



Feliks Koneczny (1862-1949)

Delivered at Christendom College on September 14, 2012

At the 35th Anniversary Celebratory Convocation

By Rev. Wojciech Giertych, OP, Theologian of the Papal Household

I sincerely thank you for the invitation to come to Christendom College and for the honor conferred upon me. I profit from the occasion to share with you some interesting conclusions of a Polish Catholic historian, Feliks Koneczny, who lived between 1862 and 1949 and spent most of his life in Kraków, Poland. Koneczny was a prolific writer, producing his most important works towards the end of his life. Since he disagreed with the Marxist claim that the class struggle is the motor of history and instead he saw the role of morality in history, he was condemned to oblivion in the communist period. In the 1970-1980s his major hitherto unpublished works appeared in Britain, to be reprinted again in Poland after the fall of communism, where they have gained some recognition among Catholic thinkers, although they are ignored by the mainstream academia.

Koneczny worked out a theory of civilizations that is somewhat akin to the views of Samuel Huntington.¹ He disagreed with cyclical theories of history that compared civilizations to biological organisms having a time of youth, growth, decline and death. Some ancient civilizations, such as the Chinese or Jewish are thriving and show no signs of senility. All attempts to view history according to a deterministic objective process deny spiritual freedom and impose an *a priori* vision of reality. A view of history must be *a posteriori*, based on facts. When towards the end of his life, Koneczny asked whether there is any order in history analogous to that perceived in the natural sciences,² he was not searching for some objective historical course leading inevitably to progress. He was looking only for a key to interpret social reactions that appear when conflicting ethical models of life meet. Koneczny rejected the reduction of scientific enquiry to the study of phenomena or even of causes. The finality of actions, consciously formulated by responsible individuals can be studied also, because "history is governed by abstracts", the ideas that people have about what they want to do.³ The Gospel is such a challenge, to which Christians have always responded to. Ideas may be followed, viewed more profoundly or rejected, and so their influence can be studied.

As a historian Koneczny noted differing ethical views about how social life is to be organized. A specific ethos is normally transmitted to the next generation. This allowed him to individuate the dominant ethos of different civilizations. It is through this key of descriptive ethics that he tried to organize observed historical facts. Some societies did at times choose to radically change their civilization. When the Hungarians arrived in Europe in the X century they

¹*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (London: The Free Press, 2002).

²*O ład w historii* [After Order in History], (London: Wyd. Tow. R. Dmowskiego, 1977), p. 9.

³*Prawa dziejowe* [The Laws of History], (London: Wyd. Tow. R. Dmowskiego, 1982), p. 50.

consciously gave up their traditions and espoused Christianity in its Latin and not the eastern Slavic form that they found in Pannonia. When the Spaniards arrived in America they did not espouse the civilization of the Incas, but imposed their own.

In his major methodological work, Koneczny defined a civilization as a “method of community life”, a certain ethical idea about how life is to be organized.⁴ People often do not live up to the standards that they uphold, and then they feel guilty, but this does not mean that they do not want life to continue according to the standards that they endorse. Civilizations are a spiritual, historical phenomenon that is independent of race. People of differing races can belong to the same civilization. And people of differing civilizations may live geographically close, but the uniqueness of their ethos makes them want to live in closely knit social entities.⁵ There are some differences within civilizations which Koneczny described as cultures. So he noticed a Polish and English culture within the Latin civilization and a mediaeval Spanish culture within the Arab civilization.

Technical progress does not change civilizations. “We all use telephones, but our thoughts are different.”⁶ A spiritual ideal is more important than technical and social developments, which do not necessarily raise ethical standards. Koneczny distinguished civilizations by looking at their family laws, the laws of property and inheritance. Only civilizations that have espoused monogamy have a respect for the person. Furthermore, he looked into the basic categories of being as they function in individual and social life. These include health and economic prosperity, Goodness, Truth and Beauty. Each social group has some ideas about these realities and they are not identical. There are also differences in the understanding of space and time. Some peoples have wide geographical horizons and others cannot imagine what is outside their village. The awareness that time is short generates a sense of responsibility and finality in action. Some peoples seem to live in eternity reacting passively to changes, without planning and caring not to waste time, and they are slower in progress. The highest approach to time is where the future is viewed through the prism of accumulated experience. Only within the Latin civilization is there a respect for national history.

