

## A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL OF PLURALISM

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"Religo", one of the Latin words from which the English word "religion" is derived, means "to rebind", "to bind together." Throughout history, one of the typical functions of religion has been to unify, to bind peoples, cultures, civilizations together. Numerous wars have been fought and atrocities committed to bind "the other" to the norms and frames of reference of one's group.

If one of the traditional functions of religion has been unitive, to bind together, what is the role of religion in newly pluralistic societies? Attempting to wrestle with this question, I present, in the first section, a North American model, that of process-relational thought, with the work of John B. Cobb, JR. and Henry James Young serving as examples, that has illuminative potential for the current situation in my native Hungary, the Eastern European county with which I am most familiar. In no way do I mean to carry this out in an imperialistic or hegemonistic way, suggesting that Hungary's problems would be "fixed" by adopting a North American philosophy or ways. On the contrary, if process thought can be appropriated, this needs to be done in a uniquely Hungarian way relevant to the contemporary historical context.

The converse is no less true: there is much that North Americans can learn from the infant Hungarian democracy as it seeks to grow to maturity. The second section deals with this issue, first by describing the notion of a "usable past", utilized by feminist, African American, and Third World theologians of liberation. There is much in the history of Hungary, replete with struggles for national independence and the extension of freedom to larger numbers of people, at least a modicum of democracy. The Revolution of 1703-1711 under the leadership of Ferenc Rakoczi serves as an example. I shall claim that while Hungary has all too ambiguous a religious history, with the hierarchy all too often forming an "unholy alliance" with the upper nobility, of which it was a part, in opposing aspirations for national independence and liberation from poverty and oppression. On the other hand, struggles for national independence and democracy, such as that of 1703-1711, were inspired by popular piety, often fueled by Franciscans and Roman Catholic and Reformed clergy who lived among the serfs. The recovery of this "usable past," without romanticizing it, has much to teach about the role of religion in newly pluralistic societies.

In the conclusion, I suggest briefly what Hungarians may learn from North American process philosophy and explore the unique opportunity Hungary has to present an alternative model of democracy that preserves the positive aspects of the heritage of the Enlightenment without its devastating consequences.

### I.

The paradigm for the treatment of pluralism by process-relational thought, which is pluralistic itself, is the momentary experience. A momentary experiencing self-creative subject constitutes itself as it appropriates, internalizes, "prehends" data from the past (which includes the soci-politico systems, the cultures and sub-cultures, the families, etcl of which we are a part and are a part of us; in fact, the past experiečne is self-creative; it is free as to how it pretends, synthesizes creatively data from the past and as to how it actualizes the potentialities of the

future.

Process thought attempts to overcome the traditional subject-object dualism with its doctrine of internal relations. The momentary experiencing self-creative subject is internally related to the objective data of the past; as the immediacy of the momentary subjective experiencing "perishes," it becomes an objective datum in the becoming of other momentary experiencing subjects; "the many become one and are increased by one."

I have used the somewhat awkward expression "momentary experiencing subject" to avoid the technical vocabulary of Alfred North Whitehead, one of the seminal figures in process thought, and yet articulate the key tenet that since anything actual at all is characterized by some degree of subjectivity, creative freedom, and menrality within the matrix of relatedness, all experiences are not only of instrumental but intrinsic value as well.

For Whitehead, the problem of religion is that of the individual-in-community, the problem of the one and the many, of unity-in-diversity. In process thought, the individual is always an individual-in-community. For example, the momentary self-creative experiencing we call the human self, a social, relational self, while to some degree transcending its environment, human and non-human, is profoundly shaped by that environment; the richness of experience and creative freedom of the self is enhanced or obstructed by the environments of which it is a part and which are parts of it.

In process-relational thought, God is not seen as the exception but as the chief exemplification of metaphysical categories. Consequently, God experiences all creaturely experience eminently, within the perspective, frame of reference, and integrity of the experiences of particular creatures. Moreover, God preserves, and integrates, all creaturely experiences, in all their particularity, in the divine life everlastingly. It is based on that divine expericene of creaturely experience that God "lures" all creatures persuasively to realize their creative freedom in their fundamental interdependence with one another.

