RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: THE CHALLENGE OF “UNCONDITIONAL HOSPITALITY”

Religinis pliuralizmas: „besalygiisko svetingumo“ issukis

SUMMARY

I think that this is entering my space unconditionally, I am open to the best and the worst.

Jacques Derrida

No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions.

Adapted from the writings of Hans Küng

Religious pluralism is analysed in the context of Derrida’s definitions such as Other, “conditional and unconditional hospitality”, de-territorialization, interiorization, messianicity. The author analyzes crucial questions that faces Christianity today as a question of the demarcation of frontiers with other religious traditions, the reasons and features of “new” religious pluralism, its local perception in the countries of the European Union and such manifestations of religious aspects of postmodernism as the refusal of regulation of the religious sphere with cultural stresses to free choice, the mixing of the religious and the secular, their “hybridization”, the denomenalization as a process of free transition of religious frontiers. The concrete type of religious pluralism and real situation in society depends on many different circumstances: a combination of the variation between religious groups and the variation within groups, on different ways of world and religious interpretation in society, on polarization inside one religion from liberalism to fundamentalism. The author examines basic functions which are attributed to religious pluralism in the postmodern context.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI. Religinis pliuralizmas, Kitas, etninė tapatybė, tolerancija, svetingumas, religijų ribos.

KEY WORDS. Religious pluralism, Other, ethnic identity, tolerance, hospitality, religious frontiers.
Manau, kad tai įsiskverbia į mano erdvę besąlygiškai esu atviras geriausiam ir blogiausiam.
Jacques Derrida

Nėra taikos tarp tautų be taikos tarp religijų. Nėra taikos tarp religijų be dialogo tarp religijų. Nėra dialogo tarp religijų be religijų pagrindų tyrimo.

Parafrazė iš Hanso Küngo rašytų

We should remark that religious pluralism is a part of multiculturalism: in both processes exists a very important person, the hero – the Other. As a philosopher, Jacques Derrida is interested in the limits of concepts and what happens when they are challenged. His political philosophy concentrates on what happens when people excluded from any system of politics or law present themselves and ask for refuge or justice.

We live in a world where two challenges are more visible: the “refugee crisis” and terrorism. The increasing political presence of refugees and immigrants in contemporary Europe has generated debate about the nature of multicultural and multireligious society. The demand for the recognition of cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic differences has come to occupy a central place in the forms of post-national politics today. The liberal imperative to tolerate and respect cultural and religious difference sometimes begins to be in conflict with the sovereignty of the host society.

One of the major questions in philosophy during the last few years has been the question concerning the Other: how and to what degree are we able to receive and welcome the Other as the Other is? The debate is concerned with our hospitality, with our willingness and our capability to offer the Other a welcome. This debate is of great importance today. Obvious examples are the expansion of the EU and the debate on
immigration. The concept of hospitality will be analyzed in the context of religious pluralism.

A cultural approach to globalization combines an understanding of the different areas and levels of the meaning of “global”. For example, in “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, Arjun Appadurai suggests that when forces are brought from various metropolises into different societies they tend to become indigenized in some way. Thus, according to Appadurai, globalization touches upon five main areas, what he calls ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes. The ethnoscape means the landscapes of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups ... (who) appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.¹ For him the homogenizing pressure of globalization paradoxically produces cultural heterogeneity. The relationships between homogenization and heterogenization, or between universalization and particularization, are not direct. Slavoj Zizek rightly points out that it is deeply misleading to posit the rising globalization paradoxically produces cultural heterogeneity. The tradition of cosmopolitanism, which comes to us from Greek thought with the Stoics, we could study as a concept of the “citizen of the world”. Also, what is a very important for us and what Derrida mentions is the Christian tradi-
tion and the words of Saint Paul, who says that we are all brothers that are sons of God, so we are not foreigners; we belong to the world as citizens of the world. This tradition, if we don’t touch the aspect of evangelization, has a very important sense. But the Old Testament gives for us another example of hospitality, which Derrida does not mention. The case of Abraham’s hospitality, when he said to three strangers: “You have honored me by coming to my home, so let me serve you.” This case of hospitality is very important for several reasons. It is a case of unconditional hospitality: “Sirs, please do not pass by my home; I am here to serve you,” from Abraham’s side. But from the other side it is for us an example of respect for the free will of strangers: “I will also bring a bit of food; it will give strength to continue your journey” (Genesis 18). These Judaist-Christian cases will start to be a potential ethical ground of hospitality and a development of inter-personal relations.

In Derrida’s view, Kant opened a new age for the concept of hospitality with some conditions and limits. There are a number of conditions: “First of all you should of course welcome the stranger, the foreigner, to the extent that he is a citizen of another country that you grant him the right to visit and not to stay.” Kant’s concept is limited precisely by the reference to the political, to the state, to the authority of the state, to citizenship, and to the strict control of residency and the period of stay.