Religions play an important part in civilizations. Ideas about ethics generate different civilizations, although some dogmatic views lead to ethical conclusions. A religion that claims that the world is created by a personal God differs from a religion that views the world as an automatic emanation of God. There are religions that attribute a sacred character to all details of life, and others that distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Differences in ethical convictions set people apart more than differences in wealth, education, class or race. In some civilizations there may be several denominations of the same religious current or even several very different religions, all of which are brushed aside as being basically irrelevant. Following the Catholic view, the Latin civilization claims that ethical principles are binding in all fields of life, also political and economic life. Of all public issues, Koneczny asserted, religion is the most public, and no religion is diffused through compromises with other religions.⁷ All attempts to limit religion to the private sphere and to lower its ethical standards in the name of dialogue with other religions leads to a weakening of that religion.

Another observation point of civilizations is their attitude towards law. Is law based on ethics, or are ethics based upon law?⁸ Is there a distinction between private and public law? Is

⁴*On the Plurality of Civilizations*, (London: Polonica Publications, 1962). Preface by Arnold Toynbee.

⁵*Prawa dziejowe*, cit., p. 22-23.

⁶Op. cit., p. 24.

⁷Op. cit., p. 32, 47.

⁸*Rozwój moralności* [The Development of Morality], (Lublin: Uniwersytet, 1938; reprint: Komorów: Antyk, 2006), p. 48.

public law an expression of ethical principles, of the arbitrary will of the ruler, or is it deduced in a sacred manner from undisputed religious texts? When grassroots organizations cannot function according to their private law because they are limited by an excessively powerful public law, the state ceases to be an organism and becomes a mechanism. When a mechanism breaks down, it does not repair itself. Where there is a civil society composed of people who are animated by a personal ethos that society organizes itself organically and does not degenerate. With the supremacy of an omnipotent state in which a handful of powerful men dominate an irresponsible multitude, the capacity to withstand crises is weakened.

The characteristics of major civilizations

In two civilizations, the Brahman and the Jewish, the entire life has a sacred dimension and is regulated by religious rules. The Latin civilization based upon personalism and monogamy recognizes the primacy of spiritual forces and distinguishes between private and public law. In the Turanian, that is, the Mongolian civilization, there is only the private law of the ruler. In the Byzantine civilization the public state law is omnipotent regulating in a bureaucratic manner all fields of life. While a historian may attribute a historical and geographic location of civilizations, there is some fluidity in this description because their essence is spiritual. Some individuals may with great effort arise above the moral standards of their native society and then they change their civilization moving to a more ethically demanding one.

Having studied the history of Eastern Europe, Koneczny claimed that Russia, despite its Orthodox tradition, does not belong to the Byzantine civilization, but to the Turanian, that has its origins in the Empire of Genghis Khan of Mongolia. In Western historical consciousness there is a general conviction that just as Western Europe drew from the cultural heritage of Rome so Ruthenia of Kiev drew from the Greek Byzantium. Koneczny saw that the Slavic peoples had the liturgy in their own language thanks to the missionary effort of Sts Cyril and Methodius and so throughout the Middle Ages nobody in Ruthenia knew Greek, as Latin was known throughout the West. In Eastern Europe therefore there was very little cultural and political influence of the Byzantine state that continued to exist until 1453. In fact the peoples of today's Belarus, Ukraine and Slovakia saw themselves as Catholics in the Middle Ages, even though they had a specific liturgical rite. They viewed the great schism of 1054 as a local conflict between the Greeks and the Romans that did not bother them. The decisive cultural chasm appeared in the XIII century when the Mongolians arrived and imposed their brutal rule upon these lands. To defend their European heritage, Ruthenia of Kiev and today's Belarus joined first with Lithuania and then with Poland. The Union of Brest of 1596 reconstituted the earlier ecclesial unity of the Slavonic rite with Rome. Only the principality of Moscow whose princes were for two centuries subjects of the Mongolian Khans of Saratov on the Volga based itself not on the political traditions of Ruthenia of Kiev, but on the Mongolian example. Koneczny observed the dominance of the Turanian system of rule in Central Asia, in Muscovy, and then in the Russian,⁹ and Ottoman empires, and also in India of the Moguls.