All too briefly, let us look at how two process theologians, John B. Cobb, Jr., and Henry James Young, use the process-relational paradigm in their respective treatments of religious and racial pluralism. Cobb's most extensive treatment of pluralism is within the context of his participation in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue. He advocates an attitude of such openness that it is capable of "crossing over" into the frame of reference of the dialogue partner. Without glossing over authentic differnces or creating an uneasy synthesis of contrasting views in all too facile a fashion, he maintains that once a person has encountered a different tradition in this way and "coming back" to her/his, he/she cannot remain the same; she/he is creatively transformed. Cobb shows how this might apply as he explores the Buddhist understanding of Nirvana within the integrity of the Buddhist tradition, the points of tension between the Buddhist and the Christian traditions, what the two traditions might appropriate from each other and thus be creatively transformed.

Henry James Young, an African American theologian influenced by the ocnceptuality of process thought, finds in process metalphysics a framework for a pluralistic understanding of race relations. He shows the connection between the mechanistic Newtonian paradigm, the proclivity of white Anglo society to see itself as normative in the definition of being human, and the subjugation of minorities in enforcing conformity to that standard of normativeness. The ecological vision of process thought, on the other hand, provides a philosophical framework for articulating the experiences and aspirations of African Americans seeking empowerment and

self-affirmation as unique self-creative individuals in a community with a unique cultural and historical heritage yet within a larger web of interrelatedness that includes whites, other minorities, and the non-human natural world, an all inclusive vision that excludes no one and nothing, in all their unique particularity.

## II.

It is not uncommon among women and other oppressed groups to reject Christianity, all religion for that matter, for being inherently oppressive. Christian feminists and other theologians of liberation, on the other hand, while acknowledging that historically Christianity has all too often functioned as an instrument of oppression, claim that there are suppressed or neglected aspects of the Christian tradition that are liberating and have served to energize struggles for liberation. This is what they are referring to in their attempts to recover a "usable past."

As the newly born Hungarian democracy grows toward maturity, it might be helpful to realize that there are numerous examples in the history of Hungary, replete with struggles for national independence and the extension of freedom to ever larger segments of the population, that constitute "a usable past." The example I shall use is the Revolution of 1703-1711 led by Ferenc Rakoczi.

Before discussing Rakoczi's revolution, we need to situate it in historical context. Much of the early history of Hungary, as well as that of the Middle Ages, is filled with dynastic feuds and power struggles between the kings, upper and lower nobility, opportunistically competing for the loyalty of the serfs to undermine their opponents. Periodically, the living conditions and social positions of the serfs improved; more often than not, they declined. As we have already seen, the religious hierarchy was part of the land-owning upper nobility, while the "lower" clergy who lived among the serfs and the lower nobility fueled the fire of the popular piety that inspired and energized the hope of liberation.

After more than two centuries of occupation by the Ottoman Turks, all of Hungary officially came under the absolutist and despotic domination of the Habsburgs as a result of the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. The Habsburgs violated their prior agreements to allow a degree of Hungarian autonomy, observe freedom of religion, rule in accord with the traditional constitution, and respect the right of the Diet to enact legislation. The hierarchical feudal social order became increasingly rigid and the plight of the peasants grew increasingly worse.

Initially a reluctant insurrectionary, Ferenc Rakoczi led a revolution against these oppressive conditions. In Hungarian history, for a war of national independence to be successful, the various social classes needed to be united. Historically, these struggles were led by the nobles. As alluded to earlier, one of the typical strategies of foreign rulers and their allies among the aristocracy was to undermine the loyalty of the serfs to their rebellious masters.

