

**G. W. LEIBNIZ'S PHILOSOPHY AND
PRACTICAL PROJECTS**

Licentiate thesis

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5. THE REUNION OF THE CHURCHES

5. 1. Leibniz's Religious Views

Leibniz had been baptized to Protestant religion. As a child he found some books in his father's library, which concerned religious disagreements and got interested in theology. Leibniz learned to appreciate the good sides of Catholicism through his patrons and colleagues. He never admitted the common Protestant view of Pope as an Antichrist.¹

The philosopher seemed not to have been a pious Protestant no more than a fervent Catholic. One cannot, however, consider him as an atheist, though he hardly ever visited the church. He told his assistant that he was a priest of natural rights and noted that that was all he found in the Bible.² According to many rumors Leibniz refused blessings in his deathbed.³ These facts and rumors earned the philosopher a bad reputation and in his last years in Hanover he was very unpopular.

After reading Leibniz's writings (The *Monadology* in particular) one cannot help thinking that Leibniz was religious, but in his own way - his conception of God is perhaps closer to platonism, the mystical theology of eastern religions or pantheism than the doctrines of Christianity. Leibniz believed that in every religion there is a mutual seed of truth. It seems that Leibniz had his own, philosophical version of religion, which is a combination of Protestantism and Catholicism. Leibniz was deeply religious, notes Jordan, but hated dogmatism and the short-sightedness of clergy and kept himself neutral because of that.⁴ According to Leroy Loemker, Leibniz thought that his philosophy is an argument on behalf of Christianity.⁵

The interest in Leibniz's religious views and in his attempt at reunification the Christian confessions has been very low in recent times. The few modern authors on the matter, like F. X. Kiefl and G. J. Jordan, wrote in the beginning of the 20th century and show certain

¹Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 36.

²Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 349.

³Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, p. 16.

⁴Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 37.

⁵Loemker, *Struggle for Synthesis*, p. 59.

weaknesses in their discussions. For example, both of them tend to forget most of other aspects of Leibniz's thought and Kiefl seems also to think the reunification as an end in itself.

This state of things is not very surprising, since Leibniz never wrote any significant treatise of his "rational theology" and the knowledge we have of it is largely presented on various letters and fragments of other, mostly metaphysical, subjects. Due to this situation, I have used, in addition to Kiefl and Jordan, very various sources in this chapter and have tried to fill some holes in the respects mentioned above in the standard presentation of Leibniz's ecumenical work.

Judging by modern standards Leibniz can be situated in a long list of apologetic authors, which originates from Plato. Leibniz thought his philosophy to act as an argument on behalf of Christianity, which is evident in many of his writings, notably in *Theodicy*. Theological matters are present in every aspect of Leibniz's output - even in his mathematical writings. His work with the church reunion is mainly to be traced from his correspondence.

Leibniz's Christian truth resembles closely the one of the Protestants. On the other hand, his mysticism can be related to Catholicism. His attitude to religion is presented in a letter to Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels in 30. 1. 1692, where Leibniz divides the confessions according to three principles. The first class is based on following an authority (Catholic and Greek-Catholic churches), the second on scriptures (Protestantism) and the third on philosophy.¹ It is evident that the last alternative was based on Leibniz's own analytic philosophy.

The Landgrave Hessen-Rheinfels (1623-93) turned to Catholicism in 1652 after being a fervent Protestant. He was also the author of several works in German, French and in Italian, which he had printed and given to his friends. Hessen-Rheinfels tried actively to convert Leibniz, but the philosopher argued against Catholicism on following grounds: Leibniz divided in the Catholic church an inner (the church the way it should be) and an

¹Kiefl, *Der Friedensplan des Leibniz...*, p. 104.

outer circle (the church as it is to the public). Leibniz admitted the inner circle, but could not accept the fact, that a member of the outer circle would have to agree on certain errors in philosophy and sciences (Bruno and Galilei are especially lurking between the lines), although those things could be proven otherwise.¹

A true religion, which should be based on reason instead of dogma or authority, can be achieved, if all religions would communicate and negotiate with each other. If religion is based on reason, philosophy according to Leibniz is a kind of faith in reason - this is the only true substance which can act as a basis of religion. The faith in God, an inner conviction, matters most. This faith is to be analyzed with help of rational theology.

The reunion of the confessions is, most of all, a moral goal : since the truth is one and the souls are residents of one and the same City of God, one has to find a theological system, which is applicable by all right-thinking individuals² and this can be found by analyzing different confessions.

