

The Development of Modern Catholic Political Theology

by Timothy L. SUTTON, M.A., Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Religious Studies, University of Windsor

During the nineteenth century the war on the City of God in the name of the City of Man took many forms, such as marriage and divorce legislation and compulsory military service, but this world-wide Kulturkampf, as Bismarck's Germany taught us to call it, usually centered down to a struggle between Church and State for control of the schoolroom, rather like the classic medieval struggle over lay investiture.¹ The extraordinary variety of the patterns that emerged brings home to us the meaninglessness of numerous comfortable generalizations such as "conservatism," "liberalism," "the Catholic monarchies," "Italy," "Latin America." Reflection on these patterns has more than this merely negative value, however. Understanding history means asking it the right questions, and I believe that unless we approach this complex historical struggle between the Catholic and the Modern with a series of *theological* distinctions we have not done our duty as historians. In presenting ordinary men and women with profound moral choices disguised as political choices, the Liberal phase of the Enlightenment invariably asked such ordinary people to make fine technical distinctions in moral theology, and the resulting history turned very largely on their consistency in putting these into practice.

Closer study of the Australian model enables us to isolate many of the theological distinctions in question. There is a precise historical reason for this. Alvarez has used the formula, "the U.S.A. is the one country in the world which is unequivocally a product of the Industrial Revolution,"² but his formula demands careful qualification. For the American constitution antedates not only the Industrial Revolution but even the French. Puritan New England and the Virginians founded America pre-industrially, on the one hand, while on the other they declared the independence of the first Europeanized society to exclude Jesus Christ totally and permanently from the roots of the public consensus. Thus in America *before* the Industrial Revolution the political structure already stood against church dogmatics in principle, pre-eluding

¹ Carlton J.H. HAYES, *A Generation of Materialism, 1871-1900*, Harper and Bros., N.Y. and London, 1941, pp. 83-5.

² A. ALVAREZ, *Under Pressure. The Writer in Society: Eastern Europe and the U.S.A.*, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 131.

debate; Washington and his friends were Freemasons. It is to Australia, rather, that we must look if we are to find a society with no pre-industrial history and yet – thanks mainly to Edmund Burke’s influence after 1815 – a Christian-humanist tradition. Australia was the one advanced European culture wholly conceived and set up within the exact period of the American, French and Industrial Revolutions. Anglican and Roman Catholic Christians were able to argue the case for a Christian framework to public life (Methodist and Scots Presbyterian Christians did not want to), but they had to start from nothing in doing so – no peasantry, no squire, no village, no church buildings, no religious orders, nothing but the bare idea that Christian dogma might require man’s intellectual assent. Australia thus presents us with a coherent minority Christian humanist tradition within a radically secularised public and majority culture; Anglicans such as Broughton, Scone and Moorhouse, Catholic Englishmen such as Ullathorne, Polding and Vaughan, Irish ecclesiastics such as Geoghegan, Moran, Mannix, lay intellectuals such as W. A. Duncan, Christopher Brennan, J. McAuley, were much more united in their assumptions than they thought of themselves as being. Without giving my reasoning in detail, let me suggest that study of the Australian model gives us five main phases of development,³ five sets of theological distinctions emerging in orderly sequence and now at work concretely in all the countries of the Europeanised globe. I propose here to consider them in bold abstract terms and note the dialectical movement from one to the next, with just enough historical illustration to make myself intelligible.

1. The political implications of the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. These had to be worked out in the early liberal era, the age of romanticism, against both the backward-looking medieval utopianisms of Haller and Adam Mueller, and the national religious messianisms of Mickiewicz and some among the young Ireland Irish. It is from this romantic confrontation that we get the polarization liberal/conservative. This polarization still exists in the Americas, north as well as south, though its real correlate in Latin America is the low value-consensus of the entire region. Liberalism and the type of conservatism it opposed almost invariably misunderstood the Catholic distinction between natural/supernatural as meaning that Catholics should consent to their *separation*: the state and politics are the field of action of natural values and insights only, while church life is the proper place for supernatural values (for example, Mexico; Cuba; the Australian Labour Party). Liberalism has most often meant human autonomy

³ For a survey, see P. O’FARRELL, *The Catholic Church in Australia... 1788-1967*, Nelson, Australia, 1968. In O’Farrell’s detailed bibliography, note the studies by A. G. AUSTIN, Bros. R. FOGARTY, P. FORD and M. ROE; also those mentioned below by B. A. SANTAMARIA, T. L. SUTTOR (footnotes 13 and 22).

