is not excessive demand, because it does not know a certain measure. It demands openness, that is not every time only beautiful, nice and comfortable.

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16 Walter Benjamin *ibidem* pp. 132f.



Church should not be confined, to improve something as an offer at the marketplace of good possibilities among many other. It is a concrete place of the promise of salvation, as Ebeling wrote. It has to make salvation clear, that differs from happiness, but related to it. Eschatological salvation is something, that people can not do. It will not be disproved by death and teaches us to discern possibility from impossibility, as Ebeling said<sup>17</sup>. In this way eschatology enables us to be very realistic. In other case we are tempted, to magnify us with civil religion, to sacrifice peoples life with plans or theories and for example to think, that a nation would be a kind of higher reality or more valuable as an individual.

Our faith teaches us to see God as a person and not as an abstract absolute or something that encompasses the Being. Faith is personal also because it sees man and woman as an image of God. They will be redeemed, but cultures, nations and institutions will not be. This is the root of our theological argument of inviolable human dignity as the highest value. It is not allowed to abrogate human dignity with logical, reasonable and useful arguments. In practice rights will be diminished or relativised, but it should be clear always, that it will never be good in cause of good reasons. It is the mandate to make it clear in Synagogue and Church as places of promise in opposite to the society.<sup>18</sup>

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17 *ibidem* pp. 13f.

18 Cf. Ebeling p. 10: Die Kirchen „haben den Charakter einer allgemeinen anerkannten Heilspräsenz inmitten der Welt eingebüßt. Sie sind – im Urteil der säkularisierten Öffentlichkeit, aber auch weithin der praktizierenden Christen – Bezugsquellen für privaten Medikamentenbedarf und stehen so grundsätzlich in einer Linie mit der ganzen Skala ernstzunehmender oder auch fraglicher Heilmittel für den Existenzkampf. Die Pluralität der Heilmittel hat nichts zu tun mit einer Erwartung *des* Heils. Es gehört zu den weitverbreiteten Selbstverständlichkeiten unserer Zeit, dass es mit *dem* Heil nichts ist, dass Ende und Heil nicht auf einen Nenner zu bringen sind.“

## **About the actual situation in Latvia**

Latvia at the Eastern border of the E.U. and as a former part of S.U. is in a special situation for different reason. It is necessary to reflect the own history in the light of the experiences of other countries and peoples<sup>19</sup>. After decades of isolation from the free part of the world and dictatorship of a atheistic party it is not so easy to assert oneself. It is too easy to say, this was only a “Russian time”. The rapid development of great nations is not willing to give too much time to small countries like Latvia to reflect their own history. On the other hand it is clear, how much the people suffered exactly that, what was typical for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After all the Baltic States have been a part of S.U. and have more Russians in their countries than others, over one million. So it could be the best place to speak about Soviet time, which is not welcomed in Russia itself.

Not only the churches have to develop anew. Now we have very strong and also painful changes in politics and society. After isolation and blocking of free development we have a flood of information in the country and the pressure to change a lot in different areas at same time. We have a very weak tradition of democracy in the country and free civil society. Democracy is not a system that you could introduce like a law or program. It is, like W. Ullmann wrote, an avoidance of what has proven not to be responsible and to do it better. In practice we see also the opposite of such learning from mistakes. We have an intolerable quantity of corruption, lack of good political programs and only very little social

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<sup>19</sup> It would be ignorant and arrogant, not to listen to the experiences other countries and churches and their discourses about it. It would be not responsible, because it would be very probable to fall in similar mistakes.

responsibility.

Nationalities are more in opposition to each other than in the process of developing a common sense. Only a small part of society has knowledge about churches and what they could or should be in our time and situation. From outside the religious groups nearly all look like “conservative”, non-flexible. The truth is the matter, that they are in a hard process of transformation. One could think, it is a sign of big insecurity, and may be its true<sup>20</sup>. The church seminaries of different denominations have a much too short time for education. The Latvian theological book market is poor. The contemporary history has the well known problem, that the problems are still burning in people, it is difficult to speak about them in public. This concerns also the question of believing. What happened with the traditional faith of peoples during Soviet time? There are generations, who had no religious education. We still have some patterns of Soviet understanding of law in State-Church-law. The level of religious education of the most people is low, not to compare with 700 – 1000 hours for a child in Germany during school time. Some churches are full of people on the other hand. There is not enough open discourse about questions of faith in public, but a lot of religious instructions from above and a splendid hierarchy in Lutheran or Orthodox Church.

We have to bear in mind, that S.U. had more than other countries a civil religion as a programmed atheism with a lot of quasi-religious and empty affections. Many questions of people from catholic Latgalia, Orthodox Russia or Lutheran Kurzeme and Vidzeme about “their” traditional confessions remain open, because the congregations and their clergy are

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<sup>20</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia tended from influences of Scandinavian Lutheran Church to Missouri Synod and finally to High Church according to the „Hochkirchliche Vereinigung“ in last years. Relationship to Latvian Church in Exile and to EKD wavers between friendship and tension.

overstrained.

It is easy to maintain a tradition, but very difficult to find answers for people without that tradition. The churches have to give reason for too much in same moment. It seems to be easier to give very simple answers with the pater: it is so. Like I said. Don't ask too much and don't go too deep into the discourse.

The big shock of Soviet history<sup>21</sup> will not be overcome within the couple of next years. So the temptation is reasonable, to make it "right" with strictness. The questions of people are not only about, what is right or wrong in dogmatics; if we should have woman ordination; how Christians have to think about Jews and if homosexuality is really the heaviest sin or how to speak politically correct about Jew-murdering. The questioners do not want to have a single answer, they have to have a long and open discourse in public<sup>22</sup>. This is necessary for democracy, which does not want to have one correct meaning, but a common responsibility also about their religions. To teach the peoples means to dare an open discourse without the fear of being wrong.

This is the first task for churches in Latvia now in relation to the society, to look forward for as much as possible enlightenment. Democracy has to overcome the lack of responsibility also in relation to questions of believe. It is necessary to get confidence. We learned, that this is one of the critical points of the actual crisis of economy and politics.

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21 For the purpose of a serious research is it not helpful to categorize the Soviet time in Latvia only as a Russian occupation, so much it is correct. In this way all behaviour of society would be only a question of collaboration or nationalism. But it was a really time of eastern socialism, we should serious think about it, that the people have a chance to overcome the consequences.

22 In matter of fact majority of Lutheran pastors not long time ago voted in favour to change the Church constitution, that there will be no the possibility for woman ordination in that way, that there should not be an open discourse about it. The silent majority of the synod should decide this matter.

Such as important is increasing of responsibility in general, also in relation to groups of society, which belong not to my friends and nation. It is in my opinion a disaster, that we do not have large charitable church-institutions in Latvia, working with the principle of subsidiarity<sup>23</sup>. This is a point, where churches could demonstrate impressively to the society, what kind of power they have and what they can say in word and deed.

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<sup>23</sup> Sicher gibt es in anderen Ländern auch ganz andere Modelle der Sozialarbeit, aber Lettland befindet sich zum einen in deutscher Rechtstradition, und zum anderen ist das kommunale und staatliche Sozialwesen völlig unzureichend und verlangt dringend nach tragenden Ideen und gemeinnütziger Motivation.