5. 2. The Goals and Methods of the Church Reunion

The Thirty-years-war gave a new burst to the enterprises of church reunion. Hugo Grotius failed completely in his undertaking, but others, like the English John Dury, Baron von Boineburg, Landgrave Hessen-Rheinfels, the solicitor Herman Conring and the theologian George Calixtus³ (who was part of the Helmstad syncretist school), were not discouraged. In Germany the ecumenical movement flourished - surprisingly? - in Mainz and in Hanover,⁴ where Leibniz was active. The movement had had some substantial projects, like the ecumenical congress in Poland in 1645, which, however, resulted hardly more than to bitterness on all sides.⁵

¹Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 123.

²Rescher, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, p. 140.

³The influence of Calixtus forms a speciality in the church history of Lower Saxony. The University of Helmstedt, where he was active, became the centre of discussion of church reunion. Leibniz can be regarded as a follower of Calixtus in his ecumenical strivings. *Geschichte Niedersachsens*, Bd. 3. Teil 2, p. 123-26.

⁴Loemker, *Struggle for Synthesis*, p. 84.

⁵Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 45.

As we saw before, Leibniz's answer to ecumenical problems was a rational theology. As a 17-year old he wrote "*Vita a semetipso breviter delineata*", where he suggested analysis as an answer to theological disagreements. One has to analyze the dogmas rationally and find the central principles of Christianity.¹ Leibniz's *characteristica universalis*, or universal language, was meant to be the main tool in the process.

When the reason dominates theology, a personal conviction is left to the individual believer. The faith should only follow the reason - in another words : the reason persuades one to believe.² This resulted in a paradox, as Loemker noted : wanting to establish Christian faith, Leibniz actually helped to support the extreme rational optimism of the age which followed³ and at the same time, libertine movements and revolutions, which Leibniz always opposed. This rational ideal did not last long. The development of rational calculus would take longer than Leibniz at first assumed and he had to apply other means as well to conduct the religious unification.

Leibniz's political experience taught him diplomacy and in a letter to Bishop Bossuet this is evident. He suggested three ways to achieve religious unity. The first one was the exactness of language (all the participants understand all the concepts the same way - one reason more to develop the *characteristica universalis*!), the second one was the religious tolerance and the third one was progress in little steps (one should leave the most difficult issues to be solved last).⁴ Bossuet's attitude to religious question was much more straightforward : he thought that the dogmas should be unified and the differences solved.

Here we see a personality clash. A distinguished diplomat like Leibniz was used to proceed by negotiating and arguing whereas the French Bishop was used to enforce the right religion and the absolute power of his King, Louis XIV. We will return to the correspondence between these men shortly, but the example shows clearly that the communication between a philosopher and the ecclesticals could be very difficult.

¹Kiefl, *Der Friedesplan des Leibniz...*, p. III-V.

²L, p. 50.

³Ibid.

⁴R, p. 189-90.

Religious motives were not the only driving force behind Leibniz in his great enterprise. He was well aware that the religious controversies of the century were often cloaks for more earthly designs.¹ Leibniz's ultimate goal was world peace. By solving the religious controversies a basis for the harmony and peace in Europe is prepared - and peace is a necessary condition for the promotion of arts and sciences and the general well-being in the continent.

The religious crisis was to Leibniz essentially a question of cultural and the civilizing process of Europe.² Religious unity is also behind the scenes when Leibniz fiercely attacked atheism, libertinism and other movements, that were dangerous to this goal. He saw religious unity as a first step towards to political peace. This would enable the *Respublica christiana* and later the *Respublica optima*.

This view is shared by most of Leibniz's modern commentators like Leroy Loemker and Patrick Riley whereas F. X. Kiefl considers the reunification as an end in itself. This is more like a difference of semantics than of opinion. In a way the reunification is an end in itself, but only because it includes the consequences which unite Europe culturally. Therefore, I think that the older view of Kiefl is less accurate because it does not necessarily lead to political developments.

It is not certain whether Leibniz thought the reunification attainable in his time. Some of his early ecumenical writings (for example, "*Pour faciliter la réunion des Protestants avec les Romains catholiques*", discussed in detail in next chapter) seem to hint at that direction, but the optimism in them may be rhetorical and diplomatic by character. His optimism certainly gradually settled, but it is possible that he thought a good start would enable the project to be realized in time.

¹L, p. 6.

²Meyer, *Leibniz and the 17th Century*, p. 84.