under the sanction of religious agnosticism, and such liberalism's mystique of religious liberty preferably treated faith (that is, the intellectual positions of the Apostles' Creed) as irrelevant politically and politics as a morally neutral field. This happened in an era when the struggle of good and evil was clearly phrased in political terms such as fascism, nazism, communism, and Anglo-French, American and Russian "aid" (which so often meant tanks, planes and guns). *You* go to church and *we will* manage the country for you. Much so-called "conservatism" among Catholics, for instance in Latin America, was simply a transcript of this crude worldliness into ecclesial terms; coming very near, in both mood and formula, to Luther's exaggerated doctrine of sin, it was remote indeed from the distinctly Latin and republican genius of St. Thomas, Dante and Suarez. On the contrary, as Bonhoeffer was to argue in his *Ethics*, just as evangelical sanctity is misunderstood unless understood as the completion of natural virtue, so, reciprocally, the political virtues demand the infusion of both grace and church witness.

At this stage, on which the correct unfolding of each subsequent stage at any time in any culture continues to depend, the social work in hand is primarily metaphysical and apologetic and psychological. Faith has to be *placed* correctly in the whole field of the culture, both within each individual and in society at large. It was the great merit of Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* and De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* that they did precisely this, but it is humiliating to reflect on how few theologians and religious leaders digested their methodology. In Lamennais, de Bonald, Bonnetty and Bautain, in Renan and Maurras and Leon Bloy, French Catholic thought perpetually lost its grip on the Golden Mean at this metaphysical level, and there is something equally unsatisfactory in German contemporaries of theirs such as Görres, Gunther, Hermes, and even Schlegel, Moehler and Scheeben. English Catholicism was blessed with a series of massive figures here, such as Newman (d. 1890),⁴ G. K. Chesterton (d. 1936)⁵ and T. S. Eliot (d. 1964), who combined sagacious social awareness with tact, taste and metaphysical penetration. Marshall McLuhan is their authentic heir. The same Patristic humanism was true in varying measures of the Pecci

⁴ There has been some tendency to contrast Cardinal Manning's involvement in social issues with Cardinal Newman's involvement in intellectual issues. But it was Newman, not Manning, who spent forty years, 1849 on, as pastor of a working class parish in an industrial city. Cf. M. TREVOR, *Newman Light in Winter*, Macmillan, London, 1962, and the comment of C. HOLLIS, *Newman and the Modern World*, Hollis and Carter, London, 1967, pp. 207-221.

⁵ M. WARD, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1944, pp. 433-448.

brothers,⁶ Toniolo⁷ and Pacelli in Italy, of Solovyev and Berdyaev in Russia,⁸ and also of Spanish and French thomism from Lacordaire (d. 1864) to Maritain (still alive as I write),⁹ or the group Blondel, Teilhard de Chardin and de Lubac, who thought it necessary to take up a somewhat anti-thomist stance if they were to effect a synthesis of Catholic and modern thought.

We lack comparable figures in nineteenth century-Germany or America, and the aggiornamento crisis of the 1960s reminds us of this. "In response to science and Biblical criticism," writes Manning Clark, "the dissenter tended to urge Christians to abandon most of their beliefs, to surrender the Virgin Birth, the God-Man, the Resurrection, the Ascension, Miracles, and all the sacraments of the Church, and take their stand on belief in God and the teachings of the man Jesus."¹⁰ It is a fair summary of the heavily Germanic revolution of campus theology in North America after 1960, and for that matter a pretty fair summary of what a rather more Anglo-Saxon America in the 1920s described as Humanism or Liberal Protestantism,¹¹ but Clark is writing of the party that debated *and won* in the Australia of the 1860s and 70s. The Christian humanism that survived this religious catastrophe in countries such as Britain, France and Australia was far from naive or fundamentalist. The Canadian Lonergan, indeed, with his international roots, is a good exponent of it. It was a question of much more than organization and piety, it was the ability to see what was wrong with the Hegelisms of Germany and Italy, with Comte, with the Darwinian philosophies of Dewey and James, Lenin and Mao, Nietzsche and Haeckel, Spencer and G. B. Shaw and H. G. Wells. Sound politics depends on a high general level of literary taste, on philosophical and historical criticism. It will simply never happen without

⁶ Thesis by T. J. A. HARTLEY, *Neothomism in Italy and the XXIV Thomist Theses*, St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1966; also F. DURANT], *La rinascita del tomismo a Perugia. Appunti per una storia del neotomismo* in *Aquinas*, 5 (1962), pp. 249-294.