In the Turanian Russian system of government the will of the ruler is completely arbitrary and supreme. The entire state is treated like the personal property of the Tsar, who is not bound by any moral rules, who does not recognize any natural or acquired rights or any laws, and who can in one day make a peasant into a prince, and a prince into a Siberian prisoner. As a result, fear replaces the individual conscience. The more brutal are the leaders the more they are cherished and those who try to be humane are despised as being weak. People brought up in such a system are excessively servile towards those who are above and are abusive towards those who

⁹*Dzieje Rosji* [The History of Russia], vols. I-III, (Komorów: Antyk, 2003).

are below. The economic strength of such states is based not upon the private enterprise of individuals but on the state with the production of arms being the most important economic sector. Such a system generates expansive imperialism and strictly speaking has no place for nationhood in the Western sense. Revolutions often turn against the historical heritage, changing even the name of cities, something unthinkable in the West. Various ethnic and religious groups may coexist in a state that is governed in a Turanian way, but they have no influence on public affairs. The Orthodox Church of Russia always accepted total dependency upon the state and so it never developed a social ethics. It teaches about private and family spiritual life, but does not dare to view economics and politics from an ethical stance. Its Orthodoxy is therefore basically a "Tsarodoxy"¹⁰

In a lengthy historical study of the Byzantine civilization, Koneczny began with antiquity and covered the theme up to the XX century.¹¹ He was interested in the mode of functioning of the Byzantine Empire and in the later continuation of this model in European history. Here again, he arrived at a surprising conclusion. While asserting that Russia belongs to the Turanian and not the Byzantine civilization, he noted a profound Byzantine impact within German, particularly Prussian and Austrian history and so he described German imperial aspirations as the highest achievement of the Byzantine civilization.¹²

Greek and Roman antiquity had worked out an original cultural model with a republican form of government, with civil rights (that did not encompass slaves), independent philosophical thought and the recognition of a divine eternal law and a natural law. The military expansion of that world first under Alexander the Great and then by the Roman emperors led to a meeting of the Western model with the eastern empires of Babylon, Persia and Egypt. This encounter led to the orientalization of Rome and the reception of the Egyptian administrative methods. When Constantine moved the capital to the East the system of government became even more oriental, whereas the weakened West was left only with the moral authority of the Papacy. In their struggle against the Byzantine Empire the popes defended heroically the primacy of the spiritual realm above the political. In this way, the Church in the West conditioned the Latin civilization.

The memory however of a universal Roman empire, the heritage of which continued in Byzantium remained. The Empire of Charlemagne and then the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation of Otto and his successors continued to look towards Byzantium for inspiration. To the end of its existence the Byzantine Empire influenced the imagination of the European Holy Roman Empire. Koneczny claimed that through trade, the crusades, and the knowledge of Latin and occasionally of Greek, the Byzantine Empire exerted a greater influence on Western Europe than upon the Slavic East. The mediaeval struggle of the Papacy with the Western emperors, the reform of Cluny, the support of universities and mendicant orders were all expressions of the concern of the Papacy to maintain the supremacy of the spiritual over the political order and the independence of the Church from political pressure. The German Reformation followed the Byzantine model subordinating the Protestant churches to secular princes and the absolute monarchies. It was within the German imperial tradition that Josephinism was born, with the state legislating about the functioning of sacristies. Even today in German speaking countries the state collects levies for the Church through a system of taxation, thereby maintaining a control over the Churches.

In the Byzantine Empire the public state law was expanded enormously eliminating any vestiges of private law. Society could organize itself only in a way provided by the state and in

¹⁰*Prawa dziejowe*, p. 79.

¹¹*Cywilizacja bizantyńska* [The Byzantine Civilization], (London: Wyd. Tow. R. Dmowskiego, 1973).

¹²*Bizantynizm niemiecki* [German Byzantinism], (London: Wyd. Tow. R. Dmowskiego, 1982), p. 359. The term „German Byzantinism” was coined by the French historian Edgar Quinet (1803-1875).

accord with a finality imposed by the state.¹³ Art could follow only one canon. Monastic life could follow only the rule of St. Basil. The increasingly brutal bureaucratic police state imposed a total uniformity upon the burdened society.¹⁴ In Byzantium the most efficient way to improve one's economic situation was not through the production of something useful but through corrupt contacts with the officials. Taxation stifled economic initiatives particularly in the peripheries of the Empire, strengthening thereby the core. As a result a constantly shrinking Empire saw the steady Islamic advance. The Byzantine state was Christian in its ceremonial and state ideology, but the Church was subordinated to imperial authority. The principle *cuius regio eius religio* was not invented by the Reformation. It functioned for centuries in Byzantium, with only few saints who had the courage to stand up to civil authority.