5. 3. Leibniz's Work for the Reunification of the Churches

Leibniz's enterprise for the reunification of the churches was a visible part of his actions all through his life. This project was his personal project and had nothing to do with the official policy of the Hanover court.¹

His first big-scale attempt at unification was a sketch for a work called *Demonstrationes Catholicae*, which would include his previous and new writings on the subject.² The task of the work was to bring together the Christian main points in such an easy form that all parties were able to accept it. It would work as a basis to a new, ecumenical religion. Leibniz put forward the plan already in his Mainz years 1669-70, but the actual writing of the book was to take place once Duke Johann Friedrich had presented the plan to the Pope while visiting Rome.³

This high tide in the reunification project was largely due to the Duke's interest on the subject. He had earlier approved of the Bishop Bossuet's work *Exposition de la foi de l'Église catholique*⁴ and some negotiations with the papal legate Rojas y Spinola had been conducted on the subject.

In a letter to Johann Friedrich Leibniz wrote that the first part of the book is comprised of ontological arguments for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, the second one argues on various aspects of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist and the resurrection of the body. The third part would concentrate on the relations between the ecclesiastical and secular orders.⁵

In addition, there will be a philosophical introduction (prolegomena), in which subjects like

¹Kiefl, *Der Friedensplan des Leibniz...*, p. II.

²The work was essentially influenced by the discussions with Baron von Boineburg. L, p. 108.

³Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 99-100; L, p. 109.

⁴Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 99.

⁵L, p. 260.

physics, metaphysics, logic and practical philosophy are discussed.¹ Unfortunately the Duke died on his way to Rome and the work was never finished. Only fragments of the work on such subjects as dreams, physics and the immortality of the soul has remained, but these present no definitive method for the reunification, more like various philosophical arguments, which have a bearing on the main arguments.

An important fragment connected with the work is *Confessio naturae contra atheistas*, where Leibniz laments the state of things where "truly capable men for the first time began to try to save or to explain natural phenomena, or those, which appear in bodies, without assuming God on taking him into their reasoning."² Then he goes on to prove, against Gassendi and Hobbes, that bodies cannot move without an external cause. And this leads to an argument on the existence of God; Leibniz presents a demonstration on behalf of the immortality of the mind as well.

After the death of the Duke Leibniz sought support from Landgrave Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, who was at first interested in Leibniz's project, but came later to the conclusion that the reunion was impossible and tried instead to convert Leibniz to Catholicism. The correspondence ended in bitter feelings.

Through the Landgrave Leibniz established an important contact with Antoine Arnauld, the famous French Cartesian and theologian. Unfortunately, Arnauld was primarily interested in converting Leibniz to Catholic faith and though a long correspondence resulted (featuring the *Discourse de la metaphysique*), Leibniz's plans did not influence Arnauld. The French theologian thought Leibniz should give up philosophy and dwell on mathematical studies, which were better suited for him.³

Leibniz's politics in the reunification are exposed in a memorandum to the Landgrave. In the memorandum he thought that without the help and activity of some great prince (the

¹Leibniz, a Biography, p. 109. Some commentators have seen the Discourse of Metaphysics in connection with the Catholic Demonstrations, as a metaphysics, which would form the basis for the universal church and finally help in uniting the Protestants and the Catholics. Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, p. 79.

²L, p. 110; G IV, p. 105.

³Kiefl, *Der Friedensplan des Leibniz...*, p. XIX.

Pope, the Emperor, a leading Catholic or Protestant prince) the practical difficulties in the project would be far too great to cope with.¹

Leibniz turned his attention to France. The correspondence with Arnauld was the first step in a long discussion with the French theologians, who, Leibniz thought, would influence the King Louis XIV and persuade him to support the project.

There was some action in Germany as well. Rojas y Spinola, Bishop of Tina in Croatia and later of Neustad and a Spanish Franciscan acted as an agent of the Emperor (being a member of the Spanish party in the imperial court) and the Pope and arrived at the Hanoverian court in 1677, approximately at the same time as Leibniz himself.² Negotiations with Spinola were encouraging and a German theologian Molanus (Gerhardt Walter van den Muelen 1633-1722), who was Abbot of Loccum, drew up a memorandum (*Regulae circa Christianorum omnium ecclesiasticam unionem*, 1683; the memorandum was not published until 1691³), which became the basis of the forthcoming attempts at reunification.

Leibniz had no official status in these negotiations, but followed them closely and had close contacts with all the parties. He also wrote some memoirs himself in the name of Molanus, like the fragment *Pour faciliter la réunion des Protestants avec les Romains catholiques*⁴, where he presented a very detailed proposition of the reunion and a timetable for its realization. It is useful to look at this memoir in details, since it helps us to understand Leibniz's view of the reunion of the churches. It is also an excellent case-study

¹Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 141.

²Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 46-47. Spinola had already been active in the 1660's, when he conducted several negotiations about the church reunion in various courts around Germany. His great journey in Germany began in 1666 and he visited München, Kassel, Osnabrück, Celle and Wolfenbüttel besides Hanover. Huber, *Leibniz*, p. 290-91.