The attempt to re-define the political not only beyond the nation-state but beyond the cosmopolitan itself is regarded by many as a utopian or very distant perspective. Not so for Derrida: “We can analyze this every day, so what seems to be, and is, very far ahead of us, is also very close to us every day, and it is an urgent task to re-elaborate, to re-think, to re-engage and to be committed differently with these issues.” And “hospitality is a very general name for all our relations to the Other, it has to be re-invented at every second, it is something without a pre-given rule.”

I would like to present a small passage that contains many of Derrida’s ideas of hospitality and law. “Vice versa, it is as though the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing the law of hospitality, the one that would command that the “new arrival” be offered an unconditional welcome.”

The consequence of this passage stresses that being hospitable is no easy obligation. The problem lies in the disharmony between two laws: the law of unconditional hospitality and the laws of hospitality. Derrida’s examination of the conflict between the law of hospitality (the demand of unconditional hospitality) and the laws of hospitality (the norms, duties and laws in society which form the basis of hospitable habits) shows us all the difficulties of realization of this project. But that does not mean that Derrida’s reflections on hospitality cannot be useful. Derrida’s reflections tell us that it is not about finding eternal answers but about opening
up to the insecurity in the decision concerning hospitality. In other words, hospitality has to be reinvented, again and again, demanding a responsibility towards the Other. Welcoming the Other in the form of codified multiculturalist’s tolerance implies a conditional welcoming and hospitality which limited within law and legislations.

It is visible in the “the structure of exception” which Giorgio Agamben discusses in Homo Sacer… For example, following Agamben, the conditional welcoming of workers indicates that they are left outside the sovereign law of the host society. The “guest-workers” as a short-term labor force is an example of conditional hospitality. In this sense they are not the agents of Derrida’s hospitality without conditions, when we have no right to ask “about the Other’s identity, their language, their capacity for work, for integration, for adaptation.” For Agamben, “what cannot be included in any way is included in the form of the exception”.

Derrida understood this potential situation and described it: “I say not as a rule, but sometimes, exceptionally, it may happen. I cannot regulate, control or determine these moments, but it may happen, just as an act of forgiveness, some forgiveness may happen, pure forgiveness may happen. Unconditional hospitality can’t be an establishment, but it may happen as a miracle … in an instant, not lasting more than an instant, it may happen.” Please, look how many times Derrida used the verb “may”. He told us not about reality but about possibility, not about necessity but about potentiality. Derrida believes that it is only faith in the possibility of the impossible that must guide our decisions.

The foremost North American interpreter and researcher of Derrida, John Caputo, says that “his passion is not a determinable wish or a will for a definable goal or foreseeable objective … It is not a search for something plannable and foreseeable, the fulfillment of which can be steadily approximated …” and “Derrida tells us that while religion, like law, is deconstructible …, for him, to speak to another is to ask the other to “believe in me” or “trust me”. Such faith, says Derrida, is “absolutely universal”. This universal structure of faith is an undeconstructible that Derrida calls the messianic structure or messianicity”.

The harmonization between law and laws it is not enough for hospitality to start to be a reality. In a discussion in 1997, Derrida described two steps of internal harmonization that exist. First “we have to negotiate the hospitality within ourselves”, second “negotiate this hospitality in him or her.” Because without that we cannot be hospitable to the Other. If you are at war with yourself, you may be allergic to the Other. This idea is very close to the postmodern idea that Other doesn’t exist outside me, but he becomes only a unique way of my self-identification.
Religious pluralism as an illustration of the tendency of ignoring and demarcation of borders traditionally means: the diversity of religious movements within a particular geographical area, and the theory that there are more than one or more than two kinds of ultimate reality and/or truth; and that therefore more than one religion can be said to have the truth, even if their essential doctrines are mutually exclusive. Religious pluralism refers to the theological attempts to overcome religious differences between different religions, as well as the attempts to overcome religious differences within different denominations of the same religion. Religious and cultural pluralism is not only a system of various values, acting under the banner of religions and culture in its various modifications, but also has a secular tendency.

The so-called «external pluralism» is a coexistence of liberal-humanistic and religious outlooks. It was a very serious subject of discussion first of all in circles of Christian theologians. From their point of view, the story of a preamble of the project of the European Union Constitution testifies that the co-existence of liberal-humanistic and religious outlooks in European integration processes is gradually substituted by the tendency of domination of the former.

