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The Role of the Church in the Political Order

By CARL S. MEYER

THE bearing of changing Christologies and ecclesiologies on the historic relations between church and state with a view to ascertaining the viability of the present doctrine of strict separation," has been defined by George H. Williams of Harvard University as one of the vital areas in which studies and explorations will be made in the field of church history.¹

The interrelations between church and state have been of importance throughout the history of the Christian Church. The persecutions under the emperors of Imperial Rome and the anti-Christian moves of the Kremlin testify to these interrelations. The Concordat of Worms (1122) and the Napoleonic Concordat (1801) are part of the problem. That it is persistent points to the basic nature of both institutions.

After stating that "the problem of our time is the separation of church and state," Jacob Burckhardt continues, "It is the logical outcome of toleration."² Divergencies of religious beliefs within a country will result in toleration or persecution. However, where there has been persecution in the twentieth century it has been carried on to strengthen the state, usually not to bring about the

¹ George H. Williams, "Church History," Ch. VII in *Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century: Whence and Whither?* ed. Arnold S. Nash (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 176.

J. S. Whale in his *The Protestant Tradition: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955) has three points under the heading of Part IV ("Modern Issues"). The second of these is "The Totalitarian State and the Crown Rights of the Redeemer," pp. 263—312.

² Jacob Burckhardt, *Force and Freedom: An Interpretation of History*, ed. James Hastings Nichols (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), p. 185.

domination of a particular Christian denomination. Once the Emperor Trajan could write to Pliny the Younger (A.D. 112): "The Christians are not to be hunted out. If brought before you, and the offense is proved, they are to be punished, but with this reservation — if anyone denies he is a Christian, and makes it clear he is not, by offering prayer to our gods, then he is to be pardoned on his recantation, no matter how suspicious his past."³ Today the totalitarian state demands the soul and heart and mind of its subjects, much more so than did even the cult of the emperor.

This points to the necessity of examining the functions of the state in the modern world. It raises, too, the questions of the role of the church in its relationships to the state today. Theologians, political scientists, and philosophers have attempted to define this role. The present study attempts to summarize the views of some representative Reformed and Roman Catholic thinkers on this problem.

The problem is one with which even the New England Puritans had to contend. They learned to make a distinction between civil power and ecclesiastical power. Roger Williams' tenets, however, were not accepted immediately, and much confused thinking remained in the theology of the descendants and heirs of the Puritans. The idea of the "kingdom of God," especially, was transformed in their minds into an earthly, idealistic state, akin to that held by the disciples as late as Christ's ascent from the Mount of Olives. H. Richard Niebuhr has pointed out that in the nineteenth century the "institutionalization of the kingdom of Christ," as he calls it, "was naturally accompanied by its nationalization. . . . Christianity, democracy, Americanism, the English language and culture, the growth of industry and science, American institutions — these are all confounded and confused."⁴

Richard Niebuhr is among those who have addressed themselves to the broad setting of the problem. He much prefers to regard Christianity "as a movement rather than as an institution or series

³ William Stearns Davis, *Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources, II. Rome and the West* (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 1913), p. 222.

⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Hamden, Conn.: The Shoestring Press, 1956 [c. 1935]) pp. 178, 179.

of institutions." ⁵ For that reason, it would seem, he does not define carefully the relationships between the institution called the church and the institution called the state. To him the kingdom of God operative within the framework of culture is *the* dialectical movement of genuine consequence. A recognition of the existence of an invisible catholic church and faith in it becomes for him a second major conviction. ⁶ With that he couples faith in a "sovereign, living, loving God." He says: "Apart from God and His forgiveness nationality and even Christianity particularized in a nation become destructive rather than creative." ⁷ Underlying these convictions there is the basic assumption that the kingdom of God can become operative within the framework of a culture and that it can become the dominant force in the culture, society, and the political entity. "H. Richard Niebuhr, alone in American theology, understands without utopianism that Christianity is a movement, that life, a permanent revolution, that the world of culture, man's achievement, exists within the world of grace, God's Kingdom, that culture is therefore convertible, that sovereignty and grace are organically related to every human society and every human soul, that nature and history are perpetually open to redemption." ⁸ Among the social achievements which go to make up culture Niebuhr includes government. ⁹ He is emphatic, too, that ". . . the world of culture — man's achievement — exists within the world of grace — God's Kingdom." ¹⁰

That the practitioners and the functionaries will make application of these theories would seem almost inevitable. The call goes out for a revitalization of a sense of destiny, a hope to refashion the American Commonwealth into "this nation under God" with its official motto "In God We Trust" (as a quasi-magic formula which will transpose it into a nation of the godly). ¹¹

⁵ Ibid., pp. xi, xii.

⁶ Ibid., pp. xii—xiv.

⁷ Ibid., p. xiv.

⁸ David Wesley Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology: Six Contemporary Leaders* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), p. 155.

⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1951), p. 33.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 256.

¹¹ See, e. g., A. Mervyn Davies, *Foundation of American Freedom* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), pp. 246—248.

Reinhold Niebuhr, the second of the theologian-brothers of the Niebuhr name, has much to say about the relationships between church and state. Niebuhr, it has been said, has sought "the place where gospel and world meet" and "where first they can come into right relation."¹² He wrote *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.¹³ He raised the question and made it the title of his book *Do the State and Nation Belong to God or the Devil?*¹⁴ Much more important was his *Nature and Destiny of Man*.¹⁵ He has been concerned about political philosophy¹⁶ and the philosophy of history.¹⁷ He says:

Nations, classes, cultures and civilizations do not, of course, in their collective consciousness, ever pray or experience the judgment and mercy of God as revealed in Christ. . . . But it is possible for the church, as that part of a culture and civilization in which the final truth about life as revealed in Christ is known, to mediate the ultimate truth as a leaven in a lump.¹⁸

The Church is the one place in history where life is kept open for the final word of God's judgment to break the pride of men and for the word of God's mercy to lift up the brokenhearted. . . . But when I see how much new evil comes into life through the pretension of the religious community, through its conventional and graceless legalism, and through religious fanaticism, I am concerned that my growing appreciation of the Church should not betray me into this complacency.¹⁹

On the international scale, others have urged the transposing of

¹² Hans Hofmann, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, trans. Louise Petibone Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 34.