³According to Jordan the memorandum is probably a compromise but is not certain, since our knowledge of the negotiations is based only on Protestant sources. Therefore Spinola's exact original suggestions are not known to us.

Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 55.

⁴FC II, p. 172f.

of Leibniz's view of rational decision-making.¹

In the beginning of the memoir Leibniz declares that the possibility of the reunion is dependent in the question of heresy² - the Protestants were not formally heretic, because the status had been cast upon them without consulting. The protestants were only materially heretic, which should be admitted by the Catholics.

Leibniz proceeds by presenting six concessions to be made by the Catholics³ : 1) The Catholics should admit the Protestants to return permanently to the Roman Church 2) The Catholics must not force the Protestants to hold catholic masses or to use a language that is not familiar to people in their churches. They should also not to be forced to introduce rites, which would cause alarm or inconveniences. 3) The Protestant priest and other ecclesticals should be allowed to marry, since it is already an established practice 4) The Protestant priests should be allowed to practice their profession to the Catholics also - according to Leibniz this would cause no scandals if the sacraments and rules of the Catholics are honored. 5) All the lands and property of the Protestants transformed in the Peace of Westphal and other transactions should be returned 6) When the Protestants have agreed to the terms here, all excommunication's and anathema's should be abolished. A declaration should be issued which states that the Protestants are no longer heretic or schismatic.

Leibniz holds certain that the Pope could admit these terms : "...there is nothing in these points, which is contrary to the Divine justice and which the Pope could not allow..."⁴ The Protestants should also make some concessions and submit to the following five points sincerely⁵ : 1) The Protestants should admit that the Bishop of Rome is the highest authority of the whole Christian world and the supreme patriarch in spiritual matters. 2)

¹There are a number of similar memoirs, of which only some have been published. For example : "Variae definitiones ecclesiae" (N. 514 in Vorausedition), where Leibniz defines the difference between the visible and invisible church and "Animadversiones in schedam ex Batavis missam" (N. 518), where Leibniz discusses of Calvinism. Leibniz, Vorausedition, 10.

²FC II, p. 174.

³Ibid., p. 176-77.

⁴"...il n'y a rien dans ces points qui soit contraire au droict divin et que le Pape ne puisse permettre..."Ibid., p. 178.

⁵Ibid., p. 179-80.

The Protestant priests are subject to their bishops, the bishops to their Archbishops and so forth according to the Catholic hierarchy. 3) The Protestants should recognize their fellow Catholics as brothers in Jesus Christ, cultivate actual unity with them and practice charity. The controversies should be solved by the Church. 4) When the reunion is made, the Protestants should agree not only to maintain the peace and unity, but perfect it by all means available. 5) The Protestant priests should enter into a solid and peaceful discussions, where the controversies and disagreements of the two doctrines are analyzed and which would establish the core of Christian faith to the posterity.

Leibniz maintains that a majority of controversies are pseudo-problems because of the manner they are presented and that by careful analysis one often finds out that the differences are not real or that they can be left to a later moment, when the solution is easier to find.¹

This is evident, when Leibniz goes on to present a time-table for the reunion, which is to last for 30 years. During the first decade the question of the mass and the Eucharist will be almost solved and the differences are only verbal. The Protestants will allow the Catholic masses and the Catholics will allow the Protestant sermons, as long as there is no abuse towards the saints or no vernacular language will be used.²

During the second decade some Catholic sacraments (the sacred oil, for example) will be introduced to the Protestants.³ Also the sacrament of marriage will be unified throughout Christendom.⁴ One must also clarify some verbal misunderstandings between the parties (the question of the actual removal of evil by mass, regarded to be held by the Catholics, for example).⁵ As the third decade of the reunion starts, "there are no controversies about whether good deeds will affect the justification or the forgiveness of evil things."⁶ The controversies of good deeds and their affection to one's "heavenly credit" will become

¹ FC II, p. 184.

² Ibid., p. 184-85.

³ Ibid., p. 186

⁴ Ibid., p. 187.