Koneczny aligned the modern expansion of the responsibility of states with the Byzantine model. The fundamental canon of socialism that attributes total competence to state bureaucracies has its origin there. Koneczny differentiated between administration and bureaucracy.¹⁵ In an administration issues are handled by local governments and lower instances that react according to their own responsibility and recognition of a problem. A bureaucracy is an institution of the state and it does not need society, in fact it despises it, imposing detailed rules of behavior so as to extend its own control. In bureaucratic states laws are not known under the names of politicians who introduced them, because they have been imposed by anonymous, irremovable bureaucrats. Once an office has been established it constantly extends its interference justifying thereby its existence. One should distinguish between bureaucratic states and states that respect civil society rather than between monarchies and democracies.¹⁶ The more a state is omnipotent the more it has to be unethical, because to impose uniformity it must opt for the least demanding behavior. Nanny states based on heavy taxation and the throwing of costs upon future unborn generations do not envisage that services could be offered by independent local initiatives and at a cheaper cost. They are fundamentally Byzantine.

Koneczny observed that the Catholic Church always opposed the extension of state competence defending the principle of subsidiarity. The Latin civilization applies ethics to all walks of life, personal, family, social, political, economic, national and international.¹⁷ Catholic ethics are the most demanding and so the historian has difficulty in showing when and where ethical principles have been followed coherently. But it is possible to note that at times they have influenced social life. The Catholic Church offering sacramental graces to sinful men proposes a continuously developed ethical challenge. Those who respect the Catholic faith assess themselves and their responsibilities in the light of this horizon. The social functioning of this challenge can be studied by the historian. Koneczny understood the Latin civilization not as an abstract ideal, even deduced from the Gospel, but as a real model of behavior and social organization that for centuries has influenced Europe and the Americas.

What Koneczny described as the Latin civilization is basically the Catholic social ethos. He noticed its presence throughout the history of the Church and not only from the times of Leo XIII.¹⁸ In earlier social and economic contexts, the same ethical principles were in practice and they brought a humanization of social relationships and a defense of human dignity. Social bonds are conditioned by responsibility that derives from a moral stance, formed by a personal conscience. Society in the Latin civilization is something more than a mass of people, and so it

¹³*Prawa dziejowe*, p. 62.

¹⁴*Bizantynizm niemiecki*, p. 348-349.

¹⁵*Państwo w cywilizacji łacińskiej* [The State in the Latin Civilization], (London: Wyd. Tow. R. Dmowskiego, 1981), p. 47-59.

¹⁶*Rozwój moralności*, p. 226-7.

¹⁷*Prawa dziejowe*, p. 47; *Państwo w cywilizacji łacińskiej*, p. 46.

¹⁸*Prawa dziejowe*, p. 47.

precedes the state. The state can therefore respect society without taking over its tasks, and in so doing it is strengthened by the inner social cohesion.¹⁹ In the Arab civilization where morality is assured only by external pressure, there is no personalism and there cannot really be any democracy. When a state ceases to respect society, society ceases to treat the state as its own. In the Latin civilization the law of the state is based on ethical values that individuals bear within themselves recognizing their moral responsibility. When society begins to doubt about the possibility of knowing truth, moral truth ceases to be binding, and society, deprived of groups of people united in the name of values and professional ethics, degenerates into a mass of easily manipulated egoist individuals.

A fundamental principle of the Latin civilization is the supremacy of ethics over law. This is the exact opposite of the Arab civilization based on the Koran and the Jewish civilization that refers to the Talmud. In these, the holy law has absolute primacy and so intellectual effort does not search for moral truth itself and its ramifications. Instead it wonders how the unquestioned law can be reinterpreted in a casuist way so that the letter of the law will be followed, while its spirit will in fact be ignored. In the Catholic tradition, when new circumstances and challenges appear, there is first an attempt to understand the moral truth of the issue as it provokes a sense of responsibility, a virtuous stance. The moral law is helpful in this, but it basically only excludes the evil avenues leaving the positive way free. Only when moral clarity about the values involved has been achieved, there comes the time for an eventual change of penal laws and also of ecclesial canon law. The perception of the moral challenge precedes the search for legal solutions. So there is always a gap between ethics and penal laws.²⁰ This means that people are to follow ethics rather than just the law. Honesty requires that one does not profit from legal loopholes if they are unjust. When ethical responsibility sees more than the law, neither society nor the state are weakened, but beware of situations in which the law denies ethics!²¹ A perverse law generates impossible situations. If the state becomes stronger than society personal responsibility withers and moral irresponsibility is then easily justified by obedience to the state. It is precisely here that the Latin civilization differs from the Byzantine, let alone the Turanian.