¹³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

¹⁴ London: The Student Christian Movement Press, 1937.

¹⁵ New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941 and 1943.

¹⁶ See Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, Vol. II of the Library of Living Theology (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), especially the essays by Kenneth Thompson.

¹⁷ See in Kegley and Bretall the essay by Richard Kroner.

¹⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Relevance of Reformation Doctrine in Our Day," in *The Heritage of the Reformation*, ed. Elmer J. F. Arndt (New York: Richard R. Smith Publisher, Inc., 1950), p. 261.

¹⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in Kegley and Bretall, eds., op. cit., p. 437.

the nations into the area of the kingdom of God — without, however, recognizing the limits of the Kingdom of Grace and the Kingdom of Power.

It is the function of the state to ensure a tolerable realization of these basic principles [of law and justice, of human rights and fundamental liberties] in any society, national or international. They are to maintain the external expression of the belief that man as a human being has a dignity, being delivered by Christ from sin and decay. The Church must preach the foreordained Kingdom of God among men. It must point out that human rights and other basic principles can never be equated with the reign of Divine love and of man's responsibility before God; but it must insist that without those basic principles of public and private behaviour declared and guaranteed, demonic forces are free to obstruct the penetration of God's commandments into human life. There will never be a Christian state; still less, a Christian "United Nations." But the Church must exhort governments and ordinary men to found a society on justice and law, national as well as international. . . . Justice here on earth takes its deepest meaning from the observance of God's commandments in this shattered world. The Church must continually bear this in mind, as part of its apostolic and missionary task.²⁰

Such a statement recognizes tensions and conflicts. Among the theologians of today who have labeled these tensions Paul Tillich stands as one of the foremost. George Williams says that Paul Tillich "in his distinction between 'autonomy' (in this context, secularism) and 'heteronomy' (in this context, ecclesiasticism) and his clear definition of the middle position so difficult to perpetuate, 'theonomy,' has introduced a new set of theological categories that will prove especially valuable in guiding American research into the history of Church and State."²¹

Tillich's three terms (*theonomy*, *heteronomy*, and *autonomy*) go far beyond the issue of church-state relations. He writes:

²⁰ F. M. van Asbeck, "The Church and the Disorder of International Society," Ch. III in *The Church and the International Disorder: An Ecumenical Study Prepared Under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches* (Vol. IV in *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, the Amsterdam Assembly Series (New York: Harper & Bros., n. d.), p. 70.

²¹ George H. Williams, "Church History," Ch. VII in *Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century: Whence and Whither?* ed. Arnold S. Nash, p. 176.

The words "autonomy," "heteronomy," and "theonomy" answer the question of the *nomos* or the law of life in three different ways: Autonomy asserts that man as the bearer of universal reason is the source and measure of culture and religion—that he is his own law. Heteronomy asserts that man, being unable to act according to universal reason, must be subjected to a law, strange and superior to him. Theonomy asserts that the superior law is, at the same time, the innermost law of man himself, rooted in the divine ground which is man's own ground: the law of life transcends man, although it is, at the same time, his own. Applying these concepts to the relation between religion and culture, we called an autonomous culture the attempt to create the forms of personal and social life without any reference to something ultimate and unconditional, following only the demands of theoretical and practical rationality. A heteronomous culture, on the other hand, subjects the forms and laws of thinking and acting to authoritative criteria of an ecclesiastical religion or a political quasi-religion, even at the price of destroying the structures of rationality. A theonomous culture expresses in its creations an ultimate concern and a transcending meaning not as something strange but as its own spiritual ground. "Religion is the substance of culture and culture the form of religion." This was the most precise statement of theonomy.²²

Among the cultural forms, however, would be the various forms of government. These aspects of temporal power must be filled with meaning by religion, faith, surrender to the Deity. This is not merely, according to Tillich's thought, a question of separation of church and state or transfer of a secular order into a spiritual order; it is the question of which shall be the dominant force in the future. Nor does Tillich leave any doubt as to where he stands in any conflict between autonomy and heteronomy. In his treatise *The Interpretation of History* he writes: "I am determined to stand on the border of autonomy and heteronomy, not only principally but also historically."²³

²² Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 56, 57.

²³ Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, pp. 26, 28, 30, as quoted by Soper, op. cit., p. 120.

See also Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, p. 59: "So the gap between religion and culture is filled: religion is more than a system of special symbols, rites, and emotions, directed toward a highest being; religion is ultimate concern; it is

Tillich has grappled with the problems raised by National Socialism in Germany; it is understandable that he should feel so keenly the conflict between Christianity and the demands of a state for idolatrous loyalties.²⁴ He will speak of "the ideological misuse of Christianity in the Church and State" and of "the latent Church,"²⁵ so that his concept, too, of church and state cannot be institutionalized. In discussing the "dissociation of the Christian message from disintegrating Western society," Tillich declares that this requires "a true conception of the relationship between transcendence and immanence." He comes to the conclusion: "The creative ground, the judging power and the fulfilling meaning of all finite centres and events . . . is the source, structure and ultimate meaning of the *one* world in which finite centres and events are found. It has been and always should be the intention of the Christian Church to point to this ultimate ground of life and experience, and thus to lead every generation to *the* spiritual centre of its own existence. The Christian Church should perform this task for 'the Christian nations' of the present age."²⁶

Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, each using different phraseology, are not very far apart on the question of church-state relations. Using the terms *Christengemeinde* and *Brüdergemeinde*, Barth has stressed the differences between church and state. He writes:

The Church must remain the Church. It must remain the inner circle of the Kingdom of Christ. The Christian community has a task of which the civil community can never relieve it and which it can never pursue in the forms peculiar to the civil community. . . . It proclaims the rule of Jesus Christ and the

the state of being grasped by something unconditional, holy, absolute. As such it gives meaning, seriousness, and depth to all culture and creates out of the cultural material a religious culture of its own. The contrast between religion and culture is reduced to the duality of religious and secular culture with innumerable transitions between them."