We note two tendencies in the process of religious pluralism:
• Differentiation or erection and worship of borders (traditional communities, religious fundamentalism)
• Dedifferentiation or ignoring and demarcation of borders (postmodernism, beginning in modern times)

Forms and spheres of display of the first tendency are the following: the disintegration of totalitarian empires and a reconstruction of mononational (homogeneous) states; the intensification of ethnic, national and confessional borders, giving it the status of the highest value; the amplification of religious fundamentalism as attempts to strengthen the ethnic and religious traditional way of life, women’s functions and the system of values. The occurrence of that in scientific literature has received the name «frontier zone» or regional cultural phenomena in which the dichotomy «we» and “they” dominates the public consciousness, and “ethnomythology” is determining the spiritual stimulus of future development and the basis of aspiration to designing new borders.

Forms and spheres of display of the second tendency: the wish «to rethink Europe», the aspiration to have the past, the creation of overstates formations ignoring “old” borders on the economic, political and cultural levels, the integrated approach to scientific disciplines and development comparative method as universal in sciences about the human being, the rapprochement of identities and opportunities of their free choice on the basis of ignoring former borders and criteria, overcoming religious, confessional and denominative borders, the occurrence of interethnic, transnational
religious organizations ignoring state and national borders and the tendencies of ecumenism. The dialogue starts to be one of the most important ways to mark the borders of hostility.

Different theologians give a different sense and form of dialogue in the condition of religious pluralism. First of all, it is the incorporation of one religion into another. In Leslie Newbigin’s view, as the result of long coexistence “... Jesus has been painlessly incorporated into the Hindu world view. The foreign missionary knows that this is not the conversion of India but the co-option of Jesus, the domestication of the gospel into the Hindu world view.”

Second, it understands the limits of dialogue on a theological level. The theologian James Arraj in the work *Christianity in the Crucible of East-West Dialogue* describes how difficult it is to find a common ground for dialogue between different theologies. He wrote: “But it is quite another matter to go from recognition of this existential pluralism and embrace a de jure or a theoretical pluralism..., but they can never be brought into a relationship with each other. It is hard to see how such a theoretical pluralism is compatible with the Christian faith and the oneness of God as truth”.

Another kind of limited religious and theological pluralism is represented by Vanlilier Hunter. Hunter wrote: “We must take the theological pluralism of the Bible seriously because it tells us that no one way of perceiving God is complete and final. No one understanding of how God relates to us human beings is all-inclusive ... Because it means that the Bible is not so much a book of answers but of debate and discussion”. This kind of pluralism exists inside the Christian tradition, but at the same time it opens the way for a wider dialogue.

For some commentators, religious pluralism implies the recognition of the common foundation of all varieties of the religious quest and the possible convergence of world religions. John Hick, a theologian and philosopher, is the leading voice today in religious pluralism, and one of the more radical theological researchers in the sphere of religious deconstruction. For Hick, this theory is “a religious but not confessional interpretation of religion in its plurality of forms”.

Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis attempts to explain four critical factors:
1. the fact that people are inherently religious;
2. the observation that there is substantial diversity in the actual content of religious belief;
3. the assumption that religious belief is not an illusion;
4. the recognition that almost every religious tradition positively changes its followers’ lives.

Having rejected naturalism and absolutism, Hick offers his own position – namely that “the great post-axial faiths constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied visions of it.” At the heart of Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis is his assertion that an Ultimate Re-
ality, which he calls “the Real”, is the grounds of all religious experience. Hick proposes, “This suggests that each concrete historical divine personality – Yahweh, the heavenly Father, the Qur’anic Allah – is a joint product of the universal divine presence and a particular historically formed mode of constructive religious imagination”. These points are important for understanding Hick’s pluralistic hypothesis. As Hick examines various religious traditions, he does not deny that they disagree; despite these differing beliefs, he hopes that almost every faith helps people develop morally. Hick describes the religious situation in his native town, Birmingham: “Indeed in the city of Birmingham, where I live, there are well over a hundred mosques. The city also includes a substantial number of Sikhs and Hindus, and smaller numbers of Jews and Buddhists and Bahai’is, as well as many members of all the many different branches of Christianity, all amidst a large secular or nominally post-Christian population. We all live together in the same city and on the whole without friction and indeed often with very positive relationships”. In the speech “Religious Pluralism and Islam” in the Institute for Islamic Culture and Thought, Tehran, in February 2005, Hick said, that “now the time has come to consider the theological implications of this. We all, within each faith, need our theologians and philosophers to give thought to the overall question of how to understand the fact of religious diversity … The only stable and enduring basis for peace will come about when dialogue leads to a mutual acceptance of the world religions as different but equally valid relationships to the ultimate reality. In fact, Hick tries to deconstruct a sense of religious diversity and inter-religious contradictions mostly theologically.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AS A DEMARCATION OF FRONTIERS

The wider conclusion implies that religious pluralists are not saying that all religions are the same, or that all religions necessarily lead to the same place or that religious pluralism does not necessarily mean universalism. There is no place for “unconditional hospitality”. The situation of religious pluralism shows how many limits and contradictions exist even in a democratic society:
- between established and non-established religions in society;
- between traditional and non-traditional religious movements in society;
- between religions with different ways of the interpretation of the world and religious interpretation in society (Orthodox, conservative, traditional, liberal);
- polarization inside one religion from liberalism to fundamentalism.