Koneczny noticed that from antiquity the Catholic Church has always insisted upon four fundamental ethical principles that greatly contributed to the birth of nations. The Church always rejected polygamy defending lifelong monogamy. The Church always insisted upon independence from the state so that salutary truths could be freely preached, stressing thereby the supremacy of the spiritual realm. The Church strived to abolish or limit slavery. And finally the Church never accepted the vendetta, "honor killing" as a way of ensuring justice, requiring that conflicts be resolved through a state judiciary that has to recognize above itself superior moral principles.²²

The insistence on lifelong monogamy leads to the development of personalism and greatly uplifts the dignity of women. Monogamy is so important that it has had an impact on Arab civilization particularly in mediaeval Spain, where it contributed to the blossoming of that local culture. It also has influenced the Jewish civilization which retains many echoes of earlier polygamy in its Talmudic tradition.

The second principle requiring autonomy of the Church in respect to the state differentiates Catholicism from Byzantine Orthodoxy and German Protestantism. Kings often wanted to designate bishops, but the Catholic Church insists that they have to be ordained,

¹⁹*Państwo w cywilizacji łacińskiej*, p. 36.

²⁰Op. cit., p. 19.

²¹Op. cit., p. 38.

²²*Prawa dziejowe*, p. 80-81.

having an apostolic mandate. This issue today is at the heart of the struggle of the Catholic Church in China. The defense of the Church's autonomy leads to the conclusion that the state is not the ultimate criterion of truth. Happiness, salvation, eternal life, truth, justice and goodness are not politically negotiable. Constitutions of states need to recognize the primacy of moral values that are not conferred by the states, but are to be respected by them. The Church may defend the primacy of truth, because she does not invent it, having received it from God. The primacy of the spiritual realm over political power often had to be defended at the price of martyrdom. Two European nations that were the first to develop a parliamentary system at the end of the Middle Ages, earlier had martyr bishops who stood up to the power of the king: St. Thomas à Becket in England and St. Stanislaus in Poland.

The abolition of slavery required centuries and even today it has not been universally successful. Mediaeval kings and bishops strived to restrict the slave trade. The feudal system that obliged peasants to work on the land of the nobility had many injustices but it also imposed moral obligations on the lords who had to help the peasants in moments of catastrophes. In the New World Bartolomeo de Las Casas defended the rights of the Indians. The Catholic spirit is concerned with human dignity. It is interesting to note that when the Soviet system crashed, the peoples of Catholic countries, in Poland and Lithuania were the first to struggle for liberty, before the nations of the Orthodox tradition.

In all underdeveloped societies the moral obligation of revenge was a way of defending against aggressors, but this private meeting of justice only perpetuated hatred. Tribal revenge creates strong bonds based upon crime and it greatly brutalizes the social order. Mediaeval Irish monks who launched the practice of auricular confession introduced the going on a pilgrimage as a penance for crime. The hope was that during the long pilgrimage the penitent would get lost and so the cycle of the vendetta would be broken.²³ The transfer of meeting of justice on public authority, even when this was a local prince, a pagan emperor or a Protestant king, always strengthened the state and social morality. The Church has not succeeded in eliminating the vendetta everywhere. It still exists in part in Sicily and Sardinia. Koneczny noted that the European ethnic groups that have a deepest ingrained sense of the moral obligation of revenge are the Albanians in Kosovo and the peoples of Montenegro and Macedonia. It is also a basic rule in Afghanistan.

In the Latin civilization the state has to defend private law that is distinct from public law. In ancient Rome, even in the time of the Empire, when oriental methods of government were brought in, private law was respected. The recognition of acquired rights meant that a mediaeval English king could not enter the cottage of a peasant without his permission. Not only the Church struggled for the maintenance of its autonomy and self-government, but also various social and economic groups, guilds, universities and professional corporations cherished their freedom from state interference. Out of respect for private law Catholic kings gave privileges to the Jews so that they could live in their own neighborhoods and govern themselves according to their own law.

