Politics, Democracy, Civil Society in a Globalized World

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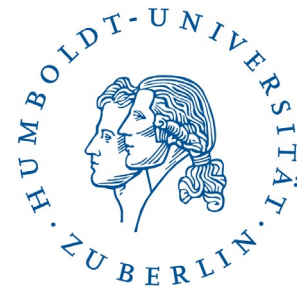
Slide #1

Introduction: Public Theology

Public Theology

- Public Theology can be understood as "*theologically informed interdisciplinary discourse on public issues and the scholarly reflection thereof*". (See. https://www.theologie.hu-berlin.de/de/professuren/institute/bipt).

This includes…

- …reflexion on the relation of Christianity and Politics
- …the insight, that theology and the church cannot be non-political.
- …the task to make the political implication of Christian life and theology explicit

1 What is Politics?

Politics

- Politics refers to the "*production of commonly binding rules and decisions in and between groups of people*."
  (Manfred Mols: Politik als Wissenschaft: Zur Definition, Entwicklung und Standortbestimmung einer Disziplin. In: Manfred Mols et al. (eds.): Politikwissenschaft. Eine Einführung, Paderborn 1994, 25–66, 28. Translation: FH.)

Distinction of Dimensions

- Policy: the actual content of decisions and regulations.

- Politics: the process of decision-making.

- Polity: structures, institutions, culture.

2 The Church, Christian Communities and the State

Sorting Possible Relations between Christianity and Politics

- Policy: the role of Christian orientations in decision making.

- Politics: the role of Christian virtues in the political process.

- Polity: the role of Christians institutions in the strucutres of politics

One Theological Model by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

- Christians know about the task of the state and politics: to maintain order and to defend everybody's rights.

- Possibilites of the church:
  - To make the state responsible
  - To care for the victims of political actions
  - To be political itself in the state of emergency.

3 Democracy and Civil Society

Democracy

- basic idea: the people produce "commonly binding rules and decisions"

- Elements of
  - Representative democracy
  - Direct democracy

Civil Society

- Characteristics:
  - Space of voluntary associations
  - Public Sphere
  - Rights and Resources.

- Christianty as one tradition among others in society.

Soosten, Joachim von (1993): Literaturbericht: Civil Society. Zum Auftakt der neueren demokratietheoretischen Debatte mit einem Seitenblick auf Religion, Kirche und Öffentlichkeit, in: *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 37, S. 139–157: 140ff.

Wolfgang Huber: Kirche und Öffentlichkeit, Stuttgart 1973.

4 The Ecumenical Dimension of Public Theology

Ecumenical Vision of a "Responsible Society" (Amsterdam 1948)

- *"Man is created and called to be a free being, responsible to God and his neighbour. Any tendencies in State and society depriving man of the possibility of acting responsibly are a denial of God's intention for man and His work of salvation. A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it.We therefore condemn:*
  1.   [...]
  2.   Any denial to man of an opportunity to participate in the shaping of society, for this is a duty implied in man's responsibility towards his neighbour; [...]"
  (Hooft, W. A. Visser'T (Hg.) (1949): The Assembly of the World Council of Churches. Held at Amsterdam August 22nd to September 4th, 1948 (Man's Disorder and God's Design. The Amsterdam Assebly Series, 5). London.)

Ecumenical Dimension

- Economic, cultural and political process all over the world are interconnected.

Discussion Questions

- How does the relation of Church or Christianity and state or Politics look like in your context? How has it been relevant in your experience?

- Repeat Bonhoeffer's concept about the task of the state and the task of the church. Discuss, whether you agree with him theologically and how relevant his thinking is.

- What does it mean for the Church to be one communities alongside other religious communities in the society?