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Citizenship from an Austrian Christian Theological perspective

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"Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven" (Letter to Diognetus)

Communicative Theology as related to citizenship

If you Google "Citizenship in Austria", you will find a huge number of references nearly all of which are definitions of citizenship in Austrian law. Can a legal definition encompass all of what citizenship in Austria means? I know a lot of people who are citizens of Austria by law but they are not by mentality. Citizenship in Austria cannot be defined as a "cold" term. Rather it is a "hot" metaphor that can be appropriated by everybody. Having this in mind, we will interrogate how Communicative Theology can lead us to a deeper understanding of citizenship from a theological perspective.

What is Communicative Theology?

In brief "Communicative theology is theology done in and from a living process of communication" (Scharer & Hilberath, 2003, 15). When we speak about "living processes", we address living communication processes. The term "living communication" evokes Ruth C. Cohn's concept of "living learning" (Cohn, 1971, 245), which is in contrast to "dead learning" (Scharer & Hilberath, 2008).

Ruth Cohn was born in 1912 in Berlin. As a Jew, she emigrated from the Nazi terror initially to Switzerland and then, to the U.S. (Cohn & Farau, 2008, 222-225). Her understanding of "living learning" is a response to inhumanity. "Dead learning" takes a very limited stance or is often just a sham communication: 'something', a task, a learning object, a content, a piece of tradition- as a quasi-neutral object, as matters devoid of personal reference without considering the dynamics

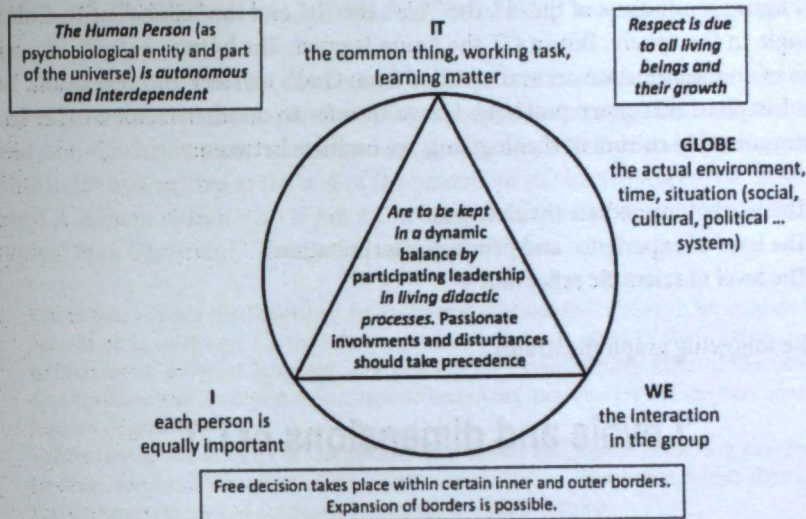
in (learning) groups and independently of contexts in which learning processes are communicated. "Dead Learning", according to Cohn, mainly occurs at universities and schools. It is dry knowledge, as an anonymous product, isolated from its background without personal reference. Dead Learning is distant from any real social context and lacks an anthropological or ethical basis (Matzdorf & Cohn, 1992).

Not only is it characteristic of dead learning but also it is part of human communication. Single-line transfer distinguishes the multi-dimensional information and increasingly intimate human communication. Therefore, it makes sense not only to speak of living and dead learning, but also to equally distinguish "living communication" from "dead communication" (Hilberath & Scharer, 2012, 63-111). Citizenship can be communicated as a "dead object" within the legal system or as an existential theme. As an existential theme it includes:

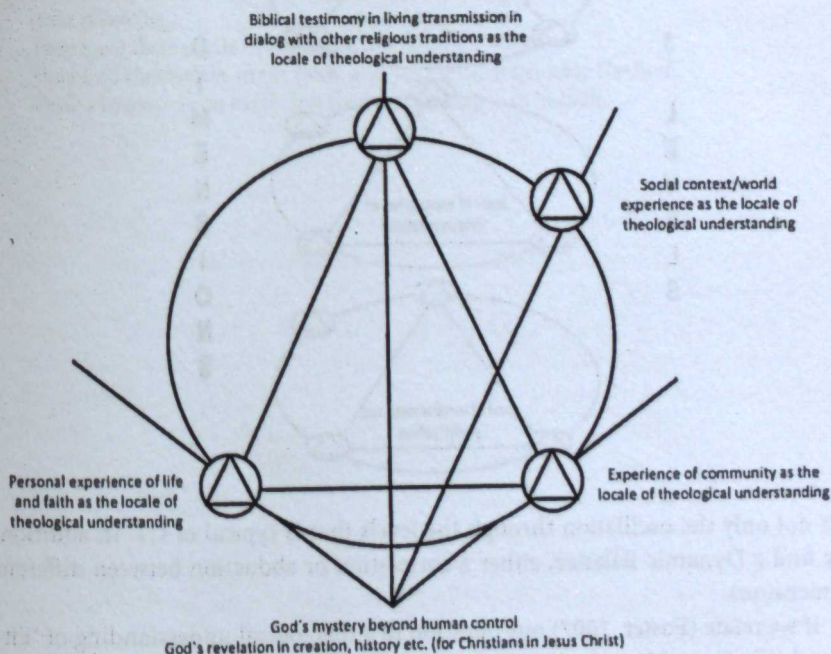
- The "I" of everyone as an autonomous-interdependent subject: Who am I as a citizen or without citizenship? What are my personal experiences with citizenship?
- The "We", which expresses the dynamics of groups/communities. Who is included or excluded from the "We" of citizenship? The "We" does not have instrumental significance.
- The "It", as the thing or concern which the interaction revolves around: It is citizenship as a subject of discourse.
- The "Globe", which represents the temporal and the social context, encompasses the three dimensions by way of an equilateral triangle within a sphere (for example, citizenship exists in different historical situations).

The value reference is most clearly expressed in the "axioms" of TCI,¹² which formulate the "irreducible" of the TCI approach and contain "elements of faith" (Cohn, 1974, 215). Due to the limited space that I have, I can only show the figure for the whole approach with some of the different aspects.

12 TCI (Theme-centered interaction) is a concept and a method for working in groups aimed at social learning and development of the person. TCI was developed by the psychoanalyst and psychologist Ruth Cohn. The diagrams in this chapter, for example, are based on TCI concepts.



In CT we work with this figure:

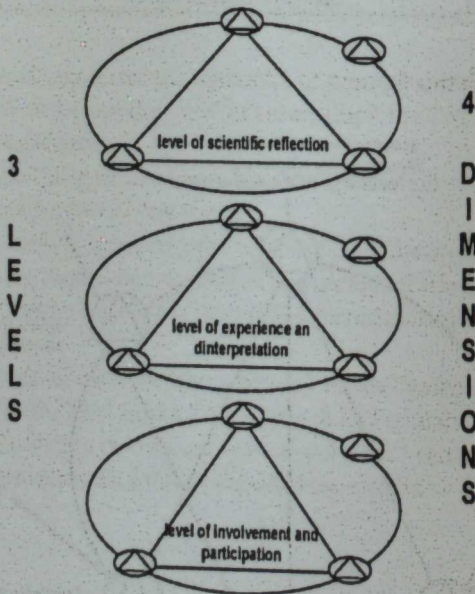


This figure reminds us of the "I", the "We", the "It" and the "Globe" of R. Cohn's triangle in the sphere. But in CT the figure is open. The human aspects of every form of communication are transcended from God's mystery and revelation. Before I explain this more precisely, I have to refer to another factor of CT: In a communicative culture of theologizing, we oscillate between:

- The level of immediate involvement
- The level of experience and primary interpretation
- The level of scientific reflection

as the following graph illustrates.

Levels and dimensions of CT



It's not only the oscillation through the levels that is typical of CT. In addition, we find a Dynamic Balance, either a correlation or abduction between different dimensions.

If we relate (Foster, 2007) our question to a theological understanding of "citizenship" we could write the secular term in the middle of the triangle in the

sphere. In CT, a new meaning is formed: Citizenship becomes a metaphor for a "good life" for every human being.

Since early Christianity, citizenship for Christians has been based on controversial experiences. A very impressive full example of the struggle between Christian and non-Christian understandings is in the "Letter to Diognetus" (Foster, 2007). This letter was written at the end of the second, or the beginning of the third century. A Roman citizen who is not a Christian asks his Christian friend: "What is typical for a Christian?" The Christian friend answers:

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind, either in locality or in speech or in customs; for they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own. They neither use a different language, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life. They don't possess any invention discovered by ingenious men and are not masters of any human dogma.