Koneczny viewed economics as a branch of ethics and not just applied mathematics. In the Latin civilization economic improvement is through production. Initially this was in agriculture and only later in crafts and trade. Mediaeval moralists allowed for the taking of interest on loans for investment, but they objected when this was for consumption. Since for centuries there were hardly any investments in agriculture the Church protested against usury. A basic Catholic principle is that a maximum number of people are to be economically independent, working on their own, for themselves. A second Catholic principle is the concern

²³Cf. John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology. A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 11-13.

that the more powerful will not destroy the weaker. Regulations among guilds and corporations that were abolished with the French Revolution had specifically this finality.²⁴ Another principle, mentioned by St. Paul (2 Cor 12, 14) is that “children are not expected to save up for their parents, but parents for children”. By comparison in Turanian economics war spoils and the production of arms play a dominant role. In the economics of the Byzantine civilization the obtaining of state contracts, privileges and tax deductions is of prime importance. In the Jewish civilization, financial services and trade, including international trade already in the early Middle Ages were central. Agriculture played a role only in Palestine.

When Koneczny worked out his theory of civilizations the major centers of traditional Jewish life were in Poland. This was before the Nazi Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel. In an extensive study,²⁵ full of historical detail Koneczny tried to individuate the specific characteristics of the Jewish civilization, wondering what is it that allows Jews to recognize and support one another despite differences in religious traditions, education, wealth, country of residence, language and political options. Koneczny insisted that this is not an issue of race, or language, or even religion, since there are essential differences between Talmudists, Cabbalists, the Chassidim and Jewish atheists. What unites all Jews is a profound conviction of their belonging to the chosen people, a conviction that even Jewish atheists seem to hold. Viewing the Old Testament as a historian and not as a theologian and abstracting from the New Testament, Koneczny saw that election was often tied with monolatry and not with monotheism. God was treated as a tribal god, better than other gods, and it is this theme that was later developed in the Talmud. Jewish religiosity became like a contract made with a private god with the terms of the agreement clearly and legally defined, which could then be interpreted purely in one's own interest, so long as the letter of the law is maintained. This generated a sacred legal civilization that specifies religiously the most detailed aspects of life. Regulations concerning not only ritual but also cooking, washing and economic relationships led to the desire to live in closely knit communities with their own judiciary, penal system, taxation and security that had the characteristics of statehood, and it led to an unimaginable in the Latin civilization, dual system of ethics, one towards the Jews and another towards non-Jews. Inevitably this generated conflicts with the outside world. It also led to the conviction that externally imposed procedures rather than personal virtue ensure the appropriateness of action.²⁶ Since the Enlightenment important changes appeared in Jewish life, but some elements of their civilization, like Messianic self-understanding have remained.

The laws of history

Towards the end of his life Koneczny developed a general synthesis, formulating six basic laws of history. He understood these not in a deterministic sense that denies human liberty, nor did he try to offer a prophetic hope that eschatology would find its fulfillment within time.

The first law of all civilizations is their commensurability. Minor differences may exist within them, but without inherent contradiction.²⁷ Each civilization can function only by being coherent, meaning that basic elements have to be in tune with one another and there has to be a social consensus about fundamental values. It is not possible to be civilized in two opposing ways. If people belonging to different civilizations marry, one of them has to change the value system. History demonstrates that in Spain the Arab civilization abolished the earlier Latin tradition, and then the Spaniards expelled or converted the Moors. People of different ethnic background, but

²⁴*Państwo w cywilizacji łacińskiej*, p. 41; *The Jewish Civilization* (Komorów: Antyk, 2011), p. 659.

²⁵*The Jewish Civilization* (Komorów: Antyk, 2011).

²⁶Op. cit. p. 410-417.

²⁷*Prawa dziejowe*, p. 118.

all affirming their European Christian roots could create the United States. But the establishment of a common integrated society composed of people affirming a Catholic, Islamic and Gypsy ethos is impossible. At best each group will strive to live within its own cultural and ethical milieu.

Koneczny pointed out that there is commensurability between permanent monogamy, personalism and private property. It is unimaginable that monogamists will sell their daughters to polygamists, because such a trade is unthinkable in a personalist social system. The emancipation of the family based upon life-long monogamy develops respect for private property and generates responsibility in the economic and political spheres. The questioning of the monogamous family leads to the abolition of private property. This happened among the Albigensians, the Dutch Anabaptists and the Bolsheviks, and everywhere it led to degeneration and enslavement.²⁸ The law of commensurability shows that it is not possible to build a cohesive society when it is racked by internal ethical inconsistencies.