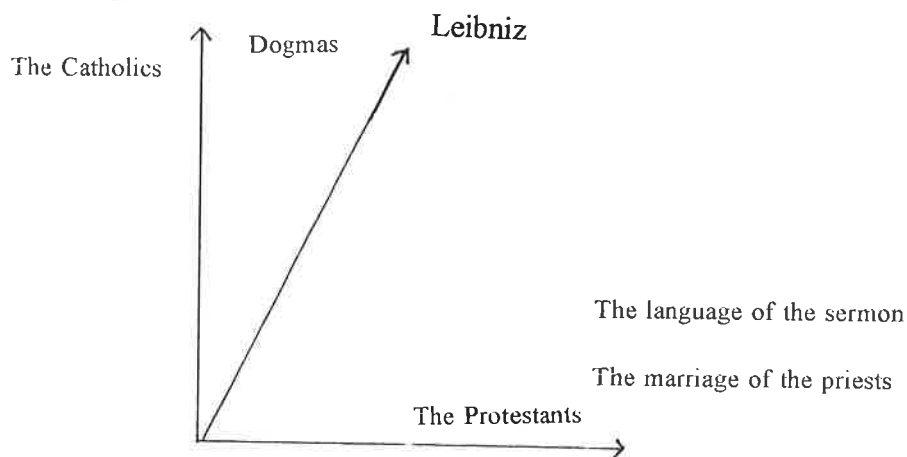
⁵ Ibid., p. 188.

⁶ "...il n'y a plus de controverse si les bonnes oeuvres méritent la justification ou la rémission des péchés." Ibid., p. 189.

only scholastic disputes.¹

The same holds for all former difficulties. In the last stage of the reunion the controversies have become only verbal and can be solved by continuous discussions between the leading theologians of both parties. Leibniz describes the problems of not real, but only verbal.²

Leibniz's memoir seems to apply the vectorial model of rational decision-making discussed in 2. 2. 3. We can see that the two main factors of the question are, on the other hand, the dogmas and on the other hand, the uniformity of the Church.



The points of difference will eventually be clarified and the final result is a compromise of competing opinions and doctrines. The Protestants should admit some of Catholic sacraments whereas the Catholics should tolerate the vernacular used in sermons and the marriage of the priests.

Spinola had in mind a general church assembly, where the Protestants and the Catholics could negotiate of the church reunion. The necessary preconditions for the success of such an undertaking would be that the Protestants would show their willingness to return to the Pope's subordination and that the Catholics would accept the Protestants as an equal party in the negotiations.³ Various suggestions of different practical matters were presented and the general idea of these were that the Christians would be divided to old

¹FC II, p. 189.

²Ibid., p. 189-90.

³Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 49.

and new ones. New Christian priests were allowed to preach in vernacular and marry, even twice.¹ The Pope would announce a bull, which would end the Protestant's status of heresy.

The reception in Hanover was encouraging, but other German theologians were not impressed by this plan. The Pope and the cardinal collegium thought best to leave the issue at rest.² According to Jordan, the reunification of the confessions were at this time closer to realization than ever before or after.³ No wonder Leibniz had high hopes of his reunification projects and Spinola performed an even more grandiose tour in Germany in 1678, which included München, Nürnberg, Frankfurt a. M., Mannheim, Mainz, Köln, Hanover and Lübeck, among others. Because of various other assignments Leibniz lost contact to the ever-active Spinola, but renewed the friendship later and Spinola helped him in introducing him to influential people in Vienna.⁴ The Bishop Spinola moved later in Hungary, where he died in 1695.⁵

At the same time as these negotiations were going on and the correspondence with the Landgrave continued, Leibniz started correspondence with a third party, Pellisson Fontanier. Pellisson Fontanier had an important position in the French court as a court historian of Louis XIV and was interested in controversies between confessions. Like the Landgrave, he had been a Calvinist, but turned to Catholicism in 1670.⁶

Pellisson's work *Réflexions sur les différends de matière de religion* (1686) reflected on writings of various Protestants including Jurieu, à French theologian, and Leibniz. The work led to a correspondence, which was conducted from 1690 to 1693 (when Pellisson died) by Marie de Brinon⁷, who was a secretary of the well-known Abbess of Maubuisson (Louise Hollandine), herself a convert and sister of Sophie of Hanover.

¹Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 54.

²Ibid., p. 62-63.

³Ibid., p. 122.

⁴Huber, Leibniz, p. 293.

⁵Kiefl, *Der Friedensplan des Leibniz...*, p. XXVI.

⁶Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 134.

⁷Ibid., p. 136.

The correspondence touched the same subjects as the correspondence with Landgrave Hessen-Rheinfels. Leibniz's division between the inner and the outer circles of church were especially discussed. Leibniz emphasized the need of analyzing and verifying the dogmas of Christianity.¹ Another main point in the discussion was Leibniz's conception of heresy. He thought there was two kinds of heresy. The other one was material heresy and the another one was formal heresy. The formal heresy is unforgivable, but material heresy is a less serious case and can be forgiven.