While they dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians and follow the native customs in dress, food and lifestyle, the constitution of their own citizenship, which they set forth, is marvelous and confessedly contradicts expectations.

They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign.

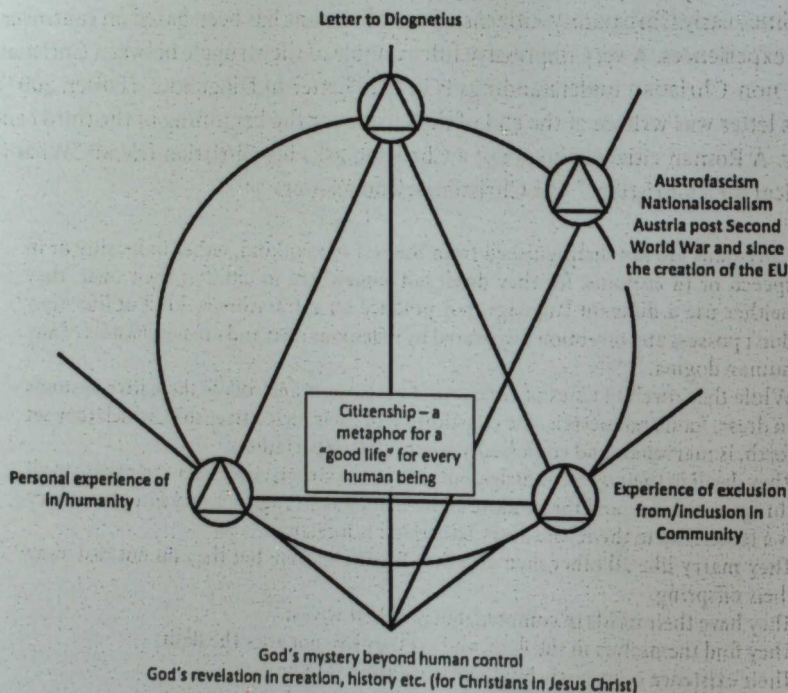
They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring.

They have their meals in common, but not their wives.

They find themselves in the flesh, and yet they live not after the flesh.

Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.

Based on this text we can concretize our figure for research on citizenship in this way:



Three contexts of Citizenship in Austrian history: Austrofascism, Nationalsocialism and Austria post the Second World War since the creation of the EU

As my second point I try to figure out what happens if the historical context – R. Cohn mentioned “the Globe” – changes. The context/globe touches every other dimension, “Who does not respect the Globe will be eaten by it” (R. Cohn).

Austrofascism

Austrofascism is a term which is frequently used by historians to describe the authoritarian system installed in Austria with the May Constitution of 1934. It ended with the annexing of the newly founded Federal State of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938 (Talos & Neugebauer, 2012). Austrofascism was based on a ruling

party, the Christian Social Party, with their Home Guard, the Fatherland Front, as a paramilitary militia. They were close to the Catholic Church. Ignac Seipel, a Catholic priest, was Lord Chancellor before Austrofascism expanded. Leaders of Austrofascism were Engelbert Dollfuss and, after Dollfuss' assassination, Kurt Schuschnigg. All were original politicians of the Christian Social Party, which was quickly integrated into the new movement. The Socialists, and their paramilitary militia, were more and more excluded from the movement (Wenninger & Dreidemy, 2013).

Austrofascism shows us the big problem of an excluding "We." Catholicism and the Christian Social ideas of the leading party could not prevent the practical exclusion of nearly half of the citizens. They were not excluded from citizenship legally but mentally. The Austrofascists were not Nazis but the system led to National Socialism.

Nationalsocialism

The blackest time in Austrian and German history, was that of Nationalsocialism. Adolf Hitler, the dictator, was an Austrian, born in Braunau near to my home (Zehnpfennig, 2011). He was obsessed by the idea of an Aryan Race according to which Aryans as the followers of Germaniums should be the only honored citizens. All others, especially Jews, were excluded. Jews, handicapped and resistant people were transported to be executed in special camps (Zucconi, 2011).