⁷ L. STURZO, *Church and State*, vol. 2, University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, pp. 529, 533. I was led to attempt the present paper by the obvious lacunae in Sturzo's discussion of *The Present Situation* in chapter 15 of his otherwise beautifully argued history.

⁸ E. LAMPERT, *Nicolas Berdyaev in Modern Christian Revolutionaries*, ed. D. Attwater, Devin-Adair, N.Y., 1947.

⁹ *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, eds. J. Evans and L. Ward, Image Books, N.Y., 1965.

¹⁰ M. CLARK, *A Short History of Australia*, Mentor Books, N.Y., 1963, p. 146.

¹¹ N. FOERSTER (ed.), *Humanism and America*, Farrar-Reinhardt, N.Y., 1930. C. H. GRATAN (ed.), *The Critique of Humanism*; originally published 1930, reprinted 1968 by Books for Libraries Press, Freeport, N.Y.

them. The *bios theoretikos* must underlie and permeate constructive action; it must be its *milieu*. Curiously enough, Marxists such as (I use the word in a broad sense) Rosa Luxembour, André Malraux, Tito, George Orwell, Mao, never lost sight of this.

2. Under these circumstances the nineteenth century Church had to arouse its feudalized conscience to a sense of the obligations of the Catholic as citizen. Daniel O'Connell (d. 1847) was first in the field here, and has never been surpassed as an exponent and practitioner of non-violent revolution.¹² But today Caroline Chisholm, who worked in India, Australia and Britain from 1838 to 1866, appears perhaps the profounder thinker, with her careful integration of natural and supernatural in her motives and goals, and her trenchant insistence that Christian Democracy means the active participation of women in public life and debate.¹³ This growing awareness of the duties of Catholics as citizens meant three forks in the road, each a moment of choice where evil bore the same name as good:

(a) The choice between patriotism as a virtue (the old word is piety) and Nationalism as a form of idolatry (pan-Germanism, Manifest Destiny, the Bantu philosophy). In Italy, perhaps, one feature of Catholicism, namely, the Pope's territorial monarchy, stood in the way not of national ambition merely, but of patriotism as a Christian virtue. Romantic politics in Italy, whether Catholic or Liberal, concentrated all their forces around this question: Manzoni, Mazzini, Gioberti, Pio nono himself. Elsewhere this was not the case, but Nationalism *usually* claimed an irreconcilable conflict existed between the national interest and Catholicism's internationalism. To Uvarov, the education minister under the Nicholas system in Russia, to Bismarck, to Gladstone debating on papal infallibility, to American, to Australian, and to Canadian politicians and educational theorists such as Ryerson, the Catholic schoolroom was *divisive*, and that was enough to condemn it. But an error exists in the opposite direction, too, and late in the day, during the 1960s de Gaulle had the greatest difficulty getting people to grasp that the abandonment of nationalism does not mean the abandonment of patriotism, and that the advent of super-powers does not suddenly end the *de facto* historical existence and rights of separate but mature national cultures such as France and Britain.

(b) The choice between democracy as a valuable set of techniques for obtaining popular consensus and just government, as distinguished from Democracy as a god to which religious systems, and individual men and

¹² The best short exposition of this is still the article by W. O. MORRIS in the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

¹³ Her importance is well brought out in the chapter devoted to her in E. O. C. SHANN, *An Economic History of Australia*, Cambridge U.P., 1930, but for her theological roots, consult T. L. SUTTON, *Hierarchy and Democracy in Australia, 1788-1870*, Melbourne U.P. 1965, pp. 138-144.

women, are to be more or less indiscriminately sacrificed. Recent examples of democracy made an idol are the federal order the British imposed on Nigeria, in defiance of all historical pattern, and U.S. "aid" in South Vietnam seeking the overthrow, and thus leading to the murder, of Ngo Dinh Diem. But the greatest monument to Democracy as an idol was the Versailles group of treaties. Most of the paper democracies in question collapsed in due course – Italy, Germany and France along with them, not to mention Poland, Finland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia – and a papal policy which continued to treat with their successor dictatorships was represented in the "liberal" world press as a quasi-fascist force for doing so.

(c) Similarly, we have to distinguish socialism as a valuable set of techniques for avoiding unemployment and other forms of social oppression from Socialism as a quasi-religion claiming to solve the problem of evil. Here was a distinction the Hungarian Catholic voter needed and generally failed to grasp in 1917 and again in 1946-8, and a distinction the U.S. bishops failed to make in connection with Henry George and *Rerum Novarum*, 1891-3. The participation of the Catholic masses in the Australian Labor Party, or the co-existence of the Catholic Church with the communist government of Poland, rested precisely on the fine distinctions which so many Americans and Hungarians did not make.