"The theologians hesitate to accept the banishment [of the Protestants] as rightful. In addition the Catholics admit, that these are materially heretic and disobedience only causes them to be heretics in this case."²

Leibniz concluded that the Protestants fall to heretics without knowing it themselves. This means that they are only materially heretic and the schism can be ended :

"...they believe in a heresy without knowing it and that is not formal heresy - when they were excommunicated, they were not schismatics neither."³

Pellison supported Leibniz in his reunification activity, but remained very strictly within the Catholic traditions and dogmas. Leibniz did not want to push things and obliged his former diplomacy - he explained that the dogmas were not very far from each other and one should concentrate on practical matters first.⁴ The correspondence did not lead to any significant practical results, but it had a few advantages : first, it led to a correspondence with the leading theologian of France, Bishop Bossuet and second, it helped Leibniz to sharpen his theological arguments.

¹Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 138.

²"Les théologians demeurent d'accord qu'on peut estre excommunié justement. De plus, les catholiques accordent qu'il y a des hérétiques matériels qu'ils n'osent point condamner : ce n'est donc que la désobéissance, selon eux, qui condamne."

(From a letter to Pellison) FC I, p. 174.

³"...il croiroit quelque hérésie sans le seavoir, il ne seroit pas hérétique formel pour cela, et quand il seroit excommunié ou retranché, il ne seroit point schismatique non plus.

(Des méthodes de réunion) FC II, p. 5.

⁴Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 182.

The correspondence between Leibniz and Bossuet marked the high point in the project of reunification. Bossuet as a privy councilor of Louis XIV and influential churchman had much more power than Pellisson or Landgrave Hessen-Rheinfels. There was also some positive developments around this time : in the early 1690's discussion with Roman Catholics created hopes of the recognition of a semi-autonomous German Catholic Church.¹

Jacques Bénigne Bossuet was born in Dijon in 1627 and directed to clerical career by his parents at an early age. After preaching in courtly events he was nominated to Bishop of Condom and later to Meaux. Bossuet became a fervent defender of absolute monarchy and a pillar of Catholicism although he was in friendly terms with Arnauld and other Jansenists. Bossuet was also an author of a well-known work, *Histoire des variations des églises Protestantes*, which was a learned attack against Protestantism.

He was also well-known opponent of Malebranche and the Cartesians, who, according to Bossuet, held God as the giver of universe-governing general physical laws, not King of kings. Bossuet wanted to say, with Pascal : "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob - not of the philosophers and the theologians."² This paternalistic attitude can easily be seen in the correspondence between Bossuet and Leibniz - there is no place for reasoning : one has only to study the Scriptures.

The correspondence started from the memorandum of Molanus, which was sent to Abbess Maubuisson by Electress Sophia of Hanover.³ The memorandum was delivered to Bossuet with Leibniz's letter and the Bishop answered with a letter containing the dogmatic and practical disagreements between the Catholic and Protestant churches presented point by point. Leibniz carried on in this vein in his answer and this systematic discussion

¹RB, p. xxviii.

²Bossuet, *Politics Drawn from Holy Scriptures*, p. xx.

³A little later Molanus prepared another version of the memorandum called *Cogitationes privatae de methodo reunionis ecclesiae Protestantium cum ecclesia Romano-Catholica*, which dealt with the same issues as the previous version, but included also more practical suggestions. Leibniz sent the memorandum to Bossuet right away, but no great change in correspondence occurred.

G VII, p. XXXIV.

crystallized on two points : the Council of Trent and the doctrine of predestination. Other topics included the marriages of ecclesiastics, the use of the vernacular and the abuse of church money by the Catholic priests.¹

The Main task of Council of Trent in 1545-63 was to find a common ground between the Catholic and Protestant branches of the church, but the outcome was that the hate and suspicions had won and a deep chasm between the confessions was established. The extremist groups (like the Spanish jesuits) dominated and the Protestants were not able to accept the Council as official. This meant, according to Leibniz, that an official ecumenical Council had not taken place and such an assembly should be arranged.² He wrote in a letter to the Landgrave that he does not see how one can regard the Council of Trent as ecumenical, since it was fundamentally merely a Council or Synod of Italians.³

"But as the Council of Trent fulfilled all the formalities, there is still another important consideration : it is that it may be that its decisions are not as contrary to Protestants as one has thought."⁴

Leibniz tried at first to claim that the Council had never been officially accepted in France.⁵ Bossuet did not accept this interpretation. He thought that the Protestants had rejected the Council and were therefore heretics.

He wrote : "The revelation of God has never changed and the Council of Trent is unanimous in this respect, in France and in everywhere else."⁶ and : "...The Roman church does not give up of any one of its defined dogmas and in particular not of the one, which

¹See Leibniz's letter to Marie de Brinon, A I, 7, p. 213-214.

²Aiton, Leibniz, a Biography, p. 141.

³Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 164.