Close to the small town where Hitler was born in 1889, a man called Franz Jägerstätter came into the world eighteen years later (Bergmann, 1988). He was a simple man working on a small farm (Putz, 2007). Jägerstätter, as a citizen of Hitler's "Millennial Kingdom" had to serve in the military. Before he did, he had a nightmare. He saw a train, which was driving directly into Hell. The train was full of people. The simple man identified the train with the Nazi regime. He refused to join the military. To make sure of heeding the voice of his conscience he asked the religious authority what he should do: He was married and had children. The religious authority who was the bishop of Linz encouraged Jägerstätter to go to the military. He would not be responsible for Nationalsocialism. He would be responsible to his family. Jägerstätter refused and was executed (Jägerstätter, 2007).

Many years after the Second World War, Jägerstätter was honored by the Catholic Church as a holy person (Zucconi, 2011). This led to broad discussions on the meaning of citizenship under a dictatorship. Did Jägerstätter serve his citizenship well by resisting the Nazis? I remember the fury of my father who had been in Hitler's military. He argued: If people of "Greater Germany" had resisted the

military they would not have done their duty as citizens. This example can make us aware of the big ideological power of a dictatorship like the Nazi regime over everyone and on the community. One of the aims of theology is to enlighten us about the nature of ideologies from wherever they come; even if they come from religious establishments.

Austria after the Second World War and since the creation of the EU

It seems as if there aren't any problems for citizenship in Austria post World War II and since the creation of the EU (Gschiegl & Ucakar, 2012). The Catholic Church learned a lot from Austrofascism and Nationalsocialism: Government and church should be in "Equidistance." This means, for example, that every Catholic should be free to follow his own political beliefs. The church is not involved in politics. Catholic priests are not allowed to get involved in parties. The prior Cardinal of Vienna demonstrated Equidistance personally: He was invited by the Socialists to give a presentation for a large audience. He did. From this time on, he was called the "Red" Cardinal. The Conservatives were very angry and intervened with the Vatican to install more conservative Bishops in Austria, and this succeeded.

In the liberal Austria of the EU, there exists a new problem, which relates to citizenship: Who maintains the newcomers, especially those from countries which are not in the EU? Austria, and also other countries in the EU, are getting more and more strict with respect to laws on immigration. More and more people are excluded from citizenship. Some weeks before Christmas 2012, some immigrants occupied a Catholic Church in Vienna. The police wanted to evacuate them by force, but the Cardinal granted them asylum. His action was clearly against the strict immigration laws of the government and EU. In this context, we can also respect the clear intervention of Pope Francis in the drama of the boat people in Lampedusa. Today the Catholic Church has the option to open up possibilities of citizenship to more people in Austria and in the EU. Christians know that citizenship is not a "cold", legal, term. It has become a metaphor for inclusion or exclusion from society.

Brief Conclusions

In the late modern context, citizenship seems to be a clear and "cold" secular term with a strict legal understanding: The decision of who gets citizenship in Austria follows strict rules. Education in citizenship is required of all students but is especially necessary for new immigrants.

When we bring citizenship into the "hermeneutic play" of TCI and CT, we learn different perspectives of citizenship. Citizenship is not only related to a subject: What is Austrian Citizenship? Citizenship includes deep biographical, interactive, contextual dimensions.

"The letter to Diognetus" written in early Christianity, shows us the metaphorical character of citizenship: "True Citizenship for Christians is in heaven." The metaphor of "Citizenship in heaven" leads us, not as Karl Marx argued, to an apolitical Christianity: True Christians only think about getting into heaven. As Latin America liberation theology shows us: Christians are deeply involved in the very real struggles of citizenship regarding inclusion and exclusion.

Bringing citizenship from some periods of Austrian history together with the "hermeneutic play" of CT shows us where there is a lack of understanding. Aspects of inhumanity and exclusion thereby come to light and are reawakened.

One of the responses of the Austrian Catholic Church to the misunderstanding of citizenship in Austrofascism and National Socialism was "Equidistance". This means that the Church is not connected with a specific political party.

To live with a perspective of "citizenship in heaven" in the modern world would be acceptable, as long it does not remove us from recognizing the inhumanity of earthly political systems.

The problem of Austrian citizenship post-World War Two, and since the creation of the EU, is not the symbiosis of government and Church. It is rather the symbiosis of liberal economics and strict government laws of citizenship.

Therefore, theologians and religious people of all faiths have to open themselves up to the theological metaphor that leads us to an understanding of citizenship as the human right to a "good life" for everyone in Austria and globally.

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