The second law of history is the principle of inequality. Observation proves that there are inequalities in human talent, health, education, honesty and wealth. People have differing ideas about work. For some it is a blessing, for others it is a curse. Differences diversify society and this is the foundation of personalism and responsibility. The weaker emulate outstanding individuals. There have in history been many ideologies that tried to impose an artificial equality, insisting that all have to be equally rich or more often equally poor. Christianity differentiates between justice and equality and so it accepts differences in wealth, so long as wealth does not become an idol. The recognition of the fact of inequalities is an essential element of describing every social reality.

The third law of history is the principle of durability and expansion. The expansion of ideals has a greater part in history than military conquest of lands and resources.²⁹ When the colonial powers left Africa the work of missionaries survived. At the basis of a civilization there is an idea for life, and since it is valued, there is the desire to transmit it to the next generation. Most often people belonging to a given civilization, if they cannot share their value system with others or do not strive to do so because their civilization is not missionary, they will find a way of maintaining their own style of life. A civilization that is not vibrant, and passively imitates the inherited ethos, may still be durable. Since the basic difference between civilizations is ethical, invariably there are conflicts when opposing civilizations clash. If neither civilization succeeds in imposing its value system, this generates ethical exhaustion and apathy with individuals moving to the more coherent, even though lower civilization. Some Englishmen convert to Islam, because it offers them a way of life that Anglican Christianity has failed to give them.

The fourth law of history notes that syntheses among developed civilizations are impossible. A social order built upon conflicting ethical ideals is bound to crash. Dogmatic and moral principles are important and so they cannot be replaced by ideologies invented by intellectuals or bureaucrats who come up with a novel brand of moral propriety. The working out of inherently conflicting inter-civilization syntheses does not happen naturally, but only as a result of conscious but completely misguided efforts, which always in history have failed.³⁰ There have of course been spontaneous encounters of people of differing civilizations, but periods of cooperation were short and conflicts were long lasting. Hellenistic states set up after Alexander the Great accepted the Greek language, science and art, but their political system was still oriental. They had no philosophy and independent political thought. India has seen many attempts to work out a synthesis of religions. They always proposed to include the new religion

²⁸Op. cit., p. 118-124.

²⁹Op. cit., p. 161.

³⁰Op. cit., p. 184-5.

into the existing pantheon. Christians cannot accept that Christ will be treated as one more idol amongst others. Suggestions that religious beliefs can be the subject of negotiations leading to a nebulous synthesis that can then be interpreted at will are only made by those for whom religious beliefs are irrelevant anyway. Cultures, however, that belong to one civilization can merge. Anglican and Scandinavian Protestant traditions were included by Koneczny in the Latin civilization, because in his time there were no major ethical differences between them and the Catholic Church. Similarly he probably would have envisaged the possibility of an integration of the Hispanic and north-American Protestant cultures, (something that Huntington feared). But, a synthesis of the Byzantine and Latin civilizations is impossible despite their common Christian roots. Differences in ecclesiology and the servile attitude of the Byzantine civilization towards the state exclude such a fusion.

Koneczny's fifth law concerns the mixing of civilizations. An inter-civilization synthesis is an unrealistic intellectual ideology, whereas mixing is the natural result of travel and the appearance within one civilization of people who live according to the ethical principles of another. This does not produce a new civilization. The foreign element may be allowed to live in its own community, or in time it may be assimilated, but it will have to then relinquish its identity. Or under the influence of the arrivals the local civilization will be weakened or changed, or else there may be even an attempt to expel the foreign element, sometimes brutally. Koneczny attributed many wars of universal history not to the interplay of conflicting economic interests and class struggle, but to the appearance of a medley of conflicting ideas about the ethical principles of social and political life. Such a mix generates serious problems, incertitude about concepts, contradictory aims, and inconstancy in views, desires and actions. There is disorientation, the weakening of the will to react and inability to uphold values. The victims do not know what to think and how to react. Some fall into apathy and others follow sudden but thoughtless impulses.³¹ Value systems in the field of politics and economics are then suppressed by brute force and mendacity, which become the necessary tools of government. Invariably this leads to moral relativism, hedonism and stagnation.