²⁴ Daniel Day Williams, *What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 21.

²⁵ Tillich, *Interpretation of History*, pp. 48, 49, as quoted by Soper, op. cit., pp. 23 f.

²⁶ Paul Tillich, "The Disintegration of Society in Christian Countries," Sec. 2 of Ch. II ("Our Un-Christian World") in *The Church's Witness to God's Design: An Ecumenical Study Prepared Under the Auspices of the World Council of Churches*, Vol. II in *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, the Amsterdam Assembly Series (New York: Harper & Bros., n. d.), p. 63.

hope of the Kingdom of God. This is not the task of the civil community: it has no message to deliver; it is dependent on a message being delivered to it. It is not in a position to appeal to the authority and grace of God; it is dependent on this happening elsewhere. It does not pray; it depends on others praying for it. It is blind to the Whence? and Whither? of human existence; its task is rather to provide for the external and provisional delimitation and protection of human life; it depends on the existence of seeing eyes elsewhere.²⁷

The prayers of the church are a manifestation of the responsibility which the church has towards the state. It is subject to the state, not with a blind obedience, but in full responsibility toward the will of God. It trusts in the power of the Word. It is not God's purpose "that the State should itself develop more or less into a Church."^{27a} The church does not expect the state gradually to develop into the Kingdom of God. However, taking up its share of political responsibility, it reminds the state of its obligations. "The distinctions, judgments and choices which it makes in the political sphere are always intended to foster the illumination of the State's connexion with the order of divine salvation and grace and to discourage all the attempts to hide this connexion."²⁸ The church will stand on the side of law and justice. It is against anarchy and tyranny alike. Concentrating on the lower and the lowest levels of society, the church will be conscious of its supreme mission—to bring the Gospel of salvation to mankind. It will, likewise, insist on the state's responsibility to these members of society. "The church must stand for social justice in the political sphere."²⁹ Nor will the church serve merely parochial politics. In all of this Barth maintains that not "natural law" but the "gospel" governs the relationship between the Christian community and the civil community. "This gospel which proclaims the King and the Kingdom that is now hidden but will one day be revealed, is political from the very outset, and if it is preached to real (Christian and non-Christian) men on the basis of a right interpre-

²⁷ Karl Barth, *Against the Stream: Shorter Postwar Writings, 1946—52* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), pp. 22, 23.

^{27a} Ibid., p. 30.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

tation of Scriptures it will necessarily be prophetically political." ³⁰ The church in its inner life is to make a practical demonstration of the working of the Gospel in polity and administrative procedures. "The real Church must be the model and prototype of the real State. The Church must set an example so that by its very existence it may be a source of renewal for the State and the power by which the State is preserved." ³¹

That vague hope for a future world order in which the Gospel is the dominant force, seen in Niebuhr and Tillich and Barth, perhaps expressed variously and envisioned somewhat differently by each, has also been expressed by Florovsky. "The Church remains 'in the world,' as a heterogeneous body, and the tension is stronger than it has ever been; the ambiguity of the situation is painfully felt by everyone in the Church. A practical programme for the present age can be deduced only from a restored understanding of the nature and essence of the Church. And the failure of all Utopian expectations cannot obscure the Christian hope: the King has come, the Lord Jesus, and His Kingdom is to come." ³²

These European theologians, with the necessity of living in totalitarian states or opposing them actively from within or from without, have attempted to find an answer to the question of the proper role of the church in the political order. Amid the chaos and confusion of disintegration and war they have looked with wistful hope to an undefined future. The realities of the present demanded some answer, especially in the days of the *Kirchenkampf* of 1934. Various answers were attempted.³³ Of these the most effective was the Barmen Declaration (May 29—31, 1934).³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 46, 47.

³¹ Ibid., p. 48.

³² George Florovsky, "The Church: Her Nature and Task," Part 3 of Ch. I of *The Universal Church in God's Design*, Vol. I of *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, The Amsterdam Assembly Series, pp. 57, 58.

³³ See *inter alios* Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, ed., *Die Bekenntnisse und grundsätzlichen Äusserungen zur Kirchenfrage*, Band 2: 1934 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953); W. Jannasch, *Deutsche Kirchendokumente: Die Haltung der Bekennenden Kirche im Dritten Reich* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag A. G., 1946).

³⁴ Daniel Day Williams, *What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking*, p. 21: "The key to the confessional groups' resistance was expressed in the Barmen declaration."