3. The Catholic had next to graduate from a sense of his duty as citizen to a sense of his duty as a Catholic citizen to give corporate witness and exert corporate electoral pressure. This corporate witness and pressure, an early twentieth-century task, came to be called Catholic Action. The phrase emerged under Pius X, early in the twentieth century, but became a rallying cry only under Pius XI (1922-1939).¹⁴ It had at least three interrelated dangers and usually succumbed to all three of them:

(a) The combination of ecclesial and political objectives. The Spanish bishops' support for Franco was a particularly delicate and complex instance of this: they wished to save their necks, and preserve the Church's existence, but at the same time there was by March 1937 no question in their mind as to which course of action was best for Spain as a policy.¹⁵ Another instance of a confusing combination of temporal and ecclesial policy was the Italian Christian Democrats' support, after the fall of Mussolini and the monarchy (1943), of the 1929 Lateran Pact as an integral part of the Italian Republic's

¹⁴ *The Church and the Reconstruction of the Modern World. The Social Encyclicals of Pope Pius XI*, ed. T. P. MCLAUGHLIN, ImageBooks, N.Y., 1957, especially the Encyclicals *Non Abbiamo bisogno*, pp. 301-330, and *Nos es muy conocida*, pp. 405-418.

¹⁵ *Joint Letter of the Spanish Bishops to the Bishops of the Whole World Concerning the War in Spain*, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1937.

constitution.¹⁶

(b) The imposition of Papal-encyclical norms on large non-Catholic or nominally Catholic populations in the name of natural law (for example, Italy's divorce laws before 1970, the Massachusetts and other anti-contraceptive laws). Perhaps the most odd instance of this was not strictly political: the role of U.S. film-censorship in guaranteeing the moral vacuity of the U.S. film industry's product. Though penned by a famous Jesuit, Daniel Lord, the Production Code of 1930 was scrupulously undenominational in its wording. As administered by J. I. Breen, 1934-64, it enforced a complete ban on nudity (clothes, of course, are hardly an item of Natural Law!) and a law of moral compensation (i.e. vice must be punished and virtue rewarded) which made the U.S. movie an extension of Victorian melodrama, with the same religious and aesthetic bathos.¹⁷

(c) The failure to advance from a conception of Catholic Action as a minority's defence of its rights (the 1933 Nazi Concordat was an instance where a powerful Catholic minority apparently abandoned all objectives except its own survival¹⁸) to a conception of Catholic Action as the witness of the wise against political sin (the trial and execution of Count von Moltke and Father Delp in Germany, 1944-5¹⁹).

Difficulties abounded in *applying* each of these distinctions, as well as in making them, because in each case there was a lesser good to achieve (an established church, a marriage law, a school system) which was certainly not in itself evil, yet in pursuing it Catholics seemed merely partisan. It was not only that their enemies accused them of being merely partisan; part of the theological problem was that they were tempted to see themselves as merely partisan, tempted to think that their political obligations ended with looking after themselves as a political minority. The history of the German Centre Party, now the subject of so many Ph.D.s, is perhaps the most tragic case of this.²⁰ Above all, the purely theological grace dimension of their witness was often lost from view by the Catholics themselves no less than by their opponents. The history of Christian democracy in Western Europe (including Spain and Ireland) is an ensemble of the problems proper to this third phase,

¹⁶ The standard work on the Lateran Pact, Binchy's *Church and State in Fascist Italy*, was supplemented at this point by Lester Webb, *Church and State in Italy, 1948-1951*.

¹⁷ A. WALKER, *Sex in the Movies*, Penguin Books, 1968, pp. 191-193.

¹⁸ F. VON PAPPEN, *Memoirs*, Deutsch, London, 1952, chapter 16, pp. 278f.

¹⁹ *The Prison Meditations of Father Alfred Delp*, Macmillan, N.Y., 1963, especially the introduction by Thomas Merton.

²⁰ See ADENAUER'S own judgment in his *Memoirs*, Regnery, Chicago, 1965, p. 43 and the confirmation in P. Weymar's authorized biography, Dutton, London, 1957, pp. 169-170.

complicated by the need to deal politically with large populations (e.g. Bavaria) which have not emerged from the first phase, and with a general level of political education (using newspapers as an index) only just emerging from phase 2 into phase 3.