The sixth law of history follows from the preceding. Whenever there is a mix of civilizations, generally it is the lower one that wins. This view concerns not economic or political power but their underlying ethos. Chaos in ethical formation lowers moral standards leading to the victory of the least morally demanding civilization. There are many historical examples of this. The Turanian civilization of the Mongolians and the Ottoman Turks abolished the remnants of the Slav but Catholic tradition in Muscovy and the Byzantine civilization in Asia Minor. The German, primarily Prussian princes preferred the Byzantine centralized model of government to the Latin principle of subsidiarity. But there have also been examples of civilizations that have succeeded to persist in their higher value system and even to expand it, despite contrary winds. The Latin civilization converted the Germanic tribes that conquered the Western Roman Empire. The Byzantine civilization imposed its own view on the pagan Slavs who invaded the Balkans. In historical Lithuania and Ruthenia, that is today's Belarus and Ukraine, the Latin civilization from Poland withstood the pressures of the Turanian model.³² In each of these examples there was a conscious effort of several generations to defend their value system. Wherever a civilization of a higher moral standard eventually won, the role of religion was decisive.³³ The defense of a higher ethos requires men of character and not all societies faced with the clash of civilizations are willing to make the effort. Even though honest men may be a statistical minority, it is they who maintain high moral standards within the social order. But a civilization of a lower ethos which does not care about education and honesty towards the outside world may be internally coherent and have therefore the capacity to resist outside pressures. In

³¹Op. cit., p. 215.

³²Op. cit., p. 218.

³³Op. cit., p. 222.

Europe, it can be observed that Islamic and Gypsy communities locked in their own setting seem to have a greater internal coherence and capacity for resistance than the post-Christian world which is losing its moral bearings. This does not mean that these two civilizations have a greater respect for human dignity than the Catholic ethos. Koneczny therefore concluded that a higher ethos is always more at risk while a lower ethos wins easily. If a lower civilization does not mix with others, it will be stronger than a higher civilization that is willing to be watered down by others.³⁴

Sweeping generalization?

This theory of civilizations may be accused of being a sweeping generalization. But the observation that people tend to live according to a given ethos, and that ideas about what is morally appropriate are generally transmitted to next generations, even among those who drop religious practice is valid. Koneczny's theory was born out of his amazement that entire social groups have sometimes completely different ideas about what is right and what is wrong. This can therefore be the subject matter of scientific historical enquiry. Koneczny was not an ethicist, who would study the principles of morals philosophically, although he understood the need for such a discourse. He drew his conclusions from descriptive ethics based on the observation of historical facts, as he saw them. This does not mean that the knowledge of the facts on which he built his synthesis cannot be deepened, extended and also corrected. His synthesis is therefore open to further studies, confirmation and correction.

Koneczny's theory of civilizations has no trace of racism or xenophobia. It is upbringing and not some genetic code that assures ethical opinions. The fact that differing value systems are observed sociologically and historically does not have to lead to irrational phobias, even when a less demanding ethos is not approved. The Catholic conviction that morality has to be total, with the same moral principles applied to personal, family, economic, political, national and international life does not necessarily generate totalitarianism.

Koneczny defended the Latin civilization with its most demanding ethos. This allowed him to evaluate the ethics of other civilizations, without landing in a facile apologetics that would pretend that Catholics everywhere have always lived up to Catholic moral standards. He clearly perceived the difficulties involved in maintaining that ethos within social life. He did not anachronistically critique the Church condemning past historical periods through moral criteria that had been developed later. Instead, he perceived continuity in the basic ethical principles that were extended and applied as new challenges arose. And also, he was not a Romantic who would expect an imminent appearance of the Kingdom of God on earth. Nor was he a pessimist fearing a catastrophic decline of the Latin civilization despite the atrocities of the Second World War that he saw. His laws of history are not a deterministic theory that prophesies the future. They grew from an observation of the importance of personal decisions made by individuals who decide to follow or not to follow their moral orientation. It is the social dimension of these ethical stances that generates civilizations.

If anybody can be called a Romantic, this term has to be applied to contemporary ideologies that imagine that simply through globalization, centralization of power, migrations, trade, exchange of capital or even military occupation flourishing peaceful democracies will come about. Koneczny's conclusions are realistic, but not pessimistic. They are fully in tune with the Catholic Church's simultaneous defense of fundamental moral principles in the face of new challenges and with the Church's offering of the saving power of Christ's grace.

³⁴Op. cit., p. 235.