In this case we mostly speak about another kind of the Other. First of all, about the Other that is inside our soci-
ety and that is not a guest. This religious agent is not a result of immigration; he is not a refugee or guest-worker. The history of non-traditional religious movements is an eloquent example.

Both first functions tell us that the Other uses religious identity as a spiritual defence against globalization and its moral consequences and close relations with its own religious community as a source for the consolidation of values. In the case of guest workers from Turkey, it is possible to state that coming to the new Western environment with often a higher level of belief and a closer relation with the religious community than before. Oliver Roy remarks that “young European Muslims are closer to Protestant “born again” than they are to conservative traditional Muslims”. Recovering belief, they build a wall, beyond which they feel safety and solidarity.

“The last identity shelter” starts to be a very important part of life. It does not mean that this “last identity shelter” is fundamentalist; but of course it is really different from our point of view. In this case we deal with a specific style of alternative rationality, in which an important role plays the idea that religion is not personal, privatized as all other individual choices.

The function of “niche” is connected in great measure to the treatment of a role and a place of religion during European integration. Alongside the ethnic, it is considered as a design, allowing the satisfying of a need for a local attitude, for spiritual needs behind which there is a century of history and traditions, and which radical innovative tendencies influence in a minimal measure. One day, the majority of this society found themselves in a new situation where the established religion or religions were on the frontier with the “other’s” religion. In Felix Wilfred’s opinion, “By negotiating the frontiers and communing across them, Christians will continuously discover new dimensions of their own faith identity. The experimental and open-ended character inherent in every frontier-crossing and encounter will lead us to perceive our faith-identity ever afresh”.

The last function of the religious factor as camouflage is most prone to be discussed. It is possible to allocate two basic approaches to the “camouflage” function of religious pluralism. The first asserts that the religious factor is rather influential in the sphere of international relations. However, it is possible to note that the acceptance of this sight differs with the degree of its actualization.

The first approach proceeds from the precondition that “the religious conflict crossing borders is ongoing civil war”, “religious fundamentalism is present in most religions and regions of the world”, “religion gains international attention from the linkage of human rights and religious rights” (issues of gender equality, religious restrictions on birth control, sexual minorities and others). Supporters of the given approach distinguish more often a sight at the religious factor as on the global phe-
nomenon at the same time as something “not working” outside geopolitics and the economic context of the reasons and circumstances.

The second approach literally sees in religious and ethnic factors the “camouflage” meaning deforming the real reasons for international conflicts and local wars. Each of those who in any measure shares this point of view (this measure is frequently rather various), tries to correlate a degree of interdependence of religious pluralism, and such concepts as “fundamentalism”, “terrorism” and “ethnic conflict”. The most representative and polar figure is Slavoj Zizek, who considers that “for us are more interesting not cultural, religious traditions as such, but the struggle of political forces which lays in their basis”. “Balkanization” he does nor understand as some mystical identity filled by ethnic and religious distinctions, but “a necessary product of modernization”.18

Karen Armstrong, Bauman, Martin Marti and Zizek converge that a certain postmodern form of religion generated by internal contradictions of the postmodern, global world today is obviously outlined. It has nothing in common with the display of “an immemorial human illogicality” and “with an attempt of rescue by flight in the premodern local past”. “It is completely modern, and even more likely a postmodern phenomenon”, which is a peculiar modernist pragmatic rationalism in its aspiration to the resacralization of the world”.19

When the Other comes to us with its own different religion, tradition and, more importantly, with its own system of values, maybe we should not ask it “about the other’s identity, their desire, their rules, their language, their capacity for work, for integration, for adaptation”. At the same time, we will agree with Derrida that “from the moment that I formulate all of these questions, and posit these conditions ... the ideal situation of non-knowledge—non-savoir—is broken—rompu”.20 For us it is more important not to ask the Other, but to have an answer in our minds without direct questions. The host society should to informed about cultural, valuable differences, first of all for “pure forgiveness” and for “pure consequences”, which will await the host society in the future. In my view, any principal difference between “not guest” (the host minority, which has chosen the exotic, from the point of view of majority, style of life, religious rituals, sexual orientation) and the guest minority does not exist. Only “laws” should regulate these relations and should correspond to the “law of hospitality”. The last has a background in religious and cultural tolerance. But it is not enough. Religious tolerance means extending freedom to people of all religions, even though one disagrees with their beliefs and practices. Promoting religious tolerance is the right of people to hold religious beliefs that are strange to us, without hindrance, harassment, or oppression.
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