John 14:6; John 10:1, 9; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 4:15, 16; Matt. 28:20; and 2 Tim. 2:9 were the Scripture passages cited to show the overlordship of Christ and a total dependence upon Him. Significantly it found a basis for the formulation of its thought in Scripture. The fifth thesis of this Declaration reads:

Die Schrift sagt uns, dass der Staat nach göttlicher Anordnung die Aufgabe hat, in der noch nicht erlösten Welt, in der auch die Kirche steht, nach dem Mass menschlicher Einsicht und menschlichen Vermögens unter Anordnung und Ausübung von Gewalt für Recht und Frieden zu sorgen. Die Kirche erkennt in Dank und Ehrfurcht gegen Gott die Wohltat dieser seiner Anordnungen an. Sie erinnert an Gottes Reich, an Gottes Gebot und Gerechtigkeit und damit an die Verantwortung der Regierenden und Regierten. Sie vertraut und gehorcht der Kraft des Wortes, durch das Gott alle Dinge trägt.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als solle und könne der Staat über seinen besonderen Auftrag hinaus die einzige und totale Ordnung menschlichen Lebens werden und also auch die Bestimmung der Kirche erfüllen.

Wir verwerfen die falsche Lehre, als solle und könne die Kirche über ihren besonderen Auftrag hinaus staatliche Art, staatliche Aufgaben und staatliche Würde aneignen und damit selbst zu einem Organ des Staates werden.⁸⁵

In the European states in which a state church has been operative a crisis of one kind or other has usually called for a rethinking of the mutual relations. National Socialism in Germany raised such a crisis; Bolshevism has the responsibility for the crisis in Russia. Mussolini reached an accord (at least a concordat was signed) with the papacy; the Spanish Civil War was a religious war in one sense (not even the wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries so labeled were entirely religious wars). Romantic interests and sentimentalism raised the question in England. In the Asiatic countries it is nationalism that makes the question of first rate importance. In these countries nationalism is in part a protest against colonialism. And in these countries the crisis might bring on persecution and suppression of the church. In the conflict between East and West, between nationalism and imperialism, between communism

⁸⁵ Schmidt, ed., *Die Bekenntnisse des Jahres 1934*, p. 94.

and Christianity — whatever form these conflicts may take — there the question of church-state relations comes to the fore. At times it may be a question of dominance, at other times a question of existence. In the struggle for power the temptation is present to disregard the basic functions of the state or of the church, to create crises for the sake of victory, to disregard principles to perpetuate positions. In these crises the questions of rights and liberties and religious freedoms have been raised. Those questions, however, have stressed primarily the relations of the individual to the state rather than those of groups. The position of minorities, it is true, had to be considered. National and international groups attempted to solve such questions. Tensions remain; crises result.

Throughout, the Roman Catholic Church has spoken on the question of the role of the church in the state, a question which is of long standing for this church. It demands a decisive voice in questions pertaining to the social order. Pius XI in his encyclical letter *Quadragesimo anno* (May 15, 1931) cited with approval *Rerum novarum* promulgated by Leo XIII (May 15, 1891), which postulated for the church (the papacy) "the right and the duty to pronounce with supreme authority upon social and economic matters." She must "interpose her authority," Pius XI said, "in all matters that are related to the moral law." It was his aim to "bring under and subject to our supreme jurisdiction not only the social order but economic activities as well."³⁶ His successor, Pius XII, in a discourse on June 1, 1941, in which he commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, said that both Leo XIII and Pius XI were aware of the fact that the church could not lay down guiding norms for the purely practical, technical, side of the social structure [it is not clear just what he meant by this phrase];

³⁶ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno*, "On Reconstructing the Social Order," May 15, 1931, as given in Francis J. Powers, ed., *Papal Pronouncements on the Political Order* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1952), No. 1, pp. 3, 4.

An abbreviated version of the encyclical by Pius XI can be found conveniently in Anne Freemantle, ed., *The Papal Encyclicals in Their Historical Context* (A Mentor Book; New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1956), pp. 228—235.

Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum* will be found in full in Etienne Gilson, ed., *The Church Speaks to the Modern World: The Social Teachings of Leo XIII* (Image Books; Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1954), pp. 205—240.

but where the social order meets or enters into contact with the moral order, he said, there natural law and the truths of revelation make it necessary that the church form the consciences of those who must find "solutions for the problems and duties imposed by social life."³⁷ This same pope, Pius XII, said in an encyclical on October 20, 1939 (he was speaking of the function of the state in the modern world) that the re-education of mankind must be "above all things, spiritual and religious." One of the causes of modern evils, he declared, was "the progressive alienation of the peoples from that unity of doctrine, faith, customs and morals," once promoted by the church.³⁸ Therefore the church must collaborate "in the construction of a solid foundation of society."³⁹ And the church, Pius XII said, must make every effort to rewin and to subject "every domain of human life to the gracious rule of Christ, so that His love may triumph and His law reign."⁴⁰

Neither domestic nor civil society should put God aside and show "no solicitude for the upholding of natural law";⁴¹ it is an error to "endeavor to disassociate the civil authority from any connection with the Divine Being. . . ." ⁴² It may even be necessary to resist laws made by the civil authorities. Leo XIII taught: "But where the power to command is wanting or where a law is enacted contrary to reason, or to the eternal law, or to some ordinance of God, obedience is unlawful, lest while obeying man we become disobedient to God."⁴³ Resistance to decrees contrary to the Moral

³⁷ Pius XII, "The Social Question in the New Order," address commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, June 1, 1941, in Powers, ed., op. cit., No. 3, pp. 4, 5.

³⁸ Pius XII, Encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, "On the Function of the State in the Modern World," *ibid.*, No. 5, p. 5; Freemantle, ed., op. cit., pp. 263—269.

³⁹ Pius XII, "Allocation to the College of Cardinals," February 20, 1945, in Powers (mimeographed; Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, Department of Political Science, c. 1950; pages not numbered), Introduction.

⁴⁰ Pius XII, "Discourse to Delegates of Christian Renaissance," January 22, 1947, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Sapientiae Christianae*, "On the Chief Duties of Christians as Citizens," January 10, 1890, *ibid.*, Part I, Ser. iv; also in Etienne Gilson, ed., p. 249.