⁴"Mais quand le Concile de Trente auroit toutes les formalités requises, il y a encore un autre importante considération : c'est que peut-estre ses décisions ne sont pas si contraires aux Protestants que l'on s' imagine."
(Leibniz to Brinon) FC I, p. 201.

⁵See A I, 7, p. 213.

⁶"Pour la doctrine révélée de Dieu, et définie comme telle, on ne l'a jamais altérée; et tout le concile de Trente est reçu unaniemment à cet égard, tant en France que partout ailleurs."
(a letter from Bossuet to Mme de Brinon) FC I, p. 246.

is concerned with the Council of Trent."¹ and finally : "If the least particle of the Church's decisions is relaxed [Christ's] promise is annulled and with it the whole body of revelation".²

This attitude was not very encouraging, but Leibniz did his best. The discussion went more and more into specific details, as the letters began to get filled with church history and details of various church assemblies. Leibniz was not able to find any convincing evidence on theological matters and he tried to find every possible historical fact in church history, which would show tolerance to heretic movements. His main aim was to ease the influence of the Council of Trent and he later confessed that if the anathemas of the Council were not cancelled, only force would make the reunion possible. In 1691 he was so frustrated that he wrote to Marie de Brinon that those who find not obstructed to the reunion are in fact heretics and those who strive for ecumenical goals are in fact Catholics by heart.³

The dogmas and general principles were lost in the discussion, which lasted several years and was at times halted by Bossuet and then started again in 1699. The Bishop used the same arguments, which begged no questions and led to nothing.

No significant results followed during the 24 years, which the correspondence lasted -the stubborn Bossuet would not give anything away and hanged on to a principle that the Catholic church may not change or cancel any of its decisions. The doctrine of predestination remained an unsettled question also, since Leibniz's conception of the substance was not compatible with the Catholic doctrine. Leibniz was prepared to admit a great deal to the Catholics - only a few of the Protestant theologians of his time would have accepted these allowances. Bossuet was indeed surprised how "half-Catholic" Leibniz was.⁴

¹"...l'Eglise Romaine ne se relaschera jamais d'aucun point de la doctrine definie, ni en particulier de celle qui l'a esté par le Consile de Trente."
(Bossuet to Marie de Brinon 29. 9. 1691) G VII, p. 156.

²RB, p. xxviii-xxix.

³FC I, p. 235-36.

⁴Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 152.

For example, Leibniz was ready to accept that the Protestant priests were subjected to the commands of the Pope in all matters except in using the vernacular and freedom of marriage. On the other hand Bossuet had restrictions because of his position - he could not accept allowances which were not acceptable to his masters, Louis XIV and the Pope. Leibniz wrote Marie de Brinon :

"You are right, madame, to judge me as Catholic by heart; in that I have been quite frank : because they are not stubborn that fall to heretics; and that is why, by grace of God, my conscience does not accuse me at all."¹

After realizing in the 1690's that the correspondence would come to nothing, Leibniz lost his hopes of a quick reunification and became disappointed with the Frenchman. He summed up his discussions to Thomas Burnett in 1705 : "M. Pellisson and I debated the subject with the greatest civility and loved to discuss points on which we could agree. But after M. Pellisson's death the Bishop of Meaux wanted to continue the correspondence, took too decisive a tone and attempted to push matters too far, putting forward doctrines which I could not accept without betraying my conscience and the truth. As a result I replied to him firmly and forcefully and assumed a tone as lofty as his own, to show him, great conversialist that he was, that I saw through his tricks too well to be caught out by them. Our disputation could make up a whole book."²

A serious setback to the cause occurred in 1685, when Louis XIV cancelled the Edict of Nantes in 1685. More bad news followed : Rojas y Spinola died in 1695, the new Pope

¹"Vous avez raison, Madame, de me juger catholique dans le coeur; je suis mesme ouvertement : car il n'y a que l'opiniastreté qui fasse l'hérétique; et c'est de quoi, grâce à Dieu, ma conscience ne m'accuse point."
(Leibniz to Brinon) FC I, p. 235.

²"...c'est que M. Pelisson et moy nous traitons la matiere avec beaucoup de civilité, et qu'on aimoit de parler des choses, où nous pouvions convenir. Mais après la mort de M. Pelisson, l'Eveque de Meux voulant continuer la correspondance, prenoit un ton trop decisif, et vouloit pousser les choses trop loin, avançant des doctrines que je ne pouvois point laisser passer sans trahir ma conscience et la verité, ce qui fit que je luy repondis avec vigueur et fermeté, et pris un ton aussi haut que luy, pour luy monstrier, tout grand controversiste qu'il estoit, que je connoissois trop bien ses finesses pour en estre surpris : nos contestations pourroient faire un livre entier."
G III, p. 303-04; RB, p. xxix.