4. Mature Christian citizenship requires the ordinary Catholic to distinguish two sets of objectives and two sets of institutions and institutional obligations within the complex called Catholic Action. The object of the *social* apostolate is the common good, social justice here on earth; the object of the *lay* apostolate is union with God both now and forever. While distinct, these activities are not separable as far as the individual is concerned: he may not pursue one goal and ignore the other. But the institutionalization needs in practice to be distinct if ordinary people are to grasp the principle. Even as late as the Vatican II document on the lay apostolate these things were not particularly well expounded.²¹ Here once more a characteristic error emerged, an oversimplification, an over-concretization: the laity can look after the socio-political apostolate and the clergy after the theological apostolate. Australia was one of the main theatres in which the necessary distinctions were worked out, as the Catholic Action secretariate founded in 1937 had by 1949, due to the domination of communism in the trade unions, become a major factor in federal politics.²² But the exactly contemporaneous evolution of Christian-Democratic parties in Chile and Brazil has been surrounded by exactly the same problems and fine distinctions.²³

5. One last distinction was perhaps foreshadowed in the person of Santamaria in Australia but has been far more fully realized by men such as Salazar in Portugal, the Opus Dei technocrats of Franco's cabinet,²⁴ and a number of distinguished Common Market Eurocrats: I mean the distinction between the social apostolate at the trade union, electoral and parliamentary level, as in the Christian Democratic Parties of Italy, France and Germany, and the social apostolate of management expertise. Barbara Ward is a well-known English-speaking example. As government becomes more technological in method, and more computerized, it falls more and more into the hands of the unelected expert. The future of the Christian social apostolate

²¹ *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. W. M. ABBOTT, Guild Press, N.Y. 1966. *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, ch. 1, par. 2, pp. 491-2; ch. 2, par. 5, p. 495; ch. 4, pp. 506f

²² H. MAYER (ed.), *Catholics and Free Society*, F. W. Cheshire, Melb., 1961; B. A. SANTAMARIA, *The Price of Freedom*, Compion Press, Melbourne, 1965.

²³ I. VALLIER, *Catholicism, Social Control, and Modernization in Latin America*, Prentice-Hall, N.I., 1970, pp. 66f

²⁴ B. CROZIER, *Franco*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1967, pp. 459-466.

performance lies here, no matter what the risks, for its chief concern in the late twentieth century was inevitably to be the implementation at the international level of the newly emerged possibility of global affluence, rational controls of population, production and pollution. I might underline the words, *no matter what the risks*, for Christians who have foreseen jobs and therefore trained for them will be envied for getting them; they were killed for it in the Congo, Nigeria and Vietnam. But the Bishops' Synod on December 9, 1971, approved a statement on *Justice in the World* which put all the emphasis in the *international* and *rational* dimensions of contemporary social problems.²⁵

A rational and therefore severely practical internationalism, then, emerges as the final phase of the Catholic theology of society, and we are at once reminded of two things. First, that whereas since Leo XIII the Roman See has consistently been characterized by just such a rational internationalism, local hierarchies, on the contrary, have nearly always allowed themselves to be trapped within their several nationalisms. This is clearly the problematic within which we must view Papal Jewish policy during the Nazi terror. It is clear that the initial stage of rational internationalism must in consequence be anti-nationalism, a hard saying in nations where Catholics have closely assimilated to the national culture, whether because the majority, as in Spain and Ireland, or because excessively anxious to keep in step, as in Germany and the U.S. Second, however, the necessary internationalism of contemporary technology reinforces and is reinforced by classical thomist social theory. Vittoria spoke of the republic of the world, Suarez of Machiavelli's sovereign state as but a province of the world, and their school weighed issues such as tariffs and slavery, colonisation and war, in the light of that principle.²⁶ Today Buckminster Fuller argues that the energy-wealth accruing from globalization "will be so vast as to tend swiftly to cancel out the ideological differences of the respective beneficiary peoples' previous sovereign-political-system advantages," and Watson of I.B.M. says that to speak of England's balance of trade with Spain is now as unreal as it would be to adjust trade annually between New York and New Jersey by gold-bullion transfers.²⁷

²⁵ *Catholic Mind*, March 1972, vol. LXX, no. 1261, pp. 52f

²⁶ The present shift to the left in the Spanish Church, far from being a novelty, is continuous with a tradition tracing back to Renaissance thomism in Spain. In the 1950s, the series, *Problemas de Hoy*, published in Barcelona, expounded this complex of social doctrine very fully. See particularly *Bien Comun*, by L. PERENA, *Problematika del Bien Comun* by J. ZARACUETA, and the Keynesian study by Garcia y Moralejo, a member of this group who was made a bishop.

²⁷ R. Buckminster FULLER, *Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity*, Bantam Books, N.Y., 1959, p. 198, p. 189 (for IBM).