⁴² Pius XII, Encyclical, *Summi Pontificatus*, "On the Function of the State in the Modern World," October 20, 1939, in Powers, No. 52, pp. 28, 29.

⁴³ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Libertas praestantissimum*, "On Human Liberty," June 20, 1888, *ibid.*, No. 54, p. 29, and in Gilson, pp. 65, 66.

Law is not sedition, according to the Roman pontiff. He says: "But if the laws of the State are manifestly at variance with the divine law, containing enactments injurious to the Church, or conveying injunctions adverse to the duties imposed by religion, or if they violate in the person of the supreme Pontiff the authority of Jesus Christ, then truly to resist becomes a positive duty, to obey a crime."⁴⁴ The Roman Church does not teach rebellion or insurrection against tyrants. Patience and prayer are taught.⁴⁵ Not revolution, but evolution through concord is the best means of improving social ills,⁴⁶ for insurrection can be justified only when "the civil power should so trample on justice and truth as to destroy even the foundations of authority."⁴⁷ As a consequence, therefore, it is within the functions of the church to pronounce on the limits of obedience to the state; the individual is not the ultimate judge on what God has commanded or forbidden, although every individual according to his capacity and intelligence should be imbued with Roman Catholic doctrine.⁴⁸ Unquestionable obedience is due to the church.⁴⁹ ". . . the Church cannot stand by, indifferent as to the import and significance of laws enacted by the State; not insofar, indeed, as they refer to the State, but insofar as passing beyond due limits, they trench upon the rights of the Church. From God has the duty been assigned to the Church not only to interpose

⁴⁴ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Sapientiae Christianae*, "On the Chief Duties of Christians as Citizens," January 10, 1890, in Powers, No. 55, p. 30; and in Gilson, p. 253.

⁴⁵ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Quod apostolici muneris*, "On Socialism," December 28, 1878, in Powers, No. 58, p. 32; also in Gilson, ed., p. 194.

⁴⁶ Pius XII, "Address to Italian Workers," June 13, 1943, in Powers, No. 59, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Firmissimam constantiam*, or *Nos Es Muy Conocida*, "On the Religious Situation in Mexico," March 28, 1937, *ibid.*, No. 60, p. 33.

⁴⁸ The Pastoral Letter of 1866 of the Archbishops and Bishops of the United States stated: "The Catholic has a guide in the Church, as a divine Institution, which enables him to discriminate between what the Law of God forbids or allows; and this authority the State is bound to recognize as supreme in its sphere—of moral, no less than dogmatic teaching." Peter Guilday, ed., *The National Pastorals of the American Hierarchy (1792—1919)* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1954—reprint of 1923 edition), p. 206.

Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Sapientiae Christianae*, "On Christian Citizenship," January 10, 1890, Gilson, p. 255.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260: "Now it is evident that he who clings to the doctrines of the Church as to an infallible rule yields his assent to *everything the Church teaches*: . . ." Italics by the present writer.

resistance, if at any time the State rule should run counter to religion, but further, to make a strong endeavor that the power of the Gospel may pervade the law and institutions of the nations."⁵⁰

Various forms of totalitarian government have been condemned by the popes in recent years. Pius XI condemned communism because it was based on atheistic materialism and dialectically insisted on the class struggle. It rejected God as the basis for civil authority and looked for a new era and a new civilization "culminating in a humanity without God."⁵¹ Socialism, this same pope said, denied the natural basis of society and civil authority. He declared that it was based on a "doctrine of human society peculiarly its own—which is opposed to true Christianity." Pius XI therefore concluded: "No one can be at the same time a sincere Catholic and a true socialist."⁵² Nazism and fascism were condemned by Pius XI, who called the deification of race, nationality, or state unchristian; he maintained that any attempt "to lock within the frontiers of a single people, within the narrow limits of a single race, God, the Creator of the universe, King and Legislator of all nations," is unscriptural.⁵³ Pius XII called National Socialism "the cult of violence, the cult of race and blood, the overthrow of human liberty and dignity."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 263, 264.

Pius XII in his encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, "On the Function of the State in the Modern World," October 20, 1939, said that the "Chair of Peter" is "the depository and exponent" of the "fundamentals of morality," that the "Church of Christ" is "the faithful depository of the teaching of Divine Wisdom," and that it is a grave error of modern times "to divorce civil authority from every kind of dependence upon the Supreme Being—First Source and absolute Master of man and of society—and from every restraint of Higher Law derived from God as from its First Source." Freemantle, ed., pp. 264—266.

⁵¹ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Divini Redemptoris*, "On Atheistic Communism," March 19, 1937, as given in Freemantle, pp. 255—262 (see p. 257 for the citation).

⁵² Pius XI, Encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno*, "On Reconstructing the Social Order," May 15, 1931, *ibid.*, pp. 228—235. The quoted part, however, is omitted by Miss Freemantle. It will be found in Powers, No. 67, pp. 39, 40.

⁵³ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, "On the Position of the Catholic Church in the German Empire," March 14, 1937, *ibid.*, No. 72, p. 42. See also Freemantle, pp. 250—255.

⁵⁴ Pius XII, "Allocution to College of Cardinals," June 2, 1945, in Powers, No. 73, p. 43.