Rakoczi's army was initially made up of the "kuruc," who had fought against both the Habsburgs and the Turks to gain national independence and the improvement of their socio-politico-economic conditions (the word "kuruc" originally referred to participants in the peasant rebellion led by Gyorgy Dozsa in 1514, the seeds for which were planted by the Franciscans). Guaranteed their traditional privileges by Habsburg rule, the nobility was initially suspicious of what to them appeared to be a lower class rabble. Nevertheless, the nobles joined Rakoczi in 1707. The Magyars had never been so united (and perhaps not since then), a unity that crossed class, religious, and ethnic lines. Symbolic of this unity was Rakoczi's legendary general, the serf Vak ("Blind" - actually half-blind) Botyan who led both the kuruc and the nobles into battle (it

was inconceivable for a serf to be giving orders to nobles!). In spite of Magyar unity, the kuruc army was finally defeated in 1711. Rakoczi died as an exile in Turkey (1735).

Rakoczi adopted the color white, bordered by red and green, a variation of the Hungarian red-white-green tricolor, for his flag. In the middle was the inscription, the motto of the revolution, "Cum Deo pro patria et libertate" ("with God for country and liberty"), most often above a likeness of the Virgin Mary. Jesus and Mary, seen as the embodiment of God's ultimate solidarity with the oppressed by popular piety, have since that time been viewed as the patrons of the struggles for national independence and democracy.

I do not mean to romanticize either Rakoczi's revolution or popular piety. The feudal structure remained intact and Habsburg oppression continued after the rebellion. The history of popular piety was ambiguous: it could be authoritarian, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and superstitious. Neither do I mean to advocate a return to a Golden Age in a paradisiacal "illud tempore." Nevertheless, this ambiguity does not negate the historical function of popular piety as a source of inspiration and energizing for in the struggles for national independence and democracy. The symbols and images of Rakoczi's revolution and of the popular piety that inspired it provide a "usable past" that can be reappropriated in creative ways as Hungary embarks on its unique new course in history.

### III.

In attempting to deal with the issue of the unitive function of religion in newly pluralistic societies, I presented one particular North American model, that of process-relational thought, as having illuminative potential for the current situation in Hungary. As examples, I used the work of John B. Cobb, Jr., in the area of interreligious dialogue, particularly the Buddhist and Christian encounter, and Henry James Young, with his vision of a pluralistic multiracial society. I then explored the relevance of the notion of a "usable past", using the Revolution of Ferenc Rakoczi (1703-1711) as the illustration of a time when the symbols and images of popular piety provided the inspiration and source of solidarity in the struggle for national independence and democracy.

In the context of this discussion, what can Hungarians and North Americans learn from each other? We might look at the issue in the following manner. It can be said that Hungary, an Central and Eastern Europe as a whole, finally have the opportunity to come to grips with the Enlightenment (for instance, we might think of the call of the Alliance of Free Democrats to complete the Revolution of 1848, which was inspired by and sought to realize, among others, the ideals of the Enlightenment). North Americans can only hope that in the newly pluralistic democracies in Hungary and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, the positive achievements of the Enlightenment are affirmed without repeating its devastating consequences in the West.

By the positive contributions of the Enlightenment, I am referring to its anti-authoritarianism, its emphasis on critical reason and political liberty. On the negative side, I am thinking of the atomistic individualism that has contributed so much to the kinds of values that have legitimated modern forms of oppression, the dualism between the human and non-human natural world that has justified despoliation of the environment, and the destructive dualism between reason and emotion. In the West, process-relational thought, affirming the uniqueness of any individual experience yet claiming that all experience is inextricably interrelational, provides a conceptual antidote to atomistic individualism and its fateful consequences. The problem in Hungary and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe is different: while on the contemporary scene, Western individualism may seem attractive to some, historically the rights of the

community have superseded those of the individual. In the newly democratic Hungary, the rights and liberties of individuals have legal and institutional protections (the realization, at least partially, of the Revolution of 1848?). Given these new developments, given that Western individualism is alien to Hungarian culture, Hungary has a unique opportunity to provide an indigenous model of the individual-in-community, manifested in a pluralistic democracy, united yet tolerant of those who disagree, by the vision of a Cosmic Empowerment and Solidarity in the struggle for freedom in an environment that fosters the liberty of all.