Clemens XI took a negative stance towards the reunification and the War of the Spanish Succession broke up in 1701.

After the peace of Ryswick in 1697 Leibniz changed his objectives. He strived for the reunification of Protestants and the Orthodox Church as a possible counterpower against the French aggression. This would promote the balance in Europe and act as a first step towards the final reunion. The churches of Germany, the Netherlands, England and Russian were to be united. Although the task was a difficult one, it seems that Leibniz had no high hopes of this project. His enthusiasm had confronted several drawbacks and his popularity among the theologians had diminished significantly because of the failed negotiations with the French.¹

The most promising areas in Germany were Hanover and Prussia, which were the most religiously tolerant areas whereas many Lutheran sects of Germany and the Netherland were fanatics.² During the process the dogmas of these different branches would ideally be unified and this would help in the final stage of the reunification with the Catholics. Since the relations among the various branches were peaceful, Leibniz would have tolerated these divergent movements as such, but the Elector of Prussia demanded unification of the Lutherans. This process would result to a new religion, which was to be called evangelical religion.³

Leibniz discussed the matter with Thomas Burnett (friends with Sophie of Hanover) and the Prussian Jablonski. He was planning to found a Protestant council in Hanover.⁴ The idea was eventually realized in summer of 1698, when Leibniz, Jablonski and Molanus came to three practical conclusions : 1) The doctrines of the confessions must be brought in accord with each other 2) The ecclestial manners and ceremonies must be standardized 3) The different names of evangelical confessions must be abolished.⁵

¹Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 192.

²Ibid., p. 193.

³Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 221.

⁴Kiefl, *Der Friedensplan des Leibniz...*, p. LXIII-LXV.

⁵Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 203.

Circumstances were against these projects. The relationship between Hanover and Prussia became worse due to the war and the process where the Prussian Elector became the King of Prussia did not help the situation, either. There was also some resistance from the Prussian theologians.¹ The hope was revived later, but Georg Ludwig, the Elector of Hanover, forbid Leibniz to conduct such negotiations.² The philosopher could not help the situation, but he was not ready to give up, either - in his last years he tried promote the cause by exploring the possibilities of reunion with the Russian and English churches.

Leibniz was also risking the relationship with his employer in these negotiations. Prussian Jablonski had a central part in these discussions and Leibniz had to spend a lot of time in Berlin, which irritated Georg Ludwig. The negotiations came to nothing and the death of Frederick I in 1713 was a final straw of the project.³ Even after this Leibniz corresponded about the reunion with the Princess of Wales. The hostility towards Catholicism in England, however, was a serious obstacle to Leibniz's plans and the final ascendancy, where Leibniz was left to Germany, was of course the end to Leibniz's dreams.

Leibniz regarded the Orthodox Church as a church free from the bureaucratic influences of the Papacy and to be in closer correspondence with the early church than the church of Rome. However, he did not regard it as having reached the perfection of the christian ideal of the church. Leibniz's plans for the Russian Orthodox Church were mainly connected with the possible forthcoming ecumenical council, which was an important part of his dreams until the end.⁴ His correspondence with Urbich, the Russian ambassador in Vienna discussed the council and one of Leibniz's main objectives was to persuade Peter the Great to act as a leading force of the council. The Turkish war, however, made the attempt impossible.⁵

¹Jordan, *The Reunion of the Churches*, p. 204.

²Ibid., p. 206.

³Ibid., p. 208.

⁴Ibid., p. 211.

⁵Kiefl, *Der Friedensplan des Leibniz*, p. lxxxx

5. 4. Conclusion

The scope and the persistent activity of Leibniz in the process of reunion shows clearly that the philosopher thought the reunion vital for his practical goals. The reunion of the churches can be considered as a basis where the civilization process of mankind was to start. Common religion would mean common culture, common values and common objectives. It also diminished the danger of war (Religion was, at least as a pretext, the commonest cause of war in the 17th century) and thus help to promote the scientific and cultural goals so important to Leibniz.

Leibniz's project of reunification is also tightly connected to the development of the universal language and scientific co-operation. With analysis and synthesis as a common ground the rational theology can be found which will result, in time, to a better life and to an increasing perfection and to a greater glory of God which is for Leibniz the essence of religion.

The universal dogmas would also help the common man with his relation to ecclesticals, since unified and simple dogmas are more easily understood by anyone. This would also help in missionary work and in directing the deeds towards the good. The principle of sufficient reason can work on a more informed theological basis.

The reunification of the confessions is, as noted, parallel to the development of universal language and the scientific co-operation. It is both the goal to which more adequate reasoning should be developed and the process, by which the *characteristica universalis* will be tested and refined.