These popes have not hesitated to define the purpose and function of the state, since that defining, too, belongs to the role of the church. They postulate that the state exists to promote the common good. To them the common good can be achieved only within the framework of a moral society and the church must teach morality.⁵⁵ The common good, properly understood, protects individual and social, spiritual, and material values.⁵⁶ Pius XII says: "The true common good is determined ultimately and recognized from the nature of man with its harmonious co-ordination of personal rights and social obligations as well as from the purpose of society which in turn is determined by the same human nature."⁵⁷

On the further question of the separation between church and state the guiding principles were laid down by Leo XIII:

Yet, no one doubts that Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Church, willed her sacred power to be distinct from the civil power, and each power to be free and unshackled in its own sphere: with this condition, however—a condition good for both, and of advantage to all men—that union and concord should be maintained between them; and that on those questions which are, though in different ways, of common right and authority the power to which secular matters have been entrusted should happily and becomingly depend on the other power which has in its charge the interests of heaven. In such arrangement and harmony is found not only the best line of action for each power, but also the most opportune and efficacious method of helping men in all

⁵⁵ See the citations *ibid.*, No. 94—101, pp. 60—63, from Pius XII, Pius XI, and Leo XIII.

See especially Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Rerum novarum*, May 15, 1891, *ibid.*, No. 95, p. 61, and in Gilson, p. 222.

Cf. *ibid.*, p. 206: ". . . the responsibility of the apostolic office urges Us to treat the question of set purpose in detail, in order that no misapprehension may exist as to the principles which truth and justice dictate for its settlement."

Ibid., p. 222: "Now a State chiefly prospers and thrives through moral rule, well-regulated family life, respect for religion and justice, the moderation and fair imposing of public taxes, the progress of the arts and of trade, the abundant yield of the land—through everything, in fact, which makes the citizens better and happier . . . since it is the province of the commonwealth to serve the common good."

⁵⁶ Pius XII, Discourse Commemorating Fiftieth Anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, "The Social Question in the New Order," June 1, 1941, in Powers, Part II, Sec. ii.

⁵⁷ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, March 14, 1937, *ibid.*

that pertains to their life here, and to their hope of salvation hereafter.⁵⁸

These arrangements, he is saying, redound to the common good, but also to the spiritual welfare of the individual.

One guiding principle on the role of the church in the political order is the principle of the distinction of functions. The ecclesiastical power and the civil power each has its own sphere — free and unshackled. Leo XIII says: "All things that are of a civil nature the church acknowledges and declares to be under the authority of the ruler: . . ." ⁵⁹

The second guiding principle laid down by Leo XIII is the principle that agreement and harmony must prevail between the two powers. This habitual agreement, too, is necessary for the common good. In the sentence in which Leo XIII said that the church acknowledged civil matters to be under the jurisdiction of civil authorities he continues: ". . . and in things whereof for different reasons the decision belongs both to the sacred and to the civil power, the Church wishes that there should be harmony between the two so that injurious contests may be avoided." God, according to another encyclical, who has ordained the two powers, the ecclesiastical and the civil, each with "fixed limits within which it is contained," also "has marked out the course of each in right correlation to the other." ⁶⁰

The third guiding principle which Leo XIII laid down is the principle of dependence of the state on the church. "To wish the Church to be subject to the civil power in the exercise of her duty is a great folly and a sheer injustice." ⁶¹ The primacy of the spiritual power is maintained.

⁵⁸ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, "On Christian Marriage," February 10, 1880, in Gilson, pp. 105, 106.

⁵⁹ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Diuturnum*, "On Civil Government," June 29, 1881, *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶⁰ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Immortale Dei*, "On the Christian Constitution of States," November 1, 1885, in *ibid.*, p. 167.

In this same encyclical he said later on, *ibid.*, p. 177: "In matters, however, of mixed jurisdiction, it is in the highest degree consonant to nature, as also to the designs of God, that so far from one of the powers separating itself from the other, or still less coming into conflict with it, complete harmony, such as is suited to the end for which each power exists, should be preserved between them."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

Jacques Maritain, the Roman Catholic philosopher, and Joseph Lecler, the Jesuit, have both used this phrase "the primacy of the spiritual."

Maritain, speaking of "General Immutable Principles," treated the relationship between the human person and the body politic. The common good to him is transcended by the absolute ultimate end of the individual and this ultimate demands the primacy of the spiritual. Since the church deals with the supernatural and the spiritual, the church must be free to fulfill its functions. He lays down the principle of "the freedom of the Church to teach and preach and worship, the freedom of the Gospel, the freedom of the word of God."⁶² His second principle follows, "the superiority of the Church—that is, of the spiritual—over the body politic or the State."⁶³ In the third principle he comes to the principle of harmony or agreement, or as he calls it, co-operation, "the necessary cooperation between the Church and the body politic or the State."⁶⁴

Lecler treats of the distinction between church and state,⁶⁵ the agreement between church and state,⁶⁶ and the primacy of the spiritual.⁶⁷

Roman Catholic writers, pontiffs, philosophers, or theologians, are not today demanding a Christian or Catholic state in which bishops are temporal rulers. The modern age is recognized as a secular, not a sacral age.⁶⁸ They are urging the participation of Roman Catholics in public affairs; in this way the role of the church becomes operative in the political order. Pius XII urged that the believer should generously and courageously assume his share in public affairs.⁶⁹ "When there is a question of the moral foundation of the family and the State, or the rights of God and

⁶² Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*; Fourth impression, Phoenix Books (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), pp. 151, 152.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁶⁵ Joseph Lecler, S. J., *The Two Sovereignities: A Study of the Relationship Between Church and State* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), pp. 15 to 31.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32—49.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50—84.

⁶⁸ Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁶⁹ Pius XII, "Christmas Message," 1948, in *Powers*, No. 11, pp. 7, 8.

of the Church, everyone, man or woman, of whatever class or status, has a strict obligation to utilize his political rights in the service of a good cause."⁷⁰ Priests, too, Benedict XV urged, were to "devote themselves as far as possible to social theory and action by study, observation and work."⁷¹ In general, according to Leo XIII, Catholics should "give their attention to national politics."⁷² Roman Catholics should remember that "the right to vote is a grave responsibility," especially when it comes to electing officials who make laws, "particularly those laws which affect, for example, the sanctification of feast days, marriage, the family and the school. . . ."⁷³ By means of the electoral ballot also the Catholic woman can fulfill her duty.⁷⁴ Pius XI says: "A Catholic will take care not to neglect his right to vote when the good of the Church or of the country requires it."⁷⁵ Leo XIII amplifies this when he says: "Every Catholic must bear in mind that the choice of men who compose the legislature is of the highest importance to the Church."⁷⁶ Catholics, therefore, should be willing to serve in public office, "defending the highest interests of the Church, which are those of justice and religion."⁷⁷ They may join political parties;⁷⁸ they have the duty of making their Christian convictions felt in public life.⁷⁹ Indifference⁸⁰ and isolationism to the needs

⁷⁰ Pius XII, "Discourse to Catholic Women Workers," *ibid.*, No. 12, p. 8.

⁷¹ Benedict XV, "Letter to Bishop of Bergamo," March 11, 1920, *ibid.*, No. 13, p. 8.

⁷² Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Immortale Dei*, "On the Christian Constitution of States," November 1, 1885, *ibid.*, No. 14, pp. 8, 9; and also Gilson, p. 266.

⁷³ Pius XII, "Discourse to Lenten Preachers of Rome," March 18, 1946, in Powers, No. 15, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Pius XII, "Discourse on the Duties of Women in Social and Political Life," October 21, 1945, *ibid.*, No. 16, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Firmissimam Constantiam* or *Nos Es Muy Conocida*, "On the Religious Situation in Mexico," March 28, 1937, *ibid.*, No. 18, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Leo XIII, "Letter to Bishops of Brazil," July 2, 1894, *ibid.*, No. 19, p. 10.

⁷⁷ Pius XI, Encyclical, *Non abbiamo bisogno*, "On Catholic Action in Italy," June 29, 1931, *ibid.*, No. 20, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Pius XI, "Letter to Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, Portugal," November 10, 1933, *ibid.*, No. 21, pp. 10, 11.

⁷⁹ Pius XII, "Radio Address to Congress of Swiss Catholics," September 4, 1949, *ibid.*, No. 22, p. 11.

⁸⁰ Pius XII, "Discourse to Roman Nobility," January 1, 1947, *ibid.*, No. 23, p. 11.

of mankind⁸¹ are not in accord with meeting Christian obligations. A courageous application in civic affairs, Pius XII pleaded, of the Church's social teachings was needed.⁸² A vivisection, as he called it, of public life from the Law of God should be regarded as anti-Catholic. "What is essential is that the social doctrine of the Church should become the patrimony of all Christian consciences and that doctrine be put into practice."⁸³

In this manner, through Catholic Action and through the control of the electorate, the Roman pontiffs wish to safeguard the interests of the Roman Church in the name of religion and to insure the recognition of its role in civic affairs, while supporting a distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority. The attitude of the Roman Church can best be summarized in the words of Leclerc:

The *magisterium* of the Church has certainly never been more active or widely exercised; it deals with all the great problems of religious and moral life, not excepting its social and political aspects. Again, the Church's jurisdiction has never been more powerfully exercised or more dutifully obeyed. Yet there has never been a time when the Church has shown herself more reluctant to commit herself in regard to modes of action that are purely temporal. The rules which have been drawn up, in various countries, for the guidance of Catholic Action well bring out this wise and prudent attitude. True, it is recommended to Catholics, in their capacity as citizens, to make every effort to participate in social and political life, but the greatest discretion is enjoined upon them when, as members of Catholic Action, they are entrusted with the task either of aiding, or preparing the way for, the hierarchy's activities. In the first instance, the Catholic citizen, whilst taking for his guiding light the common teaching of the Church, compromises no one but himself and must be prepared to assume, on the temporal plane, his own initiative and his own responsibilities. In the second instance, every active member of Catholic Action must recall that he is speaking for the Church and that there might be a danger of compromising her if any rash decisions were taken in matters political. The contemporary

⁸¹ Pius XII, "Christmas Message," 1948, *ibid.*, No. 25, p. 12.

⁸² Pius XII, "Allocution to College of Cardinals," June 2, 1947, *ibid.*, No. 27, pp. 13, 14.

⁸³ Pius XII, "Radio Address to the German Catholic Congress," September 4, 1949, in Powers, Introduction.

Papacy, therefore, does all within its power to maintain on distinct planes the separate missions of the two powers, thereby obviating, so far as in her lies, the possibilities of conflict.⁸⁴

Obviating the possibilities of conflict is one of the three basic principles of church-state relations adopted by the Roman Church. Maritain calls it "the necessary co-operation between the Church and the body politic or the State."⁸⁵ Leo XIII states the principle when he endorsed the Encyclical of Gregory XVI,⁸⁶ on the question of the separation of church and state: "Nor can we hope for happier results either for religion or for the civil government from the wishes of those who desire that the Church be separated from the State, and the concord between the secular and ecclesiastical authority be dissolved. It is clear that these men, who yearn for a shameless liberty, live in dread of an agreement which has always been fraught with good, and advantageous alike to sacred and civil interests."⁸⁷

He himself states it this way: "In matters, however, of mixed jurisdiction, it is in the highest degree consonant to nature, as also to the designs of God, that so far from one of the powers separating itself from the other, or still less coming into conflict with it, complete harmony, such as is suited to the end for which each power exists, should be preserved between them."⁸⁸ "The things that are Caesar's," Maritain said, "are not only distinct from the things that are God's; but they must cooperate with them."⁸⁹ The state has the material task to promote the economic welfare of society and the moral task of administering justice. In that way the state makes the functions of the church possible. The state should publicly acknowledge the existence of God, he believes. So far as specific forms of mutual help are concerned, the state should grant exemption from military obligations to the clergy. But in much broader terms, the state, promoting the temporal good,

⁸⁴ Lecler, op. cit. (note 65, above), p. 30.

⁸⁵ Maritain, op. cit. (note 62, above), p. 153.

⁸⁶ Gregory XVI, Encyclical, *Mirari vos*, August 15, 1832. An excerpt is found in Freemantle, pp. 127, 128.

⁸⁷ Leo XIII, Encyclical, *Immortale Dei*, "On the Christian Constitution of States," November 1, 1885, in Gilson, p. 176, quoting Gregory XVI.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

⁸⁹ Maritain, p. 171.

would recognize that the church is above the Christian political society.⁹⁰ The state must guarantee that full freedom of the church. Secondly, the body politic must ask the assistance of the church to promote the temporal good. The body politic, according to Maritain and with him many Catholic thinkers, must ask more of the ecclesiastical order. The state is put into the position of the suppliant, coming to the church and asking the church to support the common good through religion.

Thus the body politic, its free agencies and institutions, using their own freedom of existential activity within the framework of laws, would ask more of the Church. They would ask, on the basis of freedom and equality of rights for all citizens, her cooperation in the field of all the activities which aim at enlightening human minds and life. They would positively facilitate the religious, social, and educational work by means of which she—as well as the other spiritual or cultural groups whose helpfulness for the common good would be recognized by them—freely cooperates in the common welfare. By removing obstacles and opening the doors, the body politic, its free agencies and institutions, would positively facilitate the effort of the apostles of the Gospel to go to the masses and share their life, to assist the social and moral work of the nation, to provide people with leisure worthy of human dignity, and to develop within them the sense of liberty and fraternity.⁹¹

The arrangement might be made through concordats; it might be brought about permissibly through the legislative action of favorable officials. Essential, however, is the readiness of the state to co-operate with the church. "Religion, of its essence, is wonderfully helpful to the State." This statement by Leo XIII must be understood in the light of his previous statement in this same connection that "the profession of one religion is necessary in the State" and that one religion must be the "true religion," the religion of the Roman Catholic Church, which the rulers of the state "must preserve and protect . . . with prudence and usefulness for the good of the community."⁹²

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 178, 179.

⁹² Leo XIII, *Libertas praestantissimum*, "On Human Liberty," June 20, 1888, in Gilson, p. 71.

After discussing this principle of co-operation or agreement Lecler writes:

To sum up, the peaceful co-existence of Church and State requires for its realization a policy of understanding and of cordial relationship. The most important thing of all, if this end is to be attained, is a determined resolve on the part of each to understand the other, to unite, to collaborate in the great work common to both, namely, the promotion of the temporal and spiritual progress of humanity. Without this basic goodwill, without this mutual understanding, the most pompous official agreements are but empty words, or worse, instruments of oppression. When, on the other hand, a sympathy based on reason exists between the two parties, disputes die down and obstacles grow less formidable. The official expression of this basic understanding will be more or less precise, more or less detailed, in accordance with circumstances and the conditions of the countries concerned. It may take the form of a concordat in good and true form, of a more modest *modus vivendi*, of a special arrangement in regard to disputed questions; even, for grave reasons, of a legal separation. The essential thing is that there should obtain, between the Holy See and national governments, a policy of reciprocal contacts which will make it possible to find a rapid solution for passing difficulties and to maintain between the two parties a deep and lasting sentiment of esteem.⁹³

Yet the principle of the primacy of the spiritual must not be lost out of sight. "Church and State," it is maintained, "do not belong to the same order, and the two orders have their fixed hierarchical places. The church is superior to the state as the spiritual is superior to the temporal, as an institution of supernatural origin takes precedence over an earthly organization, the creature of human nature and its needs."⁹⁴

The Roman Church has not abandoned its centuries-long claims to supremacy over the state. Those claims have been restated in terms of co-operation of the state with the church. In this way,

⁹³ Lecler, pp. 47, 48. In a footnote he states that the policy of reciprocal contacts is "entirely compatible with a state of separation between Church and State."

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 50.

to borrow Burckhardt's simile, the ship of the Roman Church has learned to float.⁹⁵

In this survey the words of Roman Catholic popes have been cited. Some references have been made to other Roman Catholic writers. A few prominent Reformed theologians of the present day were examined concerning their views of the role of the church in the political order. Other voices ought to have been heard.

There are those who have pointed to the two realms taught by Martin Luther and have tried to make an application of this teaching to present-day conditions. There are others who have demanded a strict and absolute separation of church and state. Quasi-religious and fraternal organizations have gained much influence without flaunting their power or heralding their conquests. Unsuspecting parsons and persons have disregarded the entire problem, unaware of the world-wide ramifications of the issue.

The role of the church in the political order is best described in terms of functions — the function of the visible church or churches and the function of the state. In the divine order each has its responsibilities. An examination of basic relationships in the context of a modern problem will be brought in a subsequent issue under the caption "Religion in the Public Schools."

The struggle for power is an unending struggle. The church or the churches ought not to enter the contest for political power. Yet there must be eternal vigilance for the cause of political liberty as for the cause of Christian liberty. A "practical, outspoken application of Holy Scriptures to the condition of a place and time" (to use a phrase applied to Luther) is entirely within the task of the church; "the created orders, the callings of human society, the '*iustitia civilis*,' and the law, are themselves the instruments of God's own personal action."⁹⁶

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⁹⁵ Burckhardt, op. cit. (note 2, above), p. 187.

⁹⁶ Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 300.